

Titanium Notes from the BFI

Key things to look out for

- Stereotypes—over/under represented -
- Intertextuality
- Representations—issues/self/social/events
- Messages and Values/Themes/Ideology
- Contextual factors –Artist, technology, history
- Media language -multiple meanings, re-representations
- Audience –response/positioning
- Genre –challenge/subversion, changes

Introduction

- David Guetta's Titanium music video is a cross between a narrative video and a concept video.
- The music video does not feature the artist) so instead the video celebrates the power of narrative (a story) and also what is called signification (the power of images to tell that story.)
- There is also an emphasis on intertextuality (references to other media products

The Opening

- The video opens the enigma revolving around an extreme close up of a young boy (aged about 12.)
- We see him crouched in a foetal position (a position which has connotations of vulnerability and innocence) and at first we do not see his face, the camera instead drawing attention to bruising on his hands. This bruising immediately associates the boy with being hurt and if you think of this opening image in its entirety then in terms of representation we are being shown an anti-stereotypical image of a young boy.
- Boys and by extension males in the media are defined by strength and purpose, they are agents in control of the narrative, thus it is rare to see them in such a vulnerable position where their identity is literally being hidden by the camera –this more passive positioning is more stereotypically allocated to young girls or women in media representations.

The Location of the school

- As the still hidden boy rises from the foetal position (intertextuality links this scene to The Terminator) we see images of debris in the form of strewn paper, a folder and a



football surrounding him –this close up gives the audience the merest hint that the location of the video will be a school because of the associations we all have of folders and screwed up pieces of paper.

- This is confirmed when the video switches to a wide, master establishing shot of a school corridor which is in a state of devastation, lockers have been ripped off the wall for example and display boards litter the rubbish strewn corridor and there are deep cracks on the wall next to the boy. Thinking back to the lyrics and their meaning it must be remembered that a lot of people thought the song was about inner strength when confronted with bullying so in terms of representation the location of a school would fit the dynamics of the song's meaning because the audience recognize that schools can have a reputation of being a place where lots of bullying takes place

The Boy

- The boy reaches for a hat, the importance of this prop can be linked to the fact that many teenagers hide their faces and by extension their identity by wearing such things as hoodies and caps –although this hat does not conceal the identity of the boy in the video -you can still argue that hoodies and hats are still symbolic of representations associated with troubled teenagers
- As the boy is revealed, it is telling that the director uses a high angle shot which emphasises the boy's vulnerability, this is reinforced by his performance –he has a dazed look on his face, as if he has come through some kind of crisis but is unaware of its importance. Again this bewilderment and vulnerability is at odds with stereotypical representations of young boys in the media because they are usually seen as confident and not confused in their appearance or behaviour; this is especially true of media representations of white boys and men so this high angle is significant because it breaks traditional media stereotypes.

Intertextuality

- In terms of context, the boy that is revealed in the Titanium video is played by an actor called Ryan Lee, who was one of the stars of the film Super 8, a film that dealt with science fiction themes and also some mild parental abuse towards young boys and girls similar in age to the boy in the Titanium video; Super 8 also came out in 2011 it is an important intertextual reference point for the makers of this video.
- As the boy stands he takes a deep breath (a sign of anxiety or a sign that he is preparing himself for whatever comes next) and begins to walk down the now devastated school corridor followed by the camera operator in a steadicamshot.



- The child is seen clutching the bobbed hat (maybe because it is a sign of comfort to him) and as he walks in a long shot we see what could be an intertextual link to the artist David Guetta, there is a drawing on the wall of the corridor behind the unnamed boy which looks suspiciously like Guetta –this is probably placed there because it is an in-joke for Guetta fans, what is called an Easter egg, a small surprise for fans of the DJ

The female teacher

- As the student carries on walking we see an unnamed female teacher framed in the background in both deep focus and a long shot, she looks panic stricken
- As the boy walks past she closes the door on the student and in terms of representation this not only goes against stereotypes of teachers who should be supportive of students but by being a female teacher the look on her face also goes against stereotypes of women being caring and compassionate, especially to young children who usually look up to adults as being protective and caring
- Here the teacher is literally closing the door on the student's education as she also begs for help on the phone –the teacher is also wearing yellow, a colour associated with cowardice, which also suggests that what she is doing is somewhat shameful and non-stereotypical.

Key Message and Value

- The boy puts on his hat and the camera follows behind him which again obscures his face –at this point the student is hidden from view, thinking back to the lyrics could this be because the boy in the video is a metaphor for all those other faceless people who also suffer bullying/abuse in their lives
- it is also telling that the camera also tracks him at a distance when he walks out of the school –almost as if it doesn't want to get too close to him –again you could read this as being because the student is representative of a problem in society that affects numerous individuals.

More Intertextuality –the colour red

- The boy's hat is predominantly red, as the video reveals when the boy gets home there has been a 'supernatural incident' at the school so the colour used for the hat could be another intertextual link to films
- For example M.NightShyamalan is known to use red to leave certain 'clues' in his horror films; for example in *The Sixth Sense* he used red to depict objects that were touched by the other worldly beings and by the end of the music video we clearly see that something mysterious has happened to the boy – something which could be seen as being 'other worldly.'



- It must be noted that the bike he rides is also red which could suggest the sense of strength that the boy has within himself, a metaphor for the lyrics of the song

Editing changes

- As the boy leaves the school we also see a change in editing, up to this point in the narrative the camera and the audience's attention has been clearly focused on the boy in a series of long slow takes (the camera following only him) and his distraught facial features, however as he enters the suburban streets outside the school the pace and technique of editing changes because we see urgent and rapid cross cutting between the female teacher (her performance again highlighting sheer panic, another stereotype of women in the media and the newly appeared police officer (played by a white male which represents stereotypes of traditional masculine strength and fortitude we see in a range of media today; his facial features are also in contrast to the teacher, he is calm and again this is indicative of quiet strength that males are usually represented with –he is also wearing the conventional uniform of a policeman -this highlighting the trust that the female teacher will place in him)
- The pace of the editing is also changing because the song is reaching a crescendo of not only the first beat drop but also the first singing of the chorus, indeed when the chorus is reached this is indicated by the frantic pedalling of the young male as he flees home away from the policeman who he senses will be coming for him. As I have already stated the pace of the cycling is very fast and the bike is also red indicating that he might have some kind of supernatural powers.

The importance of the cycle

- As he cycles it is almost as if the young student has gained some kind of freedom, the close up of his face as he cycles is etched with a serious demeanour and the framing of these scenes are more open rather than closed as they were in the school –what this means is that the empty space around the student gives the illusion of freedom, something that is denied him in school because the camera was at first closer to him – could this be because he is no longer open to the abuse that the lyrics of song hint at. The camera also no longer looks down at him from a high angle but instead it is face on, almost in the form of direct address as we see from the boy's facial features that he is determined to get away from the school and the authority figures.
- In terms of intertextuality, it must also be noted that bikes are a common feature of science fiction films and TV programmes which revolve around young children, from ET and Elliott's ascent across the moon to Stranger Things and the children's escape from authority figures (the recent horror film It is another example) the cycle represents freedom of movement for these young children, unable to yet drive a car the bike becomes a



metaphor for freedom and adventure -a means to escape adults and to become free in their own decision making this is reflected in this video.

Intertextuality –suburban homes



- Another feature of intertextuality in this scene is the seemingly empty suburban streets that the young boy rides his cycle, in films like Halloween young people walked down streets were adults did not appear –this is the same in It and films like ET and TV programmes like Stranger Things; the reason to why is because adults only seem to care about themselves and their property in these films so keep to themselves and in their

own homes meaning that young people are left to their own devices to not only explore their surroundings (a symbol of growing up) but also as a narrative means whereby it can only be them that can protect themselves and their friends –obviously these films and TV programmes are also usually liked by teenagers so the empty streets are appealing because they also want to explore and be there for their friends. I also mention Halloween because we can see many leaves on the ground, indicating October, and the houses have the same exteriors to those found in this film.

The Joggers

- As the chorus breaks we see two comedic women jogging down the empty streets, again wanting to be fit is stereotypical to feminine representations in the media and this funny interlude relies on humour to emphasise a point, they seem to be trying really hard and as the boy cycles past he dawdles to a very slow pace but is seen to be easily faster than the women.
- The clothes they wear (head bands, joggers) are also stereotypical of the 1980's (the same period as films such as ET, Super 8 and the TV programme Stranger Things) again giving us an intertextual link to the nostalgic past, especially to those older people who are watching the video



The boy's home

- As the boy enters his home we see that the home is different inside, unkempt and messy, maybe a sign of neglect towards the boy or some form of depression –this is obviously vague and different audiences will have different interpretations however the absence of parents and the mise en scene of the house indicate that the boy has been

probably been neglected and his powers have come as a result of this. At this point in the music video I am also reminded of this suggestion that comes from the internet with regards to David Guetta and the true meaning of the song,

- 'If you follow David's life story you might get it better. In school he was considered a nerd and bit of an outcast. His upbringing was very traditional and at age 13 he began mixing music, which enraged his father, who wanted something else for his future. In the end, he proved that even if the world was against him, he would make it whether people liked it or not. That is the idea behind the video.

The poster

- We see to the left of the TV a poster which advertises the 1968 Italian science fiction and superhero film 'Superargo and the Faceless Giants.'
- The poster is important in terms of intertextuality and representation because it comes complete with the tag line 'He got the power to save the world,' obviously what is being suggested here is that the boy's powers in the video have been mis-interpreted as being bad or evil, thus instead of being a villain the fact is that he could use his new found powers for good,
- in the film mentioned in the poster 'Superargo' has to overcome an army of faceless robots who are threatening the world; who is to say that the unnamed student in this music video could use his powers in the same way, there are numerous films and TV programmes where supposed evil powers are actually used for good –one of the best examples is The X Men franchise where mutants (significantly teenage mutants) unwittingly gain powers and then use them for good



The supernatural/school Intertextuality



- As he turns towards the TV we also see the headline 'Supernatural Occurrence at Local School' displayed on the TV, this narrative information solves the enigma at the start of the video because we now know that the student in the film is also the source of the 'supernatural occurrence,' this is clarified because the spine of the books next to the TV have the words 'emergency' on them, a not so subtle sign that the boy really does have supernatural powers.
- In terms of intertextuality schools in TV and media have a reputation of having 'supernatural occurrences' happening in

them; one only needs to think of the TV show Buffy The Vampire Slayer and Stranger Things for example and films like Carrie and Jennifer's Body where teenagers either have to fight supernatural occurrences or are themselves supernatural in their personality or character.

The Teddy Bear and Planets

- As the boy enters his bedroom the action of throwing his teddy bear over his head is symbolic of the fact that his childhood is over as he seeks to escape from his claustrophobic life
- We also see that he has a mobile over his bed which has different planets on them, planets have connotations of space travel in science fiction and here I feel it also indicates that the boy is ready for the next stage of his life as he prepares to leave his childhood behind him; we also see a model plane just before he leaves the house and for me these examples of props associated with travel reinforces a common theme for 'coming of age' narratives because I am reminded of how the children in Stranger Things grow up during the course of the series and this is the same for Elliott in the film ET.

Police Representation

- As he prepares to leave the frantic cross cutting returns as we see agents arrive at the home to arrest the boy, we do not see their faces (they become literal manifestations of the 'faceless giants' from the poster) and the director only focuses on their shadowy features –this reminds the audience of the military and scientists in ET and other science fiction programmes like Stranger Things where adults are often represented in a threatening manner
- The majority of the shadowy figures are male, again in terms of representations this plays on stereotypes of males in the media, strength and determination for example though the shadows also indicate other more disturbing male representations such as the threat of violence –

Telekinesis

- The cross cutting gets more frantic as the music video prepares for the next beat drop and like the last one this is reinforced with some dramatic action in the video, as the beat actually drops the police violently enter the home whilst the student struggles with the back door's doorknob –in desperation he reaches out for the keys and in the key moment of the music video so far we finally see his 'supernatural powers' as he is able to use telekinesis to move the keys to him, in terms of intertextuality the way he holds his hands is exactly the same posture as Eleven in Stranger Things and I am also reminded of many other films where teenagers use the same psychic ability (Chronicle, Push, Carrie and X Men)

The importance of telekinesis

- The representation of teenagers in science fiction are often associated with puberty and what puberty does to the body and mind; in Carrie for example the onset of Carrie's first period comes complete with power to control objects in the same manner as the boy here and by the end of the film she can barely control these powers, here the fact that he is about 12 seems to suggest that changes in his body have also resulted in changes in the way he can move objects; obviously this theme is a metaphorical representation of how children become teenagers or how teenagers become adults, with associated themes of transformation and change, changes which mirror the move to High School or going to university



The light



- As the boy leaves, we see a bright illuminating light which is also a common feature of science fiction films, similar light can be seen in ET, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Arrival and Super 8 and it usually indicates an alien presence; obviously this is the case here and the implication is that the boy does indeed have special powers; the light also causes what is called a lens flare where light directed straight at the camera creates a halo effect, this could be interpreted as maybe being religious as well as having intertextual links to the films of both Steven Spielberg (ET) and JJ Abrams (Super8)

The Journey

- What follows this pivotal moment is a montage of shots as we see the boy travel from a road and then go into a forest, forests have associations with fairytales and danger –we also see water, a symbol of rebirth and baptism, as well as the setting of the sun.
- All these images are suggestive that the boy is ready for teenage life or the next stage of his evolution (also signified by the close up of the breaking of the branch) because they all have metaphorical representations of change or a journey, the changing of a season or the dawn of a new day –the fact that we see a road as well also indicates this theme of change and movement

The Swat Team

- For the final minute of the video we return once again to the frantic cross cutting between the boy and the adult world, represented by the 'faceless giants,' this time represented by what looks like either members of the FBI or a SWAT team, the use of black clothing and high velocity weapons obviously indicating that they are a clear and present danger.
- We see torches being used to track the child and the torches are intertextual reminders of science fiction programmes and films such as Super 8, ET and
- in terms of representation it is significant that the only close up of the SWAT team we get is that of an angry black man; this is a common stereotype in the media and one that is actively been used by the dominant western media for many years –again the fact that this team is male also suggests many violent representations and stereotypes of males in the media.

The end and its meaning

- As the boy returns to the foetal position of the opening video after he is pushed to the ground (complete with a high angle shot again) he is confronted with what looks like a mirror of the lyrics 'you shoot me down,' 'fire away fire away' though to counter this we see energy building until a lighting burst of energy is released that overpowers the men and the video ends with a fade into blackness, though significantly if you start the video again immediately after this conclusion you see that the boy is seen in exactly the same position as the conclusion of the video suggesting that he might be in a perpetual loop where people will keep mistreating him unless they learn to actually listen;
- This could suggest that the lyrics are about the fact that the boy and by association other young people in society will keep protecting themselves, the 'I am titanium' of the lyrics until older people are prepared to listen though the lyrics can also be interpreted as standing up to bullying (the police, the teacher and the parents of the video) or they could just stand for the belief that what you stand for is right and you should be proud of that, that is the great thing about this video; it means different things to different people.