

The Social Network Study Notes



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Directed by: David Fincher
Certificate: 12A
Running time: 120 mins
Release date: 15 October 2010

Synopsis:

Harvard University, 2003. Zuckerberg develops the idea for Facebook with the financial help of his friend Saverin, but as the site soars in popularity, the pair fall out over the direction the company should take. Meanwhile, three other students claim that key ideas behind Facebook were stolen from them. As the site becomes more and more successful, Zuckerberg finds himself increasingly alone and learns that huge success can come at the cost of true friendship. Based on true events, *The Social Network* charts the foundation of Facebook, the relationship between its co-founders Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg) and Eduardo Saverin (Andrew Garfield), and the two court cases over the site's origins that followed.

These Study Notes are designed for use with Media and Film Studies GCSE and A-level and related qualifications.

Before viewing: cinema for the digital age

For a number of years, films have been captured digitally as opposed to recording onto film stock by everyone from George Lucas (*Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* was the first film to be entirely captured to a digital source) to numerous independent filmmakers using small, cheap digital cameras. Currently digital exhibition is becoming increasingly common: cinemas are converting their screens and no longer need to project heavy, unwieldy rolls of film through projectors, but can now receive pristine digital films on hard drives. Currently, around half of all cinema screens in the UK are digital. *The Social Network* is an example of a film captured digitally and, in selected cinemas, exhibited digitally.

- When viewing a film in the cinema, how can you tell whether it is a digital print or a film print?
- It is anticipated that all cinema screens in the UK will be digital within the next two to five years. What might be the financial, social and aesthetic implications for cinema of this change?
- Even *The Social Network*'s extra features and documentaries were filmed digitally. Have a look at a Blu-ray edition of the film or look at a version in an online shop. How do the extra features on Blu-ray discs encourage:
 - Interactivity
 - Use of other media platforms (internet, games consoles etc.)
 - Experiences beyond the film
 - Wider understanding of the film?

After viewing: opening sequence

Director David Fincher is famous for creating startling opening credit sequences. *The Social Network* opens with an incredibly effective break-up scene followed by a relatively understated credit sequence. The 'break-up' scene has been recognised as a classic scene that fuses filmmaking expertise, character and narrative to memorable effect.

- What key details do we learn about Zuckerberg's character in the sequence?
- How is the scene humorous?
- What is unique about the editing and pace of the sequence?
- Look at the opening sequences of Fincher's previous films, especially *Se7en* (1995), *Fight Club* (1999), *Panic Room* (2002) and *Zodiac* (2007). How do they set the tone of the film?
- Consider the use of music in the sequences. What type of music does Fincher tend to use? What effects does the music have in each opening sequence?

Fincher is famous for shooting multiple takes of scenes, often to the exasperation and amazement of his actors. The opening sequence alone comprised of footage from over ninety takes!

- What advantages are there for a director who shoots multiple takes?
- Stanley Kubrick used the same method. Are his films comparable to Fincher's in terms of tone? Look up Kubrick's films if you are not already familiar with them.

Facebook, representation & target audience

The Social Network presents a 'new breed' of youngsters who are culturally and technologically savvy. Ironically, in creating Facebook – a virtual network designed to bring people together – they are ultimately driven apart, personally and professionally. Set in Harvard University, Massachusetts, the film captures a very distinctive class, place and moment in history.

- There is rarely a scene where Mark Zuckerberg is alone. How does this character view others and how do they view him? How is this conveyed? In what situations do we find him alone and what is he doing when he is by himself?
- To what extent are the students, most of whom come from rich families, portrayed in an unsympathetic light?
- Is there anything stereotypical about the representation of adults?
- The film is set around a decade ago. How does the film relate to the 16-25 age bracket of today? Consider casting, locations and mise-en-scène.
- How could the film appeal to a secondary/other audience who have little interest or experience of Facebook? Consider the setting and the credentials of writer Aaron Sorkin (look him up if you're not familiar with his work).
- Does the film take a stance for or against the existence of Facebook? Does it comment in any way on the impact it has had on the world today?

Music

The Social Network's celebrated score was created by Atticus Ross and Nine Inch Nails' front man Trent Reznor (who have both since worked on Fincher's adaptation of *The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo*). The score frequently switches between sombre, haunting and minimal piano melodies to techno or industrial dance.

- What tone or sensations does the music evoke?
- What is unique about the piece of music that accompanies the boat race in England?

Activities

- Design a fake Facebook page for a character in the film. What would their beliefs, quotes and interests be? If you don't have access to Facebook at school, write out or sketch the page on paper.
- Film a conversation between two people in the style of *The Social Network's* opening scene. How will you keep the scene interesting, kinetic, humorous and dramatic through editing, performance and camera movement and framing?

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