

'control' film review – a.s film studies

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In this essay, I shall be reviewing the film 'Control', a film directed by 'Anton Corbijn' and based on the book 'Touching From A Distance' by 'Deborah Curtis'. The film opens in Macclesfield, in 1973, with a teenage Curtis in love with glam rock, striking 'Iggy' poses into his bedroom mirror. After analyzing the background it's obvious this person has a distinct literary bent; his bedroom is stacked with paperbacks and files with his poetry, songs and planned novels. I'd describe him as a lover rather than a geeky loner.

Meeting his friend's girlfriend 'Deborah', he quotes 'Wordsworth' to her and she is then instantly hooked. They marry, but before long, his literary and musical dreams are brought down to earth by the day job at the employment exchange, and eventually the pram in the hall. When Punk Happens, Curtis and his friends form 'Warsaw', then 'Joy Division'. They meet manager 'Rob Gretton', sign to the new label set up by the local TV presenter 'Tony Wilson' and record the 'Unknown Pleasures' album. But while 'Joy Division' are progressing, Curtis' own life falls apart, he's diagnosed with epilepsy and prescribed medication. He also becomes increasingly estranged from Deborah and then has an affair with 'Annik', a Belgian fanzine writer who represents all the exotic European 'otherness' that he yearns for.

In personal opinion 'Corbijn's' film traces how a sensitive young man with poetic dreams and a literate tongue got trapped in the divide between the person he wanted to be and the realities of a humdrum existence of work and marriage. In this story singing in a band – even one as exalted and innovative as 'Joy Division' isn't that of a glorified fantasy, but actually a mundane occupation which brings its own pressures. Yet at the same time Joy Division's intensity is evoked magnificently through 'Control', on stage

and on record and reminds us that Curtis was one of the mesmerizing performers the British music scene has ever produced. The film conveys an unusually realistic feeling too, and not just in the way that the four young actors cast as 'Joy Division' play their instruments, catch the bands sound and stance, no. 'Sam Riley' is a dead ringer for Curtis, down to the stare and the windmilling elbows on stage, but most importantly his performance doesn't play into the myth of the rock star as an otherworldly figure, too big or too intensely alive for the world. Curtis comes across as an intelligent, yet vulnerable and somewhat frail young man, totally out of his depth in the face of adulthood.

Also, the film shows how different it actually is with it being shot solely in black and white. In the late 70's, 'Corbijn' was a lead photographer for 'NME' and made a major contribution to the image of 'Joy Division'. He has re-captured some of that feel in this black and white film, but he's also captured an era of British life, which now oddly different, there's no glamour in this film, nor fake grim-up North dourness; but a profound sense of the everyday that the inexperienced Curtis couldn't quite handle. Control is a trenchant (vigorous style), intelligent exercise in stripping away the many myths surrounding both Curtis and the music world in general. The second term which I'll comment on which is present throughout this movie is that of 'Binary Opposition' which is under simplistic phrasing a contrast between two mutually exclusive concepts that creates and drives a narrative, so within this movie it would, 'Happiness And Sadness', happiness on the part of the other band members glee of the rise of 'Joy Division' and sadness being an ever present theme throughout, with Curtis' as I've stated

previously struggling to cope with being in a world he's not yet ready for.

Another is ' Mise-en-Scene' which is a French term which means " composing the scene" which when cut down further essentially means how everything is positioned and designed in the set.

Throughout the film there isn't usually many people in front of the camera at any one time, bar that of the lead character. It usually consists of mid shot's, close up's and extreme close up's of ' Curtis', which is understandable as it is that of a biopic on his life, the only time you see ' Ian' taking a more background like approach is when he's too ill to play a ' gig' and is then replaced by another musician, another thing which can be commented on in his little ' paragraph' could be that of ' Genre' now, the obvious genre would be that of a biopic, due to the scope it adopts on the life and death of Curtis, however, this film has so much more depth, it's a love story, due to the illicity of Curtis' nature, it's also a drama, due to the the problems it tackles within it, e. g depression, death, financial hardship etc and i suppose one could call it a a tragedy as well, this coming from the untimely death of a character the audience has warmed too throughout the movie. Whether or not the film is strictly accurate about Curtis' life and death, it certainly has the ring of intimacy. It also gives a sensitive account of what it's like to be the woman left out of the picture when the boys go pursuing their dreams, though hers is essentially a supporting role, Samantha Morton is extremely effective when playing the part of ' Deborah'.

Everybody should see ' Control'. It looks majestic, is full of natural piety, is frequently funny, and, just as Donnie Darko did to the music of ' Echo and the Bunnymen', transforms songs into something epic and global. But don't
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be fooled: this is only one version of Curtis's life, a timid one, too, that reduces the lyrics to the status of veiled autobiography; that interprets the disorder, wilderness and Pennine shadows of his band's songs as comments on his epilepsy; and, this is the cardinal sin, goes on so long you're almost glad he put himself out of his misery when he did.