

ReAnima – Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s Degree Program – Thesis

(Aalto University, Luca School of Arts, Lusofona University)

**Exploring Animation as a Medium for Running Political Commentary; An
Analysis Of “Rule of Thumb”**

Name: Delanyo Sabblah

Email: riddledele@gmail.com, riddlemations@gmail.com

Supervisor: Joao Miguel Real

Content:

I. Introduction

- Background of the Study
- Statement of the Problem
- Purpose of the Study
- Research Questions
- Significance of the Study

II. The Short Film

- Overview of "Rule of Thumb"
- Plot Summary
- Analysis of Political Commentary

III. Research

- Overview of Literature Review
- Oral Literature in Africa
- The Griot

IV. Tests

- Overview of Testing
- Strategies for Political Commentary
 - Folktales
 - Animation
 - The Montage

V. Animation Technique / Style

- Overview of Animation Technique / Style
- Analysis of Animation Technique / Style in "Rule of Thumb"

VI. Project Assessment

- Summary of Findings
- Implications of the Study
- Limitations of the Study
- Recommendations for Future Research

VII. References

Introduction

Ghana, formerly known as Gold Coast gained its independence from colonial rule on 6th March 1957. The name Ghana was chosen because of a connection between the current indigenes and travelers who migrated south from the ancient kingdom of Ghana. The nation is acknowledged as a democracy.

I have cast two ballots in the nation's elections as a citizen of Ghana. Ghana's democracy is governed by a constitution that was established in 1992, during the country's transition from military to civilian government. Many Ghanaian political analysts have cited this shift as being both iconic and perfect for the development of the nation (Mensah Bonsu, 2021). The democratic system has been used by the nation to elect 5 presidents in peace. However, the country's continued progress does not exactly mirror that of a democratic state. Among other problems, there are ongoing instances of nepotism, misappropriation of funds, corruption, and economic difficulties. Leaders of the nation who hold various political posts seem to prioritize their personal profits over what the nation's tax-paying citizens are due. An interesting dynamic to this situation is the unfortunate plight of citizens who believed in the ideologies of the politicians and actively participated in their journey to gain political leadership. They also experience the harsh conditions all citizens experience when campaign promises are not honoured by the elected leaders. Despite the fact that some citizens fall victim to the lies propagated by the political leaders when they seek power, other individuals vote for other reasons. In most cases, it appears, the manifestos of political parties or individuals running for leadership positions are not assessed based on the merits of their policies or interventions but elected based on family ties, tribal connections, religious beliefs, and other vain reasons. Tribalism plays a major role in electing political leaders in Ghana. This is mostly evident in the pattern of votes declared during elections. It is common knowledge that certain tribes in Ghana align themselves with specific political parties. The political parties record massive votes in these so-called affiliate regions consistently. This highlights the issue of default voting patterns irrespective of policies, interventions or leadership skills. This bias in my opinion is one of the major causes of the complacency and lack of accountability exhibited by political leaders in Ghana.

The Short Film - Rule of Thumb

In Ghana's most recent elections, I witnessed political leaders visit some communities to share tokens of money and souvenirs to electorates as motivation to win their support and subsequently their votes. These activities, usually described as 'vote buying', have become common practice for political parties when going to the polls draws near. In such visits they mostly create the impression of identifying with the struggles of the people. In some instances, politicians have eaten in the homes of people in deprived communities to create perceptions of being "down to earth", humane, and tolerant. Despite the obvious cues such gestures project as "PR gimmicks", people fall for the charm of the leaders. I may probably be a victim of one of such orchestrated systems by leaders to appear as ideal candidates.

As an artist and animator, this plight sparked ideas to tell my story, the people's story and leaders' story through animation. The aim was to present the reality of this situation in a new way that makes clear the risks of pledging support to a particular leader. The creative process began in 2020 with an illustration of how the leaders positioned themselves when they sought power.



Figure 1: An illustration of politician that inspired the idea of the project

I posted the above illustration on social media with the caption *“When the big man gets on his knees today, the small one is about to suffer in the future”*. This was my way of running political commentary on the issue at the time. The illustration became the foundation for the concept, “Rule of Thumb”, an animation project. The phrase “Rule of Thumb” in this project does not function as the known expression that refers to important guidelines but as a phrase coined to describe the power that a thumb may wield in some societies. In “Rule of Thumb”, a leader in his bid to rule forever decides to cut the thumbs of his people as a measure to disenfranchise them permanently in the future. The animation project serves as an expanded version of the idea from the illustration that better expresses my frustration and highlights how dire the situation is. Rule of Thumb is a creative expression of what some Ghanaians may experience before and after elections in the country. The literal cutting of the thumb is a visual metaphor that seeks to simplify the process of receiving information from a leader, pledging support for the leader, queuing to vote for the leader, and remaining in deplorable conditions or even worse when the said leader gains power. The negative effects of this process, in my opinion, is as painful as the cutting of thumbs if not worse. This creative idea does not predict the days of doom enough as it is already in motion and has captives of the system visible to all.

My ambition for the film is for it to serve as a viable reference point for the awakening of the voting class in Ghana towards reformed ways of selecting political leaders. Ways that refrain from nepotism, corruption, and other vain reasons for supporting political ideologies. I intend to produce a film that becomes an artefact that highlights a negative perspective about electoral processes and what the stakes could be in such engagements. A very important goal of ‘Rule of Thumb’ as an animated short is for it to be very accessible to a vast audience through film exhibition outlets, and other related events. The primary goal of the film, however, is to spark relevant conversations, or debates on dysfunctional political systems and their stakeholders. In this case, a film that extends beyond the screens to become a catalyst for reforms and discourses in various conferences. In terms of exhibition, I hope the film gets screening time on various platforms in Ghana and other countries, especially in Africa. The film should transcend its conventional creative community to be accessible in other spaces where its political theme will be impactful. As a film with a multi-faceted plot which runs political commentary, I hope it attracts the attention of art connoisseurs, film critics, and journalists. These professionals usually provide informed analyses of artistic content like films which may become a bridge between creators and audience, especially in conveying a

desired message. ‘Rule of Thumb’ seeks to mimic a folktale in terms its structure, and its camouflage qualities when used in critiquing a society. The film, having been produced based on research into specific aspects of animation like aesthetics, story structure, and, technique is projected to serve as a good resource material for other filmmakers to create films with similar themes and related ideas.

Rule Of Thumb

Synopsis

A political leader orchestrates an evil plot to allow him rule his people forever. He deceives them and chops off their thumbs. The people fall into a cycle of hardship and helplessness.

Tag-line: One cannot tie a knot without a thumb.

Logline: A man dreams of ruling forever so he ends up stifling members of his community for his personal gain.

Note of Intention

“Rule of Thumb” is intended to explore a political theme with animation as its medium. The project seeks to present an artefact that critiques bad leadership, abuse of power and other associated vices. Though the concept has a universal theme, it will be created with Ghana and by extension Africa as an immediate target audience.

Rule of thumb creatively represents in its scenes, the Ghanaian voting cycle. As a director I simplify this process and use electoral stages as elements that evoke a concept of unfair treatment against humanity. In the plot, there is a storyteller who represents the voice of the creator. The storyteller presents a tale from a perspective of someone who has also experienced the events of the plot. This compressed sequence of an electoral process may appear fictional and relatively dramatic but presents a reality the film’s audience can relate to. The film will rely on the expressive possibilities of digital 2D animation. Portions of the film will be created with charcoal on paper; a medium considered for its grittiness in texture and sensorial appeal.

Genre: Drama, Horror

Target audience: Adults

Length: 7 minutes

Style: 2D hand-drawn animation

Scriptwriter & Director: Delanyo Sabblah

Main Characters



Figure 2 Characters [From top left to bottom right] Politician, Peasant, Storyteller, Child - listener of story

Research

My initial attempt to conduct research into storytelling that could be tailored towards representing Africa in terms of structures exposed complex problems that may not be resolved within the time frame of the research. The research questions opened up the need for a broad scope of data that ideally should span across Africa. This meant considering a lot of African countries' folklore and cinema industry for study and analysis. The diversity in culture, art, and systems in the continent makes it a complex task to pursue within a limited time frame. These limitations led to the formulation of new research questions that sought to use Ghana as a reference point because information would be relatively more accessible to the researcher in that regard. The research questions were as follows:

- *What is the history of storytelling in Ghana?*

- *What is the Ghanaian storytelling structure?*
- *Who are the storytellers?*
- *How did they do it?*

The research sought to discover features of Ghanaian storytelling through their folklore. It examined storytelling in terms of structure, mode of delivery and themes. The literature and resources that served as data for the above question provided a pattern that traced the history of storytelling in Ghana from Ancient Africa. The key elements from the research revealed a pattern that would facilitate the ‘mind-map’ for the project. The pattern presented information in a manner that could be loosely considered as being from a generalized perspective to a focused perspective. This being how the study of aspects of an African culture is narrowed down to highlight a smaller demographic i.e., Ghana. In the ‘mind map’, key elements from the research were listed in a hierarchical pattern in an attempt to display a logical relationship between the main components of the research.

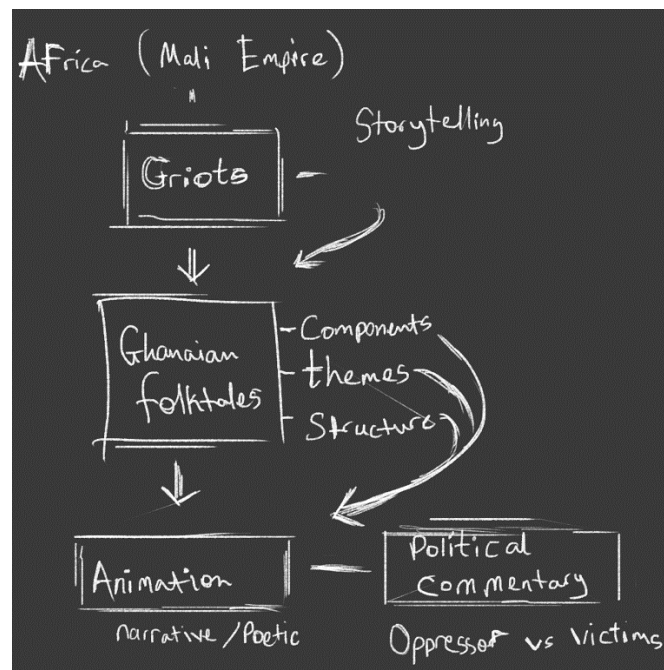


Figure 3 Structure of ‘mind map’ created after research findings.

The above diagram reflects findings of the research which tracked the history of storytelling in Ghana from ancient Africa through the activities of ‘Griots’ and how they influenced oral

tradition on the continent. The pattern in the mind map in my opinion also reveals a transition from an old practice of oral tradition to animation, a relatively new media in terms of storytelling. Both mediums are viable to effectively run political commentary however, in this case, animation borrows from oral tradition in terms of story structure and style because of the goals of the project. Folklore stands as a strong reference for this project since some of its components provide support for the goals of the project.

Tests

It is imperative to conduct tests as a form of research into animation styles, techniques, and production pipeline prospects being considered for a given project. For “Rule of Thumb”, I conducted tests to explore concepts, textures, animation applications, and other techniques apart from the primary 2D digital animation that the project intends to employ.

The initial test I made was mainly to explore textures and one of the main concepts in the project.



Figure 4 A bleeding hand in bandage

In the above image, the concept of a cut thumb and bandaged hands was explored using a stencil technique. The texture was generated organically from a foam paint roller dipped into acrylic paint. This test aided in exploring the basic shapes that would allow a simplified approach to illustrating the hand and bandage.

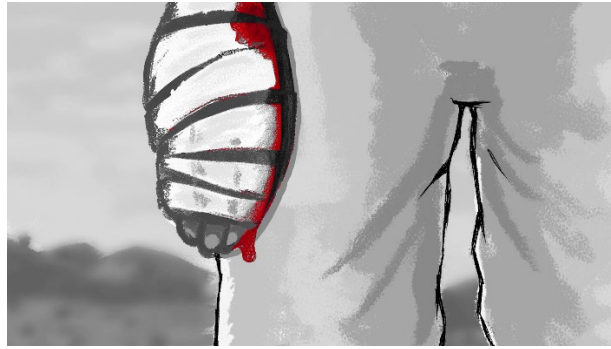


Figure 5 A bleeding hand in bandage with fingers visible

After a careful observation of the initial test, it was discovered that the illustration lacked clarity of concept and readability. A proposed solution was to make the fingers of the hand visible through the bandage. This is displayed in ‘Figure 5’ which bears the same image from the first test but with an update that captures fingers and a section of a body. Portions of the updated image was drawn digitally in “Adobe photoshop” to enhance the legibility and also attempt to replicate the organic texture of the former. The blood dripping was also animated as a further test of the concept. It explored the viability of a gritty texture for blood and also the expression of goriness in terms of mood.

The test revealed how the imagery created by a bandage dripping with blood suggests a gruesome detail that is functional to the visual expression in “Rule of Thumb”.

Charcoal Test

There are at least two techniques that the project seeks to employ; Digital 2D animation and an under camera traditional charcoal on paper technique. A test was conducted with charcoal on paper as the medium for animation under the supervision of Mika Karhu in Aalto University. The animated works of famous South African animator, William Kentridge, were used as reference while observing his animation with the charcoal technique. He usually creates a sequence of images maintaining one support medium as he scribbles and erases charcoal strokes (Cameron, Christov-Bakargiev, Coetzee, & Kentridge, 1999). In using charcoal for the test, the quality of its texture and how it provided a sensorial appeal to an artwork became evident.

The image below displays the sequence of shots created for the test.



Figure 6 A sequence of charcoal test

The frames were drawn mainly with the straight-ahead technique and exposed on twos. The significance intuition played in the creative process was identified while animating the charcoal sequence. The initial frame of the sequence was already planned out before the test, but the subsequent frames were animated intuitively with the use of techniques like metamorphosis to navigate ideas.

The research conducted through the charcoal test revealed how the black messy visual texture created by the charcoal strokes contributed to creating a dark mood for the scene. In terms of illustration, charcoal aided in conceptually projecting the idea of contrast as the test dwelled on its quality of displaying a sharp variation between positive and negative space. This enabled the use of silhouette as an element to enhance readability while allowing the possibilities of creative lighting in other instances. Another discovery from the test was the incoherence of the aspect ratio it used with the one used in the film. The charcoal test as seen in the images below was drawn on a paper with a portrait orientation. It appeared in sharp contrast to the 16:9 aspect ratio of the film as it also lacked some aesthetic qualities and continuity.

‘Rule of Thumb’ employs the use charcoal in a part of the plot that projects violence and pain. The film relies on the aesthetic qualities of the charcoal medium to transmit the concept of oppression. This is noticed from the juxtaposition of images in a bid to convey ideas which appear abstract or poetic in form.

Virtual Reality Test

In order to make an excerpt titled "Trapped in a queue," I experimented with the immersive capabilities of VR based on the topic of the movie. Workflow between programs like Quill and Unity were used to create the installation. The creation of "Trapped in a Queue" as a mini-project was produced with the Oculus VR headset. The process of creating in VR provided the opportunity to create with 3D based applications, and use advance tools like "motion capture". Motion capture provided a solution for the rigging and animation of the characters in the project. "Trapped in a Queue" was presented at an exhibition in Helsinki. The curated VR experience at the exhibition served as a relevant source of feedback and insight; especially after interacting with people who experienced the immersive visual project. The VR project offered solutions to 'Rule of Thumb' in terms of character design and composition of the queue in the film. It is used as animated video footage in the scenes where the queues in the film are seen. These VR enabled characters display the intended emotion and body language the film seeks to convey with the queue.



Figure 7 VR test character design

Strategies employed to run political commentary through the animated short "Rule of Thumb"

I. Folktales

Folktales as storytelling components were discovered when research was conducted to seek the viable means of storytelling primarily tailored for audiences in Ghana and by extension

Africa. The research ventured into the history of storytelling in Ghana/Africa. Ghanaian folktales were recounted to be delivered by a fireside at night. Stories were told by old experienced members of a family or clan to entertain and educate members of a community or household. These storytellers functioned as cultural influencers. This system of storytelling has been traced by scholars from some ancient empires of Africa, where it is alleged that modern day indigenes of Ghana migrated from. The activities of griots have been linked mostly to west-African countries. In such societies, they were regarded as custodians of history and culture. These were skilled musicians and orators who sought to entertain and educate their various communities.

One of the most popular folktale characters among the people of Ghana is “Ananse”. Ananse is a mischievous spider who is often the subject of attraction in most Ghanaian tales. Folktales in Akan is known as “Anansesem”. Anansesem when translated directly from Akan to English means Ananse stories or the spider’s stories. “Anansesem” is used interchangeably to describe folktales or stories. (Monsma, 1994)

Folktales are significant components found under the umbrella of folklore. These tales, together with myths and legends, are considered as the storytelling elements of folklore (Lwin, 2022). Societies in Africa for instance have employed this narrative medium as a tool to nurture and transfer principles to younger natives (Niala, 2018). The narrative content of folktales covers a broad spectrum of culture and moral related themes of various communities. These stories, oftentimes, accentuate beliefs of a particular society. Youth in such communities are mostly the recipients of the narrated content. This places folktales as a channel for socialization. Various characters are portrayed in folktales. They can be broadly categorized into two contrasting traits of good and bad. The use of good or bad characters in tales presents audiences with intended moral virtues. In most cases, the goals of good characters within narratives are upheld, and receive rewards for exhibited deeds. Bad or mischievous characters on the other hand end up in trouble or suffer forms of punishment (Foláránmí, 2015). The orators of folktales are often elderly and experienced individuals from communities or families. For example, Dorji (2022) recounts being told Bhutanese folktales by his late grandmother. Individuals who possess the skill of telling such tales are rare in this modern day. The extinction of folktales, as suggested by many researchers, has a direct effect on the storytellers. In making reference to Yoruba folktales from the West African country, Nigeria, Foláránmí (2015) lists discontinuity as one factor that contributes to the problem. He

alleges that the older generation of recent times no longer share folktales to the younger generation. He acknowledges modernization as a major contributor to the above problem. He further suggests that the new generation could get exposed to folktales through other mediums but may be from different cultures. He vividly points to the fact that Yoruba children get easily exposed to tales such as “Cinderella” more than Yoruba folktales. Additionally, he does not fail to give prominence to the fact that Yoruba folktales have not been readily available through other mediums such as animation. The dwindling of folktales can be attributed to some ever-changing systems of the world like modernization; however, the lack of commitment on the part of an older generation of individuals supposed to be modern-day storytellers adds to the problem.

Considering the prominence of evolution in terms of technology and culture, folktales and other culture centered narratives ought to be repackaged to suit “modern times” and audiences. The medium through which the content is presented directly affects the channels of its exhibition and distribution. I consider the use of multimedia to be a viable means of documenting folktales while also making them accessible to a target audience. Animation in this case becomes very useful as a medium in telling such tales because of its ability to convey fantasy themes effectively. Animation offers many grounds for execution of such plots through its numerous techniques of production. Rule of Thumb relies heavily on the merit animation provides while paying homage to folktales.

Key components of folktales

- Oral Storytelling
- Musical Interlude
- Mythology
- Social commentary

The discovery of the above components after deconstructing folktales is key in advancing this research or providing solutions to the problem under review. This will allow a fictional story to mirror current political situations in a modern-day society to be presented in the guise of a folktale.

The components of folktales discovered through this research provided the research questions with relevant results that set the research on a new path. Oral storytelling was discovered as

the mode of delivery, social commentary as one of the themes, myth as a genre and musical interlude as a mechanism used to create suspense, retain interest or emphasize the plot of the tales. These research findings sought to directly impact the narrative structure of the film.

These components were used to create an animated film that possessed the qualities of a folktale. A film presented with features that could make an audience regard it as an adaptation of an existing folktale they have not been told yet.

“The names of animals, and even that of the Sky-God himself, were substituted for the names of real individuals whom it would have been very impolitic to mention. Later, no doubt, such a mild exposé in the guise of a story often came to be related Qua story. The original practice is still resorted to, however, in order to expose someone whom, the offended party fears to accuse more openly, or to escape the African law regarding tale-bearing and libel.” (Rattray, 1983, p.9)

The above quote by Rattray reveals the viability of folktales as an instrument of criticism and social commentary. “Rule of Thumb” as a project also seeks to present its social commentary in such a disguised manner in terms of personalities. This eliminates the association of the criticism in the film’s plot to a particular political regime or ruling government. In addition to the safe space folktales may offer the project for socio-political commentary, animation acts as a medium for the message to be conveyed efficiently. Animation usually offers a broad scope of artistic expression. This factor when put in perspective, enables the premise to create characters, settings, and governing principles in the project with adequate anonymity to real life references while maintaining relatable details for the audience.

The Griot

The influence of a griot has been established as an important aspect of folklore, especially in West Africa (Bowles and Hale, 1996: 77). As a result, the inclusion of a griot was crucial to the plot of "Rule of Thumb" in its attempt to imitate a folktale. The griot's speech was cleverly constructed to mimic the familiar speech pattern used by such storytellers. This composition did not only provide the plot with a poetic perspective but also contributed to its mysterious tone and vagueness in expression. In the film, the Storyteller is seen telling a tale to kids in an ironically incomprehensible set of phrases. Below is the speech of the narrator as used in the film translated from “Ewe” to English.

*“...and that was when the hill stepped into the valley.
Was it to elevate it?
or it was to witness the museum where water touches earth?
Hmm?
You see! Thirst shares only with itself
Thirst hates dry places but the days of their past glory.
Thirst is desperate.
Are you thirsty?
The master servant is still not an heir
The smoke from the fire that destroys the forest is not the bearer of heat...
Nevertheless, it is a real forecast
Show me smoke without fire.
Pure as gold they say. ...but how can a throne made of pure gold attract flies?”*

The griot in his speech, describes the activities of political leaders when they seek power. He goes ahead to issue a word of caution to potential supporters of the leaders in question. The griot begins by using nature as a premise to develop analogies to aid convey the intended message. He refers to the politician as a hill and followers as a valley. This gives a clear contrast in terms of status between the two parties. He extends the premise of the metaphor when he suggests that the hill moved into the valley. This highlights the magnitude of the reason why the two elements must meet. It also expresses the concept of an invasion since the literal visual interpretation suggests the hill filling up the space of the valley. The storyteller goes on to question the ‘Hill’s’ intentions. In another instance the Politician is referred to as ‘thirst’, where a description of thirst is used to mirror his character, and intentions. ‘Smoke and fire’ are also elements the storyteller uses to warn against the politician. He ends his speech in a statement that questions the legitimacy and integrity of the leader when he projects an idea of a canker associated with a throne.

The narration by the storyteller is woven into the plot of “Rule of Thumb” to contribute to its narrative curve. This is noticed when the narration is analyzed and simplified into the following stages.

1. The introduction of the Hill. This can be identified as part of the plot that establishes the main character and his goals.

2. The warning about fire. This functions within the plot as the rising action towards the climax of the film.
3. The throne of flies. This metaphor offers a description of the short-lived reign of the politician as it associates the throne with rot.

In semblance to a folktale, the Griot's narration controls the rhythm of the plot as he exhibits storytelling skills through his oratory. "Rule of thumb" heavily relies on this quality to advance the pace of the story in the film.

II. Animation

If animation is to be considered for what it is as a medium and not a genre, then animation can function beyond its stereotypical boundaries (James et al., 2021). Animation is considered by many as a medium that appeals to a relatively younger generation. This notion has caused a lot of potential audiences to underestimate the power of animation beyond comedy or content for children. Animation through films like "Animal Farm" by John Halas and Joy Batchelor, has been used effectively to run commentary on adult themes like political power and its associated vices. This adaptation of George Orwell's book, runs its political commentary under the guise of a fable. Scholars have associated characters in the plot to existing world leaders and political movements (Sutherland, 2016). The approach of not naming specific public figures allows the story to transcend its targets of critique to be of relevance to other audiences who can relate to such themes. Animation as a medium of storytelling in this case proves to be functional in projecting such themes.

Animation as a medium provides a creative outlet for producers, directors, or animators to express ideas and explore complex concepts in their various creative processes. "Rule of Thumb" employed 2D animation as its means of production. The creative liberty this animation style provides supports artistic expressions in many ways. In terms of concept, the application of 'abstraction' for instance enables a concise projection of a rather complex idea. Rule of Thumb relies heavily on the idea of a political electoral process without explicitly showing its detailed phases. The utilization of visual metaphors through the techniques of

animation expands the depth of the plot into a channel of evocation; where feelings of anxiety, desperation, fear and anger could be felt. As an audio-visual medium, animation is used in this project to sustain the audience's attention while the intended message is transmitted.

III. The Montage

The film "Rule of Thumb" uses an intuitive approach to create a montage scene that functions as a visual aid during the project's thumb cutting phase. The montage employs abstract visuals, sound effects, and symbolic representations to convey the feeling of suffering. The montage is mostly created from intuition, with only a few visual components preconceived, to convey the abstract concept of pain without showcasing triggering images. The montage uses metamorphosis as a transitional technique between symbols. To gain a firsthand understanding, the creator of the film created a test of the montage scene using charcoal on paper. The intuitive shots expressed the creator's inner feelings more effectively than shots with conscious intentions.

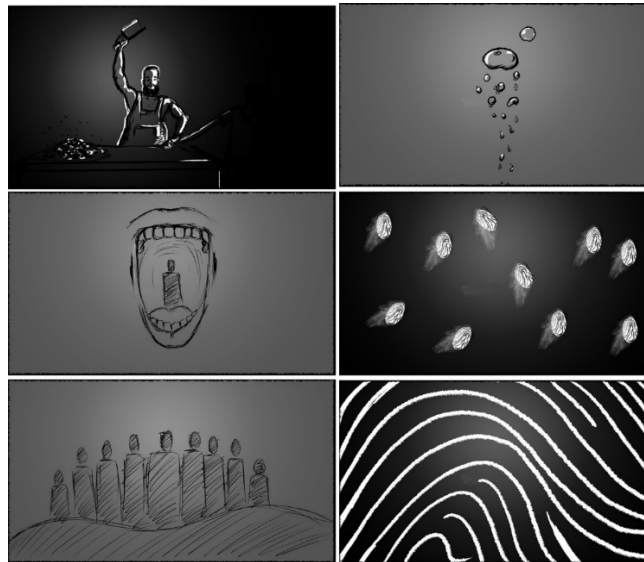


Figure 8 Visual guide for charcoal montage



Figure 9 Last frame of charcoal montage

The emotions of pain, fear, helplessness, and oppression become apparent through the juxtaposition of symbolic images. The deliberate choice of technique, using charcoal on paper, greatly strengthens the impact of the montage. The gritty, dark, and powdery nature of charcoal complements the animation, adding depth and enhancing the evocative nature of the scene. The unique texture created by the charcoal medium not only visually stimulates the audience but also stimulates their sense of touch. The roughness of the charcoal strokes and the deep black tones it produces create a somber atmosphere that effectively conveys the pain and anguish depicted in the montage. The combination of the intuitive development of the montage with the specific use of charcoal on paper succeeds in compressing a complex idea into a condensed period of screen time.

The montage scene becomes a pivotal editing device that enables the effective expression of a multitude of events and concepts, all within a short span (Kellison, 2013). Through the careful selection of symbols, the seamless transitions, and the medium's unique properties, the montage succeeds in creating a powerful and emotionally charged experience for the viewers. It engages their senses, immerses them in the abstract representation of pain, and evokes a profound and visceral response.

- **Animation Technique / Style**

The main animation technique used in the project is the digital 2D hand drawn technique. The above technique was used because of its versatility when it comes to creating a perceived environment from scratch. It provides a premise for various creative options to be explored in terms creating the illusion that animation is noted for (Williams, 2009). This determines the route the production pipeline follows. It directly influences the applications that can be used as well. For this project, the following applications listed below were considered:

- Adobe Animate
- TVPaint
- Adobe Photoshop
- Adobe After Effects

All the above applications provide substantial technical support for a digital 2D animation process however there were specific requirements needed for this project. For an independent student film's pipeline efficiency, I was in search of an application that could offer the possibility of achieving extra production stages of a digital animation process. This requirement refers to other significant features apart from the production stage components like sketching, inking, painting, and timing. The initial preference for the project was "TVPaint" because of its supposed efficiency and its vast gallery of brushes. Some tests were made in TVPaint to assess its technical efficiency and user experience as a new user. It became the preferred choice for the project after a few tests. "Adobe Animate", which is an application I am well vexed in, was out of the options because of its vector-based brushes that failed to enable the easy simulation of organic textures.

An alternate animation method using "Adobe Photoshop" was introduced after taking part in a session in masterclass run by Regina Pessoa at Casa Museu de Vilar. After being exposed to a more sophisticated and effective approach, it became the project's most popular application. This process offered a more organized interface for the animation tools and timeline. With the aid of a plug-in known as "AnimDessin", relevant animation commands could be easily accessed on one menu bar within the application.

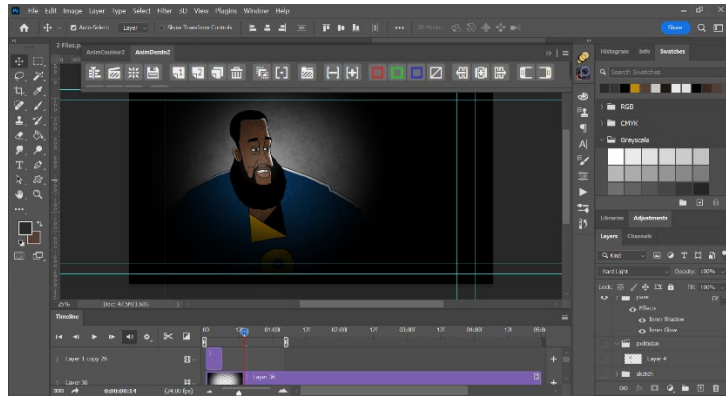


Figure 10 AnimDessin menu in Photoshop

Photoshop like ‘TVPaint’ possessed a wide range of artistic brushes. Two different brushes were mainly used for the production process in the application. These are “animator pencil brush” and “Kyle’s Ultimate Charcoal Brush”. The animator pencil brush relatively displays fine strokes while maintaining some visual qualities of an organic pencil. This brush was used for initial sketches and the rough animation in the project. Kyle’s Ultimate Charcoal Brush on the other hand displays a gritty texture at the edges of its strokes. It mimics the coarse quality that organic charcoal on paper exhibits. This brush was used for cleaning up rough animated sequences by using it to draw more defined lines and also for painting characters and objects.

Photoshop also made it possible to access some post-production features. It allowed a significant level of compositing to be explored by accessing its dynamic layer effects, and other in-built visual editing features. For instance, to create the perception of the grittiness in terms of texture, an image of a sand paper texture was placed above all the layers in photoshop to affect all the layers below. A ‘color burn’ blending mode and a reduction of the texture’s opacity was applied to achieve a realistic compositing of the texture and image.

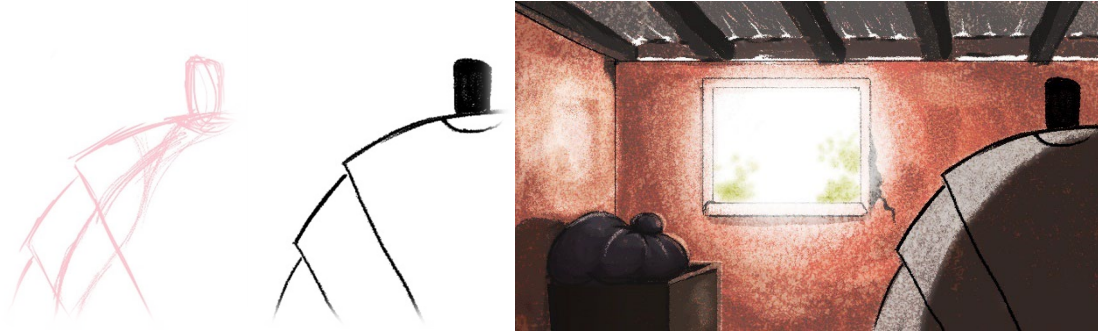


Figure 11 Production stages in Photoshop. From left to right [Rough animation, cleaned up, and painted]



Figure 12 Shot of hand without texture

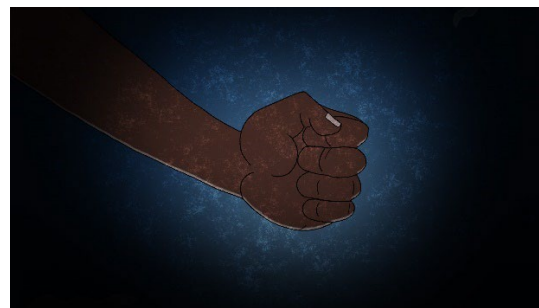


Figure 13 shot of hand with texture applied

Project Assessment

Production Process

Any movie goes through several stages of production, from concept to post-production.

Similar steps were taken in the 12 stages of 2D animation development for "Rule of Thumb."

The stages are as follows:

1. Idea / Concept
2. Research
3. Tests
4. Concept art
5. Storyboards
6. Animatics
7. Character Design
8. Voice recording
9. Sound design
10. Animation
11. Compositing
12. Editing

The project took about two years to produce, with 18 months of that focusing on development and preproduction. The production and post-production stages spanned over a period of 6 months. To manage the short period of time available for production, it was imperative to adopt a concise approach for the storytelling. This meant using creative means to convey the message of the film while maintaining the essence of the story. The film adopted the use of devices like visual metaphors to express complex ideas. It also employed filmmaking tools through elements like editing techniques, cinematography, and sound design in compressing the story.

Another measure put in place to make the goals of the project attainable within the required period was to work with a team. The team members were as follows:

- Delanyo Sabblah – Director / Lead Animator

- Ida Bamfo – Sound designer
- Dennis Appiah Danquah – Sound recordist
- Artur Correia - Assistant animator (Clean-up and in-betweens)
- Anthony Profirio - Assistant animator (Clean-up and in-betweens)
- Felipe Kenji – Assistant animator (Clean-up and in-betweens)

An important aspect of working with the team was discovering a synergy that would make the project most efficient. This involved managing the delivery timelines of the team, making sure there was consistency in the quality of work, and a good channel of communication. In this period of production, the team worked and communicated both in person and remotely. For instance, regarding the assistant animators, Adobe Photoshop files were shared through email for them to work remotely. The lead animator created the rough animation and left the clean ups and painting and sometimes in-betweens for the assistants to work on. The assistants were provided with a color palette, character model sheet, and the list of required brushes.

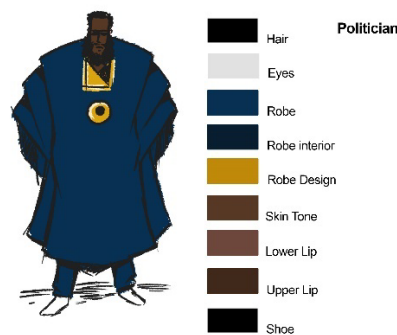


Figure 14 Sample of color palette for animation production team

It was discovered during this procedure that the lead animator's pace was still crucial to how quickly the task was completed. The production's efficiency was occasionally impacted by this aspect.

As the main voice cast for the short film resided in Ghana, the director and sound designer had to join and supervise the recording session remotely via WhatsApp video call. The recording session lasted for an hour and was productive. It was, however, difficult to perceive the quality of sound in real-time during the recording session. Because of this, the sound recordist was ultimately responsible for the sound quality. During the session, the acting was

the only aspect that the director could direct. The sound files from the recording were shared through a Google Drive with the Director and sound designer. Following a thorough evaluation for a professional media project, the quality was satisfactory.

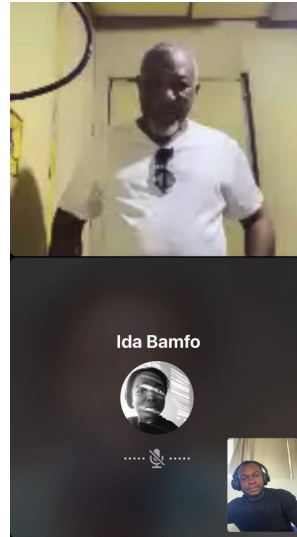


Figure 15 A still shot from the recording session of narrator

With the director in Portugal, and the sound designer in Estonia, they attempted to collaborate virtually. The post-production process's communication and creativity were, in part, hampered by this distance. The sound design procedure was made to overlap with the production stage in order to manage the allocated time for production. The 'animatic' became the reference for the sound design. The same animatic became a reference for editing as animated shots replaced still shots in the animatic. The post-production of "Rule of Thumb" partially overlapped with the production process as a measure to maximize the efficiency of time.

Conclusion

The production of "Rule of Thumb" is regarded as urgent due to the importance its theme to the targeted audience. It was hence delivered through the viable medium of animation to enable it run a social commentary. The project also employed elements of folktale for its storytelling structure. The function of a storyteller is a prominent element of "Rule of Thumb" that is taken from folktales.

2D digital animation offered an outlet for several visual solutions in the animation project. The exploration of the charcoal on paper technique also added to the visual depth of the

project whiles making use of abstraction and a montage to poetically convey a sensitive message.

The discovery and application of alternative media like 'Virtual Reality' also provided the project with creative resources and an avenue for expansion of the project. This offered a visual solution to the 'queue' scenes in the film and other means of exhibition of the same.

Adobe Photoshop functioned as the main animation application used in the film's production process. The discovery of the post production prospects of Adobe Photoshop due to its constant use also proved to be relevant for the project at hand.

References

- Bartolome, N. (2018, February 2). Music and storytelling in West Africa. World View. Retrieved January 17, 2022, from <https://worldview.unc.edu/news-article/music-and-storytelling-in-west-africa/>
- Cameron, D., Christov-Bakargiev, C., Coetzee, J. M., & Kentridge, W. (1999). William Kentridge. London etc.: Phaidon.
- Embassy of the Republic of Ghana. Ghanaian history. (n.d.). Retrieved January 17, 2022, from <http://ghanaembassyiran.com/en/page/ghanaianhistory>
- Ghanaians. Countries and Their Cultures. (n.d.). Retrieved January 17, 2022, from <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Germany-to-Jamaica/Ghanaians.html>
- Hynes, W. J., & Doty, W. G. (Eds.). (1993). Mythical trickster figures: Contours, contexts, and criticisms. University of Alabama Press.
- James, T. W., Ashford, S., & Lindwasser, A. (2021, May 4). "animation is a medium not Kellison, C. (2013). Chapter 9: The Final Product: Post-Production. In C. Kellison, K. Morrow, & D. Morrow (Authors), Producing for TV and new media (p. 200). New York: Focal Press.
- Klutse, J. B. (2018, October 9). Ghanaian folklore: All you need to know. J.B. Klutse. Retrieved January 17, 2022, from <https://www.jbklutse.com/ghanaian-folklore/>
- Monsma, B. J. (1994). Mythical trickster figures: Contours, contexts, and criticisms ed. by William J. Hynes, William G. Doty. *Western American Literature*, 28(4), 357–358. doi:10.1353/wal.1994.0028
- National Geographic Society. (2020, August 19). The Mali Empire. National Geographic Society. Retrieved January 17, 2022, from <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/mali-empire/>
- Newell, S. (2006). *West african literatures: Ways of reading*. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
- Peek, P. M. (2009). *African folklore: An encyclopedia*. Routledge.
- Rattray, R. S. (1983). *Akan-ashanti folk-tales*. AMS Press.

Sutherland, J. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-animal-farm>

Williams, R. (2009). *The Animator's Survival Kit: A Manual of Methods, Principles and Formulas for Classical, Computer, Games, Stop Motion and Internet Animators*. Faber & Faber