CARLA MACKINNON - Royal College of Art

Analysis of short animated documentary films programmed in key UK festivals: 2016–20

Abstract

This study of 144 short UK animated documentaries, exhibited between 2016 and 2020, identifies frequently occurring characteristics in the films' content and production contexts. Analysis of the films shows that the majority of these films are made by directors from an animation background, rather from than a documentary background, and also show a high occurrence of films made by female and disabled filmmakers. It also shows that self-funding is frequently adopted in the production of these films, and that the films in the study favour 2D digital and traditional animation techniques over 3D animation. Funding and finance contexts are shown to be broad, and to correlate with trends in theme, for example social issues, health and mental health were more common in films supported by trusts, charities and foundations than those made in other finance contexts. In general, the findings support many of the suggestions and observations that have been made about animated documentary by scholars such as Annabelle Honess Roe, Paul Wells and others. However, they also raise questions, for example the high rate of self-funding, often alongside other sources of funding, suggests potential barriers to entry for those from diverse social-economic backgrounds. This study suggests areas for future research that can be taken up in the field of animated documentary, and contributes to an increased focus on quantitative research alongside qualitative analysis in the study of animated documentary, of short-form film and of films made outside of commercial contexts.

Introduction

Short animated documentary production takes place in a heterogeneous landscape, encompassing multiple industries, fields and production cultures. Films that can fall under the banner of 'animated documentary' are diverse, and there is an absence of clarity regarding where the category begins and ends. This boundary-crossing nature of the animated documentary form has been noted by scholars (see, e.g., Guo and Yan 2017: 128; Ehrlich 2019: 2; Lefevre 2019: 21).

Despite the heterogeneity of the field, scholars and filmmakers do make observations about common tendencies in stories and styles taken up by animated documentary. These can be found

presented in journals or books, and at conferences and festivals. However, these statements are generally made through informal, if extensive, observation of animated documentaries. There is little in the way of quantitative research to indicate trends. For this reason, I conducted a study of 144 short UK animated documentaries, exhibited between 2016 and 2020, with the intention of identifying frequently occurring characteristics of content and context.

This article does not propose that the patterns or trends identified should necessarily be extrapolated as fact to wider or current production in the field of animated documentary. It presents a relatively small data set, and is limited to work produced by UK filmmakers, and exhibited in the United Kingdom within a specific timeframe. The inclusion of other territories would have very likely yielded different results, in part because funding and finance frameworks, as well as the festival, exhibition and distribution landscapes, differ between global territories. The United Kingdom's funding landscape also shifts constantly, which affects what is produced, how it is produced, and by whom. For this reason, this study does not propose its results to hold true for future years. The primary intention of this study is to begin to address some of the gaps in research in the field of animated documentary, particularly the lack of quantitative research to support statements made about the form, as well as to create a record of the work being exhibited in a particular time and place. I will also highlight some areas that would be suitable for further research.

I will begin by briefly discussing the role of festivals in showcasing animated documentary. I will then establish the definition that I have used for short animated documentary in conducting the research, discussing some of the problems of categorizing this form. I will then describe my methods for collecting and analysing the data on films, before presenting my findings, a short analysis, and conclusions. In this final section I draw on survey responses, as well as additional interviews and paratextual materials related to the films.

Animated documentaries and film festivals

While for some, film festivals conjure images of celebrities sipping champagne on sunny beaches and paparazzi swarming around red carpets, it has been suggested that the age of the major market festival is fading (see, e.g., McGill 2011). The contemporary festival landscape is a constellation of diverse events taking a range of forms. Many film festivals are low budget and

low-key affairs, often with a specialized focus. Dickson writes that ‘the number of these events taking place – locally, nationally and internationally – continues to grow at an extraordinary rate’ (2015: 704).

Recent years have also seen an increase in the presence of animated documentary in festivals across the globe. DOK Leipzig International Festival for Documentary and Animated Film has presented the forms alongside each other since 1955, explicitly screening animated documentaries since 1997. Other festivals that have, in recent years, featured an animated documentary focus include Nordisk Panorama Film Festival, DOC NYC, CPH:DOX, Open City Documentary Festival, True/False Film Festival, Sheffield International Documentary Festival, International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA), London Short Film Festival, Edinburgh International Film Festival, KLIK! Amsterdam Animation Festival, Fantoche International Animation Festival, Encounters Festival, Tricky Women, Open City Documentary Festival, The International Animated Film and Non Fiction Comics Festival, and Anifilm International Festival of Animated Films. London International Animation Festival (LIAF) has an annual animated documentary programme, which has grown steadily in audiences and submissions since its launch in 2008 (Vladermersky 2016). There are also a handful of festivals focusing exclusively on animated documentary. These include: Rising of Lusitania AnimaDoc Film Festival, launched in Liverpool in 2019; Deptford AnimaDocs, launched in 2019 in London; and the Factual Animation Film Festival (FAFF), which has been running annually since 2015.

Filmmaker Sheila Sofian suggests that it is only relatively recently that animated documentary has gained equal cultural status at festivals to other forms of animation. She remembers that early in her career, filmmakers presenting non-fiction animation ‘felt kind of like second class citizens in the animation festivals because [animation festivals] were more interested in, you know, the craft of animation […] whereas we were concerned about content. […] But then over time that’s changed, there’s been more specific categories for animated documentary, and it’s been elevated a little bit more in status.’ (Sofian 2017: n.pag.)

Producer Abigail Addison also credits festival programmers with spearheading changes in how

animated documentary is culturally perceived, noting that the inclusion of animated documentary strands in high profile festivals 'legitimizes' the form (Addison 2017). While animated documentary may be more present at festivals, it can be difficult to define from a programming perspective. I have participated in animated documentary programming teams for a range of festivals, and found the process of selecting 'animated documentaries' from a wider set of films to be problematic, often requiring recourse to films' paratextual material to glean if it is 'documentary' or not. At the 2019 Deptford AnimaDocs event, joint programmers Walden and Honess Roe spoke about the difficult process of defining animated documentary. Walden referred to the experience as an 'ontological crisis', as her team had divergent views about what constituted a documentary film (Walden, speaking at Dunn et al. 2019). Honess Roe also admitted that 'increasingly […] I don't know how to define documentary – it seems to get more woolly all the time' (Honess Roe, speaking at Dunn et al. 2019). Given these complications of definition, I will now go into more depth on the definition of animated documentary that I established for use in this study.

Defining the short animated documentary

Defining non-fiction subgenres is problematic, and there is no one system accepted by all scholars. Challenges of definition are also increasing as media evolves and new forms emerge. Paul Ward states: 'factual films and programmes have now reached such a level of hybridity, that it is very difficult to sustain a notion of there being stable categories' (Ward 2005: 1). Samantha Moore refers to animated documentary as a 'cinematic genre' in its own right (Moore 2019: 209) and describes an animated documentary as a film that 'uses the form of animation as the framework within which the genre of documentary is investigated' (2014: 68), while Gunnar Strøm (2003: 49) defines animated documentary as 'a documentary in which an extensive part – at least Fifty Percent – is animated'. However Annabelle Honess Roe argues that it is not possible to 'put a quantitate requirement on the amount of animation that a film should contain in order for it to be classed an animated documentary' and suggests that instead, for a film to be considered an animated documentary 'the animation must be integrated to the extent that the meaning of the film would become incoherent were it to somehow be removed' (Honess Roe 2013: 4–5). Indeed, even if a percentage of content were a suitable criteria to measure the 'animatedness' of a documentary, it is near-impossible to practically use. Would a live action frame featuring one animated composite be classed as animation or live action, or would it be necessary to measure the percentage of screen space that each inhabit?

Ward describes documentary as a ‘range of strategies in a variety of media’ that can be ‘inflected’ by animation (Ward 2005: 84–85). He suggests that films which use animation as ‘a mode of expression’ within otherwise live-action documentary should be referred to as ‘documentaries with animated sequences’ rather than animated documentaries. Conversely, Alys Scott Hawkins defines animated documentary as ‘any film based on nonfiction which uses animation techniques’ a definition that does not exclude ‘live action documentaries with animated segments’ (Scott-Hawkins, quoted in Collington 2016: 215).

Drawing on established definitions of documentary by Bill Nichols and of animation by Charles Solomon, Honess Roe defines animated documentary as an audio-visual work that (i) has been recorded or created frame by frame; (ii) is about the world rather than a world wholly imagined by its creator; and (iii) has been presented as a documentary by its producers and/or received as a documentary by audiences, festivals or critics. (Honess Roe 2013: 4) For Honess Roe, this last criteria excludes advertising and other non-fiction such as training and public information films ‘because they are neither intended, nor received as documentaries’ (Honess Roe 2013: 4). While Honess Roe’s definition is useful, it is complicated by different curatorial understandings of animated documentary. For example, the Factual Animation Film Festival (FAFF) focuses on ‘factual animation’ but uses the term ‘animated documentary’ widely in its marketing materials, describing itself on its Facebook page as ‘an annual film festival celebrating animated documentary’. This conflation of ‘factual animation’ and ‘animated documentary’ implies that the programme’s films can all be classed as animated documentaries. FAFF’s programme includes work that would be commonly classed as infotainment or promotional films, categories that seem to be excluded from Honess Roe’s definition, and yet which paradoxically must be included if these films are received and presented, by a festival, as animated documentaries.

Building on definitions proposed by Honess Roe and Ward, for the purposes of this study I define the short animated documentary as a moving image production which:

1. has been recorded or created frame by frame;
2. makes assertions or truth claims about the real world or people in that world;

3. has been presented as a documentary by its producers (either filmmakers or funders / commissioners / broadcasters) and/or received as a documentary by critics, audiences, festivals or critics;

4. is intended for viewing beginning-to-end in a single screen exhibition context;

5. is less than 40 minutes in duration.

Method

This study investigates production contexts of animated documentary in the United Kingdom, identifying and analysing short animated documentary films programmed in key UK festivals between 2016 and 2020. I worked through the programmes of key UK festivals for each of their editions from 2016 to 2020. Key festivals were selected as those identified by BAFTA on their 'A-list' of eligibility (BAFTA 2018). These were: Edinburgh International Film Festival; Leeds international Film Festival; Foyle Film Festival; BFI London Film Festival; BFI Flare; London International Documentary Festival; Raindance Film Festival; Open City Documentary Festival and Sheffield Doc/Fest. To give a voice to online curators I also included all the films on the Short of the Week website's Animated Documentary collection. From these programmes I identified and listed UK-produced or co-produced short animated documentaries. To increase the size of the sample, I then added films from two specialized animated documentary events: the Factual Animation Film Festival and the short films programmed in London International Animation Festival's Animated Documentary screenings.

Omissions

<u>Fiction films</u>

I omitted from the sample films that did not fit my working definition of animated documentary, for example films which were programmed as an animated documentary but which I know from my other research are complete fictions which do not make assertions or truth claims about the real world or people in that world.

<u>Films produced more than five years prior to the festival</u>

In some cases, films were screened which had been produced significantly before the screening date. These films were usually screened as part of a historical or retrospective programme and, as they do not represent the current production landscape, I have omitted them from the sample.

Films by filmmakers I was unable to contact (partial omission)

While all 144 of the films identified were analysed for Phase 1 of this study, which looked at theme, only 105 of these were analysed for Phase 2, which required filmmakers to respond to questions about their film's funding and technical production contexts, as well as to self-identify their industrial background, gender and ethnicity. In cases where I was unable to make contact with filmmakers, the films were omitted from the second phase of the study. The 144 films which I included in Phase 1 are listed below, and the 105 that were also included in Phase 2 have been marked below with an asterisk.

Films included

2.3 x 2.6 x 3.2 (Jiaqi Wang 2019); A Close Call (Wing Chiu 2017); A Different Category (Linnéa Haviland 2018)*; A Kiss, Deferred (Moth Collective 2015)*; A Pistol Against My Head (Luca Schenato and Sinem Vardarli 2016)*; A Scribbled Memory (Bhulla Beghal 2018)*; All of a Sudden, Something Popped (Daksha Patel 2016)*; Amputee Undefined (Sophie Kamlish 2019)*; Animation Is My Alter-Ego (Natalie Priest 2017); Arlene (Farouq Suleiman 2015); Art for Lawyers (Rory Waudby-Tolley 2017)*; Bathroom Privileges (Rupert Williams and Ellie Land 2020)*; Bathtub Armada (Sofia Castello y Tickell 2018)*; Better Humans (Moth Studio 2018)*; Blood, Rats and Anticoagulants: The story of Warfarin (Ed Prosser 2018)*; Bloomers (Samantha Moore 2019)*; Blue Light (Harriet Croucher 2017)*; Border Line (Meg Earls 2019); Brexicuted (Chris Shepherd 2018)*; Chalk trace (Ester Johnson 2013)*; Chin Up (Joanne Salmon 2018); Colorscope Black (Matt Abiss 2017); Colorscope Green (Jorge R Canedo E. and Rafael Mayani 2017); Colorscope White (Jocie Juritz 2017)*; Colorscope Yellow (Sebastian Baptista 2017)*; Conan O'Brien discusses 'We're Going to be Friends' by the White Stripes (Moth Studio 2017)*; Conception: Why I Won't Teach My Son Black Codes (Jocie Juritz 2019)*; Conception: Catie and Jen (Moth

Studio 2018)*; Critical Living (Alex Widdowson 2017)*; Dear England (Marta Lemos 2018)*; Desire Line (Ruini Shi 2018)*; Devil in the Room (Carla MacKinnon 2013)*; Do I See What You See? (Simon Ball 2018)*; Double Portrait (Ian Bruce 2018)*; Dusk (Di Wu 2016); Entrevista/Interview (Lottie Kingslake 2016)*; Escape (Natalia Tegos 2017)*; Escape From Syria - Faiza's Story (Jack Whilding Newman 2017); Escapology: The Art of Addiction (Alex Widdowson 2017)*; Everyone is Waiting for Something to Happen (Emma Calder 2015)*; Februarium!! (John Summerson 2020)*; Fifteen-two (John Summerson 2019)*; First Kiss (Ali Aschman 2018)*; Flying While Fat (Stacy Bias 2016)*; Forgotten Voices of D-day (Peter

Roch and Jason Davidson 2019)*; Freedom (Kathrin Steinbacher 2017)*; Fruitcake (Harriet Croucher 2016)*; G-AAAH (Elizabeth Hobbs 2016)*; Getting Something Out (Kirsty O'Rourke 2018); Go Outside (Zehong Zhu 2017); Guantanamo Bay: The Hunger Strikes (Jonathan Hodgson 2013)*; Hair (Zainab Sanyang 2020)*; Heavy Load (Laura Franchito 2017); Helplessness (Chenyao Zhang 2017); Hit and Run (Hannah Brewerton 2020)*; Home (Anita Bruvere 2019); Hunger by the Sea (Sue Sudbury 2017)*; I Am Here (Sorrel Milne 2019)*; I AM VADER (Lachezar Dimitrov 2016); I am Worthless (Haemin Ko 2018)*; I Don't Protest, I Just Dance In My Shadow (Jessica Ashman 2017)*; I Don't Want to Call it Home (Léa Luiz de Oliveira and Nisan Yetkin 2019)*; Isabella (Ross Hogg and Duncan Cowles 2015)*; Kensho (Aaron Paradox 2015); Life Inside 'Islamic State' (Scott Coello 2016); Little Elephant (Kate Jessop 2015)*; Living on the City Fringe (Vera Reshto 2018)*; Loop (Samantha Moore 2016)*; Lost For Words (Sanjana Chandrasekhar 2018); Make do and Mend (Bexie Bush 2014); Marfa (The Brothers McLeod 2017)*; Margot (Sara Spånghagen 2019)*; Material World (Anna Ginsburg 2017); Men Talk About Mother (Bunny Schendler 2016)*; Mm-hmm (Hannah McNally and Martha Halliday 2017)*; Music and Clowns (Alex Widdowson 2018)*; Music Unites: Herbie Hancock & Kamasi Washington in Conversation (Wednesday Studio 2020); My Dad's Name was Huw. He was an Alcoholic Poet (Freddie Griffiths 2019)*; My Dream, My Taste (Emily Downe 2020)*; My Stammering Tap (Peter Snelling 2017)*; My Troubled Mind – Jack (Salvador Maldonado 2019)*; Nadirah, Coal Woman (Negar Elodie Behzadi and Kate Jessop 2019)*; Newport Gun Girls (Lauren Orme 2017); Nicolas (Jade Evans and Catherine Prowse 2017); No Body (Haemin Ko 2019)*; No Stigma (Siobhan Smith 2017); Not for Money, Not for Love, Not for Nothing (John Robert Lee 2020)*; O Hunter Heart (Carla MacKinnon 2018)*; Own Skin (Geena Gasser and Saksia Tomlinson 2018)*; Preloved (Jude Marcella 2017); Private Parts (Anna Ginsburg 2016); Queer Heroes (Kate Jessop 2016)*; Quilted (Cat Baskerville 2020)*; Right Now, I Am (Ciara Kerr 2020); Right to Say No (Ines Delicioso 2017)*; Rug (Jonathan Hodgson 2015)*; Sent Away (Rosa Fisher 2019); Seven Seven (Georgina Ferguson 2016)*; Shaun Ryder and the Salford Sioux (Glenn Kitson 2020)*; Sleepless (Ellie Land 2016)*; Solos (Gabriella Marsh 2019)*; Sophie's Story (Alex Hatjoullis and Christos Hatjoulis 2016); Speak Out (Elizabeth Hobbs 2018)*; Spinning Record (Emily Downe 2017)*; Stems (Ainslie Henderson 2015); Technology for Talking (Jemima Hughes 2019)* Tha thu air Aigeann m' Inntinn (you are at the bottom of my mind) (Catriona Black 2018)*; That Yorkshire Sound (Marcus Armitage 2017)*; The Act of Lunacy (Freddie Griffiths 2018)*; The Amazing Life Cycle of the European Eel (Sofia Castello y Tickell and Chris Doble 2015)*; The Camp

(Madeline Swift 2016)*; The Feather (Anna Honorato Marciniak 2017); The Great War (Shelly Wain and John Harmer 2018)*; The Last Job On Earth (Moth Studio 2016)*; The Man Inside Mickey (Daniela Sherer 2013)*; The Mind of an artist: William Kentridge (Rosa Beiroa 2018)*; The Mystical Journey of Jimmy Page's '59 Telecaster (Smith and Foulkes 2019)*; The Peacock in the Room (Sanjana Chandrasekhar 2020); The Petard Pinch (Michael Brookes 2015)*; The Redness of Red (Emily Downe 2018)*; The UN Treaty Bodies (Nicolai Troshinsky 2018)*; The Unforgiven Moment (Laurie Harris and Salvador Maldonado 2016)*; The Woman who Turned into a Castle (Kathrin Steinbacher 2018)*; There's Something in the Water (Rory Waudby Tolley 2018)*; They Call Us Maids: The Domestic Workers' Story (Leeds Animation Workshop 2015)*; Think like a Rainforest (Scriberia and Angie Phillips 2017); Together | Fragmented (Flora Martyr 2020)*; Tough (Jennifer Zheng 2016)*; Trump Dreams (Ruth Lingford 2017)*; Twiddly Things (Adara Todd 2016)*; Under My Skin (Tina Rashidi 2017)*; Weight (Cheuk Kwan Lai 2017); West Question East Answer (Dal Park 2018)*; What Comes After Religion (Jonathan Hodgson 2015)*; What Is Consciousness? (Diana Gradinaru 2019)*; What It Feels Like (Steven Fraser 2018)*; When (Deanna Crisbacher 2018); When I Was Settled (Sacha Beeley 2017)*; When I Was Young (Katy Milner 2018); When I Worry About Things – Annabel's Story (Andy Glynne and Liam O'Connor 2017)*; Where Are You (Si Jang 2017); Women and Power (Meg Earls 2018); Yours Faithfully, Edna Welthorpe (Mrs) (Chris Shepherd and Emma Parker 2017)*; مايا - Days (Sofia El Khyari .*)2017

Analysing the films

Phase 1: Analysing the full set of films

<u>Common themes</u>

For each of the 144 films in the main set, I noted down key themes. As trends began to emerge, these crystallized into fourteen main categories:

• Migration

• Social and political issues: Films with a social message, including themes such as homelessness and domestic violence; and films with a clear Political agenda, such those that are explicitly anti-Brexit or anti-Trump.

• History: Historical stories that are in the public domain (excluding local, family, or personal

histories).

• Local history/place: Stories that explore the history or nature of a specific geographical place, often with a psycho-geographical or socio-historical approach.

• Conflict: Stories relating to war and global conflict.

• Filmmakers' stories: Personal stories belonging to the filmmaker, including family histories.

• Health: Films on subjects related to physical health and mental health, including trauma.

• Culture: Films that explore art, music or other areas of the creative industries.

• Environment: Films relating to nature, wildlife, climate or sustainability;

• Science (other)/Technology: Films primarily about science and technology and/or its impact on the world.

Some films fell into multiple categories, for example A Pistol against My Head, a film about military PTSD, can be placed in the categories of both conflict and health (mental health), while Tough can be categorized within migration, conflict, history and family history.

Phase 2: Analysing only survey responses

A total of 105 filmmakers responded to my survey request and I used their responses in the second phase of data collection, which looked at how the films were supported, how they were made technically, and at the demographics of the filmmakers. My questions related to the following categories:

<u>How the film was supported, including labour</u>

This was usually through one or a combination of the following avenues:

• Public funding (e.g. BFI, Arts Council England, Creative Scotland);

• Academic funding (e.g. AHRC grant, funded Ph.D.);

• Grants or commissions from Trust, Charity, Foundation (e.g . Wellcome Trust);

• Crowdfunding;

• Brand or company funding, sponsorship or commissioning;

• Finance from a broadcaster such as Channel 4 or the BBC;

• Finance from an online publication (e.g. NYT);

• Student production using university resources;

• Made as part of a non-university workshop; or

• Self-funded.

Primary disciplinary ‘home’ of the director or creative lead

I categorized this as either:

• Animation (a filmmaker who works in animation production or has completed an educational course in animation production);

• Documentary (a filmmaker who works in documentary production or has completed an educational course in documentary production);

• Fine Art (a filmmaker who identifies primarily as a fine artist or has completed a degree in fine art); or

• Other.

In most cases the film’s creative lead was the director. However in some instances the film’s producer was given the leading credit, and rather than a director there would be an animator, animation director or art director credited prominently alongside the producer. In these cases, I would list both as creative leads. In some cases, a film’s credits would not fit into conventional crew roles. The Amazing Life Cycle of the European Eel, which screened at FAFF in 2016, does not credit a director, producer or animator but simply has a single ‘created by’ credit, so in this case I used the names listed there.

The animation technique used to make the film

I initially placed films in the categories of: Mixed Media, Processed footage, Hand-drawn (traditional), Stop-motion, Motion graphics, Live action elements, 3D digital, 2D digital, Article cut-out and Oil-on-glass. Following the initial categorization process, I grouped the films into fewer groups with broader definitions. For example there were very few films used oil pastel or oil on glass, so I included these in a broader category of ‘2D traditional’. The final categories were:

• 2D digital;

• 3D digital;

• 2D traditional (including non-digital hand-drawn, painted, pastels, ink, etc.);

• Stop-motion; or

• Mixed media.

Gender of the director or creative lead

My survey included seven possible gender categories, but results included filmmakers identifying as only three of these: ‘female’, ‘male’ and ‘non-binary’.

Findings

Phase 1

Theme

Health or mental health featured prominently in 36% of the films. There were also high occurrences of films that dealt with social and political issues (30%). Personal stories and family histories made up 17% of the films (Figure 1).

Looking only at student films, the percentage of films dealing with health or mental health rose to 39%, with personal stories increasing to 32%. Looking only at films supported by a company or brand, the prevalence of films about health and mental health fell to 20%, with subject matter more evenly spread between other themes including culture, history and science and technology.

Phase 2

Context

33.3% of the films were student productions, made in the context of a Bachelor or Postgraduate degree, using university resources.

29.5% of the films were declared to be fully or partially self-funded. Films that were partially self-funded included some student films, as well as films that also received public funding, funding from trust, charities and foundations, funding from companies and brands, funding from broadcasters and funding from online publications.

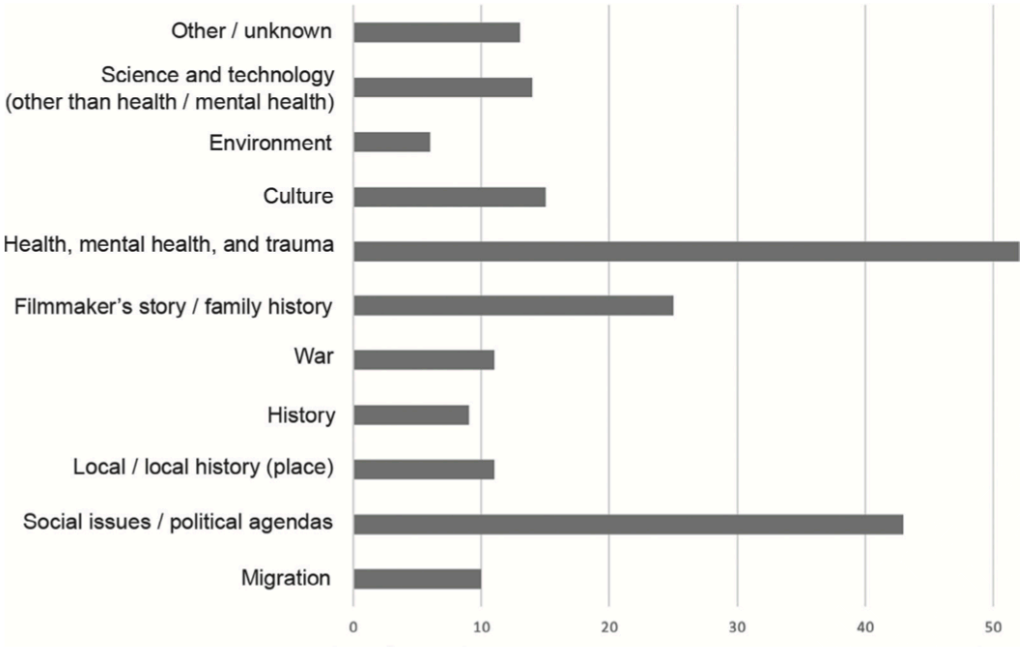

Figure 1: Carla MacKinnon, Graph showing themes of films (2023). © Carla MacKinnon.

Public funding contributed to 17.1% of the films (with funders including Art Council England, BFI and Creative Scotland) and 15.2% of the films received funding from Trusts, Charities and Foundations, with Wellcome Trust appearing as the most common of these. Academic funding such as AHRC grants contributed to 8.5% of the films. 9.5% of the films received financial support from a company or brand and 6.6% were financed by a broadcaster. 3.8% were funded by online publications, which included NYT, Guardian Online and CNN. 3.8% of the films received support from crowdfunding campaigns; all of these used crowdfunding as supplementary fundraising in addition to other funding sources. Films whose funding did not fit clearly into the existing categories included private commissions, and work produced as part of internships in organizations (Figure 2).

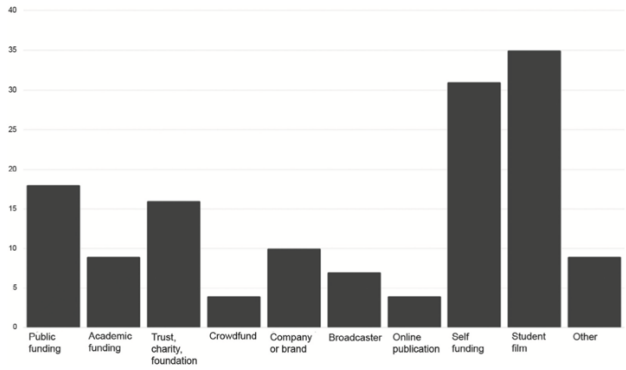

Figure 2: Carla MacKinnon, Graph showing funding context of films (2023). © Carla MacKinnon.

Gender

There is a significant female skew, with 64.7 per cent of creative leads identifying as female (Figure 3).

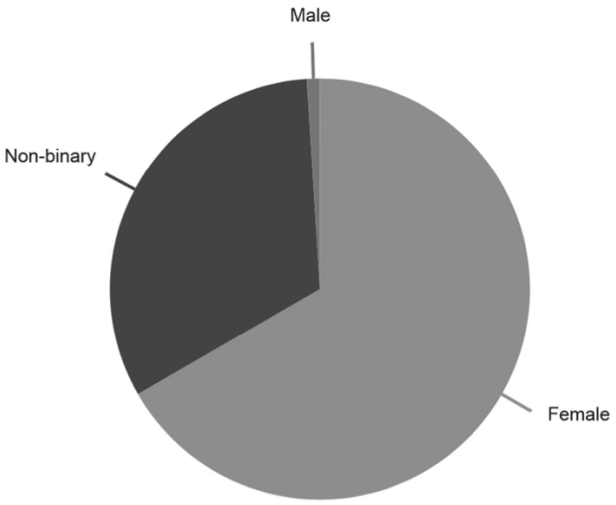

Figure 3: Carla MacKinnon, Graph showing filmmaker gender breakdown (2023). © Carla MacKinnon.

Ethnicity

80.9% of filmmakers identified as White, with 60.9% of these identifying a 'White British' and 20% as 'any other White background'. 10.4% of respondents were from Asian and Asian/White backgrounds, including 'East Asian', 'South Asian', 'South-East Asian' 'White and Asian' and 'any other Asian background'. 2.8% of respondents identified as 'Jewish', 1.9% of filmmakers identified as coming from Black or mixed Black and White backgrounds, 0.9% identified as Middle Eastern and 0.9% identified as coming from 'any other mixed/multiple ethnic group background' (Figure 4).

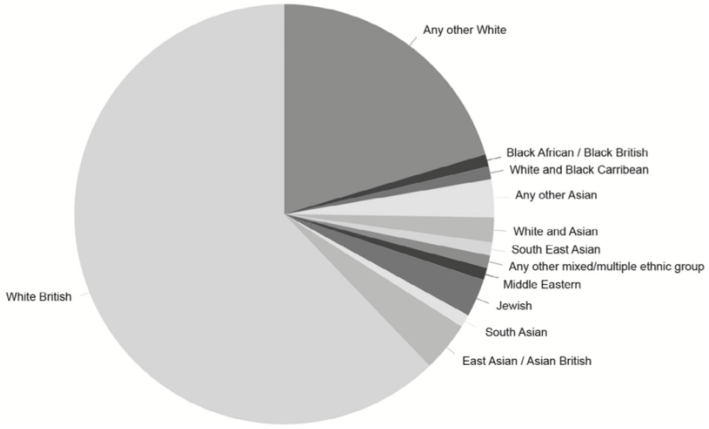

Figure 4: Carla MacKinnon, Graph showing filmmaker ethnicity breakdown (2023). © Carla MacKinnon.

Disability

24.7 per cent of respondents identified themselves as having a disability, impairment, learning difference or long-term condition (Figure 5).

Disciplinary ‘home’

The disciplinary ‘home’ of the projects’ creative leads is strongly skewed towards animation. 20 per cent of respondent identified as ‘other’. These included those who identify primarily within another discipline (e.g. illustration), those who identify across multiple disciplines, and those who identify more specifically within a disciplinary niche (e.g. animation for museums). Two respondents selected ‘other’ and identified their disciplinary home specifically as ‘animated documentary’ (Figure 6).

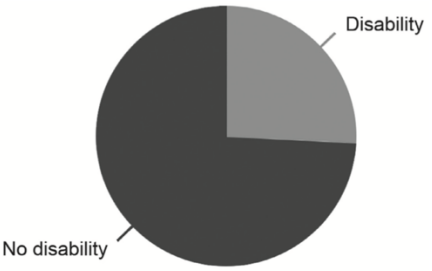

Figure 5: Carla MacKinnon, Graph showing percentage of disabled filmmakers (2023). © Carla MacKinnon.

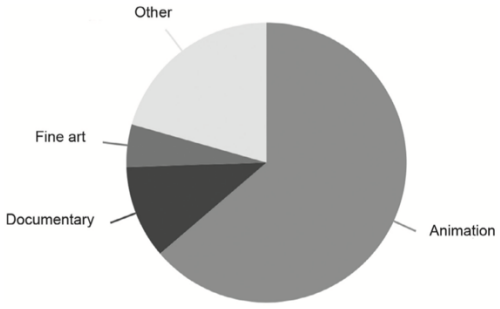

Figure 6: Carla MacKinnon, Graph showing disciplinary ‘home’ of filmmakers (2023). © Carla MacKinnon.

Production techniques

Digital 2D (44.7%) and mixed media (31.4%) techniques were the most popular for telling these animated documentary stories. 18% used 2D traditional and 10.4% of the films were stop-motion. Digital 3D techniques are relatively uncommon in the films, at 6.6% (Figure 7). Looking only at student films, there is a slight increase in films made using stop-motion (15.3%), 2D traditional (20.5%) and mixed media (33.3%), alongside a decrease in 2D digital (35.8%) and 3D digital (2.5%). Within the set of films

supported by a company or brand, 70% used primarily 2D digital techniques, with the remaining films primarily using 3D digital or mixed media techniques. Among films fully or partly produced with public funding, mixed media was the most frequently occurring production technique (38.8%) followed by 2D digital (33.6%) and 2D traditional (22.2%).

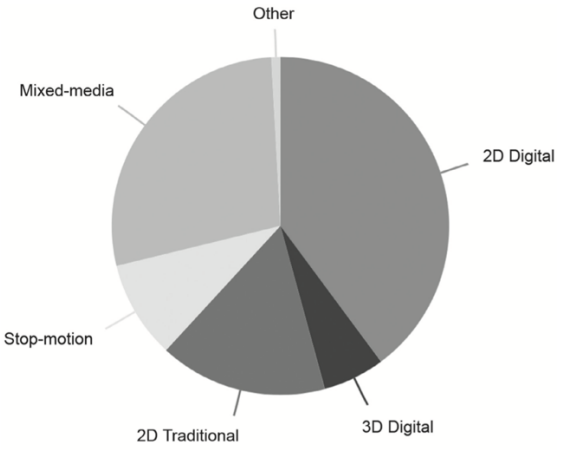

Figure 7: Carla MacKinnon, Graph showing production techniques of films (2023). © Carla MacKinnon.

Analysis and conclusion

The high rates of public funding for the United Kingdom's short animated documentary work in this period, and the strong representation of Arts Council in this alongside BFI and Creative Scotland, is indicative of the broad creative contexts that animated documentary can fit into. This is further indicated by the spread of other funders including significant support from academic grants, commercial sources, broadcasters and online publications.

Trusts, charities and foundations were also well represented as funders, particularly in areas of social issues, health and mental health. This supports the position frequently taken by researchers that animated documentary is particularly well suited to telling stories related to psychology, and to representing disempowered people and issues that may otherwise lack representation (see e.g. Honess Roe 2013; Glynne 2013; Piotrowska 2011). The prominence of the biomedical foundation Wellcome as a funder reflects their contemporaneous funding strategy, which offered filmmakers who wanted to make work on biomedical subject matter the chance to apply for funding through a rolling open submission process.2 This also accounts in part for the large number of films that

represent health-related subjects. Wellcome also collaborated with Royal College of Art on a series of student films inspired by their collection, with films including The Redness of Red, Critical Living and The Woman Who Turned into a Castle emerging from this initiative. A similar collaboration saw Animation students from Central Saint Martins collaborating with The Children's Society on a set of short films illustrating pre-recorded spoken testimonials from the charity's clients and staff. These films were programmed as part of FAFF.

It should be noted that the relatively low levels of online and broadcast films could be partly due to this data being drawn primarily from film festivals. Work produced for broadcast or online distribution already has a large online audience in mind at the point of commissioning, while Arts Council or BFI funded work, as well as student, unsupported independent work, and artists commissions, often rely on festivals to reach an audience, so more time and money is likely to be invested into festival submissions. It may also reflect a programming bias in festivals, some of which are reluctant to programme work that has been made with an explicit commercial or social agenda. Despite this, the fact that there is a small but significant number of films (6.6 per cent) commissioned by broadcasters is notable; while long-form animated documentary film is very rarely commissioned by broadcasters such as BBC, this research indicates that this reluctance does not extend to the commissioning of short-form work.

The data suggest that female filmmakers are well represented in short animated documentary production. Over half the directors in the study were female, contrasting with just 29 per cent of female directors reported in UK television production (Creative Diversity Network 2021). This supports the suggestion of Wells (1998: 199) that a 'documentary tendency' can be seen in much work created by female animators. Honess Roe suggests that animation has 'the potential to offer ways of challenging hegemonic power relations, particularly those regarding gender' (2013: 145). A number of the films included in this sample could be seen to be doing this, including They Call Us Maids: The Domestic Workers' Story, Bathroom Privileges, Nadirah: Coal Woman, G-AAAH, Queer Heroes, Men Talk about Mother, A Different Category, Not for Money, Not for Love, Not for Nothing and Little Elephant. It is also striking that a quarter of the films were directed by filmmakers who identify as having a disability, impairment, learning difference or long-term condition. In a 2018 report on UK television

production in 2016–17, it was shown that just 4.5% of people working off-screen on productions were disabled (Creative Diversity Network 2018). In comparison to this figure, the representation of disabled filmmakers in animated documentary is high, even exceeding the 18% of disabled people within the UK population.

While the gender balance of filmmakers indicates that animated documentary may be a less male-dominated space than other film forms, and may have a high proportion of disabled filmmakers, diversity is not so strongly reflected in diverse ethnicities, with a large majority of films coming from white filmmakers. However, the 19% of filmmakers coming from non-white backgrounds is roughly in line with the percentage of non-White ethnicities represented in the UK population, and it remains higher than the 8.4 per cent of directors (and 12 per cent of overall off-screen contributions) by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in the UK television industry in 2018–20 (Creative Diversity Network 2021).

The majority of short-form animated documentary represented at festivals has been directed or creatively led by practitioners from an animation, rather than documentary background, and the form is more common in animated than in documentary courses. Furthermore, analysis of the films' credits indicates that when a film is led by a documentary practitioner, an animator is often also involved but the reverse is not necessarily the case – if an animator leads there may be no one with prior documentary experience involved. The strong skew in this data towards animation supports Honess Roe's (2013: 2) suggestion that animated documentary is embraced more readily by the animation community than by the documentary community and that the majority of these works are produced by animators rather than documentary filmmakers.

In addition to the high number of animators directing these documentaries, it is notable that 20 per cent of filmmakers identified neither animation or documentary as their primary disciplinary home, with only two of these identifying specifically as 'animated documentary'. The others represent a range of media and other backgrounds, indicating that animated documentary is a form that not only offers opportunities for non-documentary professionals, but also for non-filmmakers to

communicate through directing and producing films.

The fact that 29.5 per cent of the films were fully or partially self-funded indicates that within this area of short film production, it is not uncommon for 'professional' productions to be subsidized by the filmmaker themselves, either with their own economic capital, their own resources, or their own unpaid labour. As a filmmaker's own financial contribution is rarely acknowledged in a film's credits, it can become invisible to most eyes. In the case of A Scribbled Memory, director Bhulla Beghal explains in his response to my survey that his labour was contributed unpaid, as he wanted to both communicate the subject matter, and develop his own skills:
"It was a passion project where I wanted to take a radio clip and turn it into an effective visual aid to emotionally capture audiences to be more aware of domestic abuse. I also wanted to exercise new animation techniques that I learnt. Therefore, it was not funded and was something I made in my own time without any direct costs involved" (Beghal 2022: n.pag.)

Elizabeth Hobbs's short film G-AAAH, about pilot Amy Johnson, was also wholly self-supported. Hobbs made G-AAAH in 'a couple of weeks' in response to a competition brief, drawing on the studio practice she maintains regardless of funding. Hobbs recognizes that reliance of funding brings the risk 'that I'd stop working for large periods while I waited for finance to come through, which very often it doesn't' (2023: n.pag.). These films support Nåls's (2016) assertion that impactful short animated documentaries can be made 'on a shoestring budget', as well as reflecting Wells's description of animation as an 'auteurist' practice, that 'offers the possibility for a film-maker to operate almost entirely alone' independent from commercial constraints (2002: 73).

In her response to my survey, Stacy Bias also describes her short film Flying While Fat as 'a labour of love' (Bias 2016). She supplemented grant funding with in-kind labour to complete the film, learning new software processes as she went. 'I was committed to creating the animation as it was based on a topic I am personally invested in and also on my own research' she explains, 'what it would have cost to pay me for all that time was well beyond the reach of the project' (Bias 2016: n.pag.). For Glenn Kitson, director of Shaun Ryder and the Salford Sioux, self-funding the film was necessary to give him the opportunity to step away from brand work and 'do something personal', recognizing that 'it's important

to invest in your craft, to try new things and develop what you're about' (Kitson 2020: n.pag.). In the case Men Talk about Mother (Bunny Schendler 2016), some costs of production and labour were covered by a grant from Film London, but the funding scheme assumed that those in above-the-line roles such as director and producer contribute their work on an unpaid, in-kind basis (Herman 2019). Self-funded films were not limited to low-budget independent work. Moth Studio's multiaward winning short film A Kiss Deferred (Moth Studio, 2015), commissioned by the New York Times, received only $2000 in finance. Marie Margaux Tskiri-Scanatovits, director and co-founder of Moth Studio, describes how Moth spent £15,000 in employing animators to help make the film as a 'loss leader' to showcase their skills in a new context. However the risk 'paid off because it got us a lot of awards […] and that got us more clients' (Tsakiri-Scanatovits 2016: n.pag.).

It is notable that only a handful of students films in my study declared themselves to be self-funded. Arguably most student films could be described as self-funded as the student is usually paying fees and contributing unpaid labour to the project, but student films are usually categorized as separate from self-funded work. The design of my survey, with student productions listed as a separate category from self-funded films, may have encouraged this perceived separation. However, from the responses that did identify as self-funded as well as being a student production, it was clear that it was not only time and university fees being invested; students also contributed equipment, resources and money. In the case of Fifteen-Two, director John Summerson notes that while he 'did have thebenefit of the RCA's equipment and studio spaces' he also 'purchased the materials, paid a compositor a laughably small amount of money to help, and otherwise relied on in-kind donations of labour'.

In terms of production technique, Digital 2D remains the most commonly used technique across all films except those in the publicly funded group, where it is narrowly overtaken by mixed media. Arts Council England is the most frequently occurring public funder, and this may in part account for the increase in mixed-media work; films may be more likely to be made by 'artist' filmmakers, and the funders themselves may consciously or unconsciously favour this style or aesthetic. A frequently occurring aesthetic device among the mixed media films is the combination of animation with live action or photographic elements. This use of photography could be seen as a 'warranting strategy' (Lipkin 2002), adding a sense of documentary authenticity to the overall look of the film – a kind of

visual guarantee of the film's link to reality (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Photographic images in an animated film. Madeline Swift (dir.), The Camp*, 2016. UK.*
© Madeline Swift.

There is also a slight increase in traditional or analogue techniques in the student films included in the set. This could be due to the opportunities presented by the facilities and production timescales of a university context, as well as to restrictions on this kind of production outside of one. Stop-motion can be an expensive, time-consuming and resource-heavy process. It can be difficult for independent animators to execute on low budgets outside of universities, where there are resources such as studio space, lighting, cameras and rigging. The increase in handmade and stop-motion techniques within the set of student films supports the idea that study is a time for exploration, in which animators can produce work less dominated by efficiency than when working in commercial environments. Animator and educator Birgitta Hosea has observed that students, as well as practitioners in the 'independent animation sector' are often drawn to traditional, craft-based techniques (2019: 17).

In general, my findings support many of the assumptions and observations that have been made by scholars about animated documentary. However they also raise questions. The diversity data indicates that the short animated documentary form is exceptionally accessible in terms of opportunities for disabled and female filmmakers, but perhaps less so for those from ethnic minority backgrounds

(though representation here is still higher than in other forms of media production). Furthermore, the high rate of self-funding, often alongside other sources of funding, suggests potential barriers to entry for those from diverse social-economic, including low-income, backgrounds. This should be explored through further research.

To contextualize and analyse the results of this study, it would be helpful to have more robust data on the United Kingdom's short film production more generally, as well as specifically within animation and documentary fields, as this would serve as a useful point of comparison. Quantitative research on short film production is an under-researched area and is often limited to data collected from specific funding programmes or exhibitors, rather than cross-industry collection.

It would also be useful to expand the scope of this study beyond the United Kingdom, to see how content and context of production changes across different territories. Other ways in which this research could be expanded would be to look beyond the short film form (e.g. into XR production), and to look at work exhibited beyond festivals. My study primarily looked at films screened in festivals, so therefore were filtered by both programmer preferences and filmmaker intention. As a result, potential blind spots remain, for example films intended primarily for distribution on social media or in galleries. I attempted to mitigate this by including films from Short of the Week's online animated documentary channel, but these again reflect a curatorial preference and often overlap with festival selections. Certain areas of production, particularly in client commissioned animated factual production, may be underrepresented. A future line of enquiry could be to extend the analysis to look at the output of micro, small, medium and large production companies, and to identify the spread of non-fiction production of different types across these companies, mapping production of factual animation beyond films that use festivals as part of their distribution model.

I hope that this study suggests areas for future research that will be taken up in the field of animated documentary, and that it can contribute to an increased focus on quantitative research alongside qualitative analysis in the study of animated documentary, of short-form film, and of films made outside of commercial contexts.

References

Addison, A. (2017), telephone interview with the C. MacKinnon, 10 March.

BAFTA (2018), 'BAFTA Qualifying Festivals List: British Short Film', https://awards.bafta.org/sites/default/files/images/short_film_qualifying_festivals_list.pdf. Accessed 1 March 2018.

Bias, S. (2023), e-mail to C. MacKinnon, 31 March.

Collington, M. (2016), Animation in Context: A Practical Guide to Theory and Making, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Creative Diversity Network (2018), 'Diamond: The first cut', https://creativediversitynetwork.com/diamond/diamond-reports/the-first-cut. Accessed 1 December 2022.

Creative Diversity Network (2021), 'Diamond: The fourth cut', https://creativediversitynetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CDN-Diamond4-JANUARY-27-FINAL.pdf. Accessed 1 December 2022.

Dickson, L. (2015), '"Ah! Other Bodies!": Embodied spaces, pleasures and practices at Glasgow Film Festival', Participations, 12:1, pp. 703–24.

Dunn, J., Honess Roe, A., MacKinnon, C., Walden, V., Wragg, T. and Young, S. (2019), 'Roundtable', Deptford Animadocs, 13 July, London: Deptford Cinema.

Ehrlich, N. (2019), 'Indeterminate and intermediate or animated N nonfiction: Why now?', in J. Murray and N. Ehrlich (eds), Drawn from Life: Issues and Themes in Animated Documentary Cinema, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 47–65.

Glynne, A. (2013), 'Drawn from life: The animated documentary', in B. Winston (ed.), The Documentary Film Book, Houndmills and Basingstoke, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 73–76.

Guo, C. and Yan, B. (2017), 'The story of first-person: Recovering autobiographical memory through the animated documentary Ketchup', Animation Practice, Process & Production, 6:1, pp. 115–36.

Herman, M. (2019), e-mail to C. MacKinnon, 3 May.

Hobbs, E. (2023), e-mail to C. MacKinnon, 5 April.

Honess Roe, A. (2013), Animated Documentary, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hosea, B. (2019), 'Made by hand', in C. Ruddell and P. Ward (eds), The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-

Based Animation and Cultural Value, London: Palgrave Animation and Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 17–43.

Kitson, G. (2020), ‘Shaun Ryder and the Salford Sioux’, The Social, https://www.thesocial.com/shaunryder-

and-the-salford-sioux. Accessed 1 February 2023.

Lipkin, S. N. (2002), Real Emotional Logic: Film and Television Docudrama As Persuasive Practice, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Lefevre, P. (2019), ‘From contextualisation to categorisation of animated documentaries’, in J. Murray and N. Ehrlich (eds), Drawn from Life: Issues and Themes in Animated Documentary Cinema, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 15–31.

McGill, H. (2011), ‘Film festivals: A view from the inside’, Screen, 52:2, pp. 280–85.

Moore, S. (2014), ‘Out of sight: Using animation to document perceptual brain states’, Ph.D. thesis, Loughborough: Loughborough University.

Moore, S. (2019), ‘“Does this look right?” Working inside the collaborative frame’, in J. Murray and N. Ehrlich (eds), Drawn from Life: Issues and Themes in Animated Documentary Cinema, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 206–21.

Nåls, J. (2016), ‘Drawing the unspeakable: Understanding “the other” through narrative empathy in animated documentary’, Journal of Film and Media Arts, 1:1, pp. 28–41.

Piotrowska, A. (2011), ‘Animating the real: A case study’, Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal, 6:3, pp. 335–51.

Sofian, S. (2017), telephone interview with C. MacKinnon, 1 December.

Strøm, G. (2003), ‘The animated documentary’, Animation Journal, 11, pp. 46–63.

Tsakiri-Scanatovits, M. (2016), ‘Reproducing reality: Animation and documentary’, 30 June, London: Frontline Club.

Vladermersky, N. (2016), interview with C. MacKinnon, London International Animation Festival Office, Islington, London, 18 March.

Ward, P. (2005), Documentary: The Margins of Reality, London: Wallflower Press.

Waudby-Tolley, R. (2018), telephone interview with C. MacKinnon, 20 February.

Wells, P. (1998), Understanding Animation, London: Routledge.

Wells. P. (2002), Animation: Genre and Authorship, London: Wallflower Press.

Suggested citation

Mackinnon, Carla (2022), ‘Analysis of short animated documentary films programmed in key UK festivals: 2016–2020’, Animation Practice, Process & Production, 11, pp. 55–79, https://doi.