

DRAWING THE UNSPEAKABLE – UNDERSTANDING ‘THE OTHER’ THROUGH NARRATIVE EMPATHY IN ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY

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Abstract

How to represent the suffering of distant others? An international exchange program between Africa and Europe was set up in 2006 to tackle this issue with the help of documentary filmmaking. A result was *A Kosovo Fairytale* (2009), a case study of how animated documentary can provide insights in how to represent ‘the other’.

Theories of narrative empathy inform the understanding of the process as well as the final film. This paper examines animated documentary from three distinct perspectives: as a pedagogical tool to enhance cultural understanding, as a process of narrative empathy, and as a coherent text which makes use of narrative strategies endemic to animated documentary in order to create emotional engagement.

Conclusions suggest that animated documentary can be a novel way of representing the other, especially if narrative empathy is present throughout a production process, and that the process involves participatory elements where the subjects contribute to the narrative.

Keywords: empathy, narrative, Africa, representation, animated documentary, refugee

Introduction

How to represent 'the other' – be it with regard to race, culture, gender or beyond – has long been a challenge in media practice and its study (Hall, 1997; Shohat & Stam, 2013; Nichols, 1992). An additional question is how to represent the suffering of these others and traumatic experiences in general. To gain new insights into these questions, an international exchange programme between Africa and Europe was set up in 2006. The controlling principle was to explore cultures with the help of documentary filmmaking.

In 2009, I acted as a supervisor for one multicultural group of young filmmakers from Africa and Northern Europe. The process resulted in *A Kosovo Fairytale* (2009), a film that stands out as a case study of how animated documentary can provide new insights and suggest solutions to the challenges of representation of 'the other' in visual narrative. The case study also highlights the unique quality of animated non-fiction as a medium to represent traumatic events. My role as a supervisor allowed me to conduct participatory observation throughout the making of the film. This paper examines the case both as a process and finished product.

The production, a 15 minute animated documentary with some live action sequences, was shot in Finland by a team

of young international film students from Finland, Zimbabwe and South Africa. *A Kosovo Fairytale* explores the history of one traumatized refugee family – the Neziris – who fled to Finland from Kosovo and in the process were separated from their youngest son, Albin. The Nezirri family consists of a mother, father and Albin's three older siblings. The narrative takes the form of a fairytale told through a series of animated tableaux that directly address the child they left behind and explain to him the reasons why they were forced to leave him. It raises questions related to the reasons and consequences of forced migration and the feelings of guilt of those who have left.

The pedagogical approach was to use the documentary form, in this case animated documentary, as a tool inspired by the tradition of ethnographic filmmaking. As a product of colonialism, ethnographic cinema – for a long period – created audio-visual narratives of exotic others that have now been largely criticised and discredited (Eraso, 2006). Today, we are witnessing a change in non-fiction cinema in which cultural identities are being analysed and represented very differently from how they were in the past. We can increasingly see, for instance, films where there is a multiplicity of voices – polyphonic films – where contradictory arguments appear, or filming conventions are broken and cultural difference is increasingly freed from tight scientific conceptions. Ethnography requires

extended periods of immersion by the researcher in the field. The main method used in ethnography is participant observation, and the aim of using this method is to facilitate the understanding of cultural contexts from the inside (idem). The process for *A Kosovo Fairytale* included immersion and participant observation, but also another kind of participatory element. The subjects – the Nezirri family – took part in the making of the film by drawing themselves, after which the drawings were used in the animation.

This paper looks at animated documentary from two distinct perspectives. Firstly, as a pedagogical process that helped young filmmakers as well as their subjects to understand each other and the broader cultural context in which they operate. Secondly, as a coherent text that makes use of visual and narrative strategies endemic to animated documentary in order to engage an audience on an emotional level.

The production process can be understood as an arena where authors experience empathy with their subjects on individual levels. This *authors' empathy* is vital in order to understand subjects and to represent them fairly. Consequently, such sharing of feeling informs the narrative on various levels. Narrative structures, such as the film *A Kosovo Fairytale*, make use of many formal strategies that are linked to empathic responses in an audience.

The theoretical background for this study introduces empathy as a concept when examining both process and narrative. Theories of narrative empathy inform the understanding of the creative process that resulted in the film *A Kosovo Fairytale*. Narrative empathy, according to Keen (2006), can be understood as the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition. Narrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it, in mental simulation during reading/viewing, in the aesthetics of reception when readers/viewers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it. As Keen and also Taylor suggest, empathy permeates the whole creative process on different levels, with authors feeling empathy with their subjects and finally in the narrative poetics of the film, in this case through the use animated documentary (Keen, 2006, Taylor 2002).

Animated documentary – The Art of Showing the Invisible

Documentary representation is fundamentally informed by the challenges of inter- and multicultural encounters since it always entails a dialogue between a filmmaker and a subject that exists in the world outside of the narrative – a person, a community or a culture. Therefore, a heightened aware-

ness towards the challenges and moral problems present in intercultural discourse has developed throughout the history of documentary film (Finch & Nynas, 2011). Today, people in different situations and contexts face intercultural challenges. These are a result of increasing mobility. Sometimes such challenges are brought about by crisis situations and an international labor market. However, people also come in contact with each other through forms of new technology such as the Internet, and through literature and film. In these multicultural encounters, misunderstandings and sometimes clashes are experienced. This volume presents studies in culture, communication, and language, all of which strive, through a variety of theoretical perspectives, to develop understanding of such challenges and perhaps offer practical solutions. Encountering otherness may evoke fears, negative attitudes, and a corresponding will to dismiss the otherness in front of us—either consciously or unconsciously. This denial of otherness may also be subtle. Thinking about otherness, as described in this volume, also raises questions about how otherness is represented and mediated and about the possible role of third parties in facilitating communication in such situations. Sometimes a third party can play a crucial role in facilitating the commu-

nication process and serve as a channel of communication. Trust in humanity as a bridge to community requires a subtle balance between representations of self and other. Various problems arise in intercultural mediation, which may be caused by cultural and political differences, and these are sometimes used to validate stereotypical beliefs and images. The editors argue that in both academic and art circles, European perspectives have widely been understood as universal. `{ "family": "Finch", "given": "Jason" }, { "family": "Nynas", "given": "Peter" }, "issued": { "date-parts": [["2011", "3", "31"]] }, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json" }`.

Documentary, with roots in anthropology, has historically been put to task in representing 'the other' in various contexts. And at least on the level of social rhetoric, documentary films are still made to give a voice to the voiceless, to get close to those who are far away – to make the strange familiar (Barnouw, 1993; Nichols, 1992; Bondebjerg, 2014).

Documentary often deals with historical events and experiences that cannot be shown on screen since they have already passed. The genre also has a tradition to deal with conflict and trauma that cannot be shown on screen without difficult ethical choices. Hence, documentary filmmakers have devised different strat-

egies to deal with these obstacles. Ever since Robert Flaherty staged scenes and had events re-enacted for the camera in *Nanook of the North* (1922), documentary has found ways in which to represent the past. Interviews and re-enactments are still dominant methods, and the use of animation can be seen as a part of the tradition of re-enactment. Animation makes the re-enactment explicit since it challenges the reality illusion of documentary film.

The animated documentary is an established genre. From “early on, animation was seen to have a unique representational function for the non-fictional moving image, one that could not be fulfilled by the conventional live-action, photographic-based alternative” (Roe, 2013). Animated documentary is a genre that can represent what eludes live-action images. This notion was supported by the authors of *A Kosovo Fairytale*, who claimed that they did not want to do “another refugee film,” which would repeat and reinforce old and worn-out notions – especially images – of what it means to be a refugee. Thus, the animated documentary at the same time expands the narrative and how its subjects are represented. As Roe (2013) states, the “animated documentary broadens and deepens the range of what we can learn from documentaries.” It can show subjective states of mind that are not filmable. Ward (2006) writes: “animation can perfectly trace the contours of

a thought process in a way that is out of reach for live action films.” In this manner, the animated documentary can establish contact with the invisible realm. Žižek (2008) “number-of-pages”: “272”, “edition”: “1st edition”, “-source”: “Amazon”, “event-place”: “New York”, “abstract”: “Philosopher, cultural critic, and agent provocateur Slavoj Žižek constructs a fascinating new framework to look at the forces of violence in our world. Using history, philosophy, books, movies, Lacanian psychiatry, and jokes, Slavoj Žižek examines the ways we perceive and misperceive violence. Drawing from his unique cultural vision, Žižek brings new light to the Paris riots of 2005; he questions the permissiveness of violence in philanthropy; in daring terms, he reflects on the powerful image and determination of contemporary terrorists. Violence, Žižek states, takes three forms—subjective (crime, terror claims it is only by accessing the invisible realm of subjective violence that one may arrest the perpetual cycle of violence. He continues that access to this invisible realm is best facilitated through indirect forms of representation that eschew the mystifying force of directness. The clumsy, self-drawn figures in *A Kosovo Fairytale* that represent the Nezir family are an example of such an indirect form of representation. Animation enables one to represent what cannot be represented. This unrepresentability is active on two very different levels, the psychological one that Žižek refers to,

but also on a very practical one: the animations are re-enactments of memory and experience, they are subject matter that need to be re-enacted in order to be shown.

Animated characters can engage audiences emotionally, in similar manner to fictional characters. Similarity of audience members to characters is considered to increase the likelihood of identification. However, this similarity may be based on a multitude of factors other than demographic similarity of age, gender or race. Indeed, iconic representations, such as animated characters, often elicit feelings of similarity – identification – by suggesting similarity of attributes such as goofy or scared – or similarity of situation: being ridiculed like Dumbo or scared and dependent like Bambi (Cohen, 2001) “container-title”: “Mass Communication and Society”, “page”: “245-264”, “volume”: “4”, “issue”: “3”, “source”: “Taylor and Francis+NEJM”, “abstract”: “In this article I argue that although the notion of identification with media characters is widely discussed in media research, it has not been carefully conceptualized or rigorously tested in empirical audience studies. This study presents a theoretical discussion of identification, including a definition of identification and a discussion of the consequences of identification with media characters for the development of identity and socialization processes. It is suggested that a useful distinction can be made

between identification and other types of reactions that media audiences have to media characters. A critical look at media research involving identification exposes the inherent conceptual problems in this research and leads to hypotheses regarding the antecedents and consequences of identification with media characters. The importance of a theory of identification to media research and communication research, more broadly, is presented.,"DOI":"10.1207/S15327825MCS0403_01","ISSN":"1520-5436","short-Title":"Defining Identification","author":{"family":"Cohen","given":"Jonathan"},"issued":{"date-parts":[["2001",8,1]]},"accessed":{"date-parts":[["2015",6,12]]}},"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"} .

These are some of the ways non-fiction tells stories that bring viewers closer to the everyday reality of distant and strange others. Bondebjerg (2014) suggests that documentary still can create identification by showing us that people have universal human dimensions despite cultural and other differences.

Narrative empathy

Narratives are extraordinarily effective devices for opening the channel of fellow feeling and breaking through barriers of difference created by distance, time, culture and experience.

In empathy, we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others. Empathy derives from the German word *Einfühlung*, which can be translated as "feeling-into." Freud notes that empathy allows us to understand others by putting ourselves in their place. He suggests that empathy is actually the only way to know of other psychological beings other than ourselves (Freud & Gay, 1990), an argument that receives support from recent studies in cognitive neuroscience and the discovery of mirror neurons in the human brain (Gallese 2009). The human capacity to empathize with others is one of our most important skills. When we share another person's feelings we connect to our humanity, we expose it and are exposed to it. By experiencing empathy we come to understand others and their situations on an emotional level, even if these persons are strangers to us in a cultural, ethnic or social sense. This is why empathy can be seen as a key to successful communication.

Narrative empathy is the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition. It plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it, in mental simulation during viewing, in the aesthetics of reception when viewers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it (Keen, 2006, Taylor, 2002). Empathy, therefore, permeates a narrative process

through its different stages, in different ways.

The particular characteristic of animated documentary is its twofold relationship to reality. It can create identification with the help of animated characters, and juxtapose this with live action footage. Our emotions are real, but the situation and character we feel with are real in another, very tangible sense – their lives exist outside the narrative and continue after the narrative ends.

Techniques thought to evoke empathetic responses have been identified, though caution should be taken not to oversimplify predictions about the effects of particular narrative techniques, which are protean. Specific narrative techniques of fiction and film narrative have been associated with empathetic effects. (Keen 2006) These techniques include manipulation of narrative situation to channel perspective and representation of fictional characters' consciousness and point of view (Peer & Chatman, 2001). Animation is a powerful way of representing consciousness, create unique points of view and fictionality, and as such is a mode of documentary well equipped for creating empathy. Most of the existing empirical research on empathetic effects in narration concerns film (Tan, 2013; Bryant & Zillmann, 1991)"publisher":"L. Erlbaum Associates","number-of-pages":"430","source":"Google Books","abstract":"This volume takes the next step

in the evolution of mass communication research tradition from effects to processes – a more detailed and microanalytical analysis of the psychological processes involved in receiving and reacting to electronic media messages. This domain includes investigations into those psychological processes that occur between the process of selecting media messages for consumption and assessments of whatever processes mediate the long-term impact such message consumption may have on consumers' subsequent behavior. The editors strive to further understanding of some of the basic processes underlying the ways we gain entertainment and information." ISBN: "9780805800333", short-Title: "Responding to the Screen", language: "en", author: [{"family": "Bryant", "given": "Jennings"}, {"family": "Zillmann", "given": "Dolf"}], issued: {"date-parts": [{"1991}]}}, schema: "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json" where the use of the close-up and point of view shot has been mentioned as techniques linked to empathy. *A Kosovo Fairytale* makes use of both of these techniques. The close-up is the defining shot in the closing sequence when the Neziri family makes a skype-call to Albin. The same sequence uses point of view to enhance the identification with the character. In this case, it is Albin's brother Lavdim – the narrator of the film – whose point of view is represented.

Pedagogical Process and Authors' Empathy

As noted, *A Kosovo Fairytale* was initiated within a pedagogical framework, an exchange programme intent on examining cultures, with the catchphrase "knowing yourself through others." The ethos was not only to expose foreign filmmakers to other cultures, but that the native students would be able to see their culture through the eyes of others, and gain new insights this way. The programme was called "Training producers for ecological broadcasting," and was part of the North South South Exchange (NSSE), a funding instrument devised by the Finnish Foreign Ministry, aimed at building networks between Africa and Europe. The programme included staff and students from six higher education institutions: three film schools and three universities and their media departments.

The exchange was devised as a mirror programme, with students spending three months in Johannesburg, South Africa and then the same group of students travelled to Helsinki, Finland. The pedagogical tool to achieve new knowledge was that of documentary filmmaking. Students were divided into production teams who were then briefed to make a documentary film on a central theme, in 2009 the theme was "Borders." Anna-Sofia Nylund, a directing student, voiced the idea to research a story of refugees that were living in a refugee centre

on the west coast of Finland, in a town called Oravais, close to her native town of Jakobstad. The film crew consisted of Nylund and one other Finnish student, two students from South Africa and one from Zimbabwe, at the time studying in South Africa. The refugee centre was an unfamiliar space for the Finnish students. While there the students met the Neziri family, and they soon saw the potential and the broader relevance in their story.

A Kosovo Fairytale was to be a collaborative effort by these five film students and the Neziri family, and they all contributed throughout the process. It is relevant to know the background of one particular author because her personal back story allowed her to be uniquely positioned to understand and subsequently feel what Keen (2006) calls authors' empathy with the subjects in *A Kosovo Fairytale*.

A year before the exchange, in late 2008, problems in Zimbabwe had reached crisis proportions in the areas of living standards, public health and various basic affairs. This led to increased migration as one result, with the UK and South Africa being the main destinations. The Zimbabwe Central Bank has estimated 1.2 million Zimbabweans have gone to South Africa since 1990. One of these migrants was Tapiwa Chipfupa, who arrived in Johannesburg and started studying at AFDA Film School. In 2013, four years after the completion of *A Kosovo Fairytale*,

Tapiwa Chipfupa commented on her personal history:

“Some stayed on [in Zimbabwe] because they were hopeful things would get better while others had no choice but to stay. My mother left to find work in England and together with my father and four siblings we struggled to make ends meet in Zimbabwe. A few years later my father joined my mother with my siblings. I continued my studies, gave birth to my daughter and obtained a scholarship to the AFDA film school in Johannesburg, South Africa.” (Chipfupa, 2013)

The author shared other traits with the Neziri family as well; she had many siblings and most relevant of all, she was the one left behind by her family:

“When I was finally able to visit my parents I tried to go to England but by then the British authorities had changed the immigration laws, and they denied me a visitor’s visa. They have refused me many times since then, with the result that I have not seen my parents or siblings in 12 years.” (Chipfupa, 2013)

When Tapiwa Chipfupa applied to take part in the exchange programme committed herself to spending up to three

months in Finland. This commitment involved leaving her young child behind since she could not take the child with her because of visa constraints and since she could not have taken care of the child during her studies abroad. This situation also mirrored that of the subjects of the film.

The personal background and history of Tapiwa Chipfupa allowed the whole film crew to empathize with the Neziri family on multiple levels. The dynamic of the multicultural team also encouraged the students to find common ground in all of their different experiences. When the team was construed of three different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, there was a clear need to find universal characters within a universal narrative. Tapiwa Chipfupas background proved to be the most influential since it allowed the others to understand the subjects on an emotional level. In an interview in 2015 she reconnects with the experience and how her background helped her in understanding the Neziri family:

“I understood and felt their pain, loss and grief over being separated from Albin, the difficulty of their journey to Finland and the process of trying to find acceptance in a foreign country. So I cried when they cried, I laughed when they laughed. The things that the Neziri’s faced were similar to what my family went

through. They were like kindred spirits. As a filmmaker, I was sensitive to what we needed to say and how to say it. So it became a collaborative process between the Neziris and us.” (Chipfupa, 2015)

In the end a Finnish and a South African student were credited as directors of the film, and another South African student was in charge of the actual animation. Both the directors and the animator were however first and foremost influenced by their Zimbabwean colleague and her personal experiences. Through her, they got deep access to the story. The documentary process gave the students the opportunity (and the necessary excuse) to interact with the family that became the subjects of the film. The same process also forced the students to structure their experience into a narrative and find the form for this narrative.

Form and Content

As the film team had found their story, the next big question was how to tell it. At first the group considered to re-tell the story through interviews. The decision to use animation was taken because the group wanted to move away from traditional documentary modes, but also because the story demanded it.

The concept of the film soon focused on the binary of the family in Finland and

the son they left behind – Albin. As a film crew, the students were committed to telling the story from the point of view of the family, but they were struggling to find the right form to suit the story. In a pitch early in the process they were worried about making “another refugee film,” and the group stated clearly that they wanted to “re-invent the refugee narrative.” After feedback and supervision the team presented another idea: it still featured the Neziri family, but the story was about their need to explain themselves to Albin, whom they left behind. Thus the filmmakers would act as mediators between the family and Albin, and the concept was now described in the terms of an animated book the family would make for 2-year old Albin, and in that book they would explain the reasons why.

Lavdim, Albin brother, states at the beginning of the final film:

“This story is for you Albin, so that when you grow up, you’ll understand why we left you.”

This was one of the many crucial decisions the crew made. It allowed for a very special target group of one person for the narrative, namely Albin himself. The family is riddled with self-doubt and feelings of guilt, and thus the fairytale offers the family an outlet which help them explain their choices. But as viewers we are also reminded of Albin in the sense that he exists as a living being in the real world.

This fact is especially poignant in the end. The decision to have the family address Albin directly in live-action footage gave the narrative a purpose – it was not only an engaging narrative, but it was also a story with a clear mission. And since the recipient of the story was 2-year old Albin, animation was a natural choice.

But how to do the animation? The production had a non-existent animation budget and was also working under a tight time schedule. The film needed to be finished within three months, since the foreign students were returning home to Africa. The natural choice was stop-motion animation. But since the concept was about the family communicating with Albin, the filmmakers asked the family to draw themselves. This drawing process was captured on camera and was also used as an opening sequence in the final film. The animated characters were then used in the stop motion animation. Thus, the making of the film became part of the narrative. This participatory technique helped the team to gain the trust of the family, and naturally involved the Neziris in the making of the film on a very tangible level – it created the sense that the film was a joint project where the filmmakers acted as facilitators of the story. It can be argued that this notion is an illusion since the story was carefully scripted by the filmmakers before the shoot began. But the strategy worked, since neither the budget nor the time-

frame proved to be a problem, and more importantly, they gained the trust of the Neziri family. The film was well received by the Neziris and went on to receive critical acclaim in different festivals, and was also broadcast by YLE, the Finnish national broadcaster. The real success of the film, however, constituted in the meaningful meeting between the young filmmakers and their subjects, and the empathy that this meeting generated on multiple levels.

The film: Structure and Narrative

A Kosovo Fairytale displays a narrative structure that begins with animated titles that give context to the war and the ensuing crisis in Kosovo. After the brief introduction, there is a live action sequence that shows us the Neziri family at their current home, a refugee centre in Finland. The family members gather around a table and draw images of themselves. The oldest brother, Lavdim, is the main narrator and he speaks directly on camera to his little brother, Albin, as he states that he will now tell him a fairytale that will explain why the family left Albin. Thus, we are introduced to the animated characters and the fairytale world of animation. Lavdim’s opening phrase is familiar from fairytales: “One day in Kosovo, our father met our mother...” In the animation narrative, the mother and father of the Neziri family meet in Kosovo, fall in love and marry, despite them being from two

separate ethnic groups – the father is ethnic Albanian while the mother is ethnic Serbian. They get three children, the war in Kosovo breaks out. Violence and harassment towards minority groups continue after the war. The fourth child Albin is born, but the family is constantly being exposed to ethnic violence, and finally they have to flee in the back of a truck. Safety concerns force the family to leave Albin behind. The family arrives in Finland, and the animation sequence ends when a blackbird – the symbol of Kosovo – brings Albin back to the family. Thus, the animation has a happy ending as the Neziris reunite. The documentary continues, however, as the ending is a live action sequence where each family member takes turns in addressing Albin with a Skype call. The film ends with the main narrator, Lavdim, saying goodbye to his brother Albin. All ends well in the fairytale, but in reality the family remains separated.

Animation has a tradition of comic storytelling, and graphic fiction and documentary film has a particular relationship to the real. When brought together in animated documentary, the two genres create new possibilities for understanding “the other.” The naive and minimalistic characters in *A Kosovo Fairytale* gives the Neziris a universal appeal. The same dynamic is at work in the fairytale narrative. When the story of the Neziris is reduced to a few simplistic tableaux, we are removed from the complexity of the conflict

in Kosovo and our gaze is firmly fixed on the human story of one particular family that stand as a metaphor for all suffering families in Kosovo as well as in other conflicts. Their particular story – when told by animation and a romantic fairytale – becomes universal. But the juxtaposition of the live action footage reminds us that this particular fairytale happens to be real. As in one of the seminal animated documentaries, *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), which also ends with live-action footage, *A Kosovo Fairytale* is all about the ending. When the animated sequence in *A Kosovo Fairytale* is over, we are transported to a harsh reality where the family addresses the son they left behind via a computer screen. While they speak to their son and brother through Skype, they are shot in extreme close-ups. This is an effective visual strategy to create what is called emotional contagion (Coplan & Goldie, 2011). The family members are visibly upset, and two of them are crying when talking to Albin. The emotional contagion is thereby enhanced by the composition of the shot, the narrative situation and the juxtaposition with the animation. Without the animation, the live action footage would not have the same impact it now has. It is a wake-up call from the fairytale world of the animation. The ending transforms the film in a way that implicates us and it forces us to watch and share the Neziris pain and guilt.

What do we see at the end? We see tears, guilt and longing. We are forced to look,

and to realise that what the Neziris family remembers is a construct, as well as the whole film that has been a construction of reality. It adds a reflexive mode to the film, as it comments on the limits of the cinematic form, as well as the limits of memory. It also makes us feel the pain of others, and at the same time forces us to accept what cannot be represented. The Kosovo crisis has produced a lot of news footage, but news images are produced to be forgotten. *A Kosovo Fairytale* ends with images that are produced to be remembered. It makes art and questions it at the same time. This is quintessentially a Brechtian approach. Brecht famously devised his stories as to achieve an effect of *Verfremdung*, usually translated as alienation or distancing (Brecht 1977, Willett, 1984).

Verfremdung is traditionally used to shatter illusion, and to stop the spectator from getting swept away by the story and the characters. According to Willett (1984) Brecht wanted to keep his audiences thinking by breaking the illusion he so carefully created in his plays. This approach is evident in his techniques such as actors’ direct address to an audience, harsh lighting and songs that interrupt the action. As Willett (1984) further notes, he wanted to make familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar, but also to “make the strange familiar” as Wordsworth wrote in the preface of *Lyrical Ballads*.

Verfremdung is used to remind the audience that what we see is indeed a construction. In documentary, paradoxically, techniques that create alienation remind us that the story we witness is *more* real because of the fact that it is a construction. This is one reason fictionalized techniques have invaded documentary as a genre.

A narrative construction such as *A Kosovo Fairytale* invites character identification and empathy, but at the same we as viewers are constantly reminded that this is a mediated representation. Animated documentary that mix live footage and animation is similarly making it very clear to the viewer that what is being seen is a construction of reality, it is a technique of alienation. Therefore, it is also a technique of persuasion, a way of convincing the audience of the authenticity of the story.

Conclusion

What can be learned from this particular case study of animated documentary? The creative process that resulted in *A Kosovo Fairytale* allowed for a meaningful encounter with a horrible story that was hard to access and understand, and this by an inexperienced group of young filmmakers. By way of experiencing authors' empathy with their subjects – especially due to one team members personal experience – the group also managed to find a form that communicated this

empathy, with the help of animation. The first lesson learned is that authors' empathy can open the gates to understanding, even though the subject is strange to the observer on multiple levels. This empathy can permeate the process and lead to more complex representations of 'the other'.

The second insight is that the participation of the subjects is a valuable technique in animated documentary. When subjects take part in the making of the narrative trust is gained, and the interaction between participants is greatly enhanced, as distinct lines between storyteller and subject are blurred. The subjects in *A Kosovo Fairytale* drew themselves and this allowed for the act of representation becoming a part of the narrative. It also had a clear and strong dramatic function, since the family wanted to explain themselves to Albin through the drawings.

A commonly held belief is that animation is expensive and time-consuming. The third observation is that animated documentary can be done on a shoestring budget and in a very limited amount of time and still tell a powerful story. *A Kosovo Fairytale* was completed in less than three months and did not have a specific animation budget – the animation itself was made with the use of a single lens reflex camera and with material such as old newspapers and milk cartons.

Lastly, the combination of animation and live-action – especially the powerful close-up – greatly enhanced the potential for empathy and as such worked in the representation of deep personal trauma. *A Kosovo Fairytale* used the combination to maximum effect since the narrative included two separate endings that remind us of the real situation of the Neziris family. In this light animated documentary is in essence a very Brechtian mode of representation, where the carefully crafted illusions are oftentimes broken.

How to represent extreme, traumatic experience is never going to be an easy journey, but one path is to create narratives that have a strong reflective quality, such as *A Kosovo Fairytale*, with the eclectic mix of live-action and animation. As an animated documentary *A Kosovo Fairytale* is a contemporary text that deliberately attempts to present the viewer with representations that allow for an encounter with the tentativeness, incompleteness, fracturing and surreality of trauma in the narrative context.

Animated documentary can provide filmmakers and storytellers tools to create character identification and empathy with distant others. In a best case scenario, such as has been demonstrated by *A Kosovo Fairytale*, animated documentary can re-connect us with our common humanity. In short, animated documentary draws that which cannot be spoken.

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A Kosovo Fairytale (2009) [Animated Documentary] 12 min

Nylund, Anna-Sofia; Middlewick, Mark; Nell, Samantha (writing/directing)

Chipfupa, Tapiwa (producing), Nell, Samantha (animation/cinematography), Middlewick, Mark (editing), Allén, Ludvig (sound design)

North South South Exchange, Finland/South Africa

The film *A Kosovo Fairytale* can be accessed through the following link:

<https://vimeo.com/25149104>

Nanook of the North (1922) [Documentary] 79 min

Flaherty, Robert (writing, directing, producing)

USA: Les Frères Revillon & Pathé Exchange

Waltz With Bashir (2008) [Animated Documentary] 90 min

Folman, Ari (writing, directing, producing)

Israel, Germany, France: Bridgit Folman Film Gang, Les Films d'Ici & Razor Film Produktion



Figure 1: A screen capture from *A Kosovo Fairytale* (2009). The Neziri family gather around the youngest family member, the newborn Albin. The animated characters are drawn by the actual family members they represent.