

Analysis on the Art Therapy Function of Animated Documentary Films

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Abstract—In recent years, the popularity of animated documentary film has shown us a new possibility of moving image redemption in exploring the internal world, healing the pain and caring for the mind. This paper aims to analyze the art therapy function of animated documentary film, in order to call for interdisciplinary cooperation. The author hopes to attract more attention by professionals and general audience on psychology of art, art healing function of animated documentary, and ultimately promotes wider self-healing and moving image text creation in both school education and community education.

Keywords—*animated documentary film; art therapy*

I. INTRODUCTION

The British Academy of Film Award for best animated short film *A is for Autism* (1992) gives us an animated portrait of mental illness and psychological emotions. In recent years, more and more animated documentary films have topped the world cinema awards. From *Ryan* (2004) to *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), *Sikhzein* (2008) to *Life, Animated* (2016), in which including both mainstream commercial works and independent pioneers have similar characteristics: minding reality, exploring the internal world, integrating life and reconstructing the truth. The most significant function of animated documentary films is to show the unique subjectivity of characters through animation, and explores "concepts, emotions, feelings and states of mind"[1] through animation. The main purpose of this article is to obtain the surreal interpretation of life conflict through animated documentary, and to call for the attention and research of moving image therapy through interdisciplinary cooperation between art creation and psychology.

II. INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE: ART MEDIA AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

A. *Moving Image Therapy: Interdisciplinary Art Creation*

1) *Art of Therapy VS Art as Therapy*: At present, art therapy might be still a strange medical term in mainland China, though it has gone through more than half a century in the west. In 1930, influenced by Freud and Jung, two psychologists who developed psychoanalysis, from which Doctor Margaret Naumburg made an extension called art therapy mode, to encourage patients with art form spontaneously unconscious imagery and relieve the disabled through empathy, depicting the life of suffering and

interpretation of dream images. Finally, she hopes to reach epiphany (insight) through the implementation of art. Up to 1950s, in the art education for disabled children, teacher Edith Kramer developed the concept that art therapy can be applied to different groups, emphasizing the role of artistic creation and artistic ascension in psychotherapy. Dr. Naumburg and teacher Kramer, the two pioneers who created two major schools of art therapy, that is, "art of therapy" and "art as therapy". The former believes that art therapy can be used as a basic and main treatment method, while the latter believes that art therapy is only the auxiliary way of psychotherapy, not the mainstream.

2) *Moving Image Healing within Art Therapy*: Art therapy shows us the amazing healing power of art itself and the potential of people to make use of the medium of art. From the early technology oriented psychological analysis, art therapy focuses more on the treatment of visual presentation, absorbing music, dance and drama and other art forms to motivate respondents self-expression, self-perception and team interaction, thus today's art therapy has diversified philosophical attitude. As the seventh art, film has become a fashionable cultural consumption since its birthday at 100 years ago, and gradually took on the role of enlarged edition of "psychological therapeutic room". The advantage of the filmed alike moving image works brought about in art therapy is obvious. Gilles Deleuze quoted the French cultural pioneer Artaud's words to illustrate the nature of the movie thinking, "film is not story-telling, but a series of mental states"[2] Coincidentally, Christian Matz creatively combines film with psychotherapy, and suggests that films are dealing with human desires. Film can "activate the subconscious instincts of the human being" [3] because of its audio-visual mechanism that is capable of expressing feeling and arousing illusion. In the process of watching moving images, people achieve the illusion of "hypnosis" or "like dream, not dream", so as to realize the catharsis, projection, substitution and sublimation of psychotherapy, finally reaching the psychotherapy.

B. *Animated Documentary: the Representation of Image Thinking and Art Therapy*

1) *The Most Liberal Art Therapy in Non-verbal Visual Arts*: Although domestic scholars has continually disputed on

the ontology concept of animated documentary, the assumption and symbolic character of animation and the imitation and interpretation nature of documentary conveys a huge impetus of their combination in image thinking mechanism and mental model construction. We might as well turn our vision to a broad range of moving images not simply focus on films, and think about the function and the way of art healing in animated documentary. As is known to all, animation is never kids' special, as documentary is not only serious works of highbrow. Because of the non language communication character, animated documentary's image text contributes to the lack of intelligence, action Limited (i.e. children), people who loss language function excel the language threshold of traditional psychotherapy (i.e. interview), and to avoid tension and discomfort (resistance and defense treatment). Flexible material and multi-dimensional experience give free space for the creation of animation documentary, which also provides infinite possibilities for art healing.

2) *"My World" Decoder: from "I See" to "I Say."*: The narration of Ryan (2004), Waltz with Bashir (2008) and Life, Animated (2016) as mentioned above are all from the first personal perspective "I". From "I" to talk about my individual insights behind real life, historical events, or illness experiences is the art healing feature of animated documentary films: "my world" decoder. Now, The watching experience has been liberated from the "mirror image" of Matz or the "staring" pleasure of Laura Mulvey, here "listen to or see how you tell my story" changes into "let me tell my own story.". To encourage the spirit of interactive sharing and independent expression of desire, from "how to say" to "what has been said", in viewing and creation process a man has accomplished the effect of psychotherapy from catharsis-empathy-identity-reconstruction stage that bridges life conflict, integrates inner feelings and perfects personality thoughts.

III. MIND EXPRESSION: SEARCHING FOR THE REAL SELF

Harsin(2009) evaluated Waltz with Bashir (2008) as "a powerful and deeply human meditation" and "a reflection on the insanity war".[4] He praised WWB as "a kind of national and 'everyman' psychotherapy "[5] At the beginning of WWB raises an interesting question, director Ari Folman's friend Boaz Rein-Buskila described a nightmare to him after the war lasted for more than 20 years, then Ari asked Boaz why not go to see the psychological doctor, Boaz said: " No, I'm not looking for them. I'm looking for you." Ali was surprised. "But I'm just a film director!" Boaz replied: " Not can your film do the treatment?" We couldn't tell whether such dialogue was originated from documentary shooting, but it is the director's own questioning of his inner war trauma, which constitutes the motive power and structural basis of the whole film narrative.[6] Animated cartoons are used to express psychology and emotions such as fear, grief, shame, or compassion, kindness, madness etc. Chirs Landreth, director of Ryan (2004) called it "psycho-realism". With fantastic elements, stylized visual effects to portray the internal world and describe characters, which makes animated documentary presenting a

unique charm on reality, memory and mind reproduction, imitation and reconstruction

IV. THE ART THERAPY FOUNDATION OF ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY FILMS

A. Hypothesis: Illusion Projection

Film is a machine of dream making. Whether at daydreaming or no logical fragments, "virtual reality" is the difference between film and mental dream. The hypothetical setting of animated documentary will make people unconsciously enter into the illusion of "I'm watching, I know I'm not him".

B. Imitation: Identity Search

As the memories constantly linked and created by plot, drama, and details of film, the audience will be brought into the identity process of "I will be here" and "I am him/her". When the audience has alienation effect for unfamiliar symbols, it begins to enter the next stage of the self-anesthesia and persuasion.

C. Explanation: Perfect Personality

After times of emotional changes, the audience came to realize the huge difference between animation and their own image, and the absolute right to interpret personal memory. Those terrified, faint, and unknown inner ditches are gradually blocked and turned towards new direction after exposure and amplification.

D. The View of Truth in Animated Documentary is highly Consistent with The Goal of Art Therapy

Truthfulness is the supreme aim in documentary creation. However, truth is not equivalent to actuality. The truth of animated documentary is "creative actuality".[7] As the extension of psychological treatment, art therapy meets the need of compensation of people's fantasies, pressure and tension release, and self-confirmation. It plays a role in people imperceptibly between consciousness and unconsciousness.[8] The animated documentary " as a tool to explore and reveal hidden or forgotten pasts"[9] and to overcome the inner traumatic experience of the past, is beyond the traditional boundaries of the documentary. The psychological analysis and the pursuit of inner truth in psychological treatment are highly combined together. The participation in the production of animated documentary can promote the change of mind and inner self, and ultimately realize the integration of life experience and conflict.

V. THE APPROACH OF ART THERAPY BY ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Animated Minds series [10], directed by clinical psychologists and produced by Andy Glynn, present people's mental dilemmas in short animation. Each animation in the series accompanies the parties (witnesses) to describe their mental disability experience, allowing the viewer to "climb into the heart of pain"[11], and aims to eliminate the imagination and misunderstanding of mental disorders. One of the series named An Alien in the Playground tells a story about Asperger's syndrome. The protagonist Joshua doesn't understand the games played by other children, and is therefore

regarded as a "wacky boy" Quickly he becomes the target of campus bullying. The school became a living nightmare. This film gives us valuable insight into the internal world of special people and opens the possibility of art healing for patients.

Most of the Animated Minds series directly mirror the voice of the interviewees, and they are full of metaphorical pictures, which could maximally avoid the image of the witnesses and reduce the tension and conflict in psychotherapy. The reason for its success is because it effectively combines the visual images of the monologue and the imagination of the client to distinguish it from mere imitation animation. In Bill Nichols' documentary division, "Reflexive" type and "performative" type are demonstrated entirely in this animation series. Scanning the internal world through animation, to achieve self-catharsis, release, and projection, people's emotion achieves empathy via metaphor. Audience starts identification accompanied by imaginary picture, and at last was evoked the psychological needs of character recognition and imitation, sympathy and admiration during the experience of watching animated documentary.

It is interesting to see the first dialogue between director Folman and his psychologist friend Ollie Swan at *Waltz with Bashir* (2008). Swan describes the defects of memory in psychology experiments to answer Folman's confusion, "memory is dynamic and alive... It can fill the gaps in memory with fabricated experiences". Swan constantly asked Folman, "What does the sea symbolize?" "Fear. Sentiment" says Folman. Swan believes that the sea as a symbol functioned as elimination of sorrow and pain suppression. And the process of dreaming is basically not able to be captured and filmed. WWB, this animated documentary provides the opportunity to entering protagonist's memory scene for us: the first person monologue, the reconstruction of memory and the bridge of trauma through interview and visual collage in the dialogue. The "real" scene we've been through is the same as Folman's personal experience. Right now, Folman has a dual identity, both the creator of history and memory and the healed patient. He is not only the viewer of witness, sleepwalking, masquerade, narcissism, but also a self- healing hypnosis and artist.

In the process of art therapy, animated documentary has gone through the following stages:

- Dream recurrence: reconstruction memory fragments;
- Life fable: metaphor, explanation, predicament;
- Reality hypnosis: facing and accepting pain and trauma;
- Conflict integration: the transition from irrational to rational experience;
- Self-improvement: releasing good intentions and regulating personality;

During art therapy of animated documentary, from a passive viewer to an active creator, the prophet's narrative point of view changes into interaction and participation perspective. Thus it could help people explore the hidden emotions, rediscover themselves, and build mindfulness life.

VI. CONCLUSION

Animated documentary shows us that art therapy, like art education, provides the world with opportunities for spiritual expression, interpersonal communication and self-growth. After transforming the mind and the mind into visual images and then upgrading them to abstract experiential cognition, this process eases emotional conflict, improves insight, and purifies the mind. Because of the professionalism of art, healing and film creation, there are few studies on the art of healing in animated documentary films. I hope this paper can promote more cross-border sights on psychology of art and animation creation, so that more ordinary people through professional training are able to join in animated documentary creation. May the light of animated documentary illuminate every confused mind or lonely soul.

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