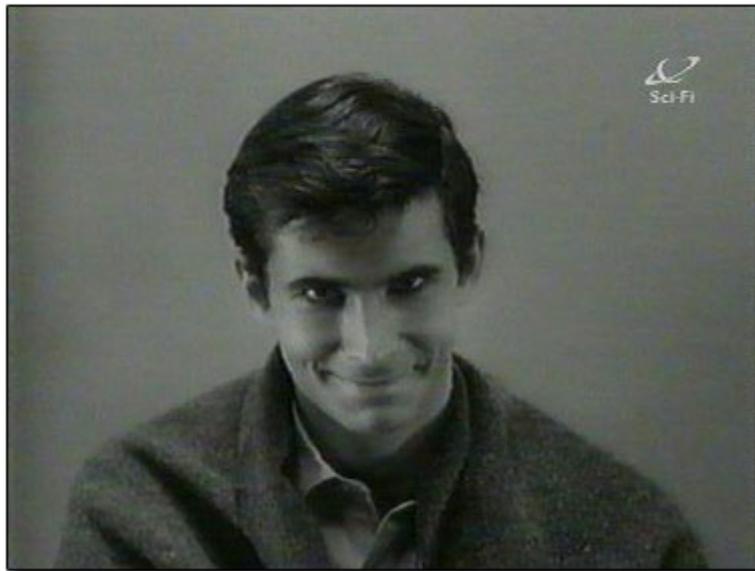# ENGLISH IN AUSTRALIA

## 'Repackaging the Slasher Movie: digital unwriting of film in the classroom'

by Andrew Burn

Richard and James are sitting in front of a computer screen at 4 o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon, in a small comprehensive school in Cambridge in the UK. Unusual for them: school finishes at 3 o'clock, and they're normally off like a shot. Something here is motivating them, and it deserves scrutiny, as they fit like a glove the image of that group of under-achieving boys who are worrying parents, schools, education authorities and government policy-makers so much. Both are on special programs to address identified patterns of under-achievement in their work – programs devised by this school to address problems of personal organisation, motivation and commitment with 14-16 year-old students (those engaged in courses leading to public examinations in the UK).

On the screen in front of them is a sequence from Hitchcock's famous prototype of the slasher sub-genre of horror movies, *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960). The sequence, showing Norman Bates's face in profile, staring through the brightly lit hole at Marion Crane as she gets ready for her shower, is running in an editing window that takes up about a quarter of the screen. They're very clear about the function of these images – they're discussing Perkins as a monster, using the word 'psycho', wanting to represent him as repellent but oddly attractive, like Freddie in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series (Craven, 1984).

To the left of the edit window is another window, a bin full of clips from the movie that they've grabbed from videotape as digitised sequences. Each clip shows as a 'keyframe' – the first frame of the sequence, about the size of a postage stamp. At the bottom of the screen is a rectangular timeline – a long grey line on which the clips they're editing are assembled; and underneath it, another line where the audiotracks appear. To put clips on the timeline, Richard and James simply drag and drop. They are using a professional digital video editing system called Media 100, which allows the rapid editing and re-editing of video and audio.
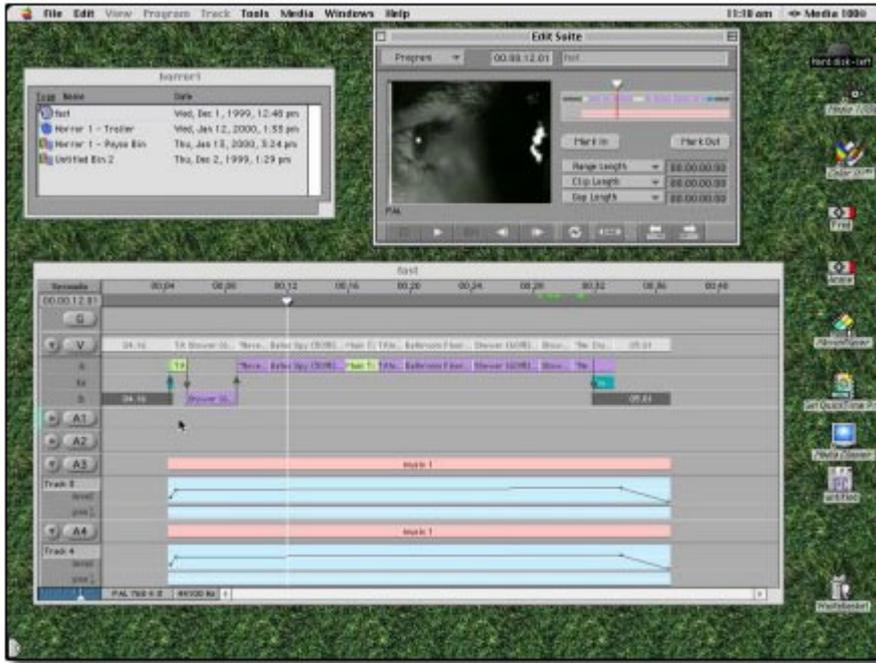
Figure 2: Richard and James' Media 100 screen. Notice the bin of clips, the edit window showing Norman's face and the timeline underneath.

Richard and James are making a trailer for *Psycho* as part of a Media Studies course in Film Distribution and Marketing, for the UK public exam at age 16, the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education). They've been asked to choose a film to market, imagining that it's being re-released for a particular occasion. James and Richard are working in a group of four, with Andrew and Alex, who have been more influential in the choice of this film. Richard and James are less sure about it, less comfortable with its distance from the colourful aesthetic of excess that characterises horror films of the eighties and nineties, and are looking for elements of *Psycho* that seem to link to this more recent, familiar tradition.

Uncomfortable with Andrew and Alex's confident ironic take on *Psycho* , using Lou Reed's '*Perfect Day* ' as a soundtrack, Richard and James have decided to make their own separate trailer. As they work, a number of questions occur to me, which I will work through in this article. Some of them are questions I have addressed before; most of them are, for me, only partly answered, partly resolved.

They group into two big issues. The first of these is to do with the study of film in the secondary curriculum. Part of the problem here is film as a cultural form which, in spite of its enormous impact on the sensibilities of 20th century audiences, is still only marginally recognised by curriculum policy-makers in the UK, still locked into a notion of textuality partly predicated on Arnoldian/Leavisite values of the civilising influence of literature, partly predicated on the values of print literacy: a double package which makes the recognition of moving image texts difficult to find room for, difficult to connect to debates about cultural value and skills of reading and writing.

A second part of the problem is about selection and value: which movies get to be studied, what kinds of notion of cultural value could or should be taught, whether new kinds of cinematic canon arise, replaying all the problems of literary canonicity, with all the difficulties we continue to experience with this kind of text-ranking, so attractive to governments, so problematic for teachers and readers.

The second issue is about how we study film – what new kinds of visual (more strictly, audio-visual) literacy come into play; how these can be taught, what resources are needed, what pedagogic traditions provide useful templates for such work. The problem here is given fresh impetus by the recent advent of powerful digital technologies for the editing of video. For the first time, a century after the arrival of film as a medium for consumption by the many, and production by the very few, the many are able to make film and edit it. This can be seen as the moving image equivalent of writing, for a generation of young people whose parents, grandparents and great-grandparents have only been able to read this medium.

There is a subsidiary, though important issue of cost – the equipment we are using was very expensive, paid for partly by a special government grant, so not available to most schools. However, such equipment is rapidly becoming cheaper – the same package, two years later, is half the cost; and Apple computers have just released an I-Mac with digital video editing capacity and software for around the price of a standard PC.

The question, then, of how schools will approach this new literacy is an urgent one. Students will, in the next few years, be making meanings, interrogating powerful fictions, constructing their own narratives, through the digital audio-visual equivalents of the written word, clause, text, genre. How do teachers cope with this? What styles of teaching and learning, what literacy practices, what textual practices, what classroom interventions, will work?

Moving Image Education – 'official' recognition begins

Richard and James, though they aren't fully aware of it, are working in a school context which is delimited by a range of contradictory policy directives, peculiar to the UK, but with cousins, close or distant, in other countries. I'm grateful to colleagues from the sister associations of the International Federation for the Teaching of English for describing fully (at the 1999 IFTE conference media workshop at Warwick University organised by the UK English and Media Centre) how space is created for moving image work in the curricula of English and the Arts in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US. What struck me was how much more accommodating and imaginative these curricula often were than the English National curriculum, and how much more the professional judgement of teachers in these other national settings seems to be respected than has been the case in the UK in recent years.

In England and Wales, the first thing that strikes anyone trying to fit moving image and film work into the current curriculum is how grudging the space allocated is – a small area of the English curriculum, under Reading. However, there may be a case for cautious optimism. The revised National Curriculum, to be introduced in September 2000, has improved matters. At ages 11 to 16, it has, for the first time, a special category for 'Media and Moving Image Texts', with the following specifications:

Media and moving image texts

Pupils should be taught:

- how meaning is conveyed in texts that include print, images and sometimes sounds
- how choice of form, layout and presentation contribute to effect [for example, font, caption, illustration in printed text, sequencing, framing, soundtrack in moving image text]
- how the nature and purpose of media products influence content and meaning [for example, selection of stories for a front page or news broadcast]
- how audiences and readers choose and respond to media.

This extract is taken from the prescribed curriculum for English, constituted as one among ten subjects which make up the National Curriculum for England and Wales. In spite of contestation and fragmentation of the subject 'English' in the academy, it has been retained as a unitary area of study in the mandatory curriculum covering the phases of compulsory schooling from 5 to 16.

Media education, then, exists only as a subset of English. Its history within the National Curriculum has always been problematic. Based mainly on the print and news media, it has been repeatedly framed as a way of teaching children to read (media) texts with suspicion, to expect bias, and to read for purposes of information retrieval. Such textual practices have been profoundly at odds with the attitude to text enshrined in the curriculum for literature, which by contrast has emphasised aesthetic appreciation and a reverence for literary heritage, with Shakespeare featuring as the only compulsory author required by the National Curriculum.

It's important to mention, however, that the curriculum experienced by students is bigger than the National Curriculum. Schools have some freedom to teach subjects beyond the mandatory framework; and several of these are available as public exam courses at age 16, including Media Studies. Post-14, then, if schools are willing to find the curriculum space, Media Studies can be strengthened as a discrete area of study by virtue of the mechanisms of external syllabi, conforming to national requirements for accreditation at 16, and all the concomitant processes of assessment by portfolio and examination, training courses for teachers, and so on.

Up to now, it has always been difficult for schools to promote media work with 11-16 year-olds; and difficult to argue the case for specialist Media Studies at GCSE (the exam at 16). A host of consequences flow from this – there is little specialist training available; in Initial Teacher Education, media theory and practice are virtually absent from many courses; resources devoted to media work are scarce; media qualifications are often misunderstood by parents, by university teachers, and by professionals in the industry itself. The new curriculum will, perhaps, allow some space for growth in these areas.

The extract included above, then, may represent a significant move forward. Although this paragraph represents the 'official' media curriculum in its entirety, its rationale both includes a reference to the moving image for the first time, and is framed in terms which are more consistent with approaches to text and to language in the rest of the English document. A remaining problem, however, is that the terms in which it is presented suggest, again, only the 'reading' half of moving image literacy – no requirement is made that young people in schools should

learn to 'write' moving image, no entitlement to the experience of media production, at precisely the moment when the digital revolution is offering the equipment for such production of moving image texts.

Within this policy context, some positive initiatives have been taken to promote and clarify media education as a legitimate area for teaching and learning. One is the work of the BFI(British Film Institute), which has recently mounted a national debate on moving image education through a Film Education Working Group, which has published a Report, *Making Movies Matter* (FEWG, 1999), making the case for the study of film and the moving image more generally within the impending statutory curriculum framework. Another is the UK government's Specialist Schools initiative. In late 1996, schools were invited to make submissions to the government for designation as Arts Colleges (to join other specialisms such as Technology, Sport and Modern Languages). Within the Arts designation sub-specialisms were invited in Performing Arts, Visual Arts, or Media Arts.

The school in which I work, Parkside Community College , was the only school to win designation as an Arts College with the Media Arts as its specialism in 1997. Since then we have been joined by three other schools in England. Though these numbers are presently small, the government's target is for one in four schools in England and Wales to be specialist schools over the next few years – so we may see a rapid expansion of Media specialist schools.

The scheme brings extra funding, which is how Richard and James come to be using professional digital editing equipment. As I have mentioned above, this was expensive, and depended on government grant and fund-raising from the commercial sector; though this barrier to schools' acquisition of such technology is rapidly disappearing as costs fall and new hardware and software packages are introduced. The technology itself is often the centre of comment and publicity. The UK government, in particular, has repeatedly emphasised a need to connect schools to 'the information superhighway', without considering the implications of this for teaching and learning. To avoid the dangers of technological determinism, we might remember the prescient remarks made about cinema technologies by Stephen Heath in the early eighties, in which he pointed out that technology does not somehow precede the social, but that the social and the technological are mutually determining:

Cinema does not exist in the technological and then become this or that practice in the social; its history is a history of the technological and social together, a history in which the determinations are not simple but multiple, interacting, in which the ideological is there from the start - without this latter emphasis reducing the technological to the ideological or making it uniquely the term of an ideological determination. (1980: 6)

We need to remember this in the often-inflated debates about the digital revolution, and the excitement about the rapidly accelerating multimedia technologies it brings. Richard and James are unusual in using a non-linear editing system that few of their age have access to – though it will rapidly become increasingly common. It is already clear, however, that they work within a national curriculum framework which, though beginning to recognise a need for moving image education, offers no real clues about what subject matter might be suitable for digital dissection or production on these spanking new screens. We need, furthermore, following Heath's cue, to ask what kinds of 'reading' and 'writing' of the image are appearing; what new social roles pupils might be inhabiting, what pleasures, what kinds of conceptual development, what possibilities for their own social futures are offered.

A good deal of energy is often invested in the demonstration of new technologies for educationists, but current government training schemes for teachers in the application of ICT within their subject areas are largely based on quite familiar uses of ICT, and very little attention is given to the possibilities for moving image education. We need, then, to heed Heath's warning, and explore the social contexts in which such technologies are developed, what new possibilities they offer for the social processes of making signs, and how they are used both formally within education, informally in the home or cyber-cafe, and how these different arenas meet, collide, cross-fertilise.

Why Psycho *?*

Why would Richard and James be immersed in *Psycho* ? After all, the film was originally released thirty-six years ago. I've discovered that students are aware of its 'classic' status, but this does not mean that they enjoy the film when they first see it. In fact, many of them (including Richard and James) find it a bit dated and boring, although they recognise its groundbreaking status.

The class watched *Psycho* as part of the course, and also watched clips from what has been referred to as 'a very British *Psycho* ', *Peeping Tom* , by Michael Powell, the cult popular horror film by John Carpenter, *Hallowe'en* , Jonathan Demme's superior grand guignol adaptation of Thomas Harris's *Silence of the Lambs* , Katherine Bigelow's slasher/stalker film with a powerful female central character, *Blue Steel* , and Wes Craven's ironic, parodic slasher movie, *Scream* . This selection highlights the problem of cultural value facing curriculum developers and policy makers, as well as classroom teachers and cultural theorists.

In school, I experience it as something like a rerun of the old and continuing debate in the UK about the literary canon; and it is clear from a recent article by Brenton Doecke and Terry Hayes (1999) that when teachers in

Australia include in senior school reading lists texts which challenge the traditional canon, such inclusions also run the risk of provoking a conservative backlash.

Making *Movies Matter*, the British Film Institute's recommendations for moving image education, will provoke the debate about film canonicity; though the argument about how the value of individual films is perceived, and how such value might be a contested quality, is a problem that needs to be faced up to and explored.

The course I have just taught to Richard and James' class possibly exemplifies the problem of canonicity. I have taught them about *Psycho*, about Hitchcock and his celebrated suspense aesthetic, about Michael Powell's ill-fated but cinematically fascinating exploration of the *Psycho* scenario, *Peeping Tom*. They are interested in these ideas on the whole; more able students seem enthusiastic about the historic significance of the movie, and its influence on the horror genre. There's something a little dutiful about their attitude, though; and it's hard to ignore the drifting of attention as students watch clips from these classic films, the lack of impression the *Peeping Tom* murders make on them (though they're intrigued by the idea), the way they perk up as more recent examples of the genre appear, the hands over the eyes as Agent Starling confronts Hannibal Lecter, the mixture of gasp and knowing laughter as Wes Craven rattles refreshingly through the genre clichés in *Scream*.

Not to labour the point, these tensions are something like the difficulty of teaching pre-twentieth century literature to children: the language (in this case, the cinematic language) is different, and hence difficult. This is not a reason for not teaching it. The cinematic language of arthouse movies can also, even in some recent films, be opaque and boring for young people. Sometimes, it's worth working through this. But we need some rough guiding principles.

Firstly, we need to find the value that popular cinema has for young people. Though not well documented, there is an emergent tradition of audience research which demonstrates that young people operate complex strategies of aesthetic engagement, moral judgement, even quasi-political interpretation as they watch popular film (see, for instance, Buckingham, 1996; Willis, 1992; Barker, 1998). Furthermore – and maybe this should be the real point of departure – this is a form of cultural engagement that they really enjoy. This pleasure, often commented on in contemporary cultural theory, is also often reified. We need to begin to work out what threads make up such pleasures: how they relate to developing and changing senses of identity, how they are integrated with the very process of meaning-making itself. We also need to acknowledge the pleasures of popular cinema for ourselves as teachers. Too many of us, recruited as literature graduates, have been all but compelled to deny or repress our own pleasure in popular texts, in the service of a heritage aesthetic that many of us would now want to question.

Secondly, there is need to keep a balanced view of how we operate with the contradictory accounts of cultural value which come with the films we want to teach; and how we ourselves, and our students, modify these evaluations. Such crude distinctions as 'elite' or 'popular' culture often become unclear; the dividing line is, in many cases, quite untenable. *Psycho* was a popular, low budget movie before Hitchcock was 'discovered' by Truffaut. Michael Powell also was a popular director. The *Silence of the Lambs* is an upmarket movie with high production values, as subtle in its use of suspense as any Hitchcock classic, and quite impossible to locate easily within a trash aesthetic or a tradition of low-budget B movies.

The need for guiding principles of these kinds is clearly apparent as I look at my Media Studies class. Two groups have independently decided to make trailers and re-release marketing packages for *The Shining*. One boy, Alex, wants to do this because his group think it's a great horror movie, with a great popular star, Jack Nicholson, a movie which still has them covering their eyes at its images of spectacular excess (they're using the shot of a river of blood filling the hotel corridors in slow motion as a long, underpinning sequence overlaid with flashes of other key images). But they are also working on *The Shining* because Alex is a dedicated arthouse fan, works at the local arts cinema in his spare time, and wants to do the film as a study of Stanley Kubrick, in the year of the death of the great director. These contradictions are emphasised by the showing of Kubrick's last film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, which is showing at both our local Warner multiplex and our Arts Picturehouse, in one cinema as a Tom Cruise/Nicole Kidman sex thriller, in the other as the last masterpiece of an auteur revered by the arthouse world.

And *Psycho* itself? As I have suggested, it's a horror film that, for today's teenagers, lies between the world of popular horror and the more distanced aesthetic of arthouse film – they enjoy it in some ways, not in others. The pleasure becomes problematic – and this is, I sense, fruitful teaching territory. The experience relates clearly to the pleasures of recent slasher movies; but extends the experience, the terms of reference, the sense of where this textual tradition came from. It extends their conscious awareness of film as historically situated, as a dynamic medium, as an experience felt differently by different audiences in different social and historical contexts. A group of girls who completed the same project last year, and whose work I have described elsewhere (Burn, 1999a), became increasingly aware of how *Psycho* was important for their parents' generation; and how it is importantly both different from, and related to, the slasher movies which have succeeded it.

Cultural Pleasure versus Cultural Value?

The study of *Psycho* in the classroom does not, then, need to be dominated either by the question of textual value urged by an auteurist approach to directors like Hitchcock and Kubrick, or by the question of the visceral pleasures apparently promoted by Wes Craven and Jonathan Demme. I want the best of both worlds. The horror genre, as Noel Carroll has observed (1990), is one of the few genres named after the affective response it invites; and this response, the characteristic thrill of horror, has always been about a delicious combination of fear and pleasure, or 'distress and delight', as David Buckingham (1996), in a study of teenage engagements with the genre, has described it.

These pleasurable fears are too complex to do full justice to here, but it is worth briefly reviewing some suggestive proposals. Buckingham explores how the watching of frightening films might be a kind of rite of passage, a proving ground where teenage boys can show their maturity. He also cites Carol Clover (1993), who suggests that horror spectators identify with the victim, and derive pleasure from the fact that such victims are usually vindicated in the end, often through the intervention of a heroic figure. Buckingham suggests that the points of identification are in fact more fluid, and shift subtly as the film progresses. My own research suggests something similar: that young people can gain considerable pleasure in quite contradictory allegiances to both the 'good' characters and the monsters (Burn, 1997). The fascination with which Richard and James play with and discuss the image of Norman Bates suggests something of this attraction.

But it isn't just about some kind of innocent response. These students are immensely knowledgeable about this genre. The group working on *Silence of the Lambs* surprised me, as Andrew, whose attainment, as measured by conventional systems of assessment related to the UK public examination system, is low, who rarely offers opinions in class and presents himself as someone with very limited relevant knowledge to bring to lessons, turned out to have an intimate knowledge of this film, and an ability to explain the intricacies of its plot and Lecter's complex character. Andrew displays two important features of a knowledgeable film audience here – a detailed and wide-ranging knowledge of the film and genre; and a particular aesthetic taste, bound up in his affection for horror films. It is these kinds of pleasure and knowledge – the 'tastes' described by the cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1976) – which make classroom encounters with film dynamic, and conventional pedagogies or systems of assessment problematic.

Certainly, there are the more conventional kinds of cultural capital possessed by students from middle-class backgrounds, who know about directors and about the patterns of film consumption exploited by art cinema. But others, such as Andrew, or Philip, who both have a detailed knowledge of the films of Wes Craven, come into their own as well. They have an extensive knowledge of film – but it's very different from the arthouse aesthetic, and rooted in the popular pleasures of the multiplex and the video rental store. There are obvious differences – or distinctions, to use Bourdieu's term – between the kinds of knowledge displayed by students from middle class backgrounds and the knowledge shown by Andrew and Philip.

Andrew and Philip don't refer to directors, don't know about film noir, never watch foreign language films. We need, maybe, both kinds of knowledge. There is the chance in this course to offer these possibilities, to expand the terms of reference. And there is the possibility, rare within the official curriculum, to explore the pleasures of popular cinema and the powerful fictions it builds, the gripping, vital metaphors of contemporary social concerns, fantastic identities, visual spectacles it promotes. Increasingly, it's important to recognise how these stark oppositions often collapse into each other, certainly depend on each other, invite shifting positions as new examples of the cinema of each side of this cultural divide mirror, court, probe the aesthetic of the other. My class recently went to the local multiplex to see a National Film Week preview of the recent German film, *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer, 1999), and were enjoyably impressed by its dizzy oscillations between avant-garde temporal structures and its streetwise, comicstrip, techno-beat audio-visual style.

So we choose horror films, and we live with the contradictions somehow; we 'inhabit the paradox', in the words of the cultural theorist Steven Connor (1996). The legacy of the last century of literature study, to paraphrase Connor, is that we experience the most valued texts as the least pleasurable; and the most pleasurable as the least valuable. Since there is no obvious way out of this dilemma, we need to learn to live with the contradiction, subverting it as best we can. These contradictions are not initially experienced by the students as a problem, until their tastes come into open conflict, and they are unable to move beyond simply disapproving of each other's choices. These emergent engagements with judgments of cultural value are what we need to mediate, though they are completely unrecognised in Media Studies syllabi in the UK, which steer well clear of the question of aesthetic value, and treat taste merely as an audience variable.

So, broadly speaking, we have two strands of the teaching of moving image texts which need further development, both with antecedents in the English curriculum and the literacy debate. These strands relate to the questions I set out at the beginning of this article: the question of what moving image 'literacy', especially in the context of new technologies, might be; and the (closely related) question of pleasure, taste, and cultural value.

Back to Richard and James

How, then, do these questions appear in Richard and James' work on *Psycho* ? What kinds of literacy do they show, what kinds of 'reading' and 'writing' of the moving image as they manipulate the visual fabric of the film? And what kinds of filmic pleasure are these literacies partly determined by?

In the choice of clips from the film, they have been guided by ideas of 'key scenes', moments which are particularly important to the narrative and the genre. There are lots of possibilities here – they have the shower scene, of course; and they have powerful images of Norman Bates and of his dead mother. These selections represent their initial 'reading' of the film. In common sense terms, they are 'the good bits', the bits we discuss enthusiastically as we come out of the cinema. Hodge and Tripp, in their influential study of 42 Australian children watching a TV cartoon (1986), refer to these moments as 'synchronic syntagms', moments from the moving sequence that we apprehend as if instantaneously.

For Hodge and Tripp, synchronic syntagms have two sets of properties. The first is that any frame of a moving image sequence has its own pattern of visual design, distinct from, though related to, the flow of the moving (diachronic) sequence. We 'read' such images as if instantaneously; though, because they pass by so rapidly, perhaps we don't pay enough attention to their design – an argument, in my view (Burn, 1999b) for studying still frames of film more closely with students. The second set of properties is to do with the fact that synchronic syntagms are a special category of image – those images from the film that have a particular significance, such as the face of a major character. Furthermore, these images, argue Hodge and Tripp, encode particularly powerful ideological meanings, and are susceptible to widely variable readings by different viewers.

For Richard and James, these particularly powerful meanings seem to be vested in the images of characters from *Psycho* in roles which are clear points of pleasure and horrified identification in horror films: Anthony Perkins framed as monster; Janet Leigh as screaming victim; the sinister figure of Norman's mother. Their work with the digital equipment has involved, then, a reading of these images, and a recomposition of them in a linear sequence that expresses a set of understandings about genre and narrative, as well as marking the points of pleasure in the film for these two teenage spectators.

So these students develop, through spectatorial engagement, memory, and the social processes of understanding, checking out, enjoying, rehearsing, building cultural allegiances to films, a range of mental readings, banks of powerful images, ranked in different forms by the ways in which they interact with, remake, structures of genre and narrative. The apparently simple process of digitising clips in this software is, then, a kind of formalising of this process.

The next stage is for the students to edit their trailer by assembling the clips on the timeline. There is, again, a kind of visual literacy, as Richard and James suggest the narrative movement from the introduction of Norman, through the death of Marion Crane, to the revelation of the dead mother in the cellar, and punctuate it with the identifying whole text wrapper, the title screen with the director's name. There's a long debate between the two boys about how not to give away the ending of the film, but still find a sense of ending for their trailer. They decide eventually on a repeat shot, which works well to short-circuit the move towards closure – they repeat Norman's evilly grinning face, an image pregnant with possibility, but somehow also final.

The technology is interesting here: the repeat shot is achieved with a couple of keyboard commands with which Richard and James delightedly discover they are familiar - the Apple equivalents of 'control c' for copy and 'control v' for paste. These basic functions of editing reveal some important principles. Firstly, that this is an editing exercise – a digital unwriting of the visual text in order to rewrite it, a reader's transformed version of it. Secondly, that such editing, such plasticity of a moving image text, is only possible with the advent of digital non-linear editing technology. Thirdly, that this technology is an ICT – and it works in a context that young people are increasingly very familiar with, so that the simple transferable skills of the keyboard commands for copy and paste are effortlessly transferred to a professional video editing environment which we were told, three years ago, would be too difficult for secondary school children. The study of Information and Communication Technology has, until now, been something very different from Media Studies; but the connections are beginning to be clear, as the technologies converge.

The final point I want to make about the creative, transformative unpicking and remaking of the cinematic text is to do with the soundtrack: this is, as I have already mentioned, an audiovisual text. On the Media 100 screen, the audiotrack appears below the videotrack, a parallel strip of media, an auditory 'sentence' alongside its visual partner. There is a sense, after years of analogue video editing in which these processes were largely invisible, in which they have suddenly become clearly visible: strips of sound beside strips of image, recalling the structure of Eisenstein's 'vertical montage' (1968), the articulation of sound and image to produce, in their conjunction, a 'third meaning' (as Eisenstein described it), just as the juxtaposition of one image with the next in the horizontal montage produced a third meaning.

In this trailer for *Psycho* , this transformation of the text, that is, the addition of a music soundtrack, produces a powerful result. Richard and James began the project in a group of four, working with Andrew and Alex. The

original group of four digitised the clips together. After that, they split into two pairs, their readings of the film pulling part. One pair, Andrew and Alex, made a deliberate appeal to a knowing audience who are profoundly familiar with *Psycho* , its history and its legacy. Their ironic soundtrack was Lou Reed's ' *Perfect Day* ', the line 'I'm glad I spent it with you' slid along the timeline to coincide with the Anthony Perkins' evil grin.

Figure 3: Andrew and Alex's timeline. Notice the two audiotracks at the bottom of the timeline: the short tracks carrying brief selections from the film's soundtrack; the long line underneath carrying ' *Perfect Day* '.

Richard and James don't have any of this sense of irony, and want to make a fresh sense of the slow suspense of the film. To begin with, they wanted a violent, throbbing action soundtrack, and were about to get a friend to write a digital techno track for the trailer. As they evolved the idea of the slow, threatening mood, Richard found a tape of slow piano music (an adaptation of Elgar's ' *Enigma Variations* ' from the soundtrack of the film *The Matrix* , just released on video), which completely transforms the sequence, making it really their own creation, and a sharp contrast to the trailer of the other pair.

I suspect that this choice of soundtrack is also related to the fact that James and Richard's enjoyment of *Psycho* is mixed – they do enjoy certain aspects of it (the images they've chosen for the trailer in particular); but they also display a resistance to it, and see it as old-fashioned, less enjoyable than 'modern' horror films. So, in some ways, the addition of the soundtrack from *The Matrix* is a kind of improvement for these two young viewers – a relocation of the film in a context of more immediate, pleasurable cultural preferences.

Marking the Moving Image?

For me, as a teacher of a Media Studies exam group, the least palatable part of the whole business is the assessment – the difficult business of evaluating their work. If I compare Richard and James' to one made on the same course last year, by the group of girls referred to above, it becomes clear that theirs will get a mark considerably lower than the *Psycho* trailer made by that group of girls. The difference, though, is not so much to do with the quality of the text. They may even score higher in some aspects of the production work: the transformative power of their piano music, for instance, is greater than that of the girls' soundtrack, which was a combination of two music tracks from the CD of the *Psycho* soundtrack. It is true that the girls' trailer is longer, and a more complex representation of elements of the film's narrative, including changes of mood and tempo.

All of this will count in my assessment, I guess. But behind this, there is a fundamental issue of how people really get to grips with textual structure at a conceptual level, how they evolve a conscious sense of the grammar of the text and its transformative possibilities. For Richard and James, a good deal of this is quite intuitive, though they are beginning to articulate ideas about character, about the narrative functions of Norman and Marion, about how the text generates emotion – and this takes them a long way. Their early work with Andrew and Alex on which clips to digitise has also moved them on, developing their instinctive feel for the 'good bits' into more conscious notions of narrative structure.

The complexity of the girls' understanding of the moving image was also evidenced by the language they used about it in their talk and their written work. I have described their trailer fully elsewhere (Burn, 1999a), but here is one example of one member of the group, Abby, describing how they addressed a new audience for Psycho:

Another successful technique we used to provoke interest or emotion from our target audience was to use text screens bearing captions, as these effectively catch the attention of the audience, who are almost forced to read them. In a sense, these separated different parts of the trailer.

The first one, 'WATCH OUT!', (placed after Norman hands the keys over to Marion) was designed to put the audience in suspense and obviously hints that Marion will not be safe, whilst not giving too much away. The second, 'SHE'S BACK!' was placed after Norman tells Marion his mother is 'not quite herself' to lead into the horror sequence (a sudden jump from the calmer narrative to fast-moving horror scenes would have looked un-natural and unprofessional) and to arouse the suspicions of the audience, who are likely to guess that 'mother' is the killer. ... The third caption, 'THE MOTHER OF ALL HORROR FILMS' is a clever play on words for anyone who has already seen the film and was placed at the end to draw a close to the action and tell the audience about the film.

These captions worked well as once we had created them and inserted them into our program we could adjust the length of time they were on screen by lengthening or shortening the block which represented them, so that they fitted the pace of the trailer and were shown for a readable amount of time.

It seems clear that the whole enterprise of making the trailer depends on a complex interplay between the more intuitive pleasures of horror that characterise Abby's membership of a teenage audience new to *Psycho* , an ability to operate within the audiovisual semiotic of the fabric of the film, a grasp of the digital languages needed for this delicate unpicking, and a higher order understanding of the languages of word and image in play here.

Conclusion

Where does this leave us, then? The big picture seems to be a National Curriculum still dominated by the supposed functional purposes and associated cultural values of print literacies at the end of the century in which film and the moving image in general have been arguably the forms of communication and cultural engagement making most impact on the lives of ordinary people in the developed world. Furthermore, this is a curriculum determined largely by notions of the skills required by the workplace, a curriculum with a limited view of the complexities of how subjectivity develops, and how important fantasy, pleasure, thrill, and the multiple literacies employed by the mass media of film, TV and, increasingly, the Internet might be in the growth of a sense of self in young people.

As I have argued, there are the beginnings of a small opening for the inclusion of these cultural forms within this utilitarian, serious curriculum. Too small – but offering some ways forward, if we can make the most of the opportunity.

There is a good deal we need to know, and do not yet fully understand. We know very little about how young people understand and produce the moving image. I have argued here that the analogy of literacy is worth pursuing. The language of sound and image, composed on a digital timeline, is a kind of writing. Furthermore, as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen argue (1996), we need to teach a language which will describe visual communication.

However, we do not know whether the traditional pedagogies constructed under the name of 'English', those pedagogies associated with literacy curricula, are really the best ones for the job. It may be that the project groupings of the Technology curriculum, or the ensemble compositions of Music, or the more individual, contemplative visual work of the Art studio, could provide better pedagogic models.

We know a little more about the pleasures of popular culture. The work of John Fiske (1989), for instance, describes how important the images of popular film and comicstrip culture are for young people involved in the difficult process of building a sense of themselves and their place in the world. But these pleasures, recruited uneasily for the project of the classroom, can easily ossify, or become simply the sugar on the pedagogic pill, instead of the vital, central motor of cultural activity and evaluation.

I have tried to suggest in this article that we need to do more than just enjoy the pleasures; we need to worry at them, push at them, see if other kinds of pleasures emerge. Fiske has sometimes been criticised for a kind of cultural populism that leaves no room for intervention, political or pedagogic. We aren't going to just sit and celebrate popular pleasures. The very act of digitally undoing cinematic sequences and remaking them transforms the social roles of these young spectators, transforms the pleasures they enjoy. The ability to handle the digital stuff of film shifts them out of the seats of the auditorium, and into different roles. They begin to handle the selective images that, historically, only film critics have been privileged to handle. They occupy the roles of small production companies, commissioned to make trailers by film distributors. And this is not just a simulation – they are using the same software; and we can broadcast their trailers on local cable TV.

So there are new pleasures here, tied in with new powers of cine-digital 'writing', the new social roles this confers, the new forms of learning it makes possible, the different ways of imagining the present and the future, the building of selfhood. In last year's project, Abby described how satisfying it was to complete the trailer – how they stayed behind after school for hours to finish it, and danced in the street as they left. Lorraine described how it made her feel confident to choose Media Studies A Level – a course she has now gone on to the post-16 college to do.

This year, Richard and James' feelings about their *Psycho* trailer are more modest. But they are definitely happy with it, and they have, uncharacteristically, stayed behind to finish it. Richard wanted me to show it to his mum when she came for Parents' Consultation evening that night. She was last in a long line of parents, and Richard had gone home hours earlier. But we went up, and had a look at the trailer. His mum was very impressed. Something had shifted in the right direction.

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