

This is spinal tap  
essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

“ This is Spinal Tap” (1984) chronicles the American leg of Spinal Tap’s World Tour to support Tap’s latest album “ Smell The Glove”. This “ Rockmentary” tells of all the struggles that a band can face whilst on the road. From drummers spontaneously combusting on stage to an eighteen-inch Stonehenge monument that was in danger of being crushed by a dwarf to playing a song called “ Sex Farm” at a US Air Force Base at one of their annual balls.

The film has had “ Tap Heads” repeating legendary lines such as “ These go to eleven” and “ There is a thin line between stupid and clever” since it’s 1984 release and is still regarded is one of the greatest films of all time. The film starts off with a close up of the film’s “ Director” Marti DiBergi (Rob Reiner), a self proclaimed Spinal Tap fan. DiBergi starts the movie with a soliloquy, introducing the film and the band. While DiBergi is talking, he starts moving around the set.

The shot is now a mid-shot and is on tracking to allow the camera to smoothly follow him around the set as he talks. The set, which DiBergi is walking around, is littered with numerous lighting rigs and stands. With the genre of the film, there is no need for the lighting to be there, however, this could be a subtle use of satire, to poke fun at the cliché of directors being surrounded by lighting and other “ Behind the Scenes” equipment, such as lighting and cameras.

The language used is not typical of that of heavy metal fans, DiBergi uses terms such as “ Let’s Boogie”, which is quite an oxymoron, for a metal fan to use such terms. There are no diegetic or non-diegetic sounds that

accompany the scene. This could be a way to make the movie seem more authentic, making people believe that the documentary was real, so to keep all attention on Marty DiBergi. This small portion of the film is also the best quality picture of the whole movie.

It is brightly lit and set in a studio, so the picture quality is of a higher standard as it is a pre planned shot of the film. Whereas the rest of the movie is in a documentary style, the picture is more grainy and raw, which is to be expected at the time. As DiBergi finishes his introduction, a diegetic aeroplane sound with a non-diegetic drum roll. This is used as a sound bridge to a point of view low angle long shot is used to film the plane coming in to land, with continuous non-diegetic metal riffs being played.

The angle might have been used to make the audience feel like they are at the airport waiting for the band to arrive, which is reminiscent of what fans of the Beatles and Elvis Presley did. Which provides a little more humour, given the fact that the Beatles and Elvis are the two biggest acts in musical history, whereas Tap are a small band from England. We then see the band walking through the airport, with a mid-shot, however, you can see the camera is not on a tracking, but is a normal hand held camera.

This again, would create a sense of authenticity, as you can see the camera wobbling around as they try to follow the band and their manager. The sound is used in a parallel fashion, so signify the point that the film is about a heavy metal band, contrapuntal sounds would not have been effective, as the audience have not yet been properly introduced to the band yet, only what Marti DiBergi has told us. So the heavy metal music played in the

background, albeit more obvious, is the only kind of music that would work in this situation we also here diegetic dialogue, both on and off-screen of typical airport conversations.

We then get a mid-shot of the bands limousine driver holding a sign which says " Spinal Pap", which shows that Spinal Tap are only a small scale band, despite the fact that they are getting their own documentary. The focus, to a mid-shot of the road crew moving stage props to the venue. The props embrace most of the typical heavy metal stereotypes, such as skulls, demons and devils. The stereotype is used to enhance the humour in the scene; even the road crew follows the stereotypes of a road crew, long greasy hair or mullets, jeans, T-shirts and boots.

The audience can faintly hear the on-screen diegetic sound of the hustle and bustle of the road crew moving the necessary equipment into the venue and the off-screen diegetic sounds of the crowd gathering outside the venue. The off-screen diegetic, along with the non-diegetic background music, serves as another sound bridge to a series of mid-shots of Spinal Tap fans. These mid-shots are fixed, giving a sense of importance to what the Tap fans have to say, despite them living up to the stereotype of heavy metal fans are of below average intelligence.

This shows through with the language used and the way in which the lines are said too, lots of " Ums and Errs" while they talk. The background music once again serves as a sound bridge to then move to a shot of the band actually performing their song " Tonight I'm Going To Rock You". The music shifts from being non-diegetic to diegetic in one shot change. The opening to

“ This Is Spinal Tap” uses many of the techniques used in factual documentaries, despite it being a fictional comedy.