

How does the mise-en-scene and point of view suggest two different sides of travi...



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In Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver the main protagonist of the film, Travis Bickle, lives in his own little world. As a veteran of Vietnam he has become isolated from the social world of New York City and holds a much distorted view of the world. Mise-en-scene and point of view play a vital role in the structure of Travis Bickle as a character in terms of his "Jekyll and Hyde" personality and the dream like state in which we see his progression and demise. These are especially important in the opening shot as it establishes the character and it shows the viewer the world as Travis sees it. It is also important in the climax of the film when he goes to 'save' Iris. The shots in Taxi Driver are slow-moving and premeditated.

The camera is used to great effect throughout the whole film to illustrate the fact that none of it is real and that he is just imagining everything. One scene that suggests this is the one where Travis is on the phone to Betsy. The camera pans to the hallway and the viewer is left looking at basically nothing. The hallway is empty and you can only hear Travis talking, you can't see him or even hear the person he is talking to. This may just be to prevent us from seeing Travis in his shame at losing Betsy or it could imply that it is not real.

Michael Chapman, the Director of Photography for the film states that it adds to the sense of it being a 'documentary of the mind.' The film opens with a high angle shot of the streets of New York City where there are open sewers with steam rising in a hazy fog that suggests that you are being taken into hell. The colours are distorted and blurred with blood red being the most dominant. It is as though the tone of the film is being established. We then

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see Travis driving around in his taxi. There are extreme close-ups of his eyes where the lighting changes from a red tint to a white tint.

The lighter colour shows his 'good' side and the red colour suggests his 'evil' side, the side that has not surfaced to the viewer as yet. This suggests that he has two different sides to his personality and shows that Scorsese wanted to tell the audience at the beginning how Travis Bickle really is. It then cuts to a view of New York City through the windscreen of the car and from Travis' point of view. The view is extremely out of focus, so much so that you can't really tell where he is and can only make out a blur of shiny colours, including red, blue and green.

This implies that Travis' view of the world is distorted, masked by the injustice and disillusionment of American society. The scene then cuts to Travis entering the taxi office. The smoke is still there, it is thinner but still rolling behind him, which suggests that his confusion is with him all the time. Also in this shot he is never in the centre and the camera is below him at a low angle and only moves up to the level of his eye line when he is cheeky to the man behind the desk suggesting that he enjoys being rebellious. When he leaves the garage the camera performs a hundred and eighty degree pan in the opposite direction to Travis showing the world in which he will belong to, the taxis, and then meets him again when he is walking out.

This furthers the idea that he is so detached from society that the audience are not even allowed to see him. It could also suggest that it is making the audience feel detached from him; they are not allowed to get close or feel like they are part of his life. It is how Travis feels everyday. Throughout the <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-the-mise-en-scene-and-point-of-view-suggest-two-different-sides-of-travis-bickle-and-his-detachment-from-society-essay/>

film we see many different hair styles on Travis as he changes it according to the situation. When he meets Betsy he becomes smart and well dressed. His hair is brushed and neat.

However, when Betsy dismisses him and he becomes obsessive and angry he wears his military jacket, his hair is untidy and in the final scene he shaves it into a Mohawk. These changes display the instability of his character and the insecurity he feels about his own identity. In a way his behaviour in the film is contradictory. He has a self-enclosed loneliness of which he is feeding everyday and reinforces it so much that it will never end. He will just continue to wallow in it in a never-ending circle for the rest of his life. The final scene of the film is fast paced showing his toughened attitude and he is sporting a Mohawk.

This is suggestive of his military days when soldiers in the jungle were given a wide berth because it presented a soldier that is on a ' special mission'. The hallway outside Iris' apartment is cramped and claustrophobic with no means of escape. There are many high and low angle shots that make it seem more threatening to the viewer and make it seem like it is from Travis' point of view. The colour of the hallway and the clothes of the characters are mainly brown, blacks and white save for Sports trousers which are red, suggesting death, rage and blood. The walls however become splashed with blood and Iris' room is full of the colour red.

This is an explosive scene and the climax of the film. It is violent and many people are killed. At the end of the scene the camera suddenly changes from a close-up of Travis to an aerial tracking shot from above his head. This <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-the-mise-en-scene-and-point-of-view-suggest-two-different-sides-of-travis-bickle-and-his-detachment-from-society-essay/>

shows the viewer the extent of the damage Travis has done and can be perceived as an out of body experience for him. The use of the camera angles and the overuse of the colour red emphasises the dream like quality. To the viewer it may seem like Travis is dead but it shows him later on and he seems to be okay and has not been punished for what he did.

I feel that this isn't real and that he really died because it would be difficult for him to talk and a person would suffer from a psychological breakdown of some kind and would be locked up. From his actions Travis has gained heroic status and has gone from ' God's Lonely Man' to ' God's Messenger'. He is the anti-hero but becomes a hero because of the absurdity of what he has done and the fame he achieved by being on the front page of the newspaper. This is not a one off thing for Travis however, as towards the end of the film after he drops Betsy off, who appears to be in his taxi and looks dreamy and glowing suggesting a dreamlike quality and that it is not real, he glimpses back in the rear-view mirror and adjusts it quickly. The reflection in it is still distorted and blurry. It is not as blurry as it was in the beginning but it suggests that he will continue with his work as a ' vigilante'.

The point of view in the scene where he is talking to himself in the mirror is especially important as it shows how lonely he is. He says the line ' well, I'm the only one here', and I feel that this is the quintessential mark of a lonely man. He is forced to talk to himself because no one else will and he speaks in an aggressive manner as though everyone outside will try and harm him or threaten him. The writer, Paul Schrader, described Travis in the script of the film as;'One can see the ominous stains caused by a life of private fear,

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emptiness and loneliness' and ' seems to have wandered in from a land where it is always cold, a country where the inhabitants seldom speak.

..'The points and major scenes in which I have talked about in this essay and the quotes mentioned above are, in my opinion, the essence of the way Travis Bickle is presented. The mise-en-scene and point of view pull the viewer into Travis' world and are shown a build up of emotions that eventually explode into a burst of violent behaviour. The high and low angle tracking shots make the audience feel like they are there in the midst of all the action and at the same time wondering whether Travis should be considered as mentally unstable or a hero of his time.

Unfortunately we, as the audience, never get to understand Travis fully or find the answer to whether it really happened and if Travis lived or died.