A2 Media Studies Revision: Whiplash

Technical codes: LAMES (lighting; angle; movement; editing; sound)
Visual codes: FIL CC (facial expression; iconography; location; costume; colour)
-General information
-Key scene textual analysis
-Text, industry, audience
-Theories + application to Whiplash
-Whiplash in terms of finance
-Whiplash in terms of production, distribution and exhibition
-Representation: masculinity

General Information

‘independent film’

Writer + director: Damian Chazelle; also wrote ‘Grand Piano’ (2013) and ‘The Last Exorcism Part II (2013)

-Wrote the screenplay for ‘Whiplash’ first > entered the black list > raised 60k > made a short film > took to the Sundance Film Fest ival > won short film award > generated buzz > ‘Bold Films’ gave Chazelle $3.3.m > took feature film to Sundance festival 2014 > S ony Pictures Worldwide acquired the international distribution rights > distributed to UK and the USA (including DVD)

Sony Pictures Worldwide acquired the international distribution rights. Distributed to the UK and USA. Also did DVD for UK and th e USA.

Worldwide gross: $33, 020, 729

UK: £1, 280, 311

USA: $13, 092, 000

Key Scene Textual Analysis – Finale

According to Jill Nelmes, key to constructing genre are: visual signifiers; narrative conventions; audio codes; themes
Genre: drama, music, thriller

Drama: narrative convention of a happy ending as the new equilibrium; suggesting that life's obstacles can be overcome. This is pre

sent in the close ups of Andrew (warm colours; humanistic lighting; Pheonix imagery – rebirth; transcendental) and Fletcher – their fa

cial expression exchange suggests that Fletcher is impressed and has honed Andrew's greatness as the next "Charlie Parker' . This is substantiated by Fletcher exhibiting respect for Andrew through fixing the cymbal

Musical: a musical performance is integral to the narrative

Thriller: frenetic editing. The narrative element of an antagonistic relationship between Fletcher and Andrew – suspense is built as A ndrew improvises. Changes in shot angles. Close ups utilised to capitalise on emotion. Suspense is built through location: the audien ce consists of people who "don't forget"; Andrew's future prospects may be compromised. Fletcher, depicted as the antagonist (argu ably) sports dark clothing

Representation

‘Men act and women appear’ (John Berger, 1972, ‘Ways of Seeing)

Gender is a social construction composed of masculinity and femininity, which in turn consist of core traits

Masculinity

-Hegemonic masculinity emphasises the superiority of ‘manly’ men over less ‘manly’ men. Historically, representations are subject to more hegemonic cultural stereotypes that reflect changes in society

-Hollywood represents the ultimate aspirational male central protagonist to audiences who seek to escape from reality into exaggerated, non-realistic representations

-80s action films portrayed aggressive, hegemonically determined hyper real action heroes played by physically dominant actors e.g. Arnold Schwarzenneger in science fiction film ‘Predator’

Trujillo (1991) identified 5 major features that defined masculinity as hegemonic in US media culture:

-when power was defined in terms of physical force **(Fletcher throws objects)** and control

-when it is defined through occupational achievement (**Fletcher as a highly respected teacher at the music academy**) in an industrial, capitalistic society

-when it is represented in terms of familial patriarchy

-when it is symbolised by daring and romantic

-is heterosexual

Generic typecasting has and often is linked with gender representation

-The masculine representation of many actors has been subverted from time to time e.g. Schwarzenegger in ‘The Terminator’ to ‘Kindergarten Cop’; Tom Cruise in ‘Mission Impossible’ to ‘Edge of Tomorrow’

-Men are not unattractive in film. The body aesthetic dominates in terms of the ‘gaze’ unlike other media forms whereby masculine dominance is associated with status and role in contrast to physicality. **Andrew is not hegemonically determined in that he has a slim bodily aesthetic and cries yet is encoded with ambition; intelligence; and quick wits. The warm humanistic colour orange could symbolise rebirth; mythological allusion to the Greek Phoenix, which is associated with the sun, a male symbol, thus evidencing Andrew as conforming to masculinity**

Matthew Hall (2008): *Teaching Men and Film*
Explores challenges to the hegemonic construction of masculinity in the 21st century offering a more pluralistic, diverse, liberal analysis of gender discussing a crisis in masculinity. **Andrew is penalised for crying, though verbal reprimands are a facet to Fletcher’s character**

Crisis of Masculinity
Males doubt their identity due to: physical labour jobs being banned or moved abroad; and the lengthening of education and increase in equal rights, resulting in females asserting their independence
New Man
Up and coming new beautiful actors such as Riz Ahmed and Ryan Reynolds are represented as sophisticated and cultured, not flat characters
Social Realist British Film
Classic social realist central protagonist was a frustrated, male, diverse, liberal, pluralistic alienated character who constantly rebelled against the system, aspiring for a better life
‘Shifty’ (2009), ‘Looking for Eric’, ‘Broken’

Theories and Application to EoT
Marxism + Cultural Hegemony

Key terminology
Base: the economic core upon which society is organised; the central means by which wealth is created and distributed amongst people
Superstructure: refers to the institutions that are shaped by the economic base and legitimate it e.g. religion; education; political system; media
Proletariat: those who work the means of production and provide services
Bourgeoisie: those who own or control the means of production or services – the middle classes
The media is crucial in the function of maintaining the power held by the ruling elite through: indoctrinating people into accepting their roles, leading to a false consciousness; and in generating money for the owners of media institutions
Application to Whiplash
Obey authority (Fletcher) or be psychologically disturbed

Post colonialism
The British Empire once spanned half the globe through militaristic dominance. Whilst colonial territories eventually declared independence leading to a significant decrease in British influence, postcolonial theorists contend that the effects of colonialism have not been extinguished as evidenced by English being widely spoken across countries which were once imperial territories. They argue the most evident sign of cultural imperialism is the area of cinema, which typically depicts Eastern culture as being inferior to Western, according to Edward.
Application to Whiplash

Hyperreality
Baudrillard argues that in a media-saturated world, representation has been replaced as the dominant mode: simulation, which 'bears no relation to any reality'. Industries depict hyperreality partially because the audience demands it
Application to Whiplash

It goes way behond that. There is a symbolic meaning behind the father's character, that represents comfort and mediocrity. That is why he is not allowed to watch the show from backstage, or inside the theatre, but to catch only a glimpse of what is actually going on from a shameful place where doors are sliggly opened for him to witness from the shadows. On the one hand, this movie shows the difference from having a comforable and pathetically happy and perfect life, and on the other, the sacrifice required to reach perfection (for a short while). The first way of life ends up being healthier for living on a less stressful environment, while the other is surrounded by trauma, sadness, depresion, but ends up making a person outstanding. The real question the movie actually presents to the audience is: All that sacrifice to obtain perfection, is it worth it for you or not? PS. The director of the movie once said that, for his obsession, he expected Andrew to commit suicide before reaching the age of 40.
14:04

think that it's certainly what Fletcher believes - that people have to be pushed, and so the ends justify the means - but, in the end, it's still only a logical, but unproven and unproveable, theory and that's the rub; Fletcher thinks he has the answer, but his absolute belief doesn't make it so. Fletcher considers himself instrumental to his students' development, and while that may be so, he's certainly been proven as instrumental to his students' destruction, and his methods and their extremes can't be proven as effective or necessary in any objective way. I think it is true, however, that Andrew may well have more respect for Fletcher and his aims/approach, flawed as their pursuit may be, than the respect Andrew has for his father at this point in his life.

Andrew going back out on stage to prove something to Fletcher, his father, or himself is certainly one theory, and probably a contributing factor in the decision. What it ignores is that he was playing to an audience of his peers who "don't forget". If he hadn't gone back out, his whole career would've been over. He has to prove to everyone that doesn't know him that he's not as incompetent as he was made to look, and it has to be on his terms so that Fletcher can't continue to humiliate him.

Andrew makes it clear that he is not proving to Fletcher that he is great, nor looking for approval by his attitude at the ending. Andrew took charge of the entire band and told Fletcher to wait for his queue which can be seen as Andrew realizing his true greatness. Fletcher may have helped him on the way, but the scene in the bar where Fletcher reveals true greats never quit, allowed Andrew to look within himself and bring out his true greatness that he had all along.

Andrew's walk offstage is one whereby he endures the most suffering of any part of the movie. Sure he does get hit by a car in earlier scenes, but he pushes through that- and it has barely as much of an emotional toll on him as the journey towards his father, through the coldly lit background. However he rejects his father, this symbol of comfort, and somewhat failure, and returns to the orange lit drum-kit for one of the greatest finales in film history. This is his redemption. He isn't proving himself to Fletcher, or the audience- in fact he isn't proving himself at all. Rather he is ascending above the realms of Fletcher's tuition, shown when he hits the crash symbol in Fletcher's furious face, into something of true greatness- all he ever wanted from the outset of the film. This is accompanied by the warm orange lighting- once again, similar to the image of the phoenix rising in flame- and the use of the drum roll in Andrew's solo, to show that he, himself, is in charge of this militaristic authority that music haunted him with prior. (see the opening scene of the film and the horror film tropes used within) Notice that the film makes it deliberately unclear as to whether Andrew has Fletcher's approval at the end of the film. This is done to prove that it doesn't even matter. If Chazelle wanted to show approval he wouldn't have picked such a close shot- he would've had a close up, or a mid shot of Fletcher smiling. But he didn't. And this is suggestive that approval (shown with the dad also) is not the key to success, but rather pain and suffering, and continual pain and suffering at that (as shown with the sweat on his brow, and the blood on Andrews fingers throughout his solo to be the best

Also, the last scene of the film is not supposed to be realistic it's supposed to make you feel something. Maybe it was all in his head and that he never got back on stage in the end. It was just like his greatest desire in that moment, the ultimate wish fulfillment fantasy scenario.