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| **Context** | | |
| **C. Production Context** | **1.** | Danny Boyle’s ***Trainspotting*** (1996) was the product of John Hodge’s screenplay based on the novel by Irvine Welsh. Whilst not explicitly autobiographical, the personal experiences of Welsh himself had a fundamental impact on the backdrop of the story and the characters he created. Films reflect the time in which they were set and made and Danny Boyle’s adaptation of Welsh’s novel set in the 1980’s is heavily influenced by 1990’s British subculture – a time where youth were heading towards choosing something else other than what was being dictated. In the 1990’s there was a collision between subcultures. We witnessed the birth and rise of what was to be referred to as ‘lad culture’ – a subculture generally associated with Britpop (Oasis, Blur, Pulp, Elastica) where the middle-class figure adopted attitudes and ideas generally associated with the working classes (football, drinking) which coined the term ‘ladette’ - a reference to young women attempting to emulate laddish behaviour. This collided with the rave scene and acid house which saw drug use becoming part of mainstream youth culture ***Trainspotting*** both reflects and recreates the experiences of British youth subculture: a time of struggle when masculinity was again in crisis. |
| **2.** | ***Trainspotting*** is a critique of the problems facing youth in the 1990’s – the hangover of Thatcherism, the ever-growing obsession with consumer culture, class divide and gender identity. To some extent the drug use is seen as a reaction or imaginary ‘solution’ to capitalist British Society and a feeling of displacement and abandonment: a rebellious reaction to a system that seemed to dismiss the needs of Britain’s youth who were already a marginalised sub-group within working-class culture and who were feeling the aftermath of a post-Thatcher era and three successive terms of conservative rule. |
| **3.** | Produced and financed by Channel Four Films in association with Figment it had an estimated budget of $3,500,000 which it exceeded in takings in the UK’s opening weekend. |
| **D. Social, Historical and Political Context** | **4.** | Although ***Trainspotting*** was shot in and around Glasgow and Edinburgh, it also relies on the aesthetics that only a big city like London can offer – an ideal setting for excess, despair, alienation and sensory overload. Scottish National identity is challenged throughout the film in a way that was not seen before. When the character of Tommy asks Renton: ‘Doesn’t it make you proud to be Scottish?’ Renton’s response hardly smacks of national pride:  *“It’s shite being Scottish. We’re the lowest of the low; the scum o’ the fuckin’ earth. The most wretched, miserable, servile, pathetic trash that was ever shat into civilisation. Some people hate the English – I don’t. They’re just wankers. We on the other hand were colonised by wankers; can’t even find a decent culture to be colonised by. We’re ruled by effete arseholes; it’s a shite state of affairs to be in Tommy, and all the fresh air in the world won’t make any fuckin’ difference”* |
| **5.** | The idea of the loss of identity for youth en-masse is reflected in Renton’s belief that he has no real (national) identity. As a postmodern film, ***Trainspotting*** questions not only the place in which youth has found itself, but moreover where it might be going. In an age where there is a clear lack of belonging and identity, where youth subculture has been drained of meaning and spirit, it attempts to offer an alternative to that which is controlled by the dominant middle-class ideology. The youth of the 1990’s felt a sense of entrapment and the text asks us to question this and to challenge it. |

**Knowledge Organiser Film Studies Component 1 – Varieties of Film and Filmmaking Section C – British Film – *Trainspotting***

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| 1. **Synopsis** | Heroin addict Mark Renton (Ewan McGregor) stumbles through bad ideas and sobriety attempts with his unreliable friends -- Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller), Begbie (Robert  Carlyle), Spud (Ewen Bremner) and Tommy (Kevin McKidd). He also has an underage girlfriend, Diane (Kelly Macdonald), along for the ride. After cleaning up and moving  from Edinburgh to London, Mark finds he can't escape the life he left behind when Begbie shows up at his front door on the run, and a scheming Sick Boy follows. | | | |
| 1. **Cast and Characters** | | | | |
| Mark Renton | | Ewan McGregor | Tommy | Kevin McKidd |
| Sick Boy | | Jonny Lee Miller | Begbie | Robert Carlyle |
| Spud | | Ewen Bremner | Diane | Kelly MacDonald |

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| **Key Scenes** | | |
| **E. Opening Section** | **6.** | The opening sequence really establishes the films departure from realist cinema. It begins with Iggy Pop’s pounding ***Lust for Life*** and within the first five minutes moves between five different scenes which submerges the spectator into the middle of the action. |
| **7.** | We witness Renton and his friends running down the streets in a reverse tracking shot, Renton clearly identified as the protagonist through the voiceover. When hit by a car, Renton stops and laughs, looking directly at the camera as his name appears on screen. |
| **8.** | The scene then cuts to a squalid flat, empty of any furniture or possessions where a solitary Renton smokes whilst high on drugs. |
| **9.** | This cuts to a shot of five characters in a football strip posing for a photograph in front of a football goal.  We are then introduced to all of the other characters– Sick Boy, Begbie, Spud and Tommy through the use of a freeze frame that also conveys their names. As Renton is hit in the head with the football and falls to the ground, the scene cuts to him falling to the bare floorboards as the camera pans around his horizontal body he tells us that he ‘chose not to choose life.’ |
| **10.** | The scene then cuts to a green wall which reads, ‘Welcome to Mother Superiors’. The camera moves inside and we watch baby Dawn crawl along the floor whilst in the next room the group of addicts shoot up. A high angle shot looking down on Spud is cut with a low angle shot looking up on Swanney (Mother Superior) who tells him it is ‘pure as the devils shit’. |
| **11.** | The scene then cuts to Begbie declaring, ‘no way would I poison my body with that shit’ as he drinks and chalks up a snooker cue. This is followed by a shot that zooms in on Tommy with his girlfriend echoing Begbie’s earlier sentiments, ‘it’s a waste of life poisoning your body with that shit.’ |
| **12.** | The scene them moves to Renton’s house as he sits eating with his parents. Renton appears almost like a silhouette, back to the camera as his father says disappointingly, ‘every chance you’ve had son, you’ve blown it stuffing your veins with that filth.’ It quickly cuts back to Renton again, on the floor, using drugs before he jumps up and declares that he is ‘off the scag’ and ‘finished with that shite’, finally introducing Mother Superior (Swanney) given that name on account of the ‘length of his habit’. |
| **13.** | The credits appear and we hear the sounds of trains moving and crossing. The scene clearly establishes the premise of the text, it establishes the themes in the narrative, introduces all of the main characters and sets the tone for the film. |
| **F. Ending Section** | **14.** | The closing sequence conveys an ideological shift in the narrative and the shots are bound together by Underworld’s ***Born Slippy***. The scene begins with a high angle shot of all five characters as they sleep in the hotel room following the drug deal. Renton is seen waking up in a double bed next to Begbie. He gets up and stares at himself in the mirror before turning back to look at the others and in the absence of any dialogue or voiceover we are acutely aware of what he is about to do. |
| **15.** | The camera looks down on Begbie as he lies asleep in the bed dressed in a pink shirt and tie and clutching the red sports bag filled with money. The low angle shot of Renton asserts his power at this point and we watch him carefully remove the bag from Begbie. A low angle shot of Renton continues as we watch him step over Sick Boy. Spud catches sight of him as it cuts to a low angle shot of Renton framed by a red door. As a close-up shot shows Spud shake his head with worry, we watch Renton leave the hotel room through a panning shot that then tracks him as he walks away. |
| **16.** | At this point, the voiceover begins again as Renton justifies his actions as a ‘minor betrayal’ between friends that had ‘outgrow each other’. The canted angle as he walks through the archway makes it seem like he literally steps over the camera. The camera then cuts to a shot of Renton from inside a mirrored locker as we see multiple images of him collecting his passport and replacing it with a stash of money. As the locker door closes and turns to black, the scene cuts back to Begbie losing it in the hotel room with a high angle shot of him smashing things and screaming. This is intercut with shots of the police arriving and is followed by a reverse tracking shot of Renton as he walks towards us, getting closer and closer to the camera so that his image is blurred. |
| **17.** | During these final shots we hear Renton assert: The truth is that I’m a bad person, but I’m going to change. I’m going to change. This is the last of this sort of thing. I’m cleaning up and I’m moving on, going straight and choosing life. |

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| **Specialist Study Areas** | | |
| 1. **Narrative** | **18.** | Fundamentally,  ***Trainspotting*** has a linear structure that starts ‘in Medias res’ and the traditional happy ending in which Renton decides to ‘choose life’ is left somewhat open which allowed Boyle to make a sequel ***Trainspotting 2*** (2017). The narrative revolves around binary oppositions that help us to make sense of the chaos we are faced with within the narrative. The most obvious binary opposition is that of poverty and wealth, where there are some clear representations of poverty in the film. However, one could also explore the following oppositions in the text: guilt v innocence, justice v injustice, left v right wing politics and addiction v sobriety. |
| **19.** | ***Trainspotting*** adheres to Todorov’s theory of classical narrative structure in that there is some sense of equilibrium at the start (Renton is a functioning heroin addict, he plays football, he has friends and he decides to quit by the end of the opening sequence). However, what follows is a series of disruptions (he is lured back into drug taking, baby Dawn dies, Spud goes to prison, Tommy Dies, he pulls a drug deal) before the narrative is resolved and we see him free of drugs and ‘choosing life’.  ***Trainspotting*** also takes on an episodic narrative structure in that we witness is a series of episodes or actions that are bound together through a narrative device – in this case Renton’s voiceover. This seems to reflect Welsh’s original literary narrative structure of a collection of short stories before it was eventually published as an entire novel. These episodes are also connected by the on-going enigma that drives the narrative forward and maintains the interest of the spectator: Will Renton retain sobriety; can he stay clean and what does his future look like? |
| **20.** | For the most part, ***Trainspotting*** exploits a **restricted narration** in the film. This is because the narrative is told from Renton’s point of view and what the spectator knows and sees is restricted to his knowledge of events. Renton is directly involved in almost all of these events, and for the few scenes that do not include him, the spectator is provided with his commentary, his voiceover to convey what is happening. This works well for the spectator as it allows us to align ourselves with Renton. The story is told from the point of view of an addict rather than someone looking in on events and his voiceover is used effectively in both the opening and closing scenes. This allows the film to maintain its pace and effectively link scenes in the film. |
| 1. **Ideology** | **21.** | ***Trainspotting*** conveys anti-Thatcher ideology. It purports the idea that if we are all consumers in a capitalist commodity driven society, then we should be free to make our own choices rather than being told what to choose. It also conveys the idea that we should be responsible for ourselves and our actions, the choices we make ultimately will have consequences not just for us, but for those around us. This is not a film that is perpetuating an anti-drugs message. It is using the theme of heroin addiction to explore some more universal issues in society: identity, belonging, class, politics and capitalism. Like Irvine Welsh’s Novel, It critiques western culture. There are no heroes in this text and the characters in ***Trainspotting*** aim to distance themselves from the capitalist culture that keeps them enslaved but in doing so they segregate and alienate themselves from wider society and are instead shackled by their addiction to heroin. Renton rejects post-colonialism in his speech on what it means to be Scottish, he is conscious of class and views capitalism as false consciousness. The film rejects consumerism and the capitalist society that sells it but doesn’t offer the spectator a solution. |
| **22.** | **Friendship**  Although Renton abandons his friends in the final scene, this is ultimately a film about friendships and relationships, ‘the film is about a group of guys who don’t want to belong to anything – nothing heroic or normal or faithful, because they’ve been disillusioned so many times.’ (Danny Boyle). The friendships are ultimately bound by drug use, but more than that there is an acknowledgement between the characters that they reject the system imposed on them and are seeking something of an escape from the restrictions placed on us in society. |
| **23.** | **Identity**  Boyle set out to avoid a clichéd notion of ‘Scottishness’ in the film and his portrayal of nationality was a departure from the cinematic representations of Scotland we were seeing during this period such as that portrayed in Braveheart which was released the previous year. This was not a film that could really be upheld as a beacon of national cinema – although it did address themes and issues that were of particular interest to British audiences at the time (both politically and culturally) and ones that were also considered universal. Boyle’s film does reflect the issues explored in Welsh’s novel and the idea of displacement and disenfranchisement in a post-Thatcher era is effectively conveyed. Both Edinburgh and Glasgow had been experiencing huge problems with heroin use in the 1980’s and 90’s and opiate use is still a major problem in some areas of these cities today. Welsh articulated that being Scottish had always been seen as something second rate, ‘In Thatcher’s Britain Scots were losers, young people were losers, the unemployed were losers’. He felt that these marginalised groups in society didn’t have the strength, ability or resources to set themselves up in opposition to the system. What they did have was time and what they did with that time was not something that offered them a viable way out. |