

Film analysis

What is the central idea behind the journey represented in *My Life as McDull*? How have narrative devices and film techniques been used to position you to accept this idea?

In the film *My Life As McDull*, a piglet named McDull grows up while travelling. The journey is shown to be a happy one, but its consequences are presented with ambivalence. The episodic nature of the film, which is segmented into chapters, may be seen to express the different philosophies held by writers Brian Tse and Alice Mak.

One of the themes that runs through the film is the incredible stress of living in the city. Escaping from the city into nature, is shown to bring happiness, even if the escape takes place in the mind. The importance of escaping from the city is reinforced by the overall look of the film created by art director Alice Mak. The characters of McDull, his mother, classmates – a turtle, a cat, cows and another piglet – are created with traditional 2D cell animation. The characters are rendered with soft pastel colours. The colour of the characters strongly contrasts with the background of Hong Kong, which is animated using computer-generated images. The repeated use of panning long shots to show Hong Kong heightens the film's sense of realism. Long shots reinforce the sense that Hong Kong is congested and lacks space. Also, the different animation techniques clearly distinguish McDull's simple, imaginative child's world from the grey, adult world of the city. The negative representation of the city is supported by repeated use of loud diegetic sounds such as cars beeping or flying past. The machine sounds are juxtaposed against Schumann's *Traumerer*, an elegiac classical piece, which is used to signify McDull's world. An animated video game sequence featuring McDull's mother as the hero satirises the dog-eat-dog nature of city living. McDull's mother receives points for killing her competitors. The timer, placed on the right of the screen, emphasises the rushed lifestyle of the city.

McDull creates an idealised world away from reality with the help of a travel agency's advertisement for the Maldives. This is suggested by the commercial voice-over that is heard every time McDull visualises a series of tropical island images in his head. This is another comment from the writers about the overtly commercialised nature of the city, where even a child's imagination is proliferated by advertisements. This argument is reinforced in the scene when McDull talks about his favourite place in a discussion at his preschool and McDull describes his local shopping centre where 'you can get large bowls of chicken rice at the food court' as being his favourite place in the world besides the Maldives.

McDull cannot actually escape, so he imagines that he can. A zoom in of McDull as he daydreams while watching TV dissolves into a close-up of his smiling face on board an aeroplane, flying to the Maldives. The plane symbolises the imagination as a means of escape. The plane constantly appears in the long shots of the city, and is often threatened by lightning and grey skies.

The Maldives epitomise paradise in McDull's mind. Images such as underwater video