Film Studies
Creative Coursework

<u>Synopsis</u>

  Great Falls Secondary School is no different from the generic British secondary school, with underpaid teachers and overworked students populating the decaying corridors. Among these students is Alyssa Murdoch, a hard working, sassy student who is thrust into an extraordinary fight for her life following the witness of her headmaster's murder.

  Finding herself alone, unable to escape from a locked building and finding herself faced with little prospect of external help, she is forced to summon all her physical and psychological resources in order to outwit a disturbed murderer who is unwilling to allow her to escape with her life. In this timely homage to the "B" movies of the 1950's, the stage is set for a highly charged and gripping battle of wits between an ordinary girl and a bloodthirsty caretaker…

<u>Cinematic Ideas</u>

- A realist aesthetic that would be adhered through the use of location shooting (as opposed to studio filming), natural or pre-existing lighting and would be compounded by the use of grainy film-stock and held camera in order maintain an aura of realism.
- In this respect the camerawork draws its inspiration from the Direct Cinema genre
- The film is stylistically fragmented, with the suspense sequences filmed using largely static camerawork in order to give the visuals an air of stillness is designed to compound audience tension and the action sequences filmed in a manner that contrasts (see below). The editing during the aforementioned sequences will be somewhat subdued in their editorial style, as it is envisioned that a purposefully slow sequence that refrains from ellipsis will gradually heighten tension effectively. (for example, see board no. 4, a sustained shot which tracks the protagonist from one end of a corridor to another without any degree of camera movement)
- The action sequences, bearing in mind that stillness would risk working against the action, employ more kinetic camera and a swifter tempo with regards to its editing. editing (for example, this is illustrated in board nos. 15 and 16, in which the highly kinetic cross cutting between the pursuer and the pursued compounds the momentum in the sequence)
- A minimalist approach would be taken with regards to sound as overbearing and intrusive or otherwise over-dramatic sound effects would work against the realist and low-tech aesthetic. The action sequences would utilise a swift and emotive orchestral score in order to reinforce the visual momentum and heighten audience response (excitement etc.)

Evaluation

The sequence conveyed by my storyboards satisfies the emotional criteria expected by audience from a horror film. Principally, audiences expect both excitement and suspense (as well as the odd shock) to be evoked from horror films and through the visual scope illustrated by my storyboards I believe these requirements to have been satisfactorily achieved.

In terms of narrative as well as visually the sequence illustrated in my storyboards is stylistically fragmented. In terms of narrative, the first nine or so storyboards portray the protagonist engaged in relatively mundane circumstances and these opening storyboards are notable for their absence of dramatic action and abstinence from editorial ellipsis (it was a conscious decision to refrain from altering the "natural" duration of story events as presented in the film's plot). However, this effectively functions as the precursor to the ensuing violence. The audience, typically, will be expecting the "horror" to begin at any moment and by preceding this with a rather lethargic sequence that actively contrasts with the action filled content of the second half the intention is to actively build up tension and suspense, ensuring that when the oft-expected action does come it is all the more shocking, thrilling and exciting. This sense of tension that is built through the narrative is anchored visually by a reliance on relatively lengthy takes (4-5 seconds approx.) and medium to long shots which evoke a sense of stillness and highlight isolation which, again, make the oft-expected action all the more thrilling when it does a occur. For example, storyboard no. 4 illustrates a sustained long shot of a spacious corridor that the protagonist walks down – the framing of the shot actively conveys the human scarcity of her immediate vicinity, highlighting the sense of isolation, while the length of the take (the camera holds for the duration of the characters movement from on end of the frame to another) conveys the required sense of stillness.

Following the killing, illustrated in storyboard no. 10, the tonal shift of the narrative is paralleled by a stylistic shift visually. While self-consciously refraining from visual over-extravagance in order to remain faithful to the realist aesthetic they sequence nevertheless shifts stylistically in order to satisfy the narrative action. Gone are the lengthy, suspenseful shots of the opening storyboards. In their place is a tendency for close ups, used in order highlight the protagonist's emotions (to which the audience would be inclined to respond to empathetically) as well as to convey a visually disjointed, even claustrophobic impression that would heighten audience responses of tension and unease, while short takes juxtaposed by way of quick cuts infuse the sequence with a momentum that contrasts with its precursor. The stylistic deviance of storyboards 14 and 15 with their crosscutting of highly kinetic tracking shots is a good example of the increased tempo that compels the audience to respond with enthusiastic excitement. Storyboard no. 13, meanwhile, illustrates the emotive effectiveness of the framing of a shot – the framing of the 'villain' in extreme close up, thereby shielding the remainder of his body as well as his identity, adds a menacing air of ambiguity and mystery to the character.

The reader will note that the sequence does contain isolated instances of visual stylistic deviancy that do somewhat punctuate the intended realist aesthetic, namely storyboards 6/7/8, 15/16 and 20/21/22. All these storyboards illustrate shots which stray from the static camerawork of the other storyboards and instead provide flourishes of

more kinetic camerawork. The intention is that these isolate stylistic fluctuations would compound the narrative action. For example – the tracking of the fleeing protagonist in storyboard nos. 15 and 16 compounds the burst of momentum that is being displayed in the sequence. The substantial pull-back, meanwhile, illustrated in storyboards 20, 21 and 22 dramatically illustrates the isolation of the protagonist as well as the size of the building she is trapped in.

In terms of continuity, I am satisfied that the sequence is presented in a dramatically coherent way that conforms to the principal characteristics of continuity editing. Aside from the aforementioned short use of quickly cut close ups the storyboards do try to reflect the editing as a tool that works to maps out characters actions in an undistracting way and the so-called 180º rule has been adhered to, ensuring spatial continuity within the narrative.

During the creation of my storyboards I came to appreciate the different effects that different shot types had. I came to understand, for example, the effectiveness of tracking shots in giving a sequence momentum, as well as the importance of editing tempi in giving a sequence the desired effect (ie. frantic, suspenseful etc).

While I knew I would not be marked down for my drawing I was still concerned that a limited ability in that respect on my part would impair my ability to communicate my creative ideas properly. However, in retrospect the results exceeded my expectations in that regard. However, due to my lack of drawing ability the finer details of the setting have been left to the reader's imagination. Practically, however. It is worth noting, however, that it was my creative intention to satisfy the new-wave influenced realist aesthetic by shooting on existing locations (as opposed to studios) and using natural or pre-existing lighting, which explains the lack of reference to specialist mise en scene or lighting in my storyboards and conforms to the realist approach set out in my cinematic ideas.

In conclusion I believe my storyboards have satisfied the intentions laid out in my cinematic ideas, namely those of a realist aesthetic and a direct cinema influenced cinematic style, that have culminated in the presentation of a satisfactory envisioned sequence.