



Ryan Through the Looking Glass: Psycho-realism and the Animated Documentary

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Abstract:

In this article, the author analyzes the working of the animated documentary, with specific focus on the use of psycho-realism in Chris Landreth's *Ryan* (2004). Her work draws on Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Sergei Eisenstein's concept of 'plasmaticity', in addition to the work done by Bill Nichols, Paul Wells, and Anabelle Honess Roe. The mobility inherent to ANT can be seen aesthetically in motion in the plasmatic body of animation. The article analyzes how *Ryan* builds a strong case of psycho-realism with its surreal character design, non-discriminatory aesthetics that do not differentiate between the world inside and the world outside, the subject and the filmmaker, and the living and the non-living, but renders them alive and coexisting within the film through animism. *Ryan* takes the viewers through the looking glass and into a realm where physical laws no longer govern time and space. A new surreal dimension opens up that is able to capture the liminality and mobility of visual truth.

Keywords: Animated Documentary, Actor Network Theory (ANT), actors, alief, black-boxing, circulating entity, fantasmatic, indexical realism, liminality, non-Euclidean space, network, plasmaticity, psycho-realism, photorealism, plastination, surrealism.

The increasing prevalence and popularity of the animated documentary is symptomatic of a deeper and a more nuanced understanding of the traditions of animation and documentary filmmaking, which in itself is set against the backdrop of the digital age and the manipulation of the pixel due to which the very parameters of recording the 'lived experience' have changed.ⁱ It is suggestive of a quest for the nature of accuracy in documentary filmmaking that has evolved, cutting its umbilical ties with the reductive need for indexical realism, foregoing the 'absolute real' for the mobile flux of liminal surreality inherent in animation.ⁱⁱ Though the term 'animated documentary' still carries the tremors of its paradoxical origin -



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supposedly as a cross between the mainstream understanding of ‘documentary’ as cinema vérité and the ‘animated film’ as a cartoonish and predominantly fantastic genre popularized by Disney- on the surface, it is anything but an oxymoronic sum total of the two. The animated documentary has given way to a very dynamic mode of recording and documenting reality in the post-truth era.ⁱⁱⁱ This article attempts to analyze the working of the animated documentary through a descriptive case study of Chris Landreth’s *Ryan* (2004), an animated documentary that won the 2004 Oscar for Best Animated Short Film among many other awards and became a major milestone in popularizing the genre.

As Eric Patrick states, “the very nature of animation is to foreground its process and artifice” (Patrick, 38). Evolving in a space where live-action has already marked its predominance in the sphere of indexical realism, animation always strives to highlight its own unique prowess. Animation flourishes in a constant state of shapeshifting fluidity, motion and surreality, a quality which is best expressed by Sergei Eisenstein who describes it as follows:

The rejection of the constraint of form, fixed once and for all, freedom from ossification, an ability to take on any form dynamically. An ability which I would call ‘plasmaticity,’ for here a being, represented in a drawing, a being of a given form, a being that has achieved a particular appearance, behaves itself like primordial protoplasm, not yet having a stable form, but capable of taking on any and all forms of animal life on the ladder of evolution. (Eisenstein, 117)

This ability to take on any form opens up channels of expression that can harness the ‘liminal surreal’ that often flows under the radar of the ‘photographical real’. The animated documentary seeks freedom from an ‘ossified’ depiction of reality to chase the ‘protoplasmic’ reality. The terrain of the “photographically un-representable and/or non-psychical aspects” can be charted by the plasmatic “animated visuality” (Ehrlich, 251). Hence, to understand the mechanics of the animated documentary, it becomes necessary to analyze the ways in which animation is able to operate effectively from a place of its own creative fabrication. Entering into the will of an animated text is like stepping through the looking glass. The animated



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world pulsates with life and offers a non-Euclidean space where time and matter are warped to better accommodate the reality which, in being surreal, is more than skin deep.^{iv}

One of the central tenets of the animated documentary is the tendency to encapsulate the protoplasmic ‘evocative’ truth, that is, truth- not as it appears but as it is experienced.^v Animation, like surrealism, lends viscosity to the ‘unseen’ emotive aspects of reality using its uniquely illogical and unexpected ‘non-sequitur’ expression by utilizing random association, irrational juxtaposition, distortion, and uninhibited free play which further translates into an accurate yet distinctly fluid aesthetic and a more Griersonian ‘creative treatment of actuality’.^{vi} The animated documentary eschews “a direct relationship or commentary on reality preferring instead a more surreal, symbolic or metaphoric approach” (Roe 21). It is using this approach that animation is able to fully express the visceral, evocative truth. Bill Nichols describes this as a fold in time that “incorporates the embodied perspective of the filmmaker and the emotional investment of the viewer” (Nichols, *Critical Inquiry* 88).

Let us borrow certain concepts from the Actor Network Theory (ANT) that are relevant in this context.^{vii} The methodology followed by the animated documentary is very similar to the ANT methodology. The animated documentary strives to “follow the actors themselves” (Latour, *Reassembling* 12). Here, the actors are the living or non-living participants within the network. The network, in turn, is made up of the interrelations amongst the actors. By following the actors descriptively, the animated documentary is able to break down and reassemble the a priori and ‘black boxed’ reality, by uncovering the haunting subtext of surreality.^{viii} It uses its plasmatic prowess to capture the dynamism of the fluid truth, or the “circulating entity”^{ix} (Latour, *ANT and After* 17). All the other characteristics of the animated documentary stem from this methodology.

In the present context, it becomes interesting to study how the plasmatic quality of animation plays a role in the animated documentary. It is often assumed that in an animated documentary, the plasmatic quality would be kept in restraint, considering the unrealistic quality that seems to be attached to it. Since, in the tradition of the direct (observational) cinema, the recording camera, the metaphorical fly on the wall, is expected to record exactly what the eyes can see, it is assumed that the plasmatic play of animation would only serve to



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distort that observational reality. But it takes exactly this plasmaticity to “present the conventional subject matter of documentary (the ‘world out there’ of observable events) in non-conventional ways” and “to convey visually the ‘world in here’ of subjective, conscious experience – subject matters traditionally beyond the documentary purview” (Roe 2). Animation is able to visually depict diverse realities, collapsing the internal-external divide. This particular aspect becomes interesting in relation to the Actor Network Theory (ANT) as well. As mentioned by Bruno Latour, the second wave of science studies which talks of:

[...] redistributing subjective quality *outside*—but of course, it is a totally different 'outside' now that epistemology has been turned into a circulating reference. The two movements—the first and the second wave, one on objectivity, the other on subjectivity—are closely related: the more we have 'socialized' so to speak 'outside' nature, the more 'outside' objectivity the content of our subjectivity can gain. There is plenty of room now for both.” (Latour, *ANT and After* 23)

By the so called ‘externalization’ of the ‘inner’ reality, the animated film is able to dissolve the boundaries between the internal and the external by following the “actors themselves” (Latour, *Reassembling* 12). This inclination relies heavily on the plasmatic mode of animated expression. There are numerous instances where plasmaticity can be seen at work in the animated documentary film. Analyzing the instances of these within the animated documentary, we come to understand the various purposes that this quality serves in visually describing subjects that are otherwise so difficult to communicate. Roe states, “For while the indexical relationship between film and reality, something upon which documentary’s claims to truth and evidence so heavily rest, is absent, animation is very much present, both lacking and exceeding the visual indexical bond between image and reality” (Roe 2).

Chris Landreth’s *Ryan* (2004) is based on the life of Ryan Larkin, a Canadian animator and a prodigy who fell into drug and alcohol abuse. The film makes use of the audio recordings of interviews that took place between Larkin and Landreth, in addition to interviews of Felicity Fanjoy, who had been Larkin’s girlfriend and Derek Lamb, who used to be his producer. This provides acoustic indexicality to the film. The film also comprises of snippets from Larkin’s early films like *Walking* (1969) and *Street Musique* (1972). Photographs too are included, in



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one case, to recreate Ryan's persona from the 1970s. Landreth made use of 3D animation, rotoscoping, stroboscoping, vectors and distortion effects in the film. At the onset, the film begins with the sound of toilet flushing. Even without a visual to accompany the sound, it prepares the audience for the setting. The audio of the entire film remains indexically connected with the real subjects of the film yet, are unabashedly edited and shuffled to answer to the evocative needs of the film. The visual that follows the sound, further reveals the animated persona of Chris Landreth, the filmmaker himself, standing in the restroom of a hostel or a homeless mission. The restroom, though dull, drab and in a dilapidated state, looks quite realistic and concrete. Directly facing the frame, Landreth immediately introduces himself by announcing: "Hi. My name is Chris and I am here to explain some things" (*Ryan*). As one of the actors in the network, Landreth does not disassociate himself from the text of the film but accepts his own participation in it. This is the self-reflexive tendency which prevails in many animated documentaries, for instance in the works of Ari Folman and Paul Fierlinger. Many of Landreth's other films also play upon the same idea, for instance, his films like *The End* (1995) and *Subconscious Password* (2013).

The self-reflexive participation of the filmmaker in *Ryan* becomes significant as a process of identification and location in documentary filmmaking. As stated by Nichols, "the filmmaker is the one caught up in the sequence of images; it is his or her fantasy that these images embody" (Nichols, *Critical Inquiry* 77). This is quite different from the cinema vérité tradition or the direct (observational) cinema which assumes the non-interventionist eye of the camera that becomes the invisible 'fly on the wall' and has the ability to unobtrusively record actuality with its mechanical capacity to lock in objective truth. By revealing the participation of the filmmaker, the animated documentary, in foregrounding its artifice, is able to venture freely through the network, by following the actors themselves, of which the filmmaker is undoubtedly a significant part.

Landreth uses the term 'psycho-realism' to refer to the technique he uses in *Ryan* to record the full lived experience which encapsulates not the outer reality as divorced from the inner reality, but the collapse of the outer and inner space to liberate the circulating flux of action itself. Though *Ryan* makes use of photorealism in the depiction of actors (living subjects,



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non-living objects or backgrounds), yet their physical forms are ‘fantasmatic’. Landreth states his interest in using photorealism “to expose the realism of the incredibly complex, messy, chaotic, sometimes mundane, and always conflicted quality we call human nature” (Robertson, 2004). He states that *Ryan* makes use of:

photorealism to tell superficially imaginative stories, what I think they can be used for is to show, in a very detailed and realistic way, something that is not necessarily realistic – which, in this case, is the psychological makeup of people and characters; often ordinary characters who nonetheless have very complex psychologies and personalities and behavioral dysfunctions. (Animation World Network)

The direct visual impact of this can be seen in the bodies Landreth depicts in his works. He utilizes the full plasmatic scope of animation to give birth of what are often ‘grotesque’ bodies or at times ‘miraculous’ bodies, crossing over to surreality. This is evident in many of his films like *The End*, *Bingo*, *Subconscious Password*, *The Spine* and, of course, *Ryan*. In *Ryan*, Landreth makes use of the metaphorical mirror to uncover this layer of psycho-realism. In a clear juxtaposition, visible at exactly 00:28 seconds into the film, we can clearly notice the difference between Landreth’s body outside the mirror and his body as it is reflected in the mirror.

In the mirror, the right side of his head has a massive missing chunk, almost creating a grotesque crater. Yet, his head appears whole on the audience’s side of the frame. Landreth, by using the mirror as a device, makes a clear distinction between both the worlds, one of reductive realism as it appears to the naked eye which is only skin deep, and on the other side, across the mirror, the evocative truth, the psycho-reality. By exercising his control over the physically visible attributes of the body, Landreth is able to collapse the inner-outer dichotomy by bringing the psychosomatic imprints and cumulative identity of the actors into the visual domain of physicality, that is, by unleashing a fuller visual thinginess of identity. What seem like digital malformations, the scars on Landreth’s animated body are depicted as manifestations of his personal trials and sorrows which, though they left no visible scar on his physical body, left scars on his psyche. The inner-outer dichotomy between the body and the mind is collapsed as Landreth explains the psychical import of his scars. Moreover, the



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psyche is revealed, not localized somewhere deep inside the mind, but as one with the entire being of an individual and its manifestation can be felt by the individual in the very way they experience the life around them. In a way, the film makes us realize that the psyche itself, till now black-boxed must be reassembled.

The animated persona of Landreth goes on to provide a certain contextual identity to his persona as an actor within the network. While allocating the month and the year of the turning points of his life to these scars, he not only documents his past traumatic experiences as facts, but, more importantly, acknowledges their agency and the reality of their presence within the network of the documentary film. As Landreth turns towards the mirror, he points to the blue-yellow-pink gashes on his left cheek and states, “These are from October 1989 when my unbridled romantic world view was permanently shattered” (*Ryan*). The image in the mirror seems to be melting and almost fluid. Pointing to the missing chunk on the right side of his head which has left a yellow crater that looks like a smiley, he explains, “This is from September 1982 when I underwent a catastrophic loss of my ability to organize my finances in any meaningful way” (*Ryan*).

This is followed by a sudden zoom in inside his head, accompanied by a scream, which is shown to be filled with convoluting yellow sinews and which widens all of a sudden into a field of sunflowers. Eventually, the transition becomes complete as the film takes the audience through the looking glass. The scene turns to a grayscale as Landreth says, “But before all that I took on a paralyzing, self-defeating, all pervading dread of personal failure” (*Ryan*). At this point, colored threads seem to burst forth from inside his head, wrapping themselves up and closing in around the head.

In positioning his own presence within the network, not just physically, but psychologically, Landreth adds further accuracy to the network generated by the documentary film which is often made up of the subjectivities of both the interviewer and the interviewee. Often, the exact relationship shared by the subject and the filmmaker is relegated to the hidden subtext of the film. Yet, Landreth ensures that this complexity is also accurately foregrounded in the film. In contextualizing his own identity as an actor, Landreth is able to account for the conversation he has with Larkin, the impact he has on Larkin’s psyche and



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the impact Larkin's outburst has on him. Hence, though Larkin stays as the focus of delineation within the film, the other living and non-living actors are given their due visibility in terms of their influence on each other.^xLandreth states: "All the conversations in *Ryan* are live. They are actually him talking to me and vice-versa. But you know when I was doing that I realized that I couldn't take myself out of the story. So there I am" (*Alter Egos*).Landreth, quoting Anais Nain, states "we don't see things as *they* are, we see things as *we* are" (qtd. in Roe 132). This realization is embraced in the animate documentary that welcomes the subjective point of view.

As Landreth walks away from the mirror in the restroom, he takes the viewers into the parallel inverted space on the other side of the mirror. The washroom with its toilets, sinks, mirrors, pipes, doors, walls, and floor-reveals a kind of haziness of form. Everything looks skewed. The words 'Do not spit in the sink' written in French and English on the board are inverted, a clear marker that we are on the other side of the mirror. Even the audio sounds muffled and warped. Everything appears to be fluid as if declaring that this inverted mirrored space is a different space, a non-Euclidean space, where we can witness the network at work, moving, changing, and transforming in front of our eyes. Moreover, Landreth's movement itself is not in focus but reveals a kind of blurred motion.

As he walks into the dining cafeteria of the homeless mission, we are able to see other characters in the background with exaggerated forms. There is a man with a bushy beard and hairy arms, another man with an elongated head tapering on the top, a deflated guy in green smoking and almost melting on the table, a woman with a cap on her head shaped like cat ears, a man on crutches and at the rear end, Larkin, almost unnoticeable. In the background there are unheeded notices of 'No Smoking'. Shades of grey dominate the setting. Larkin comments on this as well. "I live in Toronto, a city in Canada, where I see way too many shades of gray for my own good health" (*Ryan*).In a gray city, Landrethdescribes Larkin as a 'splash of color.'

Compared to Landreth though, Larkin looks frail and dilapidated. Almost half of his head is missing, except for the framework, his left eye, mouth, and his glasses. Metaphorically, this speaks of the relative magnitude of trauma and creative loss incurred due to alcohol and drug



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abuse that Larkin has dealt with in his life. Larkin himself reacted to not liking his skeletal animated form in the film and being ‘very uncomfortable’, as depicted in a live-action documentary directed by Lawrence Green named *Alter Egos* (2004). As Larkin and Landreth interact in *Ryan*, little plastic hands glowing silver and pink extend from Landreth’s head with little background greeting voices. Larkin himself extends only a single hand from his head. The body itself becomes expressive of their respective visceral locations with respect to each other, almost like an anatomy of emotions. The topography of Larkin’s body is surreal. Most of the substance is lost. His arms are mangled. The tips of his fingers, symbolic as a synecdoche of his creative prowess and love for animation, are tinged with color. Yet, the film seems to have captured the movement of his head, the expressions of his eye, and other minuscule mannerisms hyperrealistically. Landreth has also been working on an advanced software project called JALI in Toronto that stands for Jaw and Lip Integration, a hyperrealistic facial language mechanism.

For the character design of the film, Landreth was inspired by the plastinated bodies on display at one of the Body Worlds exhibitions which display human and animal bodies and anatomical body parts preserved through the process of plastination as educational content on anatomy.^{xi} There is sometimes a sense of unease generated while looking at the incomplete models which are quite different from the usual hyperrealistic 3D models. The design is aesthetically digital. For some of the animation, the film made use of a mathematical equation called cords which is used to design the curves and to animate any structures that required filamentous meshes during the character modelling process. For instance, the colorful threads intuitively moving and jutting out of the characters to portray their psychological triggering are animated using cords.

In *Alter Egos*, Landreth is shown describing the process of animating Felicity at an animation film festival in Monaco in 2004. Her transparent model is layered with a rough sketchy look. Derek Lamb’s character uses the charcoal sketch made by Ryan and hence, provides further variety to the aesthetics. In the tradition of visual psychological realism, *Ryan* set a new record for the animated documentary, unleashing the plasmatic possibilities of 3D animation in generating a visual space that forever meshes together the normative



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external and internal space by depicting the actor network. Outwardly, to a photographic camera, the body of the characters would reveal their seemingly ossified forms. A conventional live-action documentary, hence, would only use verbal narration. But with the use of animation, all aspects of realities, psychical or physical can be accessed horizontally. The psychological realism takes the shape of surreal bodies and fluid backgrounds. As Landreth explains in an interview recorded in *Alter Egos*: “I’d like to deal [...] with mangling people’s appearances to show psychological states of people” (*Alter Egos*).

Another self-reflexive factor that can be witnessed within the documentary is related to the domain of ‘interview’ which is often considered as a normative documentary component. As Landreth walks across to where Larkin is seated, we can see the presence of boom microphones. They are not kept outside frame as many of the other live-action documentaries tend to do but are actually foregrounded as a matter of fact implements needed to carry forward the interview process. Hence, the space becomes a systematized and rearranged space within the network where the audio-visual recording is to happen. Though the camera is absent in the animated film, the microphones to record the audio are very much present. This is a reenactment of the actual process of interviewing Larkin where the audio became the recorded text while the visual was animated.

Also, the inclusion of Felicity Fanjoy and Derek Lamb in the interview is done within the same animated space, yet with certain aesthetic markers that suggest it is not the shared physical space. For instance, Felicity is introduced through a set of photographs juxtaposed one against the other. As her sketchy outlines come to surface, the background turns blue using color correction. Her outlines are pink, blue, and yellow with a very fluid style of contouring. At times, as she moves around to speak, a part of her face is made visible now and then. During her conversation with Landreth about Larkin, Larkin’s figure in greyscale is put to pause. Time for Larkin seems to move more slowly as his eyes blink in slow motion. This is a comment on the other side of live-action documentaries which at times edit out sections of interview that often do not take place in real time. After an eye blink, Larkin suddenly comes back to life. He faces Felicity, making contact with her hand. As he



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confesses that he still loves her, he seems to feel like his younger self again, as parts of his face seem to revive. This is psychological realism at its best.

In another instance, Derek Lamb enters the interview on a mechanical chair vertically. He is sketched in black and grey, almost similar to his sketch made by Larkin. As he begins to speak, Larkin is again put on pause. The entire frame too turns grayscale, except for Landreth himself, who reacts to Lamb's reference to "every artist's worst fear" as colorful filaments emerge from his head and wrap around his face representing feelings of loss and anger (*Ryan*).

As the emotional exchange between Larkin and Landreth progresses, the environment at the dining area too reflects general feelings of melancholy, ennui and frustration which are expressed through the gray hazy surroundings and the other people present there depicting a state of emotional realism. Moreover, as actors with agency within the network, even non-living things are animated. An instance is the thermos containing alcohol from which Larkin drinks after every few intervals. Larkin is shown to have developed a dependence upon alcohol which seems to exert a strong influence upon him, almost calling him to drink from it. Two elongated mechanical hands extend from the thermos towards Larkin, chiming 'I love you'.

The emotive subtext of the interaction between Landreth and Larkin is revealed as Landreth asks Larkin to get back into serious creative work and beat alcohol addiction. By participating in the network, Landreth steps down from assuming the position of the God-creator who is neutrally studying Larkin as a subject. Instead, Landreth, in talking to the subject of his documentary *Ryan*, himself turns into an active participant in the network, embracing his position in the network as an actor. Landreth's own reactions are not neutralized by the 'voice of god' effect. As a filmmaker, he does not shy away from depicting his own emotional reaction to Lamb when he talks about every artist's worst fear. Rather, playing on the motif of the voice of god, Landreth goes one step ahead and depicts the true emotional import of his advice to Larkin to give up alcohol. He seems to gain a sanctimonious semblance of being 'holier than thou' which is represented by a white mechanical halo on his head that fuses and breaks when he understands that drinking is not a



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weakness for Larkin but a way of coping with deprivation that he has been hurled into. As Larkin, transmogrified by the breakdown with red spikes ripping through his face, seems to lose a bit of his hair and scalp that Landreth picks up and tries to hand over to him, the body itself becomes a manifestation of the decomposition of the psychological state of the characters.

As Bill Nichols states that “it is not simply the knowledge possessed by witnesses and experts that needs to be conveyed through their speech, but also the unspoken knowledge that needs to be conveyed by the body itself” (Nichols, *Theorizing Documentary* 175). Landreth, surrounded by boom microphones, as Larkin stands frozen in grayscale, asks himself, “What possessed me to bring that subject up? I look at you and I see a lot of things about my mom” (Ryan). Using this as a transition, Landreth talks about the downhill journey of his mother, Barbara to addiction. This inbuilt fear, in turn, affects Landreth who finds himself overpowered completely by the colorful filaments like Larkin, representing the feeling of suffocating entrapment brought forth by self-doubt and the numbing fear of artistic failure.

Yet, Larkin redeems himself through his continued interest in images and movements of people on the street as he asks for spare change. As Larkin studies a 35-year-old drawing of his, the frame zooms in to show his aged fingers that seem to have retained their dimensions and color, with patches of paint on the finger tips, revealing that he is still as excited about drawing as he was during the successful part of his career. In his mind one can see the projection of memories evoked suddenly after being stimulated by the drawings.

As Landreth explained in an interview, “Sometimes it represents literally what he’s seeing in front of him, or how he’s comprehending what he’s seeing in front of him” (*Alter Egos*). Towards the end of the film, surreal and exaggerated images are depicted like a clown carrying a bicycle and a piano, René Magritte’s ‘The Son of Man’ figure, a hand walking a dog, and his alter ego, a more decimated Landreth across the street. In the reflection of a shop window though, Larkin is still his younger self at heart. His very movement is that of art.

This descriptive ability of animation becomes even more remarkable in relation to films that describe issues like neurological conditions, mental illness, trauma, or psychological stress born of physical ailment in a documentary film. It is precisely the plasmatic magic of



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animation with the possibilities offered by its flexible form and movement that it “redefines the material world and captures the oscillation between the interior and exterior states, thus engaging with matters both of (aesthetic, spiritual and intellectual) consciousness and the reception of a pragmatic (socio-cultural) ‘reality’” (Wells, 7). By achieving a state of surreality in the film, Landreth is able to bring forth ‘alief’ which is the mental and emotional state that can often contradict the surficial physical reality or empirical data.^{xii}As Wells further states: “Animation, simplistically, the art of making films frame-by-frame-serves to question and challenge the received knowledge which govern the physical laws and normative socio-cultural orthodoxies of the ‘real world’” (Wells,5).

Ryan, as an animated documentary, strives to do the same by remodeling the very aesthetics of time and space. Animated documentary, by using psychological “penetration”, is able to express and evoke the inner space^{xiii} (qtd. in Wells 122).In Ehrlich’s words, “Since the rules of physics do not apply, the animated spaces seem like separate spheres from the physical world” (Ehrlich 253-254). In such a space, reign aesthetics of a different nature which are especially empowered to chart domains that our normalized perception either cannot address or has become too numb to register and in the process lost all response to. It is exactly in this domain that animation is at its best, flaunting its difference and uniqueness.

The very nature of animation opens up possibilities of visually depicting the emotional and psychological subtext of the narrative through an artistic representation of the externalization of an internal reality that can coexist with the given reality, subverting it.^{xiv} In its ability to do so, lies a deeper and a hidden power. It brings to mind Terry Gilliam’s reference to animation’s “wonderful acts of smuggling” of hidden layers of meanings which address the very roots of the origin of all actions to the heart, the mind, and hence, to the individual (Gilliam qtd. in Wells



Notes

ⁱ Tom Gunning evokes the playfulness generated by the manipulated image in “The Transforming Image: The Roots of Animation in Metamorphosis and Motion”: “Thus, the protean transforming image, the very nature of visible form itself, becomes subject to technical manipulation and the moving image becomes endowed with the possibility of constant metamorphosis: a brave new world of Gods and monsters, engaged in potentially endless transformation” (Gunning 67).

ⁱⁱ The term ‘index’ is a term taken from semiotics that denotes the phenomenon of the ‘sign’ or ‘signifier’ corresponding to the ‘signified’. The degree of indexicality becomes relevant to the ‘truth claim’ of photography, a term given by Tom Gunning. The degree of indexical realism in photography becomes a major argument to support that photographs can capture the absolute ‘truth’.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term post-truth was first used by Steve Tesich in an essay in *The Nation* in 1992. Tesich referred to the post-Watergate, post Iran-Contra scandal and the post-Persian Gulf War as the ‘post-truth world.’ Referring to the pervasiveness of deception in a media dominant world, Ralph Keyes used the term ‘post-truth era’ in his book by the same name, *The Post-Truth Era* (2004).

^{iv} Though the terms Euclidean and non-Euclidean are borrowed from geometry, for the present context, the non-Euclidean space is the space where the regular and fixed physical rules of the 2D and the ‘flat’ space do not apply, but rather the space presents its curves and its surreal, morphing coordinates.

^v The ‘evocative’ element in the animated documentary stresses on evoking emotional response in the viewers through performance, reenactment and creative fabrication. It expresses the emotive coordinates of truth as equally important aspects of the subject in question.

^{vi} John Grierson called documentary as the “creative treatment of actuality.” The rendition of the truth in documentary is never direct and reductive, but rather creatively slanting.



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^{vii} ANT was developed by Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law, among others like Madeleine Akrich, Antoine Hennion, Vololona Rabearisoa, Annemarie Mol, and Vicky Singleton. The theory, often cited rather as a ‘methodology’, made interventions in social theory by stressing on the mobility and fluidity inherent in the term ‘social’. The main contention of ANT is to be wary of a priori explanations of the social and to rather encourage a more empirically-sound flat description of its mobility and diversity without discriminating between the various actors (living or non-living) that act in a network. ANT encourages defamiliarization, metaphorical ambiguity and critical tension in terminologies, warns against essentialism, thereby encouraging a process of reassembling while discouraging ‘black boxing’ (Law 1).

^{viii} According to Bruno Latour, ‘blackboxing’ is “the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become” (Latour, *Pandora’s Hope* 304).

^{ix} Latour states, “ANT might have hit on one of the very phenomena of the social order: may be the social possesses the bizarre property of not being made of agency and structure at all, but rather of being a circulating entity” (Latour, *ANT and After* 17). ANT does not consider the debate of absolute origin and consequence but rather considers that conditions exist as a “circulating entity.” According to Latour, “actors are not conceived as fixed entities but as flows, as circulating objects, undergoing trials, and their stability, continuity, isotopies has to be obtained by other actions and other trials” (Latour, *Philosophia* 8).

^x Landreth states in the film, “But I am getting off the subject here I am afraid. This story is about Ryan.”

^{xi} Plastination is a process of preserving anatomical parts or bodies of animals and humans using plastic which helps in preserving their characteristics that can be used for educational resources.



^{xii} Tamar Gendler uses the concept of ‘alief’ as opposed to ‘belief’ as the fact of feeling something is true (even though it may not be), as compared to rationally knowing something to be true.

^{xiii} John Halas and Joy Batchelor provide the term ‘penetration’ which Wells evokes, pointing to the power of animation to “evoke the internal space and portray the invisible” (Wells 122).

^{xiv} As stated by Wells: “Consequently, this results in an ontological equivalence in the animated text which recognizes the co-existent parity of perceived orthodoxies in representing the literal world and then expression of dream states, memory and the fragmentary practice of ‘thought’ itself” (Wells 7).



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