

## 4 Themes

In *La haine* we find the following themes:

- *Les cités et les banlieues* (housing estates and suburbs)
- *La délinquance* (delinquency)
- *La police* (the police)
- *La violence* (violence)
- *L'identité* (identity)
- *La jeunesse* (the youths)

### Les cités et les banlieues

Le film se passe principalement dans la cité, sauf quand les trois personnages se rendent à Paris. À travers le film, Mathieu Kassovitz montre plusieurs aspects des banlieues.

Premièrement la cité est présentée comme un endroit où règnent la violence et la délinquance. Dans de nombreuses scènes le téléspectateur est **témoin** de confrontations entre les jeunes et la police, comme celle sur **les toits** ou celle de **la poursuite** dans la cité. De plus on ne peut pas s'empêcher de remarquer que la cité est un endroit **délabré** et **insalubre**, aspect qui est d'autant plus accentué avec les scènes dans l'appartement luxueux et la galerie d'art à Paris. On voit entre autres des voitures brûlées, des graffitis sur les murs, des enfants qui jouent autour des voitures **incendiées** et des habitations de mauvaise qualité. Le paysage est triste et les HLM ne laissent aucune vie privée aux habitants. La façon dont ils sont juxtaposés et leur apparence laisse le téléspectateur se sentir claustrophobe.

Cependant il faut aussi se pencher sur une autre vision, plus positive, des cités que Mathieu Kassovitz communique. Bien sûr la première interprétation des banlieues est celle décrite dans les deux premiers paragraphes mais il est intéressant de noter que la cité apparaît également comme un endroit où les jeunes se sentent chez eux et un endroit qui leur appartient ; c'est leur territoire.

It would be tempting to concentrate solely on the negative aspects of the housing estate as the story unfolds, focusing on the tension, violence, boredom of the youths, drug dealing and the feeling of there being no escape. Hubert's line, 'I want to get out of here,' resonates. Mathieu Kassovitz shows life on these estates and what it feels like to live in one of those squalid tower blocks. The estate also appears to be separated from the city, with its own language and its own social code. The viewers get a sense of the three main characters' feeling of inadequacy at the art gallery, for instance, and the long distance between Paris and the estate on the train journey. People have a particular,

**le témoin** witness  
**les toits** (m) roofs  
**une poursuite** a chase  
**délabré(e)** run down, dilapidated  
**insalubre** unhealthy  
**incendié(e)** burnt out



## 6 Director's methods



In his film Mathieu Kassovitz has taken great care and a considerable amount of time to think his scenes through. As he wants the scenes to express certain ideas, the techniques he has used are critical to understanding the story.

Note that this more technical chapter is written in English. Important terms are marked in bold in the English text, and the French equivalents are provided as key vocabulary in the margins. You will need to know the French for these technical terms to use in your exam.

### La structure du film

The film follows one day on an estate and this is reinforced by the presence of the **clock** on the screen. The structure is clear and simple.

- The first few scenes introduce the themes of the film, with the footage of riots on the estate, and the characters. We see Saïd first, then Vinz and finally Hubert. The scenes that introduce the characters focus on their particularities. For instance, we see Saïd adding his name to some graffiti he has just written on the back of a police van, Vinz is in his bedroom dreaming and Hubert is in his boxing gym.
- The body of the film presents the vicious circle the young people are trapped in and which will lead to the **final scene**.
- The final scene will conclude on what the whole film revolves around. The **leitmotiv** of the film is then repeated again. 'It is the story of a society that...'

Kassovitz uses real **footage** to add to the realism of his film and this real footage is used a number of times in the film — the riots happening, Abdel in hospital and towards the end we hear about the death of Abdel.

### La langue

In order to recreate the reality of the suburb Mathieu Kassovitz uses a different language register — the language spoken by young people. We therefore hear a lot of *verlan* (backwards language) in the film. *Verlan* is used only by the young people, while other people use standard French. See pp. 12–13 in the social and historical context chapter for more information about *verlan*.

The language is at times very rude and this reinforces the feeling of violence. We hear the young people insulting the police and older people. There is no respect and this use of language portrays that.

The way that Saïd sometimes talks about girls and women makes us feel quite uncomfortable. He uses degrading language to refer to his relationships with women.

**l'horloge** (f) clock  
**la scène finale** final scene  
**le leitmotiv** leitmotiv  
**une séquence, un enregistrement** footage

#### TASK

Recherchez des mots en verlan sur internet et essayez de les repérer dans le film.



The *vous* and the *tu* forms are used effectively in this film to reinforce the feeling of respect or lack of it.

## Les techniques visuelles

### Le noir et blanc

Black and white is used throughout the film — a technique that intensifies the dramatic aspect of the **plot**. It also contributes to the way Mathieu Kassovitz wanted to represent life on an estate. This choice of technique attracts the viewer's attention and highlights the importance of the director's messages.

In an interview, Mathieu Kassovitz emphasised that he didn't want to make a hip-hop film. On the contrary he wanted to make **a piece of art**, he wanted to add an artistic feel to his work, to make people think and reflect. The use of black and white serves that purpose well. The viewer is drawn into the plot and realises that there is something to think about.

Black and white also makes the issues in this film timeless. Even though the film was shot in 1995 we still feel the relevance of the issues raised and we still feel compelled and drawn in by the three characters.

#### TASK

Dans le DVD paru en 2005 pour les dix ans du film on trouve un entretien avec Mathieu Kassovitz. Écoutez-le et notez ce qu'il dit sur les techniques du film.

### L'éclairage

A number of scenes are **shot** at night or in darkness and this choice amplifies the gravity of the action. For instance, when Vinz shows his friends that he has the gun the scene is shot in a very dark place, underground. The gloomy atmosphere adds a **dramatic** aspect to the scene. Later, when the trio are in Paris, they spend the night there and the scenes are shot with dimmed light and in obscurity. The lack of luminosity seems to intensify the severity of what happens in Paris.

#### Build critical skills

En utilisant le noir et blanc Mathieu Kassovitz veut faire réfléchir le téléspectateur. Quel est l'effet du noir et blanc sur vous ? Que pensez-vous des points décrits dans cette section ? Êtes-vous d'accord ou pas ?

#### Key quotation

*Téma la vache !*

(Vinz; see p. 94 of the Top ten quotations chapter for an explanation)

**l'intrigue** (f) plot  
**une oeuvre d'art** a piece of art

**tourner** to shoot (a film)  
**dramatique** dramatic



▲ Director Mathieu Kassovitz on the set of *La haine*



## Les techniques cinématographiques

There are virtually no **special effects** in this film due to the low budget. We can, however, see distinctive camera techniques in *La haine*.

### Les mouvements de caméra

**Travelling** is used to draw our attention to something. For instance, in the scene underground when Vinz shows the gun, the director uses a very fast travelling **camera** to draw our attention to it. Also when Vinz, Hubert and Saïd have just arrived in Paris we see another fast travelling camera headed towards our trio, with Paris in the background. This is to show us the transition between the two places — the estate and Paris.

### Les séquences longues

On several occasions the director uses **long sequences, wide angles** and **panoramic shots** to show our characters in their surroundings, in their everyday life on the estate. Long sequences are used to depict life on the estate as it is in reality. We see long scenes where our characters are doing nothing, telling jokes, smoking, sitting around. Mathieu Kassovitz is indeed reflecting everyday life for these youngsters. We feel their boredom and share the inactivity of the characters. We sit there with them, listening to pointless jokes or waiting for something to happen.

By using one continuous shot throughout a scene, Kassovitz maintains the momentum of the action and the energy of the characters. We are drawn into the action more and **realism** shines through more.

### L'horloge : le temps qui passe

The clock used throughout the film further emphasises this aspect of time passing when nothing really happens. The action starts at 10 h 38 and finishes at 6 h 01 the next day. However, the clock also plays an important role in the plot as it adds to the feeling that something is going to happen, like a ticking bomb.

### Les gros plans

We see numerous **close-ups** in the film and each time these close-ups draw our attention to something significant in the plot. For instance, the close-up on Vinz's ring highlights the fact that he wants to be seen as a 'gangster'; the graffiti that Saïd writes on the police van at the start of the film highlights his views of the police, while at the same time, of course, serving to introduce his name; the close-up of another graffiti on the door when the young people are being chased by the police indicates how they feel about the police; and the close-up on the trainee police officer reinforces what he is thinking about the whole scene.

**les effets spéciaux**

(m) special effects

**le travelling** travelling

**la caméra** camera

**les séquences**

**longues** (f) long sequences

**les grands angles**

(m) wide angles

**les plans**

**panoramiques**  
panoramic shot

**le réalisme** realism

**le gros plan** close-up





## La caméra sur l'épaule / à la main

In order to make us feel more in the heart of the action, Mathieu Kassovitz uses a **hand-held camera** at times to shoot the scenes. The viewer feels more drawn into this action. It is almost as if we are there with the characters as we follow them during one day of their lives. We see this hand-held technique in the scene on the roof where we really feel we are part of the group. It is also used when the young people are being chased in the basement on the estate and it makes us feel claustrophobic and part of the chase.

## La bande sonore

We hear many different sounds in this film and each one of them contributes in some way to conveying the director's ideas. We hear a clock ticking, police sirens wailing, explosions, gunshots, doors slamming — but also silences.

## La musique

The choice of music played in the film is not insignificant. It plays a part in the message conveyed in the scenes and in the film as a whole. For instance, the first song that we hear is a Bob Marley song and the lyrics are powerful. The words reflect what the young people feel: what do they have to do to be heard before they start burning and looting. Here, music is used to set the **tone** of the scene and convey a particular message.

## Le son

In a commentary about his film, the director mentions that he used two sound techniques — **mono** and **stereo**.

On the estate, stereo sound is used to capture the **atmosphere** and what happens in the background and in the foreground. We hear our characters talking but we also hear background noise.

In Paris, on the contrary, Kassovitz uses mono sound with only one central speaker. The director wanted to make us feel that the characters didn't connect with this environment. We just hear the characters, not what is happening around them.

## Les silences

Silence is sometimes even more powerful than words and this is used effectively in the film. For instance, the last scene when we see Saïd's face lit up by the police car's light is very dramatic. We sense the gravity of what has just happened. Silences in the film really contrast with the violence, which is portrayed with loud noises, gunshots and insults.

### Build critical skills

Mathieu Kassovitz a tourné de nombreuses scènes dans lesquelles le silence règne. Quel est, selon vous, l'impact de ces silences sur le téléspectateur ?

**la caméra à la main / sur l'épaule** hand-held camera

#### GRADE BOOSTER

Always use technical terms when you refer to the techniques and remember to identify the effects on the viewer and on the plot. In developing your arguments, consider whether the techniques are effective or not.

**le ton** tone

**la bande sonore** soundtrack

**en mono** in mono

**en stéréo** in stereo

**l'atmosphère**

(f), **l'ambiance**

(f) atmosphere