

## Themes

Apocalypse  
Homage Horror  
Hybridity  
Masculinity  
Post Modern  
Zeitgeist

## Opening Scene

**Mise en Scene:** The opening is set in a traditional London, back street pub. The lighting is low key and the atmosphere is smoky, it lacks glamour or class, which enhances the comedy when Shaun and his friends see this as the finishing line after the zombie invasion. The colours in the opening are dull and bleak which connote a lifeless existence. The character's costumes establish their identity, Ed is wearing a casual t-shirt and jeans, his hair is scruffy connoting his laid-back attitude, Liz is dressed in a smart top, her hair and make up are done to present she has her life together. Shaun is wearing a shirt and tie to perhaps link to the formality of Liz, however his top button is un-done and his tie is loose to show that he isn't entirely comfortable in his adult attire. He wears a name badge which is the only thing setting him apart from his colleagues.

**Cinematography:** The first shot of the film is a close up of Shaun staring at us in a trance whilst sipping his beer and smoking a cigarette, his zombie like state foreshadows the horror to come. The camera cuts to his girlfriend Liz who is trying to talk about their relationship. Shot reverse shot is used to show the importance of the conversation, Liz is expressing how she feels Shaun's best friend Ed is always in the way. The camera then pans across to Ed creating comedy that he has been present all the while she has been talking about him. The couple are then framed in a wide shot with Ed in the center, reinforcing Liz's point about Ed being ever present. This shot also highlights Shaun's dilemma of who he should choose, his girlfriend or his best friend.

**Sound:** The non-diegetic sound 'Ghost Town' gives a tongue in cheek foreshadowing to the events about to take place. As the first shot of Shaun appears the song becomes diegetic as we realise it is coming from the pubs juke box. There are familiar pub sounds such as the sound of people playing pool and the fruit machine to create an authentic mundane pub atmosphere.

**Editing:** In the title sequence a series of wipe transitions are used as we view the different shots of the car park, supermarket, bus stop and various other urban locations, this connotes the monotony of everyday life as the shots literally blend into each other.

## Meaning and Response

**Aesthetics:** The film features many zombie tropes that would be familiar to horror fans. One trope that features in many zombie films/shows is the 'zombie horde', where a mass crowd of zombies get together to smash through the door or window to get to the humans. The ultimate gory trop where a character is dismembered by the zombies is also depicted as we see the pretentious David have his insides ripped out in a graphic scene. This also acts as poetic justice for Shaun as David tries to get between him and Liz throughout the film.

**Representation of Britain:** The film was shot in Crouch End, Muswell Hill, Finsbury Park and East Finchley. The essence of the film is 'normality', it features locations such as the back-street boozer, the corner shop and the supermarket. The embodiment of Britishness comes with the choice of weapons to kill the zombies, aside for a shot gun and the army's weapons at the end, the weapons used include darts, LP's, a pool cue and a cricket bat. These are very non-glamorous compared with a Hollywood action film.

**Representation of Age and Gender:** Shaun and Ed represent two thirty-somethings that do not have their lives together. They are the video game generation with low aspirations and an addiction to technology. This 'slacker' stereotype is featured in the title sequence as gangs of youths mindlessly shuffle along. The connotation is this generation are already presenting zombie characteristics. Shaun is depicted as a 'man child' who is torn between playing video games with his best mate and being in a grown-up relationship with this girlfriend. Ed is only interested in video games and drinking. Women are represented as in control, Yvonne is the one who brings the army in to rescue them at the end and Liz wants Shaun to get his life together

## Specialist Study Area

**Narrative:** The film follows a linear narrative, it follows Shaun's physical journey; to get to The Winchester following a zombie outbreak, and his metaphorical journey as a person. The film's equilibrium sees Shaun in a monotonous sales job with his relationship in crisis.

The end of the film sees Shaun in a stable relationship with Liz, reflecting how much he has grown up. He has experienced the loss of his Mother, Step Dad and best friend, so although he is happy at the end, he has had to sacrifice a lot to get there. The final scene also reveals 'zombie' Ed's living in Shaun's shed playing video games, which leaves the audience questioning how far Shaun has changed.

Binary Opposites are used throughout the narrative to create conflict and drama. Human versus zombie is the most obvious binary opposite, but there are also differences in the characters themselves. The two people in Shaun's life, Ed and Liz are completely different and represent two sides of Shaun.

**Ideology:** The use of intertextuality and the hybridity of the genre establishes the film as a Post-Modern text. The film is littered with intertextual references, for example when Shaun's group run into Yvonne's group. Yvonne is played by Jessica Hynes, who was Simon Pegg's co-star in *Spaced*. She is the leader of another group seeking survival, these include Martin Freeman who stars in *The Office* and is co-star of Lucy Davis, who plays Dianne in Shaun's group. These references would particularly appeal to fans of these British comedy shows.

The film's unique take on the zombie genre is what made it so successful. It is a horror, action, comedy, romance set in a suburban British setting. Although it features high levels of gore and violence, the actual message is about the lengths you would go to for love, family and friends, which makes the film far more relatable than the traditional horror.

## Shaun of the Dead

(2004, Edgar Wright, UK)

Component 1: Varieties of Film and Film-Making (AL)

Component 2: European film (AS)

## The Contexts of the Film

**Historical:** The film plays homage to the work of George Ramero. Ramero directed the zombie trilogy; *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) (the name that this film parodies) and *Day of the Dead* (1985). The Vietnam war was continuing during the time of *Night of the Living Dead's* production. Also, at this time; Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated, the police were hunting civil rights activists and there was a general fear of Armageddon.

**Institutional:** *Shaun of the Dead* grossed \$30,039,392 worldwide, making it one of the most successful British comedies. Big Talk Productions was formed in 1995 and was the company behind sitcoms such as *Black Books* and *Spaced* (also starring Simon Pegg), *Shaun of the Dead* was the first film to be produced by them. The regulation of the film also caused some controversy. The film was issued with a 15 certificate from the BBFC despite featured very strong language, including use of the 'C' word. The amount of gore and horror raised questions certifying it as a 15, the BBFC stated "...the violence, blood and gore all occur within a clearly fantastical context, often lightened by humour."

**Social:** The film is a satirical look at modern Britain. *Shaun of the Dead* features a more modern representation of zombie. They represent the mindless consumerist culture of the lower classes.

The film can be classed as a cult film; a film which creates a dedicated fan base that grows over time. The film has hit cult status through the quotable script, the intertextual references, its stylistic format and the vast amounts of merchandise it generated.

### Oblivious to Zombies

**Mise en Scene:** The white board in Shaun's kitchen has a scribbled To Do list 'Go round Mum's, Get Liz back, Sort life out' this works as a narrative structure for the film, he fulfills each of these in order. As Shaun walks to the shop his body language is depressed and hopeless, he walks with his head down, he trips up the curb and slips on the floor. As the zombies' approach they have their arms outstretched and mouths open, which would ordinarily cause panic if our protagonist were aware instead it intensifies the comedy. The urban setting is littered with abandoned shopping trolleys, knocked over road signs, smashed cars and rubbish, the fact Shaun pays no attention implies this is a normal London street after a weekend, even though they hold apocalyptic connotations. Shaun's costume is disheveled reflecting his current mental state and slightly aligning him with the zombies. Shaun opens the fridge oblivious to the bloody handprints, the ultimate horror symbol. The prop of the Cornetto becomes synonymous with the Trilogy and is significant. As Shaun enters his flat it is strewn with rubbish and empty beer cans, the chaos inside the flat helps the spectator understand why he was so oblivious to the carnage outside.

**Cinematography:** The close up of Shaun at the beginning of the scene is reminiscent to the close up at the film's exposition. He is once again staring in a trance, aligning us to him and emphasising his clear distress. As he walks to the shop a hand-held tracking shot is used, this captures him mainly in a wide shot. The hand-held camera creates realism, the wide shot frames Shaun in the foreground whilst allowing the spectator a privileged view of the dangers that lurk in the background. The spectator must be able to view the approaching zombies in order to appreciate the comedy of Shaun's obliviousness.

**Sound:** Diegetic sounds connote abandonment such as the phone ringing and car alarm sounding, these are noises that require attention. As Shaun enters the shop the sound of him slipping on the blood is exaggerated to heighten the disgust of what he has stepped in. When Shaun leaves the shop non-diegetic eerie music plays, paying homage to the original score of *Dawn of the Dead*. Shaun speaks to the zombie telling him "Sorry I haven't got any change" adding humour as we realise he thinks he is talking to a homeless man. Shaun flicks through the television channels and the sound is edited to create a subliminal message "Religious groups are calling it judgement day there's/ panic on the streets of London/ as an increasing number of reports of/ serious assault on/ people who are literally being/ eaten alive/ witness reports are sketchy one unifying detail seems to be the attacks in many instances appear to be/ dead excited."

### "She's So Drunk"

**Cinematography:** A POV is used when Ed and Shaun look into the garden to see the girl, the spectator is aligned with them at this point except we hold more information and understand that she is a zombie. The camera cuts between a wide shot of the back of the girl and a medium close up of Shaun and Ed's reaction to her. A wide shot is used to frame the girl in the foreground and Shaun and Ed in the background, the expectation of this shot is that they will realise she is a zombie as she turns. As the girl turns the camera zooms into her face, it then cuts and zooms to Shaun and Ed's shocked reaction. The spectator anticipates Shaun and Ed to be scared, but we are fooled as they then start to laugh. A hand-held camera is used as Shaun is attacked by the zombie, this brings the spectator close to the action. As Shaun pushes her into the metal pole a wide shot depicts the scene, using the rule of thirds the bloodied pole in the center and Ed and Shaun are positioned either side; their reactions are shocked. As she rises from the pole the camera zooms into the hole in her back, Shaun's shocked face is visible through the hole as he finally realises what is happening. The camera swoops round to reveal another zombie, this is the first real jump scare, however it cuts to a close-up shot of Shaun inside the house dialing for help, this connotes a practical mild-mannered man, rather than the hyper-masculine action hero.

**Editing:** The cuts between Shaun and Ed and the girl are fast paced and build in speed until she turns around and the camera stays on Shaun and Ed's reaction. A sudden jump cut is used when Shaun and Ed are faced with the other zombie, it cuts to their reaction and then to Shaun on the phone. There is no information given as to how they escaped and the cut itself is quite jarring.

**Sound:** The diegetic sound of the television informs us that "Scientists are still trying to establish the cause or nature of the Phenomenon." A non-diegetic electronic sting sound is used to transport Ed and Shaun from the house into the garden, this connotes something isn't quite right, although as this is just a sound the spectator can hear, yet again we have access to the information the characters don't. The comedy of the scene is established by the sound, as the zombie turns the non-diegetic high-pitched tone is disarming, however Shaun then says the line "Oh my God", this makes the spectator think he finally realises the danger they are in, until he follows it with "She's so drunk". As the zombie girl is pushed into the pole the sound of the pole impaling her and blood splattering are enhanced to fit with the horror genre.

### The Winchester- Final Fight Scene

**Mise en Scene:** The low-key lighting in the pub creates a distinct horror atmosphere. Shaun's once white shirt is now splattered with blood and he has lost his iconic name badge, which makes him appear more individual, he no longer needs to be labelled. As the fruit machine spills the money the irony of this is that money is of no use in an apocalyptic society where every structure has broken down, the fact Ed doesn't think of this shows his immaturity. The shadows of the zombies appear at the window, this is a trope of the zombie genre and the audience know this isn't going to bode well for our protagonists inside the pub. The group merge together and place a solitary hand on each other's shoulders which acknowledges the journey they have been on. Weapons in this scene include pool cues, fire extinguisher and darts, all typical props that would be found in a pub but add to the comedy when used against a zombie. In the end Shaun uses the shotgun to kill him, but instead of shooting it he uses it to barge the zombie into the juke box. This again breaks the convention of a stereotypical action film and connotes the fact the British are not experienced with guns.

**Cinematography:** The camera pans around the pub wall to show the zombies surrounding the outside, this emphasises how trapped they are. A wide shot is used to frame our three main protagonists; Shaun, Ed and Liz whilst the zombie landlord is placed in the foreground of the frame. This shows how they have all now got to work together despite their differences to fight the common enemy. The camera pans around the zombie joining in with the circular choreography of the fight and allowing the spectator to witness the confusion of the zombie.

**Sound-** The diegetic sound of the fruit machine is the sound that draws the zombies to the pub. In unison Liz and Shaun scream "Ed No", this connotes they are finally on the same wave length. The zombies crowd the pub accompanied by the non-diegetic electric sting which has become a sign of danger. The diegetic sound of the zombies banging on the glass connotes how fragile it is and how easy it will be for them to get inside. The juke box starts to play Queen's 'Don't Stop Me Now'. The fight scene is choreographed in time with the beat of the music creating parallel sound. The music ends abruptly as the zombie is impaled in the juke box and is replaced by the sound of sparks emitting from the machine.

#### Assessment Question:

How do mise en scene and sound reinforce the notion of Britishness in the film?

#### Assessment Question:

How useful has an ideological critical approach been in understanding the narrative of the film?