John Grierson defined documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” (Ward, 2011 p. 302), sparking a longstanding debate regarding the objectivity of documentary filmmaking and the difficulties of incorporating fictional stylistic elements such as animation and reenactment to represent reality. Yet, this notion of absolute authenticity has been challenged by many modern theorists who argue that the growing acceptance of artistic expression in fact-based media allow filmmakers to treat Grierson’s definition with greater flexibility. Significant of which is the underrepresentation of the internal experience, i.e. the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of individuals involved in the documentary both in front (the participants) and behind the camera (the filmmakers).

By accounting for this debate, this dissertation will investigate the contemporary change towards the acceptability of art in fact-based media by highlighting how animation has benefited the challenge of addressing complex issues in documentary film such as the internal and subjective experience. With the majority of literature on the subject addressing the issue of objectivity, this dissertation does not try to add to the broadness of the debate but instead supplements the reader’s understanding of how animation - an increasingly common filmmaking practice - improves information consumption. Using the work of animated documentary specialists such as Paul Ward and Bill Nichols, and the research of film history and psychology theorists, this investigation aims to reveal the critical nature of animated imagery and how it can generate entirely new meanings and ways of thinking that prove
intrinsic to the viewer’s understanding of the subject matter on an increasingly personal and intellectual level.

In order to address the acceptance of animation, chapter one is crucial to highlighting changes towards the filmmaker’s involvement in documentary film and helps inform first hand case study analysis in later chapters. It will include an overview of historical development in representing reality through film to assist in contextualising how subjective filmmaking became appropriate and useful. This will also account for the role of the audience and participant and the need to clarify the perspective the information is presented from such as the nature of performance in Bob Sabiston’s rotoscoping work and understanding the difficulty of autism in A Is For Autism (Webb, 1992). Chapter two will expand from this context to show that animation can be the only way of representing a subject matter. It will examine the role of animation in helping to visualise the “unfilmable” (Roe, 2011, p. 217) through an analysis of the use of animation in Ryan (NFB, 2004), which aims to highlight psychological issues and feelings by giving them a physical appearance. Finally, chapter three will emphasise how animation is the better method of approaching subject matter through stylisation. This will include first hand scene analysis of Waltz With Basir (Folman, 2008) and Never Like The First Time (Odell, 2007) to enlighten how visuals thoughtfully convey information that transcends the need to tell but rather show. In all, this dissertation serves to display that animation - a distinctly expressive art form - has a profound relationship with the world of the actuality by pushing beyond the boundaries of pure reality to explore the non-physical, interior logic of the individuals that create the stories that documentarians want to tell.
Chapter One: The appropriation of artistic expression to documentary filmmaking

To understand the benefit that animation has to documentary film, it is important to highlight how changes to the formality of filmmaking throughout the late 19th and 20th century has developed from giving viewers “immediate access to reality” to emphasising the filmmaker’s personalised and “reflexive” approach to the subject matter (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994, p. 673). As a result of the progressively sophisticated responses from audiences due to the commonness and breath of technical, scientific and intellectual competency, documentaries have become drastically more persuasive in their execution to engage audiences on a more critical level. Thus, with this increasingly more challenging approach, animation helps to validate Corrigan and White’s argument that films should attempt to “articulate their attitudes and positions” (2012, p. 267). Ideally throughout this chapter, it is crucial to emphasise documentary as characterised by a “cultural shift [rather than a] creative one” because the genre reflects human experience over the creative process (Bevan and Bosward, 2013, p. 444). Acknowledging this notion will help provide the reader with a clear and concise understanding as to how animation can be deemed appropriate in a medium dominated by the traditional live-action model.

Historically, factual cinema focused on presenting an objective and truthful vision of the world in a raw and undisturbed form through an absence of intervention from the filmmakers. In its earliest form, the relationship between technology and subject was more dominant due to the limited development of technical proficiency and artistic strategies such as cinematic style. The growth of cinema drew from simple footage of real people performing monotonous activities such as the Lumière brothers’ films about workers leaving a factory or
a train arriving at a station (which serve as primitive retrospective examples of the documentary), before practitioners such as Georges Méliès began to implement fantasy into reality using theatrical special effects to create fictitious narratives (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994). Despite driving towards fictional cinema, this transition evidently catalysed the symbiotic relationship between fantasy and reality that eventually defined the use of animation in documentary films explored in chapters two and three. Yet, a feasibly early example of the animated documentary was from photographer Eadweard Muybridge. Muybridge used a series of cameras in 1878 to capture tycoon Leland Stanford’s horse galloping in isolated moving frames to understand the animal’s movement to help Stanford improve it’s performance (Miley, 2002). Significant to Muybridge’s original motion picture was that he was able to capture real life without influencing nature and subsequently revealed an anatomical perspective of movement in a speed that the human eye cannot process. Effectively, Muybridge demonstrated the ability to show viewers a new perspective of the world using animation whilst providing valuable scientific accuracy. In this regard, the technical process of animation became an appropriate means in which to document life that could not be achieved by live-action at the time due to limited technology. But Muybridge viewed factual information as the foundation for creating expressive and meaningful artistic outcomes (Miley, 2002), which rang true by the 1950s and 1960s in both fiction and nonfiction cinema. The artistic influence of filmmakers became more prevalent due to cultural and political motivation sparked by post-Second World War reconstruction. Cinematic movements such as Italian Neo-realism and cinéma vérité worked in synergy with the growth of more affordable and handheld technology, resulting in intimate and personal portrayals of life torn apart by the chaos of war, both in fictional representation and documentary (Corrigan and White, 2012). Cinéma vérité especially demanded filmmakers to be purely observational, but Thompson and Bordwell (1994) attribute the filmmaker’s
personal investment in what was being observed to their relationship with the social climate and the freedom granted by accessible mobile technology. The relationship between technology and subject matter found in Muybridge and early work flourished as filmmakers began challenging conventions to make complex interpretations of the subject. By the latter half of the 1900s, many theorists acknowledge the reflexive and persuasive execution of documentary film that ignited the importance of artistic expression in representing reality (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994; Corrigan and White, 2012). Audiences engaged with media more critically in the same way they and filmmakers responded to post-war stresses and justified the increasing influence of the filmmaker to provide a “voice” for the audience to draw from (Corrigan and White, 2012, p. 267). In other words, Bevan and Bosward’s (2013) statement that cultural shifts defined the growth of subjective documentary filmmaking appears valid as artistic expression became necessary to allow individuals to share their perspectives of an increasingly diverse world. This sophistication is believed to have inspired the contemporary culture change towards both the “real” and the “unreal” (Fore, 2011, p. 278). The viewer is now “alerted” to the reenactment and thus makes sense of the filmmaker’s “fantasy” in relation to the real event (Fore, 2011, p. 280). This point remains consistent across animated documentaries: the role of artistic expression to inform the audience played crucial to the representation of reality, regardless of whether it is animation or live-action. The relationship between technology and subject matter throughout the 20th century transformed beyond limitations posed by equipment and grew on the sophistication of the audience. Technology such as cameras and animation became more about achieving artistic expression, and the subject became interlinked with the audience. The use of animation particularly was “characterised in part by a heightened awareness of the presence of the filmmaker’s sensibilities and beliefs in the fantasmatic images on display” (Fore, 2011, p. 281). In this respect, the audience’s attention being drawn to the animation establishes the
thought-provoking nature of documentary stimuli imposed by the filmmaker - the sensation that encourages the viewer to think critically about the information provided.

Furthermore, to elaborate on this symbiotic relationship between the audience (subject) and animation (technology), the role of visual performance must be considered within documentary film. In the same way the uncanny valley can negatively affect a film by drawing the audience’s attention to the realistic and non-realistic animation, by calling attention to and being aware of animation, it stimulates the audience to think about what they are watching. Bill Nichols highlights a conference paper entitled Film and Representations of Culture, where anthropology lecturer Leslie Devereaux states “scientific writing works against the portrayal of experience” and consequently causes “a grave distortion of human actuality” (Renov, 1993, p. 175). Essentially, in an attempt to present real facts, it diminishes the role of the individuals involved and the chances of their uniquely subjective experience of the event being documented. He echoes Devereaux’s dilemma as a means of highlighting the value of “unspoken knowledge” (Renov, 1993, p. 175), that is, the information found in an individual’s body language. Hence, this could explain the shift towards the subjective or the necessity of making it prevalent within documentary film. The issue of neglecting the subjective is that it narrows the viewer’s understanding of a real event that is perceived and interpreted by people who experienced it in that very moment. This transition from clarity and fact and towards the “incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression” (Renov, 1993, p. 175) that Nichols suggests is valuable to developing a deeper intellectual richness to a subject matter beyond one single perspective. In such, the needed challenge that documentary’s provide is manifested in how information is presented visually. Roe (2012) presents a major analysis of the expressionistic elements of rotoshop, which calls upon Bill Nichols’ examination of the knowledge found on the body. Bob Sabiston developed rotoshop
with the intention of having the audience learn about the individuals interviewed by channeling it through the interpretation of the animator (Roe, 2012). In turn, the audience’s attention is drawn to the animation in order to make them question the reality and information that is being represented. It echoes Ward’s belief that animation can be used to simplify complex ideas through visual presentation, and drawing on Sabiston’s intentions, it “offers us a more intensified route into understanding the real social world” (Ward, 2005). In Sabiston’s work, it instigated the audience’s awareness to the animation and created a stimulating influence on their perception of the subject matter. Roe (2012) concludes that the use of rotoscoping the body helps to enlighten the audience’s understanding of both the individual and the context surrounding them. Importantly, the traditional elements of documentary might be missing in Sabiston’s films, but the audience is still obtaining information, which is fundamentally the point of the genre as a whole.

Figure 1: Animated drawings symbolise the unique representation of the world through the eyes of an autistic child (Webb, 1992)

But, the use of animation must also account for the subject matter of the film. This is shown in A Is For Autism, which animates drawings by autistic children alongside interviews
to explore how they perceive the world around them. Director Tim Webb uses “penetrative animation” (Wells, 1998, p. 124) to address the challenge of informing a complex mental condition as it provides “the ability to evoke the internal space and portray the invisible” (Wells, 1998, p. 122). In this case, animation acts as a necessary function to indicate to the viewer the unique sensory perception of autistic people. Animation can help express the “dislocation or refusal of reality” (Wells, 1998, p. 124) that characterises autism by calling attention to the fantasy elements inherent to the art form. By simply interviewing autistic children, the audience can only acknowledge the relationship between the interviewer and the subject, which ultimately restricts the conveyance of information. By incorporating animation under Sabiston’s thinking, the audience use their awareness of animation to treat the dialogue with greater meaning, as the application of fantasy to reality shows a direct separation between those with and without the condition because of the visual stimuli created (Figure 1). As Wells concludes, animation “is a critically expressive and democratizing language” (1998, p. 126) and thus becomes an appropriately valid means to accommodate the viewer’s understanding of an issue that must be carefully delivered. In this example, animation assists the needs of the subject to demonstrate its importance to the audience. The audience still proves crucial for the animation to work on a critical level, but it must also assist appropriately in what information and issues the filmmaker wants to translate.

Chapter Two: Animation as a means to show the unfilmable

Drawing from these changes to the functionality of documentary film, this chapter will examine how animation proves necessary to a subject matter through Chris Landreth’s animated documentary Ryan. Understanding how the filmmaker’s voice can be practically incorporated with significance to the subject matter is essential to justifying the work of other
individually driven animated documentaries. Roe’s (2012) emphasis on animation’s ability to show viewers information that may lack a physical appearance immediately suggests the unique benefit of the art form to the viewer’s relationship with the fantasy elements that call attention to the structure of the film. Using Ryan as the central framework to defend animation’s distinctiveness over live-action film reveals how internal thoughts and perspectives cannot be disregarded, information once opposed by early practitioners of the cinéma vérité (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994).

Before addressing this, it is important to acknowledge that the absence of animation does not suggest live-action cannot attempt similar internal subject matter. Russian director Alexander Sokurov calls attention to this issue of expression by focusing his work on the “internal rather than external reality” (Bevan and Bosward, 2013, p. 445). Sokurov’s goal was to draw emotion from the audience through complex and abstract imagery. For example, Elegy Of A Voyage uses footage of the natural world to existentially question reality and explore themes about time and place. As a documentary commissioned for the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, Netherlands, it is one of many works by Sokurov that echoes German filmmaker Alexander Kluge’s argument that traditional documentary practice “devalued the reality of subjective fantasy” (Bevan and Bosward, 2013, p. 446). In both Sokurov and Kluge’s world, dreams, imagination and the internal thoughts of an individual were very much part of everyday reality. In Elegy Of A Voyage, there is a connection made between the early tradition of raw, undisturbed filmmaking of the late 18-1900s and providing a persuasive voice for the audience to engage with. Sokurov takes footage of the world behaving without his influence and constructs it around his subjective and metaphorical expression of the existential experience. Accounting for this example is important in the greater context of how animation works better and even independently. In
Sokurov’s work, it is limited by the constraints of live-action, but also leaves the audience with a less direct means in which to understand the documentary’s abstract material. In practice, the documentary works as part of a museum exhibition because of the niche audience it attracts. But the philosophical approach to presenting information proves significantly more complex to a more traditional audience because of the visual subtlety live-action commonly exhibits.

![Deformed characters manifest Landreth’s feelings (NFB, 2004)](image)

**Figure 2.1: Deformed characters manifest Landreth’s feelings (NFB, 2004)**

In Ryan, animation serves to make information digestible and understandable without compromising intellectual stimulation. Chris Landreth frames his documentary around the complex method of psychological realism; defined as the emphasis on consciousness, intent, emotion and the internal psyche of the character as opposed to the actions they perform (Nichols, 2015). As Fore explains, Landreth draws from essayist Anais Nin’s belief that “we don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are” (2011, p. 282). In other words, Nin’s sentiment draws a resemblance to Nichols’ point that the individual’s subjective experience is paramount to factual documentation because it can challenge and inform a viewer’s
understanding of a particular subject matter from an alternative and occasionally opposing perspective (Renov, 1993). The biased perception of individuals means that one event can be viewed from an entirely unique and differing light, hence Landreth uses it as a means to inscribe his personal perspective into the creative vision. As a result, Landreth’s creations such as the deformed, surreal characters and setting are a manifestation of his inner feelings and help inform the viewer of his perspective on the world around him, in which they respond with scrutiny and interpretation (Figure 2.1).

The visuals “destabilise the documentary’s conventional discourse” (Fore, 2011, p. 286) in order to pull the viewer into an emotionally and psychologically troubled world that becomes the real focus of the piece rather than Larkin’s story. Landreth’s film identifies the contemporary cultural shift towards the necessary synergy between reality and fantasy, in addition to negating the ethical challenge posed by the fantasy element by alerting the audience to the reenactment itself. Fore describes how Landreth’s introduction, where he explains visual principles within the film related to his own disposition (Figure 2.2), establishes the functionality of animation as “the rules of the game” (Fore, 2011, p. 288). This clear sense of awareness from the audience, earlier found in the establishment of the filmmaker’s voice during the 20th century (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994; Corrigan and White, 2012), then serves as a context they can draw on when considering the information presented to them. Fore calls upon the psychoanalysts Laplanche and Pontalis to profoundly define that fantasy works because of the derived “pleasure” that comes from transforming real objects into emotional images that resonate thoughts, events and ideas that have a connection with the individual (2011, p. 280). In this respect, animation can go beyond the representation of facts and hold a greater significance to what information means to individuals involved. Audiences are triggered by provocative imagery, and given the
significance an image may have to a subject matter, animation can thus provide the filmmaker with the ability to connect the audience to the subject and effectively produce a more detailed and intellectually stimulating film.

Figure 2.2: Landreth explains the use of animation (NFB, 2004)

Additionally, the abstract visual language within Ryan serves as an insertion of expressive commentary that heightens the power of the film’s discourse. The audience is presented with a double narrative that draws on the film’s emphasis on animation as a means to tell the story. The documentary is driven entirely by two perspectives - Landreth’s emotional response to Larkin’s world and Larkin’s emotional response to Landreth’s questioning. Hence, by visualising non-physical feelings in the most direct manner possible through animation, the audience can engage the psychological importance of the film and better understand the relationship and personalities of both the participant and the filmmaker. As established with Landreth highlighting the use of animation to reflect his emotions (Fore, 2011), it also implies that Landreth’s voice as the filmmaker is just as crucial as the history and life of Larkin, who is initially predisposed as the subject matter. The subjective
perspective of the filmmaker does not go unacknowledged by Landreth, and his proactive attempt to use it as a tool to drive the documentary means he avoids the pitfall of presenting inherently biased information. The audience can thus tread carefully on Landreth’s self-aware execution.

Figure 2.3: Animation emphasises Landreth’s artistic insecurity (NFB, 2004)

While presenting a truthful depiction of both his and Ryan Larkin’s troubled state, Landreth uses animation to speak to the audience metaphorically regarding the underlying theme of artistic insecurity. The image of bright primary colours smothering over each character’s face perpetuates the similar connection between them (Figure 2.3). Their insecurities are never directly confirmed in their conversation, so the use animation helps to uncover hidden information that can be interpreted from the dialogue between them. The audience understands the verbal tension that exists, but by giving non-physical emotions a face, it provides a more apparent way to show this tension to unsuspecting viewers. By using the recurring animation of aggressive colours consuming them, the audience can make the connection between the representation of the image (bright primary colours contrasting with
desaturated imagery) and the representation of the individuals’ feelings (Landreth and Larkin’s insecurity). The abstract fantastic imagery created by Landreth becomes a factual and crucial component to the information output of the film. Without animation to drive this information, the audience only achieves a limited understanding of each individual’s creative insecurity and subsequently; the information becomes irrelevant without the dramatic emphasis placed by the animation.

Figure 2.4: Landreth’s halo highlights the internal narrative (NFB, 2004)

A scene furthers this where Landreth encourages Larkin to confront his alcoholism and overcome it, which sparks an infuriated response from Larkin. Verbally again, the audience is aware of Landreth’s concern for Larkin, but to further this information, Landreth has a halo emit from his head to symbolise his internal moral high ground and effectively convey his confidence (Figure 2.4). Yet with Larkin’s berated response, the halo breaks without Landreth verbalising a word. It indicates to the audience that his confidence has shattered and his low self-esteem begins to consume him, as highlighted again by the colours that wrap around him (Figure 2.3). The simplicity of the fantasy elements proves pivotal to
the audience’s knowledge of Landreth because he directly communicates two strands of information – the direct conversation recorded between Landreth and Larkin, and the personal feelings each of them are facing projected by the animation. The animation is thus helping to transcend raw information and provide the viewer with a deeper range of the facts and further adds to the alluring appeal documentary’s have to the growth of knowledge.

Figure 2.5: The environment represents Landreth’s view of skid row (NFB, 2004)

Furthermore, this exchange of information attributes environmentally to the film as well. The same visual facts are applied to Larkin who, during his fit of anger, discharges sharp red spikes to accentuate his emotional outburst. Yet, considering his emotion is evidently external towards Landreth, it influences the environment around him that begins to distort to convey Larkin’s increasing sadness. Once again, Nichols’ words are echoed by the need to express human interaction and the pivotal role of the “mise-en-scene” (Renov, 1993, p. 175), everything that is positioned onscreen such as the props, characters and set design, to help stimulate the emotional extremity of the film. The location of the interview does not intervene with the representation of Larkin and Landreth’s interaction, but instead
atmospherically serves as a suggestible component to Landreth’s subjective thinking (Figure 2.5). It reflects upon Corrigan and White’s point that the mise-en-scene provides a measurement of human emotion along with the association of the “physical, cultural, and historical accuracy” of the setting (2012, p. 71). The setting is a reflection and reinforcement of Landreth’s psychological theme, but also condenses his feelings of skid row as a place of dilapidation, misery and alienation that parallel with both subjects of the story. The audience can then make an appropriate association with Landreth’s feelings considering skid row is infamously known as an area of poverty and marginalisation.

**Chapter Three: Animated style to better communicate information**

Animation’s use within documentary film does not have to fundamentally stem from attempting to visualise the unfilmable. As Muybridge demonstrated in his attempt to capture a horse’s movement, animation in many cases can simply be a better way to approach the subject matter. In fact, in situations perceived to be filmable, the use of animation comes under greater scrutiny when live-action could be deemed more important in representing reality given the authenticity of its footage. Hence this presents the question: Why use animation’s fantasy when live-action reenactment can be achieved?

This concluding chapter will address this concern by examining the helpfulness of animation in translating information within an emotional context as established in the previous character. By analysing scenes from Never Like The First Time and Waltz With Basir, two vastly distinct subjects with a similar premise of remembering past experiences, it helps to highlight animation as a tool for advancing the viewer’s understanding in a more identifiable way that communicates the authenticity of the subject’s personalised story. Both
films simplify the use of animation as a conventional means of making information readily accessible to the viewer without the need for complex stimulation.

In Jonas Odell’s animated documentary Never Like The First Time, which recounts four different individual experiences of losing one’s virginity, the stylistic elements of animation prove to be substantially more valuable in addressing its subject matter than traditional live action reenactment. The reason for this, bar the technical abilities and preference of the filmmaker, draws closer to the importance that style has to the narrative. In an interview with Vice (2013), Odell explains that he chose to avoid having to “predefine the style of the film” in order to present each story with an entirely unique visualisation that reflects what each participant said and felt during their experience. Animation is not a matter of taste necessarily but rather it is a justifiably more useful way to tell the real story. His decision reflects film-editing theorist Ken Dancgyer’s belief that style serves purely to be “dramatically purposeful” (2011, p. 203), or in the case of Odell’s documentary, becomes “a necessary overmodulation stimulating the thematic extremes of the story” (2011, p. 205). In other words, the style does not assist purely for aesthetic quality, it functions as a driving device for each story on an emotional level and helps establish the context of memory that influences how each narrative is retold. It calls upon why animation is deemed appropriate in A Is For Autism to convey information that is critical to both the viewer and the subject being documented. This is not to say live-action is obsolete. In Errol Morris’ The Thin Blue Line, live action reenactment was not merely an aesthetic purpose but instead it is to “accommodate” information and highlight to the viewer that “the original event can be known only through distant, and biased, retellings” (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994, p. 675). In both Odell and Morris’ cases, their creative decisions rest on the underlying meaning of what style can do to benefit the viewer’s understanding of the subject matter. Both
documentaries experiment beyond the boundaries of the primary story and information they present. Yet, Odell’s use of animation allows for a more dramatic means in which to make the participant’s experience more apparent to the viewer because of the evident attempt to use fantasy to retell reality. Like with the work of Sokurov and Kluge in relation to Chris Landreth’s Ryan, they push further by using a style that is thematically relevant and functionally critical to giving the narrative a context to propel the emotion and intrigue inherent to documentary film.

Although, in order to understand how animation is the better way to produce Odell’s film, it is vital to examine how animated style is implemented. One story is characterised by the female narrator’s inability to recall certain information, prompting the animation to appear inconsistent, ever changing and thus reflective of the issue regarding accuracy when remembering significant events. Like with Ryan, the viewer is alerted to the animation’s role within the documentary by positioning the story as an event that is proven by psychologists to be “prone to distortions” (Lilienfeld et al, 2010, p. 66). For example, the girl is implied to
have had non-consensual intercourse with a stranger while unconscious, hence the animation reflects this ambiguous traumatic state by stylising the story like a nightmare with gritty, aggressive black and white sketch illustration that gives the overall tone a very unpleasant, negative outlook (Figure 3.1). The events become more contextualised to suit the narrator’s concerned feelings more authentically, making it clear that the man is a villain through stark, exaggerated sinister features and using disorientated movement, composition and superimposed imagery to make the circumstances more harrowing. Animation serves to accentuate the perspective of the girl and communicate the terrifying ordeal to the audience with greater clarity that provides suggestible information that the audience can interpret and immediately sympathise or connect with.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 3.2: Rotoscoping makes characters appear emotionally hollow (Odell, 2006)**

In another story, a girl retells how her 14-year-old self met a boy and shared an innocent and awkward bond. But after weeks of increasingly intimate encounters, their relationship met a sudden and unceremonious end. The story becomes less impactful with the extraction of the animation to convey the inevitable soullessness of their relationship. Odell is
focusing on the emotional response of each experience, not necessarily the story itself. The subject matter is the feeling, not the event, further echoing the philosophical work of Anais Nin who inspired Landreth’s development of Ryan (Fore, 2011). As a result, the animation maintains a dominant presence throughout the story to reinforce and retain the tension that exists between them. To establish the hollow relationship, both characters are animated with rotoscoped outlines that present them as empty vessels that look visually dissatisfying, insinuating a sense of distrust between them that inevitably unfolds (Figure 3.2). As a result, the animation foreshadows a looming uncertainty that the audience can engage with. The viewer understands the tragedy the real girl is feeling through the cold minimalistic animation, and the use of photo collage to present environments adds a scrapbook-esque quality to it that infers to the essence of capturing memories. It is a complete emotional departure from the previous sequence (Figure 3.1) and this is reflected in an animation style that distinguishes itself to represent a unique, individually complex perspective, preserving Nichols’ belief in the need to emphasise the individual’s perception of reality as fact (Renov, 1993).

Additionally, the dramatic components present in Odell’s film are further echoed in Ari Folman’s Waltz With Bashir, an animated documentary focusing on the experiences of Folman during his time as a foot soldier in the 1982 Lebanon War. Its commonness with Never Like The First Time is the element of memory, which White describes as “Folman remorsefully seeking to make sense of his inability to remember” (2008, p. 6). The choice of animation in Waltz With Basir may have been a practical decision based on the fact that many video recordings did not exist, but thematically, the decision also assists in expressing the personal and traumatic experience of Folman, further reinforcing Nichols’ insistence on the subjective point of view (Renov, 1993). Folman’s film does not hide his intentions as a
self-reflexive investigation. The representation of the Lebanon War is defined purely through Folman’s emotional response to it, justifying the exaggerative and dramatic presentation of the film (Figure 4). At its core, Waltz With Basir informs its audience through a traditional narrative setup to gain a more clear and intimate understanding of Folman’s personal journey. His journey and subsequent documentary is characterised by dreams, hallucinations and memories that cannot accurately be accounted for, so the audience can acknowledge the subjective framing device through Folman’s elaborate visual interpretations of each individual interviewees’ narratives. Note that Folman’s interpretation of dreams and non-physical elements are distinct from Landreth’s approach to Ryan. Instead of developing abstract visuals to imply internal information, Folman grounds his representation to reality by using fictional techniques to make his story more engaging and sympathetic to the audience. Similarly with Bob Sabiston’s use of rotoscoping, Folman is attempting to give justice to each interviewee’s story by using animation to represent the dramatic experiences they encountered through expressed movement.

Figure 4: Dramatic presentation carries the real narrative (Folman, 2007)
For example, Ronny Dayag recounts his story to Folman about being the sole survivor of an ambush and his escape back to camp. The horror and tragedy of Dayag’s situation is verbally realised in how the audience maturely imagine the event from his descriptive interview, but Folman ignites the image of Dayag’s experience by using animation to show the intensity and bewilderment of being attacked by the enemy (Figure 4). It reflects Webb’s use of animation in A Is For Autism to go beyond the interview and express the experience of the individual, and furthers Nichols’ notion that performance carries additional information for the audience to consider (Renov, 1993). Emphasis is initially placed on Dayag’s tank awkwardly turning around narrow corners, chipping chunks out the walls as the tank backs into them, and driving over cars to show a modestly comedic sense of destruction that appears routine and ordinary in Dayag’s eyes. The audience gets a sense of his daily monotonous life as a soldier and the tank is characterised to reflect his feeling of safety in such an unstoppable machine. In response, this contrasts with the latter ambush to accentuate Dayag’s sudden realisation that safety is not guaranteed within the tank and the audience are effectively alerted to his emotional shift from confident and relaxed to fear and panic. The actions that follow serve as a means to drive the story forward without direct verbal intervention from Dayag to explain events. The frenzy and adrenaline intensified by the dramatic presentation of the animation give the audience a relatively accurate understanding of Dayag’s experience more so than directly seeking the fact. The subject matter is Dayag rather than the war itself; hence the use of animation proves vital to the expression of his character’s disposition during a difficult encounter.

In summary, what is central to both Never Like The First Time and Waltz With Basir is not the representation of reality; it is the representation of the real experience. Fundamentally, the unique perspective of the participant gives the audience a window into
the world of the actuality by addressing the complexity of the human experience, that is, the emotions that allow them to engage meaningfully with the world. Both Folman and Odell treat each interview as a solitary experience where animation provides a positive means to represent their perspective of a real world issue, which in the case of these thematically distinct, yet similarly constructed films is war and sex respectively. Live-action may provide the audience with a more authentic representation of reality purely through the physical nature of the visuals actually being real. But with animation, the audience becomes exposed to the symbolic and internal relationship that the individual has with the world. In other words, filmmakers extend from depicting reality and instead use the visuals as a means to provide information that proves crucial to the audience such as the acknowledgement of the distorted memories and possibility of inaccuracy that is inherently manifested in the human experience. When compared to live-action, animation is proven to have a distinctive quality that is unmatched by the limitations of live-action that restrict the expression of the filmmaker.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has demonstrated the value of animation to documentary film through an examination of artistic expression in existing fact-based films such as A Is For Autism, Ryan, Never Like The First Time and Waltz With Basir. It is clear that cultural changes and advancement in knowledge and technology throughout the 20th century continue to manifest within the work of modern filmmakers, who express their personal depictions of the world whilst acknowledging the need to keep the audience alerted to the fantasies and interpretations they present in their facts. A clear recurring theme occurs: the nature of movement and image to express information is vital to maintaining an informed
and stimulating experience for the audience. Modern animation has extended far beyond merely showing audiences the unfilmable or parts of life that do not have a physical presence. It asks the viewers to challenge themselves, think differently and interpret the images and information they are provided with in a way that “enriches documentary and our experience of viewing it” (Roe, 2011, p. 217). Consistent throughout this investigation is the role of the audience and their awareness to make intelligent and critical decisions based on the voice of the filmmaker. Fact-based media has become increasingly sophisticated in its execution and poses a new generation of documentary observer - one who is willing to engage more emotionally and critically with complex information. The films analysed in this dissertation aim to transcend beyond generic fact and assert a new means in which to perceive the physical world by using animation to establish a relationship with the audience, reflecting modern theorists implication of the growing need to interact with viewers on a more refined and personal level through the subject experience. The symbiotic relationship between reality and fantasy works in accordance to how the audience wishes to receive and interpret information. Filmmakers have responded to Grierson’s definition of documentary with the liberty of challenging the traditional model of factual presentation. In a diverse modern age less restrictive than the old, artistic expression is not solely defined by aesthetic, but by the meaningful attribution of real world knowledge inherently driven by the attitude and beliefs of the storyteller. If the binary structures of fact and fiction in documentary can now be considered liberated by the proven benefit of art and animation to generate new perspectives and experiences, it ultimately poses the further question: how will this “post-documentary” age (Bevan and Bosward, 2013, p. 444) change the viewer’s understanding of reality?
References


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