

The Memory Machine

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper aims to discuss the suitability of material for the animated documentary, looking specifically at texts of a biographical nature, and discussing the mechanisms employed and issues with interpreting oral narratives and memory. From the analysis, I aim to suggest guidelines to my Thai undergraduate animation students so that they may gain ideas about the suitability of material and mechanisms that may help to create an animated documentary.

The paper will discuss materiality:

- i) in terms of animation and it's suitability for documentary.
- ii) with regard to the subject material to tackle an animated documentary
- iii) in relation to creating a story structure from oral narratives and memories and the mechanics of construction to get an authentic truth in an animated documentary

Because the nature of animated documentaries is so broad, I have, for this paper, narrowed it to the sub category: subjective autobiographical and biographical works that encapsulate personal oral narratives from memories. I will focus on traumatic memories, which retell an event from a personal perspective, which is skewed by the teller's own perspective in order to discuss the difficulties of memory itself. This category offers many examples of works to support further analysis and investigation by the students and appears to be particularly suited to the animated form.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the suitability and materiality of the animated documentary, looking specifically at texts of a biographical nature, and discussing the mechanisms employed and issues pertaining to interpreting oral narratives and memory. From the analysis I aim to suggest guidelines to my Thai undergraduate animation students so that they may gain ideas about the suitability of material and mechanisms that may help to create an animated documentary.

I am working in Thailand as a lecturer in the Animation and my students are predominantly Thai. Over the last five years, I have become aware of some of the distinct Thai cultural qualities that the students bring to their narratives. These include a wealth of Thai traditional stories, often drawn on a powerful beliefs in ghosts; alongside a favour for saccharine sweet cuteness and non challenging appealing characters. My particular interest is

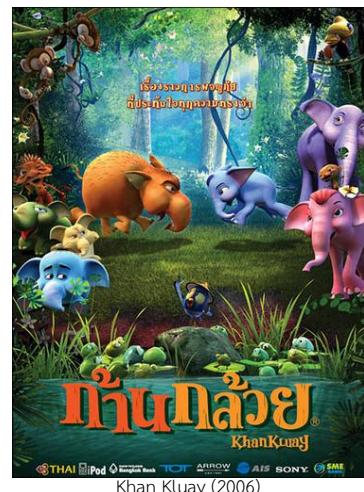
to help students develop a wider scope to their themes, and to challenge them to open their understanding of the potential for expression with animation.

The ideological position in Thailand towards animation is to see it as entertainment, mainly for children that in their words allows one to relax. So the notion of dealing with potentially challenging difficult subjects is not considered as the norm here. However, there is here in Thailand, a culturally specific ‘take’ on local and global events as they have unfolded, which gives a unique voice to the media mainstream western perspectives: the “mai bpen rai” (never mind) and “jai yen yen” (keep calm) and the “nong-phi” phenomenon (a reverence to elders, even within a school year group, that establishes a code of hierarchy and in some instances effects an accepted bullying system). As yet students have been reluctant to develop their animations, happier to avoid challenging the ideology. They show a preference to try to ‘play safe’ and imitate the influences from Japan and Hollywood animations. Avoiding criticising or confrontation, students prefer to imitate rather than speak with their own voice, which is recognisably also cultural. Here the dominant ideology is not to criticise or speak out against one’s culture or elders, but to assimilate and conform. However among the animation students, who have already repositioned themselves toward a freer expressive domain, many already having had to fight their family expectations to study law, business or science, and there are signs that a deeper voice is present. They are increasingly more ideologically aware as the global technology continues to encourage more freedom of expression. So there is potential to develop a more critically analytical attitude to their work. The Thai film industry is not internationally well known, and in animation, there are few commercial feature films to its credit. Their features draw on traditional Thai legends and myths about ghosts, elephants and kings, with a backdrop of historical events represented as ideological constructs reinforcing Thai cultural values. The most famous are:

The Adventure of Sudsakorn (1979) , directed by Payut Ngaokrachang was the first animated feature film produced in Thailand, and is a fantasy film. It was the only cel-animated feature film ever made in Thailand. The story is based on Phra Aphai Mani, a 30,000-line epic written by Thailand's best-known poet, Sunthorn Phu. Sudsakorn, the son of a mermaid and a minstrel prince, fights on different occasions - an elephant, shark, and dragon horse - and encounters in his meanderings a king, hermit, yogi, magic wand, and ghosts.



The Adventure of Sudsakorn (1979)

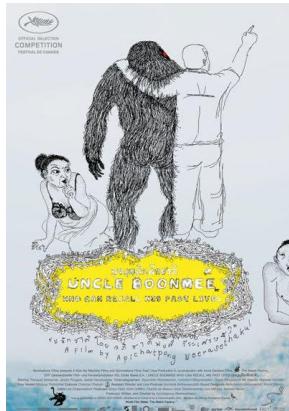


Khan Kluay (2006)

The more recent release *Khan Kluay* (2006) (*The Blue Elephant* in the United States and adapted and released as *Jumbo* in India) is a 3D animated feature directed by Kompin Kemgumnird (an ex-Disney and Blue Sky Animator) and produced by Kantana Studios. This depicts the story of Khan Kluay (Banana stalk) a young elephant in a backdrop of the Ayutthaya-era of Siam, and follows the story of an elephant who wanders away from his mother and eventually becomes the war elephant for King Naresuan. The film is based on "Chao Praya Prab Hongsawadee" by Ariya Jintapanichkarn. This was followed by a sequel, *Khan Kluay 2* (2009), directed by Taweelap Srivuthivong. *Khan Kluay* is now the elephant of King Naresuan the Great. Shaba Kaew, his beloved one, keeps a secret that she is pregnant. He must face sacrifice, courage and stable love deep in his heart and to struggle through these obstacles. The story follows Khan Kluay's two elephant children, and his struggle whether to live with his wife or fight the Burmese during another attack by the Hongsawadi (Burmese) in Thailand's historical past.

The design of 'The Adventure of Sudsakorn', strongly reflects traditional Thai art styles, but the animation work was limited by experience and budget constraints. It remains popular with local audiences due to a strong nationalistic nostalgia. The design style from Thai fine arts and crafts can also be seen in sequences and designs in *Khan Kluay*; but the sequel has veered towards a more homogenous generic 3D look with the cuteness appeal, emulating some of the Western and Japanese influences to appeal to audiences' mainstream commercial tastes and essentially losing some of the essence and authenticity of Thai culture. There has yet to be an animated documentary made in Thailand, mainly influenced by economics, as it would be hard to get the supporting funding needed from the likes of The Ministry of Culture. Notably one company, Sputnik tales has been making some moves to change this with an annual competition emphasising animation with social concerns, this year

having teamed up with Amnesty International Thailand. So there is some evidence that the industry in Thailand is gradually changing, with a growing number of small to medium sized studios which are starting to expand their horizons and are developing new styles.



Uncle Boonmee can recall his past lives (2009)

Most notably there is Apichat Weerasethakul, who won a Cannes Golden Palm award for his film “Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past lives”(2010). And with over 20 universities teaching animation either as a major or within programmes there is a lot of interest, however most courses veer toward the animation production techniques, not the analytical, even though the audience is there ready and willing to learn. Potentially the future is set for more diversity of subject matter in animation, and perhaps a window of opportunity to develop more personal narratives, thought provoking works for an emerging educated audience.

Materials

As an applied arts practitioner, I am interested in oral history and narratives as a source for my own work. In my past works the main stories were sourced from real life experiences and traditional tales: “Tally Bloody Ho!”, 1999 taken from the oral narrative of hunt saboteur’s experiences and “Mere Wife” 2007, from the traditional oral narrative culture of the Karen of Northern Thailand. The idea for this paper came from an unexpected personal experience which sent my relatively normal work/home life into a surreal alternative reality. Thailand’s annual monsoonal floods in 2011 were an enormous disaster, during which time an estimated 800 million cubic metres of flood-water displaced millions of people. The events unfolded over three months, yet the media focus only brought attention to it when the capital itself was inundated. The personal stories of those affected by the floods are what makes such events epic and universal. I had returned from New Zealand, to find that my house had been flooded 3 1/2 metres deep; the city of Ayutthaya had become cut off from dry land, and I only escaped by driving through 12 kilometres of metre deep water to get to Bangkok; only for the flood waters to follow me south to the outskirts of Bangkok 10 days

later, forcing my re-evacuation. Finally I ended up camping for 6 weeks with 70 elephants and their mahouts and families at Wat Phu Khao Thong, back on the outskirts of Ayutthaya. It seemed like the whole of Thailand went on ‘pause’. The experiences were epic and exhausting as well as creatively inspiring and often very funny. It was a microcosm of the macro events that I reflect on with a view this could make an amusing animated documentary. So there is a potential for developing ideas, but the question begins with the materiality in terms of animation and its suitability to documentary? As Nea Elrich explains in her essay *Animated Documentaries as Masking*, ‘the ability for animation to raise many questions about the reality we think we know’ is, I believe, one of the key reasons it *should* be used in documentary. A number of academic discussions explore the issues related to the truth and reality of the animated documentary, re-evaluating the author and the audiences’ relationships to reality and as Javad Khajavi in his essay *Decoding the Real*, calls the ‘ordinary ways of representing reality into question’. These questions are concerned about the authenticity that the documentary format requires to be accepted as the truth by the audience. And there remains according to Peleg, ‘a persistent expectation towards objective knowledge and truth in the field of documentary’. And by the same ideas, Bevan and Bosward argue that often in creating documentaries, filmmakers are, ‘encumbered with the journalistic and pseudo-scientific expectations’ to gather evidence, to balance material, and to create an objective presentation accurately and with informative data from an honest, rational and sensible point of view in order to encourage the belief from documentary audiences of an objective reality. However, it is also true that the very notion of objectivity suggested in the documentary form is in itself questionable, as Orly Yadin states, ‘all forms of documentary are merely *Re*-presentations of reality and, in that sense, an animation film is no different from any other film style.’

Equally, not all subject matters put under the scrutiny of documentary fall easily into this definition of reality. In particular, past events that rely on memory to recall them often don’t have clarity in their ‘data’ that is suitable for interpreting in the conventional (film) documentary format. Animation’s aesthetics can potentially offer the filmmaker a wider choice of expressive tools to define, extend and affirm their own personal voice; and also to interrogate conventional notions of knowledge, reliability and authority. Plus, argues Michael Guillen when interviewing Ari Folman, animation by its visually reproduced representation of the truth, we can be, ‘diving into the personal, a filmmaker can achieve the universal, the philosophical, the political’. This is apparent in the viewing experience, where these symbolic and metaphoric semiotics set out by the director, give the power and authenticity that is possible in animations such as ‘Waltz with Bashir’ (2008). In this film, the relaxed

conversational interview approach that Ari Folman adopts the fluidity and apparently random connection sequencing of that oral narrative, memory and dreams are utilized. The film's narrative follows a structure similar to so called 'objective documentaries'. It follows the memory of the interviewees about events experienced during the Lebanon War, in particular the 1982 massacre at Sabre and Shitila. The historical record is one of the greatest human atrocities, yet they who were there appear to have blocks or gaps in their memories and these fractures in memory open up the film's discussion of how their memory has been affected by the event and altered, which in turn reveals the emotional effects of their(the interviewees and the director's) role at the time. The film's context opens a wider unasked question of, 'why do we (humanity) allow these things to happen?', remains unasked. Within the script's discussion the psychologist explains, '*Traumatic events are surrounded with fear, which overrides reason... Things that are too emotionally hard get blocked from our memory... We develop dissociative events (kind of out of body experiences) that put the narrator into an objective position... Selected events are remembered or blocked or develop surreal sequencing...*' Ari Folman further suggests in another interview with Daniel Graham that, "It (the documentary) is subjective - your truth is there, nothing is objective. For example just by the way you (the director) set the camera angles". So he argues animation directors choices are the same, and he questions, "Is a drawing done by a very talented artist, less real than that from a camera that is shooting at the site?" This throws into question the conventional constructs of documentary, is for instance, the re-enactment on film more authentic than the drawn recreation in animation? When you recognise that for documentary film the scripts, actors and environment are made up, fabricated in such a way as to potentially skew the truth and/or our viewing towards the ideas and interpretation of the director/teller, then is animation less valid as a material for conveying the idea? Arguably no, and he concludes 'it is the audience that decides to *believe* in the film's reality'. It is the *suspension of disbelief*, the acceptance that if, 'we *believe* the film to be true, it is because we believe the intention is true ' as stated by animation producer/director Orly Yadin. And this then offers the credibility to the animated documentary.

What truths then, what materiality with regard to the suitability of subject material is best to tackle in an animated documentary? What truths are chosen or even considered appropriate to be documented in animation? Evidence suggests, from the wealth of examples such as **A is for Autism**, by Tim Webb; **I used to be an alcoholic** by Jon Callaghan; **Silence** by Orly Yadin and Sylvie Bringas; that oral narratives are particularly well-suited to the animated form. These oral perspectives, selective personal views of history, are individual interpretations of factual events reproduced inevitably with a bias. But there is a bias present

in official historical records in which ideological support for those who are in power at the time dominates the subject matter. Thus, neither the oral nor the official versions of history are fully objective or fully accurate. And even in non-documentary animation and films, we can see historical facts being twisted by alternative ideological perspectives presented, which we may readily accept. The documenting of events relies on records being taken at the time and the technology available; or else on the subjective recall of oral narratives by those who were there at the time. Conventionally, these oral narratives are the domain of the ordinary people. They tend to be poor, and sometimes illiterate and uneducated, and their accounts are reliant more on memory as the main source of recall. These personal experiences, which are often shaped by the factual historical events, can be by-passed by the conventional accepted authoritative historical accounts. Yet their stories, all our individual stories, have a place within the larger context and each of us has a tale to tell, a truth to add to all our realities.

What is it that animation can specifically render to these perhaps alternative personally skewed truths? Elrich offers that ‘Animation provides visual *interpretations* and imagery when live-action footage is missing, censored or unavailable because the content involves personal perspectives or non-physical aspects of contemporary culture that are therefore un-photographable.’ The animation process offers the film-maker more than a convenient device to recreate what cannot be seen in ‘reality’. Animation is a multi-faceted medium employing carefully constructed and organized codes and signifiers in visuals and sound. In the animation production process, all elements are invented specifically to each given production and broken down into 1/25th frames per second. The decisions are made for every colour, shape, style, design, action emotion and even the passage of time is reconstructed offering possibilities of condensation in timing; symbolic and metaphoric interpretations; fabricated and metamorphosing images and ideas; opening up multi-layered readings; and even penetrating into the psyche, visions and dreams of the director/narrator’s mind. The Animation director plays a conscious role when condensing and recreating these elements into the narrative. Each decision about the content is broken down and reconstructed with the aim of offering some distinctive insight into the universal evaluation of these events. How these memories have been sourced, collated and interpreted inevitably affects the level of believability and acceptance from the audience. In recent animated documentaries, we see a trend developing in the use of biographical and autobiographical accounts of national and political events that are combining the subjective internal and objective external realities. According to Khadjavi, narratives are designed to, ‘produce shared truths aligning readers or listeners with some statements and distancing them from others.’ These devices create the imaginary ‘we’ positioning of the audience into an assumed

consensus of opinion. The factual events serve as a backdrop to the narrator's account which is informed, even biased by, their emotional responses to the given situations. This bias highlights the issues of memory itself, of how we recall the past. How memories are affected by our experience of the past, present and future *reality* and our individual 'take' on the *truth*. As seen in the selective recall, and even inability to recall all detail, which is the basis of the discussion throughout the narrative of '*Waltz with Bashir*' where they argue, "Our memories of events are skewed by how we imagined ourselves to be, how we perceived others saw us. Not *factual* but *emotionally* driven memories. [Which are] also skewed by what we have learned or experienced since." Memory is recognized as 'dynamic', not static, and this fluidity of form becomes the narrative structure that drives us through the film to the final revelation of truth the narrator/director seeks. The events themselves are real, but to understand the reality for the individual we (the audience) have to share the memory through their eyes and penetrate their view, which may not always be factual truth but selected emotional reactions to those events that have become their understanding of their own truth. Guillen suggests, 'Any artist or, for that matter, any person who is grappling with memory, attempting to individuate through memory, attempting to reconcile memory, anyone who is looking into themselves, is engaged in active imagination'. So we can recognise that the content, the visual and aural constructs, play an active role both in the director's imaginative interpretation and in activating the imagination of the audience. Animation does not, cannot even, have a simple one size fits all, formulaic answer to representing these memories or past events. The choices for creating the documentary animation are vast, as are animation production possibilities as a whole, and these choices are informed by the available information given on the subject, the supporting data, production techniques available and, inevitably, economics.

In terms of suitability of material for animated documentary those stories that document events that cannot easily be depicted in conventional documentary form offer the strongest justification for using what is an expensive and time consuming production process, and it appears where animation offers the most viable format. Where the subject matter is recalled by memory with personal insight and truths added into the wider factual events, but the narratives slant toward documenting their memory and emotions, and allows the audience to relate to the wider events not as news but as an experience. Narratives that are sourced from memories are sometimes clouded by the teller's emotional reaction to the events themselves. Alternatively, they may have been influenced by the subsequent results of those events, or have been inhibited by some outside influence, or the experience of retelling may have readjusted their attitudes to those events or altered their view because the memory has

played tricks. Animation lends itself to depict the ephemeral, unstable and constantly reinventing state of memory itself. By using the narrative strategy of penetration the animator can depict the emotional mood and feeling, the inconsistencies and vagueness of the recalled thoughts without loosing the authentic voice /truth/experience of the narrator. The historical facts remain the same offering a framework to contextualise our existence. But the animation can penetrate right into the thoughts, to depict the feelings, emotional attitudes to those events, both reflecting what was felt at the time of the event itself and, with hindsight, adding the emotional subtext and texture. Therefore, the truth that is conveyed from these narratives can offer answers to the universal questions that these events (life experiences) throw up from those who were there in the centre of the event to those of us who were not, especially traumatic events such as 9/11, tsunamis, wars, or car accidents: “How did you cope when X happened?”; “what were you thinking when X happened?”; “where were you when X happened”; “what did you see?”; “how did it make you feel ?”

We (the audience) want to know the emotional response of someone who was actually there. The event itself gives the context, but our survival instinct needs the answers: we *need* to know how to cope, how to feel it. Animation takes us to the moment to experience the emotion for ourselves. It serves to help our understanding, but some things are beyond understanding and cannot be explained. Therefore, animation also allows for us to suggest the comparative reference without having to live it. As Wells offers, ‘The viewer can begin to assimilate the distinctive process in animation where aesthetic choices underpin different forms of narrative, and the visual construction of meaning’ This meaning becomes the audience’s truth.

These blocks or adjustments do not make the memory of the event any less of a reality. Therefore animation can capture these emotionally driven events giving it an authenticity or a reality, in a universal experience.

In Thailand, the positioning of the audiences of animation has conventionally been passive, the medium is seen purely as entertainment or to relax. Animation is not necessarily just for children but for the family and content is regarded as unchallenging. The culture has encouraged a passive acceptance of one’s role, and is noted for the ‘*Jai yen yen*’ (keep calm/cool heart) and ‘*mai thong kit maak*’ (don’t think too much); but there are , and have been growing over the last two decades a gradual unrest and unease within the status quo. There have been political upheavals and there is a strong desire to start to question authority. Part of this has been due to a rise in education standards, and those going on to further education, and also, I would argue, to greater access to media through the social media

networks. Thai people have become less insular and more aware and questioning. There is room for stronger material, as there is an growing audience.

Results

So how can Thai animations students start to construct ideas suitable to documentary? In Khajavi's study on 'Decoding the Real', he suggests a model by which to analyse the content of the animated documentary. He proposed a framework to categorise and break down the text for examining the modality of reality conveyed by selecting four modes common to moving images: 'visual', 'aural', 'motion' and 'editing'. He refers to the theories of semiotics where modality and modality markers can be recognized within texts to signify social concepts and beliefs about reality. He suggests however that these realities are not absolute truths or falsehoods in themselves, stressing that the judgments made from these are dependent on 'our conception of the world and are related to the norms, beliefs and conventions of the social group in which the intended message is to be represented.' This is a significant point, which is particularly relevant to me and my Thai students who are working in an ideological cultural system that differs significantly from the mainstream western perspective, and can therefore lead to confused messaging and misleading interpretations of ideas. The research by Khajavi sets up a starting point to deconstruct the works to recognise their realities. And can conversely be used as a means to construct or create a narrative for an animated documentary, his ideas can help to identify the elements to include in the documentaries. By linking this with some of the ideas from Wells' summary on the fundamental elements of animation language, in particular the uses of metamorphosis, condensation, fabrication, penetration and symbolic association, we can identify a means to collate and organise data into a narrative structure which can be used for animated documentary. In Wells' categorizations for the animated documentary, he states, that the *subjective* documentary 'reflect[s] the personal subjective thoughts of an individual and frequently this mode uses (the) animator's artistic work in line with real sound track of real people. The sound track is usually an interview, recorded dialogues of ordinary people, or monologue of a person who describes his/her situation.'

This role of the soundtrack is a significant element in creating the reality modality of many of these pieces. Where the *authentic* voice (eg. the autobiographer as narrator) adds the *credibility* for the audience's interpretation, the addition of authentic sounds or significant music in the soundtrack, which can also help to trigger the collective memories of the audience and thus add to the film's *believability*. It has been recognized in various psychological studies that a key factor in memory retention can be the triggers created by

sound. Thus, Michael Guillen points out, the sound design of ‘*Waltz with Bashir*’ stays with the audience long after the event. For example he refers, to the persistent aural hallucination effect of LSD, which lasts long after the visual hallucinations have faded.

It is clear that a significant *reality modal* for the auto-/biographical documentary can come from the recordings of the initial source of the information: through the interviews (recorded dialogues of ordinary people), or monologues recounting their experiences, and enhanced by in-situ or ambient diegetic soundtracks. But these dialogues and monologues can be problematic: the very nature of these oral narratives can be fragmented and incomplete, forcing the film-maker into the subjective editorial position. They are reliant on the teller’s own memory of events from a singular point of view. The nature of the exchange can often be of the spontaneous recounting of experiences in the vernacular of unmonitored speech, full of inaccuracies, repetition and with a mixed order of events, or to aid the director they can be more structured through the prompting questions of an interview. The recorded results inevitably have to be condensed and organised by the director into the film’s own narrative. The original accounts will invariably have their own structural organisation, which can either match the order of events, capturing the blow-by-blow account; or can be fragmented and jumbled by the narrator, altering the significance and understanding through changes in the order of the referenced events. In Labov’s study of oral narrative, he explains by the simple employment of temporal junctures between two independent clauses in their sentence structures, the events take on new interpretations:

eg a) A person had too much to drink, he attacked me, and a friend came in and she stopped it.

b) A friend of mine came in *just in time* to stop this person who had had a little too much to drink from attacking me.

The structural order thus influences the ‘reading’ or interpretation of the text. The director has in turn to decipher what actually happened and either re-create an authentic account following the order of events, and/or follow the influence of the narrator’s position, or even add in their own subjective commentary under the influence of hindsight on the consequences of the events. Either way the director will need to elicit enough information to both understand the event and the narrator’s perspective before they can decipher how to re-present a credible truth.

The initial data will need:

The Orientation

- Who? When? Where? Doing what?

- Introducing and identifying of the participants

- Time, place, initial behaviour

The Complicating Action	- What happened then?
The Event	- Most narratives are focussed on the most reportable event.

However, it must be credible to the audience to be believable. The credibility of the narrative account is the key factor for the director to harness in order to create a documentary that audiences will *believe*. So they will need to elicit or search for credibility in the text. Accordingly Labov suggests the credibility in oral narratives often comes through in the use of evaluative clauses:

- by narrative pre-construction adding triggering ‘non-reportable’ events that lead to the main point.
- the “so what?” (the reason why this event is important)
- the “what if?” (*irrealis*) clauses negatives, conditionals futures that add comparison to an alternative stream of reality potential events that were not realised, the “if only”, or “but if”
- hindsight wisdom the additional narrative or visual contextualisation
- quoting self or 3rd party witnesses “I said at the time”, “he said”, “she said”
- objective events actions arising as a result of the reportable event

Therefore, the narrative account when recorded needs to be directed by the use of clearly open, yet structurally informative questioning. The key is to avoid influencing the outcome through conditional or judgemental bias and allowing the speaker the freedom to offer their own subjectivity. What the animation film-makers then have to do is bring to these variable and subjective oral narratives the metaphoric artistry of animation to objectively interpret it into a universally credible reading. They have to effectively condense the information into the minimum of imagery and sound, that embodies, according to Wells, the ‘mood, attitude and intention of the thematic expression, intensifying the symbolic or metaphoric weight’ of the ideas without loosing the believability. No small feat! With particularly traumatic or difficult accounts, it can be hard to believe what is real even from a first hand account.

The animator’s job is then to visualize these memories, and this can vary from being representational or symbolic, functional, or even drawing on fantasy. The images can both interpret and penetrate into the memories, helping us to see what the narrator thought /dreamt /felt. It is possible to use the fabrication of ephemera associated with the event memory which can helps to contextualize the emotional content. This selection of the animation technique, the very texture, materiality of the medium chosen, will inevitably affect the reading of the truth and the believability for the audience. The documentary director’s

selection of medium within the spectrum of possibilities in animation therefore needs to be chosen specifically to enhance and convey these ‘truths’. Therefore they are adding their subjective interpretation through their own personalised selection; but also adding objectivity by contextualizing the memories to wider universally recognizable truth.

Well’s offers up the theoretical aim to, ‘achieve the associative relationships with the following images in a sequence’ and therefore the animator must, ‘ensure that the technical, aesthetic and conceptual continuity is achieved frame-by-frame’.

In conclusion, to offer a working methodology for students embarking on an animated documentary. Obviously where events cannot be depicted easily by conventional film documentary process is a starting point. But more importantly they need to identify the material that lends itself well to the animated documentary is that which offers a personal insight and perspectives, which oral narrative history falls into. So initially they need to seek subject matter that deals with events from a personal perspective that can be elicited via interview, anecdote and personal account; ideally but not essentially that can be corroborated or contextualised by the wider (historic or universal) event or experience.

There needs to be identified a possible reality modal that can be used to enable the authenticity and truth element to the narrative. The reality modal/s need to give the film authenticity with a contextual balance and a universal theme. This can be found both in the sound and or through the narrative where there needs to be signifiers that help lock the imagery and experiences on to the facts. As a starting point for animated documentary film making, a common technique is to record the voice over of the originator of the recollections. But reality modal’s can also come through visual triggers, media, social media, news footage, and sounds.

As it is documentary in order to develop the authenticity they will need to research and collect and collate supporting data: photos, images, journals, diaries and oral narratives. Research into the surrounding events, significant ephemera, details. Look for the means to authenticate, so there needs to be a means to contextualise the narrative so it does not drift too far into the surreal in a way that appears fabricated. One method can be to use either a specific recognisable event or revelation to link the threads. The key event(s) can work as the narrative dramatic structure; then all the other variable stories can unfold around

Creativity is needed to identify the suitable medium with careful consideration, recognition that the medium can be the message and carefully selected signifiers can be encoded in the selection of the animation’s visual mediums and styles. The choices can enhance and add texture and contextual signifiers to the narrative and help the audience to relate to the broader context.

This highlights some of the main difficulties to face and hopefully offers a way to start the process. The real test will be in the application. So far there has been some success in developing a broader approach with my students, I hope others too can add to this discussion develop further application. This is by no means the end, and further research will help broaden the scope.

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Waltz with Bashir (2008) director Ari Folman

Silence by Orly Yadin and Sylvie Bringass

A is for Autism, by Tim Webb;

I used to be an alcoholic by Jon Callaghan;

<http://www.youtube.com/user/millimations/videos> All video works can be viewed on youtube and other writings can be found on www.ajarncartoon.blogspot.com