Non-linear narrative in animation movies

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ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE
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	2. praktická část:
	Konvalinka – kreslený animovaný film

Zásady pro vypracování

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Cílem praktické části je popis vývoje a výroby bakalářského praktického výstupu, zasvěcení do procesu a obhajoba jeho východisek a výsledného tvaru.

Hodnotí se nejen jazyková úroveň textu (gramatika, stylistika), ale také formulace názorů, práce s informacemi, zacházení se zdroji. Povinný minimální počet odborných zdrojů je 5 článků, 3 knihy, alespoň z poloviny v cizím jazyce.

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Bakalářský projekt může být uceleným narativním dílem, nebo kompaktně seskládanou sadou animačních etud/obrazů/scén. V případě akcentace profesí jako je výtvarník animovaného filmu nebo charakter design / koncept art se klade velký důraz na doprovodné materiály (studie, skicy, výtvarnou přípravu filmu apod.)

Dokončené dílo se odevzdává v předepsané technické kvalitě a jeho součástí jsou i kompletní materiály mapující vývoj (téma, námět, literární scénář, bodový scénář, storyboard, animatik) a podklady k propagaci a distribuci díla (titulková listina, formuláře pro OSA a NFA, plakát, obrázky z filmu).

Odevzdání videosoubor (export: velikost obrazu v bodech 1920 x 1080 FullHD 1080p, poměr stran 16:9, bitrate (kbit/s) 10,000-20,000, počet snímků za sekundu 25, poměr stran obrazového bodu pixel aspect 1:1 square, vstupní formát zvuku WAV, případně MP3, parametry zvuku 48000 kHz, 24Bit, Stereo, kodek H.264).

Součástí jsou: výtvarný návrh plakátu (formát 70x100cm, digitální podoba PDF příprava pro tisk, rozlišení 300 dpi ve formátu PNG nebo JPEG, režim CMYK barva), 5 snímků výtvarných návrhů, 8 snímků filmu (obojí ve stejné velikosti jako video), titulková listina.
Pro přijetí práce je nutné odevzdat vyplněné formuláře pro OSA a NFA a licenční smlouva k audiovizuálnímu dílu.

Rozsah bakalářské práce:	**viz Zásady pro vypracování**
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NOVOTNÝ, David Jan. Budování příběhu, aneb, Demiurgie versus dramaturgie. Praha: Karolinum, 2007. ISBN 978-80-246--1306-2
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Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:	**19. května 2023**

L.S.

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Mgr. Lukáš Gregor, Ph.D.
vedoucí ateliéru

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Ve Zlíně dne 1. prosince 2022

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá použití nelineárního vyprávění v animovaných filmech. Analyzuje, co definuje tuto narativní strukturu a jak byla v historii kinematografie využívána. Zkoumá výhody, které může přinést pro médium animace a jeho kreativní povahu. Praktická část sleduje tvorbu krátkého animovaného filmu *Konvalinka* a popisuje, jak se nelineární struktura příběhu aplikovala během jeho vývoje.

Klíčová slova: Nelineární narativ, vyprávění, příběh, narativ, filmový čas, animace

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis explores the use of non-linear storytelling in animated movies. With the analysis of what defines this narrative structure and how it has been used in the history of cinematography it examines the benefits it can bring for the medium of animation and its creative nature. The practical part follows the creation of animated short *Lily of The Valley* and describes how the non-linear story structure was implemented during its development.

Keywords: Non-linear narrative, storytelling, story, narrative, film time, animation

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

As the landscape of cinematic storytelling continues to evolve, innovative narrative structures play an integral role in pushing the boundaries of audience expectation and artistic expression. Among these, non-linear narratives have long captured the imagination of audiences, offering unconventional and thought-provoking ways to engage with a story. By breaking the traditional chronological sequence and manipulating the order of events, it challenges viewers to piece together the story themselves, enriching their experience and inviting deeper interpretations.

Traditional, linear narratives have dominated the animation industry for decades, offering clear and straightforward plots. With target audience being in vast majority for children, clear and easily understandable stories are mostly preferred for animated movies. Which also created a perception that animation is a genre for kids. But as the forms of narratives have evolved along the history of literature and cinematography, animation as a medium has proved its great potential to challenge the norms and stimulate deeper engagement with its creative freedom in audio-visual artistry.

In the context of animated movies, where the storytelling is not constrained by the physical realities of live-action filmmaking, non-linear narratives present an exciting opportunity. They allow filmmakers to experiment with time, space, and perception, offering audiences an immersive viewing experience.

This thesis aims to delve into the use of non-linear storytelling in animated movies, exploring its characteristics, benefits, and applications. Through analysing notable examples and historical trends, it will seek to illuminate how this narrative technique has been used in the past, and how it might affect the future of animated storytelling. The goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of narrative techniques that could be effectively used in animation, and to inspire further exploration and innovation in this fascinating field. Furthermore, to prove that this medium is not confined to serve as a certain genre that is aimed at certain age group but has boundless possibilities for intricate plotlines, unique character development, and profound thematic exploration.

I. THEORY

1 CONCEPT AND STRUCTURE OF NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE

To understand the complexity of constructing a non-linear narrative, this section focuses on the very basics of what narrative is in the first place. Then it follows with the analysis of what aspects takes to make a narrative non-linear and their application through various narrative techniques along with its perception and level of impact on the process of creating a storytelling structure.

1.1 Narratology and non-linear narrative

The study of narratives comes from the science of narratology that examines the relationship between the stories and the methods of its administration. Through this examination it determined the characteristics of various narrative techniques by seeking the patterns of how stories are created and accordingly arranged. This theory of storytelling has been established by many story theorists till late 20th century from which we can distinguish whether a story is narrated in linearity or non-linearity and study its various narrative techniques in detail.

Narrative and *story* are two terms that are often used interchangeably, but in the context of English literary theory and narratology, they refer to distinct concepts. *Story* is referred as a raw material of dramatic action as it might be described in chronological order. It includes the events and characters that are part of a tale. In other words, the story is what actually happens in a sequence, including all the relevant details. On the other hand, *narrative* refers to the way a story is told. It's the way the story is structured and presented to the audience. It plays around with the chronology of the events, focuses on different characters, and provide different perspectives or points of view on the events. Though they are not exact equivalents it can be seen as similar to the distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet* which are terms originating from Russian formalism, an influential school of literary criticism from the early 20th century. *Fabula* is the actual sequence of events, while *syuzhet* is the way those events are presented in the narrative.

Non-linear narrative is a storytelling technique that departs from the traditional linear form of storytelling. In linear narrative events occur in a chronological sequence from beginning to end. It follows the structure of story which means that the order of the events is the same in both its narrative time and story time. Non-linearity comes from manipulation of time and space, where events are presented out of order, disrupting the flow of time in various ways.

This can involve various narrative techniques like flashbacks, flash-forwards, fragmented storytelling, multiple timelines, or stories within stories. With these tools it can provide a more complex, multifaced view of events, characters, and themes. They can create suspense, reveal information in a more dramatic or surprising way, or provide a deeper exploration of a character's memories and subjective experiences.

Though it may seem that this form of storytelling could be a product of new age, the first glimpse of non-linear narrative has already appeared in the ancient times by the end of the 8th century BC in the work of Homer's Iliad as a Greek epic poetry. Various literature works used techniques like in media res and flashbacks, shifting the time and telling the story in non-linear manner.

1.2 Typology of non-linear narrative techniques

As the structure of narratives has endless possibilities of how it can be built, non-linear narrative offers us a handful of ways to put the story in many innovative ways. As previously told narratology focuses on the relationships between the story and the narrative. It studies the methodology of how to administrate a story through varying narratives. Non-linear narrative creates something new with how it's not constrained to the linear order of the story itself and instead focuses on how to deliver the message effectively, creatively, and powerfully. This can be achieved with many narrative techniques that are used for this type of storytelling. Though the definition and labelling of these terms may differ to one and other by various story theorists, mainly including the typology from Gérard Genette *(Narrative Discourse An Essay in Method, 1980)*, these are the categories of non-linear narrative techniques that has been used and established throughout the history of narratology:

Flashbacks and Flash-forwards: These are perhaps the most common techniques. A flashback involves cutting from the present to a scene in the past, while a flash-forward involves cutting to a scene in the future. Also referred as *Analepsis* and *Prolepsis* according to Genette's typology.

Anachronic Order: Events are presented out of chronological order. They are randomly ordered so the story might start at the end, then jump to the beginning, then to the middle, and so on. It's difficult to establish the relations between the story and its narrative due to the random arrangement of the events.

Parallel Narratives (Syllepsis): This involves telling two or more stories side by side that may be happening at the same time but involve different characters or locations. These narratives might intersect or influence each other in some way. The individual stories are interrelated somehow whether there is thematic, temporal, or spatial kinship creating compact grouping of events and characters. In Tarantino's classic *Pulp Fiction (1994)* we see several distinct narrative threads, each with their own set of characters and events, but all set in the same world and interconnected in various ways. Despite the temporal shifts, there's a thematic consistency throughout the film, as each story explores similar themes of crime, redemption, and chance which is a central aspect of syllepsis.

In Media Res: Story starts in the middle of the action, then uses subsequent scenes to fill in what happened before. It's one of the first techniques originating from the ancient times *(Homer's Iliad)*

Circular Narrative: Story usually ends in the same place it began, creating this sense of endless loop. The events are repeating or continuing in a cycle. Akira Kurosawa's title *Rashomon (1950)* tells the same plot repeatedly through three characters that are involved in a murder case. Each one of them creates their own context to the story but what exactly happened is not revealed as the narration goes through the subjective perspectives of each character.

Retrograde: The story is narrated in reverse chronological order; thus, events are portrayed backwards. Christopher Nolan's *Memento* is a perfect example of this case where the coloured sequences that seem to represent chronological order of events in a present line of time are actually arranged in reverse to emphasize the character's short term memory disease. Counterintuitively actual memory sequences in black and white are presented chronologically. These two timelines are intersected throughout the movie, which means it also utilizes the zigzag method that will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Zigzag: The events are interleaved with different periods of time. The narrative alternates for example events between the past and present as they are narrated accordingly. Intersected events must correlate to each other to gain temporal coordination within the story. In *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)* the story is presented with two characters that

constantly forgets about each other while it's interleaved with the memories of their relationship reminding them of what they were before to the present timeline.

Interactive Narrative: In video games or interactive novels, the narrative might change based on decisions made by the player or reader, leading to multiple possible paths or endings. This type of storytelling has been formed through the evolution of digital medium and its new interactive features. It lets the viewer or rather called the user to experience the story through their own decisions and actions altering its dramatic curve to multiple different outcomes. With this control and belief that the user has a significant influence on the character's destiny it lets them to immerse into the story as they are participating in it.

These are temporal manipulations of the narrative order and are a part of Genette's "order" category that will be covered in next section of *Time and perception in non-linear narratives*. They are specific techniques or structures that can be used within a narrative. The taxonomy of narrative's typology is being continuously extended as the medium of storytelling constantly evolves with new technologies and digital medium.

As non-linear narrative offers us these handful of tools to choose from, the creative process becomes much richer in inventing new ways to engage the audience and deepening their perception of the story.

1.3   Time and perception in non-linear narratives

Time in non-linear storytelling or indeed in general serves as an important metric element in translating the information we gather from the story. It provides the story's time dimension and heavily influences the creative mind's decisions on how to express their story. Gérard Genette a French literary theorist is one of the influential figures in the studies of narratology. Based on structuralist ideas he created his own syntax of narrative where he explains the systematics of storytelling. Before I jump into the temporal aspects of his narrative analysis, I'm going to explain five major categories that he identifies within his narratological framework to contextualize his syntax of narrative:

> **1. Order:** Refers to the sequence of the narrative and its relations to the chronological sequence of the story. It describes about how the events are arranged in the narrative,

which may not necessarily be in the chronological order in which they occurred in the story.

2. Frequency: It relates to how often certain events or elements of the story are repeated in the narrative. An event may occur only once in the story but be referred to many times in the narrative, or vice versa.

3. Duration: Compares the length of time an event that takes in the story versus how long it takes to tell that event in the narrative. Some events might take a long time to occur but are summarized briefly in the narrative, while others may be expanded upon in great detail.

4. Voice: It's about the perspective from which the story is told and by whom it is told. Basically, it examines the types of the narrators. It could be told in a first-person perspective (from a character within the story), a third-person perspective (from an external narrator), or a combination of perspectives.

5. Mood: Divides into two sub-categories; into *"distance"* and *"perspective"* The distance focuses on the level of narrative distance or the degree to which the narrator is involved in or detached from the events of the story. The perspective, also known as the point of view, refers to a narrator who can affect the amount of information given to the reader and the degree of objectivity or subjectivity in the narrative.

Out of these there are three categories that are used to analyse the narrative temporality: *order*, *frequency,* and *duration* are the ones where time serves as essential element for the construction of narrative.

The category of the *order* plays the most important role in determining the time and flow of the story. As it mainly involves around the arrangement of the events it provides options of how the story can be non-chronologically rephrased in the means of revealing the message or themes more innovatively. It utilizes all the temporal manipulation techniques mentioned in the earlier section and lets the story to be uncovered in many possible ways.

Frequency focuses on the relationship between the number of times an event occurs in the story and the number of times it is recounted in the narrative. Also plays a crucial role in how the story is perceived with how it can add emphasis to certain events. Story could be told once both in story and its narrative time, or multiple times to allow the exploration of different perspectives, or imply a repeated event in one narration, or as the event happens multiple times in the story narrative could be told in multiple times as well. It creates patterns or rhythms in the narrative.

Duration distinguishes the relations between time an event takes in the story and the time it takes to narrate that event. The manipulation of narrative duration allows a storyteller to control the pacing of the story, emphasize or de-emphasize certain events, and guide the reader's perception and understanding of the narrative. The duration can be equal in both narrative and story time as often dialogues, or certain actions are narrated in real time. The narrative can also come to a stop to explain something, while no time passes in the story, usually seen in the moments of detailed description or internal monologue. Time could be both stretched or shortened or even skip a large amount of story time, span several days weeks even years and decades, with the narrative resuming on the other side of the gap.

While we can analytically discuss about the time in relations of narratological studies all day, the so-called viewer time (psychological, subjective time of the viewer) is identified as more important in the end. It's all about how the viewer perceives the film, regardless of its real length, of how its narrative structure is complex. If the viewer's perception is not corresponding with director's perception of the story, it's dysfunctional. Now I'm excluding the cases of artistic intents where the director tries to open various interpretations. It's more about the cases of how it falsely leads the viewer to confusion due to their unjustifiable creative decisions. The process of creating a functional non-linear narrative is difficult, risky, as you must take particularly more focused care in building this complex narrative structure. It takes a lot of time to explore its possibilities where you have to constantly experiment during the movies pre-production to come up with something functional. Still, you can't entirely count on its success as the viewer can be easily distracted in this vast intricate narrative thread which can possibly leave them in a frustrating spot. It can be demanding for viewers, requiring more attention and interpretive effort to understand the story's full scope. So, it's essential to procedurally receive constant feedbacks from both affected and

unaffected viewers while writing a screenplay or drawing storyboards, animatics to balance the story's intricacy and its intelligibility.

However, with studying all these temporal narrative structures, it proves about the abundance of possibilities that non-linear narrative can provide in the pursue of creating a compelling story. Many of the movies mentioned are critically acclaimed titles in the mainstream cinema that pushed the boundaries of storytelling by making use of the non-linear narrative to its deserving potential. While its complexity can confuse or lead to misunderstandings if used carelessly it's still worthwhile the risks and hardships of creating such an intricate yet enriching narrative that delivers sophisticated viewing experience.

2   ANIMATION AND NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES

By examining the creative nature of animation, this section focuses on what the medium is capable of for the development of a narrative. It seeks how to utilize its capabilities to enhance the non-linear narrative structure.

2.1   Capability of animation in storytelling

As we've covered about how non-linear narrative intrigues the process of storytelling with its abundance of narrative tools, animation also offers a unique and diverse set of capabilities when it comes to storytelling. Jerzy Płażewski a well-known Polish film critic and theorist, mentions about animation while he covers the theme of film time in his book *The language of film (1982)*. *"It is perhaps worth mentioning that in the field of animated film, which by its very nature stylizes reality, and thus real time, there is no longer a reason to deal with the deviations between film time and real time. There, film time must have full autonomy, creating a flow of events with its own rhythm, unconditioned by direct conventional relationships to reality."*

Płażewski with his take on film time particularly in the section of present time talks about the importance of how the *now* of the film's story is perceived by the characters and the audience. It refers to the time frame in which the primary events of the film's narrative are unfolding. As this is set up as the basis of time structure for the story, only after then could be followed by editing its time space which leads to different film times like retrospective time, future time, or past continuous time in his narratological framework.

Just as his statement unlike live-action movies animation has the creative freedom with how it's not bound by the laws of physics or real-world limitations. It allows animators to create any character, environment, or action they can imagine and allows for the portrayal of fantastical, surreal, or exaggerated elements that can often be difficult or impossible to achieve with live-action media. With the freedom to create its own virtual worlds that are not constrained by the limits of the real world, film time or referred to as the narrative time can gain full autonomy on how the story could be told. This helps to open even more possibilities and a bigger room to proceed with greater precision and focus on developing a narrative.

Besides the creative freedom here are some other major capabilities the medium of animation can bring in for storytelling:

Visual Appeal and Style: Animation allows for a wide range of visual styles, from highly realistic to highly stylized, abstract, or even symbolic. This versatility can be used to create a specific mood or tone, convey certain themes, or target specific audiences (e.g., different animation styles for children vs. adults).

Non-Verbal Communication: Through exaggerated physical actions, facial expressions, and visual cues, animation can convey complex emotions, thoughts, and concepts without the need for dialogue. This can make animated stories universally understandable, regardless of language.

Inclusion and Representation: With how it's not bound to the reality it can accessibly portray a diverse range of characters and situations, including ones that are underrepresented in other media. This includes different races, cultures, body types, abilities, and more. Not only stylizing the real world it also includes the fictional worlds and its own typologies.

2.2 Enhancement through animation

Now as we discussed about the capabilities of animation, how can the medium benefit and enhance the non-linear narrative structure that is already complex and enriching in translating a story? As the application of non-linear storytelling on live-action counterparts proved its effectiveness on creating compelling stories, what's left in there to push it even further? This part will examine on how to embrace all the narrative traits that animation provides to push the development of the non-linear narrative structure.

The greatest feature of animation is the benefit of its creative freedom. Without the limitations of physical reality, the process of manipulating time and space which is a crucial element in constructing the non-linear narrative is far more facilitating with the accessibility to easily editable virtual space and story time. This allows to have a greater freedom and autonomy on narrative time. Without having to travel through the physical world to explore exact locations and depict them to express the temporal and locational shifts in narrative, animation is free of concerns of this time-consuming process as it manifests its own virtual space and time. It helps to easily manipulate its flow and rhythm, and easily depict early

mentioned flashbacks, flash-forwards, or dream sequences, shifts in location, and other narrative techniques that play with the concepts of time and space.

With clear intents of what the story should tell and to match its intentions narratively animators can design characters, environments to create a certain visual style establishing a certain visual theme that suits the story's implication. With this correlation between the visual style and the story's theme, narrative representation can be more convincing, believable, and relatable. This lets the creator to easily expand its visual library in the pursue of implying the story's message or theme accurately.

Non-linear narrative is structured in a way that the story is layered with temporal shifts in its narrative. To enhance these temporal manipulation techniques animation can use visual metaphors and symbols to represent abstract concepts, internal emotional states, or complex themes. These reflexive narrative devices can add layers of depth and foreshadow the meaning of the story.

To assemble the composition of non-linearly narrated story all of this is facilitated with animation techniques to create a seamless transition between temporal and locational shifts. Animation editing not only uses the conventional tools of film editing but also utilizes the medium to *animate* transitional factors. The manipulation of temporality is then enhanced with the smooth flow created by overlapping the scenes with animated transitions.

3   CASE STUDY OF NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE IN ANIMATION

This section is dedicated to analysing the actual use of non-linear narrative structure on animated movies. Though it's not as commonly used in animation as it is in live-action films or literature, the utilization of this narrative on selected animated movies for case studies are a strong testament to what the medium is capable of in terms of representing a compelling storytelling that would be difficult, if not impossible, to tell in a strictly linear manner or conveyed through a live-action media. The movies that will be discussed about are Satoshi Kon's *Paprika (2006)* and Jérémy Clapin's *I Lost My Body (2019)*. The selection is based on my personal viewing experience that highly impacted the perception of the medium and my creative outlook.

3.1   Paprika (2006)

Paprika is an animated film directed by Satoshi Kon, widely regarded for its innovative use of non-linear narrative. In this film, the story unfolds across different layers of reality and dream, interweaving the two to create a complex, multi-layered narrative. It's set in a near-future world where a device called the *DC Mini* allows therapists to enter a patient's dreams to provide treatment. The narrative primarily follows Dr. Atsuko Chiba and her alter ego, Paprika, as they navigate both the real world and the dream world to recover stolen DC Minis.

The non-linear storytelling is presented by intertwining reality and dream sequences without clear transitions, blurring the line between the two. The narrative moves between the present, past, and future, as well as different dream states, creating a labyrinthine story that loops back on itself.

Animation techniques played a crucial role in making this complex narrative comprehensible to viewers. Distinctive visual cues, such as changes in colour palette, character design, and the physical environment, were used to signify transitions between reality and dream states. Moreover, Kon used a technique called *match cuts* where the narrative transitions from one scene to another through a similar visual element, thereby seamlessly linking different narrative threads. The editing of this movie doesn't follow the conventional relations of story time and narrative time, rather it transcends the constraints of reality by capitalizing on animation's ability to edit space and time in both relations at the same time.

Kon's approach on non-linear narrative significantly contributes to *Paprika's* thematic depth. It reflects the film's exploration of the subconscious mind, memory, and identity, enabling viewers to experience the disorientation of the characters as they grapple with the convergence of dream and reality. It's a brilliant case study of non-linear narrative applied on an animated movie supporting the enhancement statements that the medium has the means to provide new creative endeavour for its storytelling development. Through its intricate narrative structure and innovative animation techniques, it demonstrates how animation can be used to tell stories that challenge the viewer's perception of reality and time, providing a rich, immersive viewing experience.

3.2 I Lost My Body (2019)

I Lost My Body (2019) is an acclaimed French animated film directed by Jérémy Clapin. It employs a non-linear narrative to weave a story that is emotionally resonant, haunting, and refreshingly original. The film presents two seemingly disparate narratives: one of a disembodied hand traveling across Paris in search of its body and another of a young man named Naoufel trying to navigate his life. The film utilizes non-linear storytelling to gradually reveal the connection between these two narratives.

The film jumps back and forth in time, from Naoufel's childhood to his present life, and between the journey of the hand and Naoufel's personal struggles. The film employs different visual cues to signify shifts in time and perspective among those three timelines. Naoufel's world is rendered with a more realistic style, while the hand's journey is portrayed with more abstract and surrealistic visuals. And the childhood timeline is presented in black and white. This distinction helps viewers follow the different narrative threads despite their non-linear arrangement. Just as mentioned in earlier section the capability of animation to design its own visual cues enhances the non-linear narrative with compactly set visual themes.

Audio cues also play a significant role. Sounds associated with Naoufel's past experiences are used to trigger transitions into flashbacks, reinforcing the sense of fragmented time. The factor of fragmented temporal narrative relations also reflects the protagonist's state of mind, characterized by disconnection and longing. It deepens the emotional impact of Naoufel's story and amplifies the sense of his disjointed reality.

The non-linear narrative enhances the film's exploration of themes such as fate, loss, and identity. By intercutting the hand's relentless journey with Naoufel's life, the film effectively draws parallels between their struggles, leading to a poignant revelation of their connection.

Just as *Paprika, I Lost My Body* serves as an excellent example of how non-linear narrative can be effectively used in animation. It helped to evoke emotional resonance with the main character Naoufel and interweaved it with deep thematic exploration through the journey of the hand and the childhood timeline. Through its creative use of animation techniques and sound design, the film manages to deliver a complex narrative that is both captivating and emotionally touching.

3.3 Comparative analysis: Linear vs. non-linear narrative

As we've studied the limitless boundaries of non-linear animation as an artistic medium characterized by its inherent flexibility and potential for creative storytelling. What are the exact aspects that differentiates it from the traditional linear structure? This last section will explore the differences and similarities between linear and non-linear narrative styles in animated films and discuss their unique strengths and challenges.

Linear narrative is the most traditional form of storytelling, tracing a clear trajectory from the beginning, middle, and ending. Almost every Disney animated movie, or generally western animation exemplifies this structure the most. The sequence of events unfolds chronologically, allowing the audience to follow the character's journey easily. They lend themselves well to the hero's journey archetype, a common trope in animated films. In this structure, the protagonist typically embarks on an adventure, faces a crisis, and then returns home transformed. It's effective in its simplicity, allowing character development and plot progression to take centre stage.

Non-linear narrative, on the other hand, as stated countless times throughout this examination, breaks from the traditional chronological storytelling structure. Events are presented out of order, involving the temporal manipulation techniques. It allows for greater complexity and depth, exploring themes and character development from different angles and timelines.

While both narrative styles have their unique strengths, the choice between linear and non-linear hinges on the story's nature and the intended audience. Linear narratives, with their straightforward structure, can be more accessible and are used in animated films aimed at younger audiences, though it doesn't mean that it necessarily cannot include the mature audience. They can foster emotional engagement by allowing viewers to follow character's journeys and transformations closely. Now the challenges of this narrative lie within itself. With how it's the most used narrative style to convey a story, the overuse of this narrative created a higher demand of innovativeness. To not fall into the pit of unconvincing and too predictive storytelling due to its exploitation creators would have to come up with something refreshing or powerful enough to convince the third perspective of the audience and gradually lead them to the first perspective of the hero. While Disney continuously produced overflowing pool of classic princess movies, DreamWorks contrasted them with their animated movie *Shrek (2001)* that contradicts the stereotypes of the very popular princess theme which opened the path to new thematic exploration of princess tales.

Non-linear narratives can provide a more sophisticated and layered viewing experience, allowing for unique storytelling techniques. These techniques can add depth and complexity to the narrative by uncovering deep thematic background and conveying the character's journey from multiple timelines and perspectives in detail. It can emphasize the character's perception of the world around him, his experiences, allowing the audience to go through their emotional arc through varying narrative threads. It engages the viewers in a more active role in collecting the pieces of the story's theme and character's situational output. However, balancing the intricacy of the narrative to make the story intelligible is very challenging. The development of the story then has to proceed through many experimentations and iterations which can be demanding and time-consuming. The interpretive nature of the narrative is a double-edged sword as it can be fascinating with its intricacy but also tiring at the same time as it demands the viewer's attention and effort to evaluate the relations of story's complex narrative threads.

Both linear and non-linear narratives offer unique opportunities for storytelling in animated films. The choice between the two often depends on the story's nature and the intended audience. While linear narratives provide a straightforward and accessible storytelling structure, non-linear narratives offer a complex and layered viewing experience. As

animation continues to evolve as a medium, the exploration of diverse narrative structures will undoubtedly continue, offering new possibilities for innovative storytelling.

II.   PROJECT

4 ANIMATED SHORT – LILY OF THE VALLEY

4.1 Concept

While I was constantly pondering about what story to depict before I came up with something specific the general thematic undertone that I wanted to capture was melancholy. It urged me to create something dreamily thoughtful as I had a phase of this pensive mood. Reflecting on the emotional aspects of melancholic moments of my life, its sense of pain, void, and its strong sense of nostalgia marked a significant influence on my contemplative mind. This experience of spiritual drift has served as my device for creating a story. Though the exploration of this theme was not that simply processed. While my mind knew what to express the means to translate this inner world through the medium of animation was hardly found in the early phase. Cluelessly floating with no exact solution, a specific song has greatly inspired me to create the story that has been developed till the end of this school year.

This Korean indie song *Lily of the Valley by DANIEL* contributed to the concept of my animated short with its dreamy melodies and lyrics. The melodies perfectly captured the mood I was looking for which helped me to find its suiting themes and its lyrics inspired me to enhance the narrative visualisation of my story. It reminded me of a story about a relationship between a man and a fairy that somehow due to the conventions of its world separates them. Man left alone in melancholy is submerged in the memories of her. With this basic outline I started to explore its themes and visual cues that would best depict the mood of the story. With the musician's permission I was able to wrap my story on his work.

As the title of the song refers to the flower lily of the valley, it inspired me to make it as one of the main themes of the story which signifies the meaning of *rediscovered happiness* (also symbolizes purity, joy, love, sincerity, happiness, and luck) in language of flowers. The lily of the valley and its theme is illustrated as a mystical character of a fairy named *Lily* which is the figurative form of the flower. Her theme is interweaved with the concept of a hopeless romantic which is conveyed through a character named *Roman*. *Roman* is meant to characterize a hopeless romantic. It's someone who never ceases to believe in love, regardless of the conflicts and obstacles they encounter in the process. They usually dream about the person they are in love with. Hence, they have a deep longing for love despite the struggles they might have to go through to pursue their dreams. With its sense of

hopelessness, it embodies the undertones of melancholy and nostalgia. These thematic traits are revealed through the characters and their journey as it's enhanced with the application of the non-linear narrative structure that is constructed during the development of the story.

4.2   Story development

The early concept of the story's outline was a setting where Roman is heading towards a deserted house in a middle of the forest while he unfolds the memories during its journey. As he reaches the house, the narrative would focus on the characters present emotional state while he observes the house where he spent the most of time with Lily rather than showing memories from another timeline. It would emphasize the aspect of characters melancholy with its atmosphere. Nevertheless, this story material was not used as the setting of the house in a forest somewhat interrupted the essence of the themes that I wanted to reveal. The focus on

The story was continuously developed trying to find the ideal setting of locations and the flow of events. The intro being multiple times changed often a whole sequence was left out due to its insignificance on the story's progression. With cutting out unnecessary and distracting story elements I reached to its final form by simplifying its locational settings and focusing more on the situational means of events.

The final outline of the story is that Roman encounters Lily in a forest full of lilies of the valley. They spend some brief dreamlike moments together but as they start to form a deep bond to each other Lily suddenly vanishes right in front of Roman's eyes. Leaving him alone in the spot. With having to deal with her sudden disappearance, Roman has to endure the melancholy left behind her. Leaving him no choice but to hopelessly return to the places where the memories are anchored and rely on that there will be a reunion eventually. The time spans to decades after Lily disappeared and now old Roman revisits the forest after a long time where he slowly ventures through the forest all the way to the spot where he last saw Lily. As he is immersed in the memories of her, he becomes sentient and sheds a tear that falls on one of the lilies in the field. The lilies start to shine and bloom indicating the return of Lily.

In this final outline, the development was involved around the selection of situational settings and its relations to what it reveals through the narrative. Symbols, foreshadowing, a

character's movement, and expressions that conveys emotions was utilized to create whole coherent story material.

Evidently the story has two timelines. The present timeline that follows the journey of old Roman and the timeline of memories that uncovers about how young Roman spent time with Lily until she vanishes. As the story material was set the next step was how to represent these two timelines through narrative techniques to deliver the characters emotional arc and reveal the themes effectively.

4.3   Narrative development

The selected narrative structure is obviously non-linear as it has to temporally shift between the past and the present period. As it's more complex to construct it took a while till an intelligible assembly of animatic came out. This could be established with continuous experiments on animatics to outline the narrative structure. Through many iterations and revisions, I was able to create a coherent assembly with seamless transitions between the two timelines and make connection through visual cues.

The 2D animation feature of grease pencil in Blender helped me a lot in developing the animatic as it provides a 3D space where you can freely shift with virtual cameras. The editing process was much more liberating as you could animate your camera progressively while working on the animatic. It gave more options of expression through camera motion already in the early phase of production. Which with traditional 2D programs like TvPaint would be impossible to achieve. With camera movement the editing was much more intuitive and enjoyable with better outputs. Drawing on a 3D space also benefited as grease pencil acts as an individual object that could be shifted around the space. Traditionally you would have to finish your hand drawn animation, export it, import it into After Effects and only then you would be able to move your animation. With the ability to composite animations and backgrounds in the 3D space you have greater overview and control in creating sequences. Revisions was then seen as an opportunity to enhance the narrative rather than a burden that must be carried out. All these technical advantages helped me to have a clearer visualisation of the narrative outline.

4.4   Visual development

Character design was a crucial part in visual development. To depict a design that accurately conveys the story's themes I paid great attention to character's stylisation. While designing Roman I created a moodboard of actors faces that would visually resonate with the concept of a hopeless romantic. Roman's face is a product of facial features from Adrien Brody, Keanu Reeves and Mads Mikkelsen. To image a romantic, I also added longer hair as a design feat which emphasizes the time span between two timelines as younger version of Roman has a clear face with short hair. Roman's black suit attire is used to contrast Lily's pure white appearance.

Lily's design was to imply the visual features of the flower itself. However, not too implicitly. Finding the right balance in the shape of the dress and her hair and mainly her face created this indefinite feeling whether is she an ordinary human being or an actual mystical being. There's a sense of mystery in her design. Her long dress with little curls on the edge implies the shape characteristics of the flower.

Colour scheme of the movie is monochromatic with mostly in shades of blue and green. In present timeline the colours are more grounded with darker blue shades. The timeline of memories contrasts the present with brighter light green shades. The memory's colour gradually darkens as it slowly overlaps with the present timeline foreshadowing Lilys departure.

Background was painted with clumps of stylised shapes. To improve the characters clarity backgrounds, have no linework, yet the visuals don't clash as effects applied in post-production helps to blend the clear visual distinctions with texture overlays and deep glow effect. They also help to create this dreamy aesthetic that supports the story's overall theme.

CONCLUSION

The medium of animation has created the chance to see a story that was once conveyed through static art into motion, shifting the static imagery into moving objects and characters that feels alive existing in their own virtual reality. It allows to tell a story in endless ways with its high versatility of both narrative and visual design tools. As humans always had and still have the urge to constantly express their thoughts, emotions, various forms of medium transformed the inner worlds of many individuals into *art*. *Art* is a powerful communication device that touches its user not only physically but also psychologically and spiritually. Animation includes the very art of cinematography, the art of music, the art of illustration, design, paintings and altogether creates exquisite, fascinating, and creatively broad form of artistic medium. Not only it can grasp the attention of a young audience with intriguing representations of traditional folklore tales it can shift all the way to the mature audience that can be impressed with rich audio-visual artistry of complex imaginative worlds and its deep stories, or even do both in one story that regardless of the age it could be told in a way that can include everyone. Impressed by this vastly and broadly creative field I chose the path to tell my own stories through this fascinating medium.

This unique and versatile nature of animation as a medium lends itself exceptionally well to non-linear storytelling. The fluidity and malleability of animation not only allows for the bending and manipulation of physical rules, but also temporal ones. It allows the storyteller to weave complex timelines and traverse seamlessly between the past, present, and future, or between reality, dreams, and memories. This provides an unconventional viewing experience and enables the exploration of themes and perspectives in a way that linear narrative often can't. Moreover, it can evoke a deeper emotional response from the audience, as they piece together the narrative fragments, decode their meaning, and uncover the underlying truth. As a result, viewers become more actively engaged in the storytelling process, heightening their emotional investment in the narrative.

The opportunity to try out this combination on my own project was a challenge at first but very rewarding with its result. The long process of constructing this narrative structure was time-consuming indeed but full of new discoveries and learnings that will serve as a strong basis for creating new complex narratives in my future works.

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