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A Companion to Martin Scorsese

Edited by
Aaron Baker

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A Companion to Martin Scorsese

Wiley Blackwell Companions to Film Directors

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Introduction

Artistic Solutions to Sociological Problems

Aaron Baker

Among critics and other filmmakers, Martin Scorsese is widely regarded as one of the most important contemporary directors. Marc Raymond (2002) has written that Scorsese is “the greatest American filmmaker of his generation,” and his stature was demonstrated by a British Film Institute international survey of filmmakers, in which *Raging Bull* (1980) finished second only to *Citizen Kane* (1941) in a poll of the Top Ten Films of all time. Yet Scorsese’s often violent stories of sin and redemption within contexts of social conflict, his films’ hybrid combination of Hollywood genre with European art cinema stylization and narrative ambiguity, have until recently limited their appeal with large audiences. Only in four of his last five features, *The Aviator* (2004), *The Departed* (2006), *Shutter Island* (2010), and *Wolf Street* (2013) – genre films built around the star power of Leonardo DiCaprio, was Scorsese able to reach \$100 million in earnings, and finally win his first Academy Award. Actor Harvey Keitel explained the Academy’s long-standing disregard for Scorsese as an indication of the director’s aesthetic standards when he commented: “Maybe he got what he deserves... exclusion from the mediocre” (Dougan, 2004: xxi).

Scorsese’s stature is built partly on virtuoso filmmaking technique, exemplified by his collaboration in eight films with the physical transformation and painstaking preparation used by Robert De Niro to redefine film acting, with Michael Chapman’s chiaroscuro black and white cinematography and Thelma Schoonmaker’s editing in *Raging Bull*, or his execution with Chapman of the tracking shot showing Travis Bickle’s carnage at the end of *Taxi Driver* (1976) or the four-minute long take done with cinematographer Michael Ballhaus

through the Copacabana kitchen in *GoodFellas* (1990). Part of Scorsese's prominence among critics and other filmmakers has come also from his encyclopedic knowledge of movie history, a reputation created by the numerous allusions in his films, his work on behalf of film preservation, and by his documentaries, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies* (1995) and *Il Mio Viaggio in Italia* (1999) about his debt to Italian cinema. His knowledge of popular music is the equal of such cinéphilia, and as Michael Baker comments in this volume, Scorsese uses "the affective power of rock music . . . to deliver moments of narrative might, stylistic swagger, and staggering emotional import." Some of these combinations of music and image are therefore as notable as his other demonstrations of virtuoso form: the use of The Rolling Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash" with slow motion and stylized lighting as De Niro's character makes his entrance in *Mean Streets*, The Animals' "House of the Rising Sun" in *Casino* (1995), and the sequence in *GoodFellas* tracked by the piano coda of Derek & The Dominos' "Layla" are just three examples. Roger Ebert has written that "of all directors of his generation and younger, he may make the best use of rock music in his films" (Ebert, 2008: 4).

Scorsese's filmmaking is at its most inspired telling stories on the margins of urban life, especially in his native New York, which he often shows as a place created by the externalized subjectivity of characters destabilized by conflict and paranoia. Even after three films, *The Departed*, *Shutter Island*, and *Hugo* (2011), that left New York for Boston, Boston Harbor, and Paris, respectively, as part of his appeal to a larger audience, Scorsese has returned to New York for *The Wolf of Wall Street*. In his chapter in this volume about the director's contribution to the omnibus film *New York Stories* (1989), Murray Pomerance states that "His films are New York films, no matter their putative location." Whether set in New York or not, the strong urban flavor of Scorsese's movies can be traced to how, coincident with his taste for stylized expressionism, he grounds his stories in a diverse social reality through a documentary style of location shooting done on city streets and colloquial language. Yet despite this tension of expressionism and realism, his movies ultimately make a stronger gesture toward self-conscious allusion and virtuoso form as a reminder of their own fictionality and the power to assert Scorsese's and the viewer's control over the narrative even as the characters conversely often find little success through their actions. Robert Kolker calls this self-reflexive tendency in Scorsese's films the director's "statement about the existence of the camera, the eyes behind it, and their ability to create, own and express ideas . . . the triangulation the film creates with itself, film history, and the viewer" (Kolker, 2011: 197).

Scorsese's four most highly acclaimed films demonstrate this synthesis of allusion, style, and authorship. In *Mean Streets*, he combined noir spaces with French New Wave discontinuity style to represent the conflict faced by Charlie (Harvey Keitel), as he tries to reconcile his sexual desire for his girlfriend Teresa

(Amy Robinson), and to move up by impressing this loan shark uncle, with a Christian duty to follow the dictates of his faith against extramarital sex and to look out for his wayward friend, Johnny (Robert De Niro). In *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese contrasts neorealist images of New York with allusion to John Ford's captivity narrative in *The Searchers* (1956) and compositions and camera movements drawn from *Psycho* (1960) and *Frenzy* (1972) to underscore the paranoid delusion with which Travis Bickle (De Niro) sees his world. In *Raging Bull*, realist mise-en-scène and noir imagery invoke Hollywood boxing films such as *The Set Up* (1947) and *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1950) to show how the anger created by economic exploitation not only fuels the intensity of De Niro's Jake LaMotta in the ring, but also metastasizes outside it into sexism, racism, and homophobia. LaMotta expresses his frustration about the manipulation of his boxing career in violent jealousy about the relationships between his wife Vicky (Cathy Moriarty) and other men, in a dark point of view shot of African American rival Sugar Ray Robinson as a monstrous figure, and through aggressive threats to sodomize another opponent and one of the gangsters whom he sees as rivals for Vicky's affections. *GoodFellas* uses the crime film convention of gangsters living large to parallel wise guy greed and consumption with similar pathologies in 1980s American society as a whole. When David Chase pitched his gangster drama *The Sopranos* to HBO executives as about how "America is a country so despoiled with materialism that...it even makes a gangster sick," he was making a Scorsese-like allusion modeled on the descent into addiction and paranoia that brings down Ray Liotta's character at the end of *GoodFellas*.

For a filmmaker of Scorsese's stature, surprisingly few books have been written on his work. One of the best is by Robert Casillo, who views Scorsese primarily in relation to his ethnicity and religious identity, describing the filmmaker as a "chronicler of the epic of Italian America" (Casillo, 2006: xi). Casillo regards Scorsese's Italian American films as his best, stories of outsider status and the struggle for assimilation based on the experience of his Sicilian family in New York. For Scorsese, organized crime is an important part of Italian American culture, and while Casillo acknowledges the criticism of negative stereotypes for Italian Americans, he rejects the assertion that the Mafia is an example of what Edward Banfield called the "amoral familialism" of Southern Italian culture, the greater allegiance to immediate family rather than community, government or laws. Casillo instead views the Mafia as a voluntary organization that requires the choice to separate from family in the interest of ambition, similar in that sense to how assimilation and acculturation for immigrants require the same separation and assertion of individual identity (Casillo, 2006: 23).

As Casillo points out, Scorsese's film career was made possible because of an instance of such separation, in his case from the common practice among Italian immigrants of making children quit school and go to work to help

support the family. Instead, Scorsese's education at New York University (NYU) provided him with not only the skills to make film his profession but formed also the basis of his knowledge of the medium that allows him to critique the assumptions of commercial cinema. While Scorsese is often seen as making films primarily about men, Robert Kolker, another critic who along with Casillo has done some of the best writing on Scorsese's career, describes how this focus on male identity is part of a critique of commercial cinema's normative assumptions about masculinity. Kolker notes that in *Taxi Driver* Scorsese uses Travis Bickle vigilante violence to comment that

while individuals may do brave deeds, the concept of the hero and heroism is a culturally constructed myth. It begins in epic poetry and lives on in movies that posit violent individual action as a social good, rendering the community passive and helpless in the face of the man of action. *Taxi Driver* allows the viewer to assume the position of the hero's admirers. (Kolker, 2011: 250–251)

But after invoking what Robert Ray calls the “outlaw hero,” whose violent unilateral “justice” is so common in Hollywood movies, Scorsese ends *Taxi Driver* with a reference to Bernard Herrmann's score to *Psycho* to imply that Travis is more sociopath than hero.

With his focus on Scorsese's ethnicity and religion, Casillo might interpret this critique as not just about Hollywood's idea of masculinity but also about what he calls a Southern Italian “code of masculine honour and its obsession with pride and retaliatory violence” (Casillo, 2006: xviii). Therefore, if the critique of antisocial violent masculinity in *Taxi Driver* comes through Scorsese's allusion to Hitchcock, it may also be motivated by the director's Catholic values; Casillo explains that it is such contradiction between Scorsese's religious morality and exposure to wise guy culture that prompted him to call his book about the director *Gangster Priest* (Casillo, 2006: xiv).

Lesley Stern also reads Scorsese's emphasis on violence as part of a critique of normative masculinity in the chapter entitled “Meditation on Violence” from her book *The Scorsese Connection*. She compares *Raging Bull* to Emeric Pressburger's and Michael Powell's 1948 film *The Red Shoes*, noting how both movies focus on performance, boxing and ballet, respectively, as rituals of obsession, which she describes as at the same time “magical and cruelly violent” (Stern, 1995: 19). Stern goes on to interpret the ritual of boxing in *Raging Bull* as about defining masculinity, and she asserts that

along with other Scorsese films, [*Raging Bull*] exhibits an obsessive fascination with as well as repulsion for, the problems and experiences of masculinity... masculine fantasies and masculinity as fantasy. (Stern, 1995: 24)

In Stern's view, the LaMotta character's limited dominance in the ring is offset by his pathology outside it, demonstrating that this fantasy is “the association of masculinity with power as illusory” (Stern, 1995: 27).

Besides Casillo, Kolker, and Stern, another useful source on Scorsese is Vincent LoBrutto's much quoted biography that benefited from cooperation with the filmmaker himself. Marc Raymond, whose overview of Scorsese's career opens this volume, has also published a book about his films that places them within a social context and looks at his work within the documentary form and on film preservation. In his chapter in this volume, Raymond offers a revisionist examination of how Scorsese's biography has been written and its bearing on his critical reputation as a filmmaker. What Raymond (2013) concludes is that the

critical community shares the conviction that great filmmaking negotiates between the two extremes of Hollywood and the avant-garde. It is in this aesthetic, which will become increasingly popular throughout the years, that Scorsese's reputation will be built.

To illustrate this point, Raymond focuses at length on the controversy over *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and how most critics sided with Scorsese, turning him into "a martyred genius." In Raymond's view, such portrayal of Scorsese as the maligned artist made possible "his ascendancy to the post of greatest filmmaker of his generation."

This elevated position, Raymond argues, allowed Scorsese in recent years to move toward the Hollywood mainstream without suffering too much damage to his critical reputation. This is an appraisal with which Robert Kolker disagrees, stating that Scorsese's transition from eight movies with De Niro to projects with Leonardo DiCaprio has coincided with a capitulation to "large-scale productions" infused with the commercial values of Hollywood stardom. Kolker states: "De Niro's characters seethe from within; DiCaprio seems always to be impersonating someone" (Kolker, 2011: 256–257).

The chapters in this volume have been arranged in four parts. Part One, entitled "The Pious Auteur," includes five chapters that build on Casillo's work by focusing on how not only Scorsese's Catholicism and ethnicity, but also an extensive knowledge of film history, have impacted his movies. Scorsese's background, particularly his upbringing in New York, his Italian American family and neighborhood, and his religious training, have played a prominent role in his films. He has explained the extreme violence in his movies as the influence of growing up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and seeing fights and bloodshed on a regular basis as a boy. In high school, Scorsese planned to enter the seminary, but wound up at NYU where he studied cinema, yet Catholicism continued to be a central theme in his films. As Scorsese has stated: "My whole life has been movies and religion. That's it. Nothing else" (Kelly, 2004: 6).

David Sterritt offers an insightful overview of religion in Scorsese's films. He traces how not just Catholic belief but a range of religious ideas can be

found in his work and regards this thematic emphasis as putting him “at odds with . . . the American film industry at large, which has a powerful belief in genre, formula, and noncontroversial narrative as the surest routes to popularity and profit.” By analyzing a range of his films, including *Mean Streets*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Kundun* (1997), *After Hours* (1985), and *Shutter Island*, Sterritt shows how “Scorsese has injected signs and signifiers of his distinctive religiosity into a broad array of movies in a variety of genres.”

Besides the role of religion in his films, Part One also includes two chapters that examine how Scorsese’s ethnicity and extensive knowledge of film history intersect through the influence of neorealism and Italian cinema more generally. Giorgio Bertellini and Jacqueline Reich analyze Scorsese’s representation of aggressive masculinity – what they term “his penchant for unregimented, rebellious male characters” through the lens of Italian cinema. According to Bertellini and Reich, Scorsese’s invocation of Italian cinema, in particular the films of Fellini, Rossellini, Pasolini, Bertolucci, and Visconti, creates a “filmic pastiche” that fosters “an intellectually rich probing of American screen masculinity.”

The result is that Scorsese’s filmmaking is best understood in their view as “an aesthetic profile positioned between American and European cinema.” His link to Hollywood comes from how he has repeatedly employed genre elements from the gangster film, boxing film, and melodrama, “as a means of paying homage to the American films of his youth,” yet while also “challenging their conventions, and using them as vehicles for his complex portraits of male heroes and anti-heroes.” Central to this critique are the ambiguous endings in many of Scorsese’s films, in which “masculine redemption and restoration is not by any means a given.”

Because film scholars have often sought to establish a line of influence from Italian cinema in general, and neorealism in particular, to Scorsese’s films, Laura Ruberto argues for the need to create an in-depth understanding of the latter movement to better understand that influence, and that in fact such an understanding will show in her view that “it is Scorsese’s efforts as an activist and advocate for film on an international scale, rather than his cinematic and televisual productions, that best link him to the tenets of neorealism.”

Ruberto notes that critics have often seen the neorealist influence in Scorsese’s formal style, what she describes as “stylistic characteristics that lend Scorsese’s films a documentary-like feel . . . his use of true-to-life characters, on-location shooting, and his favoring of a hand-held camera.” Stories that the filmmaker has himself told of watching Italian films on television with his neighbors and family as a boy in New York have also contributed to the idea of their influence on his work.

But in fact Ruberto argues that it has been Scorsese’s restoration work through the nonprofit organization he founded, the World Cinema Founda-

tion (WCF), that has been most significant in demonstrating the influence of neorealism on him by helping to support a cinematic alternative to Hollywood cultural hegemony. She states:

the mission and goals of the WCF are in line with much of neorealism at its most theoretical: using cinema to give voice to peoples and stories that usually remain unheard and unseen within a dominant culture...alternative cinematic narratives, ones which promote subaltern cultural trends, not dominant consumerist ones.

In Part One Robert Kolker also interprets Scorsese's two film history documentaries, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies*, and *My Voyage to Italy* as demonstrating how "the films he makes are a product of those films that have nurtured his imagination." Kolker observes that *My Voyage to Italy* is organized in chronological order, looking at Italian cinema from the postwar neorealists to Fellini's *8½* (1963). The documentary offers a history of an evolving Italian cinema after World War II that quickly became international and enormously influential on American film and Scorsese's work in particular. By contrast, *A Personal Journey* offers more of a practitioner's rather than a critic's view of American film, and the categories that Scorsese sets up in that film reflect the director's dilemma's rather than the critic's assessments. For Kolker, *A Personal Journey* is therefore fundamentally about how to manage "the constant tug of war between personal expression and commercial imperatives."

Based on his chapter in this volume grounding the director's career in his historical knowledge of cinema, it's not surprising that Kolker has elsewhere described Scorsese as "interested more in the medium than the politics that drive it" (Kolker, 2011: 193). As true as this may be, nonetheless, the chapters in Part Two of this volume look at how the identities of social groups, their definition, and the conflicts between them are prominent themes in Scorsese's films. As Matt Lohr states in his chapter, Italian American culture, while prominent in Scorsese's films, is balanced by a range of other identities, in particular that of Irish Americans. Lohr writes that in Scorsese's movies we see

upper-crust WASPs (*The Age of Innocence*), American southerners (*Cape Fear*), Jews both American (*Casino*) and ancient Middle Eastern (*The Last Temptation of Christ*), even Tibetan Buddhists (*Kundun*). But aside from his own ethnic group, Scorsese's cinema has examined no subculture more closely than that of the Irish-American, and what he has depicted both differs from and resembles the Italian-American experience in telling and surprising ways.

Gangs of New York and *The Departed* are the central focus of Lohr's analysis. He states that these two films show

the struggles of the earliest Irish to set foot on American shores; detailed their efforts to assimilate into the mainstream through methods legal, criminal and prejudicial; [and] compared and contrasted their pragmatic, ground-level Catholicism with the more spiritually inclined style practiced by Italian Americans.

In his analysis of two more Scorsese films, *New York, New York* (1977) and *Casino*, Lohr demonstrates that their portrayal of Irish American men and women both reinforce and subvert stereotypes of maternal nurturing and male irresponsibility and alcoholism. Lohr calls these representations of Irish identity in Scorsese's films a "valuable contribution to American cinematic ethnography."

While Lohr juxtaposes Scorsese's representation of the Irish to his Italian American films, Robert Casillo, in his chapter in Part Two, parallels those movies from the latter group about the Mafia with the period film set in nineteenth-century New York, *The Age of Innocence*. For Casillo, the high society New York families in *The Age of Innocence* and the Mafia families in such films as *Mean Streets*, *Raging Bull*, and *GoodFellas* are both "patriarchal, and hierarchical in their organization, . . . adhere to multiple codes and taboos which ensure, first, the unity, coherence, and harmony of the group, . . . its difference from the outer world."

For Larissa Ennis, what she calls "off-white" gangster films such as *GoodFellas* respond to the threat that multiculturalism presented to white privilege in the 1990s by ascribing to contemporary white masculinity the social disadvantage that ethnic groups associated with organized crime in the first half of the twentieth century had experienced. Gangster films of the 1990s displace contemporary anxieties about diminishing cultural hegemony and decentered white masculinity into a past when wiseguys are recent immigrants, and they inhabit a world of social inequality. By imagining white men as victims of America's history, off-white gangster films expiate the guilt attached to race-based privilege and dramatize a fantasy of shared trauma that resonates with the contemporary psychic wounds that whites feel as a result of their identification as the agents of a historical record of oppression and injustice.

While the dominance of male characters in Scorsese's films has been much commented on, and some critics like Robert Kolker (2011), Jon Cavallero (2011), and Fred Gardaphe (2006) have analyzed his critique of dominant masculinity, in my chapter about two movies released in 1974, *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* and *Italianamerican*, I show how they center around female protagonists, in the first "to shift away from Hollywood's masculinism and tell a story from a woman's perspective," and in the latter to demonstrate the strong matriarchal tendency in Italian immigrant culture.

In his chapter that concludes Part Two, Jon Cavallero (2011) points out that "since 2000, Scorsese has directed more television programs than feature films," yet that work for television "remains undervalued when critics assess

the director's career." Cavallero argues that Scorsese has used his prestige as a filmmaker to shift "the usual model of television authorship, which tends to favor the showrunner or writing staff, to one more akin to feature filmmaking, which tends to favor the director." Cavallero tests this view by analyzing two of Scorsese's television projects, a documentary made for PBS in 2003, *The Blues*, in which his interest in music and cultural identity are explored, and the pilot episode in 2010 for the HBO series *Boardwalk Empire* in which Scorsese revisits the issues of ethnicity in relation the history of organized crime that have been central to several of his films.

Scorsese's visual style is a combination of Hollywood intensified continuity, documentary realism, expressionist distortion, and French New Wave discontinuity. Kolker, in *A Cinema of Loneliness*, describes this mix of contrasting formal tendencies as characteristic of Scorsese's movement across filmic boundaries from documentary, experimental, and stylized art cinema to commercial genre filmmaking. As a result, Scorsese at times employs realist techniques such as handheld camera and what appears to be improvisational acting along with stylized lighting, slow motion, and allusion that reminds us that movies are about other films at least as much as they are about reality (Kolker, 2011: 188–191). But despite such diversity, Kolker regards Scorsese's films as fundamentally melodramatic, using narrative, music, and *mise-en-scène* to express strong emotions. The worlds he portrays are rarely comfortable or set in reassuring spaces, and Scorsese will often position the viewer with the point of view taken by an alienated protagonist (Kolker, 2011: 195). Slow motion in these situations then becomes what Kolker calls "a signifier of distorted perception" (Kolker, 2011: 237).

This complex mix of forms and genres in Scorsese's films is engaged by the analysis in many of the chapters in this volume, but in Part Three, Murray Pomerance and Brendan Kredell focus in particular on Scorsese's portrayal of urban space.

Kredell traces how his representation of the city "relies heavily upon the territoriality of urban space . . . divided and bounded . . . negotiated, contested, and occasionally transgressed." Kredell shows how "much of the dramatic tension in Scorsese's narratives derives from the challenges to the settled spatial order of cities that these acts of transgression represent," and that the constraints on movement such transgressions violate are predicated in large part in Scorsese's films on the notion that city space is raced, gendered, classed, and divided by culture.

Characterizing Scorsese as fundamentally a New York filmmaker, Pomerance links that spatial identity to the filmmaker's conception of the creative process. Nick Nolte's Lionel Dubie character in the "Life Lessons" segment of *New York Stories* is an abstract expressionist painter who is a product of the downtown art scene of the 1980s both in his style of painting and as a star of the SoHo galleries. As for Scorsese the filmmaker, creative integrity,

self-expression, and form are essential to Lionel, but he also has to navigate the business of art if only to be able to continue working.

Scorsese's creative relationship with Robert De Niro has been a central component of his film career, and Colin Tait looks at their collaboration in a new light cast by information drawn from the personal papers that the actor donated to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas. Tait finds that De Niro's role in the films he made with Scorsese has been undervalued and that his contributions on films such as *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver* blur the lines between acting, screenwriting, and directing, prompting us to rethink ideas of authorship.

Three chapters in Part Three examine music as a central component of Scorsese's aesthetic. In his chapter, Michael Baker points out how popular music is a major feature of Martin Scorsese's work. Besides his use of it "to deliver moments of narrative might, stylistic swagger, and staggering emotional import," he has also contributed to the emergence and evolution of the rockumentary genre. The term *rockumentary* is a portmanteau word that Baker defines as "documentary films about rock music and related idioms, and usually feature some combination of performance footage, interviews, and undirected material." Baker writes that the rockumentary genre developed in the 1960s as popular music became central to Western youth culture, but gained notoriety with the blockbuster *Woodstock* (1970), a film that made the top 10 in box office that year and on which Scorsese worked, designing the split screen compositions that showed the "symbiotic relationship" between the performers and their audience.

Giuliana Muscio analyzes Scorsese's use of music in three of his Mafia movies, *Mean Streets*, *GoodFellas*, and *Casino*, with the assumption that it "can become an autonomous stylistic component, . . . utilizing the director's musical taste as an audio signature, as identifiable as the filmmaker's visual expressivity." Muscio chooses these three movies because she interprets the inclusion of both American popular music, and also songs typical of the Italian immigrant culture, such as *sceneggiata* (drama with songs) and *macchietta* (comic songs), as communicating his "cultural identity as an Italian American."

Like Muscio, Anthony Cavaluzzi analyzes Scorsese's compilation of American and Italian music, here on the soundtracks of *Who's That Knocking at My Door* (1968) and *Mean Streets*. He shows that both films focus on "a small, closely-knit group of young Italian/American men" in New York City, and use high energy popular music, the music of the streets, heard on jukeboxes and car radios" to define and comment on their violent "male-centered universe." Cavaluzzi also describes how, in *Mean Streets*, Scorsese contrasts that popular music of the young men with the traditional Neapolitan songs of the immigrant Italian culture, that communicate a different "value system that is based on family and tradition."

Scorsese has made more than 50 feature-length films. Therefore, choosing those to emphasize as his most important is difficult. Whether or not some that should have been included were not, certainly the six chosen for special attention in Part Four of this volume are worthy. *Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, and *GoodFellas* were easy choices; they are widely regarded as Scorsese's best – Roger Ebert calls them “the masterpieces” of his career. I have also included two more, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *Hugo*. Marc Raymond argues for the importance of *The Last Temptation of Christ* because of how it cemented Scorsese's reputation as a serious artist, allowing him to move in the latter part of his career toward the commercial mainstream.

As Gueric DeBona persuasively argues in his chapter on *Hugo*, it not only demonstrates Scorsese's versatility and ability to work in new genres and with the latest 3-D technology, the film also celebrates the cinéphilie that has been such an important part of his career and allows him to present a critical commentary on the current state of the American film industry.

The chapters about the very canonical Scorsese films (*Mean Streets*, *Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, and *GoodFellas*) all attempt to offer new perspectives on their content and construction. Stefan Sereda analyzes *Mean Streets* as an example of independent film, which he calls “an endeavour that groups films on the basis of their holding in common varying industrial and aesthetic diversions from more dominant filmmaking modes, especially Hollywood cinema.” Using Chuck Kleinhans's idea that independent film is best understood on sliding scale, nearer or farther from Hollywood, Sereda notes how *Mean Streets* typifies the category as involving the contributions of an auteur director, and as what he calls a “dependie” that was made outside the corporate media system but got distribution from Warner Bros. Applying David Bordwell's definition of European art cinema, Sereda points out Scorsese's use of “realism, authorial expressivity, self-reflexive or discontinuous aesthetic overtures, and ambiguity” in *Mean Streets* to show how it “departs from and challenges mainstream Hollywood production.” But ironically, on the thematic level, the film is about the failure of independence, as the attempts by the two main male characters (Johnny Boy and Charlie) to resist conformity to the rules of neighborhood lead to violence against them. As Sereda puts it, “Through Charlie's story, Scorsese offers a meditation on the impossibility of independence within the patriarchal capitalist system, despite its ostensible insistence on individualism.”

In his chapter about *Taxi Driver*, Michael High offers a timely new approach to the alienation and violence that define the film's main character, Travis Bickle (De Niro). High points out that most readings of this much-analyzed film have seen Travis as suffering “from a pathological mental condition.” However, using trauma theory, High reads Bickle “as an interplay of external stimuli and internal frailty.” High sees Bickle, a Vietnam veteran, as demonstrating “the effects of psychological trauma” from his experience in the war,

with “the resulting dialectic of impotence and power, failure and success, that results from such an experience.”

Leger Grindon has written extensively on the Hollywood boxing film, but in his chapter about *Raging Bull*, he, like Colin Tait, draws on new information from the Robert De Niro Papers at the Harry Ransom Center to reinterpret the production history and form of the nine boxing sequences in the film. Grindon shows how they combine an art cinema emphasis on character subjectivity with the “intense physical interaction, the exchange of blows” typical of the Hollywood fight film. By moving the view of a spectator from the usual placement outside the ring into the center of the fight, Scorsese helps put the viewer inside the psyche of the title character, Jake LaMotta, but in such proximity to the blood and violence of prizefighting that the subjectivity typical of the art film is combined with the action of genre film to create what Grindon calls “subjectivity characterized by sensation rather than reflection.”

Bambi Haggins’s chapter examines what she calls “a spectatorial experience of seduction” in watching *GoodFellas*. Despite the film’s problematic representation of racism, sexism, violence, and “the capitalist and consumerist American Dream,” she admits, “Nevertheless, I love *GoodFellas*, almost against my will.” Haggins goes on to carefully analyze all the violent betrayal and exploitation of others that the wise guys engage in to pursue their self-interest, but nonetheless concludes that “the spectator’s sense of right and wrong occupy a significantly grayed moral space at the film’s end.”

As she summarizes,

our sensibilities have changed: we have been acculturated and acclimated to “the life” . . . an interested tourist who daydreams about going native . . . Who hasn’t wanted to not shy away from confrontation but to court it – for your own purposes? Who hasn’t wished to have someone ‘taken care of’ – in a non-lethal way, of course?

In attempting to describe the appeal of *GoodFellas* despite its sexism, racism, and violence, Haggins gets at a fundamental quality of Scorsese’s films: their ability to create the sympathy we feel for alienated outsiders who struggle for success, even if with hatred and violence that leave them destined for failure.

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Part One

The Pious Auteur

