

Focus film: *Amy* (Kapadia, 2005)

Overview

Most of the film consists of archival footage. Some of it is stock footage, while some is unseen footage captured on video or DV by people close to the singer. The film also includes a lot of mobile phone footage. Kapadia estimates that 90% of the footage used is digital.

Amy Winehouse's friends and family provided analogue and some early digital recordings of her. These reveal a personal perspective on Amy's childhood and early career.

There are a number of montage sequences using the amateur digital archival footage that lend great power to the film's narrative.

Kapadia's approach

Director Asif Kapadia shoots little original footage – these are the digital drone aerial shots.

Kapadia doesn't have a treatment, logline or script. He lets the story form from the archival footage.

The interviews were recorded in audio only. Kapadia believes that by recording audio, he can capture a more emotional response. This is because people tend to react differently in front of cameras, therefore demonstrating their awareness of them.

The audio is manipulated digitally for emotional impact. This is best exemplified in the *Back to Black* sequence.

Key quote

Kapadia: *'This is more personal because this is becoming home movies, and by the end of it, it's camera phones.'*

Strangely enough, the older formats of film last longer than digital, because (now) we delete photos, we delete video, we delete our audio interviews. People used to keep everything because they had a cassette tape. Now when you interview somebody, how often do you keep that audio once you've used it?'

The digital technologies debate

- Digital technologies have made the filmmaking process more democratic; in other words, it has become much cheaper and easier to make a film. We are now all potential filmmakers and can produce some amazing footage using just our mobile phones, if we are so inclined.
- The amateur quality of our 'little cameras' goes hand in hand with the idea of capturing reality, which is a major concern of the documentary filmmaker. Equally, their diminutive size allows for easier access to remote or difficult-to-film locations.
- The repertoire of archival footage available to a documentary filmmaker has grown exponentially since the beginning of the digital era.
- Non-linear digital editing has also opened up a world of possibility to the filmmaker, further democratising the documentary format.
- Some filmmakers still choose to shoot on film, preferring the texture and aesthetic of film to digital.
- In documentary film, archival material shot on film may be enhanced or restored digitally, e.g. by removing grain and scratches and even colourising black-and-white footage.