

ET, The Extra Terrestrial

(Spielberg, 1982)

Component 1: Key Developments in US film

Focus Areas: Genre, Narrative, Context

PART 1: Key Sequence(s) and timings and/or links

Opening scene: 0 – 00:08:00

Final scene(s) 1:24:00-1:54:00

The lab (1:24:00 The chase, 1:39:00 The ship)

PART 2: STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography (including Lighting)

Opening Scene:

- The opening shot is of the stars, a slow pan down to earth symbolises ET landing on our planet, the tracking shots across the earth and the interior of the ship demonstrate that we are not so very different, the low angle of these shots position the audience as one of these curious little creatures.
- Tracking shots cautiously circle the ship, as we (the audience) decide if they are a threat. The camera gets closer and closer to the aliens, until it decides they/ET are friendly.
- POV shots as ET gazes in wonder at the trees and the town align the audience with his sense of wonderment at the achievements of man and of Earth.
- Close ups of Keys' keys indicate that this is an authority figure with knowledge 'the keys to unlock the mystery'.
- Sudden, aggressive close ups of the cars juxtapose the gentle cinematography used to establish the peaceful aliens. The bright blue/white light from the headlights of the cars jarringly bleaches out almost the whole screen, contrasting the warm glow of the alien craft.
- Long shots are used to show ET's isolation and to allow the audience to appreciate the spectacle of the special effects.

Final Scene:

- There is a juxtaposition between the stark artificial lighting of the lab and the natural light of the forest, leading the audience to mistrust the systems of authority in the adult world in favour of the natural surroundings that connote childhood.
- In the lab scene at the 'he came to me' moment 1:27:00 the camera tracks towards Elliot as the panicking adults (shown in Elliot's POV) try to revive ET. During the time ET dies, Mary steps into focus and the 'Earth family' are reunited, they are lit from above to create a 'halo effect' as they embrace.
- 1:30:00 ET has died, the blinds are drawn and exterior light floods in creating a 'venetian blind effect' connoting entrapment.
- 1:43:00 the iconic visual of Elliot and ET flying past the setting sun, is this every child's fantasy action adventure? The boys have now been gifted with magical alien powers. This Long Shot allows the audience to marvel at the spectacle of the special effects.
- 1:48:00 a series of intimate close ups as Elliot and ET say their emotional goodbyes

Mise-en-scène

Opening Scene:

- The introduction of mankind, we are shown to be loud (the close up of the dirty exhaust), disruptive and not respectful of nature (we stamp through puddles, plough our cars through the forest)
- ET delicately digs up a plant while being watched by a bunny, showing us that he is not a threat and respects our world, the bunny is not afraid of him, so why should we be? ET is only interested in the plant.
- ET is drawn to the town, to humanity.
- The aliens' hearts glow when they hear an Owl's hoot, to warn/check that the group is okay, it is clear they are family.
- The design of ET is similar to that of a toddler, the waddle, the small round body and large emotive blue eyes; this promotes a maternal response in the audience.

Final Scene:

- There is a juxtaposition of locations the man made lab (a confining, clinically white mise-en-scène) contrasts the natural beauty of the forest.
- Elliot's costume in the lab scenes is ghostly, and angelic and pure.
- Elliot and Keys often mirror each other within the frame. As if they are father and son or Elliot and a version of his future self.
- 1:39:00 ET emerges from the van in a cloud of smoke wearing a white robe with his red heart glowing, an ethereal angelic image, Elliot then puts on his red hoodie, a metaphorical connection to ET's red heart, they are now family.
- The children are able to evade the adults with their cars and guns, knocking lights off of police cars (1:41) as they go, a symbol of defiance against the adult world.
- 1:48:00 at the final goodbye ET is bathed in a heavenly light from the ship, as he and Elliot embrace Elliot looks to Mary, he has decided to stay with his Earth family. As he speaks the words "I'll be right here", ET symbolises Elliot's childhood dreams and desires, even though he is leaving, those emotions will always remain in Elliot. Elliot's final moments in the film are stoic, heroic and hopeful.
- The last we see of ET 1:50:00 is his red beating heart as the ship's door closes around him, we are reminded of the film's message, of love and family, that no one ever truly leaves us.

Editing

Opening Scene:

- Cross dissolves are used to imply the passing of time as the aliens gather samples of plant life.

Final Scene:

- The rapid editing as ET dies connotes the sadness and confusion of a child confronting death for the first time.
- 1:42:00 Spielberg uses a series of closer and closer shots of Elliott's reaction to the blockage to emphasise Elliot's panic and fear.

Sound

Opening Scene:

- The music starts with a clear flute, a curious, innocent sound against the backdrop of stars as seen from Earth. It connotes hope, purity and wonder.
- The sounds of the forests such as crickets and owls are enhanced to demonstrate the connection with nature. This juxtaposes

the man made sounds of cars and keys.

- The creatures have a pleasing purr, so the audience can recognise them as pet-like and non-threatening, when in distress ET screams like a baby, activating a maternal instinct in the audience, a desire to protect this creature.

Final Scene:

- The musical score, written by John Williams, is the heart of these final scenes, anchoring the action to a repeated musical motif that leads our emotional response, the same melody for fear, hope, sadness and release.

PART 3: STARTING POINTS - Contexts

Social

Family:

- At the start of the narrative, the family is 'broken'. Elliot wants to be with his father and Mary his mother is struggling to cope with her three children, the mise-en-scène of the house is chaotic and cramped, but loving and full of toys and the trappings of 80's consumerism. (Family dinner scene 00:17:00 Elliot's adventure brings the family together, and makes Elliot mature as he has to look after his own pet/child.

Women:

- The role of women within this film is that of a side-lined minority, men/boys drive the action and female characters (There are only two) are seen as an annoyance or an obstacle to be overcome.

Positive view of the future:

- The aliens are not a threat, they are peaceful, adorable creatures (like Ewoks).
- The possibilities of space travel are endless and exciting, not to be feared.

Historical

Cold War:

- This film is Post Vietnam, the USA was shrugging off its post war disillusionment and embracing a new era of prosperity, authority is still shown to be a threat 1:17:00. Authority / adulthood are not to be trusted.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS - Specialist Focus - Genre & Narrative

Narrative:

- Heavy use of enigma codes in opening scene.
- Classical Hollywood Narrative conventions are used. The 'happy' ending offers the audience a clear resolution.
- There are clear Binary Opposites: Youth Vs Authority for example.

Genre:

- Sci-Fi was a very popular genre at the time, (Spielberg had previously directed *Close*

Encounters of the Third Kind) and *Return of the Jedi* was released a year later.

- This film uses many thematic codes and conventions of Sci-fi: 'What if...?', and visual codes and conventions: The Spectacle of Special Effects.
- Cinema creates a 'safe place' for the audience to experience fear

Roger Ebert review of *ET, The Extra Terrestrial*: <https://goo.gl/irxhZy>