

# This is England

## (2006, Shane Meadows, UK)

### Component 1: Varieties of Film and Film-Making (AL) Component 2: European film (AS)

#### Core Study Areas: Key Elements of Film Form Meaning & Response The Contexts of Film

#### Specialist Study Area: Narrative Ideology (AL)

#### Rationale for study

- Critical Acclaim: The film won Best British Film at the 2007 British Academy Film Awards and the 2006 British Independent Film Awards.

#### STARTING POINTS - Useful Sequences and timings/links

- 'This is England' speech - Combo outlines his rationale for his nationalist ideology (40:29 - 48:52)
- Shaun becoming a member of Combo's gang (58:37 - 1:01:39)

#### CORE STUDY AREAS 1 - STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

##### Cinematography

- Use of P.O.V shots from Milky's perspective in the assault scene to align the audience with him and create greater emotional impact and horror.
- Handheld camera throughout contributes to the authentic tone of this social realist film.
- Big close ups are used sparingly but powerfully – an example being in Combo and Shaun's conversation in the car to suggest a growing

intimacy between the characters (48:52)

##### Mise-en-Scène

- Symbolic use of the St George's cross, this prop illustrates Shaun's level of engagement with nationalism throughout the narrative.
- Costume – the importance of the skinhead 'uniform' to represent numerous ideas - the bonds of the gang members, Shaun's acceptance within the group and Milky's pride at his cultural heritage.
- Graffiti – used to illustrate the political views of people in the neighbourhood, 'Maggie is a T\*\*t', Shaun's lack of understanding of racism as he just spray-paints his name and the lack of education of Combo's gang members misspelling National as 'Nashnil'.

##### Editing

- Montages featuring Shaun – three main ones to mark stages in his journey. One of him alone including numerous extreme long shots conveying isolation, one happy with Woody's gang having fun to the upbeat sound of 'Louie Louie' and one of him being 'trained' by Combo. These are useful for comparative analysis as the tones vary dramatically.
- Montages of archive footage – the opening montage offers fairly wide ranging social and political context and the one near the film's end focuses on the Falklands conflict inviting the spectator to draw ideological parallels between this and events in Shaun's life.
- Use of long takes in the final scene inviting the spectator to consider Shaun's emotions and thought processes.

##### Sound

- Ludovico Einaudi's melancholic score used to convey the negative influence of Combo on Shaun's life.
- Range of popular music used from different eras to convey the racial inclusivity of ska (a music genre that originated in Jamaica) and the early skinhead movement (e.g. Toots and

the Mayals - *Louie Louie*, 1973) and the pop culture of 1983 when the film is set (e.g. Dexy's Midnight Runners - *Come on Eileen*, 1982)

- Repeated uses of radio broadcasts featuring Margaret Thatcher discussing the Falklands conflict keep the parallels between that war and the events unfolding in Shaun's life in the spectator's mind and convey how focused the UK was on the conflict in 1983.

### CORE STUDY AREAS 2 - STARTING POINTS - Meaning & Response

#### Representations

- Masculinity – the role of the father is pivotal to the film from the opening shot of Shaun's late father, through first Woody and then Combo's roles as Shaun's surrogate father figure to the violent climax of the film where Combo's motivation could be interpreted as less about race and more about jealousy of Milky's secure and happy family, "*What do you think makes a bad dad?*"
- Place – use of mise-en-scène to convey a sense of a run-down northern town in the 1980s. Social housing, graffiti and abandoned properties portray a sense of desolation and suggest a town past its prime.
- Class – the drawbacks of poverty are explored from the opening scene as Shaun's bedroom has only basic furnishings, and the décor is in poor condition and his clothes are outdated and ill-fitting causing him to be socially excluded.

#### Aesthetics (i.e. the 'look and feel' of the film including visual style, influences, auteur, motifs)

- Influenced by Ken Loach sharing the same focus on the working class, use of lesser known actors and a very collaborative, improvisational approach to filmmaking.
- Shane Meadows as an auteur – hand held camera to create realism, low income Northern or Midlands based families as a focus (Social housing, run down estates) and repeated use of the same actors (Andrew Shim, Vicky McClure from *A Room for Romeo Brass*).
- New Wave iconography described by Robert Murphy as '*kitchen sinks, railway arches... bleak stretches of moor or beach... graffiti-lined council estates, [and] people and landscapes placed in spare and striking juxtaposition*'.

### CORE STUDY AREAS 3 - STARTING POINTS - Contexts

#### Social

- A rise in discrimination against ethnic minorities partly due to the 1981 economic recession which led to greater insecurity within the working classes worried about their jobs and homes. Racial divisions were also heightened by the 1981 Brixton riots where the black community were demonstrating their anger at the racist bias of police officers conducting the new stop and search policy.

#### Political

- Conservative Government about to get re-elected due to the victory in the Falklands Conflict. A time of significant unemployment, de-industrialisation and a widening of the North/South divide due to Conservative policies.

### SPECIALIST STUDY AREA - Narrative

#### Starting points

- Binary Oppositions - conflict between opposing characters shapes the narrative from Shaun's first interaction with Sandhu in the shop and the playground fight, through Woody and Combo's gangs clashing to the dramatic assault on Milky. Levi Strauss argued that one side of the binary pair is always seen by a particular culture as more valued than the other - this could be used as a useful starting point for a discussion, particularly as the central character's allegiances shift through the narrative.
- Open ended - the spectator does not get a clear indication of Milky's condition and it is unclear if Shaun will be isolated once more or re-joins Woody's gang.
- Patterns and repetition - numerous locations and situations are repeated e.g. confrontations in Sandhu's shop, gangs playing football. These repetitions draw the spectator's attention to how things have changed.

### SPECIALIST STUDY AREA - Ideology

#### Starting points

- The implications of spectator positioning – although the spectator is encouraged to align themselves with Shaun throughout the narrative they are not encouraged to be persuaded by Combo's views in the way he is.

The film is clearly anti-nationalist as Combo is presented as a violent bully and his gang predominantly poorly educated followers.

- Anti-War – the disturbing archive footage of dead and injured servicemen and the narrative strand of Shaun's lost father point to a clear anti-war message.
- Anti-Thatcher – from Combo's comments in the '*This is England*' speech, the repeated loud, shrill voice of Thatcher on the radio and the anti-Thatcher graffiti shown repeatedly in the film the point is clearly made that Meadow's feels that Thatcher's policies and approach should be challenged.