nial Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities, this was intended by its sponsors to become part of a series entitled Storm of Strangers about immigrants and ethnic minorities.

Filming took place in the Scorsese family apartment on Elizabeth Street, where his parents talked informally about their early life in New York and their Sicilian roots. When the film was first presented at the 1974 New York Festival, its final credits — which include Catherine Scorsese's personal recipe for spaghetti sauce — received a standing ovation. Scorsese has subsequently regarded the film as a documentary counterpart to Mean Streets.

On 30 December 1975 Scorsese married Julia Cameron. This was following the filming of Taxi Driver, a project which proved difficult to finance. The original screenplay was by Paul Schrader, who had quickly established himself as a screenwriter, following a spell as a critic after leaving university and the publication of his thesis, Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer.

Brought up in a strict Dutch Calvinist home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Schrader had not been allowed to see any films until the age of seventeen. Thereafter, he made up for lost time — and claimed that this deprivation had protected him from the self-indulgent nostalgia of ‘normal’ childhood viewing. His third script, The Yakuza, was bought by Warner Brothers for the notable sum of $350,000 and directed by Sidney Pollack. Taxi Driver came partly out of personal experience of living rough in New York and a passion for guns; from Sartre’s first ‘existential’ novel, La Nausée; and from studying the diaries of Arthur Bremer, the man who tried to assassinate Governor George Wallace. Originally considered by Robert Mulligan, with Jeff Bridges intended for the title role, it was eventually acquired by the producers Michael and Julia Phillips.

Brian De Palma introduced me to Paul Schrader. We made a pilgrimage out to see Manny Farber, the critic, in San Diego. I wanted Paul to do a script of The Gambler by Dostoevsky for me. But Brian took Paul out for dinner, and they contrived it so that I couldn’t find them. By the time I tracked them down, three hours later, they’d cooked up the idea of Obsession. But Brian told me that Paul had this script, Taxi Driver, that he didn’t want to do or couldn’t do at that time, and wondered if I’d be interested in reading it. So I read it and my friend read it and she said it was fantastic: we agreed that this was the kind of picture we should be making.

That year, 1974, De Niro was about to win the Academy Award for
Mean Streets – Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore – Taxi Driver

28 Original drawings by Martin Scorsese for the climactic scene of Taxi Driver

The Godfather Part II, Ellen Burstyn won the Award for Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore, and Paul had sold The Yakuza to Warner Brothers, so it was all coming together. Michael and Julia Phillips, who owned the script, had won an Award for The Sting and figured there was enough power to get the film made, though in the end we barely raised the very low budget of $1.3 million. In fact, for a while we even thought of doing it on black and white videotape! Certainly we felt it would be a labour of love rather than any kind of commercial success – shoot very quickly in New York, finish it in Los Angeles, release it and then bounce back into New York, New York, on which we’d already begun pre-production. De Niro’s schedule had to be rearranged anyway, because he was due to film 1900 with Bertolucci.

Much of Taxi Driver arose from my feeling that movies are really a kind of dream-state, or like taking dope. And the shock of walking out of the theatre into broad daylight can be terrifying. I watch movies all the time and I am also very bad at waking up. The film was like that for me – that sense of being almost awake. There’s a shot in Taxi Driver where Travis Bickle is talking on the phone to Betsy and the camera tracks away from him down the long hallway and there’s nobody there. That was the first shot I thought of in the film, and it was the last I filmed. I like it because I sensed that it added to the loneliness of the whole thing, but I guess you can see the hand behind the camera there.

The whole film is very much based on the impressions I have as a result of growing up in New York and living in the city. There’s a shot where the camera is mounted on the hood of the taxi and it drives past the sign ‘Fascination’, which is just down from my office. It’s that idea of being fascinated, of this avenging angel floating through the streets of the city, that represents all cities for me. Because of the low budget, the whole film was drawn out on storyboards, even down to medium close-ups of people talking, so that everything would connect. I had to create this dream-like quality in those drawings. Sometimes the character himself is on a dolly, so that we look over his shoulder as he moves towards another character, and for a split second the audience would wonder what was happening. The overall idea was to make it like a cross between a Gothic horror and the New York Daily News.

There is something about the summertime in New York that is extraordinary. We shot the film during a very hot summer and there’s an atmosphere at night that’s like a seeping kind of virus. You can smell it in the air and taste it in your mouth. It reminds me of the scene in The Ten Commandments portraying the killing of the first-born, where a cloud of
green smoke seeps along the palace floor and touches the foot of a first-born son, who falls dead. That's almost what it's like: a strange disease creeps along the streets of the city and, while we were shooting the film, we would slide along after it. Many times people threatened us and we had to take off quickly. One night, while we were shooting in the garment district, my father came out of work and walked by the set. The press of bodies on the pavement was so thick that, in the moment I turned away from the camera to talk to him, it was impossible to get back. That was typical.

As in my other films, there was some improvisation in Taxi Driver. The scene between De Niro and Cybill Shepherd in the coffee-shop is a good example. I didn't want the dialogue as it appeared in the script, so we improvised for about twelve minutes, then wrote it down and shot it. It was about three minutes in the end. Many of the best scenes, like the one in which De Niro says, 'Suck on this,' and blasts Keitel, were designed to be shot in one take. Although every shot in the picture had been drawn beforehand, with the difficulties we encountered, including losing four days of shooting because of rain, a lot of the stuff taken from the car had to be shot as documentary.

We looked at Hitchcock's The Wrong Man for the moves when Henry Fonda goes into the insurance office and the shifting points of view of the people behind the counter. That was the kind of paranoia that I wanted to employ. And the way Francesco Rosi used black and white in Salvatore Giuliano was the way I wanted Taxi Driver to look in colour. We also studied Jack Hazan's A Bigger Splash for the head-on framing, such as the shot of the grocery store before Travis Bickle shoots the black guy. Each sequence begins with a shot like that, so before any moves you're presented with an image like a painting.

I don't think there is any difference between fantasy and reality in the way these should be approached in a film. Of course, if you live that way you are clinically insane. But I can ignore the boundary on film. In Taxi Driver Travis Bickle lives it out, he goes right to the edge and explodes. When I read Paul's script, I realized that was exactly the way I felt, that we all have those feelings, so this was a way of embracing and admitting them, while saying I wasn't happy about them. When you live in a city, there's a constant sense that the buildings are getting old, things are breaking down, the bridges and the subway need repairing. At the same time society is in a state of decay; the police force are not doing their job in allowing prostitution on the streets, and who knows if they're feeding off it and making money out of it. So that sense of frustration goes in swings
of the pendulum, only Travis thinks it’s not going to swing back unless he does something about it. It was a way of exorcizing those feelings, and I have the impression that De Niro felt that too.

I never read any of Paul’s source materials – I believe one was Arthur Bremer’s diary. But I had read Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground some years before and I’d wanted to make a film of it; and Taxi Driver was the closest thing to it I’d come across. De Niro had tried his hand at scriptwriting on the subject of a political assassin, and he’d told me the story. We weren’t very close at this time, I’d just worked with him on Mean Streets, but he read the script and said it was very similar to his idea, which he therefore might as well drop. So we all connected with this subject.

Travis really has the best of intentions; he believes he’s doing right, just like St Paul. He wants to clean up life, clean up the mind, clean up the soul. He is very spiritual, but in a sense Charles Manson was spiritual, which doesn’t mean that it’s good. It’s the power of the spirit on the wrong road. The key to the picture is the idea of being brave enough to admit having these feelings, and then act them out. I instinctively showed that the acting out was not the way to go, and this created even more ironic twists to what was going on.

It was crucial to Travis Bickle’s character that he had experienced life and death around him every second he was in south-east Asia. That way it becomes more heightened when he comes back; the image of the street at night reflected in the dirty gutter becomes more threatening. I think that’s something a guy going through a war, any war, would experience when he comes back to what is supposedly ‘civilization’. He’d be more paranoid. I’ll never forget a story my father told me of one of my uncles coming back from the Second World War and walking in the street. A car backfired and the guy just instinctively ran two blocks! So Travis Bickle was affected by Vietnam: it’s held in him and then it explodes. And although at the end of the film he seems to be in control again, we give the impression that any second the time bomb might go off again.

It wasn’t easy getting Bernard Herrmann to compose the music for Taxi Driver. He was a marvellous, but crotchety old man. I remember the first time I called him to do the picture. He said it was impossible, he was very busy, and then asked what it was called. I told him and he said, ‘Oh, no, that’s not my kind of picture title. No, no, no.’ I said, ‘Well, maybe we can meet and talk about it.’ He said, ‘No, I can’t. What’s it about?’ So I described it and he said, ‘No, no, no. I can’t. Who’s in it?’ So I told him and he said, ‘No, no, no. Well, I suppose we could have a quick talk.’

Working with him was so satisfying that when he died, the night he had finished the score, on Christmas Eve in Los Angeles, I said there was no one who could come near him. You get to know what you like if you see enough films, and I thought his music would create the perfect atmosphere for Taxi Driver.

I was shocked by the way audiences took the violence. Previously I’d been surprised by audience reaction to The Wild Bunch, which I first saw in a Warner Brothers screening room with a friend and loved. But a week later I took some friends to see it in a theatre and it was as if the violence became an extension of the audience and vice versa. I don’t think it was all approval; some of it must have been revulsion. I saw Taxi Driver once in a theatre, on the opening night, I think, and everyone was yelling and screaming at the shoot-out. When I made it, I didn’t intend to have the audience react with that feeling, ‘Yes, do it! Let’s go out and kill.’ The idea was to create a violent catharsis, so that they’d find themselves saying, ‘Yes, kill!’ and then afterwards realize, ‘My God, no!’ – like some strange Californian therapy session. That was the instinct I went with, but it’s scary to hear what happens with the audience.

All around the world people have told me this, even in China. I was there for a three-week seminar and there was a young Mongolian student who spoke some English following me around Peking; and he would talk about Taxi Driver all the time. He said, ‘You know, I’m very lonely,’ and I’d say, ‘Yes, basically we all are.’ Then he said, ‘You dealt with loneliness very well,’ and I thanked him. Then he’d come round again and ask me, ‘What do I do with the loneliness?’ He wasn’t just weird, he was a film student who was really interested. I said, ‘Very often I try to put it into the work.’ So a few days later he came back and said, ‘I tried putting it into the work, but it doesn’t go away.’ I replied, ‘No, it doesn’t go away, there’s no magic cure.’

People related to the film very strongly in terms of loneliness. I never realized what that image on the poster did for the film – a shot of De Niro walking down the street with the line, ‘In every city there’s one man.’ And we had thought that audiences would reject the film, feeling that it was too unpleasant and no one would want to see it!

I wanted the violence at the end to be as if Travis had to keep killing all these people in order to stop them once and for all. Paul saw it as a kind of Samurai ‘death with honour’ – that’s why De Niro attempts suicide – and he felt that if he’d directed the scene, there would have been tons of blood all over the walls, a more surrealistic effect. What I wanted was a Daily News situation, the sort you read about every day: ‘Three men killed by
31 Wayne as the embittered Ethan Edwards in Ford's *The Searchers* (1956).

32 Robbery as ritual in Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959).

33 De Niro training before the mirror in *Taxi Driver.*
lone man who saves young girl from them'. Bickle chooses to drive his taxi anywhere in the city, even the worst places, because it feeds his hate.

I was thinking about the John Wayne character in *The Searchers*. He doesn't say much, except 'That'll be the day' (from which Buddy Holly did the song). He doesn't belong anywhere, since he's just fought in a war he believed in and lost, but he has a great love within him that's been stamped out. He gets carried away, so that during the long search for the young girl, he kills more buffalo than necessary because it's less food for the Comanche - but, throughout, he's determined that they'll find her, as he says, 'as sure as the turning of the Earth'.

Paul was also very influenced by Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket*. I admire his films greatly, but I find them difficult to watch. In *Pickpocket* there's a wonderful sequence of the pickpockets removing wallets with their hands, a lot of movement in and out, and it's the same with Travis, alone in the room practising with his guns. I felt he should talk to himself while doing this, and it was one of the last things we shot, in a disused building in one of the roughest and noisiest areas of New York. I didn't want it to be like other mirror sequences we'd seen, so while Bob talked, 'Are you talking to me? I just kept telling him, 'Say it again.' I was on the floor wearing headphones and I could hear a lot of street noise, so I thought we wouldn't get anything, but the track came out fine.

I was also very much influenced by a film called *Murder by Contract* (1958), directed by Irving Lerner, who worked on *New York, New York* as an editor and to whom the film was dedicated following his death. I saw *Murder by Contract* on the bottom half of a double bill with *The Journey*, and the neighbourhood guys constantly talked about it. It had a piece of music that was like a theme, patterned rather like *The Third Man*, which came round and round again. But above all, it gave us an inside look into the mind of a man who kills for a living, and it was pretty frightening. I had even wanted to put a clip of it into *Mean Streets*, the sequence in a car when the main character describes what different sizes of bullet do to people, but the point had really been made. Of course, you find that scene done by me in *Taxi Driver*.

Notes

1. 'Slate' is normal slang for the clapperboard which is included in every shot for identification and serves at least the working title of the film.
2. Sam Fuller (b. 1912) was a juvenile crime reporter and country-wide traveller before he began writing pulp stories and film scripts in the mid-thirties. After distinguished service in the Second World War, he began to produce and direct his own scripts in 1949, with *I Shot Jesse James*. Other notable films include *The Steel Helmet* (1950), *Park Row* (1952), *Pickup on South Street* (1953), *Run of the Arrow* (1956), *Forty Guns* (1957), *Underworld USA* (1960) and *Shock Corridor* (1963). Described by Sarris as 'an authentic American primitive', Fuller has a graphic - if not tabloid - style, making much use of bizarre point-of-view shots, long identificatory tracks and energetic cross-cutting.
3. *Park Row* (1951) was Fuller's very personal tribute to the spirit of the early American newspaper business, for which he built a lavish studio replica of New York's 'Fleet Street'. This film also features some of his most bravura tracking shots: for one which follows a running fight in and out of many taverns he greased the seat of the operator's trousers so that he could slide smoothly along the bars.
4. A grip is the handyman on the film set, with such duties as laying tracks and moving heavy camera equipment.
5. Russell Metty (1906-70) worked with many major directors in a long career as a cinematographer, including Hawks (*Bringing Up Baby*) and Welles (*The Stranger, A Touch of Evil*). He also photographed Douglas Sirk's three great Technicolor melodramas: *Magnificent Obsession, Written on the Wind* and *Imitation of Life*.
6. William Cameron Menzies (1896-1957) was one of Hollywood's most respected art directors (*The Thief of Bagdad, 1924*) before he took up direction as well as the thirties. His most prestigious projects of the thirties were Korda's spectacular *Things to Come* (1936), which he directed and part-designed, and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) for which he was art director. But his later low-budget science fiction movies have a cult following - especially *Invaders from Mars* (1953), in which both the adult world and a flying saucer invasion are seen from a child's point of view.
7. Manny Farber coined the phrase 'termite art' to cover the unselfconscious action cinema that he valued highly, alongside avant-garde work, as a critic working against the grain of respectability. One of the first to celebrate Fuller among other genre- and B-movie-specialists, he is also a painter and teacher and has latterly given up writing criticism in favour of allusive 'movie paintings'.
8. Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1956) has a rare documentary-style quality and sense of real New York locations amid his more flamboyantly theatrical works and is also one of his most overtly Catholic. An innocent man (Fonda) falsely accused of homicide is eventually vindicated after a religious experience in prison.
9. Jack Hazan's *A Bigger Splash* (1973) took its title from the painting by its subject, David Hockney. A kind of fantasy documentary on Hockney, his work and his life, the film's lush colour photography and precise, clean framing reflected the artworks which, on occasion, it reproduced exactly.