

DRAWING ON GRIEF



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Drawing on grief: Illustrating narratives of loss through documentary and animation

Interactive pdf ~ Design by Stephen Davies ~ Proofread by Dr Cathy Gunn
Type set in: Enyo Slab; 20pt (Headings), 11pt (Subheadings), Charter; 11pt (Body text), 10pt (Captions) 9pt (footnotes)

Cover image: Collage incorporating Victorian chromolithography and Taranaki Maunga [Original painting, *Mt Egmont from the Southward* by Charles Heaphy (1840)]

Dedication



FIGURE 0.1
My mother on Poet's Bridge, Pukekura Park,
New Plymouth (circa 1956)

This work is a tribute to my mother, Jude Frances Hanline.

She taught me from an early age that education provides both knowledge and independence for women. Her work in education spanned over sixty-five years. In 1970 she became the first woman in Aotearoa to be appointed as a provincial museum educator, her curriculum development was groundbreaking. She gave me the gift of learning and teaching, for which I will always be grateful

The exegesis is also dedicated to the dear ones who have died over the period of the study: Lawrence Walter Hoyle, Shane Hammond, Grace Marion Rix, Rita Migotto, Lilliana Curtis, Colleen Sinclair, Lynne Jamieson, Andy McLennan, Paraskevi (Voula) Economopoulos, Judy Holdom, Adam Paikos, Nick Azidis, Neil Phillips, Austin Crocker, Bianka Horvath, Jeff Mitchell and Faye Davies.

This exegesis is submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in partial fulfilment of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Grief is both a deeply universal human experience and an intensely personal one, shaped by the circumstances and emotions of those who experience it. Responding to this inherent duality, this practice led study employs heuristic inquiry to investigate how a filmmaker working at the intersection of animation and documentary might artistically visualise intimate narratives of grief and loss. The research is guided by the central question:

How might a documentary filmmaker artistically approach interviews of grief by synthesising rhythm, imagery, and sound?

The study positions animated documentary as a creative mode capable of evoking imagination and offering subjective insight into emotional and psychological states that are otherwise difficult to articulate. In the study, three individuals' recorded experiences of loss constitute points of origin. Their edited interviews are combined with illustration, animation, and sound design to create short film texts that express experience inside the world of actualities.

The resulting short films— *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen*, and *Grief Star*—are distinct works that together form a stylistically cohesive suite designed to evoke a contemplative engagement with the complex nature of mourning. Across the three films, the researcher's presence as storyteller is embedded in the visual and sonic composition, shaping the narrative in ways that invite both empathetic identification and reflective space for the viewer. The practice and exegetical discussion extend current discourses on the nature, practice, and implications of animated documentary making, offering an artistic lens to a growing corpus of work that considers the complexity and diversity of grief.

Additionally, the project demonstrates how 'aroha' can be ethically and meaningfully integrated into documentary practice when working with participants, shaping a mode of collaboration grounded in care. It also shows how a post-disciplinary approach to artistic inquiry can harmoniously draw together thinking from diverse fields to enrich both method and form. Finally, the three documentaries illustrate how recorded interviews can be crafted as a form of poetic language, in which collage and sound operate as a distinctive expressive syntax.

Acknowledgements

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari kē he toa takitini.

My success should not be bestowed onto me alone, it was not individual success but the success of a collective.

I offer my sincerest gratitude to Professor Welby Ings, my primary supervisor. Through his strategic guidance, experience and aroha, my confidence, artistic innovation and academic rigour grew.

I would also like to acknowledge Associate Professor Arezou Zalipour, my second supervisor, who believed in my idea from the outset. She gently guided me through the development of the proposal and supported me as I learned to navigate the world of doctoral research.

I would like to thank Stephen Davies and Star Gossage who generously shared their stories of loss with me.

I wish to thank James Nicholson, my cinematographer and documentary partner, for his sensitive and kind nature that supported each interview process.

I acknowledge Dr Ross Brannigan who guided me through the performance and execution of the narrations and subsequent improvisations for *Grief Elizabeth*, the first film of the series.

I would also like to acknowledge Andrea Bentley my psychotherapist who has been beside me throughout the journey. She introduced me to scholars who were working with grief and loss. She was always there to listen and advise when creating the narratives became painful.

I would like to express my appreciation to Kelly Moore at Taranaki Hospice Counselling Service

whose understanding of the trajectories of grief was enlightening.

I wish to thank Dr Christina Milligan, Dr Tracey Wedge, and Dr Mairi Gunn, each of whom generously gave advice and support throughout the period of study.

I acknowledge Roger Grant for his industry knowledge and expertise. I would also like to thank Gilly Tyler, Maggie Fooke and Dr Philippa Burne who offered professional guidance and support during the production of the films.

I would like to acknowledge Bryony Jackson who gave me generous permission to share the experience of her beloved husband Shane's death.

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my extended whanau; Tomairangi Morgan, Bridget O'Brien, Jessica Sinclair, Michael Curtis, Jessica Migotto, Dianne Civil, and Gretchen Thomason for their patience and generosity on my journey.

Finally, I am grateful for the support of the School of Communications at Auckland University of Technology for affording the study a sabbatical grant, research funding and access to technical facilities. I also wish to acknowledge professional staff, Linda Wong, Karen Donovan, Julie Seymour, Edelita Clarke and Saide Lo for their administrative prowess. I am also indebted to Scott Creighton, Chayse Millar, Nish Varma and Andy Day for the technical expertise and support they afforded the study.

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¹ See <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/what-is-fair-use/>

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly noted) nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Elizabeth Jane Hoyle, 18 November 2025

Intellectual Property Declaration

I retain copyright in all images and creative work produced and presented as part of this exegesis apart from the following images that are the intellectual property of others listed below in the order they appear in this exegesis.²

Figure 2.1 Screenshot from the opening images of *Thanadoula*

Figure 2.2 Screenshot illustrating the blending of light, texture and archival photography

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Elizabeth Jane Hoyle, 18 November 2025

² All imagery used in the creation of this exegesis is either sourced from copyright free sources, gifted to the project from the personal archives of the participating artists, or filmed by the researcher and cinematographer James Nicholson.

Ethics approval and consents

This research received approval from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 23rd of March 2022, for a period of three years.

ETHICS APPROVAL NUMBER: 22/44

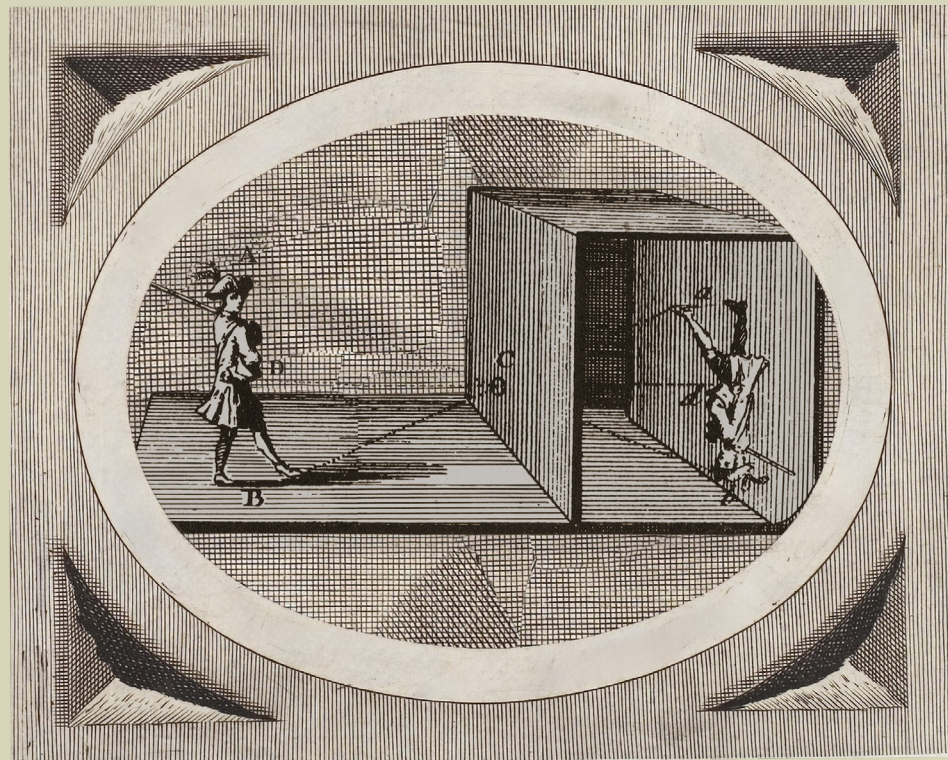
All research was conducted in keeping with the regulations and guidelines of the approval.³

In addition to AUTEC provisions, the researcher, cinematographer⁴, and participating artists followed the guiding principles outlined in Screen Safe Aotearoa to ensure health and safety are prioritised on set.⁵ Organised and considered planning prevented risk, and this was coupled with a risk assessment of each shoot. A health and safety plan was implemented and provided to all parties involved in the production.

3 Correspondence relating to ethics approval is available in Appendix 1.

4 Two interviews were shot and sound recorded by James Nicholson. The third interview and additional camera work was conducted by the researcher.

5 <https://screensafe.co.nz/>



INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Grief is different. Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life. (Didion, 2005, p. 27)

The Whitely Memorial Methodist Church in downtown New Plymouth is a stark mid-century edifice, its silvery steeple extends far into the sky. This is where I attended my first funeral. I can still see the children around me. We were small, silent, and trying to understand the death of our classmate. I witnessed the desperation and disbelief on the faces of the adults in the church that day. A few years later my grandmother died. Hers was a lingering journey and she suffered a great deal. I found it increasingly difficult to visit her in the hospital. On the day of her funeral, I refused to attend the burial. I did not want to witness the finality of it all.

In January 2024, on a blistering windy day in Melbourne I, along with a community of old friends were summoned to our dear friend Shane's bedside at the palliative care unit at Melbourne Royal Hospital. He was 53. His oncologist described his treatment as "the mother of all surgeries". We hoped he was getting better. I had not seen him for over a year. As I entered the hospital room, I recognised faces from my past. Shane beckoned me to sit with him. I could not stop my tears. He was parchment thin, his body quaking with pain. He quietly surveyed the room, looking closely at his friends and said, "I always wanted to go to my own wake."

Despite his agony, he wanted to hear about my adventures. Collectively, we told stories about each other and while we roared with laughter, our recounting was punctuated with watchful silence. Bryony, Shane's wife held him

closely, stroking his brow and making him as comfortable as she could. Nurses came back and forth to administer pain relief. Doctors were conspicuously absent. On the last day, he deteriorated rapidly. His agony persisted until his last breath as he called out for help. Bryony enveloped him in her arms, caressing his face, weeping, and whispering "My love, my love" over and over. His body was twisted in the pain of those last breaths, he was shrouded in white, the colour of his skin rapidly changing. He looked crucified to me. We sat for long moments with Bryony, trying to absorb what had just happened. Slowly and quietly, we left the room. As we stood in the corridor outside, we huddled together. Shane gave us a gift. His last harrowing moments were shockingly difficult to witness, he shared his precious life and death with us. Two days after Shane's death I received a phone call to inform me that my father had been given 12 weeks to live.

In the time of working on this research project many friends and relatives have died. I know more than ever that death is part of being human, and grief is something we all anticipate and become acquainted with.

These and other experiences of loss remain with me, old grief refreshed by new as it alters and transforms. Grappling with it has become an artistic pursuit as I have worked with images and sound to articulate loss in these documentaries. The expression allows me to face grief and deconstruct it so I might share it with others. Such an undertaking proposes that scholarship can be an act of compassion.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

As a practice-led, artistic inquiry undertaken by a filmmaker working within an animation-documentary nexus, the study asks:

How might a documentary filmmaker artistically approach interviews of grief by synthesising rhythm, imagery and sound?

DEFINITIONS OF KEY WORDS IN THIS EXEGESIS

Animation

McLaren (cited in Furniss, 2007, p. 19), argues that “Animation is not the art of drawings that move, but the art of movements that are drawn. What happens between each frame is much more important than what exists on each frame. Animation is therefore the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames.”

Drawing on this definition, animation in this study is understood as the creation of movement through the relationships established between still images over time. Movement is not drawn or illustrated within individual frames, instead, it emerges through the manipulation of the ‘invisible interstices’ between images. Thus, the interval between still images becomes the primary site of animation, where pacing, duration, transition, and juxtaposition generate a sense of motion. Animation is therefore defined as a relational and temporal practice in which meaning and movement arise from the space between still images.

Animated documentary

In this study I collect, assemble and reassemble interview narratives, public domain images,

sounds and video archives. These materials are treated using digital processes to create layered, rigged, frame-by-frame movement. Supported and guided by the interview narratives, the animations are reimagined chronicles of grief and loss. Thus, when I use the term animated documentary I am referring to factual narratives that are supported and visualised using collaged imagery.

Documentary

In this study, documentary refers to a dynamic account in form and content that uses recollection and cinematic strategies to tell stories of lived experience. Embracing Grierson’s description of documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” (1933, p. 8), the study cultivates the potentials of a creative and aesthetic rendering of three people’s lived experience. The study adheres to Grierson’s assertion that a documentary requires a humanitarian and cogent approach, whilst enriching the work through poetic expression (1933).

Grief

Because the study’s concerns are with the grief we experience when a loved one dies, in the exegesis the word ‘grief’ is used in the manner of Parks to refer to our response to the loss of “an object of love” (Parkes, 2015, p.7). Such grief occurs as a natural response to the emotional connections we build with others. (Australian Psychological Society, n.d.)

Practice-led inquiry

This study constitutes a practice-led inquiry where the development of artistic artefacts “lead the research through practice” (Haseman, 2008, p.100). Smith & Dean, (2009) suggest that in

such inquiry “the creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs” (p. 5). Practice-led processes permeate the study as I engage in thinking, learning and reflection through acts of making. In practice-led inquiry Candy argues that “the nature of practice leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice” (Candy, 2006, p. 1). This form of research promotes experimentation, trialling and iteration that open the researcher to discovery.

In the exegesis, the act of making has included the intricacies of documentary production, seeking and spending time with participating artists, designing, questioning, filming and synthesising imagery and sound into responses to recorded interviews.

Collage

Although collage conventionally describes a “technique and a resulting work of art in which pieces of paper, photographs, fabric and other ephemera are arranged and stuck down onto a supporting surface” (Tate Gallery, 2022, para. 1), in this exegesis I expand the definition to describe a process of gathering images, photographs, text sounds, and video, to mix, remix, and animate in response to a participant’s narrative of loss.

RATIONALE

Many filmmakers have documented personal experiences of grief as a way of broadening considerations of the human condition. Indicative examples include *Thanadoula* (McKenna, 2020); *Shannon Amen* (Dainty, 2019); *Spolu sami* [Apart] (Van Cam Nguyen, 2018); *Never Like the First Time!* (Odell, 2006) and *306 Hollywood* (Bogarin & Bogarin, 2018). These films position

us as observers as we come to know the lives of others in a secure and detached environment. Ellis, (2011) suggests that our observer status can enhance our sensitivity and empathetic connection “our emotions are engaged, we feel empathy with one or more characters, but we experience other emotions as well” (p.102). Through the poetic illustration of grief stories, potentials emerge to offer recognition, insight and solace to audiences.

The realm of analytical scholarship described by Doka, (2001); Klass, (2021); Murphy, (2020); Neimeyer et al., (2011); and Wortman & Silver, (1989), has done much to enable advances in understanding loss and the treatment of complications associated with grief. However, often these studies distance us from the intimate nature of the condition. Accordingly, this project artistically examines the assertion that animation has the capacity “to re-tell a story” (DelGaudio, 1997, p.190) of grief and loss.

Animation techniques can render thoughts and emotions in ways that actuality cannot (Wells, 1998; Ward, 2006), and visualisation “deepens the range of what we can learn from documentaries” (Honesty Roe, 2013, p. 23). This kind of recounting can translate raw emotion into narratives that “put something of ourselves into what we see on screen, to make connections between non-realist images and reality” (Honesty Roe, 2011a, p. 217).

SIGNIFICANCE

The exegesis proposes two significant contributions:

The poetics of the interview

Third, the project demonstrates how interviews can be used in creative ways, and it demonstrates the manner in which ethical considerations can be embedded into the recording and treatment of such material. The artistic works generated in the study offer a poetic form of interview-based storytelling that can create unique accounts that use pace, sound and iconography to elevate a sense of distinctiveness, intimacy and recognition in viewers, extending what might be achieved in conventional documentary-making.

Discourses on animated documentary making

Building on research by Honess Roe, (2013); Ward, (2006); and Murray & Ehrlich, (2020), the exegesis contributes to discourses and practice surrounding the nature of documentary when animation becomes part of the mode of address. Because animation is a frequent means of representation in documentary and mass media, the boundaries of its definition have continued to expand and blur. The significance of the study lies in the way that the films exercise the potentials of animated documentary, and the exegesis contextualises these in relation to recent practice and theoretical discourse. In so doing, the study draws correlations between artistic practice and theoretical considerations of animated documentary making.

THE RESEARCH PRACTICE

This exegesis is in two interlinked parts; the exegesis and a suite comprising three animated documentaries: *Grief Elizabeth* (2023); *Grief Stephen* (2024); and *Grief Star* (2025).

The first film *Grief Elizabeth* [7:16] is autobiographical. It offers an account of the loss of my grandmother but it also considers the nature of pain associated with grief.

The second film, *Grief Stephen* [10:27], is an account by the artist Stephen Davies that reflects on the loss of his father. The film chronicles the relationship between a father and son while exploring the convergent and divergent nature of their relationship.

The third film *Grief Star* [10:52] is an interview with Star Gossage that relates her experience of multiple losses and the meaning she makes of tohu (signs).

Although listed here in their order of completion, the documentaries are not sequential. Each may be understood as a discrete film that forms part of corpus of work that reflects on personal experiences of grief using a combination of interview audio, collage and actualities to articulate and visualise the intricacies of an individual's encounter with loss.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE EXEGESIS

Soanes and Stevenson, (2008, p. 498) note that exegesis is etymologically linked to the Greek word *exegeisthai*, "to interpret, guide or lead". In the exegesis, the exegesis is a body of writing that explains and contextualises both my research and the methodology that underpins its explication.

FIGURE 0.2:
A screengrab from *Grief Elizabeth* (2023)



FIGURE 0.3:
A screengrab from *Grief Stephen* (2024)



FIGURE 0.4:
A screengrab from *Grief Star* (2025)



The exegesis has been structured as an interactive document divided into four chapters that are prefaced by an introduction and summarised in a conclusion. Because it is formatted as an interactive pdf, one can watch moving image material and listen to audio files inside the body of the text. Sonic and spatio-temporal material can be activated by clicking on indicated links. To enable this, it is necessary that one's browser is open before reading the document.

Following the exegesis' introduction, *Chapter One* employs the concept of a cabinet of curiosities to discuss my background and positioning within the study.

Batty and Zalipour (2024, p. 5) note that:

While arguably all researcher backgrounds have a bearing on their disciplines, in creative practice research it invariably shapes the questions being asked (aims) and the way they are being answered (research design), and the extent to which knowledge derived from the study can influence the practice profession itself (engagement and impact) – if this is the intention. Who they are also determines the volume and (arguably) level of practice to be expected [...] and shapes their ability to reflect on and interpret the creative process in context.

In positioning myself in this chapter I relate intimate stories of family, grief and life experiences which have lead me to embark on the study.

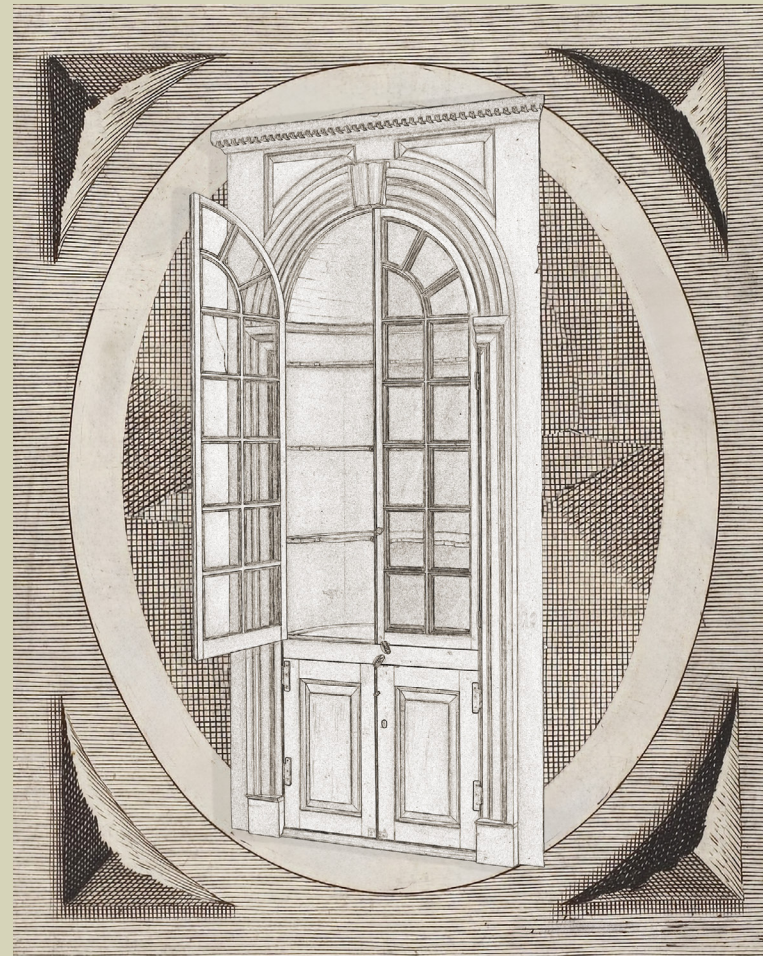
Chapter Two provides a review of contextual knowledge related to the exegesis. It considers three areas of scholarship: studies relating to

grief, the nature of documentary and, as an extension of this, the concept and practice of animated documentary.

Chapter Three unpacks the research design developed for the project. Framing the research as a practice-led study underpinned by heuristic inquiry, the chapter discusses and illustrates five principles that were employed to heighten chances of discovery in the work; embracing uncertainty, engaging serendipity, prolonged immersion, emboldening the poetic self and actioning aroha in creative practice.

Chapter Four offers a critical commentary on the three films. Here, I review the production processes from research interviews to the final cycles of post-production. I also unpack the nature of the work in relation to relevant theoretical discourses.

The exegesis concludes with a project summary and a reflection on contributions to the fields of animated documentary, documentary, and grief studies. In addition, I offer a consideration of further research that may emanate from the study and close the exegesis with a personal reflection.



CHAPTER 1



CHAPTER 1

POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER:
A CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

Title Page Image: Collage incorporating prints of Baron zu Gàlandtha, Paul Esterházy (1550-1850)
and corner cupboard (used for storing china) from the Index of American Design (1939)



THE CABINET OF CURIOSITIES IN THREE PARTS

.... a goodly huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine hath made rare in stuff, form, or motion; whatsoever singularity chance and the shuffle of things hath produced; whatsoever Nature hath wrought in things that want life and may be kept; shall be sorted and included. (Bacon, 1594/1914, p. 35)

The cabinet of curiosities, a cupboard of rarities, is a concept I became familiar with in childhood. As Bacon describes it, this is an assembly of human-made objects or examples from nature that one may preserve as material for archiving or viewing purposes. Through storage and arrangement it is understood that the keeper of the cabinet can comprehend the universal nature of life.

All the women in my family collect.

In my home, I have various collections and very few items are new. Each piece has a story, a history and aesthetic appeal. As I move house often, I have the opportunity to rearrange the collection. These reassemblies are a type of narrative and each fragment has a subplot. I cannot help this. Building a space as a kind of collage where each element is connected to the next and in an infinite number of ways, stimulates my imagination.



FIGURE 1.1:
Cabinet of curiosities: Influential women

THE FIRST CABINET: INFLUENTIAL WOMEN

The women in the generations preceding me were strong, forthright, and stropky. My maternal grandmother, my aunts and my mother experienced the trauma of war and evacuation because they lived through the blitz in London. As migrants they endured being outsiders as they settled into life in a new country (Figure 1.2). Because my father was mostly absent, these women were instrumental in my development; each in their own way guiding me into adulthood. I was taught that education would provide freedom for me as a woman because it would enable the development of my mind and afford me the ability to be financially independent.

My grandmother, Doris, (Figure 1.3) married in 1921. Her fiancé, James, was of mixed European heritage and came from a different socio-economic stratum. Doris's family did not approve of the match. She awoke early on the

day of her wedding, packed a small suitcase with her gown and a collection of pots and pans she had purchased with her savings. She caught the bus to her fiancé's parental home and began a new life. My grandmother's parents met in service, her mother was a lady's maid and her father a footman. It was my great grandmother's preference that Doris be wed within her class; her daughter marrying into a family of engineers was unacceptable. Doris remained proudly working class and left wing throughout her life.

OPENNESS ABOUT DEATH AND DYING

Doris worked as a midwife and also assisted in the preparation of the deceased before burial. This was part of her role in her community in Tottenham, London. Her frank discussions and intriguing tales ignited my imagination. She spoke of life and death openly. She said she was not afraid to die; she had lived through two world wars. Death, she said, was nothing to fear. It is the bereaved, who live with the distress



FIGURE 1.2:
A Family photo album. (Images circa 1944-60)

that comes with loss, and I have learned, need consideration. In my family, death is something to embrace, we keep the deceased in the house for three days to spend time with them. Death is not cloistered. It is present and we are present with it.

Doris took care of people in her community in a very practical way; her compassion was endless. Witnessing this has worked as a model for my way of being. This attitude has been passed down through the generations, and it has awakened my empathy and kindness.



FIGURE 1.3:
My maternal grandmother Doris May Doughty and her first-born son James in 1924



FIGURE 1.4:
My mother teaching in the classroom at Taranaki Museum (now Puke Ariki)

My mother's classroom

Doris' youngest daughter, my mother Jude, trained to be a teacher. In 2022, she retired at the age of eighty-four. My brother and I grew up between my mother's classroom and in the care of my grandmother and my aunts. Creative expression was encouraged and there were always materials to experiment with. In the early 1970s my mother became the first woman museum educator in provincial Aotearoa (Figure 1.4). She worked tirelessly to include museums in primary and secondary school curricula.

School holidays were spent travelling the country visiting collections of art and antiquities in cultural institutions where she began to establish a network with other educators, curators and artists. After school I would go to the Taranaki Museum, now Puke Ariki, to wait while she finished work. Being surrounded by antiquities, art works, taxidermy, collections of taonga

and other objects from around the world was wondrous. This was my playground, rooms of curiosities and people to explain their lineage to me.

I quickly became a collector.

Recent losses

During this study, my grandmother's adopted daughter Grace died. She was five months from her one hundredth birthday. She is a taonga, a woman who always did things her way. The attitude and knowledge of these women reside deeply within and continue to direct my life choices, including the focus of this project. Their instrumental instruction of a child who was constantly fidgeting has taught me that even in times of great difficulty, one must continue to move forward. This era of these women is coming to an end; my mother is the last of her generation and the last of her whanau. I have come to realise that I have become a maven, one who may share knowledge as maker and teacher.

THE SECOND CABINET: EDUCATION AND WORKING LIFE

My working life has been varied and interesting. My first full-time job was as a tram conductor and later a driver in Melbourne. I was just 22. During this time, I studied photography and documented my job to complete assignments. Public transport workers were not well regarded, and I felt the need to document them. I have also worked as a cleaner, a bar and nightclub manager and a carer for the disabled. These roles supported my education and gave me an appreciation of work and workers. I continued to document my jobs with my camera. Always the observer in the thick of the environment, I learned quickly to establish a relationship of trust



FIGURE 1.5:
Cabinet of curiosities: Education and working life

with those I photographed. I also understood the importance of being still and quiet so I could record unguarded moments. As my love of the photograph grew, I began to want more from the frozen image.

Study

I attended Swinburne Film School in Melbourne as an undergraduate to train in filmmaking. This was the beginning of fulfilling my dream of working with moving images. In my second year of study, I decided to make a documentary about the disabled community for whom I cared. I had been working with this group for a few years and I witnessed how in society, such people are often ignored or scorned. I wanted to create a film that challenged such perceptions. This was the beginning of a woven approach to documentary making where I combined archives, photographs, scenes shot in studios, text and the combination of 16mm film and diverse video formats.

The following year I spent eight months in an inner-city Melbourne shelter with men in extreme poverty. My approach was to volunteer at a day centre to enable the development of relationships before bringing in a camera. The resulting films developed my stylistic tendencies, and the resulting documentaries were hybrid, subjective and cinematic. Working with people

with disabilities and those without housing was a privilege. A gentle approach, openness and consideration of representation became part of a method that led to me work with other communities as a filmmaker and teacher. I continued further study at the Victorian College of the Arts, Film and Television School completing a postgraduate programme wherein I was able to refine my skills.

Learning from Professionals

At the completion of my master's degree, I was funded by Film Victoria to research and develop documentary projects. Later, I worked for Film Australia as a researcher on a range of projects including *Mabo: The Native Title Revolution* (Graham, 1997) and *The Fifth Set* (Thomson, 2000).

Since then, I have worked as a production manager and assistant stills photographer and in the camera department of many film productions. This has established a solid understanding of professional processes and introduced me to diverse ways of telling stories. During this time, I developed and researched two feature documentaries, one focused on the X-Rated film industry, and the second on nightshift workers. Following these works, I directed an episode of a series on Melbourne shopkeepers for the ABC, Australia.

The Importance of Teaching

In 2007 I moved into a lecturing position in Screen Production at Auckland University of Technology. Teaching the craft of filmmaking, working alongside students as they develop concepts and execute their projects further extended my knowledge and understanding of screen.

THE THIRD CABINET: WHY GRIEF?

Grief is an integral part of human life.

In 2007 I purchased a copy of *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion. I consumed the book. Her account of the collision of thoughts with the surges of feelings was vivid. Her slow realisation that her husband was not coming back came into sharp focus after I was present when my stepfather died. Once again, I became aware of the strange and mysterious act of living which finds its completion in death. Those remaining must make sense of the loss, enduring waves of emotions that engulf them.

During the first year of the Covid19 pandemic I attended three online funerals. As I sat at my kitchen table observing the people I love, farewell their parents, I was struck by the dislocation and modernity of this process. I was alone in my house, outside the lockdown was in its fifth week. My connection to the world was via a Wi-Fi network. The pandemic brought death to me through the loss of three elders.

In April 2024, my father died after a short illness. His approach to death was one of acceptance unless the pain was too acute. As the pain increased, so did the medication and in the last days he slept until his last breath. I assisted in the wrapping of his body in a crisp white sheet and with the funeral directors, we lifted him onto the gurney transporting him to the hearse. All the staff at the care home stood along the corridors and foyers to bid him farewell. My relationship with him was always fractious but I felt that being his companion in death was essential. This daily contact helped me understand death's process and my complex grief for him.

My position in this exegesis is shaped by these things. I am a woman empowered by strong role models, I am shaped by professional and artistic practice, and I understand grief as one who lives in the world. What Batty and Zalipour (2024, p. 5) conceptualise here resonates with me:

While arguably all researcher backgrounds have a bearing on their disciplines, in creative practice research it invariably shapes the questions being asked (aims) and the way they are being answered (research design), and the extent to which knowledge derived from the study can influence the practice profession itself (engagement and impact) – if this is the intention. Who they are also determines the volume and (arguably) level of practice to be expected [...] and shapes their ability to reflect on and interpret the creative process in context.

In positioning myself in this PhD research project, I draw on intimate stories of grief that have guided my creative decisions throughout this project.



FIGURE 1.6
Cabinet of curiosities: Grief



CHAPTER 2



CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED
KNOWLEDGE

Title Page Image: Collage incorporating prints of Baron zu Gàlandtha, Paul Esterházy (1550-1850) and front piece for engravers of the 19th Century depicting winged creature (1886)



INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of knowledge that contextualises and informs the exegesis.⁶ The review explores theoretical understandings of documentary, discourses surrounding its animated forms, scholarship relating to grief, and significant practice that contextualises the key concepts in my research question and the three films: *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star*.

⁶ In keeping with recent practice, given that the study draws on literature and animated documentaries, I describe the chapter as a 'Review of Contextual Knowledge' - rather than a review of literature (Najafi, 2023; Mortensen Steagall, 2019; Ventling, 2017; Toluta'u, 2015).

DEFINING DOCUMENTARY

Scholars continue to revise definitions of documentary (Corner, 1996; Nichols, 1991, Nichols & Baron, 2024; Plantinga, 2000, 2005; Smith & Rock, 2014). The genre has a complex history of production practices and approaches that contribute to its evolving forms. In 1995 Winston traced the term documentary to the word document "which furnishes evidence or information" (p. 11). He argued that, with the advent of photography came evidentiary status, and as documentary developed, this status was assumed. Accordingly, the provision of 'evidence' became the "source of the ideological power of documentary film" (Winston, 1995, p. 11). As digital technology progresses, and the invisibility of image manipulation becomes increasingly sophisticated, documentary's evidentiary assertions no longer stand up to traditional scrutiny.

John Grierson, founder of the British documentary movement, described documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality" (1933, p. 52). His description is often revisited by scholars (Barsam, 1976 & 1992; Bruzzi, 2006; Corner, 1996; Curran, 2022; De Jong, Knudsen & Rothwell, 2014; Eitzen, 1995; Kim, 2022; Nichols & Baron, 2024; Plantinga, 2005; Widdowson, 2018). Grierson's often quoted description suggests that documentary practice combines aesthetic cinematic methods with the capturing of lived experience. However, Nichols & Baron, (2024), note that Grierson's description is ambiguous because it fails to attend in detail to the factual and historical. Eitzen, (1995), offered a similar appraisal but cautioned that the depiction of reality is always an "artificial construct" (p. 82). Accordingly, he defined documentary as a type of fiction

because he considered both nonfiction and fiction film to be constructions. He argued that what differentiates documentary from dramatic fiction is documentary's origin in lived experience before it is shaped into a narrative. He observed that these lived origins and likenesses are captured and interpreted by the film maker.

In 1991, Nichols developed four documentary modes or clusters of cinematic techniques and conventions chosen and organised to demarcate nonfiction narratives. The first of these, the 'expository' documentary employs the use of voice over, and engages interview, archive and other visual tools to convince an audience of a particular viewpoint or argument. His second mode the 'observational' documentary describes a less-invasive and noninterventionist 'fly-on-the-wall' approach. In his third, 'interactive' mode, a relationship is built between the filmmaker and interviewee that allows the filmmaker to speak on behalf of those who are interviewed.⁷ Nichols's fourth 'reflexive' mode acknowledges cinematic processes and the filmmaker's presence.

7 In 2001, Nichols revised and renamed the interactive mode to participatory in the first edition of *Introduction to Documentary*.

8 Emphasis in the original text.

9 Profilmic is a term from film studies that refers to the reality or events occurring in front of the camera. Fabe (2014) notes the meaning is of critical importance as it "calls attention to the difference between objects that exist in the world before they were photographed and these same objects once they have been enframed by celluloid" (p.3).

Nichols, (2001) then proposed two additional modes. His 'poetic' mode (which was similar to his reflexive mode) acknowledges a poetic form and dispenses with filmic convention, adopting instead a distinctively lyrical and experimental approach. Nichols & Baron, (2024) suggest that the poetic documentary has similarities to avant-garde cinema. His 'performative' mode (like Nichols's earlier observational and reflexive modes) is relational and employs a subjective lens. This mode appropriates the expressive devices of fiction films, combined with 'oratorical techniques' (p. 144). Here, emphasis is placed on personal experiences and memories. In this mode, conventional notions of knowledge are challenged and we question facts and look for meaning that is more elusive. While Nichols & Baron's, (2024) modes are described discretely, they argued that they may overlap because filmmakers are often flexible in their practice.

Documentary, according to Nichols & Baron, "addresses the world in which we live, rather than a world imagined by the filmmaker" (2024, p.1).⁸ They suggest that instead of a rigid classification, it is valuable to acknowledge that each documentary informs our understanding of its nuances. They note that documentary is constantly recalibrating as technology and culture change. They observe a discord that exists between Grierson's "creative treatment" and "actuality" - the former implying fiction whereas the latter highlights the duty of journalists and historians to present credible facts. Furthermore, they assert that documentary is neither a fictional creation nor a faithful reproduction, because it "draws on and refers to historical reality while always representing it from a unique perspective" (2024, p. 13). Documentary, they contend, relies on the indexicality of the profilmic⁹ and this shores up its authenticity. In this exegesis, the

word indexicality draws from Charles Sander Peirce's (1839-1914) theory of signs. Indexicality refers to a documentary's image having a direct, almost literal, connection to the real world it depicts. In other words, its imagery makes evident (indexes) something that has occurred or exists in reality. Nichols & Baron, (2024) propose that this applies more to an individual image or sound, but a complete documentary work utilises multiple narrative and cinematic tactics and modes to convey its narrative. They argue that the creative treatment shifts us away from indexicality, to creative approaches and interpretation. In addition, they suggest that documentaries need to present consistent credibility and that to stray from this strategy breaches the fundamentals of documentary representation.

Renov, (1993) identified four "fundamental tendencies or rhetorical/aesthetic functions" of documentary. The first is to "record, reveal or preserve", the second is "to persuade or promote", the third is "to analyse or interrogate", and the fourth is "to express" (p. 21). According to Renov, these tendencies are not discrete; they may overlap. He argues that the principles underlying them emerge from the structure, purpose and impact that is particular to documentary. Renov emphasised the complexity and evolving diversity of documentary filmmaking and highlighted areas of practice that had hitherto been under explored.

Corner, (1996) proposed that 'veracity' is embedded in a documentary's narrative, structural devices and audience reception. He argued that the further documentary moves away from the veridicality of recorded images and sound, the more difficult it is to pin down. He also described a universally understood

'duality' of documentary, adding that it combines cinematic construction with proof. He claimed that the term documentary is readily disputed but it may be defined as a category of film and television that draws on and studies lived experience using cameras and sound as recording devices.

A decade later, in 2006, Ward considered how we might understand or engage with media artefacts that aim to depict reality but employ aesthetic choices to represent it. He proposed that stylistic strategies have the capacity to undermine truth value. According to Ward, documentary's constant is its claim to depict lived experience, but he proposed that "*how* it does it this, is something that is subject to change" (p. 8).¹⁰

Novel content and strategies, understood as creative treatment, lie at the core of documentary (de Jong, 2013). She suggests that documentary is an amalgam of qualities that represent the real in judicious and inventive ways. Thus, she reasons, an innovative approach to documentary storytelling, whether visual or sonic, does not erode its veracity. De Jong argues that defining documentary as a specific media form is challenging because of the myriads of approaches to production that have continued to evolve. In addressing this phenomenon, she suggests that documentary might usefully be framed as "a hybrid film genre which attempts to represent the 'real' in a creative and critical art form" (p. 20).

¹⁰ Emphasis in the original text.

¹¹ Capitalisation in original text

Expanding his consideration of the ethical concerns of documentary, Plantinga, (2005) offered and critiqued "characterizations" (p. 105) that might serve to separate documentaries from other non-fictional forms of cinema. He defined two characterisations of traditional documentary. The first was "Documentary as an Indexical Record (DIR)"¹¹ (ibid). This describes instances where moving images are indexically linked to the profilmic. Plantinga posits that DIR constructs its discourse via photographic imagery, and this imagery serves as evidentiary traces to their referents. He notes that these documentaries may be story driven, persuasive or taxonomic. His second, characteristic was "documentary as assertion" (DA), (ibid). Such documentaries he suggests employ a range of rhetorical articulations where the filmmaker's position is actively assertive, combining persuasion and firsthand testimony to establish truth claims about lived experience.

However, Plantinga noted that, given the wide variation of styles and approaches seen in documentary production, his demarcations might require further consideration. He proposed that a typical documentary is the implicit directorial Assertion of Veridical Representation (AVR). He argued that the defining feature of a prototypical documentary is the filmmaker's implicit assertion which is a dual commitment to truthful propositions and representation, and reliable audiovisual depictions of reality. Interestingly, he also suggested that "animated images can be reliable guides to their subjects..." (Plantinga, 2018, p. 117). In 2018, he reiterated that the filmmaker makes a pledge to the viewer that the images and sound used are reliable and accurate.

Recently Plantinga, (2020) has argued that, like fiction, documentaries are constructed,

persuasive and artistic. He maintains that documentary supplies us with "powerful visual and sonic documents" (p.113) that are consciously assembled to edify an audience. He asserts that documentaries are imaginatively shaped by their maker's perspectives and what distinguishes documentary is its aestheticism, social and political purpose, and power to persuade. This said, he maintains that Nichols' (1991, 2001) documentary modes remain a valid way to chart the genre. Winston, (2019) traces the etymology of 'documentary' to the Latin documentum (evidentiary record), noting its 1802 coinage as a term for written proof or document. This evidentiary connotation, he argues, later extended to photography where it positioned the photograph as an objective 'document'. When applied to moving images, he argues that this assumption imbued documentary film with its "ideological power" (p. 13).

ADAPTATION AND CHANGE

The shifting nature of documentary form, distribution and reception has offered filmmakers opportunities to adapt and innovate. Early works like *Hospital* (Wiseman, 1970), *Primary*, (Leacock, 1969); and *Salesman*, (Maysles, Maysles & Zwerin, 1969) were all examples of documentary making that were influenced by technological changes to cameras and sound recording equipment. These filmmakers believed that their approaches constituted an unmediated and objective rendering of lived experiences. However, at every step of the making process, subjective decisions were made. Camera positions, choice of subjects, and editing decisions all challenge claims to the objective view.

Filmmakers' styles and modes of production are diverse and documentary making has continued to adapt and apply innovative styles and techniques. Such innovation may be recognised in the use of dance as a central storytelling device in *Pina* (Wenders, 2011), the use of live action, stop motion and archive material in *Yarn*, (Jónasdóttir, Lorenzen, & Kirkegaard, 2016), the employment of interactivity and game play in *1979 Revolution: Black Friday* (Khonsari, 2016), and the use of digitally animated lego in *Piece by Piece*, (Neville, 2024). Documentary has also begun to occupy more intimate spaces in the form of immersive virtual reality, evidenced in work like *Spots of Light* (Weingrod, 2023).

ETHICS: THE PARTICIPANT, THE FILMMAKER AND THE AUDIENCE

Pryluck (1976) observed that with the development of lightweight cameras and the emergence of noninterventionist shooting, ethical issues between the filmmaker and participant began to emerge. His reflection occurred at a time when camera technology was transforming. Lightweight equipment was enabling filmmakers to access more intimate social spaces. He identified issues of power imbalance in filmmaker-participant relationships, stressing the importance of privacy and informed consent. He argued that in the fields of medical and social research, the purpose of voluntary informed consent is designed to safeguard participants' physical and mental well-being, and he noted that social sciences research includes the ethical principle that participants should not experience humiliation or diminished self-esteem. Pryluck proposed that the approach of social science was ethically relevant to documentary making but he observed that this principle is frequently violated in documentary filming whether intentionally or unintentionally. His consideration of the implications of 'direct cinema'¹² permeated subsequent discourse surrounding the ethics of production (Butchart, 2006; Butchart & Har-Gil, 2019; Aufderheide, Jazi & Chandra 2009; Aufderheide, 2024; Nash, 2011, 2012; Nichols, 1991, 2016; Nichols & Barron, 2024; Sanders, 2010, Winston, 1995, 2019).

In 2000, Winston contested the view that documentaries inherently convey truth, arguing that the profilmic should not be confused with the real. He believed that it is the nature and scale of mediation inside documentary production that needed addressing because it is this, that is the core of documentary's' ethical

dilemma. In 2005 he argued that applying journalistic ethics to documentary is problematic due to artistic freedom and the genre's overlap with other nonfiction media.

Like Nichols, (2001), Winston argued that there must be ethical discourse related to documentary making that focuses on relationships within production and post-production processes. He suggested that what exists between the documentarian, the funding body and participants is a site of possible conflict. Here, ethical concerns centre around the legal right to free speech, with the caveat of harm minimisation, and respect for privacy. Ethical concerns also relate to the relationship established between an audience, the filmmaker and funding organisations. Inside this relationship ethical concerns relate to principles of harm prevention, set against an audience's right to information and the filmmaker's right to expression.

Renov (2004) suggested that ethical practice must concern itself with factual accuracy, the dynamics of power in relation to representation, and the documentarian's subjective mediation of lived experience. Power, he proposed, is exercised through production techniques like framing or editing. Referencing Levinas, (1981 p. 198)¹³ he argued that documentary has an assumed claim to truth when it attempts to distil actuality into a unified narrative. In this process he contends that participants are reduced to "object of knowledge" (p.148). Renov argues that documentary has historically co-opted the 'other', reducing the complex to the singular through reductive explanations. He also proposes that documentary making needs to recognise its deficiencies by resisting claims to absolute knowledge (or truth) by explicitly acknowledging its shifting,

¹² Direct Cinema emerged as a result of lighter 16mm camera and sound equipment during the 1960s. This allowed filmmakers to document subjects that had been previously difficult to access using heavy 35mm camera and sound kits. As a consequence they were able to record material "on the scene" in schools, family homes, hospitals, welfare centres and mental institutions (Aufderheide, 2007).

¹³ In *The Subject of Documentary*, (2004) Renov reflects on Levinas' (1981) work *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* when discussing his ethics of documentary practice. Levinas' exploration centers on subjectivity and the self, and the relationship between the self and other foregrounding concepts of responsibility.

incomplete, and inchoate form.

As approaches have continued to evolve and new technologies have offered new modes of production and dissemination, ethical practice has remained a central concern of documentary storytelling. In 2010, Sanders observed that new technology and the emergence of new formats have created a resurgence in factual programming. With this interest and development, the borders of the documentary genre were extended. In the light of these changes she has discussed questionable production process including the exploitation of participants in ‘unscripted’ reality television programmes. She also argued that, despite changes in the nature of documentary making, the field of ethics has not developed in over thirty years. Sanders maintains that discussions of ethics should relate to morality and the context of production. She proposes that such concerns should embrace a duty of care of participants, audiences and filmmakers. Thus, she proposed a deeper investigation into documentary practice with consideration given to both participant relationships and the responsibility a film maker has to their own ethical framework.

14 In documentary film making a release (or participant release) form is a legal contract that grants permission to use a participant’s image, likeness, voice, or personal information in a work. This authorisation may include the use of the recording in other materials like promotion, advertising or additional productions. A release form may also include a clause that outlines payment or a clarification that the participant will not be paid. These forms are normally designed to protect filmmakers from potential legal claims or reprisals.

Maccarone, (2010) maintains that a documentarian’s central ethical duty is harm prevention. She views documentary films as “a practice of social institution” (p. 197) from which responsibilities surface. She notes that documentary is both rhetorical and an art form that requires the avoidance of manipulation while simultaneously preserving aesthetic treatment. She has also argued that consent should be both informed and without threat.

Nash, (2011) proposed that moral reasoning occupies a central position in documentary narratives and that documentary ethics occur within specific contexts. She suggested that empirical scholarship might unravel the intricacies of production and reception if it is to draw on empirical perspectives in addition to those developed by filmmakers. Like Sanders, (2010) she suggested that ethical issues often relate to the complexity of interpersonal relationships that occur inside documentary production. These include issues of power that may arise in collaborative maker-participant relationships. As an extension of this, she noted that concerns over authorship may precipitate disputes where filmmakers have failed to recognise the significant contribution of participants (particularly in observational films). In reference to Nichol’s, (2001) modes of documentary, she proposes that, given the evolving complexity of the media form, more subtle perspectives are necessary. She also argued that current release forms needed to be reviewed.¹⁴

In focusing specifically on observational filmmaking, Nash expanded on Renov’s, (2004) interrogation of documentary practice and audience engagement. She discussed ethical ambiguities inherent in documentary

making as it relates to privacy, informed consent, and power dynamics. These issues she suggested can all reinforce practices of ‘othering’. Central to her argument was Levinas’, (1981) emphasis on relationality in terms of a filmmaker-participant-viewer triad that develops in longitudinal projects. She noted that observational filmmaking is often conducted over long periods of time and is an intimate undertaking where participants contribute to the shaping of the narrative. This process she argued, can complicate relationships and representation. Accordingly, she proposed that ethical considerations should extend beyond consent forms and involve negotiating ongoing relational labour. Ethical fissures, she suggested, can be resolved using high trust levels predicated on participants feeling heard and understood.

In his 2016 book, *Speaking Truths with Film; Evidence, Ethics, Politics in Documentary*, Nichols proposed that a concrete ethical framework should “address the need to respect the dignity and earn the trust of subjects and viewers alike, as well as acknowledge that a struggle for power and the right to represent a distinct perspective are at issue” (p. 163). He maintained that because documentaries draw their narratives from human lives, they require close attention to potential harm associated with both production and reception. Accordingly, he argued that care is required for participants who share their lives in front of the camera and for the audiences who witness them. He proposed that an ethical framework must prioritise the participants and audience’s autonomy by adopting approaches where the filmmaker is transparent and respectful, eschewing deception or exploitation. Like Pryluck, (1976), Renov, (2004), and Nash, (2011), Nichols argued that issues of power and representation are inherent in documentary

making. He maintained, if participants are vulnerable or reliant on a documentary maker to convey their stories, the potential of exploitation increases. However, Nichols also noted that there are instances where ethically a filmmaker may employ deception (for example where a public figure strategically obfuscates or conceals the truth). He argued that issues of misrepresentation can impact on participants and audiences, including, the orchestration of actualities, the use of inauthentic archive material and the duping of individuals. He suggested that ethical methods of production rely on a commitment to reason, accuracy, reliable judgment and historical fidelity. These commitments, he maintains are important because documentaries inform audiences, stir emotions, challenge convictions and sometimes motivate action based on a sense of shared values with the constructed narrative.

Butchart and Har-Gill, (2019) published an intensive study conducted over ten years, during which time they interviewed 154 documentary makers. Their research inquired into filmmaker's reflections on ethical decision-making. Employing reflective testimony to collect data about ethical production practice, they focused on commonly encountered issues during production. They describe this as a "mode of reflective communication" (p. 58). Here, the interviewee serves as a witness to their practice. They reflect on practice, decision making, planning and execution. The filmmaker "testifies by reflectively attending to acts of looking, storytelling and their implications" (ibid). Butchart and Har-Gill argue that reflection on the processes of decision making is central to ethical practice in production. From this research they identified eight principles:

- (1) respect of participants;
- (2) care and participant endangerment;
- (3) legal constraints;
- (4) artistic choice and creative freedom;
- (5) inclusion and exclusion of audio-visual content;
- (6) objectivity;
- (7) attracting audiences;
- and (8) truth. (p. 58)

Like Winston, (1988, 2000), Sanders, (2010), Nash, (2011), and Nichols, (2016), Butchart & Har-Gill identified ethical concerns across documentary production, postproduction and distribution. Like Sanders, (2010) and Nash, (2012), they saw "documentary filmmaking ethics as situation specific" (p. 60), and proposed that this makes a filmmaker's ethical framework something guided by particular production circumstances.

Rabiger & Hermann (2020) argued that a documentary maker must see participants' perspectives to fully comprehend their role as

filmmakers. In longitudinal film productions, they proposed that participants should be cognisant of time constraints, their appearance and how rushes might be utilised in editing.¹⁵ They suggest that filmmakers must also consider positions of truth, influence and empathy, and remain aware of their potential misuse of power. They argue that consent must be free from deception or coercion, with participants fully informed about production procedures and potential outcomes. The documentarians' obligations, they contend, are moral, ethical, and legal, with the filmmaker's primary duty being to ensure that the work is truthful and free of contrivance. They further propose that "showing the origin and authenticity of evidence helps maintain a good faith relationship with [the] audience" (p. 337). Finally, they emphasise that filmmakers must remain conscious of their own assumptions and give detailed consideration to issues of representation.¹⁶

Patricia Aufderheide has written extensively about media, documentary and ethics. In 2009 she, along with Peter Jaszi and Mridu Chandra, released *Honest Truths; Documentary Filmmakers on Ethical Challenges* (Aufderheide, Jazi & Chandra 2009)¹⁷. This study was based on interviews with 45 documentary filmmakers. The research focused on ethical issues encountered by documentary makers. Her work resourced the Documentary Accountability Working Group (DAWG) that was established to respond to the future of the genre and to address exploitative and sensationalist documentary practices that were surfacing as documentary making developed into a larger scale industry. Aufderheide's work placed emphasis on a 'duty of care' for participants and the use of research and consultation to identify core values. From her material guidelines for production and reflection

15 Rushes refer to recorded, unedited footage taken straight from the camera.

16 For a comprehensive list of questions/considerations that the authors purpose should be considered during preproduction, see Rabiger & Hermann, (2020, pp. 339-340).

17 <https://cmsimpact.org/resource/honest-truths-documentary-filmmakers-on-ethical-challenges-in-their-work/>

were produced. DAWG prioritised surveying marginalised filmmaking communities in their research.

Aufderheide,¹⁸ (2024) observes that there are few formal conventions or structures that underpin documentary ethics. She suggests that the terrain of ethics falls into two categories: ethical concerns associated with documentary filmmaking, and ethical considerations that relate to media corporations and institutions. She notes that ethical practice documentaries carry equal weight to their journalistic and scholarly counterparts. She maintains that in the past, documentary filmmaking has sidestepped certain standards while asserting its social impact and claims of veracity. Aufderheide notes that ethical codes of practice exist in professions like journalism, and these offer legitimacy and recognition. These codes have had a significant impact on conduct and content, influencing both audiences and practitioners. According to

Aufderheide, the requirements of fair use have improved standards in broadcasting and the production of documentary content. Given that her research employs a cultural studies lens to focus on industry practice, political and economic contexts, and social movements, she notes that documentary has become a major part of media consumption, with production increasing, due to the growth of streaming services and genre popularity. She contends that audiences continue to trust documentaries even as they grow more sceptical of mainstream media. However, she notes that filmmakers' independence faces increasing pressure from rapid production demands, the commodification of aesthetics, AI assisted production practices, and corporate sponsorship.

Nichols and Baron, (2024) argue that ethical concerns are deeply intertwined with documentary practice because of its artistic and expressive nature. They note that while filmmakers aim to tell evocative and compelling stories, documentary “uses the lives of real people” (p. 40). Like Butchart & Har-Gill, (2019), Aufderheide, (2024), and Rabiger & Hermann, (2020) they argue that an uneven power dynamic may arise between the documentary maker and participants. This may influence representation and participant status, including whether the participant is a public figure or private citizen. Nichols & Baron note that documentary participants, ‘present’ themselves, rather than performing a role as they would in fiction.

The processes embedded within the production of the suite of films in this project are focused on transparent practice This includes considered care and respect (aroha) where the participants have agency in the entirety of the production. This is a functioning and practical enactment of

the ethical frameworks outlined by scholars like Aufderheide (2024), Nichols & Baron (2024) and the extensive findings of Aufderheide et al (2009).

DISCOURSE SURROUNDING ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY

Having discussed definitions of documentary and reviewed issues of ethics surrounding the genre, given the animated nature of the research project, it is useful to consider discourses relating to documentaries that employ animation in their recording of actual events.

Origins of animated documentary

On the 7th of May 1915 the Lusitania set sail for Liverpool, on board were 2000 passengers. Nearing her destination, the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine. In 1918, *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (McKay) was released in cinemas. Because there was no photographic record of the disaster, McKay produced 25,000 drawings to recount the event.

The work included footage of MacKay as he prepared the production and intertitles that provided additional factual information. MacKay also included photographic images of some of the deceased passengers in the film. MacKay's documentary used a hybrid approach to tell the story of the loss of life. (Public Domain Movies, n.d.)

The Sinking of the Lusitania, according to Ehrlich, is “considered the first animated documentary” (2021, p. 34). The film is often used as reference point, not only because of its historical approach to factual storytelling, but also because it raised concerns about how animation might function as a representational device in documentary

¹⁸ Their framework can be accessed here: <https://www.docaccountability.org/framework>

(DelGaudio,1997; Honess Roe, 2013, 2014; Formenti, 2014, 2022; Roe 2011; Strøm, 2003; Ward, 2006, 2011; Wells, 1997; Widdowson, 2018).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEFINITIONS, MODES, CLASSIFICATIONS AND FUNCTIONS

Formenti, (2022) maintains that as animated documentary began to mature between the 1940s and the mid 1980's, it entered what she describes as its "classical age" (p. 94), which began shortly after World War II and spanned a period from 1940 to 1985. She divided this 'age' into three phases. The first, the "affirmation phase" (p. 111) developed as World War 2 began. During this time extensive production occurred in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. These animated documentaries served as educational and informational films commissioned by both government and private organisations. Their primary function was propaganda or promotional products. The second or "consolidation phase" (ibid) emerged in the period spanning 1946-67. During this time, the film industry became the central producer of animated documentaries, and subject matter moved away from the purely instructional or propagandist documentaries to more community-oriented narratives. Formenti argues that during the third period (1968-85), animated documentary entered a "transitional phase", laying the groundwork for the subjective, expressive films that would later develop. These films continued to use an authoritative voice but began to employ expressive and experimental visualisation and complex illustrative tactics to express emotion and mental states. Following this period, animated documentaries proliferated, and approaches and subjects continued to diversify. This led to a number of scholars attempting to

define the media form (Formenti, 2014, 2022; Del Gaudio, 1997; Gushchina, 2024; Honess Roe, 2011a, 2013; Murray & Ehrlich 2020; Strøm, 2003; Ward, 2006, 2008, Wells, 1997; Widdowson, 2018).

DelGaudio, (1997) made the observation that throughout the history of documentary making, the genre's broadening nature has led to an expansion of existing descriptions, classifications and theory. She also maintains that advances in computer technology have prompted concerns relating to faithful representations of reality. She notes that early animated documentaries like *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), *Evolution* (Fleischer & Fleischer,1925) and *The Einstein Theory of Relativity* (Fleischer,1923) combined live action and animation. Aligning animated documentaries like *A Brief History of Time* (Morris, 1992) and *Of Stars and Men* (Hubley & Hubley,1964) with Nichols' (1991) reflexive mode, she notes that these works use animation as an illustrative device to document events that either lack archival records or are impossible to capture through traditional means. DelGaudio proposes that animation serves as "metacommentary" (p. 192), drawing our attention to its techniques and production processes. She also notes that increasing audience awareness of animated documentary's artificiality raises questions about the effectiveness of representation. However, she argues that every representation, despite its documentary provenance, is fabricated.

In his book *Understanding Animation* (1998), Paul Wells quotes animators Halas & Batchelor's essay *European Cartoon: A Survey of the Animated Film* (1949), where they argue "one of the outstanding advantages of animated film is its power of 'penetration'" (p. 10). Wells notes that

central to penetration is the "ability to evoke internal space and portray the invisible" (p.122). This mode has the potential to reveal unseen states or concepts that resist conventional or live action depiction. According to Wells, this mode suggests that complex ideas or distinctive ways of experiencing the world can often only be expressed through the language of the animator, as these states are most effectively and fundamentally communicated through visual means.

Wells draws on Hans Richter's *The Struggle for the Film: Towards a Socially Responsible Cinema* (1986) in his essay *The Beautiful Village and the True Village: A Consideration of Animation and the Documentary Aesthetic* (1997). Richter, (1986) describes the earliest examples of cinema as "primal" (p. 41). At this time, audiences were able to view the spectacle of movement and the recording of everyday life as novel discoveries. As cinema evolved, so did the aesthetics of the moving image, permitting the shaping of facts based on the director's stylistic choices. At this time Richter notes that although simple facsimiles persisted, new stylistic treatments began to explore the aesthetic potential of documentary making as an "artistic form" (p. 44). However, he argues that over time the use of aesthetics was seen to undermine authenticity and disguise 'truth'. According to Richter, it was use of montage, rhythm, juxtaposition and movement in Vertov's approaches to post production that elevated factual cinema to a liberated artistic expression.

Richter claims that the documentarist is essentially a creative being and uses this to camouflage or conceal the fiction of objectivity. Richter contends the central challenge for documentary makers lies in balancing recording

lived experience with the creative impulse to interpret it. He suggests that there is an interface between documentary and animation and because animation is often perceived as a fictional film language, this raises issues within documentary reception. Given this argument, Wells proposes four modes of animated documentary: the imitative mode, subjective mode, the fantastic mode and the postmodern mode. His imitative mode closely mirrors the established stylistic and structural norms of traditional live action documentary. According to Wells, these documentaries are informational, educational or persuasive. His subjective mode includes the creative reinterpretation of reality, where humour, personal expression, and social commentary are blended to challenge traditional documentary conventions. His third, fantastic mode relocates animation in a non-realist framework that broadens its subjectivity. In this mode the use of imagery clearly diverges from reality and traditional media conventions. The fourth mode Wells describes as postmodern. This mode he suggests, also adopts a subjective stance but resists traditional mixing of borrowed styles and reflects the broader principles of postmodernity (including a rejection of objective authority).

¹⁹ He argues that this association has been reinforced by the global influence of American commercial animation.

In his essay *The Animated Documentary*, Strøm, (2003) proposes that animation is a technique, and documentary is a “content-related approach” (p. 47). However, he notes that animation and documentary can function harmoniously, but contends that the term ‘animated documentary’ may seem paradoxical because documentary is understood to represent the real, whereas animation is linked to fantasy, comedy, and embellishment.¹⁹ Strøm observes that animated documentary is a widely used approach that may be evidenced in diverse forms including scientific visualisations, experimental art, and unconventional media. He proposes that, for a work to be categorised as an animated documentary, at least half of its content must be animated. He also observes that, as documentaries expand and adopt new technologies as representational tactics, debates continue to arise over their implications for authenticity because these advancements challenge traditional notions of indexicality. This prompts questions about whether an image is ‘real’ and whether an animation can authentically convey truth. He critiques documentary’s claim to objectivity, emphasising that all documentary makers inevitably shape images and narratives. However, he argues that animated documentary has the potential to be a legitimate and elegant production strategy in visualising the real. He suggests that animated documentaries employ “performative” elements (see Nichols, 2001), and their subjective nature can provide access to “the more general processes of society” (p. 149) because they are able to employ a wide array of poetic and expressively, evocative approaches.

Patrick, (2004) argues that animation has been misrepresented as a technique that is too artificial to represent reality. He positions animation as a significant step in the evolution

of documentary as a form. Like Strøm, (2003) he argues that it is impossible to objectively ‘capture’ lived experience. He also notes that developments in digital imaging have fundamentally changed audience perceptions of authenticity and this has dislocated traditional understandings of the real and the constructed. Like Strøm, (2003) Patrick argues that animated documentary may be positioned within Nichols’ (2001) performative mode. He proposes four structures of animated documentary. First, an illustrative structure uses animation to reconstruct or comment on historical events where no photographic archive exists. While comparable to journalism in its use of factual accounts, this structure adopts a deliberately subjective stance. Second, a narrated structure uses scripted voiceover to drive the narrative and underline the imagery. Third, a sound-based structure employs found or actuality audio. Such recording is noninterventionist and captures the authenticity of human voices. Structured by the recordings, these films examine human emotional reactions to real world experiences. Finally, he borrows from Wells, (1997) to propose a fourth structure, that he calls the fantastic. This structure is distinct from the other structures because it extends the potential of documentary by subverting a realist approach. A fantastic structure, he believes, is purely subjective in its approach, using surrealism, symbol and metaphor to visualise narratives. Patrick maintains that each structure is distinct in its technical and aesthetic approach and each continually reinvents itself.

Ward, (2006) notes that documentary is often viewed as a genre that excludes subjective and expressive elements, traits commonly associated with animation. This perspective he suggests, stems from philosophical traditions

that prioritise objective realism and have led to narrow definitions of representation. Like Strøm, (2003) he believes that the expansion and spectrum of documentary practice requires new understandings of the genre. Ward claims that animation “demonstrates clearly how documentary can be in the realm of subjectivity, fantasy and non-normative approaches to understanding the world around us” (p. 83). Because of animation’s ability to reach beyond the photographic into the potentials of the explicitly constructed, Ward describes its production processes as “interventionist, experimental and expressive” (p. 85). He highlights animation’s potential to communicate thoughts and emotional states. Because of this, he notes, it is difficult to propose animation as an ideal strategy for documentary productions.

This said, he argues that animation does not necessarily undermine the credibility or validity of factual content, in fact, it may be more effective at revealing deeper truths about reality. Ward also agrees with DelGaudio’s (1997) assertion that certain animated documentaries draw attention to their production techniques and, as a result, they can be described as reflexive.

Of significance to this project is Ward’s observation that animated documentary can be used to anonymise interview participants and enable an audience to witness the depiction of interior human processes. In discussing *Animated Minds* (Glynne, 2003-2008), a series that uses direct testimony from those who have experienced mental illness, he notes that each episode focuses on a different issue with diverse visual strategies used to depict audio material. Here, the use of animation he contends, enables privacy to be honoured. He also notes that, in this documentary, animation functions as an ideal medium to express complex meanings that underpin our human experience because the director is able to work beyond what is physically visible. Ward also discusses two other examples: *A is for Autism* (Webb, 1992) and *Snack and Drink*²⁰ (Sabiston, 1999) which he describes as interactive (see Nichols, 1991). These two films were made as collaborative projects that integrated drawings by the participants as part of the storytelling.

A year after positing these arguments, Ward revisited Bob Sabiston’s *Snack and Drink*, (1999) and explored Peter Lord’s stop motion animated documentary, *Going Equipped* (1990).²¹ In his chapter *Animated Interactions: Animation, Aesthetics and the World of ‘Interactive Documentary’* Ward suggested that knowledge

emerges from the “interactions between people in the real world” (2007, p.115). He highlighted the paradox of animated interviews, given that the audio remains real while the images are constructed. He suggested that “animated interactions” create “multiplications” of the original materials (p. 125). Here, meaning is generated through interconnections between the participant, the recorded video (or audio) and the illustrated rendering. According to Ward, a dialogic relationship emerges between these layers that results in a re-evaluation of how we understand the representation of lived experience. He contends that despite the participant’s pictorial absence, the animation and recorded sound elevate their presence in the final documentary work.

In 2011, a special issue, *Making It (Un) Real: Contemporary Theories and Practices in Documentary Animation*, was published in *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.²² In her editorial, Suzanne Buchan discussed the transformation of creative practices in documentary production. She positioned animated documentary as creative, ethically aware, and capable of visualising interior experiences.

Jeffrey Skoller’s introduction to the same journal observed a blurring of rigid distinctions that he claimed define the genres of documentary and animation. This shift, he noted reflected the evolution of both media practice and audience reception. He argued that previously understood binaries of documentary’s indexicality and animation’s fictive expressions had eroded and audiences encounter hybrid films that combine animation with documentary. These expressions he maintained challenge our understanding, and signify wider technological and cultural change.

20 Sabiston’s animated documentary *Snack and Drink* (1999) takes us on a journey with Ryan Power on his way to buy sweets and a soft drink. Ryan has autism and the film brings us into his world using colour, movement and a variety of illustrative, painterly and textual treatments. The documentary can be seen here: https://youtu.be/AL3LMFZEW-E?si=C5A5ueiqdBk_9SXw

21 Peter Lord’s film *Going Equipped* (1990) tells the story of a young man’s life before and after incarceration. Lord uses plasticine model animation to portray the interviewee, Derek Robinson. (This film was part of the Channel Four’s Lip-Synch series of animated interviews produced by Aardman Animation).

22 This publication presented significant thinking about documentary animation at the time. It contained contributions from a range of scholars and filmmakers including Tess Takahashi, Karen Beckman, Paul Ward, Laura U. Marks and Lewis Klahr.

Given this shift, he proposed that documentary truth is no longer solely wedded to photographic indexicality. He argued that the recording of lived experience has limitations and animation offers the possibility of visualising interior states of human experience that are beyond the reach of cameras.

Skoller noted that although the hybridisation of cinema forms had been historically applied by experimental and avant-garde cinema practitioners, the practice now permeates nonfiction forms, including exhibition, reportage and social media (all of which were inviting scholarly attention). He observed that conventions of documentary persist in contemporary culture despite the emergence of reflexive, interpretative and subjective modes of practice and he asserted that many mainstream documentaries use strategies like reflexivity to perpetuate the illusion of transparency or objectivity.

In the same journal issue Honess Roe, (2011a) discussed the history and scholarly attention given to animated documentary, and proposed a set of functions to understand how animated documentaries work. In addition to frame-by-frame manipulation or digital animation, she proposed that an animated documentary also:

(1) needs to have been recorded or created frame by frame; (2) must be about *the* world rather than *a* world wholly imagined by its creator and (3) has to have been presented as a documentary by its producers and/or received as documentary by audiences, festivals or critics. (p. 217)

Honess Roe argued that early attempts to ground animated documentary within the framework of documentary modes (Nichols, 1991) narrowed our understanding of the form. She also critiqued DelGaudio's (1997) concept of the reflexive documentary because she believed the categorisation failed to consider films that do not question their own representational structures or capabilities. In addition she argued that Nichols, (2001); Patrick, (2004) and Strøm's (2003) performative mode was vague and "harder to reconcile with animation" (p. 223). Although Honess Roe acknowledged that Patrick (2004) and Wells (1997) classifications for animated documentary were beneficial in identifying the form, she questioned whether these fully illuminated its unique characteristics.

Accordingly, she identified three distinctive functions of animation as it occurs in documentary filmmaking. She proposed that these functions "help us understand what we learn from animated documentaries and how we learn it" (p. 225).

Her first function, 'mimetic substitution', uses animation to replace events that are difficult or impossible to capture through live action footage. The second, 'non-mimetic substitution', takes a more abstract or figurative approach, deliberately rejecting "the illusion of the *profilmic* (live-action realism) to focus instead on expressing meaning through

[animation's] aesthetic realisation" (p. 226). Honess Roe's third function, 'evocation', leveraged animation's ability to visualise interior states, emotions, sensations, and subjective experiences. Affective states she argued are difficult for live-action to convey. By employing symbolic, impressionistic, or abstract techniques, she argued documentary makers are able "to imagine the world from someone else's perspective" (p. 227). She noted the ability of animated documentary to evoke lived experience particularly of those who are marginalised or outside of the mainstream.

Jonathan Rozenkrantz, (2011), in his essay *Colourful claims: Towards a theory of animated documentary*, examined the legitimacy of animation as a documentary strategy. Like Honess Roe, (2011a), Skoller, (2011), and Ward, (2007), he noted that documentary definitions have been conceived in multiple ways and how documentary is defined can be contentious. He questioned the extent to which animation can be true, noting differences in scholarly responses. Like Honess Roe, Rozenkrantz questioned the tendency to use Nichol's (1991) modes to situate animated documentary because they fail to account for significant differences between animation and the *profilmic*. He argued that although animated documentaries lack photographic indexicality, through participant testimony and subjective truth, they can achieve authenticity. He proposed that "the real issue is the existential difference between the photograph and the drawing, where the former requires and gives evidence of its referent while the latter doesn't" (para. 33).

Honess Roe, (2011b) examined Bob Sabiston's series of interviews which he treated with Rotoshop,²³ software he developed in 1997.

23 https://www.flatblackfilms.com/Flat_Black_Films/Rotoshop.html.

The effect is similar to rotoscoping or painting over a film or video footage frame by frame so Rotoshop's look is suggestive of hand-drawn animation. The software is designed to illustrate the delicate manner of human movement and expression. In addition the programme was created to generate frames between each keyframe which produced smoother flowing movement.

The interviews were documentary constructions to which a variety of artistic treatments had been applied. Honess Roe proposed that when viewing animated documentaries, our expectations are disrupted because the visual and aural tools of traditional documentary making are

substituted for animation, a medium that she argued, transcends the representation of lived experience. She suggested that "in their place we see animated images that go beyond merely re-presenting reality with a style, materiality and presence, that we must negotiate in our conception and understanding..." (p. 27). She argued that this experience of both absence and excess is something that an audience must grapple with. Drawing on Nichols, (1991) and Renov, (2004) she noted that it is not just testimony that conveys information, but also the physical bodily presence of an interviewee that expresses complex language which offers layered meaning. She argued that rotoscoped interviews create a sense of the uncanny, despite the close proximity to the indexical. This, she suggests, replaces intimacy with an unsettling sense of distance.²⁴

In 2013, documentary filmmaker Andy Glynne suggested that the union of animation and documentary can be resonant and distinctive, although he argued that not all combinations work. He noted the popularity and proliferation of animated documentaries observing that often these films can be intimate, personal and emotional. Such films, he suggested, provide unique, subjective windows into human experience. In his series *Animated Minds*, (2003-2008)²⁵ that documented the testimonies of individuals who have experienced issues with mental health, he sought "to communicate the subjective experience" of the participants (p. 74). In this work, people were encouraged to use metaphors to communicate their experiences and this provided visual material for his animations. Glynne proposed that the deployment of animation was a suitable tactic for visually describing the interiority of mental distress and sadness, (because animation can afford us insight

into internal worlds). He also proposed that animation can be used to illustrate unfilmable events, and as a tool for ensuring anonymity.

In *The Classical Animated Documentary and its Contemporary Evolution*, Formenti, (2022) argued that animation has been deployed as a strategy for addressing the real world since the early days of moving image. These films she noted, use animation's fictional conventions to tell real world narratives. She observed that these works might be fully or partly animated. She argued that in an animated documentary, the animation must be substantial in quality and meaningfully synchronised with the recorded audio to the extent that, without the animation, the meaning of the film would be lost. Formenti argued that historically, animated documentary has received little scholarly attention, although interest had intensified across the preceding thirty years. Due to the dearth of scholarship, animated documentary was perceived as a relatively recent occurrence. She noted that it wasn't until the release of *Waltz with Bashir* (Folman, 2008), that widespread scholarly interest began to surface. In her review of animation history, she observed two representational and graphic trends in animated nonfiction: "Sober animation" (p. 24) that uses scientific graphic visual language to convey information in a dry and diagrammatic style which prevents immersive storytelling and "Fabled animation" (p. 28) that utilises of fiction animation's visual language and narrative structure to illustrate reality that can inform and amuse.

In 2014, Formenti contributed to the ongoing classification debate by suggesting that animated documentaries employ the visual language of fiction filmmaking and because of this, they have a tenuous indexical connection to reality.

24 In 2013, building on her previous scholarship, Honess Roe published the first monograph on the subject: *Animated Documentary*. Here, she continued to argue the inappropriateness of trying to understand animated documentary by discussing it in relation to Nichols, (1991) modes of representation. She emphasised the potential of animation as a strategy for representation, highlighting its difference from live action documentary. Significantly, she argued that animation liberates documentary from the strictures of indexicality (Nichols, 1991) by employing a multiplicity of styles and strategies. In the monograph she reiterated her (2011) distinctive functions of animation: mimetic substitution, non-mimetic substitution, and evocation. These functions were further refined in 2021.

25 The first series of *Animated Minds* was released in 2003. There are seven series that can be viewed here <https://www.animatedminds.com/watch-the-series>

Accordingly, she argued, these films should be reconceptualised as docudrama. While she noted that both forms merge fact with fictionalisation, animated documentaries have a stronger relationship with traditional documentary. She argued that factual recordings in animated documentaries can be recontextualised or undermined by animated visuals and this can lessen their documentary claim. However, she noted that animated documentaries can possess a distinct sincerity that is missing in live action docudrama. She also argued that animated documentaries accentuate their construction whereas docudrama can be misunderstood as live action. Following this line of argument, she proposed that animated documentary is “not just a form of docudrama but the sincerest form of docudrama” (p. 113).

In their anthology *Drawn from Life*²⁶ (2020), the editors Nea Ehrlich and Jonathan Murray noted that despite animated documentary’s proliferation and the scholarly interest it has attracted, a definitive conceptualisation was yet to emerge. Central to their concerns was the use of animation to convey authentic, factual and plausible narratives that are more commonly recognised in live action documentary.

26 *Drawn from Life* (2020) explored the development of scholarship and practice of animated documentary. It included essays from Paul Ward, Paul Wells and Lawrence Thomas Martinelli, and practitioners Samantha Moore, Shelia Sofan and Jonathan Hodgson.

27 Lefèvre’s, (2020) focus was on interactive media such as gaming and participant-orientated virtual worlds.

28 Lefèvre argued that animated documentary is inherently reflexive because our attention is drawn to its construction.

29 This approach is discussed in the critical commentary chapter of the exegesis.

In the same anthology Pascal Lefèvre, building on claims by Honess Roe, (2011a) Skoller, (2011) and Ward, (2007), also argued that animated documentary is difficult to define or demarcate. Lefèvre, (2020) suggests that a hybrid documentary employs a blend of narrative and formal techniques from nonfiction and fiction. This approach, he argues, can be observed in a diverse array of creative and media artefacts including works of fine art, nonfiction and fiction writing, graphic novels, cinema and television. He located the form within the wider “context of hybrid creative practices that deliberately mix fact and fiction” (p. 22). In his discussion of varied styles and types of animation Lefèvre proposed a preliminary classification scheme that featured: diverse techniques for creating animated visuals; unity of style versus a mix of heterogenous styles; combinations of different types of source materials; various tonalities; diverse truth claims; varied degrees and quantities of fictional elements combined with factual counterparts; absence versus presence of the artist; different durations; various presentation forms; and varying degrees of interactivity (Lefevre, 2020, pp. 25-26).²⁷

Lefèvre also argued that his “provisional taxonomy” (p. 24) underscores the fluid and the porous borders of animated documentary. Using Nichols’, (2001) modes of representation to explore animated documentary, he identified the poetic mode in films like Ryan Larkin’s atmospheric and meditative work *Walking* (1968), the reflexive mode in Jonas Odell’s documentary, *Never Like the First Time* (2006),²⁸ and the performative mode in animated documentaries like *A is for Autism* (Webb, 1992) and *Waltz with Bashir* (Folman, 2008). Lefèvre suggested such “documentaries subjective accounts of reality address the viewer in

emotional and expressive terms” (p. 24). Unlike Honess Roe, (2011a, 2013) and Rozenkrantz, (2011), he contended that Nichols’ modes are beneficial to analysis, debate and characterising animated documentary. Citing Roscoe & Hight, (2001) he also emphasised the “dynamic interplay” that occurs between a documentary maker’s intention, the chosen style and structure of their film and the way they construct their work for the viewer. This, he noted, is particularly important in hybrid documentaries because these interconnections are multifaceted.

POSITIONING GRIEF

Being cognisant of ongoing debates about the nature and implications of animated documentary, I accept Strøm’s, (2003) argument that animation and documentary can function harmoniously, but ‘animated documentary’ may seem paradoxical because documentary is understood to represent the real whereas animation is historically linked to notions of artificiality. However, like Strøm, (2003), I see animated documentary reaching beyond the profilmic because it has a distinct capacity, as Buchan, 2011; Honess Roe, 2011a, 2013, 2021; Glynne, 2013; Skoller, 2011; and Ward, 2006 note, to visualise interior states of human experience that are beyond the reach of cameras.

My thinking is aligned with Glynne’s, (2013) suggestion that animated documentary can provide unique, subjective windows into human experience, especially in instances where one is documenting experiences of interiority, mental distress or sadness. I also perceive the agency of animation as a device for protecting the anonymity of interviewees although in each of my films, the visual presence of each person is rendered evident for a short moment.²⁹

Like Patrick, (2004) and Strøm, (2003) I accept that it is impossible to objectively capture lived experience. However, I believe that both documentary makers and audiences have evolved to the extent that perceptions of authenticity, based on traditional understandings of the real and constructed, have moved, so animated documentations of lived experience can be understood as valid depictions of reality. Within this, I accept Ward's, (2007) assertion that there is paradox when interviews (audio that is 'real') and animated images (that are constructed) interact, but like him, I believe that meaning is generated as a network of interconnections between the participant, the recorded audio, and a collaged animation.

30 In reviewing these works I am cognisant that they are selections from a wider corpus of animated documentary work that narrativises death and grief. This includes Denis Tupicoff's *My Mother's Voice*, (1997) https://youtu.be/AUQ31SQ-1mM?si=8LvaJp5_oj32TBX7; Dustin Grella's *Prayers for Peace*, (2009) <https://dustystudio.com/project/prayers-for-peace/>; John Summerson's *Road Trip*, (2013) <https://www.johnsummerson.com/films/road-trip>; Freddie Griffiths' *My Dad's Name was Huw. He was an Alcoholic Poet*, (2019) <https://www.fredgriffiths.co.uk/my-dad-s-name-was-huw>; Camila Donoso Astudillo's *Camposanto*, (2014) <https://vimeo.com/camiladonoso/camposanto?share=copy>; and Reanimation's *My Daughter Died. How do I introduce her to my Son?* (2020) <https://vimeo.com/392561193?share=copy>.

31 The animated documentary can be viewed here: <https://www.nfb.ca/film/thanadoula/>

32 A thanadoula or death servant, from 'Thanatos' (death) and 'doula' (servant), is a palliative-carer who supports and guides a dying individual and their loved ones.

33 Natalie Eskenazy is featured in this reenactment.

Like Formenti, (2014) I see my animated documentaries as accounts that accentuate their construction through diverse devices, some of which were identified by Lefèvre, (2020) in his provisional taxonomy. These include, the use of diverse (collage) techniques for creating animated visuals, the orchestration of continuity and heterogeneity, the pursuit of various tonalities, and the integration of fictional elements and factual counterparts.

RELATED PRACTICE

Contextualising the study are four animated documentaries that have sought to express lived experience. *Thanadoula*, (2020), *Shannon Amen*, (2019) *Spolu Sami (Apart)*, (2018), and *Never Like the First Time!* (2006) are short or episodic animated documentaries. *306 Hollywood*, (2018) is a feature documentary about grief.³⁰ Each film employs a diverse range of animation and documentary techniques.

Thanadoula ³¹

Thanadoula, (Mckenna, 2020) relates the story of two sisters Natalie and Annie Eskenazy. Annie was an unusual woman who, while deeply connected to the natural world, endured addiction and mental illness. Natalie disappeared from her sister's life for a long period until her untimely death in a psychiatric unit.

The six-minute animated documentary opens with Natalie explaining that she is unsure why she has decided to become a *thanadoula*.³² As the first images fade up from black, delicate, ethereal layers of flowers, textures and a darkened rotoscoping reveal Natalie at the bedside of a dying patient, (Figure 2.1).



FIGURE 2.1: Screenshot from the opening images of *Thanadoula* (2020).³³

During this sequence, sounds of breathing are combined with a dark, monotoned electronic soundtrack that sets the tone for the narrative. The delicately intricate documentary is told using Natalie's account and visualised through a blending of archived composited images, rippling bokeh spheres of light, animations and live action footage (treated with a rotoscope). The use of blurring and opacity give the film its distinctively palimpsestic appearance (Figure 2.2).



FIGURE 2.2: Screenshot illustrating the blending of light, texture and archival photography

The voice-over in *Thanadoula* is sparse, leaving time for viewers to contemplate the story. The slow pace, sparing use of voice-over and delicate imagery underscore choices that shaped Natalie's work as a death doula.³⁴ The result is a textually rich rendering of a difficult narrative of loss and an account of a bereaved sister's increasing bond. As the narrative unfolds, the film documents the women's relationship and Annie's connection to nature. Significantly the documentary offers a delicate account of a person who sometimes existed "between worlds" (Eskenanzy, 00:02:22, 2020), and a sibling who finds a bridge between life and death and, eventually, a pathway to her sister. With each frame we are placed between (Roe's, 2013, p. 3) phenomena of 'the world' (the actuality of photographs) and 'a world' (illustrative layers and composites). This technique is used to underscore Annie's liminal space. In discussing her approach McKenna said:

... it was like real-life magic realism, and I kept thinking about it: this idea of a realm between worlds, and the extraordinary work she did, speaking to our culture's fear of death and dying. As a documentary filmmaker, I wondered how I could tell her story in a way that could represent this blurring of lines, between the worlds of the living and dying.... (cited in an interview with Mitchell, 2020, para. 6)

34 A death doula is a non-medical individual who provides support, education, and guidance to individuals and families as they deal with the impending death of a loved one.

35 The animated documentary can be viewed here: <https://www.nfb.ca/film/shannon-amen/>

During the production McKenna and Natalie formed a friendship. The filmmaker and the participant collaborated to refine the final work by editing extended interviews that were recorded over a number of years (Mitchell, 2020).

McKenna's *Thanadoula* expands the palette of how a documentary narrative might be conveyed. Her blending of recorded interviews, archival imagery and composite moving images creates what Honess Roe describes as "an enhanced perspective on reality that presents the world in breadth and depth that live action cannot do alone" (2013, p. 26). This treatment of reality engages the viewer both cognitively and emotionally.

*Shannon Amen*³⁵

Shannon Amen is a homage by Chris Dainty to his friend Shannon Jamieson, a young woman who committed suicide whilst trying to resolve issues related to her sexual identity while growing up inside a religious environment. The 14-minute documentary employs a diverse range of techniques, including integrated archival footage (Figure 2.3), photographs, drawn and painted animation (Figure 2.4), and animated ice sculpture (Figure 2.5).

In the documentary Dainty uses Jamieson's original music, recorded voice and over 100 of her artworks to convey the story. In unison, these elements create a sense of dislocation and anxiety in the work that reinforces a sense that grief is connected with what cannot be easily resolved. Structurally, the film moves from archive footage that anchors it in a sense of historically representational accounting through diverse animated styles that shift us back and forwards across an anxious, recent past.



FIGURE 2.3:
Screengrab of archival footage of Shannon singing in a cathedral



FIGURE 2.4:
Screengrab showing a reconstruction of an episode in Shannon's life, using animation



FIGURE 2.5:
Screengrab of an animated ice sculpture as Shannon kneels in a cathedral

Jamieson's family and friends were involved in the production and her mother was a creative consultant who contributed to the film's artistic decision making. Such collaborative production approaches were discussed by Moore, (2015, 2020) and Ward, (2006) whose thinking helped to establish the ethical approach adopted when telling Shannon's story.

Spolu Sami (Apart) ³⁶

Dianna Cam Van Nguyen's 10-minute film *Spolu Sami (Apart)*, (2018) documents the stories of three young people whose parents died suddenly. The narrative focuses on life after the loss of loved ones. The documentary employs expressive line animation³⁷ partnered with painterly rotoscoping to look into the thoughts and feelings of the recently bereaved. *Spolu Sami (Apart)*'s poignant, quietly told account uses medium close-up and close up shots, with many showing the participant looking directly at the viewer. This form of direct address mediated through illustrative form, elevates the viewer-interviewee relationship and therefore the viewer's emotional connection to the accounts. The intimate expressions of grief are strengthened by a subtle continuity that is reinforced through a reduced colour palette and constrained control over the animation style (Figure 2.6).

Cam Van Nguyen argues that animated documentary has multiple benefits because it enables a director to search her "own past and express a subjective view while maintaining a strong emotional dimension" (as cited in *Team Z*, 2019, para 5). *Spolu Sami (Apart)* is significant because like *Grief*, the documentary includes a very small segment at the end of the work where we see the participants in filmed footage, in this instance, in archival family home movies. This crossing of the line between the animated and the indexically referenced is used to draw the viewer into the poignancy and intimacy of the participants' loss (Figure 2.8).



FIGURE 2.6:
Screengrab of a desaturated, rotoscoped close-up of a participant



FIGURE 2.7:
Screengrab showing stylised strokes moving across the screen as the interviewee describes the loss of a parent



FIGURE 2.8:
Screengrab a mother and son from an archived home movie which is employed in the final scenes of the film

³⁶ The animated documentary can be viewed here <https://vimeo.com/403252865?share=copy>

³⁷ The line animation and the painterly animation were both made using rotoscope.

Never Like the First Time! ³⁸

Jonas Odell's episodic animated documentary *Never Like the First Time!* (2006) visually reconstructs four intimate narratives about first sexual encounters. The stories unfold through distinct illustrative styles that mirror the emotional tone of each interview (Martinelli, 2020). The first episode depicts a young man losing his virginity in the bathroom at a party. The three central characters in this story are presented as coloured digital cut-outs while the party attendees are rendered as scant sketches on a white background. Odell uses additional photographic elements such as the toilet and sink in the bathroom to ornament the environment (Figure 2.9). In the second narrative a young couple wait for months until their relationship is consummated only to end it immediately after the event. In this story the characters are created as white line drawings laid over a realistic domestic environment (Figure 2.10). The technique enables the director to heighten the sense of vacancy, loss and unfulfillment. The third story is a harrowing account of a young woman's encounter with an older man that ends with her waking up naked, bruised and in pain. This visually shocking story is rendered in starkly contrasting black and white animation and the account is underscored by abrasive electronic music (Figure 2.11). In contrast the final story features a 92-year-old man recalling his first sexual encounter. Here, the filmmaker utilises vintage, collage animation (Figure 2.12).

38 Odell's film can be viewed here: <https://jonasodell.com/never-like-the-first-time-animated-documentary>

In this work, the soundtrack is understated, so the tone and timbre of the interviewee's voice is highlighted. The man's account is discreetly documented allowing the viewer to absorb its tenderness. This final account is positioned as a stark contrast to the narrative that precedes it

As Ehrlich, (2021), Glynne, (2013), and Honess Roe, (2013) note, Odell uses animation to preserve the anonymity of his participants. Their



FIGURE 2.9:
Screengrab from the opening scene of *Never Like the First Time!*



FIGURE 2.10:
Depicted as human outlines in a photographic living room, the two characters gently become close over a period of months

intensely personal stories are complemented with a bespoke visual strategy that honours the ethos and content of each person's account.

In *Never Like the First Time!* Martinelli, (2020) notes that Odell's aesthetic and technical choices are deeply connected to his participant's interview. Ward (2011, 2018) points out that such voices are intimate, vulnerable, first-person accounts but the animated documentary is concurrently a construction and reenactment.



FIGURE 2.11:
Screengrab from the assault scene using emotive, high-contrast animation



FIGURE 2.12:
Screengrab of a tender embrace. The filmmaker created the world of the participant using various collage elements. Here we see the two characters depicted, using images from 1940's catalogues.

306 Hollywood

306 Hollywood (Bogarin & Bogarin, 2018) is a feature-length account by the brother-and-sister team of Jonathan and Elan Bogarín as they sort through their grandmother, Annette Ontell's house after her death. Central to the film's storytelling are interviews recorded with Ontell over a ten-year period. In this work we witness the siblings approach the 'sorting' as an archaeological excavation documented through visual catalogues and installations.

The documentary uses fast cut animations to recount the house's 100-year history. The narrative is created using documents, diaries and calendars that the filmmakers found amongst their grandmother's collections (Figure 2.13). The work merges the siblings' subjective perspective with highly constructed scenes, using form, colour, pattern and texture to relate a story of what life remains in the objects we leave behind.

To create the documentary, Bogarin & Bogarin constructed a model of the house so they could experiment with perspective and scale. Supplementing these approaches are dance sequences that are woven into the film's visual treatment with performers wearing dresses that Ontell designed during her career as a fashion designer (Figure 2.14). Interviews with an archaeologist, archivist, and fashion conservator are then used to contextualise Ontell's enduring presence as her personal history and character are revealed through the detritus of her long life.

The filmmakers, describe their approach as a form of "magical realist documentary" that blends myth, fairytale and magical realism with traditional documentary methods (Hotdocs, 2018, para. 16). Michael D'Angelo, (2018)

refines this definition to a form of "normalized magic" (para. 2), a technique where the filmmakers explore an intimate world "where the day-to-day collapses with the wondrous" (ibid.). Here, the house that forms the anchor of the documentary, is transformed into a magical-realist landscape.

306 Hollywood drew on ten years of interviews that the filmmakers recorded with their grandmother. These permeate the film with honest and humorous reflections on a life that is considered through stylized documentation of both the house and its contents. The result is a work that "transforms the dusty fragments of an unassuming life into an epic metaphor for the nature of memory, time, and history" (D'Angelo, 2018, para. 3).

Having now contextualised my films in relation to the work of other contemporary animated documentary makers, it is useful to consider theory related to the underlying theme of grief that permeates *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star*.



FIGURE 2.13: Screenshot of a collection of objects from Ontell's house, organised by colour



FIGURE 2.14: Screenshot dancers in the front yard of Ontell's home

UNDERSTANDING GRIEF

In *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis described the loss of his wife, Joy Davidman as an “amputation” (Lewis, 1964, p. 61). Expressed as both terror and fear, he recounts “a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me” (Lewis 1964, p.1). Grief is an intrinsic aspect of life (Bonanno, Papa & O’Neil, 2001; Lloyd, 2017; Neimeyer, 2020). The experience involves multifaceted responses and includes a complex array of emotions and reactions that are intricate and differ across cultures (Doka & Martin, 2024; Rosenblatt, 2008; Silverman et al., 2020). Fuchs, (2017) suggests that differing belief systems affect the way we grieve and the manner in which it unfolds. Bonanno & Kaltman, (2001), Hollinger, (2020), Lloyd, (2017), and Parkes, (2016) all propose that grief is one of the most stressful events we will encounter. Yet, while Bonanno & Kaltman, (2001) note that it is common to us all, it is also uniquely individual. Neimeyer observes, “The intimate details of people’s stories of loss suggest a complex process of adaptation to a changed reality, a process that is at the same time immensely personal, intricately relational, and inevitably cultural” (1999, p. 66). When seeking a definitive description of bereavement, mourning, and grief, one encounters expansive discourses. Stroebe et al., (2008) argue that classification continues to develop as different approaches to understanding emerge. They suggest that bereavement occurs because of the loss of someone “significant” (p 4). Grief, they define as the psychological component of bereavement, our feelings, thoughts, and actions, and it may manifest somatically and physiologically. Mourning they describe as a public expression of grief.

Early discourses

Freud wrote *Mourning and Melancholia* in 1917 at a time when World War I caused immeasurable death and grief. He wrote “in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty” (Freud, 1917/1957, p. 246). His approach to grieving was that the individual must engage in grief ‘work’ and detach emotionally from the loved one in order to reinvest into someone or something else. He proposed that we must ‘get over’ the death and move forward with our lives in the pursuit of returning to ‘normal’ (Lloyd, 2017). Freud’s solution to grief was predicated on a belief that we must withdraw emotional energy from the ‘object’ or deceased. Prigerson et al., (2021) suggest Freud’s essay had considerable impact on thinking about grief, specifically his delineation between what he defined as pathological and normal grief. Although Granek (2010) notes Freud’s influence on the development of research and scholarship, other scholars challenged his concepts of grief work and its effectiveness (Bonanno, 2019; Bowlby, 1980; Doka, 2001; Gross, 2018; Lloyd, 2017; Wortman & Silver 1989). Doka, (2001) notes the persistence of ‘grief work’ models and frameworks in self-help literature but observes this hypoexegesis has been continually questioned.

In 1944 Erich Lindeman published *Symptomatology and the Management of Acute Grief*. His work included research on 101 individuals who had experienced loss. A fire in Boston’s Coconut Grove, a restaurant and cocktail bar, two years prior to the release of this work had claimed 492 lives. Lindemann worked with survivors of the fire and the families and friends of the victims. From this study he distinguished factors for “normal”

and “pathological” grief (Buglass, 2010, p. 45). His research proposed that grief can be divided into five stages: somatic disturbance or physical responses; fixation with images of the deceased; guilt, feelings of anger or aggression; and disruption of daily routines. Like Freud, he contended that “grief work” necessitates a bereaved individual psychologically processing “their loss through gradual emotional disengagement from the deceased” (Lindeman, 1963, p. 11). This process included adapting to the new situation in the absence of the departed. Lindemann’s intention was to enable bereaved individuals to break emotionally from the deceased and reconnect with everyday life (Prigerson et al, 2021).

Phase and stage theories

In the 1950s, the concept of *Attachment Theory* was conceived by British psychoanalyst John Bowlby, (1958, 1960, 1980) and expanded in concert with Ainsworth et al., (1956). Bowlby’s theory of attachment foregrounded the importance of emotional bonds that are established between a child and their carer. He asserted that survival and emotional development are essential as they provide the foundations for healthy human relationships. Their work had a significant influence on understandings of bereavement and mourning, and is referenced in studies by Eisma et al., (2023); Gross, (2015); Mancini & Bonanno, (2012); Mikulincer & Shaver, (2022); and Parkes, (2013).

According to Bowlby, (1960) our attachment to others has an evolutionary purpose that safeguards our species. In his work, he studied children who had been abandoned and noted the harm and anxiety to a child’s ego caused by maternal separation. Specifically, he noted

the distress exhibited by children who were separated from their mothers, including tearful protest and shouting to articulate emotional torment to prompt a mother's return. If the response or separation anxiety as he described it, was presented with kindness and empathy by a 'maternal figure' he argued, the ego of the child would be largely re-established. However, Bowlby also noted the impact on children who did not receive a response from a maternal figure, observing impaired feelings of safety, self-worth, and control. Later he published *Processes of Mourning* (Bowlby, 1961) expanding on the theory of attachment. In this work he proposed three phases of mourning. The first, "*the urge to recover a lost object*", (p. 333), he suggested occurred directly after death or separation causing a sense of unreality and an intense desire to find the loved one. This, he noted, was accompanied by anger and weeping. In the second phase, "*disorganisation*" (p. 334),

Bowlby suggested that the focus on the deceased lessens and despair and disappointment begin to surface. He observed that a life that had revolved around the deceased became disorganised and depressive. In his third phase, "*reorganisation as adaptive processes*" (ibid), Bowlby suggested that the bereaved believes that the deceased exists in another world although these feelings transform over time, and organisation resumes. He argued that pathological grieving results from continued searching for the deceased that, due to repression, becomes concealed or warped. Horowitz, Bonanno & Holen, (1993) described pathological grief as intense and prolonged, and proposed that it may include feelings of being overwhelmed, suffering panic or exhaustion, extreme avoidance and self-medication, disturbed thought, psychosomatic response, and disruption of ability to work or form loving relationships.

Stage theories of grieving processes were popularised by Kübler-Ross in *On Death and Dying*, (1969). The theory that terminally ill people advance through a series of prescribed stages was later applied to the bereaved. Her internationally recognised publication, *On Death and Dying* was subsequently challenged as an approach to the manner in which we grieve. Recent theorists continue to argue that there is no typical trajectory of grief and it is simplistic to expect it to progress over a series of ordered phases to recovery (Neimeyer, 1998; Stroebe et.al, 2017; Tyrrell et al, 2023; Wortman & Sliver, 1989).

Colin Murray Parkes³⁹ explored how attachment and love can influence the way in which we grieve. Working with fellow researcher Robert Weiss, (1983) their studies focused on widows and widowers. From their analysis they determined four areas of risk; vulnerability of the

bereaved, familial relationship to the deceased, the conditions and experiences preceding and surrounding death, and the nature of support systems sought after the death. In their study, these factors could indicate the potential severity of responses.

Parkes, in collaboration with John Bowlby, expanded attachment theory and demonstrated the intricate connections between love and grief. Through this work they were able to identify bereaved individuals who were in danger of trauma surrounding their loss. In 1970, they wrote *Separation and Loss Within the Family*. Here, they described four phases of mourning. The first phase, numbness, they suggest can last as little as an hour or as long as a week. This state, they note, may be interrupted by severe anger or sorrow. The second phase they defined as yearning and seeking out the deceased. In some cases this phase, they observed, may last for months or years. Their third phase was described as a time of despondency when depression or apathy may emerge. Finally, in their fourth phase, they argued that recovery from grief will surface when the bereaved person accepts the death of a loved one.

In 1982, William Worden published *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (1982/2018). In this work he proposed four tasks of mourning.⁴⁰ The first task related to the need for the bereaved individual to fully recognise the reality of the death. He proposed that integral to acceptance is the understanding that a reunion with the deceased is an impossibility. He argued that refusing the reality of the death (disbelief) can hinder the process of recovery, and noted that this impediment can be particularly common after a traumatic death. Worden's second task

39 Colin Murray Parkes (1928-2024) was a British psychiatrist who studied grief throughout his career. His work is extensive including *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (Parkes & Prigerson, 2010); *Death and Bereavement Across Cultures* (Parkes, et al, 2015) and *Love and Loss: The Roots of Grief and Its Complications* (Parkes, 2006). Throughout his life Parkes consulted and provided assistance in the aftermath of various disasters including the 1988 Lockerbie aircraft explosion, the genocide in Rwanda in 1995 and the aftermath of the 9/11 bombings in the United States. <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/colin-murray-parkes-1928-2024/>

40 Worden (2018) used the word mourning to describe the process that follows loss and grief as a response to bereavement. He suggests that grief is expressed through behaviours, thoughts and feelings.

was “to process the pain of grief” (p. 45). He argued that the pain of grief involves physical and emotional reactions and its intensity varies between individuals. He maintained that acknowledging pain and working through it is essential and prevents complications of loss. Citing Parkes, (1972) he also argued that suppression of pain can extend the period of grief while levels of attachment to the loved one can also affect recovery. Worden observed that societal expectations of mourning can also cause a mourner to deny or conceal their feelings. In addition, he noted that suppression of feelings, denying or avoiding the pain of grief, can affect the recovery process. Worden’s third task was “to adjust to a world without the deceased”, (p. 47). This task he described as three-fold. Initially it entails an adjustment to the external world and functioning in everyday life without the deceased. Then the individual is required to readjust their internal world and sense of self that has been impacted by the loss. Finally, one must adjust one’s understanding of the world without the deceased. Worden noted that “death can shake the foundations of one’s assumptive world” (p. 49) and this disturbance may impact on value and belief systems (including religion and spirituality). Worden’s fourth task was “to find a way to remember the deceased while embarking on the rest of one’s journey through life” (p. 50).

Questioning ‘grief work’, passivity and predictability

In 1989, Wortman and Silver observed that despite extensive studies, many myths about grief continued to persist. They noted that early understandings and treatment of grieving individuals often required undertaking ‘grief work’. This normally involved the individual

learning to detach from the deceased, and then to return to a pre-loss state. However, more recent attention has focused on ideas like resilience and adaptation (Bonanno, 2005, 2019), meaning reconstruction (Neimeyer & Sands, 2011), attachment and yearning (Parkes, 2014), and maintaining one’s bonds with the deceased (Klass, 2021).

In 1991, Attig rejected the idea that grief is a passive process, suggesting the potential of active grieving as a way of processing loss. He noted that much of the scholarship on loss and bereavement at the time, framed it as a “choiceless event” (p. 386). He observed that if death is expected, survivors will choose another alternative if it is possible. He observed that bereaved individuals often feel a loss of control and power when they are unable to influence events in their lives. This, he suggested could prompt amplified levels of anxiety and depression where helplessness and passivity occur. However, he noted that stage or phase models like those proposed by Kubler-Ross, (1969) and Bowlby & Parks, (1970) are inactive processes where grief is endured until it is over. Conversely, he described grief as a potentially all-consuming emotion comprised of the knowledge of the loss and a yearning to reverse this loss. Here, he observed the bereaved “fervently wants the impossible in full awareness of the impossibility” (p. 388). He argued that while emotions like fear, love or anger prompt motivation, grief can be paralyzing because of this fundamental desire. Referring to Parkes, (1972) and Parkes & Weiss, (1983) Attig argued that “grieving is a process of ‘relearning the world’ including physical surroundings, relationships with others (including God and the deceased), and our very selves” (p.390). Grieving, he asserted necessitates the bereaved

comprehensively reconstructing their qualities of integrity as they rebuild connections to what matters most. Thus he saw grieving as an active state where the bereaved transform their love to accommodate the absence of the deceased. In a state of ‘active grieving’, he argued that many choices can be made and individuals are able to transcend the invasive paralysis of grief. He suggested the basic choice requires hope and a belief that supports the power to uphold life and its meaning.

In 1999, Stroebe & Schut developed their *Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement* which was originally designed to understand spousal loss. Their model identified two coping orientations. Loss-orientation described the process of confronting loss directly. Here, the bereaved may experience crying, despair and yearning for the deceased. This initial processing of the death of the loved one may also include dwelling on the past, reflection of the relationship and struggling to understand the event. Stroebe & Schut’s second orientation was restoration. Here the bereaved adjusts to the substantial changes post-loss. They suggest that alongside coping with the death of a loved one, come significant life changes which are a secondary outcome of the loss. In restoration orientation, the bereaved redefines their role, making practical adjustments, seeking respite and distraction, reestablishing routines and engaging in re-evaluation of goals and priorities. However, the researchers caution against a linear conception of their orientations, emphasising the dynamic of “oscillation” (p. 215), where the bereaved alternates between the two orientations. This provision they suggest enables their theory of orientations to apply in flexible ways to understanding complicated forms of grief.

Like Strobe & Schut, (1993) and Wortman & Silver, (1989), Robert Neimeyer, (1999) critiqued previous conceptualisations of grief and bereavement. He observed that there was a lack of evidence supporting the belief that depression follows the death of a loved one, and that a lack of expression of grief is pathological or harmful. He observed that, as new research surfaced, fresh insight has enabled more complex understandings of individual emotional recovery.⁴¹ Neimeyer has discussed the developing scepticism that grief adheres to a predictable emotional pattern and then resolves in individuals adjusting to pre-loss circumstances.

41 Neimeyer also observed increased understanding of the acute impact a significant loss can have on identity. This he proposed, can cause fundamental reconsiderations of the self (Attig, 1996, Neimeyer, 1998). Citing Richards & Folkman, (1997) and Tedeschi et al., (1998) he also noted an increasing understanding of the capacity for development and growth in spirituality and posttraumatic experiences.

42 Constructivism is a reflective and interpretive paradigm founded on the belief that human beings actively construct knowledge.

43 Neimeyer has expanded on his approach to grief scholarship and grief therapy in multiple publications including: *Searching for the Meaning of Meaning: Grief Therapy and the Process of Reconstruction* (2000); *Living Beyond Loss: Questions and Answers about Grief and Bereavement* (2025); and edited the publication *Meaning Reconstruction and the Experience of Loss* (2001).

44 Janoff-Bulman, (1989) argues that human beings normally function within a foundation of undisputed certainty of themselves and their world. This she describes as an 'assumptive world' (p. 113).

45 Intrapsychic refers to internal psychological processes like ideas, urges or desire to act, conflicts and other phenomena that originate or take place in the mind or psyche. <https://dictionary.apa.org/intrapsychic>

Drawing on the work of Attig, (1991, 1996) he emphasises the complexity and individuality of adaptation post loss. Citing Klass et al., (1996) and Stroebe et al., (1998) he also notes a departure from the belief that effective grieving necessitates breaking connections with the deceased. Instead, he suggests that there may be potential in maintaining emotional connections. Citing Horowitz, (1997), Janoff-Bulman, (1989) and Viney, (1991) he highlights the increasing attention paid to the reconstruction of meaning during mourning as a way of supplementing "emotional and symptomatic consequences of loss" (p. 67).

Significantly, Neimeyer's work has adopted a constructivist⁴² approach, asserting that meaning making is embedded in an individual's unique grief processes.⁴³ He suggests that humans are natural storytellers who construct life narratives that communicate "thematic significance to the salient plot structure" (1999, p. 67). His view highlights the delicate variances of individual loss experiences, because each human being is considered as the weaver of their distinctive realm, which may encompass variables including culture, gender, and religious or spiritual beliefs. Like Attig, (1991) Neimeyer proposed that grieving is an active process that can propel decision making for the bereaved. These decisions may involve facing the loss or managing the tumult of feelings generated by the bereavement. Citing Kelly, (1955) he argues that we innovate and rebuild our belief systems in order to interpret experience, negotiate relationships and reestablish goals. Using the lens of social constructivism, Neimeyer contends that this bespoke reshaping is deeply connected with our intimate relationships and broader societal value systems and narratives. He maintains

...the themes on which people draw to attribute significance to their lives will be as variegated as the local conversations in which they are engaged and as complex as the crosscurrents of shared belief systems that inform their personal attempts at meaning making. (p. 67)

Citing Monk et al.,(1997) he notes there are varying levels of authorship amongst individuals. He suggests that some people have intense and intimate connections with their belief systems and preferences, whereas others feel alienated by these frameworks. Referencing Janoff-Bulman, (1989) he suggests that, when viewed from a social constructivist perspective, loss is seen to be profoundly upsetting because our 'assumptive world'⁴⁴ can be badly shaken.

Neimeyer argues that an implied assumption of grief's universality is a core deficiency in traditional frameworks of grief theory. He notes that no two bereavements are the same and an individual's meaning-reconstruction perspective is related to the unique nature of their experience.

In 2014, Neimeyer et al. proposed that a Western understanding of bereavement is predominantly "intrapsychic".⁴⁵ They argue that grief is a delicately social and familial experience that is shaped by interactions, relationships and shared meaning. They maintain that the disruption of grief forces an individual to seek out meaning and this can occur on many levels, including within families, communities and cultures. In their view, grief should be understood as a commonly emotional and interpretive experience which makes sense of loss and rebuilds one's sense of identity. They contend that this can be an experience that is shared, maintains

connection with the deceased, and enlists care from tradition whether this is cultural, religious or via community practices like storytelling or ceremonies. Thus, they argue that people express grief in individual ways.

Bonanno & Kaltman, (2001) contend that there is little consensus regarding definitions of normal, abnormal or complicated grief across existing bereavement studies. In 2002, Bonanno et al. also challenged the principle of 'grief work', suggesting that it is potentially harmful. Referring to Bowlby, (1980) and Parkes & Weiss, (1983) they also suggested that frameworks for coping with loss are founded on an assumption that the self is fixed and singular. Instead, they argued that the self is fluid, changeable and multifaceted. In 2012, Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno argued that individuals are generally resilient in the face of grief. Although they experience the pain of grief and may suffer impairment or signs of depression, they readily adapt to the loss. They note that in cases where an individual manifests high indications of depression after 6 months, a longer and protracted grief experience is likely.

In 2007, Breen & O'Connor also suggested that the experience of grief is impacted by an interplay of influences and variables. Drawing on work by Kellehear, (2001); Rando, (1993); and Winslade, (2001) they emphasised the

uniqueness of an individual's encounters with grief. Significantly their view conflicted with an established proposition that grief is divided into two categories – normal or abnormal. According to Breen & O'Connor, conceptions of grief are founded on a series of myths, including that grief follows a predictable pattern, it is linear, short lived and fixed, it includes a series of stages, it necessitates 'grief work', meaning must be sought from loss, detachment represents the resolution of the grieving process, and prolonged grief is abnormal.

Doka & Martin, (2024) also emphasise the individuality of grief and argue that it can be observed in a multiplicity of expressions where "one's constellation of grief experiences are as unique and idiosyncratic as [one's] fingerprint" (Rando, 2024, p. 19). Doka & Martin, (2010/2024) identified three patterns of grieving, intuitive, instrumental and dissonant. Intuitive grief characterises affective and emotionally expressive responses and instrumental grief involves somatic, active and physical responses. They argued that many individuals amalgamate both on a continuum, and this is the most common pattern. Dissonant grief, they say, occurs when there are disparities between the internal and external expression of grief which they argue can be triggered by family, cultural or social conflicts and complicate an individual's grieving process. They suggest that 'intuitive grievers' are strengthened by exploring their emotional landscape and openly expressing the emotions of loss through dialogue and seeking support. Conversely, 'instrumental grievers' are cognitively centered and manage their grief by pursuing practical strategies to adapt after the loss of a loved one. These individuals prefer to take control of emotional reactions and work through grief. However, they

maintain that a 'dissonant griever' may manifest varying patterns and illustrate distress due to suppressing the emotions of grief.

Pathologising grief

In 2014, Brian Nyatanga questioned the pathologising of grief and loss. Drawing on Bowlby's, (1988) assertion that relationships grow into attachments that are more profound as we deepen affectional bonds, he acknowledged that significant attachments may lead to difficult bereavement. However, he argued that we can adjust and move forward. Significantly, he challenged models and frameworks put forward by Bowlby & Parkes, (1970), Freud, (1917/1957), Kubler Ross, (1969) and Worden, (1982), all of which prescribe different resolutions, which he argued were potentially confusing and harmful. In response to Bayliss, (2008) he argued that imposing structures on the difficulties of grieving denies the agency of the bereaved. Instead, Nyatanga argued that we should not pathologise the anguish of grief, instead it should be seen as a "normal reaction" to the death of a loved one (2014, p. 315).

The impact of Covid

On March 11, 2020 The World Health Organisation declared the Covid-19 outbreak a global pandemic. In the early stages of the event there were many uncertainties about the risk to life. By April 2025, over 777 million people had been infected and more than seven million had died.⁴⁶ Breen, (2020) argued that physical isolation might be aggravating grief particularly when family and community were not accessible.

In 2021, Stroebe & Schut noted that the measures implemented to protect communities from the virus were transforming the context

46 The World Health Organisation. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/>

and settings of death as well as daily life. They described a series of features of the pandemic which they considered would influence the grief of an individual and distinguish their experience of grief from other types of loss. They argued that the isolation of the terminally ill without loved ones present, the depersonalising of protective clothing preventing intimate contact, limited or no physical contact, observing the loved one from a distance, rapid, sudden or unexpected death, body identification, and isolated removal of the deceased were all factors which were adversely impacting bereavement. In addition, because memorialisation was disrupted, postponed or remote, and opportunities to farewell were limited, the usual processes of religious, cultural or social celebrations were absent. They argued that a lack of physical support from friends and family, no face-to-face contact, increased loneliness, the ongoing threat of the virus and continual lockdowns, were all exacerbating grieving during the pandemic to

47 Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) describes continued expression of grieving occurring after 12 months of the death of a loved one. Here, regular and persistent yearning or preoccupation with the deceased is evident, accompanied by other behaviours that may include disruption of identity, severe emotional anguish and numbness and problems participating in relationships and daily life.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK507832/>

the extent that understanding grief during the pandemic was manifestly different to how it might be considered prior to the event.

A 2021 study by Eisma et al., suggested that serious and acute grief responses may arise after Covid-19 connected loss. They argued that acute grief is a “longitudinal indicator” (p. 55) of Prolonged Grief Disorder, suggesting that disturbances in expressions of grief were set to become a global concern.⁴⁷ As a result, they proposed that remote and online grieving therapies required urgent development.

Pentaris, (2021) argued that the pandemic was enflaming global experiences of trauma. The precariousness of life and reality of death were being witnessed daily through media and personal experience. He argued that Covid-19 had become a stark reminder that life is fragile for individuals, communities and societies. He maintained that although the virus reminded us of our interconnectedness and signalled our dependence on one another, it also drew attention to our fears and vulnerabilities as well as our resilience. In the face of its rapid spread and significant loss of life, communities and individuals were being confronted with loss and emotional responses in unique circumstances. Covid-19, he argued, revealed profound truths about our social fabric, values and belief and values. Significantly he noted that sudden death was amplifying grief and disrupting our traditions of mourning.

In 2022, Breen et al. published a study of risk factors unique to bereaved individuals during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sampling 831 participants in the United States, they investigated “dysfunctional grief, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, general psychiatric

distress, disrupted meaning and functional impairment” (p. 395). Their study concentrated on social contexts including inability to be at the bedside of the dying, constraints on memorialisation and funerals, and the social deprivation of lockdowns. Their research suggested that for vulnerable individuals, the intersection of grief and trauma requires an increased need for professional care.

Torrens-Burton et al., (2022) suggested that the pandemic represented collective bereavement exacerbated by severe social and economic impacts. Their study of 881 individuals in the United Kingdom, who had experienced bereavement during the pandemic, identified six central themes; “troubled deaths, mourning memorialisation and death administration, mass bereavement, the media and ongoing threats of the pandemic, grieving and coping, work and employment, and support from the health and social care system” (p. 1). The results of their study illustrated the difficult kinds of experiences associated with pandemic bereavement and the need to conceptualise these challenges and their impacts on grieving. In the conclusion of their study the researchers made recommendations for statutory, private and third sector organisations so they might improve the experiences of people bereaved during Covid-19 and in future pandemics.

Positioning grief

My three documentaries are positioned alongside arguments that grief, rather than being a predictable journey through phases or stages, is unique to each individual because it is impacted by an interplay of influences and variables (Attig, 1991; Breen & O’Connor, 2007). As a consequence grief involves a form of unique,

emotional recovery (Kellehear, 2001; Neimeyer, 1999; Rando, 1993; Winslade, 2001) and that does not adhere to a predictable emotional pattern that resolves as an individual adjusts to pre-loss circumstances (Neimeyer, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2025).

The three documentaries that comprise the project illustrate how each individual's relationship with grief is fluid, changeable, and multifaceted (Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001). However, this grieving is understood as active rather than passive (Attig, 1991, 1996; Doka & Martin, 2024; Neimeyer, 1999; Stroebe & Schut, 1999) finding its voice through behaviours, thoughts, and feelings (Worden, 2018).

Significantly, grief is documented in my work as an emotional and interpretive experience that makes sense of loss and rebuilds an individual's sense of identity over time (Neimeyer et al., 2014). In this process, rather than disengaging from the deceased through 'grief work' (Freud, 1917/1957; Lindeman, 1944), a connection is maintained that may enlist cultural, religious, artistic or community practices like storytelling, artmaking or ritual (Neimeyer et al., 2014).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an overview of knowledge that contextualises the study. Divided into four areas, its initial review considered literature relating to theoretical understandings of documentary as a genre. From there it traced how this thinking has evolved in relation to emerging technologies and practices. Given the sensitive nature of *Grief* the analysis then segued into a consideration of writing related to ethical concerns in documentary making. The chapter then reviewed discourses surrounding animated documentary as a discrete sub-genre, including literature relating to evolving definitions, modes, classifications and functions.

The third area of the review considered four animated documentaries and one feature documentary. While not exhaustive, these works serve to contextualise my project because they evidence significant approaches or visual treatments.

Given the nature of the inquiry, the fourth area of review discussed literature relating to grief. Moving from a consideration of early discourses, it progressed through the now largely dismissed theories of grief relating to progressive phases or stages. It then considered literature that critiques 'grief work', passivity and predictability, before outlining recent research emanating from studies into grief in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having reviewed the significant bodies of knowledge relating to *Drawing on Grief*, the exegesis will move on to a critical consideration of the research design developed for the study.



CHAPTER 3



CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

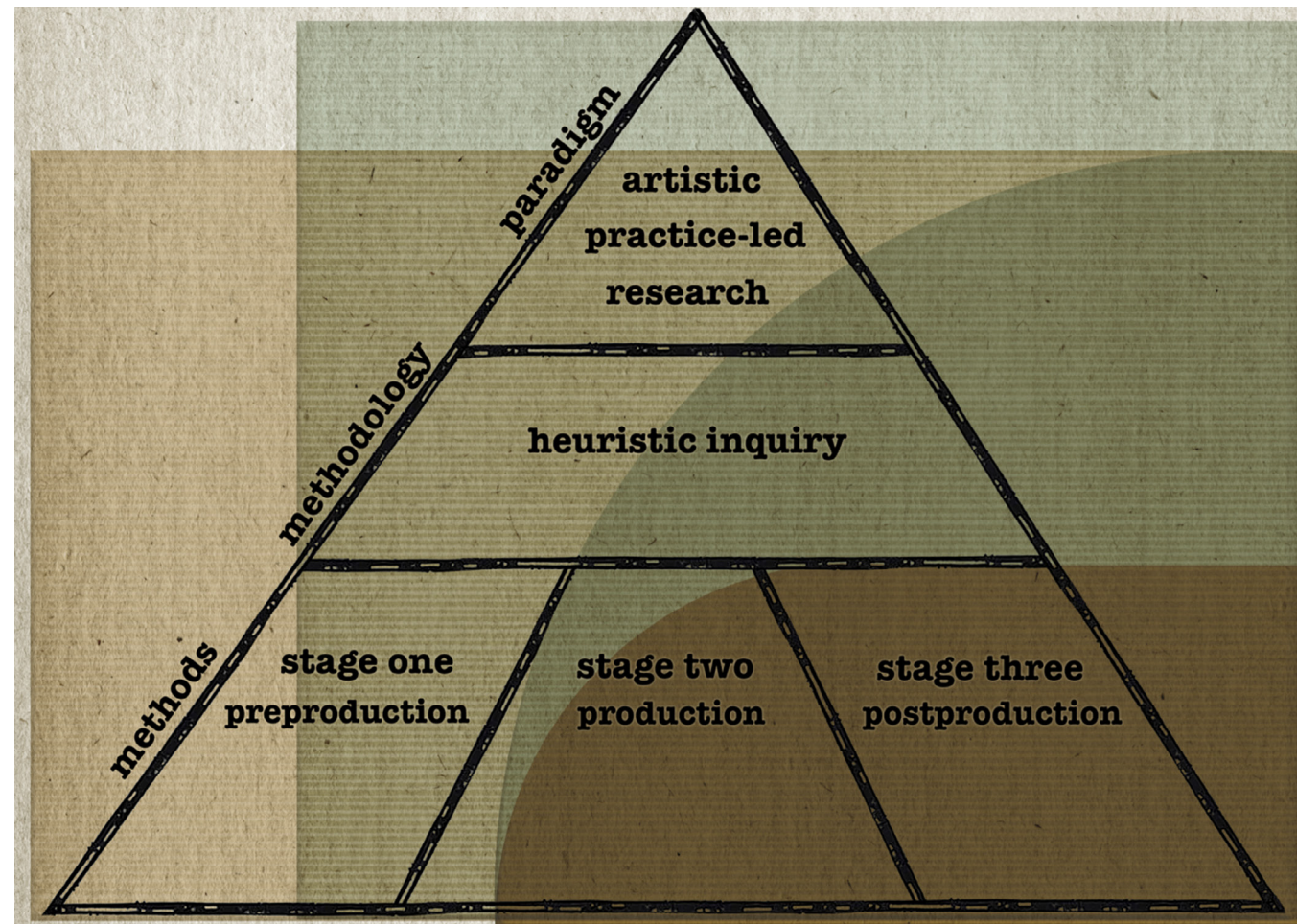
Title Page Image: Collage incorporating prints of Baron zu Gàlandtha, Paul Esterházy (1550-1850)
and a Victorian-era woman beating out horseshoes on an anvil, circa 1880, Lakeview Pictures.



FIGURE 3.1:
Research Structure

OVERVIEW

The project emanated from an artistic, practice-led research paradigm (Arif, 2022; Gray & Malins 2004; Smith & Dean, 2009; Kerrigan & McIntyre, 2010; Batty & Zalipour, 2024). Methodologically the study was actualised as a heuristic inquiry (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Ings & Tudor, 2025; Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019; Ventling 2018, 2025) conducted across three stages; preproduction, production and postproduction. These stages utilised methods relating to data gathering, creative synthesis and reflection on practice (Figure 3.1).



RESEARCH PARADIGM

In research, a paradigm describes a set of beliefs that orientate the development of the study. Ling and Ling, (2016) describe a research paradigm as,

... a set of assumptions and understandings about key aspects of the research: the nature of reality or truth (ontology); the intent, ethics and values of the researcher (axiology); the understanding of the nature of knowledge and how it may be known (epistemology); the way information is obtained (methodology); and the nature of the research outcomes. (p.19)

Mackenzie and Knipe note that it is a researcher's choice of paradigm that establishes "the intent, motivation and expectations for the research [and] without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature or research design." (2006, para. 6)

ARTISTIC RESEARCH

If we consider a research paradigm as an overarching orientation then the exegesis study may be described as an artistic, practice-led inquiry.

Julian Klein suggests that such inquiry constitutes an approach to research where knowledge is,

... acquired through sensory and emotional perception [...] through artistic experience, from which it cannot be separated. Whether silent or verbal, declarative or procedural, implicit or explicit [...] artistic knowledge is sensual and physical, 'embodied knowledge'. The knowledge that artistic research strives for, is a *felt*⁴⁸ knowledge. (Klein, 2012, para. 18)

He proposes that artistic research "does not always lead to secure and universally valid knowledge [but] the arts are granted the authority to formulate and address basal and yet complex issues in their specific ways" (ibid, para. 16).

Arif (2022) proposes that,

A paradigm that is founded on art, places humans in a perpetual state of paradoxical engagement in which the condition or being is simultaneously seen as logical and irrational, imaginative and specific, wonderers and dwellers, unpredictable and definite, thinking and thoughtless, aware and unconscious. (p.33)

In such a paradigm, the researcher embraces a "pluralist approach using a multi-method technique" (Gray & Malins 2004, p. 15) where knowledge and understanding are driven

by subjective opinions, values, reasons, and understandings, emanating from the explicit and the tacit (Arif, 2022; Gray & Malins, 2004). Tacit knowledge can be described as the knowledge, proficiencies, and capabilities we acquire through experience. Here, an interleaved and continually growing store of knowledge is not codified but emerges through practice and social interaction. In contrast, explicit knowledge describes that which can be formalised and expressed (Polanyi, 1966, 2009). Accordingly, theories may be formed from diverse realities that are challenged and resourced inside artistic practice itself (Arif, 2022).

PRACTICE-LED INQUIRY

If an artistic inquiry is practice-led the practitioner-researcher pursues discovery through processes of making. Here, the production of the work takes the lead and summons scholarship towards it (Arif, 2022; Bolt, 2004; Ings, 2015; Scrivener, 2000).

Drawing on Grief involved a complex process of documentary and animation practices resourced by productive uncertainty, indwelling and pattern recognition. Spanning recursive and iterative engagements, the process constituted an evolutionary journey that called on conscious and unconscious reflection whilst building new knowledge related to both the practice and the research question. Scrivener, (2000) describes this process as one that "spirals through stages of appreciation, action and reaction and reappraisal, whereby the unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it, and be changed through the attempt to understand it" (Scrivener, 2000, p. 7).

48 Italics in the original.

Mäkelä & Nimkulrat, (2018) note that at the heart of artistic, practice-led research lies the integration of the researcher-creator, their process, their reflection and documentation (also see Batty & Zalipour, 2024). Hasemen suggests that this integration occurs on a journey that the researcher takes from “unknown to the known” (Hasemen, 2009, p.48). In navigating this trajectory, “questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of the practice and practitioners” Gray, (1996, p. 3).

METHODOLOGY

Guba and Lincoln, (1994, p. 108) propose that a research methodology addresses the question, “How can the inquirer go about finding out whatever they believe can be known?” Thus, one’s methodology describes the overarching approach taken to an inquiry. *Drawing on Grief* involved a subjective, artistic narration of experiences of grief, including the researcher’s own. It required high levels of flexibility, experimentation, interpretation, intuition and the need to work beyond preestablished formulas. Accordingly, the study pursued a form of heuristic inquiry.

Heuristic Inquiry

Moustakas (1990, p. 9), describes heuristic inquiry as a scholarly search to uncover “nature and meaning of the phenomenon itself.” Such an inquiry is conducted through the perspectives of a researcher who has innate and current understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The term heuristic originates from the Greek *heuriskein* meaning to discover or find (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristics proposes a systematic yet flexible approach to inquiry that uses self-examination to optimise the depth of understanding of the nature of being human. Moustakas suggests that this aids the development of self-awareness and knowledge through a combination of “creative self-processes and self-discoveries” (p. 9). Brisola & Cury, (2016), Sela-Smith, (2002), and Ventling, (2025) note that such an investigation may initially be internal but can progress to extensive dialogues with others who have experience of the phenomenon under examination.

Heuristic inquiry enables open approaches to discovery that use experimentation, trialling and appraisal (Paora, 2025). Here the researcher adapts to and modifies solutions to questions as a way of deepening the research (Hoyle, 2025; Ings, 2011).

The role of the self

A heuristic inquiry typically involves a multi-phased process that begins with a preparatory commitment to the research question which must be “personally significant and existential” (Ventling, 2018, p. 130). Here, the researcher seeks out concerns or interests which are compelling and reside deep within themselves (Moustakas, 1990). The study is then marked by self-exploration and self-dialogue that deepens and strengthens the investigation (Moustakas, 1990; Ings & Tudor, 2025). Thus, heuristic researchers are informed by their question and their own “personal experience of the phenomenon of inquiry” (Sultan, 2019, p. 78). Using grief as an example she explains that, when faced with loss, we are filled with questions and

a heuristic inquiry involves “oscillating episodes of curiosity, intimacy, distance, indecision, disinclination, scepticism, aversion, and renewed curiosity” (p.79). Accessing and observing one’s own experience bolsters the investigation to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon, where one’s experiences are courted as clear tangibles. As such, researchers have an intimate comprehension of the topic or question being explored and are wholly immersed in the investigation (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990; Ings & Tudor, 2025).

The self and others

Douglass & Moustakas maintain that when self-knowledge is fused with the experiences of others and executed as “creative depictions”, findings can offer vivid accounts of complex qualities (1985, p. 40). In a heuristic inquiry participants⁴⁹ are present as complete individuals and their experience is privileged (Paora, 2025).

Flexibility and the state of unknowingness

Although a heuristic inquiry may function as a continuum, a disrupted nonlinear trajectory, or a combination of the two (Sultan, 2019), the research journey requires continual openness to discovery, mutability and unknowingness (Kleining & Witt, 2000; Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010; Najafi et al. 2025; Ventiling, 2018).

Sultan argues that embracing the unknown necessitates a form of abandonment that enables the researcher to locate and extend knowledge. This includes “a creative research approach that honours the power of imagination while challenging the very concept of absolute certainty” (Sultan, 2019, p. 80). Moutakas, (1990) suggests a number of methods that can enhance this, including narratives, creative

⁴⁹ I use the term participants here because I do not frame contributors to the inquiry as ‘participants’. This is because the documentary relationship is a collaborative one where the filmmaker and the participant are in partnership.

artefacts, poetry, or the keeping of journals. Through such engagement, essential themes and understanding may be gleaned, and the study can uncover and reveal social and universal understandings of a phenomenon under investigation (Douglass & Moustakas; 1985, Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019).

Phases of a heuristic inquiry

In Moustakas' work on heuristic research (Moustakas, 1967, 1990; Douglass & Moustakas, 1985) he proposes six phases of an inquiry; initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. These phases are derived from his reflections on the experience of loneliness (Moustakas, 1961, 1972). In nominating these phases, Ings and Tudor (2025, p. 209) argue that he did not propose that these should be interpreted as fixed stages in a sequence but rather, they might be treated as guides that may serve to unfold investigations within a researcher's broader research design.

Initial Engagement

Moustakas proposed that the purpose of a researcher's initial engagement with a research topic or question is discovery. He argued that one's initial engagement should involve a form of self-study that is resourced by a desire to uncover "an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

The phenomenon of grief had long interested me. Across years of practice I had asked myself how I might give visual and sonic representation to such a phenomenon. In 2020, two of my friends died from Covid-19 within two days of each other. Many people I encountered at this

time were unsure of how to respond. Their need suggested that there might be value in designing for grief an articulate intimate voice; something that might speak in accessible ways to shared, yet unique experiences.

Immersion

Moustakas proposed that during the second phase of a heuristic inquiry the researcher delves deeply into the topic. Here, her focus is fixed in order to become intimately involved with the question as she seeks to expand knowledge and understanding.

At this point in the inquiry I spoke with many people about their experiences of grief. I located autobiographic accounts, researched films and documentaries and sought out theory and case studies relating to grief and loss. In addition I immersed myself in the experience of accounting grief by filming an initial autobiographic interview about the deaths of my grandmother and stepfather.

Incubation

During this phase, Moustakas suggests that the heuristic researcher withdraws from directed attention to the question. Here, she becomes occupied by other endeavours and her tacit knowing and intuition begin to work behind the scenes enabling her to "clarify and extend awareness on levels outside the immediate awareness" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29).

However, incubation for me was not a discrete phase. It permeated the project, especially during postproduction. Incubation occurred while cooking an elaborate meal, preparing a lesson for teaching, listening to an audio book, or walking around the garden. It was a state of non-focus inside which ideas could form and turn

over without being limited or shaped by critical analysis.

Illumination

Moustakas describes illumination as a period where the researcher unravels findings using tacit knowledge and intuition. In this phase she amasses and solidifies the separate qualities of her study and new facets of the discovery emerge whilst existing assumptions are corrected. Moustakas suggests that "Illumination opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for sometime yet beyond immediate awareness" (1990, p. 30). Like incubation, illumination was not a discrete phase in my inquiry. For example, although it enabled me to recognise resonance and emerging patterns while I was conducting interviews, later, across postproduction experiments, illumination enabled me to intuitively identify connections between character, imagery and sound.

Explication

Moustakas' sixth phase, explication, requires a deliberate and detailed effort to "examine what has been awakened in the consciousness in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (1990, p. 31). Here, the researcher clarifies the study by focusing, searching and identifying novel elements and themes.

In this state I began to examine gathered data, asking myself:

"What does interview material tell us about this person's experience of grief?"

"How might I edit this?"

“How might imagery and sound be used to heighten the facets of this experience?”

I listened repeatedly to interview audio as I searched for images that resonated with the tone and content of what I was hearing. For example, when Stephen (the artist I worked with in the second film) spoke of the dinghy he made with his father, I imagined him as a tiny speck in an ocean, being buoyed by the sea. Later, as this image began to take form as a graphic compilation of collaged imagery, I examined its resonance and decided to extend the theme. Consequently, I returned to film him adrift in a handmade kauri dingy on the Kaipara Harbour.

Creative synthesis

In this last phase, Moustakas suggests that the researcher has acquired an intimate understanding of their data. At this point a creative synexegesis occurs that calls on the tacit and intuitive as the researcher amalgamates pieces, finding connections between myriads of themes and elements that have been discovered.

In this study creative synthesis occurred as I drafted and redrafted arrangements of images, animation and sound, to find resonance, connection, disconnection and reconnection that might most effectively evoke the content and tone of each interview.

Optimising discovery in heuristic inquiry

Although Moustakas discusses phases that might guide a heuristic inquiry, this exegesis study was less shaped by these than by an evolution of Kleining and Witt’s discussion of principles that can enhance heuristic research. In *The Qualitative Heuristic Approach: A Methodology for Discovery in Psychology and the Social Sciences* (2000) they propose that research procedures should be

understood as dialectical rather than linear. They identify four rules that have potential to optimise the chances for discovery in a study. First, they advocate an openness to novelty and the need for the researcher to remain receptive to revising presumptions that might challenge the data. Second, they propose that the research topic or question should be understood as provisional and likely to transform over the period of the study. Third, they suggest that data should be gathered using a diversity of perspectives. Finally, they maintain that the researcher must concern themselves with unearthing parallels, patterns and similarities in the data they accumulate.

Emerging principles

Although I found Kleining and Witt’s rules helpful, as the study progressed I became aware of variations on their principles that were shaping specific approaches and emphases inside my methodology. While the first and third principles were closely associated with their rules, the second and fourth surfaced from the nature of the research question and my priorities as an artistic researcher. A comparison is provided in Table 1.

KLEINING & WITT’S (2000) RULES FOR HEIGHTENING DISCOVERY IN HEURISTIC INQUIRY	PRINCIPLES DEVELOPED WHILE CREATING <i>GRIEF</i>
Maintaining openness to the fluidity of the topic	Embracing uncertainty and engaging with serendipity
Preparedness to embrace change	
Adopting a variation of perspectives	Indwelling
Unearthing parallels, patterns and similarities in data.	Emboldening poetic sensibility in the pursuit of pattern recognition and continuity.
	Enabling aroha

TABLE 1:
Comparing Kleining and Witt’s (2000) four rules for optimising chances for discovery in a heuristic inquiry to the principles I developed for the project

Given the variation in principles it is useful to consider each of these in turn.

Embracing uncertainty and engaging with serendipity

The study involved navigating doubt. States of uncertainty were often disquieting, enflaming insecurity and apprehension. Beghetto notes that uncertainty is “an undeniable and indelible feature of learning and life”, (2022, p.1). Although Carabine, (2013) observes that our response to the unfamiliar or indeterminable

can be paralyzing, Beghetto proposes that if these feelings of uncertainty are endured and incorporated into one’s practice, exploration and novelty can emerge. In fact, Beghetto, (2021, 2022), and Runco, (2022) propose that uncertainty is a requirement of creativity because it is essential to nurturing thought and prompting discovery.

Uncertainty permeated multiple aspects of the research. It accompanied the initial decision to document my personal experiences of loss. This caused me to question the accuracy of

my accounts and to ruminate on the cost of exposing personal vulnerability. Consequently, I had to come to terms with my self-consciousness and fear of answering intimate questions on camera.⁵⁰ Although attempting to document my personal experience of grief provided insight into what I would be requiring of the other interviewees in the project, it also became apparent that I needed to harness anxiety so I could “engage in a new form of reasoning” (Beghetto, 2021 p.1) that embraced risk and sensitivity.

Grief Elizabeth



Grief Stephen



Grief Star



50 At the beginning of the project, I filmed multiple instances of my accounting of my grief to the camera.

FIGURE 3.2:
Thematic considerations in the three documentaries

I was also uncertain if the nuanced states of grief I was documenting could be expressed through metaphors as animated collages. In finding a visual voice for the interviews I amassed hundreds of copyright-free images, video clips, and sound segments that I thought might resonate with the narratives of grief I recorded across the project. Rather than use uncertainty as a limitation, I reframed it as a form of creative permission and began experimenting with potential solutions using combinations of incongruent images and surface disparities in an effort to find harmony through uncertain alliance.

By embracing uncertainty and using it to lead my thinking, I consciously disabled the obvious and created the “impossible marriages” (Ings, 2017, p. 25) that were developed. These lifted the documentaries above figurative translation (Figure 3.2) in what is arguably a radical treatment of Kleining and Witt’s, (2000) third rule for heuristic inquiry that encourages the researcher to consciously adopt a variation of perspectives. In so doing, I increasingly pursued the creative potentials of serendipitous connection.

In *Grief Elizabeth* we see birds, fragmented landscapes, chromolithographic flowers, archive photography, cartography, fire, and the seemingly incongruent leitmotif of the anatomical body as reoccurring responses to the recounting of grief, even though these motifs are not mentioned in the interview. Similarly in *Grief Stephen*, we encounter brooding clouds, carpentry plans, measuring devices, and boxing portrayed through a thematic revisiting of Victorian masculinity, although neither Stephen nor his father were living during this period. In Star’s documentary we see landscapes, stormy skies, early New

Zealand woodcuts, native New Zealand plants and portraiture treated as a thematic thread even though it has no direct association with the content of her interview.

The research design engaged with serendipity. The word was coined by Horace Walpole in reference to the Persian parable of the *Three Princes of Serendip* who made discoveries through sagacity and wit (Walpole, 1754, 1937–1983). De Rond, (2014) suggests that “serendipity has been framed as chance, coincidence, luck or providence” (p. 342). Although De Rond notes that serendipity has been conventionally cast, when viewed as a capability in research, it has also been recognised as an agent of discovery (Andel, 1994; Fine & Deegan, 1996; Kennedy et al., 2022; Merton & Barber, 2011; Pearce, 1912; Ross & Copeland, 2022). According to these writers, serendipity can be viewed as an aptitude that heightens the capacity to perceive connections that others might not see. De Rond, (2014) proposes that this facility melds the researcher’s depth of knowledge with their perceptiveness. Gläveneau, (2022) notes that serendipity is likely to emerge if the researcher engages her curiosity and awe. This approach, he argues, stimulates the researcher’s creativity as well interconnecting her social and cultural domains. What then surfaces is not an accident, but rather an unforeseen perception that springs from the flow of events and enables the researcher to uncover novelty and the unexpected.

Serendipitous discovery occurred continuously while creating the documentaries. An indicative example arose during the postproduction of *Grief Elizabeth* while I was sifting through footage. While listening to the material I began to re-experience the situations I was recounting. It



FIGURE 3.3:
Close-up of me listening to my final audio (2021)

was painful. I could feel, hear and see grief. I wondered what such pain might look like to an observer. So I asked a colleague to film me while I was listening to my interview audio. I wondered if such material might be useful as a parallel documentary. But what I stumbled across in the footage was a potential form of punctuation; a sudden intrusion of figurative grief that could pull a viewer back towards the teller of the story. Watching moving footage of myself dislodged by grief, stumbling to articulate something beyond language, pushed me to consider the potentials of silence, space, extended time and awkward pause (Figure 3.3). As a consequence, I began to construct visual themes like swaying chromolithographic flowers and glacial movements across cartographic imagery.

Indwelling

The second principle that surfaced was ‘indwelling’. This is a period that some heuristic researchers describe as an initial immersion (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Ings, 2011; Ventling, 2018). Moustakas, (1990) sees it as an interior environment where one experiences an

internalising of a question and “immersion in active experience” (p. 15). He suggests that this contemplative space compels deep reflection and determined effort, “until fundamental insight is achieved” (p. 25).

Researchers like Sela Smith, (2002) employ indwelling as the primary phase. However, in my practice indwelling also functioned as an embracing state that ran parallel to artistic iterations of my work. It was inside states of indwelling that what already existed and what was being created became part of an integrated whole.

In his discussion of Polanyi’s (1965) state of indwelling Brownhill, (1968) says,

We ‘indwell’, or we immerse ourselves in the clues of perception to gain a knowledge of the whole. This does not mean we concentrate on the particulars and that this gives us a knowledge of the whole, but it means we assimilate the particulars, we make them part of ourselves, and only then can we gain a knowledge of the whole. (p. 118)

My indwelling was not a demarcated state but a condition where the self, the research question and evolving creative responses coexisted. Shifting between indwelling and external review became an intuitive oscillation. It was necessary because at times working on the documentaries was emotionally exhausting. Inside states of indwelling, I was able to consider the expression of grief in relation to imagery and sound because I was able to feel the resonance in the work I was making and respond emotionally while I was crafting connections. In other words, both what was being created and what I was



experiencing emotionally coexisted in the same environment; they became part of a constantly moving whole. It was from states of indwelling that broad decisions like the colour spectrum for the documentaries surfaced. For example, in the documentary *Grief Elizabeth* the bittersweetness I experienced while concurrently dwelling inside the imagery and my emotional state felt muted, faded, emotionally subtracted of colour. I began to craft a muted scheme to reinforce a melodic sense of loss. I was able to design background soundscapes that sang to the imagery and the poignancy of the interview in harmonious ways (Figure 3.4).

Emboldening a poetic sensibility

The third principle developed during the inquiry involved an emboldening of my poetic sensibility. This enabled me to pursue pattern recognition while creating continuity inside each documentary.

Although difficult to define, a poetic sensibility operates as an interior state that Fuchs-Holzer, (2017) suggests is intuitive and aesthetic. She proposes that poetic sensibility “requires a keen multisensory experience of the surrounding world; an ability to ask questions of, and see patterns in, that world; and an ability to make both logical and intuitive connections” (para. 1).

Grief Elizabeth

FIGURE 3.4:
Frame grabs from *Grief Elizabeth* (2023) showing desaturated bittersweetness as a colour grade

My poetic sensibility permitted unusual assemblies of image and sound. Visual metaphors, editing pace, and sensations of loss were composed while rational thinking was put aside. I navigated dark memory and emotion to gather disparate elements, then I began arranging these into themes, associations, transitions and rhythms in a manner similar to ways that a poet might arrange ideas. In this process I constantly challenged the use of literal depiction. Although the final documentaries do contain some literal themes, like boats in *Grief Stephen* and iconography associated with burning in *Grief Elizabeth*, these are integrated with images and image relationships that bear no literal connection to the content of the interviews. Issues like tone, weight, delicacy, strength, darkness, light, memory, pause, pace, and fragmented reality were composed and recomposed and measured against a poetic sense of coherency. In this process certain connections found resonance and others became more tenuous and eventually lost their connection to an emerging whole. This occurrence may be compared to Simmel's (1908) discussion of method, where he observes that "out of complex phenomena, the homogeneous will be extracted... and the dissimilar paralyzed" (p. 1).

Unrestricted by the pursuit of an expository account (Nichols & Baron, 2024) I was able to counterpoint the immediacy of each interview with symbolic, poetic animations that unfolded

across expanded periods of time that were very different to the practices I had hitherto employed as a professional documentary maker.⁵¹ In the more nuanced and suggestive realm of poetic thinking, imagery, music, sound effects, and interview recordings sought poetic affinities and relationships. In this more lyrical manner the inquiry recognised Kleining and Witt's fourth rule where they recommend that the heuristic researcher pursuing discovery should concern themselves with identifying parallels, patterns and similarities in data.

Enabling aroha

As the inquiry progressed, a fourth principle became increasingly significant, especially when I began working with the stories of other artists. To describe this principle, we might turn to the indigenous language of the New Zealand Māori for the word *aroha*. Simply translated *aroha* means to show love, compassion, and respect, but it is more nuanced than this. Barlow, (1991) notes that *aroha* also renounces judgement and is expressed as genuine concern and care.

In studies where the autobiographical is foundational Ellis and Bochner, (2000) suggest "a researcher engages multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). This requires her to respond to a 'duty of care' towards others and herself. Although Behar, (1996/2022), Ryang, (2000), and Eriksson, (2010) propose that vulnerability can lend a degree of authority to autobiographic inquiries, this vulnerability can also be emotionally costly (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009; Ings, 2014; Tolich, 2010). Clandinin and Connelly, (1994) remind us that "the researcher is always speaking partially naked" (p. 423), and Ings, (2014) cautions that with insufficient care

and forethought, an autobiographical research project "can cost a researcher emotionally and professionally" (p. 690).

Throughout the study, I was attentive to my emotional and mental wellbeing. I monitored states of intense immersion, dislocating myself and working on more external experiments, like investigating new software techniques, searching for images or delving into contextual reading, when I needed emotional respite. I also attended fortnightly sessions with a personal therapist, and this relationship accompanied the full duration of exegesis study. In addition, I chose to work with a cinematographer with whom I already shared years of professional experience. Our work ethic and philosophy of documentary making are in close alignment so we were able to work with sensitive material drawing on high levels of trust and empathy.

While these strategies for employing *aroha* in the context of autobiographically resourced inquiry were useful, other forms gathered prominence when I began working with the artists whose experiences were contributions to the project. Working effectively as a documentary practitioner requires mutual trust between participant and maker, and a trusting relationship becomes important when one is asking people to share intense or painful experiences. Pryluck, (1976), Nash, (2011), Nichols, (2017) Nichols & Baron, (2024), and Sanders, (2013) all argue that ethical responsibilities lie at the heart of documentary production processes, and these responsibilities permeate all periods of production (Sanders, 2010; Thomas, 2012). In enacting *aroha*, I looked to Thomas, (2012) who proposed that a documentary maker must form deep, trusting connections that enable reflexivity, compassion and empathy.

51 The 7.15-minute documentary *Grief Elizabeth* took eight months to create. Stephen's 10.27-minute work took six months, and Star's 10.52-minute minute piece, took over five months.

Accordingly, I took time to talk with the artists who considered sharing their stories. We ate together, spent time in each other's worlds, shared our creative work, and they clarified parameters they might bring to the project. Consequently, my questions were designed in ways that afforded them opportunities for deep reflection, without intruding on issues about which they felt uncomfortable.

The delicacy of this relationship went beyond the provisions of university ethics approval. It was predicated on building deep levels of trust. Ings and Tudor, (2025 p. 207), note that "university ethics criteria and committees are generally more concerned with instrumental ethics, which are based on consequentialism, than with intrinsic value ethics which are based on relationality." When one navigates between cultures, as with Star Gossage's interview,⁵² or knows that an inquiry will travel into spiritual and emotional understandings, there is a need for something beyond safety ... something that comes closer to love and attentive care. Accordingly, I have found that *aroha* is not a luxury principle, but a necessity that enables a researcher to heighten integrity and consideration. Such an approach is encapsulated in the Māori *whakatauki*,⁵³

Aroha mai, aroha atu

Love received demands love returned

(Elder, 2020 p. 63)

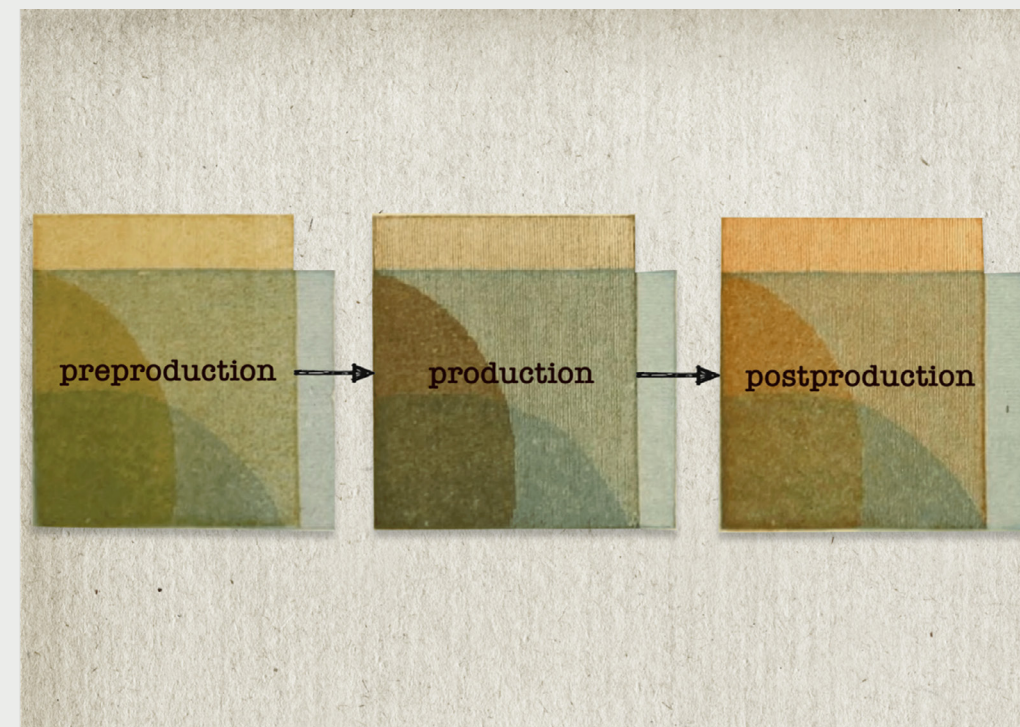
52 Star Gossage is a New Zealand Māori artist with iwi affiliations to Ngātiwai, Ngāti Manuhiri and Ngāti Ruanui (Taranaki).

53 A *whakatauki* is a form of proverb with an unknown origin. It often includes poetic language which has a deep or underlying meaning.

METHODS

The study followed a traditional trajectory of production practice (Figure 3.5). Methods used in the project are discussed under three stages; preproduction, production and post production. The pre-production trajectory commences with preparatory research as narratives, interviewees and archival materials are explored. Additionally, logistical requirements of filming are reviewed including health and safety protocols and visual and sonic potentials for storytelling. Once all the requirements are in place and locations are confirmed the production stage begins. Postproduction may begin during shooting (as footage is gathered), but it is generally associated with honing the story and refining relationships between image and sound.

FIG 3.5
The trajectory of documentary production (2025)



Stage One: Preproduction

Pre-interview

Having gained university ethics approval to engage with artists as participants I developed methods that enabled me to work artistically with vulnerable stories. Early in the study I made the decision to work with artists I knew and began seeking individuals who were interested in sharing their experiences of grief with me. I then contacted these artists to invite them to be part of this project.

These were established relationships, so trust and some understanding of each other's life experiences already existed. Each of us had experienced grief and searched for ways to express it. Initiating this process was a form of pre-interview.

54 A contemporary cyclorama (sometimes known as a cyc) is a modular and seamless white wall. The curved nature of the design provides the illusion of infinity. This serves as a blank canvas where lighting and props may be added. <https://systemsdigest.com/posts/cyclorama-theatre-definition-exploring-its-role-immersive-experiences>

55 The interrotron method of interview recording uses two studio cameras with attached teleprompters. One camera records the interviewee and the other records the interviewer. Both the interviewer and interviewee are able to 'look' at each other through the reflection in the camera's teleprompter mirror (Figure 3.5). This heightens a sense of personal engagement in the interview experience because it gives both parties the feeling of looking straight into each other's eyes.

56 I worked with a cinematographer/sound recordist on these interview shoots. The interrotron was set up by technicians. After this was completed, the cinematographer, interviewee, and I began the recordings. Neck microphones were used to record audio and Sony FS 6 cameras attached to studio pedestals were employed to record video data.

In a pre-interview, the documentary maker normally conducts initial research on the topic and meets with the interviewee (Rabiger & Hermann, 2020; Reid & Sanders, 2021). However, in this project, this process was followed by additional face to face discussions. In this project, I position the participants as participants to incorporate care and to eliminate any power relationships in the creation of this work. This includes respect and acknowledgement of their contribution as reflexive dialogue and feedback loops during the production stages.

Pre-interview methods included sharing meals, storytelling and discussing detailed descriptions of the production process including a broad agreement of a question line. In Māori research this method is called *kaitahi*. Paora notes that the English translation of *kai* is food, but it also indicates one's action. *Tahi* means as one or together. Thus, *kaitahi* brings people together to share food, conversation and thoughts. It establishes a "safe and compassionate space of a study" (Paora, 2025, p. 32). In this project, giving and sharing food was essential to extending our relationship, cultural sensitivities and trust in each other and the project.

These conversations also considered where we might film the interviews and what I was seeking to do with the material as well as discussions about specific visual memories of loss. It was clarified that, as the documentary maker, I would tell a story of their stories using audio material from the interview that would be artistically interpreted with animated collage and supporting compositions of sound. Up until the point of locking off the sound edit the artist had the right to ask that any part of their interview about which they felt uncomfortable was removed.

Once parameters had been agreed, I designed broad question lines in preparation for shooting.

Stage Two: Production

Interrotron set up

The first two films in the project were shot in a television studio on a white cyclorama.⁵⁴ This method involved a simple lighting rig. I used Erroll Morris' technique of the interrotron to record material (Figure 3.6)⁵⁵ and limited the crew to two people (myself and the cinematographer). This approach enabled me to establish a more intimate and secure environment for the interviewee.⁵⁶

I used my question line to structure the storytelling and to prompt recollections of grief inside a reflective discussion.



FIGURE 3.6:
Interrotron camera set up for Stephen's interview
(July, 2022)

Adapting Production Strategies

I began the project by creating the autobiographical documentary *Grief Elizabeth*. The approach I adopted developed over three separate shoots where questioning techniques were refined and increasing focus was placed on imagery and metaphor.

Grief Elizabeth was shot entirely in a studio but Stephen's accounts were filmed both in a studio using the intertron and on his farm. Star preferred to be filmed in her painting studio. For her interview I operated both the camera and sound recording devices, using natural lighting and lapel microphones (Figure 3.7).



FIGURE 3.7:
Screengrab of Star Gossage in her home studio in Pakiri (November, 2024)

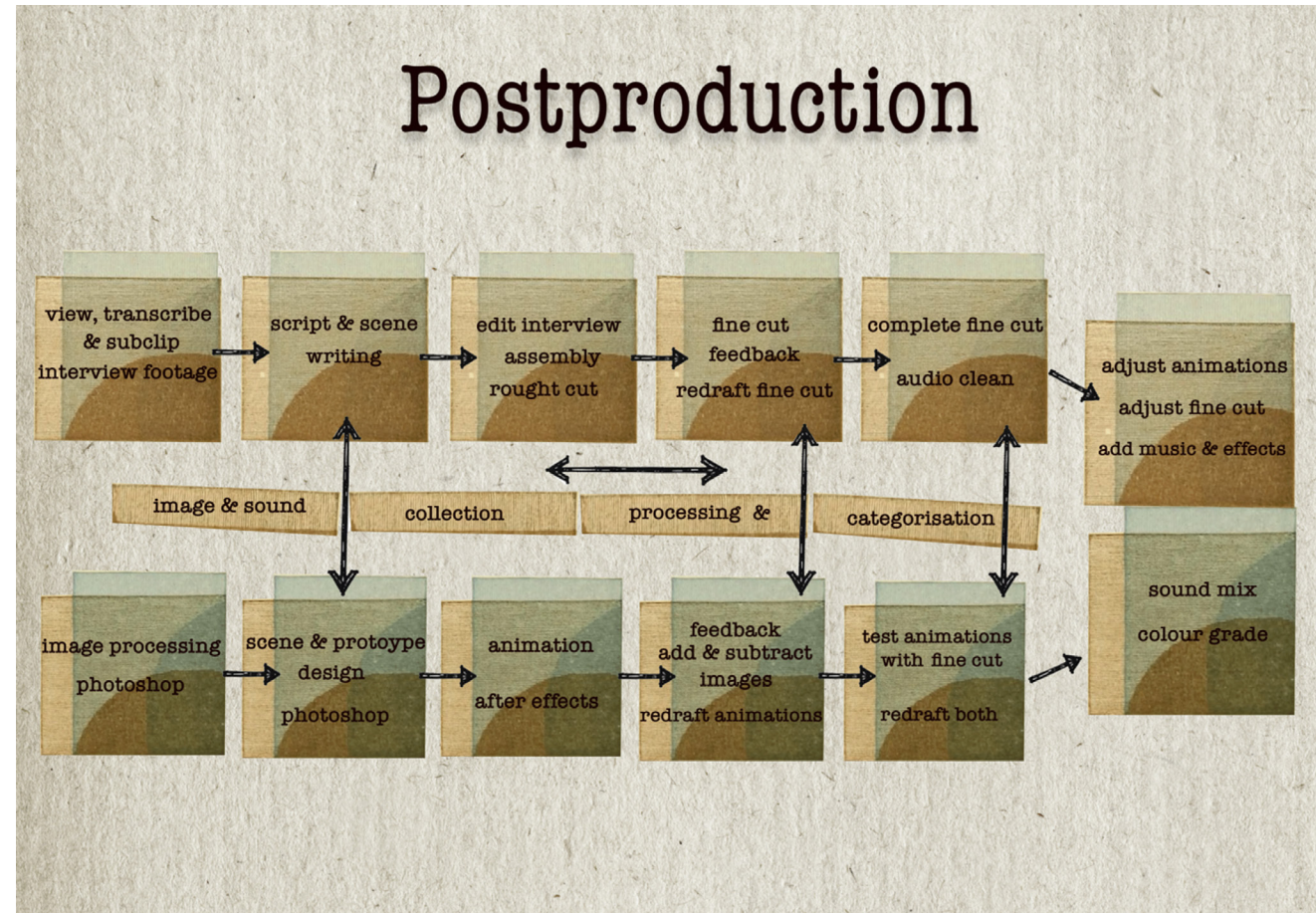


FIGURE 3.8:
Postproduction as a complex, multi-linear, multi-phasic process of iterative experimentation

Stage Three: Post-production

A multi-phasic process

Methods employed in postproduction included editing interview material, drafting imagined scenes, collecting and processing imagery, prototyping animated sequences, and designing soundscapes. Although these methods are treated sequentially, in the discussion that follows they were often revisited because the approach to postproduction was fluid and changes made

to one part of a documentary necessitated undoing and reconstructing other areas. Thus, the post-production stage became a multi-linear, multi-phasic process that moved back and forth between diverse activities. Using this interconnected web of processes I was able to create, consider, reconsider and refine visual and sonic responses to the interviewees' narratives in very fluid ways (Figure 3.8).

1. A GENTLE GREEN LANDSCAPE, TREES MOVE SLOWLY. A FLOCK OF BLACK BIRDS MOVE ACROSS THE DEEP BLUE SKY

Liz V/O

Don't ask me how I feel
I don't know.
I cannot get hold of words.
Perhaps it is pictures that will allow
me to explain?

2. A bonfire burns as the smoke wisps into the sky. Black and white photographs crisp and curl amidst the flames.

Liz V/O

After my grandfather died, my
grandmother built a bonfire.
And she burned all the photographs of
him.

The flames hiss and die away

She wept so much; the fire was
extinguished.

3. The screen dips to black slowly dissolves up to a series of archival photographs of face moving across a timelapse sky
See me?

Liz V/O

That's not true. My mother found her, wrestled the
Photos from her and they wept together

What I fear is losing the ones I love the most

4. The rough rock strewn landscape shifts and moves slowly
away as a darken sky moves forward and engulfs the screen.]

Can I tell you what it looks like?
You are asking me?

FIGURE 3.9:
Excerpt from script experiment from the
documentary *Grief Elizabeth* (July 2021)

57 Subclipping is the process of identifying 'sections' of footage and making separate shots in preparation for editing. An assembly is the rough ordering of shots to create the scene or narrative. Rough cutting occurs when narrative structure is being finalised. Finecutting is a time to refine the narrative, shots, sequences, and scenes to finalise the edit (Rabiger & Hermann, 2020).

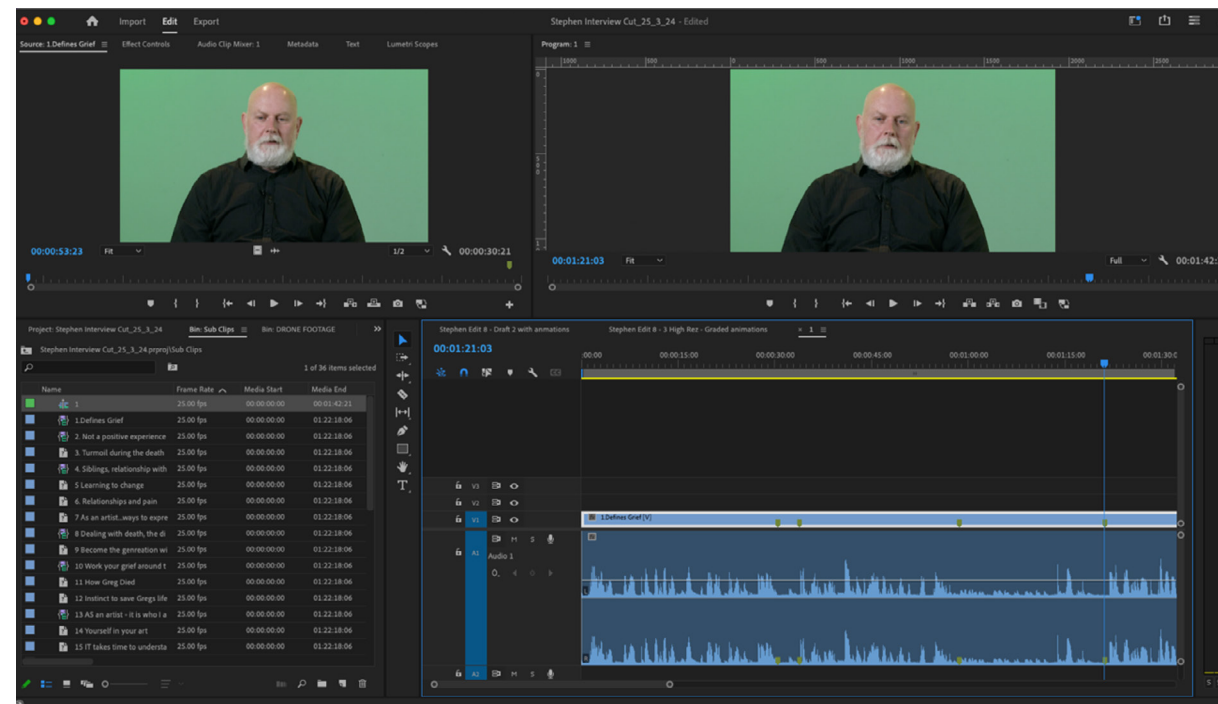
58 This enabled detailed editing of each artist's voice.

Editing interviews

My approach to editing followed a process from transcription, paper editing, subclipping, assembly, transcribing assembled footage, and fine cutting.⁵⁷ In breaking with conventional editing methods, I also used initial interview transcripts to draft imagined scenes that were then rewritten in a script format (Figure 3.9). These scenes were created after reflecting on each artist's interview. They then served as the basis for visual and sonic thematic development that enabled me to expand what had been recorded into broader dimensions of poetic interpretation.

The fine cut of each documentary involved multiple assemblies and reassemblies of interview footage and experiments with audio waveforms (Figure 3.10).⁵⁸

FIGURE 3.10:
Screngrab from Premiere Pro - showing the use of markers and extended waveforms to edit Stephen's audio (June 2023). The waveforms are a graphical representation of his voice.



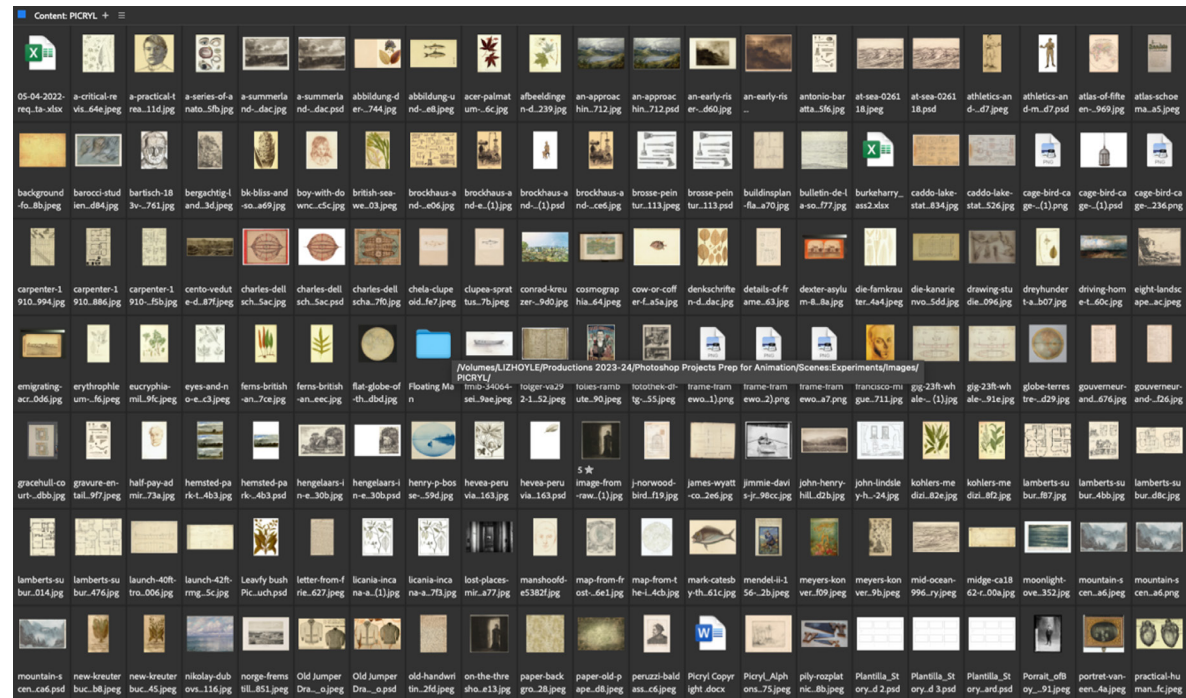


FIGURE 3.11:

Screengrab from one of numerous image banks used for the documentary *Grief Stephen*. I was able to view these images and video files in Adobe Bridge while I was considering what I was hearing in edited versions of the interviews (2024)

Collecting and processing imagery

Gathering and archiving images accompanied early editing processes and expanded as each documentary called higher levels of poetic resonance to itself.

All images used in the documentaries were sourced from the public domain.⁵⁹ Image selection resourced an ever-expanding palette of interpretation and thematic development. To assemble images I worked across three computer screens. I would watch an interview cut on one

computer and use another to search for images, while the third was used to follow processing tutorials. Central to this process were four Adobe applications; *Bridge*, *Photoshop*, *Premiere* and *After Effects*.⁶⁰

Collecting imagery entailed travelling through extensive galleries of paintings, photographs, prints, cartoons, maps and drawings. Across the three documentaries I created enormous image and sound banks (Figure 3.11). Image banks took the form of extensive galleries of prepared png images that I formatted with transparent backgrounds. This meant that the images were ready to create scenes in *Photoshop* or to add to an animation as I further developed ideas in *After Effects*.

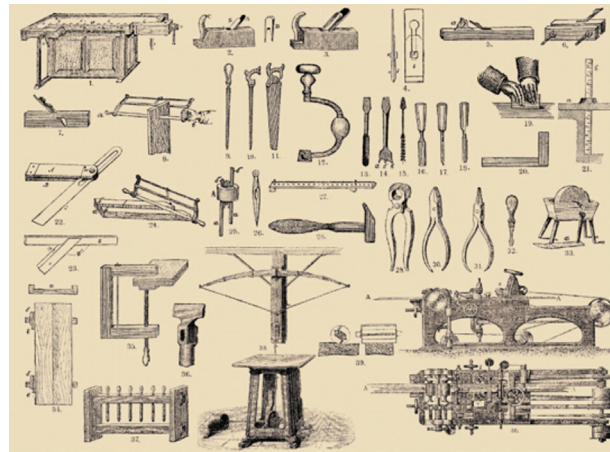
Creating the ‘visual voice’ for each documentary often required looking for other images that might complete or compliment a theme. The image search garnered unexpected finds which I kept in reserve in case they might prove to be useful. It was through the process of heuristically dwelling inside each documentary, while concurrently searching for imagery, that I was exposed to the potentials of serendipitous discovery. I found poetic connection in chance encounters, in tangents to pursued themes and in unexpected repositories. An example of this was my stumbling across the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary (1890-1907).⁶¹ Inside this resource I was able to consider thousands of images, maps and diagrams, including the drawings of tools and building plans that offered me a solution to Stephen’s discussion about his father’s work as a carpenter. Finding these technical drawings prompted me to think about ways such imagery might be used as thematic expressions. Given that Stephen’s relationship with his father has a certain remoteness to it, I

59 The public domain refers to materials which fall outside of copyright requirements and intellectual property. These materials are publicly owned. They may be used without permission. However, permissions need to be checked on every item available as each has specific requirements. For example, the artist and owner of copyright must be acknowledged, or in some instances an image cannot be remixed or used inappropriately, for example, for commercial purposes. Many items fall under Creative Commons Licensing provisos which serve to protect artists but are also a way for artists to share their work. See: <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/public-domain/welcome/> and <https://creativecommons.org/>

60 Adobe Bridge was used to create image galleries, Photoshop for image manipulation, Premiere Pro for editing interviews and After Effects for animation and motion graphics.

61 The Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary was first published in St Petersburg Russian in 1890-1907. Its 86 volumes provide information on science, philosophy and the arts. Each volume is 500 pages in length and the complete collection contains over 7.800 images as well as articles and maps. These are now, all in the public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Images_from_Brockhaus_and_Efron_Encyclopedic_Dictionary

FIGURE 3.12:
A page from the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary 1890-1907



realised that such drawings, as expressionless diagrams, might carry a reserved tone that could be paradoxically positioned against the vulnerability of Stephen's personal account of grief.

When translating the diagrams into the world of Stephen's documentary, I studied techniques for creating 'star bursts' in *After Effects* (Figures 3.12-13). In Figure 3.12, a series of carpentry drawings were added underneath, changing as the tools enlarge and move towards the viewer⁶².



FIGURE 3.13:
Separated tool elements added to *After Effects*, resized, positioned and repeated to create a starburst of tools.

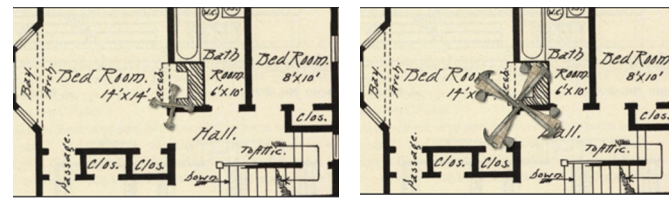


FIGURE 3.14:
Screengrab of initial assembly (January 2024) compared to the final composition where Stephen talks about grief as a state of love and relationships (May 2024)⁶³



Prototyping animated sequences

While I assembled imagery I also experimented with making 'scenes' in *Photoshop*. To do this I created a blank 1920 x 1080 px canvas, then added and subtracted image selections and potential backgrounds or landscapes (Figure 3.14). By listening to audio associated with each sequence I was able to anchor visualisations. However, as refinements to the selection process progressed I worked in silence, focusing on compositions, textures, relationships and poetic coherence. It was during this stage that some of the images needed to be repaired because they contained stains or scratches. As a scene was refined I also cleaned up edges so the disparate elements in each composition appeared more integrated. Thus, I would begin with a cluttered compilation and slowly subtract elements until I was satisfied with the composition. I then imported the file into *After Effects* and began to experiment with movement and perspective, continuing to add, subtract or manipulate images. If I was uncertain about the tone of the scene, I would return to the audio to confirm or discard choices I was making.

62 An interactive, animated experiment of the aesthetic can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/cnW0TDFtpuw>

63 The final animated sequence can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/TyTUNqpB2rg>

Sometimes, several discrete prototypes of a scene were developed so I was able to assess comparative resonance and continuity within the wider arcs of the documentary.

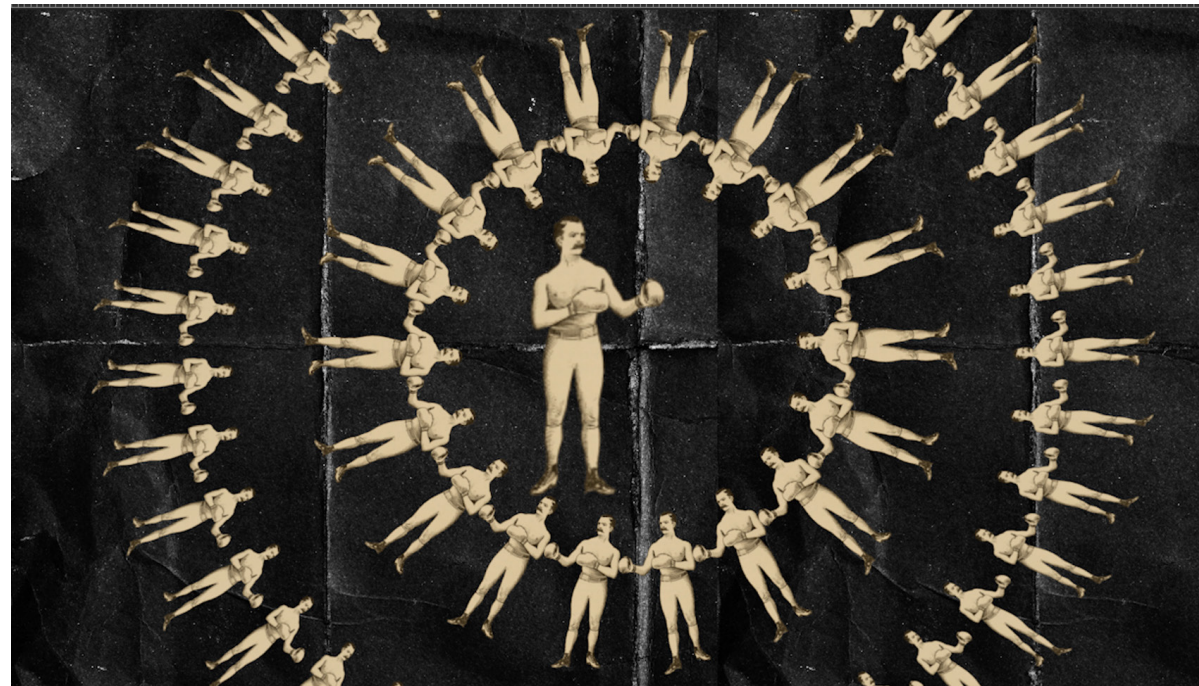
When animating sequences I tried to maintain openness to the fluidity of what I was encountering. This meant concurrently searching for new techniques in software tutorials that might enable me to add movement, depth and texture to specific scenes. This constant searching for potential may be illustrated in the development of the phenakistoscope⁶⁴ in Stephen's documentary. This sequence was assembled and animated based on rudimentary examples I discovered online that had been made in *After Effects* (Figure 3.15).⁶⁵

Sound design

Designing sound for each documentary began before the fine cut was completed. Preparatory work involved collecting and organising music, atmos and foley. Atmos or ambiance is the sound of a location, either interior or exterior, which has its own aural characteristics (Rabiger & Hermann, 2020). Atmos can give a scene depth and character by adding ambiance. For example, in the documentary *Grief Elizabeth*, a painted landscape was brought to life by adding an atmos of birds and wind to the imagery.

Generally, music was gleaned from material available under Creative Commons licensing.⁶⁶ Copyright can be extremely expensive. In the *Grief* films I chose to sample and remix images and sounds that are in the public domain and therefore copyright free and without cost.

FIGURE 3.15:
Screengrab from *Grief Stephen*, showing the boxer used as a phenakistoscope



64 This Victorian amusement was aimed at children and as one of the early forms of animation, became a precursor to modern cinema. A phenakistoscope comprised of images displaying sequential movement drawn or painted onto a cardboard disk. As the disk is spun it gives the illusion of movement. <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/phenakistoscopes-1833/>

65 The final animated sequence, mapped onto part of Stephen's interview, can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/VtIDHyUpnI?si=QROE0dWzS0yOAJ98>

66 Film festivals require 'clearance' or legal permission for copyright materials which are set out in their guidelines each year. This protects artists and ensures all copyrighted materials are used legally. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand_International_Film_Festival A call for submissions and the guidelines for 2026 have not yet been posted. <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/licenses/>

In documentaries like *Grief Elizabeth*, I concentrated on pieces that were set in a minor key, acoustic, and simple in their orchestration. In addition to music samples, I purchased atmos and effects sound files.⁶⁷ These collections enabled me to design sound palettes that spoke to shifts in the mood of each work. I sought to produce a form of poetic, sonic realism that might support and enhance the constructed imagery.

As each project progressed, I built sound banks that contained multiple examples of atmos and effects like multiple versions of wind types recorded in different landscapes and seasons. As with the imagery in the films, sonic material was initially layered and then refined through iterative, heuristic experimentation (Figure 3.15). For ease of visual recognition, sounds were named and labelled with a colour. Here, the interview audio is blue, music is teal and the wind is pink. As each scene was developed, sounds were added or subtracted to build appropriate aural environments. Tracks were reviewed for sound levels throughout this process so I was able to establish a balance between sonic elements, i.e. interview audio, music, foley and atmos.

Having discussed methods that actualised the heuristic approach adopted in the study, it is useful in concluding this chapter to consider strengths and challenges inherent in the research design.

67 At the beginning of the project I set up an account with Envato. This is a repository of copyright media assets <https://elements.envato.com/>.

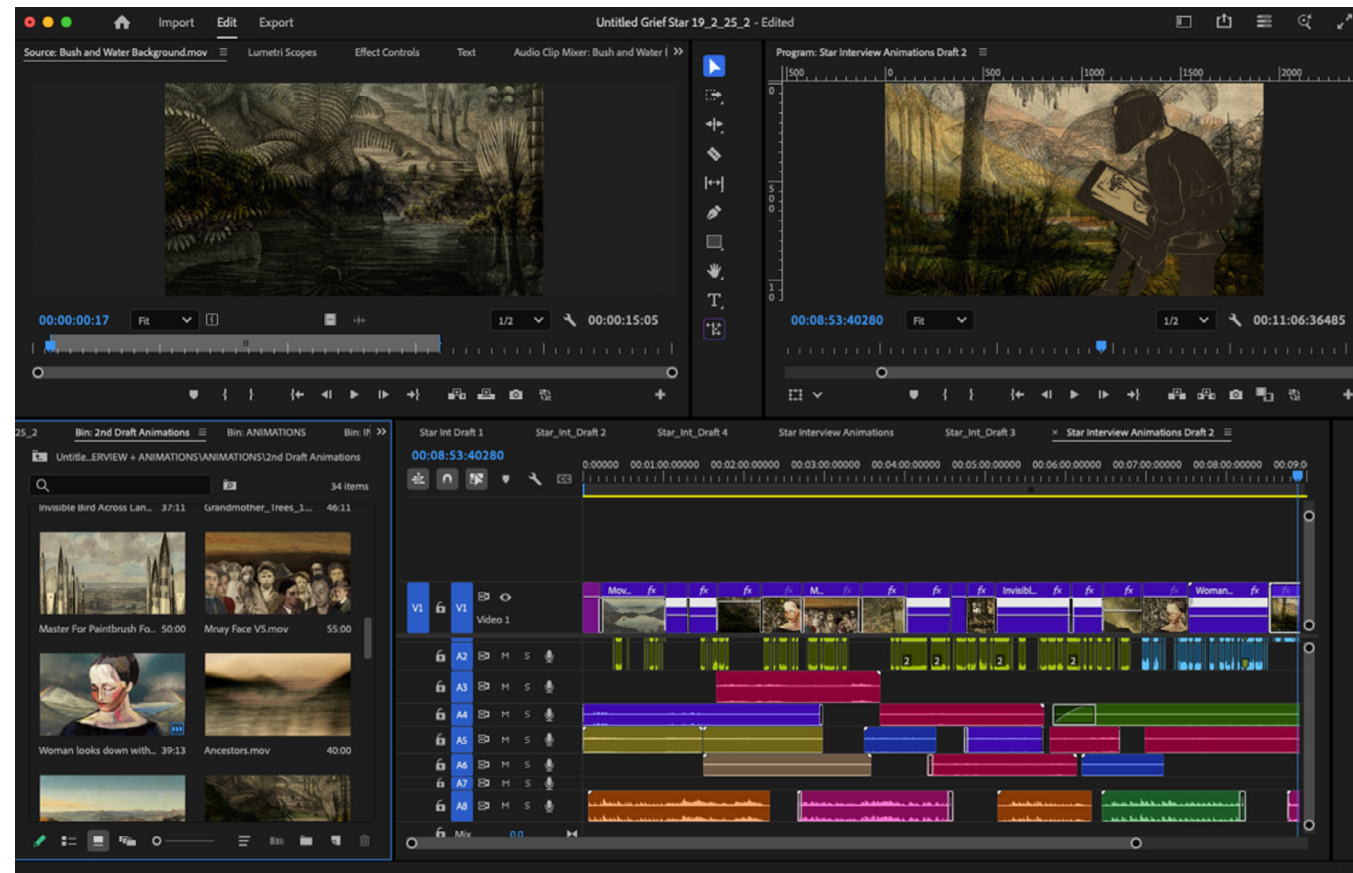


FIGURE 3.16:
Screengrab from PremierPro showing layered sound and music for the documentary *Grief Star* (2024)

CRITIQUE OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was grounded in the subjective experience of the researcher. It drew on her artistic interpretation of personal grief and the accounts of two contributing artists. The research design for the project did not follow a templated or linear set of steps. Instead, it drew heuristically, relying on deeply constituted experience, reflective search and insightful questioning. Because such approaches to inquiry are not easy to manage (Ventling, 2018; Ings & Tudor, 2025; Sela Smith, 2002) they offer distinctive advantages and challenges.

Advantages

Validating the self

A heuristic inquiry places the documentary maker at the centre of the problem to be addressed. It elevates her ability to utilise informed subjectivity and intuition in the navigation of complex and often mutable problems (Ings, 2011). From this position, the researcher is able to pursue self-dialogue, intuitive reflection and insightful decision-making with a heightened sense of validation.

In adopting a heuristic inquiry I was able to draw on tacit knowing and apply this as subjective, artistic responses to experience, either biographical or autobiographical. As a researcher I was also able to elevate the intuitive, rational and non-rational inside an integrated approach to recognising, interpreting and reconstituting knowledge.

Flexibility

The research design offered high levels of flexibility. This meant I was able to respond to questions and materials I gathered

with exploratory openness. Uncertainty, unknowingness, and the serendipitous became qualities to reframe as approaches and enable distinctive levels of discovery. I embraced complex narratives and emotions and translated them using a multi-phasic process, broadly structured into stages of preproduction, production and postproduction. Thus flexibility enabled me to merge both sensory and rational responses in the development of solutions. This process involved embracing wrong turns and cul-de-sacs as I nudged my practice forward using self-dialogue and questioning.

- 68 Significant among these filmmakers were cinematographer/filmmaker Dr Mairi Gunn, <https://profiles.auckland.ac.nz/mairi-gunn>, producer, Associate Professor Christina Milligan <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0589666/>, producer Kath Shelper <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0791286/> postproduction supervisor and editor Roger Grant <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0335628/>, documentary maker and animator, Maggie Fooke <https://www.acmi.net.au/creators/8380--maggie-fooke/>, writer/director Professor Welby Ings <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1779844/> and screenwriter Philippa Burne, <https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/profile/656370-philippa-burne>
- 69 Hoyle, E. (2021, November 30). Drawing on Grief. Center for Screen Practice as Research. Auckland University of Technology, Auckland New Zealand.
<https://www.aut.ac.nz/study/study-options/communication-studies/research/aut-centre-for-screen-practice-research/2022-dialogues-postgraduate-symposium>
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<https://www.aut.ac.nz/research/postgraduate-student-support/events/research-symposium>
<https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/rangahau-aranga/article/view/121>
- Hoyle, E. (2023, September 8) Untitled Grief: An Application of Heuristic Inquiry.
Post Graduate Research Symposium, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand.
<https://www.aut.ac.nz/research/postgraduate-student-support/events/research-symposium>
<https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/rangahau-aranga/article/view/208>
- Zalipour, A., Brannigan, R., Hoyle, E. (2024, December 3-6). Blurring Boundaries: Innovative approaches of practice as research. Screen Studies Association of Australia & Aotearoa New Zealand. Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia
<https://ssaaanz.com/2024-ssaaanz-conference>
- Hoyle, E. (2024, December 16-20) Untitled Grief: Heuristic inquiry and the documenting of loss. Visible Evidence XXX. Monash University, Melbourne, Australia.
<https://www.visibleevidence.org/conference/visible-evidence-xxx/>

Challenges

Self-referentiality

Artistic, heuristic inquiries rely on subjective questioning and response but, given this circumstance, both Ings, (2011) and Sinfield, (2020) caution that the researcher can lose sight of the communicative clarity of what is being created. In other words, because the researcher is so ‘inside’ her work, she can assume the presence of meaning when it may be unclear. To address this issue, I sought expert feedback from colleagues who are professional filmmakers at critical stages in the development of the documentaries.⁶⁸ I also presented iterations of my work at conferences and symposia.⁶⁹

Feedback from these engagements were used to refine clarity and resource further experimentation. By framing external reflections as “considerations for attention rather than actionable advice” (Sinfield, 2020, p. 93), I was able to maintain agency in decision making while importing a wider variation of perspectives into aspects of the work that required reconsideration.

Emotional cost

Because a heuristic inquiry draws so deeply on the researcher’s inner self, it can be self-exposing. Chase, (2005 p. 60) notes that in inquiries where the self becomes an integral part of the study, the researcher “turns the analytic lens on themselves ... writing, interpreting and performing their own narratives about culturally significant experiences.” Although Eriksson (2010), Ings & Tudor (2025), and Ryang, (2000) all suggest that openness may elevate levels of authority in such studies, the researcher is concurrently rendered vulnerable.

Excavating my memories of grief and interpreting the experience of others had unexpected outcomes. At times, it felt as though I was turning myself inside out. To address this, it was necessary to establish support from a professional grief counsellor so I could manage indwelling with practices of self-care.

Because the study was so emotionally destabilising I managed vulnerability by oscillating between emotionally difficult, internalised phases like editing my interview material and more externalised aesthetic processes associated with the development of imagery and sound construction. The ability to move back and forwards between aspects of the inquiry enabled me to strategically remove myself from sadness and engage in the joy and creative expression of constructing poetic imagery and sound.

Managing time and resources

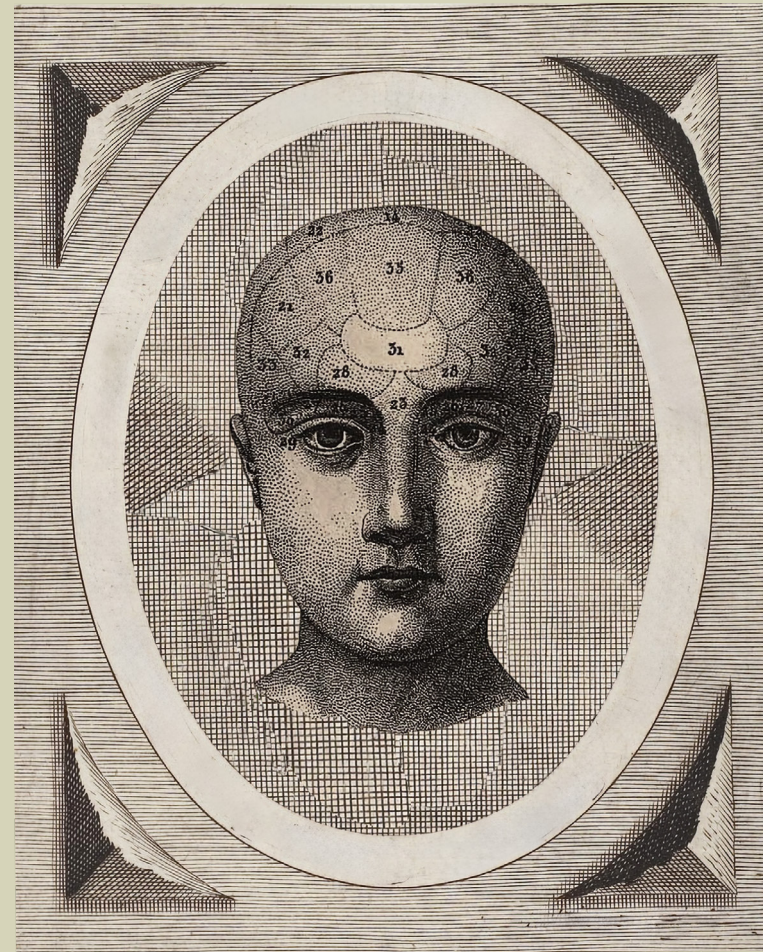
Because heuristic inquiries are nonlinear and elastic in nature the budgeting of time and resources can be challenging (Tudor & Ings, 2025). Harnessing the study required constant attention. It was easy for me to get lost in the minutiae of images and sound. To address the issue I adopted three strategies.

First, began to create time constraints in the form of contractual reporting back to supervisors or scheduling the completion of bodies of work for conferences and film festival deadlines. These contracts were not immutable, but by using them as external, proportional guides I was able to pace progress throughout the project.

Second, in June 2022, I planned leave provisions so I was able to apportion blocks of uninterrupted time inside which I could

immerse myself in practice and exegetical writing without the distraction of parallel professional obligations.

Finally, I budgeted the project within parameters, pursuing potential inside technological and physical resourcing that I knew would be available to me through the university or existing professional networks.



CHAPTER 4



CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Title Page Image: Collage incorporating prints of Baron zu Gàlandtha, Paul Esterhàzy (1550-1850)
and image of phrenology from the Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary (1890—1907)



INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a critical commentary on the three films that comprise the artistic practice of the exegesis. It begins by discussing the structure of the documentaries then unpacks stylistic approaches evident in the work with specific reference to imagery, colour, sound, pace and indexicality. This analysis then leads to a discussion of ethical approaches that underpinned the practice.

STRUCTURE

The documentaries may be understood as three discrete accounts with their own stylistic nuances. However, the films may also be viewed as a composite documentary where three artists offer unique accounts of their experiences of, and reflections on, grief. The structure has precedents in Jonas Odell's work *Never Like the First Time* (2006) where four individuals relate stories of their first sexual encounters. For each work he adopts unique visual style as a way of demarcating character, time and the ethos of each person's story. Like *Grief* each of his films employs an assembly of photographic or illustrative elements.

Grief Elizabeth

Grief Elizabeth is a 7:12 minute film that was edited from two interviews. The first was 90 minutes and the second a 30-minute scripted narration⁷⁰ based on the interview answers. Pieces of these interviews were combined to produce a single audio track for the documentary.

⁷⁰ See chapter three Stage One: Preproduction

⁷¹ Tohu in Te Reo Māori can mean to advise or guide, it can also mean a sign or emblem.

<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?&keywords=tohu>

Grief Elizabeth is structured as a self-narration that begins with contemplations on my grandmother's grief. These lead to reflections on my grief after her death. The work then segues into a definition of grief as an experience based in love and associated with painful sensations that are presented as metaphors in the film. The 'absent bereaved' is then recalled through associations with light but the film concludes with reflections on grief as a time of darkness.

Grief Stephen

Grief Stephen is a 10:29 minute film that was edited from a 90-minute interview with Stephen Davies. As part of the post-production phase I shot additional footage of him at his farm and in a small kauri dinghy on the Kaipara Harbour.

The documentary opens with Stephen discussing his relationship with this father, in particular the skills he learned under his tutorage. It then moves to the artist's reflections on the impact of grief and ways that he learned from his father to manage difficulties in life. Unlike *Grief Elizabeth*, the documentary is focused on grief surrounding the death of single person but within it, Stephen describes diverse faces of loss.

Grief Star

Grief Star is an 11:62 minute reflection on belief, debilitation and painting by the Maori artist Star Gossage. It opens with her discussion of grief as something unique to each individual. She then discusses the death of her grandmother and the unexpected impact of the loss. This segues into accounts of tohu,⁷¹ signs of the departed that Star and her family experienced. The documentary concludes with her consideration of the nature of grief in her paintings.

VISUALISATION

All of the films use image fragments as “metaphors for the nature of memory, time, and history” (D’Angelo, 2018, para. 3). Apart from small instances of live footage, most of the images are sourced from the public domain and span a broad range of styles and periods.⁷² My approach to selection was determined by listening to the interview material. Jonas Odell notes that it is essential to allow the resonance of the narratives to determine one’s stylistic approach. He says,

... especially when we collect different stories on the same subjects it is really important that story gets the style it deserves rather than you having a preconceived notion of a style you want to work in. It’s always about the story ... and about the tone of the story.⁷³

Each participant is an artist, but the visualisation of the films was not based on their work, instead I cast the image net very wide, looking for images that evoked the words and feelings within the recorded audio material (Honesty Roe, 2013). Thus, although at some points there are literal associations with audio recollection, most of the imagery forms an empathetic relationship with the tone and ethos of the recollection.

COLLAGE

Central to the iconography of these films is the principle of collage. I use the word ‘principle’ because as Gowrley notes, “collage” is neither medium nor genre, but a mode; a means of processing the world as it was encountered by individuals across cultures and geographies, who subsequently produced a creative response to that experience” (2024, p. 16).

Collage is derived from the French *coller* meaning to glue. Adibi, (2021) describes it as a work that is created by bringing together diverse elements into a new form. Collage as a technique was first named by Guillaume Apollinaire, but in contemporary use Cran, (2014, p. 2) describes it as a “plastic process with strong poetic associations, an expansive alliance which, in and of itself, asserts its non-exclusivity”. However, Gowrley, (2024) argues that the term is difficult to define because of its diversity of mediums and historical incarnations.

Arranging and rearranging collaged compositions allowed me to visually express accounts of grief as unique, contemplative forms of emotional recovery (Doka & Martin, 2024; Kellehear, 2001; Neimeyer, 1999; Rando, 1993; Winslade, 2001) that transcend a predictable emotional pattern and evolve as we adjust to pre-loss circumstances (Neimeyer, 1999, 2004, 2006). I used collage to allude to the enigmatic nature of memory and the unstable and reflective disorder of reconstructing the self after trauma (Attig, 1996; Neimeyer, 1998). In this scene (Figure 4.1) the artist talks about emotions being present in the mark making on her paintings. Here, collage is an artistic reenactment of dislocation, unstable relationships and reflective reconstruction the meaning after trauma. The collage does not mimic an indexical account. In this scene a woman sits in a garden that is a disordered state of wildness that references New Zealand bush. As she paints, animated strokes emerge from the canvas and float across the environment.

Collage provides a contemplative medium that lends itself to feelings of irresolution. It involves a linking of disparate phenomena (Cran, 2014, p. 4) where compositions constitute reenactments (Ward, 2011, 2018) (Figure 4.1), interpretations

⁷² See Appendix 2 for a full attribution of sources.

⁷³ Odell, (2019). Interview with Jonas Odell (16th Animateka) 00:00.46-00:01:06 <https://youtu.be/110D0NNfhv0?si=W0PoA9Bfto8LKMRR>

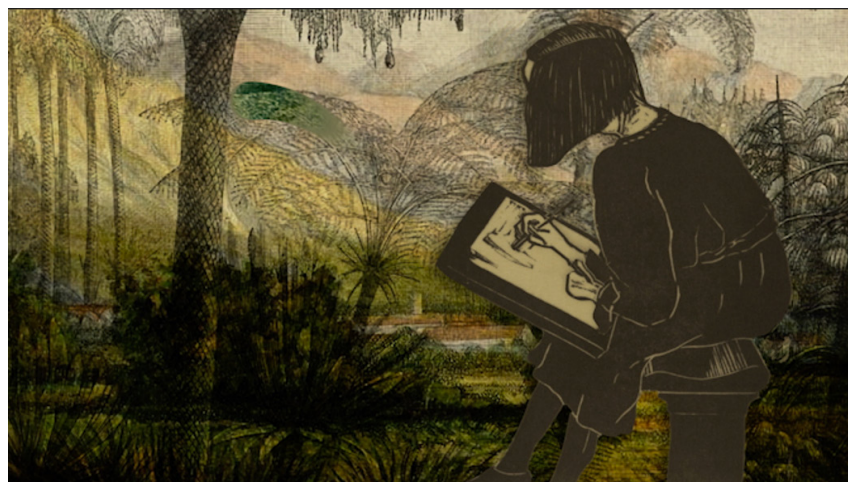


FIGURE 4.1
Screengrab from *Grief Star*



FIGURE 4.2
Screengrab from *Grief Elizabeth* using home movie footage I found in public domain archives, showing a young couple (circa 1950)



FIGURE 4.3
Screengrab from *Grief Stephen*

(Figure 4.2), I was not alive to witness the early years of my grandmother's relationship. Collage enabled me to interpret an event by assembling elements for an account of which no physical evidence remains (Buchan, 2011, Honess Roe, 2013) and instances of evocation (Honess Roe, 2013) (Figure 4.3). In this animated collage the metaphor of falling leaves in a deserted space evokes aloneness, loss and an inability to draw recollection into stable meaning. In his interview, Stephen never mentions leaves or empty rooms. Thus, this collage is not a translation, it is a poetic evocation.

ICONOGRAPHY

While each documentary employs collage, there are distinct differences in iconography because both the content and ethos of each interview is unique. The imagery used in rendering of each interview audio is both a literal and imaginative.

Grief Elizabeth

The selection of images used in *Grief Elizabeth* are predominately feminine. This is a world of women related by a woman. Here, slowly moving, chromolithographic flowers grow against pastoral landscapes and star maps and globes traverse expansive fields. The imagery in this film suggests the loss of time; time that is both domestic and cosmic. The iconography plays chaos and destruction against grace and fragile connection. There are moments of anguish expressed as rocky outcrops jagged with grief and moments of delicate unity. Visually the world of *Grief Elizabeth* is a paradox where grief crosses generations through a sense of 'print imagery'. We see images from seed packets, old photographs, maps, and magazine illustrations. Things here can burn and dissolve into smoke and ash.

Grief Stephen

The iconography of Stephen's documentary is masculine. It references an artist as a builder and maker and it is through making that he maintains and reflects on his relationship with his father. The men's shared interest in carpentry and design is interpreted through diagrams of tools, building plans, old ledgers, and measuring tapes.

Much of the imagery for this documentary reflected on Stephen's observation that his father's death has caused him to feel adrift. 'Adrift' is interpreted as boats in diagrammatic form that float across water, in the imagery of drifting leaves and slowly moving, darkened skies. These are evocations of the gravity of grief.

As Elizabeth's iconography is anchored to a woman from the 1920s, Stephen's is anchored to the image of a small boy in a sailor's suit (Figure 4.4). The isolated child in this photograph is extended across the documentary to represent a boy/man trying to make sense of grief through a residue of tools and diagrams.

Grief Star

A deep generational connection to land is used to build thematic continuity across Star Gossage's documentary. The imagery in this work references early New Zealand depictions of the unease artists encountered in the nation's landscapes. Referencing the work of engravers like E. Mervyn Taylor and painters like Alfred Sharpe, Petrus Van Der Velden, George French Angus and Markus Pernhart, I created a sombre world of layers, on top of which people are in a state of sombre displacement. Across this world we encounter the flight of birds. These represent the spirit - the tohu that Star refers to in her interview.



FIGURE 4.4: Portraits of a woman from the front cover of *Ilustracao*, (1927) [*Grief Elizabeth*]; a boy in sailor suit, (name unknown) (1894) [*Grief Stephen*]; and Portrait of Woman by Ilya Ivanovich Mashkov, (1944) [*Grief Star*]

COLOUR

Each of the documentaries carries a distinctive colour palette that draws its collaged iconography into greater continuity. The palette for *Grief Elizabeth*, while referencing chromolithography, is sombre and the look is burnished and desaturated as if life has been subtly drawn away from the account. The documentary is graded using bittersweet extensions of sepia, so the desaturated imagery evokes the visual qualities of aged photographs, fugitive colour and archival documents. This binds the film to history, memory, and the subdued nature of loss (Figure 4.5).

The collage in Stephen's documentary is even more desaturated than Elizabeth's because it draws its palette from the oxidization, tanning, foxing and yellowing of paper diagrams. In the darker scenes we feel the weight of skies and



FIGURE 4.5: Screengrab from *Grief Elizabeth* showing a desaturated and sepia toned colour pallet



FIGURE 4.6:
Screengrab from *Grief Stephen* showing the subtle use of paper discolouration on a seemingly black and white image



FIGURE 4.7:
Screengrab from *Grief Star* showing the solemn, melancholic pallet of tertiary hues

water, the feeling of being lost when our parents die. Here Stephen's tone of voice lowers and we watch the almost colourless drift of a transparent boat across the darkness of water (Figure 4.6).

The palette I used for Star's documentary is an extension of the solemn weight of early New Zealand landscape painting. The hues here are muted and the tones are deep. This is a world of diminished light, of brooding introspection encased in tertiary hues (Figure 4.7).

INDEXICALITY

In discussing the place of animation in documentary making much attention is drawn to considerations of indexicality, (Conde Aldana, 2018; Ehrlich, 2020, 2021; Formenti, 2014; Honess Roe, 2011b, 2013; Skoller, 2011; Strøm, 2003; Ward, 2007, 2011, 2018). In 2014, Nichols proposed that documentary relies on profilmic indexicality to establish its authenticity. He argued that artistic treatments like animation, move us away from this indexicality and, because documentaries need to present consistent credibility, if a director strays from the profilmic, she breaches the fundamental requirements of documentary representation. However, writers like Strøm, (2023) and Patrick, (2004) propose that, because contemporary documentary making continues to explore a range of alternative representational approaches, the concept of authenticity warrants reconsideration. Indeed, Skoller, (2011) proposes that changes in both media practice and audience reception have eroded binary understandings of documentary's profilmic indexicality and animation's association with fictive expression. He argues that documentary truth is no longer solely aligned to the concept of filmed indexicality.

In the documentaries *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star*, I combine animation with filmed action. This is not done in an attempt to illustrate tensions surrounding indexicality and authenticity but because, in each instance, I saw value in combining the profilmic (the physical presence of the artist) and animated responses to their reflections on grief that give us access to "internal worlds" (Honess Roe, 2013, p. 106). This approach enabled me to illustrate "nebulous areas of subjective conscious experience" (p.110). Ward suggests that such treatments can offer the viewer an act of intellection where someone 'thinks through' their viewing experience (2018, p. 97).

In *Grief Elizabeth* we see the artist only once and this is in a reaction shot where we encounter her tearfully shaking her head and murmuring (00:02:47-00:03:03). This was woven into the documentary to personalise the impact of grief by visually and sonically connecting (momentarily) to the essence of the person speaking.

In *Grief Stephen*, the artist appears in a series of rapid match cuts. Each shot is five frames in duration. These situate him in his rural environment (Figure 4.8). These images are stylised and rhythmic, evoking the feeling of stop-motion animation. The aesthetic creates a sense of disorientation mirroring the emotional turbulence of loss. As the scene shifts to a phenakistoscope of Victorian boxers circling around the frame the visual sequences allude to paternal loss, masculinity, and the enduring pain of grief.



FIGURE 4.8:
Screengrabs from the match cut sequence of Stephen at his farm in Matakohē

At the end of the film we encounter Stephen once again, from above, as he rows in a dinghy⁷⁴ (Figure 4.9). This is a poignant placement that, while positioning his physical presence in the documentary, also visually references his metaphor that connects grieving with being adrift. In this, the final sequence of the film we hear his voiceover talking about what he learned from his father and how he believes that grief needs to be subsumed into living. It is at this point that he metaphorically likens the loss of his father to being adrift.

In *Grief Star* we encounter the artist in a three-shot sequence as she draws in her journal. She is seated in a very similar position to the animated character in the preceding scene as she talks about emotions in the marks she makes on a canvas, where she maintains her grief is expressed and resides. The momentary live action sequence offers a glimpse of the artist in her environment flanked by a work in progress. By integrating the filmed with animated sequences, I was underscoring the idea that, for this woman, grief is a form of artistic expression.

⁷⁴ I shot the live action after I had begun post production on the documentary. In Stephen's interview he spoke about being adrift in the dinghy he made with his father.

FIGURE 4.9:
Screengrab of Stephen in a dinghy I shot using a drone



SOUND

Ward has suggested that knowledge emerges from “interactions between people in the real world” (2007, p. 115). He highlights the paradox of animated interviews, given that the audio remains real while the images are constructed. He suggests that “animated interactions” create “multiplications” of the original materials (p. 125). Here, meaning is generated through the interconnections between the participant, the recorded audio and the illustrated rendering. According to Ward, there is a dialogic relationship that emerges between these layers that results in a re-evaluation of how we understand the representation of lived experience. He contends that despite the participant’s absence, the animation and recorded sound elevate their presence in a final documentary work.

The soundtracks of all three of these documentaries consist of spoken testimonies of participant’s lived experience, ambient atmospheres (atmos), sound effects, and music. While the edited interviews form the narrative backbone of documentary, these other aural elements have been woven into the accounts, so they form a subtle dialogic relationship with the recorded voice. This approach has parallels in fiction films, where sound is incrementally built to augment environments or enhance emotional resonance in storytelling. I employ the judicious layering of audio elements to direct attention, signal narrative moments, and underscore emotional tone.

The interview audio as the indexical trace

The edited interviews compose the voices and testimonies of *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star* and anchor the narratives to lived experience. Cox (2018) argues that the interview is the “cognitive heart” of documentary (p. 5), and it asserts authenticity while informing the audience. The combinations of the words expressed by the participants and the tone of their voices further connect us to their lived experience. Renov (2002) asserts that the interview testimonies in animated documentaries act as sonic proof of the real. These acoustic indexical traces lend authority to the visualisation and “underscore the ways in which a documentary text’s indexical status can be bolstered.” (p. 6)

Ward argues that in animated documentary, it is sound rather than imagery that forms the indexical link to lived experience. In animated documentaries, recorded interviews form the connection to the real and the voice of the participant becomes the “bearer of truth and meaning” (Honesty Roe, 2013, p. 28). Honesty Roe suggests that animated documentaries prompt us to reexamine both the sound and the nature of visual representation.

In my work, the voices of the participants situate the films within the realm of documentary and the collaged imagery forms an evocative (Honesty Roe, 2013) and poetic (Nichols & Baron, 2024) response to what is being spoken.

Ehrlich (2021) suggests that interviews anchor

their narratives in recognisable documentary techniques and the soundtrack forms a link to their “embodied existence”(p. 55) when they are physically absent. She maintains,

... if the audio acts as a warranting device, more fluid visual depictions can be sanctioned, since they are not the only, or even the main, criteria for authentication. Presence is signified by aural not visual elements, which contribute to the sense of the animated documentary’s authenticity. (ibid.)

Sound is used both literally and atmospherically in the documentaries. Foley connects literal recollection to imagery and atmos draws imaginative connections between what is said and metaphorical or poetic interpretation.

Voices

Proportionately in all three documentaries, the participants are predominately represented by their voices. Nicholson (2018) argues that voices are central in documentary and they “determine the form” (p. 220). He examines vocal hierarchies in documentaries and analyses the relationships of power between participants, audience and filmmaker, arguing that this hierarchical power of voice, the addition or omission of testimonies, and the “uncertainty of a filmmaker’s interpretation” (p. 231) can have a significant impact on a film. He asserts that the number and identity of the participants combined with the interactions between voices and visuals are key elements in shaping the uniqueness of a documentary. Nicholson borrows from Chion’s (1994, 1999) explorations of image and sound’s synergistic relationship and audience acuity of cinematic sound. Chion asserts that our hearing

is involuntarily attuned to the human voice, and in watching films, we prioritise voice above other aural information. Chion (1999) described this as “vococentrism” where “in every audio mix the presence of a human voice instantly sets up a hierarchy of perception” (p.5). In each of my three documentaries, the human voice is central to the soundtrack and is prioritised in the sound mix.

This acousmètre or unseen voice, which in fiction may be understood as enigmatic or magical, has the propensity to foster our imaginings of the unseen character. In *The Voice in Cinema* Michel Chion (1999, p. 17) introduces the concept of acousmètre, where the voice is heard but its source is not clearly defined. Here the voice is neither off screen nor anchored into the corporeal. This disembodied voice is yet to be visualised and may be revealed later in the narrative. He suggests that such “voices become invested with magical powers [and such] powers are usually malevolent, occasionally tutelary” (p. 23). Jensen’s (2023) application of acousmètre to sound effects and ambience opens the possibility that one might apply acousmètre to animated documentary interviews where the participants are rarely seen but are instead “fluid visual depictions” (Ehrlich, 2021, p. 55). Honess Roe (2013) in examining *His Mother’s Voice* (Tupicoff, 1997) and *Prayers for Peace* (Grella, 2009) notes “voices of absent, soon to be or nearly present bodies” (p. 101). It is this phenomenon that influenced my decision to delay a depiction of the participant’s presence in both *Grief Elizabeth* and *Grief Star* so the tone and evocation of their worlds were established before their presence was revealed. This is because these are the two more mysterious documentaries where grief, while tied to the loss of specific people, takes on almost transcendental aspects.

Sonic adornment

When editing the rushes, considerable time was spent reading the transcripts and listening to distinctive qualities of each artist’s voice. I became attentive to cadence, timbre, pitch, changes in volume, rhythm, and prosody (emotional tone). I found myself responding to particular words, expressions, and sighs or deeply exhaled breaths. In reference to *Flee* (Rasmussen, 2021) Jensen applies the concept of “acoustmètre” (Chion, 1999 p. 21) to the sounds of breathing and physical movement that are audible in the soundtrack. He suggests that these sounds “come to signify or evoke a bodily experience” (p. 48). He argues this is a “non verbal variant” (ibid.) of a voice, or in this case, a human sound, heard but not seen in the imagery. These sonic details, coupled with the testimonies, shaped my creation of an aural environment that complimented and accented the tone of each artist’s account. Because of this, I was restrained in my effort to heighten clarity in the voices. This is why in Star’s interview we hear both her dialect and speech peculiarities. Given this approach I sometimes included clarification sentences that might normally be edited out and I reinforced what might not be audibly clear with imagery that fills in gaps in comprehension. Similarly, in *Grief Stephen*, I included his distinctive breathing pattern and extended pauses when he is thinking about his responses to my questions.

During postproduction of *Grief Stephen* I was drawn to his memories of constructing a dinghy with his father. As he talks about this, the pitch and volume of his voice lower, he becomes quieter and the vocal tone becomes elegaic and wistful. When listening to this account you can sense his childhood and the melancholy he felt

recalling the memory of times with his father. This melancholic tone is what Cox (2018, p. 5) calls “the sonic adornment of the voice [that] can make meaning more *felt* and thus enduring.” Like Leimbacher (2017), Cox argues that the voice is intermediary, a changing and transient sound wave that enables human connections to the self. Leimbacher points to a distinction between listening and hearing where the former indicates the subtly perceived sense of the “grain” in our voices.⁷⁵ Stephen talks about “giving grief space” and just as he begins to recall his father’s death, he exhales with an audible whistling sound. The pace of his expression slows and falters a little (Figure 4.10). The sense of loss is embedded in both his words and vocal expression. This adds another layer of meaning while supporting the acoustic indexicality of the film.

Atmos and sound effects

Each of the three documentaries has a distinctive sonic environment that comprises an atmosphere accented by sound effects. The notion of the “sonic environment” (Strachan & Leonard, 2014 p.167) is traditionally understood as a type of aural background. Chion (2009 p. 467) describes this as ambient sound that enfolds or “envelops a scene”. Such sound he observes, resides within the film’s environment without calling attention to its origin. This layer of the soundscape lies subtly behind the edited interviews. Jensen (2023) argues that sound effects contribute a critical element to authenticity in animated documentary. Jensen notes that usually three categories of sound are used: location or field sound, library sounds and foley (sound and

⁷⁵ Leimbacher’s reference to “grain” stems from Roland Barthes’ essay *The Grain of the Voice in Image, Music and Text* (1977). Barthes compares and contrasts two renowned singers’ vocal texture and tone. He suggests Charles Panzera’s voice embodies a distinctive and particular “grain” which heightens the enjoyment of the music. He proposes that “the grain is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs” (p.188). Leimbacher extends this idea further in connection with experimental documentary practice (and arguably animated documentary) where the voice is foregrounded, extracting the melodic, rhythmic and tonal resonances. She suggests that voice extends outside of language because an audience can engage sensorially, emotionally and resonantly with its tone and texture. Honess Roe (2013) notes this phenomenon when discussing Denis Tupicoff’s film *His Mother’s Voice* (1997). Here, she describes the voices “expressive potential which goes beyond language” (p. 100). In a similar manner, in 2022 Tupicoff referred to “grain” when searching for a way to identify the “power” (p. 63) of the participant’s voice in his documentary, *His Mother’s Voice* (1997).

⁷⁶ <https://youtu.be/wlOyMqIWlr4>



FIGURE 4.10:
A 90-second sequence of Stephen recalling his father’s death⁷⁶

sound effects reproduced in a studio setting for specific filmic requirements). He argues that reproduced sound is omnipresent in media and is now accepted as real. This acceptance, he suggests, has developed as our experience of media has expanded. Citing Chion (1994), he notes the authenticity of sound in film is founded on conventions and codes that audiences understand as real. Chion argues that what sounds believable to an audience is not always the same as what is authentically real. He proposes that sound effects can establish a strong “iconic resemblance” (p. 41) to real world sound, that helps to construct “*perceptual indexicality*” (ibid.) and this preserves evidentiary status.⁷⁷

When composing environments for the documentaries I collected copyright free audio material that included sounds of air, forests and various water movement. I experimented by adding and subtracting sounds then looking at the scene and listening to the embedded interview to determine if my compositions suitably underpinned the feeling of the environment I was collaging. Each layer of sound was intended to build the environment as an accumulation of impressions. Strachan & Leonard (2014) suggest that the deployment of ambient sound reinforces an image by building a credible sense of a particular environment. Here, ambience is often unobserved by an audience and the design acts as a subtle perceptual anchor. Strachan & Leonard suggest that the use of



FIGURE 4.11:
10-second sequence from the documentary *Grief Star*
<https://youtu.be/NFWxvr29CB4>
with integrated recordings of tui ⁷⁸

ambient sounds signal realism through a crafted “sense of actuality” (p. 167). However, they also propose that ambient sound can be designed to elicit a sense of distance or the uncanny. So, for example, in *Grief Elizabeth* an atmos of desert wind is woven through the film. It feels cold, distant and desolate. Used at times during a pause in music or interviewee audio, this arid sound underscored the sense of desolation that accompanies her recollections of grief.

Punctuating this atmosphere is foley material (like fire effects) that was added when I discuss my grandmother burning the family photographs. By combining recorded interview, atmos and sound effects I was able to bring together narrative, physical (or indexical) evidence of the

fire, and the loss of the family albums.

Water fulfils a similar role in the documentary *Grief Stephen*. However, here it also connects us to the content of his interview. In this work I subtly layered multiple recordings of water, testing them against sequences for sonic fidelity and resonance with the visuals.

In the documentary *Grief Star* I used native bird sounds with emphasis on the call of the tui, which is easily recognised by the New Zealand ear and situates the film within the context of Aotearoa (Figure 4.11). In this work the scratchy chill of the birdcall echoes the aloneness of the artist’s account of grief and the mystery surrounding her experience of it.

⁷⁷ Italicised emphasis in the original text.

⁷⁸ Sound files courtesy of the Department of Conservation: Te Papa Atawhai <https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/conservation/native-animals/birds/bird-song/46-tui-morning-chorus.mp3>

Music

The music in the documentaries is designed as a subtle undercurrent that integrates scenes and narrative beats into a coherent flow.

All of the films use original, instrumental compositions that were sourced from FreeMusicArchive.org.⁷⁹ The pieces were chosen to compliment the spoken word, animation, the rhythm of the cut, and the emotion tone of the scene. The compositions are all in minor keys (Figure 4.12). A musical key is defined as a specific collection of musical notes that form the basis of a composition. A minor key can be distinguished by the structured intervals between its musical notes. When arranged in ascending order that form a scale, the characteristics of the sound or music feel melancholic, and expressive. By and large they are slow in tempo and “*suggest what cannot be seen*”⁸⁰ (Rabiger & Hermann, 2020, p. 250).

The composer and musician Alan Špiljak⁸¹ who created the music for *Grief Elizabeth* and *Grief Star* says of his distinctive use of minor keys:

⁷⁹ The Free Music Archive was founded in 2009, in New Jersey. It is an online catalogue of original compositions created by independent artists from across the globe. Each artist has a portal where they share their music under Creative Commons licensing and have the ability to monetise their work. This is a way to support artists and to give them the opportunity to share their work. Currently, the archive has a catalogue of 34,000 artists from 190 countries, and it runs on a sustainable and fair business model. <https://freemusicarchive.org/home>

⁸⁰ Italicised in original text

⁸¹ I met Alan Špiljak through Free Music Archive. His compositions can be found here <https://alanspiljak.com/>

“I like to use the idea of reciprocity in music by writing in minor keys, which often carry a sense of melancholy. But I balance that sadness with moments of hope and nostalgia.” Reciprocity refers to the relationship between music and our emotional states. Wang (2023) notes that this relationship is complex and expresses and prompts emotion by stimulating the limbic system and arousing changes in our physiology. Hervner (1935) experimented with the effect of major and minor keys to determine assumptions about the emotional impact of music. The minor signatures were understood to communicate darker and melancholic qualities including grief. The sense of melancholy Špiljak describes permeates multiple layers of the documentaries, including image selection, composition, pace and aural atmosphere.

Rogers (2014) highlights the tension between documentary realism and the addition of musical soundtracks noting that nondiegetic music is often criticised as undermining the perceived authenticity of nonfiction media. However, documentary is a mediated form that requires creative choices that can be rhetorical, expressive, subjective, or emotional. Rogers suggests “the emotion, historical referents and rhythmic persuasion of music make the use of creative sound an extraordinarily compelling device for many nonfiction filmmakers” (p. 3). In their discussion of soundtracks Rabiger & Hermann (2020) note that if discerning restraint is applied to complex and nuanced narratives, a score can cue an audience to deeper emotional layers of participants’ interviews.

However, Corner (2002) argues that the “musical ingredient” (p. 385) can potentially undermine authenticity in a documentary. However, he accepts that when used sensitively, music



FIGURE 4.12:
Samples from minor key compositions in *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star*. (The audio segment plays when you click on individual icons).

can deepen an audience's connection to, and investment in, imagery, enabling them to attune themselves in an emotional and interpretive manner so that, rather than just 'looking at' individual shots, they form connections to the larger narrative.

PACE

The documentaries were shaped using processes of selection and editing.⁸² This involved working with the transcriptions and writing potential illustrative scenes as I crafted the structure and aesthetics of each work.

Documentary film editor Jacob Bricca (2023) argues that in establishing the pace of specific scenes "there are no absolutes" (p.174). He suggests the pace is dependent on "what the *film* defines as being "slow" or "fast" (ibid.).⁸³ In my work pace relates to the duration of each scene, the movement and animation within a scene, the time signatures of the musical compositions and the prosody and cadence of the participants' edited testimonies.

Grief Elizabeth, *Grief Stephen*⁸⁴ and *Grief Star* are intentionally slow in tempo. Individual scenes across these documentaries range from 15 to 40 seconds in duration. Movement within the compositions is gentle and gradual so that objects and transitions progress with a form of melancholic grace. The contemplative tempo provides space for reflection affording the audience time to dwell on the images and sounds and experience an almost meditative connection to each artist's account of grief.

The documentaries are also emotional. While it was not my intention to invade or exploit intimacy, I edited together excerpts from interviews that drew attention to each artist's

reflection and vulnerability. Walter Murch (2001, p. 18) asserts that an editor should "preserve" emotion by all means necessary. He argues if the emotion is clearly present, the story is moving forward, and the rhythm of the film is working, then issues like spatial continuity, line of action and eye traces will be ignored (or forgiven) by an audience.

All three documentaries reveal the pain of grief, both in the moment of recollection and as a form of long term trauma. But this pain is quiet and reflective, it is intimate, slow moving and woven through the vulnerability of each artist's account. To reinforce the connection between pain and the individuality of each artist, I made distinctive use of pause.

Pause in these works functions as a form of silent punctuation. It humanises the nature of uncertainty and emotional difficulty. It also slows the pace of each narrative, causing us to encounter something beyond the expository that is more akin to difficult thought. Pause causes us to dwell with the unique awkwardness of each person's inarticulate grief, state of unknowingness, and tentative meaning making. Pause (like tempo) also affords the audience time to digest what they are witnessing.

Bricca (2023) argues that the use of well timed pauses can create moments where feelings are amplified. This is particularly evident in *Grief Elizabeth* when we momentarily see her on screen. Here, there is a pause, exhalation and a few words - then another pause. It is what occurs in these pauses, in the nature of the inarticulate silence, that carries the poignancy of the sequence.

82 Bricca (2023) notes the similarities between fiction and documentary editing, because in both genres one is working with narrative structure, establishing characters and dramatic arcs. He suggests that despite detailed planning and robust research in documentary preproduction, "*the story is created in the editing room*" (p. 2). [Italics in original].

83 Italics in original

84 In *Grief Stephen*, the match cut sequence and the phenakistoscope scenes are driven by the rhythm of the edit, the speed of the phenakistoscope, and the tempo of the music track. These scenes work cohesively with the edit and the music to reinforce each other. However, the documentary slows down considerably after these two scenes, drifting into a quiet form of reflective melancholy.



FIGURE 4.13:
Parallax construction in *Grief Star* demonstrating how dislocation and continuity work with pace to create a harmonious accompaniment to a segment of interview material. (The audio segment plays when you click on the icon). <https://youtu.be/5r35EGNZHPE>

PARALLAX

In addition to sound, texture, tempo and pause, I also use parallax movement or scrolling. In motion graphics and animation, the parallax effect creates the illusion of depth by moving foreground and background elements at different speeds. This is a spatial device that paradoxically combines dislocation and continuity (Figure 4.13).

Dislocation and continuity are also conditions of grief where the bereaved must progress with the continuous flow of their life while carrying irresolution and incontinuity as integrated conditions of trauma. This may be considered as a visual enactment as layers shift and move and perception alters.

Stroebe & Schut (1999) see grieving as an oscillation⁸⁵ between overlap, melding and separation through moments as one moves towards adapting to life after loss.

In the documentaries, parallax's reconstruction of three dimensional space creates a dynamic that dislodges conventional order and I recompose depth perception, time and feelings of immersion within a two dimensional plane. Within this space movement is subdued and unhurried, we drift across diverse landscapes where time and pace have become graceful discontinuities and we have time to gaze, to contemplate, and to be drawn into the scene, that is both stationary and glacially moving.

ETHICS AND IMPACT

While this critical commentary has discussed the form of the documentaries, the films form part of a wider research focus that considers approaches a director might take to documentary filmmaking when working with vulnerable participants who are discussing intimate experiences of grief. Three ethical considerations have shaped the eventual form of the documentaries:

- The nature of aroha
- Ethical issues associated with sound, and
- The responsibilities of using material sourced from repositories in the public domain.

Aroha

From the outset my intentions were to present grief in a gentle way and to filmically acknowledge its uniquely personal, cultural and intricate nature (Doka & Martin, 2024; Rosenblatt, 2008; Silverman et al., 2020).

⁸⁵ According to Stroebe & Schutt's (1999) Dual Process framework, we move (or oscillate) between two processes of coping when a loved one dies. These processes are loss-orientated grief and restoration orientated grief.

Central to this approach was the choice to apply aroha by working in closely with the coresearchers. This enabled quiet interior reflection in the documentaries rather than invasive scrutiny into the agony and distress of bereavement and grief. Accordingly, the documentaries feel like poetic condensations. As a director I do not pursue exhaustive exploration or overwrought analysis. There are no moments of tearful or stressful recounting. The principle of aroha guides approaches to care and respect for vulnerability while preserving the emotional essence and dignity of each individual's narrative. The documentaries 'watch and listen' with tenderness, using drifting motion punctuated by moments of stillness to create delicately compressed experiences of loss.⁸⁶

I use aroha as a form of respectful 'positioned proximity' that may be compared to the opening voice-over in Trinh T. Minh-ha's film *Reassemblage: From Firelight to the Screen*⁸⁷ (1983) where, she says, "I do not intend to speak about, just speak nearby" (00:01:30-00:01:34).⁸⁸

In an interview with Erika Balsom, she expands on this approach:

When you decide to speak nearby, rather than speak about, the first thing you need to do is to acknowledge the possible gap between you and those who populate your film: in other words, to leave the space of representation open so that, although you're very close to your subject, you're also committed to not speaking on their behalf, in their place or on top of them. (2018, para. 13)

Each film is a poetic record that recounts and visualises memories and experiences in a way

that seeks to console the brutality of grief. This approach physicalises aroha within the frame. Thus aroha manifests as an expression of 'care-full' honour paid to the [Star and Stephen's] memories.⁸⁹

Aroha means that high levels of respect are afforded to what is recorded inside agreed parameters between the artist and the filmmaker. By extension, my approach to editing involves no rearrangement of words to alter meaning, build dramatic narrative arcs, or arrange a tidy dénouement. For example, in *Grief Star*, there is a reference to miscarriages when she reflects on different types of grief but, seeing the distress reflecting on this issue caused her, I chose not to explore this through further questioning although with her permission, I left her reference in the final cut.

Stephen and Star viewed cuts of the films during the making process from the beginning of production through to the conclusion of postproduction. They understood that if they had concerns about their representation, I was willing to make changes. Although not identical, this approach has some resonance with Samantha Moore's production practice and methodology, described in *Does this Look Right? Working Inside the Collaborative Frame* (2020). Her filmmaking practice draws on Luke Eric Lassiter's collaborative ethnography, to build transparent, dialogic and collaborative relationships, where participants become "collaborative consultants" (p. 156). This may be aligned with Zalipour and Nicholson's (2023) "filmmaking-as-research" project where collaborative strategies they used in making their short documentary *Shama* "gave fundamental support to the autonomous expression" of participants (p. 306).

86 In *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star*, the interviews were conducted over a 3-4 hour period, with approximately 90 minutes of raw material which I edited to 12 minutes in duration.

87 *Reassemblage: From Firelight to the Screen* (1983) focuses on the day to day life of rural women in Senegal. The film can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/812809962>

88 By 'speaking nearby' I do not refer to the director's interviewing voice but rather her quiet, interpretive support with sound and imagery.

89 See the discussion under Enabling Aroha (p. 77) of the role of aroha in the research design of the project.

Winston (2000) and Maccarone’s (2010) assert that ethical considerations should focus on relationships within production and post-production processes including the principle of harm prevention. My application of aroha also aligns with Pryluck (1976), Nash (2011), Nicols (2016), and Renov’s (2004) assertion that, although a documentary must concern itself with factual accuracy, sensitivity must be shown to the dynamics of power as they relate to representation, given that the documentarian is navigating a subjective mediation of someone else’s lived experience.

An example of this may be illustrated in a response to Star Gossage after she viewed a fine cut of her film. She described the work as “dreamlike and beautiful” and said she was very happy with the final work. However, she raised a concern relating to the young man in the scene where she discusses the impact and connection of the many people in her life who have died (Figure 4.14). She believed that he might be Māori and she wanted to know whether his whānau⁹⁰ had given their permission for me to use the image.

Māori hold a deep reverence for the deceased and there are specific protocols surrounding death, mourning and representation. Dr

⁹⁰ Whānau in Te Reo Māori refers to one’s extended family or family group. <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?&keywords=whanau>

⁹¹ Wairua in Te Reo Māori can be defined as our soul or spirit and continues after our death <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?&keywords=wairua>

⁹² Mauri in Te Reo Māori refers to our life force, core spirit and emotion foundation. It is the essence and vitality of a being. <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?keywords=mauri>

Karaitiana Taiuru argues that “it is a breach of tapu using a photo of a dead person and animating it. The image of a dead person whether they recently passed or are a tipuna (ancestor) interferes with the persons mana and their wairua⁹¹ and mauri⁹² (2021, para. 4).

I was able to show her that the photograph was of an early modernist painter from Portugal (Figure 4.15).

Ethical issues associated with sound

In filmmaking, Murray (2013) observes that sound “is routinely manipulated” (p. 13) by removing or suppressing aural elements to create engagement, clarity, and intelligibility. He argues there is a responsibility in sound design to review the possibility of misleading audiences or misrepresenting participants. In *With My Own Ears: The Ethics of Sound in Nonfiction Film and TV*, Leo Murray (2013) proposes an ethical framework for sound design, structured around critical questions. For the audience, he asks, “Is there potential to mislead?” (p. 13). Regarding documentary participants, he asks, “Is there potential to misrepresent any of them?” (ibid). On accuracy, he reflects on the “risk of oversimplification or misrepresentation?” (ibid). Finally, for films functioning as archives, he considers, “Could this material become a de facto historical record - and be (rightly or wrongly) presumed accurate?” (ibid).

When constructing these documentaries, I made no alterations to Stephen or Star’s spoken reflection. In particular, I refrained from vocal layering, a post-production technique used to increase richness or complexity in dramatic tone. What appears in the audio tracks is exactly what was recorded. This includes distinctive voice quality, difficulties with articulation,



FIGURE 4.14:
Screengrab from *Grief Star*

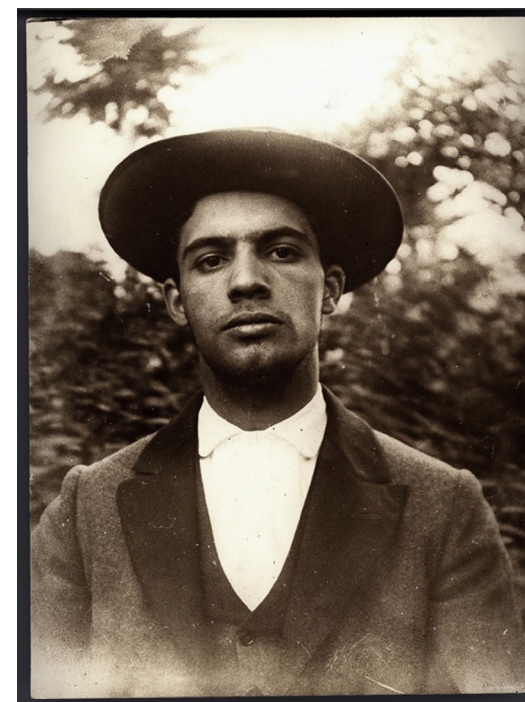


FIGURE 4.15:
Portrait of Portuguese painter Amadeo de Souza Cardoso (circa 1908)

and disruptions to fluency. I wanted the audio presence of each participant to be as uncompromised as possible so the viscerality of their grief, strength, and vulnerability was present in its unadulterated form. This is why considerable care was taken during the interviews to gather high quality audio recordings (see p. 53).

I also adopt a process of consultation when using the musical compositions by composers, even though their work may be sourced in public domain sites. Thus, during post production, I requested feedback from the musician Alan Špiljak, I arranged to send him a link to the fine cut. He affirmed my use of his compositions and responded by writing a new work while rewatching the film, which he gifted to me for consideration in new documentaries I might produce. It is likely that we will work together on future projects.

The use of material from public domains

A significant feature of the documentaries is the use of visual and sonic materials sourced from public domain repositories. I tend to use work licensed under Creative Commons provisions that permit reuse and remixing. I was careful to ensure that all arrangements, including collage and sound mixing, complied with legal regulations surrounding 'fair use'. As a manifestation of this, credits of each film list all works used and acknowledgement is made of the original sources of imagery and sound used, regardless of legal attribution requirements.⁹³

My use of public domain materials is not only guided by legality and attribution but also by an ethics of care. I know that I cannot be certain

⁹³ Also see Appendix 2.

that, because an image appears in an open access repository, it is devoid of historical context or connection. Any filmmaker using collage must accept that they are reconstituting other people's records. I am also aware that in some instances there is no information that enables me to credit work to the original photographer or illustrator. I accept that I am entering difficult ethical fields related to authorship, aestheticisation and decontextualisation that are legally governed by,

... how much of an original work is used, the visual relationship between the original and the collage, how the collage is made and used, whether the collage is scanned or reproduced [...] and whether the collage constitutes fair use. (Dodd, 2025 para. 4)

However, I believe that an ethic of care goes beyond this. It means that as a filmmaker I must work relationally within a belief that "there is moral significance in the fundamental elements of relationships and dependencies in human life" (Sander-Staudt, 2025 para.1). This means that how I use an image or sound and its new context and new relationships, become ethical concerns.

I try to work respectfully. I approach image selection with attentiveness to the affective resonances that it might carry when it is applied to the context of a participant's testimony. I select and arrange images for their capacity to support the tone and emotional register of each film. This care is also embedded in the textures and slow rhythms of the work. It reflects my desire to engage with archival sources not as neutral repositories but as living and historical artefacts that require careful handling. Part of this is my awareness that I am always working with dimensions of 'unknowing'.

In instances where footage is filmed by me in the documentaries, I never shoot material without the permission of a participant because I am aware that I am entering and recording elements of their private worlds (Rabiger & Hermann, 2020). In each instance of use, the film shows contexts or environments that the participant felt most articulately expressed their identity

Like Savannah Dodd, I do not believe that because a work is considered art it is "automatically insulated from any consequence or ethical responsibility" (2025, para. 16). But I also accept that, because contexts vary, there may be differences in how filmmakers approach ethical responsibility. I try to navigate ethical issues without proselytizing, but my work reflects the values I bring to its development and realisation.

Accordingly, aroha is more than an aspiration; it is an embedded practice.

This chapter has unpacked and critically examined features of the three documentaries that comprise the artistic practice of the exegesis. It opened with a discussion of their structure, then examined stylistic approaches taken to the construction of imagery, colour, sound, pace and indexicality before discussing the impact of ethical considerations on the work. Having now offered a critical commentary on the films, we will turn to a concluding summary of the research and a consideration of its impact and pathways into the future.



CHAPTER 5



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

Title Page Image: Collage incorporating prints of Baron zu Gàlandtha, Paul Esterházy (1550-1850)
and etching and dry point of Mrs Drummond in profile by Muirhead Bone (1898-1907)



CONCLUSION

This practice-led research project has explored three narratives of grief. Using animated collage as a central illustrative technique, *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star* represent a filmmaker's response to ways in which testimonies of loss might be articulated. In the study animation may be understood as the creation of movement through the relationships established between still images over time. Here, movement emerges through the manipulation of the 'invisible interstices' between images. Each film is a coalescence, bringing together the voice of the participant, their intimate portrait of loss, and a poetic rendering of image and sound.

In the early stages of this study, I listened to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's memoir, *Notes on Grief* (2021). She wrote it in the wake of her father's sudden death during the COVID-19 pandemic. Separated from her family in Nigeria while living in the United States, Adichie reflected on the disorienting and isolating experience of mourning from a distance and the emotional intricacy of returning home. She wrote, "Grief is a cruel kind of education. You learn how ungentle mourning can be, how full of anger. You learn how glib condolences can feel. You learn how much grief is about language" (p. 6).

For an extended period of years I had deliberated about a visual and sonic language to express grief. Before I started this exegesis I read Anabelle Honess Roe's *Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion: Towards a Framework for the Study of Animated Documentary* (2011) and became fascinated by "evocation" as a function of animation (p. 225). This catalysed the idea of translating the narratives of grief using animation. I began to imagine a potential visual language for grief.

This exegesis sought to construct such a language for grief. It's dialect was gentle and, while explicit, it sought a non-invasive tone that drew harmonious connections between image and sound.

AN EVOLVING QUESTION

During the project, the research question evolved as I worked through each production and deepened my understanding of practice and scholarship. Before I embarked on the study, I began with a very broad question:

How might one illustrate grief through animation and documentary?

In the first year, this shifted to a more focused inquiry:

How might one translate narratives of grief using documentary and animation to evoke resonance?

As the question refined I asked:

How might a documentary filmmaker interpret narratives of grief through animated images and sound to invoke empathy in the viewer?

However, I could not establish that the work I was creating would invoke empathy because this was not an audience response oriented study. So the question's final iteration asked:

How might a documentary filmmaker artistically approach interviews of grief by synthesising rhythm, imagery and sound?

In reflection, I believe the protean nature of the question was a response to the inquiry being led by practice. Although in much doctoral study a question is established at the outset, its context is reviewed and a 'gap in the field' is established, my experience has been that an artistic inquiry constitutes a responsive dialogue between a question and practice and both are shaped by the depth of reflection brought to bear on the journey. Najafi, Tudor, Ings and Ghobakhlou (2024) note that:

... in a heuristic inquiry the researcher moves away from the application of pre-established formulae and emphasis is placed on heightened levels of flexibility, trial and error, astute questioning, and acceptance that there will be an optimal solution that is discovered rather than guaranteed. (p14)

The solution to this study was predicated on engaging in constant dialogue with the research question as I made, unmade and remade films, and refined the focus of the inquiry. Central to this was connecting the voices and languages of grief with images and sound. The practice pursued artistic amalgamations of interview narrative and visual and sonic responses in an attempt to communicate loss. In this way the eventual documentaries rendered the invisible visible, reaching where the camera could not (Roe, 2011a, 2013; Ward, 2006; Wells, 1998) while inviting reflection on the impact of the death on loved ones.

On the journey I navigated new technological and storytelling terrains. I approached technology as an opportunity to express narratives of experience rather than a stylistic determinant. The final documentaries are the result of multiple experiments and iterations that led me to consider a language for grief and how it might be visually and sonically expressed.

TRANSFORMATION

Over the course of this study, I developed both technical and conceptual confidence in my practice. Learning to animate and complete the three documentaries has been a gift and a milestone. I have had a longstanding anxiety about sharing my work publicly. In presenting my films at conferences and engaging in dialogue with other scholars and filmmakers, I was presented with valuable insight. Witnessing the positive responses to the work has been profound. Additionally, this affirmed my production framework, principles of engagement, and intention to further develop the use of digital collage as a medium.

Time has also played an essential part in this exegesis. Whether constrained by its absence or supported by the space afforded through sabbatical and the long-term processes of a doctoral exegesis, time has been my ally. Over the duration, necessities impacted, ideas matured, and methods deepened. I was able to honour Star and Stephen's contributions because of this. Although my practice has never confined itself to conventional documentary techniques, my impulse to take aesthetic risks, and to experiment and reflect across all phases of the study was very different to my previous professional practice.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS

Broadly, this exegesis offers three contributions to knowledge: the development of the poetic interview, contributions to animated documentary and the implementation of aroha within documentary practice

POETIC INTERVIEW

First, the documentaries demonstrate how recorded interviews can be created as a form of poetic language where collage and sound constitute a distinctive syntax to express the narratives of grief. The films share elements of Nichol & Baron's (2024) Poetic Mode where the constructed nature of film is foregrounded, thereby drawing attention to form. In such an approach one encounters a departure from continuity editing and a disregard for temporal or spatial coherence. The poetic in my work explores associations and patterns through the use of rhythms and contrasts between different spaces or environments. While Nichols notes that participants in the poetic mode are rarely described as fully developed characters and "typically function on par with other objects" (p.174), my films emphasise the individuality and emotional depth of each participant. The strength of the visualisation lies its potential to convey ideas, narratives and themes in visual and sonic language that constitutes a kind of poetic documentary interview.

Central to my work are concerns with depicting and expressing inner states and emotion that can be difficult to render via live action (Ehrlich, 2020; Moore, 2011; Skoller, 2011; Wells, 1998; Ward 2006). The animation in the films functions as a strategy for representing grief in a manner that is evocative and may offer insight into unfamiliar mental and emotional states by engaging our imagination and precipitating knowledge (Honesty Roe, 2011a, 2013, 2021).

CONTRIBUTIONS TO ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY

Grief Elizabeth, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star* contribute to a growing body of scholarship related to animated documentary studies. Central to my work are concerns with depicting and expressing inner states and emotion that can be difficult to render via live action (Ehrlich, 2020; Moore, 2011; Skoller, 2011; Wells, 1998; Ward 2006). The animation in the films functions as a strategy for representing grief in a manner that is evocative and may offer insight into unfamiliar mental and emotional states by engaging our imagination and precipitating knowledge (Honesty Roe, 2011a, 2013, 2021).

Stylistically, the films contribute to a composite form in which a small number of discrete interviews are brought together as a suite of documentaries. This approach builds on Jonas Odell's *Never Like the First Time* (2006), which uses a composite animated structure to present multiple interview based narratives. However, unlike Odell's work, which emphasises stylistic variation between individual stories, this project develops stronger stylistic continuity across the individual films.

In *Never Like the First Time* (2006), Odell employs photographs, drawings, and public domain imagery, collaged and combined to visualise interview testimony. In particular, the final account, told by an older man, is rendered through imagery drawn from the historical period described, demonstrating how collage can be used to evoke personal experience through visual association rather than literal illustration. Similarly, each film in this study employs imagery and sound that are specifically connected to the individual interviewee. Cam Van Nguyen in her work, *Spolu Sami [Apart]* (2018)

also explores the potentials of a composite of interviews with three young people who describe their experiences of grief. These interviews are interwoven to create a single film that employs rotoscoping and animated illustration.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AROHA AS AN APPROACH TO DOCUMENTARY MAKING

In this study, my approach was founded on the principle of *aroha*; showing love, compassion and respect while renouncing judgement and expressing genuine concern and care (Barlow, 1991).

In responding to concerns regarding uneven power structures that can underpin documentary making (Butchart & Har-Gill, 2019; Nash, 2012; Nichols, 2001, 2016, 2024; Pryluck, 1976; Rabiger & Hermann, 2020; Sanders, 2010; Winston, 1988), I demonstrate how approaches to preproduction can enable relationships based on high levels of trust and respect. This then permeates the entire documentary making process. In the exegesis I propose *aroha* as an integral, relational approach that enables high levels of sensitivity to become embedded in both the making process and the resulting work. As a consequence, the three films resist spectacle. Instead of seeking to definitively represent grief, they offer an audience contemplative time for recognition and reflection on a state that is unique to each individual (Doka & Martin, 2024; Rosenblatt, 2008; Silverman et al., 2020).

RESEARCH DISTRIBUTION

Film festivals

Because I chose not to enter national and international film festivals until all three documentaries were complete, *Grief* is currently awaiting feedback related to the following submissions:

94 <https://rigaiff.lv/en/>

95 <https://tamperefilmfestival.fi/en/>

96 <https://factualanimation.com/>

97 <https://animadocff.wixsite.com/animadoc/about>

98 <https://festival.sundance.org/>

99 <https://clermont-filmfest.org/en/global/home>

100 <https://www.nziff.co.nz/2025/tamaki-makaurau-auckland/>

101 <https://www.showmeshorts.co.nz/>

102 <https://doceedge.nz/>

103 Hoyle, E. (2025). Documenting grief: A heuristic inquiry. In Ings, W. & Tudor, K (Eds.), *Heuristic Enquiries: Research Across Disciplines and Professions*, Routledge. pp. 86-104. https://www.routledge.com/Heuristic-Enquiries-Research-Across-Disciplines-and-Professions/Ings-Tudor/p/book/9781032830957?srsltid=AfmBOopw7u6_l0rwiqTJ0L0wBNXNVwpxSJDnplEeI9FyXF0XusOJttn

104 The Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network is an academic and artistic network <https://www.aparn.net/> and a special interest group of the Society for Artistic Research <https://societyforartisticresearch.org/>

105 https://miro.com/app/board/o9J_ljYhqws=?invite_link_id=991644065129

106 Sally Pearce's work can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/sallypearce>

107 <https://ssaaanz.com/2024-ssaaanz-conference>

The Riga International Short Film Festival. This festival considers a wide range of forms of animation including animated documentary.⁹⁴

Tampere International Film⁹⁵ Festival in Finland is one of the largest short film festivals in Europe.

Factual Animation Film Festival. This festival also specialises in short, animated documentaries. The screenings take place in London and Berlin after which the films are distributed globally.⁹⁶

Rising of Lusitania (Poland). This festival focuses on animated documentary and features an international competition.⁹⁷

The short film programme of the *Sundance Film Festival*. This festival accepts a wide range of films including documentaries and animations.⁹⁸

Clermont Ferrand International Short Film Festival. This is the second largest festival in France. It offers both a market and festival.⁹⁹

In 2026 I will enter the following New Zealand festivals:

The short film programme of the *New Zealand International Film Festival*.¹⁰⁰

Show Me Shorts, an Academy Accredited festival dedicated to short film of all genres.¹⁰¹

Doc Edge, Academy Accredited and New Zealand's only international documentary festival.¹⁰²

Publications and conferences

Early in 2025, my chapter *Documenting Grief: A Heuristic Inquiry*, was published in, *Heuristic Enquiries: Research Across Disciplines and Professions*.¹⁰³ The chapter describes my application of heuristic inquiry during development of my first film, *Grief Elizabeth*. In the chapter I describe the initial development of four principles of engagement: embracing uncertainty and serendipity; extended indwelling; pursuing poetic sensibility and embedding aroha into my research practice.

Across the trajectory of the study, I presented papers at eight conferences and symposia including three international fora.

In November 2021 I took part in the *Asia Pacific Artistic Research Network's*¹⁰⁴ Graduate Research Meet-Up. Here, I presented my initial visualisations for *Grief Elizabeth* and my emerging thinking surrounding heuristic inquiry.¹⁰⁵

In 2022 I co-presented *Intersections between Autobiographical Documentaries and Animated Ethnographic Research* with Dr Marta Madrid-Manrique of Sheffield Hallam University, UK and animator Sally Pearce¹⁰⁶ at the Society of Animation Studies Conference.¹⁰⁷ As part of this paper I screened the first iteration of *Grief Elizabeth* and discussed heuristic frameworks inside practice led research.

In 2024 I co-presented a paper with Associate Professor Arezou Zalipour and Dr Ross Brannigan at the *Screen Studies Association of Australia & Aotearoa New Zealand* conference at Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia. Our panel *Blurring Boundaries: Innovative approaches of practice as research*, outlined frameworks of

creative practice. In this presentation I used my films to illustrate the use of heuristic inquiry and the development of my principles of engagement.¹⁰⁸

In December 2024, I presented *Untitled Grief: Heuristic Inquiry and the Documenting of Loss* at the conference *Decentering Documentary* in Melbourne, Australia. In this forum I screened excerpts from *Grief Elizabeth*, *Grief Stephen* and *Grief Star* and discussed *aroha* as a principle and practice in documentary filmmaking.¹⁰⁹

In New Zealand I have presented iterations of my thinking at the following events:

Dialogues: The 2021 Screen Practice Postgraduate Symposium, held by the AUT Centre for Screen Practice Research. This paper introduced the iterative experiments that led to the pursuit of collage as an approach to the films.¹¹⁰

Dialogues: Screen Practice: The 2022 Postgraduate Symposium, held by the AUT Centre for Screen Practice Research. My paper *Drawing on Grief: Adapting Heuristic Inquiry in a Practice Led Exegesis* drew correlations between the exegesis' emerging methodological framework and emerging practice.¹¹¹

In November of 2022, a development of the same paper was presented at the *Auckland University of Technology Post Graduate Research Symposium (2022)*.¹¹²

The following year I presented *Untitled Grief: An Application of Heuristic Inquiry* at the *2023 Auckland University of Technology Post Graduate Research Symposium*.¹¹³

In 2026 I will be submitting abstracts for the following conferences:

The Society of Animations Studies (Pittsburgh, 2026)¹¹⁴

The AIDC Australian International Documentary Conference (Melbourne 2026);¹¹⁵

Visible Evidence XXXII (2026).¹¹⁶ TBC

108 https://www.tees.ac.uk/minisites/sas/docs/SAS_Speaker_Schedule_Tuesday_v4.pdf

109 https://visibleevidence.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Visible-Evidence-2024-Final_A5.pdf

110 https://www.aut.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/847316/2021-Dialogues-SP-PG-Symposium-Programme.pdf

111 https://www.aut.ac.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/847316/2021-Dialogues-SP-PG-Symposium-Programme.pdf

112 <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/rangahau-aranga/1/article/view/121>

113 <https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/rangahau-aranga/1/article/view/208>

114 <https://v4.animationstudies.org/conferences/>

115 <https://www.aidc.com.au/>

116 <https://visibleevidence.org/>

FURTHER RESEARCH

Grief is not finished as a project. In 2023 I interviewed a screenwriter about the death of her father. I will use these recordings to create another animated film. Additionally, I have agreements to interview a sculptor and a novelist as I pursue the potentials of the project. My original intention was to make six films. I will develop this more extensive suite once the exegesis is completed.

Following this I am thinking of a complementary suite of documentaries that have their origin in an encounter in the waiting room of the counselling service at Taranaki Hospice. Flipping through magazines I observed an older, heavyset man as he emerged from a session. His gait was slow and shuffling. I began to consider the anguish and difficulty he might have experienced in expressing his loss. Having worked with articulate artists I am asking myself,

‘How could I extend what I have learned when working with people who experience profound levels of grief but have great difficulty expressing it?’

Outside of practice, I am also interested in developing parts of this exegesis into published articles. Initially I want to expand my understanding of cognitive film theory, particularly the role of empathy, imagination and knowledge-building in animated documentary. Honess Roe’s conceptualisation of the ‘evocative’ in animated documentaries (2013, 2021) offers a valuable foundation for this. She suggests that this approach to production can stimulate “knowledge-through-imagination” (2021, p. 128). I plan to embed this idea into a future project and write a case study to explore it. I will propose an abstract to the peer reviewed online

journal *Animation Studies*.¹¹⁷

Second, I would like to expand and develop my considerations of sound design in animated documentary making. This is influenced by my experience in the doctorate with a limited body of research relating to the communicative nature and potentials of sound. While I acknowledge the work of Corner (2002), Cox (2018), Honess Roe (2013), Jensen (2023), Murray (2013), and Rogers, (2014), all of whom examine the implications of sound, I am interested in exploring the indexicality and “evocative” potentials (Honess Roe, 2021, p. 128) of sound design as a way of expressing inner states. The findings of this research I will submit to the multi-disciplinary journal *The Soundtrack*.¹¹⁸

117 <https://oldjournal.animationstudies.org/>

118 This journal examines the relationship between sound, music across a wide range of moving image texts. <https://www.intellectbooks.com/the-soundtrack>

IN CLOSING...

In the last six months of this exegesis I went to live in my mother's house in New Plymouth, New Zealand. She lives in the home my father built in 1959. On a clear and cloudless day, if you walk to the top of the hill at the end of her street, you can see the mountain.

On the walls of this classic mid-century home, is her extensive collection of New Zealand art, and innumerable books and objects. Framed photographs of our whānau occupy small spaces. In my childhood bedroom is a collection of annotated photograph albums my mother made when she and her family travelled by ship to New Zealand after World War II. Her house breathes memory. These traces of her past are assembled in a kind of collage. It is in the gathering of these fragments that joy and grief reside and I am reminded that "the pain of grief is just as much part of life as the joy of love; it is perhaps the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment" (Parkes, 1972/2009, p. 9).

This exegesis pursues a harmony of fragments while navigating the wonder and sorrow in the search for understanding and knowledge.

It is an evocation of grief.



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Title Page Image: Collage incorporating prints of Baron zu Gålandtha, Paul Esterhàzy (1550-1850) and printed portrait of Madam la Comtesse Anaïs de Bassan Ville (1870)

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APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1: Documentation confirming ethics approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
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T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

21 July 2023
Welby Ings
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies
Dear Welby

Ethics Application: **22/44 Drawing On Grief : Illustrating Narratives of Loss through Documentary and Animation**

On 7 April 2022 you were advised that your ethics application was approved.
We would like to remind you, that it was a condition of this approval that you submit to AUTEC the following:

- A brief annual progress report using the EA2 Research Progress Report / Amendment Form, available at <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics/forms>, or
- A brief Completion Report about the project using the EA3 form, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics/forms>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 7 April 2025 or when the project is completed;

It is also a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified if the research did not proceed or any adverse events occurring during the research. If there has been any alteration to the research, (including changes to any documents provided to participants) then AUTEC approval must be sought using the EA2 form.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Cc: elhoyle@aut.ac.nz; arezou.zalipour@aut.ac.nz; James Nicholson

Title Page Image: Collage incorporating prints of Baron zu Gålandtha, Paul Esterhåzy (1550-1850) and printed portrait of Madam la Comtesse Anaïs de Bassan Ville (1870)

APPENDIX 2: Public domain imagery acknowledgements

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