**Background to the film Control**

Control is a British ‘indie’ film about the band Joy Division and their lead singer Ian Curtis. It was premiered at the Cannes film festival in May 2007 and released in Britain in October 2007. The film Control appears nominally to belong to the genre perhaps best described as ‘bio-pic’, the biography of a popular character, for example Johnny Cash in *Walk the Line* (2005) or the Tina Turner film *What’s love got to do with it* (1993). However in many ways the film Control fails to meet the generic conventions associated with this type of film.

You might like to read the chapter on the British Film Industry in AS Film Studies: The Essential Introduction where the British film industry is described as a ‘cottage industry’ in relation to its American equivalent. It is also noted that it is perhaps this sense of independence, individuality and ‘artiness’ that distinguishes much of the British film industry from its American counterparts. The British film industry is also an important part of how we, the British, see ourselves and how we present ourselves to the rest of the world. It is therefore interesting to speculate what the rest of the world would make of a film like Control. The music has a wide appeal across the world but the bleakness of the film’s setting and story and the lack of big stars and special effects probably means that the film did not feature in many ‘top tens’ and will have had difficult in competing for distribution amongst the big multiplexes and so would have been mainly seen in small independent ‘art house’ cinemas.

One of the ways in which the film Control has tried to gain attention is through its credentials as a ‘serious’ film that has won several awards, for example Control was a winner at the Cannes Film festival as well as winning many other awards for it’s main actor and it’s director. It also won Best Film award in the [Evening Standard British Film Awards](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0421082/awards) for 2007. For more details of nominations and awards see [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0421082/awards](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0421082/awards).
As we mentioned one of the key ways in which the subject of this film is represented is through the use of black and white rather than colour. This use of black and white can be seen to have various connotations. It refers to the ‘seriousness’ and ‘realism’ of documentary films that were once made in black and white although today it is as likely that it is a fictional film that aims, like Control, for a documentary style realism and seriousness. Consider for example the discussion on Steven Spielberg’s film Schindler’s List in AS Film Studies: The Essential Introduction (p.26). There are some similarities between Schindler’s List and Control in that both films are based on real events that were written about in books, in the case of Control it is the book Touching from a Distance, by Ian Curtis's wife, Deborah Curtis, who is also a co-producer of the film.

Other representations that come from the use of black and white could include the band themselves, Joy Division, as many of their artefacts and promotional material were produced in black and white, see for example the album covers for Unknown Pleasures and Closer or the promotional video for the single Atmosphere http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0We9d5J3BLQ&feature=related. Perhaps another representation could be Macclesfield and the Manchester music scene during the 1980s when, as a result of the policies of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Government, there was a large amount of youth unemployment and a feeling of ‘post punk’ gloom amongst young people. Joy Division’s way of presenting themselves and their music was perhaps an attempt to capture the bleak austerity of that time and place.