



A Level Film Studies 'Amy' (Kapadia, 2005)

COMPONENT 2: GLOBAL FILMMAKING PERSPECTIVES

Section B: Documentary film

Written examination: 2.5 hours

35% of qualification

AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of elements of film

AO2 Apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to:

analyse and compare films, including through the use of critical approaches

evaluate the significance of critical approaches

analyse and evaluate own work in relation to other professionally produced work

CONTEXTS

Production | Social and Political | Critical Debate

POLITICAL Invasion of privacy a big media debate at the time; Leveson enquiry was in 2011 examining press invasion. Mitch threatened Kapadia with legal action over his representation in the film

INSTITUTIONAL Kapadia's budget was around £3million. Highest grossing British documentary in the UK –made £23 million and won over 50 awards including a BAFTA and an Oscar

CULTURAL Documentary is of a similar construction to "Senna" –a documentary on Ayrton Senna. Her music is universally acclaimed. Camden was culturally seen as the place to be seen - a cool and edgy part of London

SOCIAL Film exposes 21st century Drug Culture, use and addiction, the issue of celebrity worship, Peer pressure, representations of the family and the role of fathers. Kapadia calls style of documentary making "True Fiction."

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

ACCESSIBILITY Proliferation of technology enabled the production of the movie via mobile phone and hand-held camera footage / recordings

POST - PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES Ken Burns effect – slow zooms added in post to produce dramatic effects

SLOW – MO. elongates available footage and dramatizes a situation

VIGNETTE dark edges around a frame so attention is drawn to a specific aspect of a frame

FRANKENBITING used where sound bites are edited out of context to create an alternative meaning

MONTAGE SHOTS juxtaposed in an often fast-paced fashion that compresses time and conveys a lot of information in a relatively short period

TERMINOLOGY

OBJECTIVITY

CONSTRUCTION

SPECTATOR POSITIONING

ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

ACTUALITY FOOTAGE

FRANKENBITING

REENACTMENT

RECONSTRUCTION

DOCUMENTARY MODES

MANIPULATION

IDEOLOGY AND THEMES

Many documentary films will have an ideological interest that is, in part, about challenging and exploring the typically accepted idea that a documentary film tells us the 'truth' about a subject.

Like film stars, pop stars (such as Amy Winehouse) connect to both concepts of the male gaze and of the female gaze. Critically, the star arguably serves as a means by which certain societal concerns are expressed and so the star fulfils a cultural role and an economic role in that the producer makes a financial investment in the star not only as a performer but as a vital means of promoting the film and attracting audiences to it.

Pop stars, then, do something other than only 'entertain' audiences and, critically, and appropriately in terms of Amy Winehouse, there is a contradiction between performance and off-screen identity. Stars, then, are media texts that are encoded and can be decoded for their meanings and values. Stars (whether of the pop music industry or the film industry) allow audiences to access emotional states, issues of gender, and aspirational behaviour and situations.

LANGUAGE AND MISE EN SCENE

Sound | Lighting | Editing | Cinematography

CINEMATOGRAPHY Mostly original, archival footage (stock footage), some actuality footage to provide expositional information re. setting

LIGHTING Natural lighting; lighting altered in stock footage to create a story

MISE-EN-SCENE Natural; contrasts between mise-en-scene before and after fame; drug paraphernalia

EDITING Associative editing used to impose a narrative on the documentary form; highly sophisticated. The film was largely constructed via the editing process

SOUND Non-diegetic sound used to offer a preferred reading through use of Amy's songs and sound effects (e.g. bullet-like sound for flash photography). Indirect interviews used

PERFORMANCE Archetypal characters selected to support Kapadia's view of her story e.g. Blake Field & Mitch represented as Proppian villains; contrasting characters create tension/ offer different view points

CRITICAL DEBATES

MOORE

Plays to his Left-Wing Populist audience
Says he creates MOVIES not documentaries
Auteur
Obtrusive / Biased Opinionated
Entertaining / Dramatic / Satirical
Deliberately sets up binary oppositions in the extreme
Non-Diegetic / Contrapuntal Sound for humour / irony
Scripted
Aesthetic approach

LONGINOTTO

Voice Of God: She is never seen; no direct address.
Unobtrusive
Appears to be unbiased
'Authentic'
Unscripted
No Music
Observational Cinema
Fly On The Wall/ Cinema Verite – 'Truthful Cinema'

PAST EXAM QUESTIONS

Explore how two documentary techniques are used in presenting the subject of your chosen film. Refer to one film-maker's theory you have studied. [20]

'Digital technologies have expanded our sense of what a documentary can be.' How far is this true in relation to your chosen film? [20]

AUTEUR

At the time of Amy's cinema release, Asif Kapadia was interviewed for high profile, mainstream film website rogerebert.com and the point is made that Kapadia's "...work is immersive without ever becoming exploitative."

Of his approach to the work of being a filmmaker, Kapadia comments that:

"I come from a drama background, and in the dramas that I've done, there's hardly any dialogue, so I'm really not a fan of talking heads. I worked in TV for a short time and couldn't stand the fact that we'd always be filming someone talking, just giving information."

In terms of Asif Kapadia, his film *Amy* is now considered the second of a trilogy of documentaries: *Senna*, *Amy* and now, released in 2019, *Diego Maradona*.

NARRATIVE | GENRE

Classic 3 act structure. Linear and chronological, structured around dramatic situations e.g. interventions and family death

Binary Oppositions used to create a classic narrative of heroes, villains and victims. Press v family, childhood V experience, independence V record label

Amy is defined as a "Poetic documentary style" – aims at creating feelings rather than truth, "expository" - persuasive / informative & "reflexive".

Voiceover is completely absent, yet often common in documentary

SPECTATORSHIP

Spectator aligned to identify with the pressures Amy was under and to sympathise with her. Towards the end, that shifts so we align with her friends and feel powerless to help her.

KEY SEQUENCES

Live recording scene 'Back to Black'

Concert scene – mobile phone footage to make it more "unprofessional"

Paparazzi gunfire scene

Final scene – cameras still around her, even in death