

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is the skill of deconstructing media texts: that is, a detailed examination of the way in which a text has been constructed to convey. Such study reveals both intended – and sometime unintended – meanings in films, television programmes, advertising, newspapers and so on. We often take our ability to read images for granted, but there is far more to it than we usually realise.

As an A level Media student this skill is important for a number of reasons. For one, there is an AS level exam paper devoted entirely to the analysis of an unseen text. For another, the more you understand the way texts are constructed, the more able you will be to construct your own for the practical production module. More broadly, the entire study of the media is built upon it: it is not so much a building block of Media Studies as it is a foundation stone.

What am I looking for?

In analysing any text, whether it be print-based, radio, new media or moving image, you should look to address all of the *key concepts* of Media Studies, and analyse how and why meaning is created.

The following is a list of questions you should ask yourself about every text you analyse. It is not exhaustive (you can *never* stop asking questions); neither should you expect to answer every question about every text. Some will be more relevant than others.

Media Representations

- Who is being represented?
- In what way?
- By whom? (links to institution)
- Why is the subject being represented in this way? (links to ideology)
- Is the representation fair and accurate?
- What opportunities exist for self-representation by the subject?

Media Languages and Forms

- What are the denotative and connotative levels of meaning?
- What is the significance of the text's connotations?
- What are the non-verbal structures of meaning in the text (e.g. gesture, facial expression, positional communication, clothing, props etc)?
- What is the significance of mise-en-scène/sets/settings?
- What work is being done by the sound track/commentary/language of the text?
- What are the dominant images and iconography, and what is their relevance to the major themes of the text?
- What sound and visual techniques are used to convey meaning (e.g. camera positioning, editing; how are images and sounds combined to convey meaning)?

Narrative

- How is the narrative organised and structured?
- How is the audience positioned in relation to the narrative?

- How are characters delineated? What is their narrative function? How are heroes and villains created?
- What techniques of identification and alienation are employed?
- What is the role of such features as sound, music, iconography, genre, mise-en-scène, editing etc. within the narrative?
- What are the major themes of the narrative? What values/ideologies does it embody?

Genre

- To which genre does the text belong?
- What are the major generic conventions within the text?
- What are the major iconographic features of the text?
- What are the major generic themes?
- To what extent are the characters generically determined?
- To what extent are the audience's generic expectations of the text fulfilled or cheated by the text? Does the text conform to the characteristics of the genre, or does it treat them playfully or ironically?
- Does the text feature a star, a director, a writer etc who is strongly associated with the genre? What meanings and associations do they have?

Media Institutions

- What is the institutional source of the text?
- In what ways has the text been influenced or shaped by the institution which produced it?
- Is the source a public service or commercial institution? What difference does this make to the text?
- Who owns and controls the institution concerned and does this matter?
- How has the text been distributed?

Media Values and Ideology

- What are the major values, ideologies and assumptions underpinning the text or naturalised within it?
- What criteria have been used for selecting the content presented?

Media Audiences

- To whom is the text addressed? What is the target audience?
- What assumptions about the audience's characteristics are implicit within the text?
- What assumptions about the audience are implicit in the text's scheduling or positioning ?
- In what conditions is the audience likely to receive the text?
- Does this impact upon the formal characteristics of the text?
- What do you know or can you assume about the likely size and constituency of the audience?
- What are the probable and possible audience readings of the text?
- How do you, as an audience member, read and evaluate the text? To what extent is your reading and evaluation influenced by your age, gender, background etc?

Media Representations

Madonna, in role of spy being interrogated by hostile forces. Female James Bond. Likely shot by an experienced director, but M is her own institution: in control of her image. The unglamorous presentation (blood, bruises, fighting) subverts both M's image and that of the 'Bond girl'. Violence is a little stylised. M dances provocatively.

Media Languages and Forms

Two contrasting looks: damp, dark cells of her external struggle versus high contrast black and white of internal struggle. Interrogation sequences de-saturated - colourless=hopeless. Setting intertextual: mirrors Bond's experience in the film.

Lyrics/facial expressions/fencing: all defiant - she still controls her destiny.

Music is sparse. Fusion of dance/techno techniques and (synthesized) strings more typical of Bond sub-genre. Aggressive beats. In fencing, black versus white = dark versus light. Fencing inter-textual: M plays fencing instructor in the film.

Iconography: Bond references to early Bond films Goldfinger, From Russia With Love, Thunderball. Fight in a Bond museum? Also gun barrel and silhouette. M addresses audience in the cells: not realistic, contrived. typical of music video. Mirror breaking = seven years bad luck, fractured personality.

Narrative

Fairly clear narrative: M is interrogated. Fencing = inner struggle - black: give up the secrets, white: stay quiet and die. Editing allows M to play both fencers.

Narrative is intercut. Tells how M resists interrogators and personal demons to escape. No set-up - straight into action. Intercutting show inner turmoil manifested: cuts in dream lead to cuts in 'real world'. Narrative packed with binary opposition: Villains are either violent to M or ugly, and all men. Enemy is Oriental/Asian, as in the movie. M is the hero. Inner battle also binary: black versus white.

Destruction of Bond iconography = M breaking the mould. Her theme is largely not in the Bond tradition. Song tells a very simple story; video is more complex. Common feature of music videos. Two enigma codes: how does M escape. Who is other man?

Genre

Music video, heavily intertextual with Bond feature film.

Madonna sings/mimes to the camera, dances, gyrates etc. References to Bond 20 rather than actual scenes - unusual. Mise en scene not generic - gloomier than Bond, at odds with usual music video fun. Bad guys are Genre stereotype 'heavies' Usual music video conventions of glamour, sex, largely subverted. Madonna has long history of telling stories with her videos.

Media Institutions

Primary purpose of institution to sell a) record and b) movie. Therefore MGM likely involved. Also M = her own institution. Selling her role in the film. Video distributed to TB stations for extensive airplay to coincide with movie release. Synergy.

Media Values and Ideology

Woman takes place of man as subjugated hero. Stands up to oppression (of men?) Tricks captors and escapes. She is the strong one. Usually takes man (Bond) to help girl escape. M = woman, not girl.

Media Audiences

Audience = Madonna fans, music show viewers: 12-30 year-olds A B C. Audience is challenged by unconventional presentation. Graphic for prime-time screening - may have been cut from children's shows? Watched at home on TV - mass international audience. Also included on feature film DVD.

Die Another Day: Exemplar Textual Analysis

The product carries no institutional or other identification, but the music and appearance of Madonna present it as a 3½ minute music video promoting the single *Die Another Day*. This text is intrinsically inter-textual: it is the theme to the James Bond feature film of the same name. Movie audiences will see a completely different set of images set to the same music at the start of the film.

Knowingly, the video presents Madonna in the role which Bond inhabits during the film's opening titles: that of the spy being interrogated and tortured by an oppressive regime. The harsh single bulb in the familiar interrogators' angle-poise lamp parodies the more flattering spotlight Madonna would normally expect to stand in.



As is common to many music videos, a narrative of sorts is presented: Madonna has been captured and is being tortured for information. Her internal battle over whether or not to tell them what they want to know is represented by a fencing match between 'two' Madonnas – one in white, one in black on a blood-red catwalk – and this is inter-cut with the supposed real world of Madonna's incarceration. The colours suggest this is a fight between good and evil. Wounds on both

fencers – both sides of her internal conflict – are manifested physically on Madonna's body, connoting a powerful battle. At one point we observe the fencers within a broken mirror in her cell, seeming to represent the manifestation of a fractured personality. The lyrics also allude to this, as she sings: "Sigmund Freud – analyse this."

The narrative is more complex than the song lyrics and is packed with binary oppositions. The black and white fencers are polar opposites; their (initially) graceful swordplay contrasts with the spy's brutal treatment. The sole, beautiful woman is detained by a group of ugly men; she is from the West while her captors are from the East (as in the feature film). Throughout the video Madonna is defiant: as well as fighting her captors, her face and body express determination and control. The lyrics proclaim that she will keep her secret and yet die another day. As she is strapped into the electric chair, she laughs and spits in the face of her enemy.



The video simultaneously plays with its two genres (Bond films and music video) and subverts them. Madonna, famous for her glamour and tight control of her image here allows herself to be presented bruised and bloody, in a grim, dark cell. The film stock appears to have been desaturated to be almost monochromatic, suggesting hopelessness. This narrative

also abandons the typical 'Bond Girl' damsel-in-distress approach, and re-casts the woman (not girl) as the hero. The mise-en-scène is atypical of both Bond films and certainly music videos. Unusually the video references the new film's plot without including any footage from it.

The fencers battle in two settings: the first, a white echo of the set from the feature film in which Bond and his nemesis do battle; the second a black-walled museum, peppered with specific iconography (the Gold-painted girl, Odd Job's hat) from early Bond films. The two fencers destroy the museum in their battle. This could be said to both celebrate and knock the early Bond films which were popular yet misogynistic. It could also be read as Madonna breaking the Bond mould: she is no Shirley Bassey. The stabbing of a portrait of Pierce Brosnan, the current Bond, suggests a level of ambivalence towards the project.

The song itself is sparsely arranged: a fusion of forceful dance/techno conventions in a minor key with the (synthesized) strings characteristic of a James Bond score overlaid. More conventionally, Madonna addresses us, the audience, through most of the video, miming to the lyrics, breaking the fourth wall. She also dances aggressively and provocatively, and while this is to be expected in a music video, it is slightly at odds with the violent setting.



Identifying the audience for this text is surprisingly challenging. Madonna's audience has aged and matured as she has, and her record sales suggest she is less appealing to today's teenagers. The video's purpose is to promote both the single and the feature film. More subtly, it is to promote Madonna's role in the film: she plays the fencing instructor (another layer of inter-textuality). However, its violence and blood may not have sat well on Saturday morning children's television (a prime broadcast slot for music videos) and this may have affected its reach. The video is too unconventional to be targeted at young teenagers and children; it is more likely pitched at an older audience, say 20-35 year-olds. Neither the song nor the video seem calculated to appeal to traditional Bond fans: my own father (60) was disappointed by the theme.



The ending presents the white fencer defeating the black. Her body falls to the floor as the executioner trips the power. The intended reading is ambiguous: is Madonna dead? The white fencer of her hallucination still stands. As the smoke clears an empty chair is revealed, leaving us with several enigma codes: how does Madonna evade electrocution; who is the man seen sitting, momentarily, in her place; and what

does the Arabic-style tattoo left behind on the chair mean?

850 words.

Note for new readers: the structure of your write-up need not follow the linear narrative of the text; nor should you expect to write a paragraph per concept. As you practise, you will find you can write thematically, covering all the (largely inter-related) concepts holistically rather than rigidly. If you're reading this in September/October of Year 12 DON'T PANIC! When you read this again in six months time it will mean a lot more to you.