



# T H E B E T R A Y A L

A Film by Susan Young

5' 40" / Colour / 16 : 9 / Stereo / UK / English

Screenings include:

Premiere: Annecy International Animated Film Festival  
Bideodromo International Experimental Film and Video Festival  
17th Norrköping Film Festival Flimmer  
No Gloss Film Festival  
Anim'est  
Anilogue  
13th London Short Film Festival  
Alchemy Film and Moving Image festival  
Chicago Underground Film Festival  
Reel Recovery Film Festival  
Arizona Underground Film Festival  
1st European Short Film Festival  
9th Imagine Science Films Festival

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**TAGLINE:**

Warning: Do NOT take the stated dose.

**LOGLINE:**

A patient, trapped in a terrifying relationship with her megalomaniac doctor, resorts to desperate measures to escape.

**SHORT SYNOPSIS:**

A traumatised woman consults a psychiatrist. He urges her to trust him and to do everything he says. She agrees, but finds herself imprisoned in his treatment regime of sadistic manipulation. Terrified of her doctor, and in despair at the possibility of escape, she sees only one way out. At its dark heart, *The Betrayal* is a twisted, deadly love affair.

**SYNOPSIS:**

*The Betrayal* is a dark film about psychological enmeshment. A traumatised woman consults an eminent psychiatrist. He urges her to trust only him, avoid emotional entanglements and do everything he says. She agrees, but finds herself imprisoned in his treatment regime of sadistic manipulation and powerful prescriptions. Terrified of her doctor, and in despair at the possibility of escape, she sees only one way out. The film uses rapid editing and repetition to evoke the sensory overwhelm of the patient's dilemma. Fragmented images of medical records are interwoven with hypnotic, pulsing pills, creating a shimmering, seductive, disorienting montage. At its dark heart, *The Betrayal* is a twisted, deadly love affair.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*The Betrayal* is a cautionary tale about a doctor-patient relationship, and the second in my autoethnographic trilogy focusing on trauma. The first film, *It Started With A Murder*, explores an event that ended my marriage. *The Betrayal* begins one day after that event, when, traumatised, I sat in my doctor's office and told him everything. He asked me to trust him and give him a year of my life. I handed him my trust, and almost lost my life.

With *The Betrayal*, I wanted to see if I could communicate the ambiguity and emotional complexity of this doctor-patient relationship. Beautiful, pulsing pills are juxtaposed with text suggesting dangerous, coercive control. The film has a seductive, hypnotic quality that belies its psychological brutality.

This was a difficult film to make. I was complicit in a deeply destructive relationship. It has taken years to exorcise the ghost of this enmeshed relationship, but the autoethnographic methodologies used in *The Betrayal* have been a cathartic part of that process. For those who recognise the damage caused by abuse of power in any relationship, I hope this story resonates.

## DIRECTOR'S BIOG: SUSAN YOUNG



*Carnival*, Susan Young's multiple award-winning Royal College of Art graduation film, features the fluid, calligraphic line that defines her commercial work. Commissioned films include: *1984: Music For Modern Americans*, for artist Eduardo Paolozzi, *The Doomsday Clock*, a film about multilateral disarmament for the United Nations, *Beleza Tropical* for musician David Byrne, and *Jimi Hendrix: Fire*, for producer Alan Douglas.

Susan's films, titles, promos and commercials have received BAFTA nominations, numerous awards, and been screened extensively worldwide.

Susan has recently returned to the Royal College of Art, where she is researching animation's potential as a medium for processing psychological trauma, using autobiographical material to create a trilogy of film experiments. *It Started With A Murder*, the first of these films, premiered at the International Video Art House Madrid Festival in 2014. *The Betrayal*, second in the trilogy, premiered at Annecy International Animated Film Festival in June 2015.



## **Q&A WITH DIRECTOR SUSAN YOUNG**

### ***What is the story behind The Betrayal?***

*The Betrayal* is the second film in a trilogy exploring how animation might help trauma survivors process their experiences. It is about trust, addiction and the abuse of power in a doctor-patient relationship. On a psychoanalytical level there are issues of transference and countertransference, the unconscious dynamics that exist in any therapeutic situation. The relationship between the doctor and his patient in this film is completely toxic. The patient is trapped and with no other way out, she resorts to desperate measures to escape.

### ***How does this film relate to the first film in your trilogy?***

*The Betrayal's* opening scene takes place just one day after the key events in *It Started With A Murder*, which is the first film in the trilogy. *It Started With A Murder* deals with a serious assault at the end of a traumatic marriage, so both films focus on violent relationships. In the first film the violence is physical, in the second, it is coercive, so the violence is more insidious. *The Betrayal* begins with the doctor recording an interview he's just had with his patient. He writes that she has just been assaulted by her husband, and should avoid emotional entanglements. His subsequent treatment strategy is ultimately self-defeating; as it ends up with him and the patient getting so emotionally entangled that the patient barely escapes alive.

### ***You say The Betrayal is an autoethnographic film, so is everything we see on screen true, and if so, how do you feel when the work is shown?***

The film is based on my own psychiatric history. I suggest that public screenings of autoethnographic films may help trauma survivors bear witness to their experiences, and understanding whether this is the case and why is critical to my study. When an audience knows that a film is based on personal experience, they sometimes share their own stories after a Q&A, which is always a privilege. Making *The Betrayal* was painful, but during the production I recorded a change in my relationship to memories of the events portrayed, which indicates that the animation process metabolised some of the trauma.

### ***What inspired your research, and how do the films relate to it?***

My research is inspired partly by animation's influence on my life. In 1981, I was making *Thin Blue Lines*, a film about the riots in Toxteth, Liverpool. I was struggling with undiagnosed psychological and emotional problems, and noticed that while I was animating I felt less distressed, and calmer and more focused in an almost meditative way. This realisation influenced my decision to become an animator. I then started to notice that my work became more dynamic whenever I was stressed, and guessed I was using animation to mediate my emotions. In 1996 my then-husband tried to kill me. As a result I developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and poured even more energy into my work, but then unfortunately became a patient of the doctor who is the antagonist in *The Betrayal*. In 1997 his treatment caused an overwork-related neurological disorder that affected my right hand, which meant I couldn't animate any more. That was devastating, as I couldn't cope with the loss of my ability to draw or animate, and I became psychologically very unwell for a considerable time. My current research is the sum of all these experiences. I've reengaged with animation, again using the medium to mediate emotions, but this time I have a specific focus, which is to ask: *can animation enable a trauma survivor to bear witness to traumatic experience, and if so, how?* The most stimulating part of my research is making the films. It is liberating to create work that is totally different in style and substance from my pre-injury output.

### ***What influenced the design of The Betrayal?***

In relation to the film's design, nothing was set in stone at the outset. All I knew was that I wanted to have rhythmic sequences of 'pulsing pills' throughout the film, as a percussive, hypnotic punctuation. To tell the story, the film uses legal documents, computer printouts, and the doctor's handwritten clinic notes. I used a macro lens to get close to the text, and very small lights to illuminate the text, which symbolically represents a psychological-archaeological excavation of my emotional life at the time. I didn't have a clue what the final third of the film would look like, and this was deliberate on my part. Allowing the film to evolve spontaneously meant that I could watch my creative thought processes unfolding. The liberation of imagination through open-ended enquiry is one of my research goals, because in a lot of psychological trauma (and I would include my own in this), many describe a feeling that perception that cognitive functional

capacity is negatively affected, which is partly due to the way trauma affects the brain and mental processes. In my own case I felt that I had lost my creative spark, or even the desire to be creative, so I allowed this film to design itself, and this fluid design process is an aspect of how I have reengaged with my own creativity while making the film.

***What influenced the sound design?***

Conceptually I like the fact that the doctor's voice is actually my voice, distorted. My first film is silent, and that silence powerfully communicates the speechless terror of trauma. In this film, my own words are viewed only as text on the screen, and the dominant voice is that of my doctor, but I vocalise his words on the soundtrack, indicating that whilst still silenced in this film, I am now finding ways to articulate my trauma and regain my power in that particular relationship. The final film in this trilogy will take this motif of regaining one's lost voice to its logical conclusion.

More information about Susan Young's current research can be found here:  
<http://susanyounganimation.com/research.html>

# THE BETRAYAL

## Credits

Writer / Director / Producer	Susan Young
Sound	Susan Young
Re-recording mixer	Mike Wyeld

Special thanks

Katie Goodwin

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