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**Animated Realities:  
From Animated Documentaries to  
Documentary Animation**

By

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2015

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work is my own. None of the material within this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Nea E. Ehrlich

7th May 2015

## ABSTRACT

### **Animated Realities: From Animated Documentaries to Documentary Animation**

My thesis on contemporary animated documentaries links new media aesthetics with the documentary turn in contemporary visual culture. Drawing from the fields of Contemporary Art, Animation, Film Studies and Gaming Theory, my aim has been to explore the development of animated documentaries in the context of animation's intersection with other visual fields in a very specific technological moment of the past two decades in order to broaden the scope within which animation is analysed and understood.

The starting point of my research was the widely accepted divide assumed to exist between animation and documentary. I, however, claim that the supposedly contradictory nature of animated documentaries can no longer be considered a given. Despite the potentially challenging reception of animated documentaries, it is important to identify what it is that the animated image contributes to documentary, which is the visualisation of what is otherwise un-representable. My thesis investigates a new area of the intangible, focusing on *the virtualisation of culture* rather than on subjective or imaginary aspects of documentary works and visual interpretations. This cultural shift consequently requires new aesthetics of documentation that exceed the capacities of the photographic. My main argument is that due to contemporary technological changes, animation has permeated real contexts of daily life to the extent that it has become disassociated from the realm of fiction. Rather, in altering the way viewers are becoming accustomed to observing, learning about and connecting with reality, animation has brought about a constitutive change in ways of seeing one's world. This change can be described as animation's impact on the relation between *visual signification* and *believability*. It is this which necessitates a reconsideration of what shapes a sense of realism in documentaries today. My research therefore culminates with new conceptualisations concerning the cultural role of animation, introducing what I argue is the formation of the "animated document" and "documentary animation". In these contexts, animation is no longer an interpretive visualisation substituting for photography but a direct capturing of

animated realities. Animation thus expands what is considered to constitute reality and, as a result, also destabilises assumptions about the perceived conflict between animation and documentary, widening the sphere of documentary aesthetics.

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"Cartoons don't have any deep meaning.  
They're just stupid drawings that give you a cheap laugh".<sup>1</sup>

Homer Simpson



## INTRODUCTION

### From Animated Documentaries to Documentary Animation

I recently came across a description of someone's first encounter with the Beatles' music in the 1960s. It was described as something so overwhelmingly new as to have literally caused her breathing to stop momentarily. In 2003, I experienced a comparable moment of surprise when I watched *Kill Bill* by Quentin Tarantino. In the film's anime sequence, a child witnesses the cruel murder of both her parents and then takes her revenge through murderous sexual intercourse with the paedophile who had slaughtered them.<sup>2</sup> The horrific content delivered in animated form stunned me, as if hypnotised.<sup>3</sup> As a child I had read Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (USA, 1991), a graphic novel about the Holocaust, and was familiar with the power of comics to address serious and controversial material, but in Tarantino's anime sequence such material had 'come to life'.<sup>4</sup> The scene starts with the assassination of a young girl's parents. Horrified, she hides under the bed and as the mattress is slowly being soaked with their blood she cringes silently. This scene touched me and it continues to reverberate. Although I had always loved animation, fascinated by the idea of boundless worlds created from scratch that come to life before me on screen, this combination of appalling content with a visual form associated with a childhood aesthetic was extraordinarily powerful.<sup>5</sup> And later on, in Ari Folman's Oscar-nominated *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), an animated documentary about soldiers' recollections of war, I recognised this juxtaposition yet again.



Figure 1.1: *Kill Bill*, 2003, by Quentin Tarantino

Having grown up in Israel, Folman's film resonated with me on several levels. The first nightmarish scene, depicting ferocious dogs running in a boulevard, would have evoked a unique experience for anyone familiar with the tree-lined location in question. This was Rothschild Boulevard, a popular venue for weekend strolls and coffee breaks in Tel Aviv, which was suddenly on-screen, identifiable, yet also completely foreign. My world, one which I had personally inhabited, was suddenly depicted in an utterly new way. There is a lot to be said about *Waltz with Bashir*, and the film has indeed stimulated much academic research.<sup>6</sup> At this point it is, however, sufficient to note that, as a film dealing with trauma, memory loss and reconstruction, the animated imagery was indirectly used to question the difference between animation and photography and to reflect upon different modes of representation that are deemed to bear the mark of the real, accepted as believable and legitimate documentation. "It's fine as long as you draw, but don't film", retorts one of the characters when asked by Folman about recording their meeting. The imperative 'don't film!' articulates an ironic and central theme of *Waltz with Bashir*, as if only a photographically indexical relationship to a material context could constitute "real" footage – an idea which will be explored later in this study. *Waltz with Bashir* was powerful. It was new. And it was unclear. Animation in a documentary setting captured my imagination and stimulated my thinking.



Figure 1.2: *Waltz with Bashir*, 2008, by Ari Folman

## **Animated Documentaries as a Field of Research: Notes on the Virtualisation of Culture**

Even though recent documentary works "attest to a new diversity and complexity of forms", animated documentaries seem to embody a contradiction, which prevents an easy acceptance of the sub-genre.<sup>7</sup> The break between what is visible and possible in the viewer's "real" physical world versus what can be visualized and made to appear "alive" through animated movement on screen is what creates the presumably unbridgeable gap between the two realms.<sup>8</sup> Animation theorist Paul Ward explains that at the heart of the rising interest in animated documentaries is "an attempt to map what happens when two (apparently) opposed 'registers' meet...Documentary is associated with truth, representations of the real; animation is associated with flights of fancy and the imagination: how can these two ever be reconciled?"<sup>9</sup> His argument is echoed by filmmaker and writer Jeffrey Skoller's contextualisation of animated documentary research, in which he explains that "documentary and animation genres defined the lines between fact and fiction, indexical traces of the real and hand-made imaginings, truth and fancy, naturalism and expressionism".<sup>10</sup> Similarly accentuating animation's assumed fictitious nature, philosopher Stanley Cavell claims that the field of animation is a region of film that "explicitly has nothing to do with projections of the real world".<sup>11</sup> These theorists articulate the point of departure of the present research, which seeks to interpret and redefine animated documentaries and their role in contemporary visual culture.

Despite the potentially challenging reception of animated documentaries, it is important to identify what it is that the animated image contributes to documentary. Through the specific examination of new visual deliveries of information in the documentary field, this thesis will consider the meaning and power of this new aesthetic. What does the animated image *do*? As will be explained in the following chapters, animation's chief capacity is the visualisation of the non-visual, of what is otherwise intangible.<sup>12</sup> To date, research into animated documentaries has focused on animation's ability to stand in for un-photographed or un-photographable footage of physical-world events and processes, or to allow for the inclusion of subjective or fantastical accounts of a range of experiences.<sup>13</sup> I wish to argue, however, that it is impossible to comprehend animation's use and role in documentaries today without

considering recent shifts in the theorisation of the documentary field alongside the technological modifications in new media that have reshaped the contemporary world.<sup>14</sup> Maintaining the view that animation provides a means of visualising' the otherwise un-representable, my thesis investigates a new area of the intangible, focusing on *the virtualisation of culture* rather than on subjective or imaginary aspects of documentary works and visual interpretations.<sup>15</sup> My contention is that due to technological changes, new uses of animation have infiltrated what constitutes reality today, despite animation's break with the physical appearance of both objects and subjects.<sup>16</sup> This cultural shift consequently requires new aesthetics of documentation that exceed the capacities of the photographic. In other words, as technology shapes culture and the virtual becomes part of the real, photography--which is based on the physical--is no longer an adequate documentary language for representing the complex layers that comprise today's mixed realities. The thesis will thus explain the contemporary circumstances I identify as affording growing legitimization to animation as a documentary aesthetic but, far from merely being a defence of animated documentaries, my conclusions will also focus on the possible and potentially dangerous repercussions of this growing phenomenon.

Viewing animation as a central cultural component, rather than a youth-oriented aesthetic, becomes apparent if animation is regarded as both strange and familiar. Animation seems alien when compared to photography and the 'human' perception of the physical world, yet it is also encountered in the everyday life of millions: You wake up, make your coffee, check your smartphone, just moving the icons – ANIMATION; you drive to work, use the GPS – ANIMATION; you go online and are confronted with data visualisation and advertisements everywhere – ANIMATION; you work, take a minute's break, play a casual game online or on your phone – ANIMATION. It is perhaps superfluous to mention leisure activities such as films, art or the field of gaming into which animation has also been integrated. These examples, and many more that could be invoked, suggest that animation has become an omnipresent visual language. This idea has been advanced by animation theorist Suzanne Buchan in her 2013 publication, aptly titled *Pervasive Animation*, and at a related conference, held at Tate Modern in 2007.<sup>17</sup> This then leads us to confront the question: how could animation *not* be used to depict realities as well? My use of "realities" in plural acknowledges the varied kinds of reality I will elaborate on in the

chapters that follow. Beyond more ideologically-coded realities, my research has led me to distinguish between physical realities, digitally virtual realities and the mixed realities that define current technologized culture.

### **Research Aims and Research Questions**

Grappling with the relation between theoretical and technological context and new material, I found myself asking numerous questions. Animation is relatively new and yet its ramifications are extensive: this necessitates a reassessment of existing views. My research has, therefore, led me to question assumptions about animation in documentaries, to analyse current characteristics and theorisations of documentary and animation, to examine new directions of the field in contemporary culture and, consequently, to propose new and original conceptualisations of the sub-genre at large.

The starting point of my research was the widely accepted divide assumed to exist between animation and documentary. I, however, claim that the supposedly contradictory nature of animated documentaries can no longer be considered a given. My main argument is that, due to contemporary technological changes, animation has permeated daily life to the extent that it has become disassociated from the realm of fiction. Rather, in altering the way viewers are becoming accustomed to observing, learning about and connecting with reality, animation has brought about a constitutive change in ways of seeing one's world. This change can be described as animation's impact on the relation between *visual signification* and *believability*. It is this which necessitates a reconsideration of what shapes a sense of realism in documentaries today. As virtualisation characterises culture, animation is used as the dynamic visual façade of non-physical computerised platforms of activity, otherwise unrepresentable. My research therefore advances new conceptualisations concerning the cultural role of animation, introducing what I argue is the formation of the "animated document" and "documentary animation". In these contexts, animation is no longer an interpretive visualisation substituting for photography but a direct capturing of animated realities. Animation thus expands what is considered to constitute reality and, as a result, also destabilises assumptions about the perceived conflict between animation and documentary, widening the sphere of documentary aesthetics.

In his book on film and video art, Stuart Comer states that "in both mainstream cinema and artists' moving image, animation has increasingly become a feature, both when it is evident and when it is not".<sup>18</sup> For such a rapidly expanding field, animation is still surprisingly under-represented in theoretical fields other than animation and film studies. My aim has therefore been to explore the development of animated documentaries in the context of animation's intersection with other visual terrains in a very specific technological moment of the past two decades in order to broaden the scope within which animation is analysed and understood. The material examined straddles contemporary art, film and gaming studies within a wider framework of visual culture. I have sought to establish animation's role as an increasingly central visual language in contemporary visual culture and, as both cause and effect, an ever more relevant and necessary visual form of documentation. As imagery of the real and realism change, competence in image analysis is needed in an effort to deepen comprehension about how technologies have changed realities, referentiality and, as a result, how new documentary representations are received. This clarifies the significant and innovative character of my research.

The key questions guiding my research have been:

1. How has the role and use of animation changed in visual culture since the 1990s and how has the integration of animation into new cultural fields influenced the theorization and spectatorship of animation?
2. What are the advantages of using animation in documentary practice?<sup>19</sup>
3. Why now? What are the reasons for the rise of animated documentary production and research at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
4. Can animation be used as a document or to document?
5. How do changing uses and conceptualizations of animation influence the discourse on and assumptions surrounding documentary today?

My research methods consisted of a comprehensive critical literature overview and fieldwork, which included archives and catalogued collections, animation exhibitions, conferences and festivals as well as interviews with artists and filmmakers.

## Structure and Scope of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts, in which different chapters examine theoretical concepts, analyse prominent animated documentaries and propose new directions of thought. The first part, Terminology and Theoretical Context, includes a review of definitions and a discussion of literature in the field. In Part 1 I also investigate the rise of animated documentary production and research since the 1990s. The second part, Animation in Today's Digitalised and Virtualised Culture, evaluates animation in documentary vis-à-vis "indexicality" and "virtuality", key concepts in documentary theory and contemporary culture. These lead to new conceptions about realism, which I define as "simulations of witnessing" and believability. The third part, New Directions of Animation in Documentary identifies the relationship between virtual realities, the increasing popularity of the gaming industry and gaming-related real-time animation techniques to the development of documentary games, the "animated document" and "documentary animation".

Entitled "Terminology", **Chapter 1** begins by examining the multiple and at times contradictory concepts that are essential to map the territory of research whilst laying out the definitions I will be using throughout the thesis. I claim that in an era of murky conceptualisations of truth based more on belief than fact, the role of the viewer as arbiter of a work's documentary status becomes increasingly central, which influences my approach to the subject at large and explains my interest in changing uses and reception of animation in visual culture today.

**Chapter 2** is an historical survey of the theorisation of animated documentaries and clarifies how my own arguments differ from existing literature. I consider the widespread suspicion towards truth claims in today's information era and introduce the concept of masking as an advantageous angle with which to engage with the sub-genre, demonstrated through the 2008 film *Slaves* by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn as a case study.

**Chapter 3** engages with the question "why now?" and sets out the main cultural and technological reasons I take to explain the rise of animated documentary production and research since the 1990s. These include changes in documentary practice, theorisation and reception, the ubiquity of recording devices and surveillance that

evoke an expectancy of imagery, the digitization of and suspicion towards photography, hyperreality and a growing culture of simulations, Paul Virilio's concept of machine vision and a general virtualisation of culture where animation plays the central visual role rather than serving as a replacement for other forms of representation.

The second part, *Animation in Today's Digitalized and Virtualized Culture*, focuses on new uses of, assumptions about, and effects of animation in contemporary visual culture and theory. The analysis of animation as "moving imagery only visible on screen", as I define it, leads to my interest in today's networked "screen culture" and situates my research in a specific historical, technological and cultural moment in animation history. **Chapter 4** elaborates upon the current reincarnation of the virtual in the digital sphere and surveys historical theorisations of virtuality. The investigation of the blurred boundaries between physical and non-physical contemporary realities and animation's role vis-à-vis their representation and documentation is further discussed. This is in turn connected with an analysis of materiality in today's virtualised culture and the role of physical appearance in contemporary experimental documentaries. I consequently claim that, although an interest in the body and embodiment occurs in today's bio-political systems of authority, an opposite tendency is also developing where the importance of physical appearance is minimised as a central signifier in contemporary art-related documentaries.<sup>20</sup>

**Chapter 5** confronts the issue of indexicality, the signifying connection between a sign and its 'material' referent and the basis upon which photography has been privileged as a documentary language. I assess animation through Charles Sanders Peirce's theoretical conceptualisation of the index in relation to documentary. On the one hand, I demonstrate that animation can function as an indexical trace of the physical and, on the other hand, I explain how, in today's networked culture where viewers are active within non-physical environments, new forms of documentary representation are required that do not rely on the physical referent. These representations act instead as a different form of index, Peirce's deictic index. Animation thus acts as both record and indicator, as *trace* and *deixis*, of both physical



reality and non-physical virtual reality. This will facilitate my discussion of animation's relation to documents, a foundation for documentary works.

**Chapter 6** continues the discussion of indexicality and virtuality in their relation to documentary in an era where, I argue, technological changes have reshaped and redefined both realities and their representations, introducing multiple and at times contradictory theorisations of realism. I propose that contemporary understandings of realism and believability expose a tension between a decline of mimetic aesthetics in documentary and the varied reasons mimesis has been and is deemed naïve, illusionistic and inadequate as a mark of the real versus its on-going persistence nonetheless. Rather than a notion of realism and believability based up on visual mimesis, I find that new forms of conveyance, or what I define as "simulations of witnessing", previously achieved by photographic mechanisms that supposedly acted as an extension of the human eye and which have since been weakened, become key. In today's networked and computerised culture I introduce interactivity and a sense of presence as central in new conceptualisations of documentary.

The third part, *New Directions of Animation in Documentary*, examines current and developing directions in the field of animated documentaries that lend weight to my argument concerning the need to rethink notions of realism and introduces my ideas about animation's changing role in documentary practice. **Chapter 7** describes the emergence of the field of documentary games as interactive forms of documentary and discusses the meaning and role of gaming today. I argue that, in a hyper-visual mediatised culture, media images lose much of their power to a desensitised gaze whereas animation, as a defamiliarizing aesthetic that can draw attention whilst also visualising interactive events on screen, serves to place the viewer within the documentary content. This personalises the documentary in a new way and also highlights the central role of the viewer as arbiter of documentaries today. Engagement, I argue, is essential in an era where belief in photography has diminished and a participatory networked culture has evolved, in which viewers have become accustomed to a different form of interaction with information.

Where the previous chapter examines games which can be labelled as documentary, **Chapter 8** focuses on the documenting of so-called games. The chapter introduces the field of gaming as the most popular field of leisure today which, I explain, is no

longer "merely" a game or necessarily fantasy. Rather, in many ways, gaming becomes a continuation of the physical reality, which permits me to introduce the concept of "mixed realities" as defining of our era. In these contexts I demonstrate that animation is now both event and representation, changing its status in documentary. Through a technological and theoretical discussion of these virtual worlds and their documentation, as well as an in-depth analysis of machinima animation, I argue for the existence of "animated documents". I see the animated document as characteristic of a contemporary approach to realities that is crucial to the examination of animation's role within the contemporary documentary field. In the final chapter and coda that concludes the third part of the thesis, I examine how the virtualisation of culture and consequent new technologies of animation completely redefine animation, thus emphasising how far animation has developed from the starting point associated with fantasy and childhood, as elaborated in the first chapter. These changes in today's field of animation create, I argue, a whole new form of animation which changes its relation to documentary. Many of the assumptions about animation become destabilised and irrelevant, and instead the aesthetic of "documentary animation", as I define it, emerges. The relation I establish between animation and documentary alters animation's comparison with photography, and further demands a rethinking of conventionalised documentary aesthetics in general. These topics and their potential repercussions are further discussed in the conclusion.

In order to demonstrate the changing aspects of animation's integration into contemporary visual and informational or non-fiction culture, this thesis examines works from the fields of art, film, gaming and news coverage. The examples of animated documentaries discussed include those that deal with physical events, those that focus on virtual realms and works that reflect upon documentation and animation in varied ways. The thesis examines a broad range of visual material from around the world, including North America, Australia, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Although I do aim to introduce a corpus of relevant works, the thesis is not intended as a geographically comprehensive review of contemporary animated documentaries. The particular examples discussed are not intended to form a "typology" of animated documentaries, but rather serve to illustrate specific points of my argument about animation's changing role in today's visual culture and the ramifications this has in the field of documentary. This discussion of animation in documentary settings is

intended to establish the importance of critically interrogating the relationship between technology, visuality and the apprehensions of reality mediated by them.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Simpsons, "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington" (Season 3 Episode 2), directed by Wes Archer, written by George Meyer (Original air date September 26, 1991; Los Angeles: Fox Broadcasting Company), Television Series.

<sup>2</sup> *Anime* are Japanese animated productions of varied techniques, usually also referring to a Japanese-disseminated animation style.

<sup>3</sup> As is explained in the first chapter, my research focuses on animation that does not attempt photo-realism's naturalistic aesthetics. Also, it is important to note that although the juxtaposition of animation (a genre associated with children) and certain kinds of violence (content associated with adult viewers) was new to me at the time, since then I have become familiar with the varied content covered in Japanese *anime* and *manga*.

<sup>4</sup> As is explained in the first chapter, animation is characterized by movement and a sense of bestowing life and vivacity upon the imagery.

<sup>5</sup> For more on animation's association with comic and children's entertainment see Joanna Bouldin, "Cadaver of the Real: Animation, Rotoscoping and the Politics of The Body", *Animation Journal* 12 (2004): 7; Michael O'Pray "The Animated Film", in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 434; Eric Patrick, "Representing Reality: Structural/Conceptual Design in Non-Fiction Animation", *Animac Magazine* 3 (2004): 46.

<sup>6</sup> For more information see Annabelle Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009); Raya Morag, *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* (London : I.B. Tauris, 2013); Garrett Stewart, "Screen Memory in Waltz with Bashir", *Film Quarterly* 63:3 (2010): 58-62; Robert Moses Peaslee, "It's Fine as Long as You Draw, But Don't Film: Waltz with Bashir and the Postmodern Function of Animated Documentary", *Visual Communication Quarterly* 18:4 (2011): 223-235; Jonathan Murray, "Waltz with Bashir", *Cineaste* (2009): 65-68; Ohad Landesman and Roy Bendor, "Animated Recollection and Spectatorial Experience in Waltz with Bashir", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6:3 (2011): 353-370.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, ed., *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>8</sup> The terms "physical", "corporeal" and "material" will be used interchangeably throughout this dissertation, in contrast to virtual and personal-subjective "worlds" that do not consist of matter in the same way.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ward, "Animating with Facts: The Performative Process of Documentary Animation", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6:3 (2011): 294.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Skoller, "Introduction to the Special Issue 'Making It (Un)real: Contemporary Theories and Practices in Documentary Animation'", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6:3 (2011): 207.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 167.

<sup>12</sup> The relation between the real and the intangible raises related issues about reality and truth, such as objectivity and relativity, what exists independently of our minds and what best way to represent reality in a truthful manner. These issues have vexed almost every major philosopher and have been examined across a diverse array of disciplines, thus obviously exceeding the scope of this thesis. For this reason the topic is specifically examined through the prism of documentary aesthetics.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that varied representational devices, such as writing, painting and drawing, can also depict what is unrepresentable in photography. However, as will explained in Chapter 1, the uniqueness of animation is movement, which bestows a sense of "life" and, according to Tom Gunning

and as will be developed in Chapter 6, a form of realism to the representation. In chapter 5 I will discuss indexicality and elaborate upon contemporary animation's unique indexical characteristics, contrasting and differentiating it from other forms of representation. Not only can animation act as a physical trace of the referent, it can also deictically denote in a dynamic manner that grabs attention and is ideal for the portrayal of processes. Furthermore, since animation can only be seen on screen, it is different from other representational languages such as writing and drawing and is an important facet of an era characterized by the ubiquity of screens, as will be explained in Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> This research thus refers to the technologized world and digital cultures available to those with access to lithium-based internet technology. The fact that billions of individuals around the globe still have no access to these technologies only accentuates the potential schism that may develop between those with and without such technology, based on the changes I claim are developing in ways of perceiving, believing and conceptualizing realities through changes in visual information.

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 4 about virtuality engages with the complexity of the term and the varied uses of animation in virtualization that varies from video games to nanotechnology.

<sup>16</sup> Developing the focus on changes in material conditions such as technology into a Marxist reading of this emerging field is not my main emphasis in this current research but is a possible direction for future research.

<sup>17</sup> See Suzanne Buchan, ed., *Pervasive Animation* (New York: Routledge, 2013) and the 2007 Tate Modern conference of the same name at: [www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/pervasive-animation-day-1-video-recordings](http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/pervasive-animation-day-1-video-recordings)

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Comer, ed., *Film and Video Art* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 102. Although not a comprehensive list of artists working in the field of animation, it seems useful to provide examples of artists who use animation and whose work has been widely and internationally exhibited. These include: Nathalie Djurberg (who won the Silver Lion award at the 2009 Venice Biennale), William Kentridge, Harun Farocki, Kota Ezawa, Stephen and Timothy Quay, Cory Arcangel (whose animation is mostly based on video game modifications), Eddo Stern, Kara Walker, Nancy Davenport, Francis Alÿs, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy and many others. Also worth mentioning is the 2003 *Destino*, a short animated film whose production originally began in 1945 as a collaboration between Walt Disney and Spanish Surrealist painter Salvador Dalí. In recent years animation exhibitions in major museums have also contributed to the growing visibility of the field's richness. Examples include the 2007 *Geopolitics of Animation* exhibition at the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo in Seville, Spain; the 2011 *Watch Me Move* exhibition at London's Barbican centre; the 2012 *The Art of Video Games* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington and many others.

<sup>19</sup> This question will be considered from a technical as well as political-ethical perspective.

<sup>20</sup> Due to the scope of the thesis I will not be able to include a fuller examination of the topic of bio-politics and its repercussions on the field of documentary. For further reading about the relation between bio-politics and documentary, see Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art" in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, ed., Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008).

# CHAPTER 1

## Terminology

### Introduction

The reception of animated documentaries is complex. "It's interesting...but it's not *real!*" is a frequent comment I have heard since embarking on the research of animated documentaries. On the one hand, those familiar with one or two animated documentaries (usually *Waltz with Bashir* and *Persepolis*) generally agree that they are thought-provoking. On the other hand, when people try to explain *why this is so*, their terminology quite often becomes muddled with that used to describe photographic imagery. To many people, it seems that photographic imagery alone is considered "real"; the rest is "animated". This reinforces the conventional distinction between animation and photography as well as between animation and reality. In this first chapter, I shall examine the terminology and assumptions that have hitherto governed both the popular and critical reception of animated documentaries.

### **Defining Documentary: Central Themes in Contemporary Documentary Theory**

Bill Nichols suggested in 1992 that the goal of documentary is to inspire and satisfy epistophilia, the desire to know about the world.<sup>1</sup> The conception of documentary as a truth-telling discourse based on documents and evidence leads to a persistent expectation on the part of the spectator, that the film will offer some form of objective knowledge, accuracy and trustworthiness.<sup>2</sup> As I shall go on to argue, however, the theoretically shifting and unstable nature of these terms, as well as the historic questioning of both reality and truth, culminating in today's sense of "truthiness" and "parafiction", reveal that the documentary's relation to its referent is an ambiguous one.

Since the 1960s the mass media and information age have impacted upon the art field and a growing interest in documentary in the art world negotiates "an unstable relationship between the two".<sup>3</sup> Animated documentaries originate in the increasingly experimental use of documentary materials in film and visual arts since the 1990s, most commonly referred to as "The Documentary Turn".<sup>4</sup> The Documentary Turn, felt broadly in visual culture, reflects contemporary art's concern with the social and

political aspects of everyday life, igniting discussion about the goals of documentaries as shapers of the realities they document and the subjects with which they engage. Curator Maria Lind and artist and theorist Hito Steyerl maintain that documentary is a genre that emerges in a time of crisis, searching for ways to approach and engage with social, political and economic upheavals.<sup>5</sup> Documentaries stimulate discourse about problems of the era and assessments of what is needed for reform.<sup>6</sup> The continuing interest in documentaries shows that, despite the haziness of their claims to 'truth', there is still a belief that they can serve as a field through which to search for meaning in present predicaments.

In a somewhat paradoxical manner, many contemporary documentaries seem to exhibit contradictory characteristics. While documentary materials do strive to "touch the real", signifying an aspiration for certitude and stability, recent decades of increased propaganda and misinformation in the media have nurtured an attitude of "habitual mistrust as well as advanced media literacy".<sup>7</sup> This sense of uncertainty has affected modes of knowledge production and dissemination of information, which often include enquiries into the perception of "truth" and "documentation". Experimental and art documentaries have led to varied explorations questioning documentary conventions and blurring boundaries between fact and fiction. Walid Raad's work from 1989-2004, for example, was made under the rubric of The Atlas Group, which he invented, and whose mission was to form an archive of research related to Lebanon's civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s. The archive consists of videos, photographs and documents supposedly produced by individuals on both sides of the conflict but actually fabricated by Raad, whose intention was to raise questions about the formation of historical narratives which can only be understood as mingling fact, memory and fiction.<sup>8</sup> Another example is Avi Mograbi's 2008 documentary film *Z32*, an Israeli-French production that combines live-action footage, computer-generated imagery and musical elements where Mograbi inserts himself in the narrative like a Greek tragedy chorus. The film is about the testimonies of former elite-unit Israeli soldiers who participated in retaliation acts against Palestinian policemen. The Israeli soldiers, years later, view these events as crimes of war, and as a result take renewed responsibility for their actions and seek to be absolved by their loved ones. These themes are integrated alongside Mograbi's own personal dilemma about disguising the protagonists, which he essentially sees as giving shelter to

murderers, collaborating in the described events and their larger political context of the Israeli occupation. Towards the end of the film an ex-soldier faces the camera and speaks, complying with traditional "talking heads" documentary conventions. Only when the ex-soldier reaches for a cigarette does the viewer realize that his "face" is actually a hyperrealist computer-generated veneer. The realization that what seemed to be live-action footage is in fact constructed and false renders a sense of deception and is a reminder that it is no longer possible to tell "reality" and "fiction" apart, an unsettling statement about documentation and the inability to reach definite knowledge.



Figure 2.1: Z32, 2008, by Avi Mograbi

These themes are also evident in the ascension of documentary hybrids such as Reality TV, Mockumentaries and Docudrama, "aesthetic journalism" and infotainment.<sup>9</sup> Alfredo Cramerroti accordingly lists media products that blend fact and fiction by featuring "'documentary style' and 'realism approach'... facticity (the presentation of documents as facts), faction (fact combined with fiction) or straight fiction, [which] all represent varying degrees of that staging of reality".<sup>10</sup> This is also called theatricality (so there is a distinction between the performance of reality and



the real caught in the act, but these categories have already collapsed.) A number of important questions arise: Is the staging of the real fiction? If this is the case, then what are the criteria that permit an evaluation of the relationship of various types of aesthetic modes to truth claims? Where do animated documentaries stand in a developing continuum of mediated information, staged and constructed realities, and new forms of representation that aim to explore and reveal contemporary ontological and epistemological complexities?

The difficulty in the conceptualization of animated documentaries is, first and foremost, the fluid perception of documentary itself. John Corner contends that the main areas of dispute in contemporary documentary studies fall into the three categories of: *definitions*, based on issues of form, subject and purpose; *aesthetics*, the stylization and techniques used for the expression of creativity; and *cognition*, the kind of knowledge systems employed, the truth claims that documentaries can make and the likely interpretation and use of this by viewers.<sup>11</sup> My research explores these three key areas of documentary analysis through a specific examination of the use of animation in documentary. The thesis will explore the following questions in relation to the categories of analysis proposed by Corner. *Definitions*: Can the use of animation be defined as documentary? How do assumptions about documentaries accommodate this proliferating practice and how do changes in the uses of animation in visual culture contribute to its status as viable documentary? What purposes does animation fulfil in documentary practice? *Aesthetics*: How do different styles and techniques of animation engage differently with information in the context of documentary? *Cognition*: What is the extent and evocation of trustworthiness and believability of animation as documentary? What kind of truth claims can animation make?

In terms of definitions, critic and filmmaker John Grierson's primary definition of documentary was "the creative treatment of actuality".<sup>12</sup> Noting the paradox involved, Brian Winston questions what remains of actuality after its creative treatment.<sup>13</sup> Animation may be considered as one particular form of creative treatment of actuality, similar to myriad other experimental and aesthetic choices used in the representation of non-fictional content. The issue of indexicality, the connection between a sign and its referent most often associated with photography, links documentaries to the world beyond them and, consequently, validates their claims to

truth. However, in a field based on the creative treatment of information and evidence, different forms of referencing may be used to illuminate varied aspects of an event or topic. The tension between, on the one hand, "aesthetics", "representation" or "creativity" and, on the other, "reality" or "actuality" has always been central in the documentary field because filmmakers manipulate or edit reality and choose how to stylistically portray it whilst still claiming their representation is a truthful and presumably "direct" one.<sup>14</sup> As Lind and Steyerl explain it, the conflict that exists between the desire to let the subject express itself without much interference and the wish to turn it into something aesthetically unique is the "documentary quest for ever more authentic representations of the real".<sup>15</sup> The issue of Indexicality will, therefore, be of central significance to this research, which aims to analyse changing modes of visual referencing as believable markers of actuality in documentaries.

The realization that no un-mediated view of realities can ever exist emphasizes the aesthetics and creativity of documentaries rather than the supposed objective and stable "actuality" upon which they are based. This directs inquiry into the choices made when presenting information as criticism and truth-telling, revealing the gap between reality and representation.<sup>16</sup> While an emphasis on "actuality" alludes to facts and a search for stable and objective knowledge, an accentuation of the "creativity" involved in documentary suggests a more fictional and perhaps personal-subjective component, based on the creator's vision, message and stylistic preferences. The differentiation between the two is increasingly difficult to determine, which leads me to Corner's notion of "cognition", which involves the truth claims that documentaries can assert as well as spectatorial reception and interpretation of the content presented.

Philosopher Jacques Rancière has also addressed the blurred boundaries between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction. Rancière plays upon the ambiguity of the French word "histoire", referring both to "history" and "story", in order to assert that "writing history and writing stories come under the same regime of truth".<sup>17</sup> This sense of a progressive blurring of the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction is often accompanied by a mistrust of media-based coverage where fabricated reports can and do generate an ideologically-coded reality.<sup>18</sup> The demand for documentaries to present facts while their very ability and intent to do is simultaneously thrown into doubt reflects a culture in which the surplus of constant information has created a

pressure for exposure and a demand for knowledge along with a persistent sense of uncertainty and distrust. Steyerl claims that, “the only thing we can say for sure about the documentary mode in our times is that we always already doubt if it is true”.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, as Michael Renov explains, documentary goals are no longer concerned with objective knowledge, but rather “how this knowledge is conveyed and what types of knowledge it is”, treating knowledge as contingent, hybrid and particular.<sup>20</sup> In fact, as documentaries become new platforms of increasingly experimental modes of inquiry and information production and delivery, the distinctions between documentary, educational and informational works become more difficult to discern due to the varied uses and interweaving of facts, fiction, personal opinions and subjective accounts, distortion, illusion, metaphor, symbolism and even deception.<sup>21</sup> Rather than searching for a clear-cut differentiation between fact and fiction in definitions of documentary, I am instead interested in how this persisting sense of uncertainty has been theorized and incorporated into documentary studies. Nonetheless, through an examination of indexicality and theorizations of documentary's relation to documents I demonstrate that animation can act as both *informational* (i.e. denotative rather than evidentiary), through the role of a deictic index, and *evidentiary* when performing as indexical trace. Both are essential aspects in definitions of documentary.<sup>22</sup>

In the absence of a clear division between representation and realities as well as between fact and fiction, it is useful to understand the underlying principles that help the acceptance of certain works as documentaries and their categorization as such. Rather than basing definitions of documentary on the issue of facts alone, more ambiguous aspects have become part of how documentary film has been critically understood. For example, Nichols identifies a film as documentary through “production (how it is made, the filming conventions it employs, the claiming of its filmmaker) and/or reception (including the phenomenological orientation of the audience, its positioning in film festivals, etc.)”.<sup>23</sup> Renov emphasizes the goals of documentary works, which are: to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express.<sup>24</sup> Since these goals, and production and reception methods, can be achieved by varied means, a shift from assumptions of transparency, clarity and truth to murkier waters of classification highlight many of the transformations the field has undergone.

Different, and perhaps more fluid, understandings of documentary today become evident in Ursula Biemann's popularization of 1940s avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter's conception of the "Film Essay". In his text *The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film* Richter proposes "a new genre of film that enables the filmmaker to make the 'invisible' world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen. Unlike the documentary film that presents facts and information, the essay film produces complex thought reflections that are not necessarily bound to reality, but can also be contradictory, irrational, and fantastic. The essay film...allows the filmmaker to [bend] the rules and [test] parameters of the traditional documentary practice, granting the imagination with all its artistic potentiality free reign".<sup>25</sup> Artist and curator Ursula Biemann, working mainly in the genre of video essay, explains that

The video essay situates itself somewhere between documentary video and video art.<sup>26</sup> And as an *in-between* genre, these videos often fall through given categories [presented] at art events, film festivals and activist conferences. For a documentary, they are seen as too experimental, self-reflexive and subjective, and for an art video they stand out for being socially involved or explicitly political.<sup>27</sup>

Both Richter and Biemann's observations appear pertinent to my consideration of animated documentary. Animation's ability to liberate its varied techniques from the confines of photography within a documentary context may be considered analogous to Biemann's conceptualization of the video essay, facilitating a greater degree of creative freedom and exploration. Furthermore, as I will show, contemporary technologies of image production and digital networked platforms enable innovative explorations of contemporary realities by virtue of the unlimited expressivity of animated documentaries.

Michael Chanan discusses documentaries that engage with realities in ways that exceed the appearance of things, thus expanding the potential of documentary by creating metaphors for what the camera is unable to record whilst nonetheless engaging with what exists behind and beyond the image.<sup>28</sup> Acknowledging the productive effects of uncertainty, Rancière argues that contemporary documentaries break with conventions and use varying forms of fiction in order to undo "the

connections between things, signs and images which constitute what we intend as reality".<sup>29</sup> These novel forms of hybrid documentaries use the complexity, vagueness and contradictions of contemporary actuality to explore new forms of representation, knowledge production and modes of evoking trust in order to illuminate larger truths and reach new insights.<sup>30</sup> Proving that, as D. Graham Burnett explains, "truth won't necessarily let us free but imagination is freedom", the experimental nature of animated documentaries explores both the changing notions of truth prevalent today and the limitations of documentary in an era where any visual criterion as a marker of actuality has been widely destabilized.<sup>31</sup> It is my contention that animation has a significant role as a newly proliferating representational language that forces viewers to reconsider their assumptions of documentary conventions and their expectations of truth claims.

I further propose that a sense of confusion about the signifying capabilities and believability of imagery reflects a larger shift regarding the status of truth claims in contemporary culture. Some of the reasons for this are due to changes in epistemological theorizations and technologically-oriented ontological developments.<sup>32</sup> Due to varied media filters and digital photography, viewers' trust in their ability to decipher the veracity of an image and its meaning has been weakened. It sounds so simple, and yet it explodes with significance to state explicitly that *knowing is replaced by believing*. Reliable truth criteria are unclear in today's visual culture, which opens the field to new theorizations of and experimentation with signifiers. A shift has occurred away from the assumed truth and objectivity from a fact or document towards *the strategies of communication* used to convince viewers of the believability of the representation. *The veracity of the content is replaced by the reliability of the representation*. The expected objectivity and truth claims of a documentary are thus replaced with the more elusive sense of "truthiness" and the changing paradigms of believability regarding varied forms of information delivery.

The word "truthiness" was introduced in 2005 and became Merriam-Webster dictionary's word of the year in 2006, reverberating as a sign of the times.<sup>33</sup> The American Dialect Society defines truthiness as "the quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true".<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Armstrong, curator of the 2013 exhibition "More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness" at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts notes that "we live in an age of

truthiness", in which fabricated information, without regard to fact or logic, is becoming increasingly accepted as true.<sup>35</sup> The issue of truth today is progressively dependent on a process of imbrication, the overlapping between knowledge and belief. This in turn means that the role of the viewer--as arbiter of documentaries based on what is accepted and believed to be true, rather than on any sense of uncompromising facts--thus becomes central. Carrie Lambert-Beatty wonders about a sense of sufficient epistemological diligence, asking "[w]hen does one decide that something is – in the epistemologists' phrase now codified a Wikipedia's primary criterion – *true enough*?"<sup>36</sup> This is an important question which, in foregrounding the personal search of each viewer, corresponds more broadly with the active role required of consumers of information today.

Advanced viewer involvement in the comprehension and even production of information is a characteristic of contemporary technologized culture, to the extent that viewing is replaced with interactive using and "surfing" so that the spectator is transformed into a viewer/user, accessing, collecting and navigating in a wealth of "too much information".<sup>37</sup> Interaction in the contemporary online participation culture means that individuals generate and disseminate ideas more than ever before, choosing where to search, what to share and thus developing a heightened sense of self-reliance in regard to how to construct their own personalized narratives of "truth".<sup>38</sup> In fact, User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI) are central concepts in web usability that emphasize interfaces as evolving representations of information with regard to the experience of the user. As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, the active role of the viewer in new documentaries thus becomes of principal importance, shifting the focus away from attempts at objective knowledge to the viewer's experience of the documentary work.

Echoing Roland Barthes' 1967 'The Death of the Author' essay, Lev Manovich identifies a broad shift in attention in cultural theory from the author to the text to the reader.<sup>39</sup> Film theorist Paul Rotha accordingly advocates a viewer-oriented approach to documentaries, claiming that "[d]ocumentary defines not subject or style, but approach. . . . It justifies the use of every known technical artifice to gain its effect on the spectator".<sup>40</sup> Joost Raessens also suggests documentary theory has moved towards an emphasis upon the viewer's role in the reception of the work since documentaries are received as such if they succeed in indicating that a "documentarizing lecture"

should be practiced, rather than a fictive one, in order to influence the viewer's mode of reception of the work.<sup>41</sup> As Dai Vaughan claims, "[w]hat makes a film a 'documentary' is the way we look at it; and the history of documentary has been the succession of strategies by which filmmakers have tried to make viewers look at films this way".<sup>42</sup> It is for these reasons that I too rely heavily on the viewer in my definition of documentaries whilst combining Grierson's preliminary definition about documentary's reliance on the amalgamation of creativity with actuality, Renov's documentary goals and Nichols' definition that emphasizes viewer reception. As such, I define documentary as the (potentially creative) narrativisation of documents meant to attain Renov's documentary goals of recording, revealing, informing or persuading and accepted as a documentary by its viewers. Whilst the reliance on viewer reception introduces ambiguity into the definition, I find this component cannot be overlooked in today's participatory and mistrustful information culture.

What is accepted as a documentary relates to warranting devices that instil believability of representation. It is for this reason that a clearer definition of animation and a consideration of its changing uses in visual culture is vital, in order to understand its modified reception. This will serve to explain what I claim is a growing acceptance of animation as bearing a greater truth status and believability and the possible repercussions this may have.

### **Defining Animation**

What is becoming evident in animation research circles is that, rather than reaching an agreement about the definition of animation, there can be multiple definitions and as many opinions about what animation *is* as what it is *not*. The variety of definitions is a logical outcome of a number of different factors including animation's evolution based on continuously changing technologies; the mounting theoretical research contributing to the field in recent years; and varied non-English terms which are translated as "animation" but which each have their own nuances.<sup>43</sup> Although differing aspects and definitions of animation will be addressed where appropriate, I have chosen to adopt a very specific definition. I refer to animation as "moving imagery only visible on-screen" and my research focuses particularly on non-naturalistic aesthetics within this definition.<sup>44</sup> This definition encompasses the wide variety of animation techniques and styles whilst most clearly differentiating

animation from photography, as imagery that is generated rather than recorded.<sup>45</sup> In addition, this definition is clearly time-oriented and engages the current historical and cultural moment of visual culture, excluding early animation techniques that were not screen-based, such as flip books and pre-cinematic optical devices, as well as potential future displays, such as holography, which may not rely on screen technologies.

The on-going discussion surrounding the definition of animation is an integral characteristic of the field itself, a growing and dynamic area of theoretical and technical knowledge where debate is welcome. Whereas an unclear definition may be deemed all-encompassing and thus regressive, the current abundance of animation in visual culture and the cross-pollination between previously separate fields renders animation an important element in documentary creation. My claim in this thesis is that changing representations of multiple fields, ranging from military functions to advertisements and mapping systems, ensures that viewers are becoming increasingly accustomed to seeing their world in animated form. I will, nonetheless, engage with varied definitions in order to illustrate how central themes, namely animation's relation with cinema and with the physical world, relate to its use within the field of documentary.

Since animation is so varied in technique and visual form, it is no surprise that its uses are similarly diverging. As a result, and even though animation may still be associated by some with cartoons and childhood content, thinking of animation as a genre is a misconception. Using Arthur Asa Berger's definition of "genre" as "a set of content and style conventions common to a group of texts that readers come to expect when approaching a text of that group", Raz Greenberg explains that "animation spreads across a variety of contents and styles".<sup>46</sup> Greenberg goes on to claim that an additional misconception about animation is, similarly, its treatment as medium, when "a medium is the physical means through which the text's message is recorded and carried".<sup>47</sup> Since historical creations of and methods of viewing animation include a wide range of means, such as paper for flip-book animation, spinning cylinders for zoetrope, and early cinema apparatuses, as well as varied screen-based media, Greenberg concludes that animation is *not* a medium.<sup>48</sup> It is, therefore, perhaps more useful to think of animation, as Paul Wells has suggested, as "an art, an approach, an aesthetic and an application".<sup>49</sup> Although the terms "art" and "aesthetic" may seem



extensive and therefore somewhat vague, they certainly convey a variety that is appropriate for the diversity that is animation. The terms "application" as "the action or fact of putting something to a use or purpose" and "approach" as "a means or way of approach; an access, passage, avenue" or "a way of considering or handling something" are particularly useful when examining animation in relation to documentary, for they emphasize that animation is used as a unique way to address a purpose or to get certain meaning across and that it is an exceptionally visual means of doing so.<sup>50</sup>

Etymologically, the term "animation" is derived from the Latin word "animatio", from "animare". Originating in circa the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it has two key meanings, one referring to movement and the other to the bestowing of life.<sup>51</sup> As Donald Crafton explains, the earliest uses of the term were theological and referred to the union of soul and body, denoting an endowment with spirit, as in the biblical description of God giving life to Adam. The adjective "animated" also referred to magical and supernatural beings such as spirits and angels. Over time, the meaning expanded to reflect a broader tendency towards secularization, and came also to indicate different aspects of "life forces", to include "awakening", "becoming aroused", "intensifying", "reviving", "imparting vividness" and "to give lifelike qualities".<sup>52</sup> As a result, "by modern times, animation had accreted two separate co-existing meanings: the atavistic theological one meaning generative, giving life; and the other secular one, simply moving or changing something".<sup>53</sup> The idea of motion is, accordingly, a defining element in animation theory.<sup>54</sup> For Brian Wells, a key property of animation is that "it must move or change over a perceptible and discernible period of time, comprised of two or more discrete units of time".<sup>55</sup> Norman McLaren suggests that "how it moves is more important than what moves".<sup>56</sup> Maureen Furniss responds to McLaren's suggestion that "animation is not the art of drawings that move but the art of movements that are drawn", by stating that this is a description of animation's essence, rather than practice.<sup>57</sup>

An emphasis on practice, however, leads to different ambiguities. The term "animation" exceeds assumed relations to a specific technique or visual style. In the past, definitions of animation focused on motion but were technique-specific, thus reflecting a limited grasp of what animation was and could be. Exemplary definitions include "a motion picture made by photographing successive positions of inanimate

objects...[and] animated cartoon, a motion picture made from a series of drawings simulating motion by means of slight progressive changes".<sup>58</sup> In fact, animation is as visually varied in technique as well as consequent visual style as fine art is. The field of animation is comprised of sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, collage, digital art, 2-D and 3-D computer imaging and is constantly developing due to changing technology.<sup>59</sup>

In her examination of definitions of animation from the perspective of representational forms, Furniss has suggested that "all animation may be placed within a continuum between *mimesis* and *abstraction*".<sup>60</sup> Since digital animation now enables the creation of photographically-appearing hyperrealist imagery, this raises a central issue in the discussion of animation as well as animated documentaries, namely the relationship between animation and live-action cinema.

The relation between animation and cinema is a complex one. A dominant view of many media theorists is that the optical devices of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that synthesized the motion of drawings paved the way for cinema, which utilized similar concepts to photography.<sup>61</sup> In fact, before the term "motion pictures" caught on, films were called "animated pictures".<sup>62</sup> The idea that cinema originates from animation places film ontologically as a subfield of animation, Alan Choleddenko asserts, since every live-action film "animates" still-image photographs.<sup>63</sup>

The emergence of digital cinema has led to a new merging of cinema and animation. Where cinema may once have been defined by lens-based recordings of reality, the computerization of cinema in the digital age facilitates the modification of individual frames and entire scenes so that even though the photographic appearance may be maintained in form, the images shown were never filmed.<sup>64</sup> Manovich explains that

seen in this context, the manual construction of images in digital cinema represents a return to the pre-cinematic practices of the nineteenth century, when images were hand-painted and hand-animated... Consequently, cinema can no longer be clearly distinguished from animation. It is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a subgenre of painting.<sup>65</sup>

Manovich thus goes so far as to assert that "born from animation, cinema pushed animation to its periphery, only in the end to become one particular case of

animation".<sup>66</sup> To return, then, to the issue of definitions, some theorists claim that, through the "triumph" of animation over cinema and other media, "animation" itself is actually reduced into "nothing" by "becoming everything".<sup>67</sup> Caroline Parsons finds that the neutralization of "animation" as a term means the loss of a critical tool "which could help to explicate the changing ontology of digital cinema".<sup>68</sup> In contrast, award-winning gaming-oriented animation artist Tom Jantol has coined the term "anymation", which does not distinguish between varied animation techniques and instead is entirely goal-oriented.<sup>69</sup> Manovich also refuses to define animation as clear-cut and instead sees it as a combination of forms in an ever-expanding field. He describes animation as

a set of principles and techniques...[used] to create new techniques, new production methods, and new visual aesthetics. Therefore, it is not worthwhile to ask if this or that visual style or methods for creating moving images that emerged after computerization is animation or not. It is more productive to say that most of these methods were born from animation and have animation DNA, mixed with DNA from other media.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, the photographic and the graphic met again on the contemporary computer screen.<sup>71</sup> It is for this reason that the screen is an essential element in my own definition of animation and discussion of animated documentaries.

As I will show in the next chapters, since my work focuses on non-photographically-realistic animated imagery, the screen is also what differentiates between the physical world of the spectator and animated worlds whose imagery and movement cannot be seen anywhere but on screen. The screen--as dividing element between animation and the physical world of the viewer--is thus an essential element in understanding how the use of animation eventually becomes accepted, as I claim, as documenting the world of the viewer.

Although the traditional, theological interpretation of animation may seem of little relevance to any study of contemporary animated imagery, a sense of magic or wonder may still be part of animation's legacy as a world of imagination and/or fantastical spectacles otherwise un-visualisable as moving, "living" forms. Or, as Phillip Kelly Denslow puts it, "what is animation if not the desire to make real that which exists in the imagination?"<sup>72</sup> The idea of "animated worlds" derives from a

conference and anthology of the same name that reflected upon the "realms of cinematic experience that are accessible to the spectator only through the techniques available in animation filmmaking".<sup>73</sup> The infinite possibilities of visual styles and content "brought to life" through movement and hence different from what may be seen and/or is possible in the physical world creates a gap between the two so-called "worlds". It is this gap, I claim, that has an important role to play in differentiating animated imagery from the physical world of the viewer. Hence, any discussion of animation's validity as a documentary language needs also to address this gap. Nichols' distinction between documentary and fiction asserts that documentary addresses "*the* world in which we live rather than *a* world imagined by the filmmaker".<sup>74</sup> This corresponds with Brian Wells' definition of animation, which also differentiates between the animated world and that of the viewer.

In his attempt to define the key properties of animation, Wells points to those specific characteristics of animation which express its supposed separateness from the lived physical world of the viewer. Wells defines animation as existing "in a recorded state of being", "exactly as its creator committed to creating it".<sup>75</sup> He questions whether animation can exist in the same time and space as its viewers or if it is rather relegated to another dimension, "a dimension of 'projected' time and space that one might perceive as 'other-timeness' and 'other-spaceness' existing parallel to our 'real-timeness' and 'real-spaceness'?"<sup>76</sup> Where Wells argues against the idea of animation in shared time and space, claiming that animation recorded in real time would be live-action, I propose that the "worlds" of animation and the physical are in fact slowly *converging*. The convergence of these worlds is due, I would suggest, to factors including the growing uses of animation in multiple fields, the increasing use of animation as a main form of visualisation within the virtual realities of today and, as I will explore in my last chapter, which discusses real-time animation such as the GPS—a device that simultaneously translates physical movement into the "other space" of animation--a growing trend to use the aesthetics of the virtual in the depiction of the physical.

Because animation *looks* different from the physical world, it can be perceived as "not real" or fictional when used in documentaries. This cultural characteristic is, however, now in the process of redefinition. It is my argument that today's technologies demand a reconsideration of key binaries including the opposition between live action and

animation and between the worlds of the physical and the animated. My goal is to show that animation can no longer be considered artificial, or rather that photography *and* animation are both synthetic.<sup>77</sup> I will further claim that animated documentaries can be direct representations of contemporary digital realities without nearing any mimetic form based on the physical. The contemporary technological cultural context of my research offers new definitions of realities through the analysis of virtual worlds whose documentation requires visual languages of representation that exceed the capabilities of photography and are not limited to the capturing of physical referents. Furthermore, I will show that, as visual culture changes and animation is used for new forms of expanded realities and their documentation, these same visual languages are being used to depict the physical as well, thus making their "artificial" nature seem less so, despite its visual break from photographic imagery. Within this context, ways of seeing and scopic regimes will also enter my discussion, as will the possible repercussions of the changing believability of documentary aesthetics today.

### **Conclusion**

In this first chapter, I have demonstrated the growing experimental nature of documentaries today and the field's expanding definitions. I have also exposed the limitations of existing definitions of animation and its relationship to physical reality. It is generally held that, where photography captures realities, animation generates them. According to Greenberg, this results in a definition of animation in which a key element is absence, because instead of basing imagery on the presence of referred-to physical objects (i.e. indexicality), animation can create them from nothing.<sup>78</sup> This supposed "absence" of protagonists or referents is then used to question the validity of animated documentaries. My research investigates, complicates and challenges this idea. I instead argue that, although a visually absent physicality may indeed be a key element in animation, the protagonists are not obliterated and made to seem "absent". Instead, other modes of representation, which coincide with the animation, such as audio interviews or interactivity, induce a new sense of presence. In the former, this presence refers to the documented protagonists whereas in the latter, such as in animated documentary games, the participation of the user bestows a perception of presence upon the protagonist through player-avatar connection. As I shall go on to demonstrate, the varying forms of presence in animated documentaries are what in fact enhances their status as engaging and consequently believable forms of

documentary for they serve to maintain an inherent "liveliness" rather than becoming a distanced and desensitizing "image only" that breaks with the complexly real world of the spectator.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 31.
- <sup>2</sup> Hila Peleg, "New Practices Across Disciplines", *Berlin Documentary Forum Web Magazine*. (2010): 6, accessed July 4th, 2010, [www.BDF\\_magazine\\_web\\_e.pdf](http://www.BDF_magazine_web_e.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 12.
- <sup>4</sup> See Mark Nash, "Experiments with Truth: The Documentary Turn", *Experiments with Truth* (Philadelphia: Fabric Workshop and Museum, 2004).
- <sup>5</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 12.
- <sup>6</sup> It is therefore no surprise that in a rapidly changing technological world, in the post 1989 and post 9/11 age, the documentary is a prevalent form, covering such topics as globalization, migration, surveillance, the war on terror, political, epistemic and economic instabilities and popular uprisings.
- <sup>7</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 16.
- <sup>8</sup> For more information see the Atlas Group website, [www.theatlasgroup.org](http://www.theatlasgroup.org).
- <sup>9</sup> See Alfredo Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism* (Chicago: Intellect Press, 2009).
- <sup>10</sup> Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*, 31.
- <sup>11</sup> John Corner, "Documentary Studies: Dimensions of Transition and Continuity", in *Rethinking Documentary*, ed. Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 19-25.
- <sup>12</sup> John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (Lois Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 13.
- <sup>13</sup> Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), 11.
- <sup>14</sup> According to Cynthia Poremba, the term "actuality" "tends to operate un-problematically as a reality that is present, material, tangible and/or specific". See Cynthia Poremba, "Real/Unreal: Crafting Actuality in the Documentary Videogame" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2011), 5. As I will show in my analysis of animated documentaries, in the contemporary digital world, the relation of realities to the physical is changing, making a material-based definition of actuality problematic. In this sense, animated forms, although still mediated, emerge as a significant site for the depiction of realities that are digital rather than physical.
- <sup>15</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 14-15.
- <sup>16</sup> Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*, 28, 32.
- <sup>17</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2006), 36, 38.
- <sup>18</sup> See Elizabeth Armstrong, ed., *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013); Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009); John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption* (Manchester: Manchester university Press, 1998).
- <sup>19</sup> Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty", *A Prior* 15 (2007): unpaginated, accessed March 20, 2009.
- <sup>20</sup> Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 137.

- <sup>21</sup> These issues will be elaborated upon in later chapters.
- <sup>22</sup> The theorization of animation as both forms of index, trace and deixis, are based upon Charles Sanders Peirce's theoretical conceptualization of the index, which are covered in chapter 5.
- <sup>23</sup> Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*, xi.
- <sup>24</sup> Michael Renov, *Theorizing Documentary* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 21.
- <sup>25</sup> Nora M. Alter, "Memory Essays", in *Stuff It*, ed. Ursula Biemann (New York: Springer, 2003), 13-14.
- <sup>26</sup> In this context it is worth mentioning Chris Meigh-Andrew's explanation about the diversity of video art, which in the past was distinctly differentiated from film but which today "can adopt a multitude of formats and, like television, video has the ability to contain a diversity of other forms. In its latest digital manifestation, video embraces photography, sound, film, graphics and architecture. By extension, video can contain cultural forms as diverse as narrative story-telling, documentary, theatre, dance, music, virtual reality and animation, reaching out to new and as yet undefined forms such as interactivity and non-linearity. Digital video is now rapidly eradicating the boundaries between cinema and television, making the distinction irrelevant to everyone but the most devoted purist". See Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art* (New York: Berg, 2006), 277.
- <sup>27</sup> Ursula Biemann, "The Video Essay in the Digital Age" in *Stuff It*, ed. Ursula Biemann (New York: Springer, 2003), 8.
- <sup>28</sup> Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong, ed., *Rethinking Documentary* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 6.
- <sup>29</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Some Paradoxes of Political Art" (lecture at the conference Home Works III in Beirut, 17-24 November 2006).
- <sup>30</sup> Andre Mayer, "TIFF Documentaries Mix Fact with Fiction", *CBC News*, September 5, 2012, unpaginated, accessed January 12, 2013, [www.cbc.ca/news/arts/story/2012/09/04/f-hybrid-documentaries-tiff-2012.html](http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/story/2012/09/04/f-hybrid-documentaries-tiff-2012.html)
- <sup>31</sup> D. Graham Burnett, "In Lies Begin Responsibilities", in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 194.
- <sup>32</sup> This will be elaborated upon in my discussion of realism in chapter 6.
- <sup>33</sup> The word was introduced on the fake American news program *The Colbert Report* on October 17, 2005. Elizabeth Armstrong, "On the Border of the Real" in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 34.
- <sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Armstrong, "On the Border of the Real", 34.
- <sup>35</sup> Kaywin Feldman, "Foreword", in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 6.
- <sup>36</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make believe: Parafiction and Plausibility" in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 138.
- <sup>37</sup> This can be understood as a contemporary parallel development of Roland Barthes' argument regarding the death of the author and consequent birth of the reader.
- <sup>38</sup> These cultural characteristics' influence on new directions of documentary practice will be elaborated upon in chapter 7.



<sup>39</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Art and Interpretation: An Anthology of Readings in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Eric Dayton (Peterborough: Broadview, 1998), 383-386. Manovich explains that at the end of the 1950s Structuralism shifted the focus to the text itself as a system of semiotic codes whereas after 1968 a shift to the reader emerges through psychoanalysis, Apparatus Theory in film studies and Reception Theory in literature. See Lev Manovich, "Post Media Aesthetics", (2001): 8, accessed June 10, 2010, available on manovich.net or <http://www.alice.id.tue.nl/references/manovich-2005.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Jack Ellis, *The Documentary Idea: A Critical History of English-Language Documentary Film and Video* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), 7.

<sup>41</sup> Joost Raessens, "Reality Play: Documentary Computer Games Beyond Fact and Fiction", *Popular Communication* 4 (2006): 220. Joost Raessens uses Roger Odin's term to explain the way spectators view works through a documentary or fictionalizing perspective, which can be produced by individual spectators depending on the information/experience they wish to gain from the film, or by the textual and contextual instructions indicated by the film, which stimulate certain viewing lectures. See Roger Odin, "A Semio-pragmatic Approach to the Documentary Film", in *The film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. W. Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 227-235.

<sup>42</sup> Dai Vaughan, *For Documentary: Twelve Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 84-5.

<sup>43</sup> For more information on the unclear boundaries between animation, cinema, new media and special effects see Stephen Keane, *CineTech Film, Convergence and New Media* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michele Pierson, *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Dan North *Performing Illusions* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008); Martin Barker and Thomas Austin, *From Antz to Titanic Reinventing Film Analysis* (London: Pluto Press, 2000). My thanks to the SAS discussion group and their useful comments on the topic and to Malcolm Cook who turned my attention to varied non English terms in the discussion of animation definitions.

<sup>44</sup> This definition was part of a presentation titled "Real-Time Animation and Data Visualization: Redefining Animation and the Animated Documentary" I gave at the *Re-defining Animation Society for Animation Studies 2013 annual conference* at University of Southern California.

<sup>45</sup> Even though contemporary techniques such as Motion Capture blur the boundaries between the two, using captured physical motion combined with rendered imagery, the final image is one that could not have been seen in the physical world, which is why it is still included in my definition. For an excellent article that explains the complexities involved in such technologies, see Yacov Freedman, "Is It Real...or Is It Motion Capture?: The Battle to Redefine Animation in the Age of Digital performance", *The Velvet Light Trap* 69 (2012): 38-49.

<sup>46</sup> Raz Greenberg, "The Animated Text: Definition", *Journal of Film and Video* 63:2 (2011), 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Greenberg, "The Animated Text", 4.

<sup>48</sup> Greenberg, "The Animated Text", 4.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Wells, *Animation – Genre and Authorship* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2002), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, accessed March 20, 2013, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>51</sup> Brian Wells, "Frame of Reference: Toward A Definition of Animation", *Animation Practice, Process & Production* 1:1 (2011), 14.

<sup>52</sup> This is a partial list. For an elaborated account of the term's etymology and lexicology, see Donald Crafton, "The Veiled Genealogies of Animation and Cinema", *Animation*, 6:2 (2011): 97-98.

<sup>53</sup> Crafton, "The Veiled Genealogies", 98.

<sup>54</sup> It is important to note that movement also differentiates animated documentaries from graphic novels and comics such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, to which they may often be compared.

<sup>55</sup> Wells, "Frame of Reference", 17. These discrete units of time are known in animation as "frames".

<sup>56</sup> Wells, *Animation – Genre and Authorship*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (London and Montrouge: John Libbey, 1998), 5.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Kelly Denslow, "What is Animation and Who Needs to Know? An Essay on Definitions", in *A Reader in Animation Studies*, ed. Jayne Pilling (London: John Libbey, 1997), 1.

<sup>59</sup> It is for this reason that my research does not focus on a specific representational aspect of animation, such as drawing, for it would overlook the diversity of techniques that are part of the field, shifting the research in a different direction and the larger claim I am trying to make about animation's contemporary use in documentary. However, since drawing is, historically, the origin of animation, a relation to drawing as based on a criterion of indexicality that differs from photographic indexicality will be discussed in Chapter 5 and in my conclusions, in regard to my differentiation between pre-photographic and post-photographic documentary logic and aesthetics.

<sup>60</sup> Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Crafton, "The Veiled Genealogies", 94. For more on early cinematic and pre-cinematic vision machines and apparatuses and their relation to the development of the moving image see Chris Darke, *Light Readings: Film Criticism and Screen Arts* (London and Montrouge: John Libbey, 2000), 178.

<sup>62</sup> Denslow, "What is Animation", 4.

<sup>63</sup> Alan Cholelenko, "Animation (Theory) as the Poematic: A Reply to the Cognitivists", *Animation Studies* 4 (2009): 3 and Alan Cholelenko, "Who Framed Roger Rabbit, or the Framing of Animation", in *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*, ed. Alan Cholelenko (Sydney: Power Publications, 1991), 212-13. This view is contested by Donald Crafton who claims that emphasizing the mechanical similarities between animation and early cinema does not necessarily bind them together for cinema is only one of the possible trajectories in which these technologies could have developed. He explains that numerous cultural traditions were subsumed into cinema, such as narrative, songs and more, without being defined as precursors to the field. He suggests that early apparatuses could be seen as the basis for the trajectory that led to digital games, which will also be part of this research. Crafton, "The Veiled Genealogies", 101,107.

<sup>64</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 295.

<sup>65</sup> Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 295.

<sup>66</sup> Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 302.

<sup>67</sup> The lack of a clear definition raises questions about conceptualizing animation in such a wide sense may be regarded as cartoons, digital arts, new media imagery, post-photography, simulations, computer graphics, multi-media and more. Steve Reinke claims that "in the end, animation is triumphant, but at the price of an enormous leveling: It becomes everything". For more on this see Steve Reinke, "The World is a Cartoon: Stray Notes on Animation", in *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema*, ed. Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2005), 11.

For an ongoing discussion on this topic and views about the consequential need for a new language of cinema, see Caroline Parson, "Why We Need a New Language of Cinema", *The Society for Animation Studies Blog*, accessed July 22, 2013, [www.blog.animationstudies.org/?p=397#comment-575](http://www.blog.animationstudies.org/?p=397#comment-575)

- <sup>68</sup> Caroline Parson, "Why We Need a New Language of Cinema", unpaginated.
- <sup>69</sup> Michael Nitsche, "Machinima as Media" in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 114.
- <sup>70</sup> Lev Manovich, "Image Future" in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 89.
- <sup>71</sup> Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 311.
- <sup>72</sup> Denslow, "What is Animation", 4. I think "making real what is in the imagination" may also easily be applied to political activism, for one of many comparisons, and an idea which will be elaborated upon in my discussion of virtuality and realism but for now the emphasis in this definition on the imaginary as separate from the real serves the point I am trying to make.
- <sup>73</sup> Suzanne Buchan, ed., *Animated 'Worlds'* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006), vii.
- <sup>74</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), xi. (emphasis in the original).
- <sup>75</sup> Wells, "Frame of Reference", 22.
- <sup>76</sup> Wells, "Frame of Reference", 24.
- <sup>77</sup> For they both create a world but the visual nature of the representation seems to still be part of a labeling system which contrasts the assumed basic trait of documentary that aims to create something deemed as "reality" rather than as representation.
- <sup>78</sup> Greenberg, "The Animated Text", 5. This focus on absence does not take into account the role absence has in all representational systems where the sign, gesturing to a certain referent is also inherently the very opposite of that referent, testifying to its absence. John Ellis has noted the themes of presence and absence in film and photography claiming that cinema makes the absent present by saying "this is was". John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Radio* (London: Routledge, 1982), 58-59.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theoretical Contextualization of Research

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I will review the existing literature on animated documentaries. In her 2011 article 'Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion: Towards a Framework for the Study of Animated Documentary', Annabelle Honess Roe has already provided an in-depth historical survey of the amalgamation of animation and documentary.<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I am, however, primarily concerned to question the widespread theorization of animation as being in some way incompatible with documentary. The thesis places its emphasis upon the changing uses of and attitudes towards animation, which I claim are in the midst of a cultural paradigm shift that is reshaping the reception of animation in the context of documentary, and strengthening its growing believability. Where Honess Roe provides a useful overview of the varied ways in which animation has been historically used in documentary, I focus on more recent developments in the theory, practice and contemporary context of animated documentary.<sup>2</sup>

#### Historical Precedents and Central Themes in the Theorization of Animated Documentaries

Animated documentaries throw into question Bill Nichols' distinction between documentary and fiction as a differentiation between "*the* world in which we live rather than *a* world imagined by the filmmaker".<sup>3</sup> In animated documentaries, the content is based on *the* world whereas the form is *a* world fashioned creatively by the animator.<sup>4</sup> This raises important questions, once again, about the relationship between representations and realities. It also demands a re-examination of theories that address the crisis of representation. Several early publications about animated documentaries accordingly attempted to validate the existence of this new hybrid sub-genre: Gunnar Strøm and Sybil DelGaudio, for example, demonstrated the lack of objectivity in all documentary works and argued that definitions such as Grierson's about documentary as a creative treatment of actuality could potentially include animation as well.<sup>5</sup>

Although documentary conferences and film festivals have included screenings and sessions devoted to animated documentary since the early 1990s, academic research on animated documentaries in the past fifteen years has been sparse.<sup>6</sup> What few studies there have been have mostly been written from the perspective of animation, rather than documentary, studies.<sup>7</sup> A number of recent publications and events may, however, be considered indicative of a growing academic interest in the topic. In 2011, Suzanne Buchan and Jeffrey Skoller edited a special issue of *Animation: an Interdisciplinary Journal* dedicated to animated documentary. Also in 2011, the first conference on animated documentary, "Animated Realities" was organized by Jonathan Murray and myself and was held in Edinburgh, including presentations by over 40 international speakers. In 2013, Annabelle Honess Roe published the first scholarly monograph on the topic of animated documentaries. The first anthology of essays on the topic of *Animated Realities*, edited by Jonathan Murray and myself, will be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2015, to which I contribute a chapter as well as co-write the introduction. As academic interest in the subject expands, so too does the range of questions being asked. Although theoretical justifications and explorations of the topic are still rooted in the complex field of documentary studies, recurring questions revolve around the issues of indexicality, animation and new technologies, the personal, movement and performance, new cinematic realism and the authority of new forms of documentaries. This thesis examines these questions in specific relation to new media and technological contexts.

In attempting to offer a critical overview of an emerging and increasingly complex field, it can be useful to begin by considering how definitions of animated documentary have changed and shifted.<sup>8</sup> Writing in 2005, Sheila Sofian defined documentary animation as "any animated film that deals with non-fiction material".<sup>9</sup> This definition raises the murky issue of "non-fiction", and points in turn to the blurred boundaries between documentaries, journalistic, informational, educational and even propaganda works. The longstanding assumption that animation must stand in complicated relation to documentary stems from a persistent bias associating animation with fantasy, light-hearted subject matter and exaggerated humour, due to the content produced by early pioneers of animation and the worldwide dominance of American commercial animation.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, Gunnar Strøm proposed that "'animation' is a technical term and 'documentary' is a content-related approach, and...the terms do

not exclude each other".<sup>11</sup> In 2011, Brian Wells defined animation as, first of all, "a visual communications medium".<sup>12</sup> Although the term "medium" has been a troubling factor in the definition of animation, Wells's emphasis on communication echoes Strøm's assertion that animation is a means for a message, whose content may vary widely.

Writing in 2003, Strøm favoured a pragmatic approach that defines "animated documentary" as "a documentary in which an extensive part – at least fifty percent – is animated".<sup>13</sup> I find the idea of measuring proportional content a limited one. Rather than classifying works based on the percentage of their visual materials and techniques, Honess Roe is interested in the hybridization of animation with documentary, revealing "a desire to explore beyond the traditional boundaries of what each media form could individually hope to portray".<sup>14</sup> While I share Honess Roe's interest in the ways in which animated documentaries expand the breadth of documentary and facilitate new forms of explorations, her important and formative research about animated documentary films does not investigate the same areas as my work, which focuses specifically on the visual cultural characteristics of the networked digital age. Honess Roe defines animated documentaries as "an audiovisual work [that has]: a) been recorded frame by frame in order to create a sense of motion; b)...is about *the* world rather than *a* world wholly imagined by its creator; and finally c)...been presented as a documentary by its producers and/or received as a documentary by audiences, festivals, critics, and so on".<sup>15</sup> Whilst I agree with this definition on a conceptual level, the new aspects of visual culture such as documentary games and real-time animation included in my work exceed formal contexts of documentary displays and raise questions about distinctions between *a* world and *the* world depicted through animation in digital contexts. My research focuses in particular on the evolving uses and increasing omnipresence of animation in contemporary culture and the implications that this may have for the theorization of animation in documentary.

First, however, I should like to examine the main trends in the history and theorization of animated documentary. Winsor McCay's *The Sinking of the Luisitania*, made in 1918, has been named the "first animated documentary". The film portrays the torpedoing of a British ship by a German submarine in 1915. Depicting an event that was not photographically recorded, McCay used animation as reenactment in order to

provide visual imagery based on survivors' testimonies. Significantly, the film includes an intertitle stating "from here on you are looking at the first *record* of the sinking of the *Luisitania*".<sup>16</sup> According to the OED, "To record" is "to indicate, relate or mention" as well as "to witness or preserve and register in some permanent form".<sup>17</sup> This definition has shared meanings with "to document" and, I claim, is related to the issue of indexicality, the relation between animated image and referent, upon which I will later elaborate. *The point is that "to record" is both denotation as well as evidence, a confusion that persists until today.*

In *The Sinking of the Luisitania*, the allusion to "a record" of the events would appear to indicate that animation was considered as suitable a live-action technique as news imagery.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the graphic style of the animation mimicked newspaper illustrations of the period, and acted as a "quasi news-reel...[with] an imagined narrative...(selectively) determined in retrospect".<sup>19</sup> This demonstrates the changing conventions of non-fictional visual presentation. However, the inclusion of still photographs of well-known figures who perished on the ship, a stylistic decision often used in contemporary animated documentaries as well, seems to weaken the assertion that animation was accepted as documentary representation, for it appears that, in order to justify or strengthen the work's documentary status, more conventional means such as photographs had to be included.<sup>20</sup> The creative and experimental aspects of the works are just as evident, complicating its assumed documentary status.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the informational approach and photography-influenced aesthetics make way for a clearly imaginary perspective on events made possible by animation, namely an underwater view that includes frightened fish avoiding the approaching torpedo. Paul Wells consequently claims that the film shares characteristics with tabloid journalism and propaganda, rather than the more objective approach expected of conventional documentary.<sup>22</sup> These analyses point to the varied non-fictional informational categories according to which such films may be classified. However, Honess Roe claims that, "perhaps [*The Sinking of the Luisitania*] is an early example of the fallacy of the presumption, or goal, of documentary objectivity and a demonstration that the form can make an argument and have a strong point of view".<sup>23</sup> It is indeed difficult to draw clear boundaries between documentary or informational explorations—hence, my emphasis on viewer reception and the viewer's definition of a work. Rather than dismissively branding a work as "non-documentary" or

completely fictional, I propose that it is more interesting to acknowledge the ways in which a representation may be considered informational but the reception of that representation may gradually change so that is perceived as an argument, propaganda or even, eventually, deception. These unclear margins and consequent variations in the reception of the information are, my research shows, still the case today. This is especially true at a time when critics claim that the use of media for solely informative purposes is diminishing.<sup>24</sup> There seems to be less interest in news media or news content (the so-called "hard news") and more interest in a "softer" approach wherein information and entertainment are combined.<sup>25</sup>

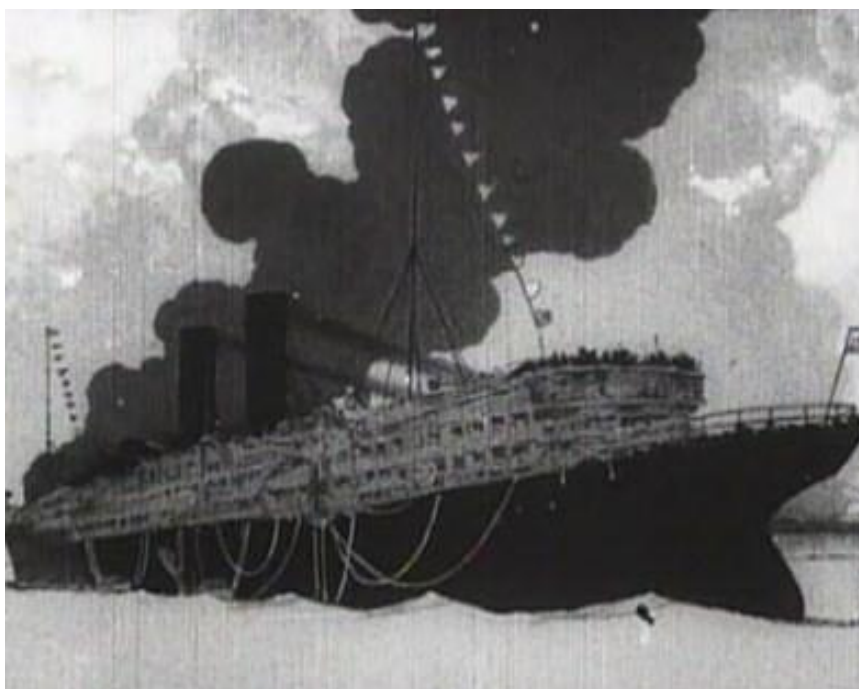


Figure 3.1: *The Sinking of the Lusitania*, 1918, by Winsor McCay

Honess Roe explains that the "documentary context has provided an arena for experimentation with the animated form".<sup>26</sup> Animation has also been used to substitute for live action, to enhance clarity through illustration and provide emphasis. During the First and Second World Wars, animated films were used as education and training for soldiers. In the 1942 film *Stop that Tank* by Disney, for example, animation is combined with live-action and is used to explain about the use of anti-tank rifles through its depiction of the mechanics of the rifle.<sup>27</sup> During the same period, animation was also used for propaganda purposes to rally public support for the war. Capitalizing on the popularity of Disney's 1937 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Disney's 1941 *Seven Wise Dwarfs* features the dwarfs marching to the Post



Office in order to purchase war savings certificates, using fictional worlds to comment (and potentially shape) the historical "actual" world.<sup>28</sup> The association of animation with humour and entertainment helped in the reception of animated propaganda's messages.<sup>29</sup> In works such as Frank Capra's 1942-5 *Why We Fight* series, animation was also used to explain and persuade of America's role, aims and advancement in World War Two. Using animation for emphasis, clarification and illustration of information, diagrams, maps, statistics and symbolism were brought to life in order to simplify complex processes and to contribute to the underlying messages.<sup>30</sup> Animation in these instances is used as a denotative sign for explanatory purposes, even if it does not act as evidence. The difference between these signifying approaches and abilities will be discussed in relation to indexicality in Chapter 5.



Figure 3.2: *Seven Wise Dwarfs*, 1941, by Walt Disney

The pedagogic potential of animation was explored as early as 1910 when Thomas Edison used animated sequences in his instructional films, and it has been used ever since as a form of representation that facilitates the visualization of concepts, as well as those aspects of the physical world that are not visible to the human eye and/or are photographically un-capturable.<sup>31</sup> In one notable early example, Dave and Max Fleisher used live-action and animation with explanatory texts in their 1923 *Einstein's Theory of Relativity*.<sup>32</sup> As I will go on to show, this use of animation persists into the contemporary situation. The animated documentaries produced in the 1950s by the National Film Board of Canada contributed to the field by their willingness to

abandon documentary conventions, to experiment with form, and to allow the topic of the film to determine the animated stylistic choices used.<sup>33</sup> Animation has also been used to engage with subversive material, utilizing allusion and symbolism as a means of circumventing censorship.<sup>34</sup> In fact, these abstract, suggestive and experimental uses of animation in documentaries have more recently begun to play an increasingly interpretive role in the depiction of realities. This has become quite popular in socio-political animated commentaries such as the works of The Nursery Film Group, in which animation is used as an accessible language of representation in order to present an argument about social-political realities. The existing social order is challenged by the work's message and its novel means of representation, a topic I will expand upon in my discussion of realism in Chapter 6. Similarly interpretive uses of animation are evident in the presentation of subjective accounts of events and explorations of memory in animated documentaries such as Ann Marie Fleming's 2010 *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, which is based on the 2006 autobiographical graphic novel by Bernice Eisenstein. Eisenstein explores her own identity through the experiences and memories of her parents, both Auschwitz survivors.



Figure 3.3: *I was a child of Holocaust Survivors*, 2010, by Ann Marie Fleming

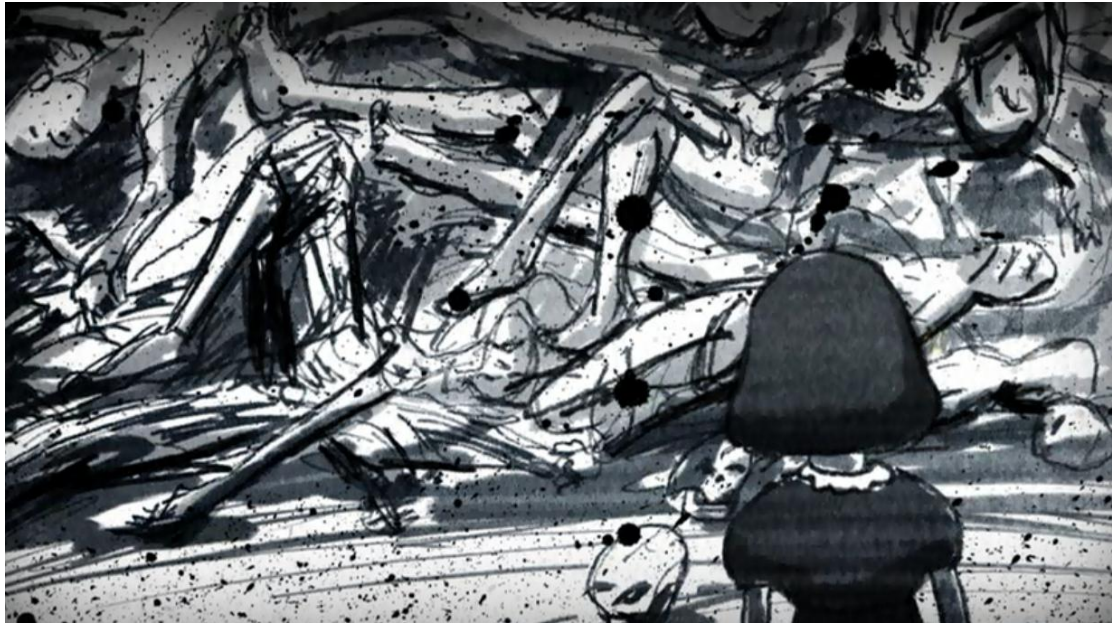


Figure 3.4: *I was a child of Holocaust Survivors*, 2010, by Ann Marie Fleming

While acknowledging their somewhat blurred parameters, in his 1997 analysis of the relationship of animated documentaries to reality, Paul Wells outlined four modes of categorization for animated documentaries. *The Imitative Mode*, whilst varied, intends to educate, inform and persuade, basing its representational logic on existing conventions of live-action documentary. *The Subjective Mode* aims for a multi-faceted and relative expression of "the real" that exposes the falsehood of objectivity by emphasizing the gap between aural and visual components, the fine line between real and surreal, and often illustrates subjective perspectives on realities. *The Fantastic Mode* continues *The Subjective Mode's* exploration of what animated representation enables and rejects both "objective reality", naturalistic graphics and realism as "only a relative point of comparison" that "is refuted as an ideologically charged (often politically corrupt) coercion of commonality". *The Post-Modern Mode* questions epistemological possibilities and "[prioritizes] pastiche, rejecting notions of objective authority, and asserting that 'the social', and therefore 'the real', is now fragmentary and incoherent".<sup>35</sup>

In his 2004 examination of the storytelling aptitude of animated documentaries, Eric Patrick proposes four different categories. *The Illustrative Structure* depicts "events based on historical or personal evidence". *The Narrated Structure* uses a script and voiceover to narrativise the represented occurrence. *The Sound Based Structure* also relies on an aural link to the depicted reality but, in opposition to *The Narrated*

*Structure*, uses found or un-manipulated sound recordings as a basis for representation. *The Extended Structure*, similarly to Wells' postmodern approach, emphasizes subjectivity, the symbolic, the surreal and metaphoric in order to consider traditional storytelling techniques in animated documentaries, expanding the epistemological possibilities through creative approaches.<sup>36</sup>

In 2011, Honess proposed three key functions of animated documentaries. *Mimetic and Non-Mimetic Substitution*, in which the absence of filmed material is solved through the use of animation, the style chosen based on the content at hand and the creator's preferences. *Mimetic Substitution* offers knowledge on what could potentially have been seen directly, while in *Non-Mimetic Substitution* the animation adds meaning through its chosen visual forms. *The Interpretive Function* is used to engage with concepts and states of mind that are difficult or impossible to represent through live-action footage.<sup>37</sup> She claims that "while all documentaries purport to teach us something about *the* world, animated documentary broadens the epistemological potential of documentary by expanding the range of what and how we can learn".<sup>38</sup>

The existing critical literature on animated documentaries has thus concentrated exclusively on animation's capacity to act as substitute for un-photographed footage of physical-world events or its ability to allow for the inclusion of subjective or fantastical accounts of experiences. In placing its emphasis upon animation's uses and roles in documentary today, my work differs from this existing scholarship in several crucial ways. My research examines recent shifts in the theorization of documentary and the technological modifications that have remodelled the contemporary world. The documentary turn in visual culture has led to rich and experimental explorations in the field of documentary, in which fact and fiction are continually blurred. I accordingly propose that animation should be considered a reflexive documentary aesthetic, due to what I deem are its masking capabilities. As I will explain, animation can be used to reflect upon the general mistrust of data in an informational era where as much seems to be concealed as is continually exposed and ever-present. Secondly, my research investigates an additional realm of un-representable experiences that require visualization by other means than the subjective or imaginary aspects of documentary works previously discussed. I focus on the virtualization of culture, and propose that technology has introduced new elements of reality that require new

aesthetics of documentation that exceed the capabilities of the photographic and transcend mimesis, topics which I will elaborate on in later chapters.

### **Animated Documentaries as Masking**

Animation creates a surface appearance or barrier that differentiates what is seen on screen from what is seen directly in one's physical surroundings.<sup>39</sup> This difference raises not only questions about animation's veracity, but also about what distinguishes animation as a novel and thought-provoking form of representation. This central characteristic of animation in documentary contexts is, as I see it, a form of masking.

The concept of masking contributes to an understanding of the emerging field of animated documentaries because masks, like animation in this context, facilitate a convergence of exposure and concealment. Animation presents information in a masked manner by creating an alternative visual stylization to physical appearance and a graphic visualization for the non-physical, what cannot be or was not photographed. As such, animation both conceals by covering what *could* be photographed but also exposes by "giving face" to what otherwise would not be photographically representable. The notion of masking furthermore brings centre stage the issue of visibility versus invisibility: masking the visible may make it invisible or differently visible, while animation as masking can also provide visibility to the otherwise invisible. The concept of invisibility has been explored in many different ways within contemporary art, visual culture and cultural theory. I want, however, to emphasize that the masking capability of animated documentaries uses visual signifiers, vital in an ultra-visual era, to point to the invisible.<sup>40</sup> Not only can animation, like all non-photographic representational devices, make the invisible present, so too can it "bring it to life" through movement. Additionally, with regard to in/visibility and absence/presence I will demonstrate that, whereas animation can be theorized as embodying absence, since it generates rather than captures reality, it does not only obliterate protagonists but can also represent them differently, making them "present" for the viewers in varied ways.

Secondly, by utilizing varying masking effects as a documentary aesthetic, animation can thus represent the multiplicity and intricacy of contemporary realities while engaging with them differently, exploring myriad interpretational and representational possibilities that aim to expose new angles. Thirdly, as I will analyse in my discussion

of realism in Chapter 6, animated depictions of realities can also create a sense of distancing and defamiliarization that can change a viewer's perspective, in a manner similar to masks, which break with the quotidian and which can influence a change in behaviour.

Finally, the idea of masking also links this new form of documentary with the current discourse of exposure and concealment in relation to journalism and wider information systems, which has been imperative to the contemporary discussion of documentaries. Maureen Burns explains that a sense of the invisible "evokes what we both don't know and the traces, the excess, the supplement to our established structures of knowledge. It is the crumb line leading us to a suspicion that there must be more to the visual landscape".<sup>41</sup> The tension between the visible and invisible, as the known and unknown in relation to animation's ability to disguise and expose, positions animation as a highly relevant reflexive documentary aesthetic that expresses central concerns in contemporary information culture. As I will explain, animation can be used to reflect upon the general mistrust of data in an informational era in which as much seems to be concealed as is continually exposed and ever-present.

The post 9/11 "national-security" era is defined by ubiquitous surveillance, government secrecy and consequent demands for privacy and anonymity. It is, therefore, vital to understand this tension between exposure and disguise in contemporary information culture. Disguise and exposure have become recurrent themes that clearly also influence the information systems of which documentaries are part. As organizations or loosely-defined groups such as Wikileaks and Anonymous and other digital whistle-blowers or cyber-leakers throwing "info-bombs" lead a war on secrecy, confidentiality versus disclosure is a crucial matter. The examples of Wikileaks and Anonymous are useful in evaluating the future directions of informational representations as they expose the interactions between professional and networked journalism. While Wikileaks did end up collaborating with some of the world's most influential newspapers, media responses to Wikileaks also illustrated how professional journalists defended their domain against the alternatives of Wikileaks, and reasserted their authority.<sup>42</sup> Information leaks have also exposed how the media, which in the past may have been believed to be watchdogs of democracy, are actually cooperating with larger systems of control so that belief in them is also

changing. It is particularly noteworthy in this respect that whistleblowing has even been proposed as a new brand of journalism:<sup>43</sup> a proposition which exemplifies the idea that, in today's orders of power, disguise facilitates the exposure of information.<sup>44</sup> Documentaries that succeed in embodying this contemporary characteristic of information arenas, with a dual sense of partial revelation and simultaneous withholding of information, are a salient feature of the times.

In order to avoid scrutiny and to protect one's privacy, information must be disguised and encrypted. I posit a connection between these emerging tendencies and the way in which information is depicted in animated form--as a visual rendition of the notion of encrypted messages. For example, as a way to battle face recognition technologies for surveillance purposes, easily-created animated depictions of subjects and events could potentially act similarly to website word verification systems meant to "prove you're not a robot", based on the premise that a highly stylized font is recognizable to humans but not to technological means. This issue is of central concern to contemporary documentaries, which implicitly reflect upon meta-systems of information and knowledge production today. It is for this reason that I propose that animated documentaries, which reveal information while also maintaining a sense of veiled concealment, have a vital role to play in the field of documentary.



Figure 3.5: Anti-robot and spam website word verification systems

In deploying the concept of masking in order to categorize the applications of animation in documentary contexts, we must differentiate between the masking *effects* of animation as a formal language, and the masking *uses* of animation in a documentary context. In today's computerized and networked information age, the *effects* of animation as a masked visual language may explain why animation can be a useful tool in the field of documentary. First of all, in the current image-saturated

technologized world desensitized viewing demands novelty in order to attract attention. In an era defined by a surplus of visually transcribed information, the visual variety of animation and its ability to create unusual and iconic moving imagery as a new visual "face"--a mask-- contributes to its visibility, circulation and marketing potential. Secondly, animation techniques increase the animator's agency by easily eliminating or adding visual elements to simplify and/or enhance a message.

Animation can thus be understood as a mask that excludes aspects deemed unnecessary while accentuating others. This specifies animation's informative potential and explains its frequent use in educational contexts and historical propaganda. It also acknowledges animation's efficacy in communicating cross-culturally, rendering it a global visual language. Appropriately, Wells defines animation as one of the most important creative forms of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>45</sup> Thirdly, animation's many uses in online games, music videos, and advertising contexts as well as its lingering childhood associations, mean that, despite the possibility of it being considered "inauthentic" in a documentary context, animation can be seen as a covertly disarming, accessible and appealing mode of representation. The disparity between a visual "childish" mask that is created for a variety of adult-oriented, non-fictional content produces a unique representational mechanism that has potentially powerful spectatorial effects. Finally, as will be elaborated upon in following chapters, the development of digitally virtual, non-physical environments utilizes animation as a visualizing element.

An excellent instance of these characteristics may be glimpsed in the use of animation in in-flight safety films. In these short films, animation serves as an attention-grabbing and memorable cross-cultural representation that accentuates certain messages whilst eliminating others, thus facilitating multi-layered reception modes for animation.<sup>46</sup> The important informational aspects of emergency conduct are transferred in a simplified and memorable way, whilst the child-associated stylized animated visuals incorporate humour and enable the inclusion of fantastical elements (such as a fairy-stewardess or sheep passenger, for example) to distance the event from the world of the viewer, thus preventing potential panic upon departure. Animation thus provokes a double manner of viewing whereby cognitive information can be easily transferred in a clear manner whilst stylistic choices can influence the emotional reception of the information portrayed.





Figure 3.6: *El Al Airlines* in-flight safety film, 2014

I began this thesis by examining the powerful effect upon the viewer of using animation combined with non-childhood-oriented and non-fictional content. The idea of animation as masking that can potentially detach cognitive and emotional reception has a different effect upon viewers of animated documentary. Curator Okwui Enwezor claims that the amalgamation of arts and politics tends to "transform ethical concerns into aesthetic devices and vice versa... the critical ability of such actions to effect change remains, thus far, in remand".<sup>47</sup> According to this view, the use of the novel aesthetics of animation instead of photographic imagery risks overshadowing the political urgency of many documentaries. On the other hand, if we assume that by "non-art-related" Enwezor means more conventional visual depictions of non-fiction, this seems to imply that the "*non*-amalgamation of arts and politics" would not have this effect. But is this the case? Is photography necessarily a privileged means of conveying horror and urgency, thus potentially inducing change?

Susan Sontag in her formidable book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, explores visual representations of atrocity and their effects on viewers.<sup>48</sup> She explains that a degradation in the affective potential of photographic representation means that the ethical and political meaning received from photographic and naturalistic imagery already has diminished effects on viewers. Other writers have subsequently

emphasized the lack of connection, let alone an empathic one, between viewers and viewed. Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht asserts that heightened media coverage distances those viewers who are sheltered from the material pressures of history, both economically and security-wise, and who receive information about the world through mediated visual culture. In his view, this creates "an attitude to the world in which the observer of world events is taken to be placeless, disembodied, omniscient, and impartial. 'The world' is something the observer approaches with conceptual tools, not a place where he or she lives in or through which he or she is formed...[viewing] it from above...the world is seen here as an image, separate from the observer, or as a 'world picture', as Heidegger once put it".<sup>49</sup> People are, therefore, seen in their physical frame, yet are not perceived as physical in the sense that materiality can create a sense of empathy. Zygmunt Bauman's description of "civil indifference" is also relevant here. "Civil indifference" is "an ominous symptom of our contemporary relationship to people who we do not know...by which the other is relegated to the background of our attention".<sup>50</sup> This is part of the modern art of "mismeeting", which lacks sympathy and solidarity with others, and that Bauman describes as a "technique for de-ethicalizing the relationship with the other".<sup>51</sup> These views are important to my argument because they illustrate that, as Sontag explains in her discussion of photography, even a mimetic image of protagonists in horrific situations no longer necessarily evokes the empathetic and documentary viewer response I introduced earlier. The relation between these ideas and animation's masking effects will be explored in the following case study. Through a close reading of the 2008 film *Slaves* by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn, I shall explore the question of whether or not animation necessarily obliterates the humanity of protagonists by masking their appearance and thus sentencing them to dehumanization and invisibility.

The masking *uses* of animation resemble aspects of previously described classifications in which animation is positioned as an alternative representation to photography. This is similar to Honess Roe's conceptualization of mimetic and non-mimetic substitution. However, I think it is useful to consider how these different representations engage with the information involved and the consequent effect that they may have on viewer reception. Animated documentaries can be seen as a *disguise* when they provide concealment, an "alternative face", for physical aspects of life that can potentially have a direct indexical reference. Animation can be used to

maintain the anonymity of protagonists, to shield spectators from horrific, live-action imagery, and even as a form of censor. On the other hand, animated documentaries can serve as a form of *exposure* when engaging with information for which live-action footage is, for various reasons, unobtainable. In the following case study, I shall examine the multi-layered capacity of animation to convey information through masked imagery and the ways in which it evokes viewer believability and trust despite the novelty of its forms.

### ***Slaves* by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn**

The 2008 Swedish film *Slaves* by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn is an animated documentary about child slavery in the civil war of Southern Sudan. The work is based on audio interviews with Abuk and Machiek, aged nine and fifteen, who talk about their abduction and enslavement by government-sponsored militia. Due to the dangers of filming in Sudan and obtaining live-action footage, the subjective nature of the experiences and memories described, and the fact that the protagonists are underage and their anonymity therefore needs to be protected (either by law or ethical imperatives), animation acts as a useful tool for the telling of their story. This award-winning film serves as a case study through which to analyse the varied theoretical propositions surrounding the use of animation styles in documentary, and to explore how a constructed and disguising visual element actually exposes more than it hides.<sup>52</sup> A close reading of the film reveals how animation creates additional layers of meaning by raising questions and attendant notions of doubt. In *Slaves*, animation is used to present what would otherwise be impossible to show whilst simultaneously reflecting upon the use of the medium.<sup>53</sup> By analysing this work through the prism of masking, I intend to show how this animated documentary evokes believability and convinces the viewer of its documentary status.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to explain, however, that rather than defending animation as a believable documentary aesthetic, I am instead interested in the techniques used to evoke such believability. Even though, as I will continue to demonstrate throughout this thesis, I find animation to be an increasingly appropriate documentary language that can no longer be dismissed as fictional, it is also necessary to further understanding of animation's potential spectatorial effects when used in non-fiction.

The changing role and uses of animation today leads to a tension between animation as a desensitizing and obliterating aesthetic versus its capabilities to re-sensitize and evoke engagement and identification on behalf of viewers. These possible and contradicting tendencies obviously influence the reception of the documentary content and reliability of the work. In this case study it is thus my intention to use varied theorizations of the field in order to focus on the potential influence that the use of these novel aesthetics in non-fiction may have on viewers and their relation to the documentary content at hand.

In order to comprehend how the information depicted is positioned as a reliable basis for documentary viewing, we have first to identify the film's "warranting devices". The term "warranting devices" was coined by Steven Lipkin to identify the ways in which docudrama "validates...assertions...that 'warrant' that what we are watching is (to some degree) true".<sup>55</sup> These "anchors to realities" and/or familiar stylistic documentary conventions increase a sense of truth value and help steer the viewer into a documentary "mode of spectatorship" or "documentarizing lecture".<sup>56</sup> What, then, are the authenticating measures used in the film *Slaves*?

First of all, *Slaves* brands itself an animated documentary in the opening credits of the work. Although this is an obvious and perhaps insufficient tactic on which to rely, philosopher Noël Carroll claims that most films arrive already labelled so that audiences know how to receive them.<sup>57</sup> Secondly, in what Wells defines as *The Imitative Mode*, the work relies on documentary film conventions in order to validate its status. The film opens with textual information about the civil war in Southern Sudan, which is presented alongside photographs of (assumedly) Sudanese children, thus placing the film in its socio-political context. The incorporation of photography into the opening scenes legitimizes the use of new aesthetics by grounding the work in a more conventionally accepted aesthetic of documentary. The photographic opening scenes create a bridge between the physical world of the spectator and the animated film world, encouraging the viewer to accept the work as a reliable documentary. For example, in the opening photographs a silhouette of a red-tinted tree and house is visible at the right-hand side of the frame. Throughout the film and its changing animated styles and scenes, the same red tree and house are retained, all in the exact same position within the frame, evoking a sense of continuity between the initial photograph and the following animation. The importance of this element is clarified

by Vivian Sobchack, who describes documentary viewing as transforming the space of the "irreal" into the space of the real, connecting the on-screen imagery with the physical environment of the viewer.<sup>58</sup> This shared sense of space and the imbrication of on and off-screen spaces corresponds to my conceptualization of the creation of a shared sense of presence of both viewer and viewed.



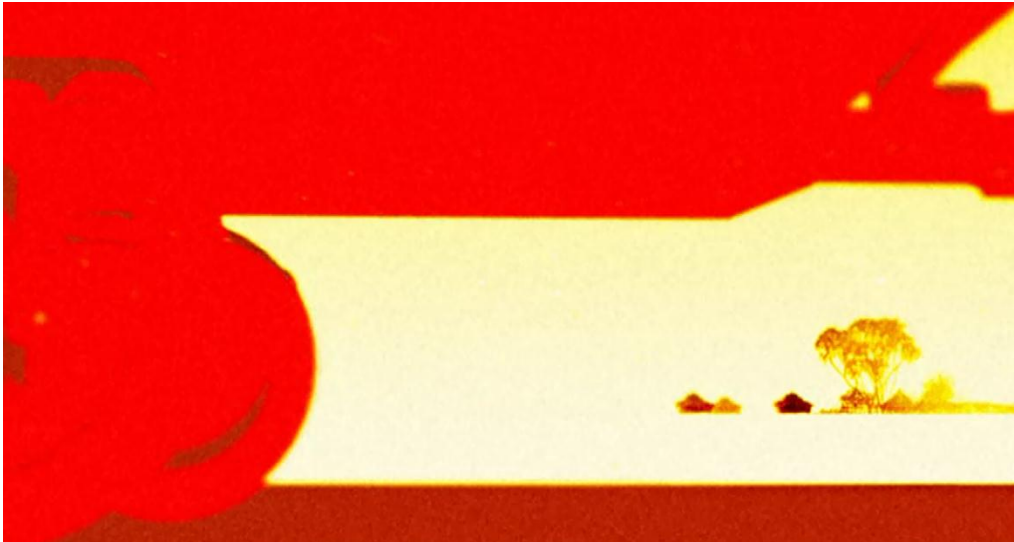


Figure 3.7-9: *Slaves*, 2008, by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn

The image of the tree at the bottom right corner creates continuity between scenes, both photographed (first image) and animated (second and third images)

Not only are photographs used at the start of the film but the formal characteristics of those photographs are maintained and incorporated into the animated sequences, creating a sense of continuity and thus strengthening our sense of the believability of the animation. In its stylistic choices, the animation is in some ways similar to the initial photographic imagery. The opening animated sequence, for example, is made to resemble filmed footage by imitating the visuals of a "camera" that is being adjusted, focusing and re-focusing on the protagonists about to be "filmed".

As several theorists of animated documentaries have pointed out, although discussions of indexicality often tend to concentrate on the visual aspects of one's physicality (hence the repeated comparison of animation to photography), it is important to consider other aspects of the physical trace, such as the aural as well as the visual.<sup>59</sup> In *Slaves* the opening photographs of children playing soccer are accompanied by the sounds of children's chatter and laughter. This is an example of what Patrick has named the *Sound Based Structure* storytelling mode of animated documentaries, which relies on an aural link to the visually depicted reality. In most of the interview, the subjects are shown speaking in concurrence with the audio soundtrack of the interview. The film, combining interview scenes with the visualization of the children's stories, fluctuates between Patrick's *Sound Based*

*Structure*, which relies on un-manipulated sound recordings, and his *Narrated Structure*, which uses voiceover to narrativise.

The importance of the audio in visually masked animated documentaries is emphasized by Renov, who points to the bias towards the visual regime in the existing field of documentary studies, which overlooks the important oral/aural link between documentary film and physical realities.<sup>60</sup> Documentary conventions have changed and evolved over time with the interview now commonly integrated into documentary.<sup>61</sup> In Michael Chion's writings, the "accousmatic voice", whose unseen source is important as an omnipotent presence, is somewhat akin to the documentary "voice of god".<sup>62</sup> Even though the interviewed protagonists are not seen in *Slaves*, the soundtrack acts as index of their embodied existence, which retains its palpable trace of physical presence. The sense of absence that has been so extensively emphasized in existing theorizations of animation is, therefore, thrown into dispute in animated documentaries, which often combine recorded audio elements with animated visuals.

Somewhat similarly to Patrick's differentiation between *Narrated* versus *Sound Based structures*, Nichols differentiates specific, embodied knowledge and general disembodied knowledge, distinguishing also between spoken knowledge and unspoken knowledge, which can only be conveyed through the body itself.<sup>63</sup> Chion points out that the materiality of the voice is usually overlooked, confusing it with speech, and thus affording insufficient attention to the expressive potential of the voice.<sup>64</sup> The aural aspect of the interview is, if not using voice-actors, a form of embodied and unspoken knowledge that can convey more than just the words uttered.<sup>65</sup> In *Slaves*, the emphasis on the audio aspects is made conspicuous by the animation, which visualizes the children's testimonials as well as picking up every extraneous sound made by the recording device, such as the decision not to delete from the sound track disruptions such as the small child sneezing. This contributes to the sense of authenticity and emphasizes those aspects of the voice and the corporeal utterings of sound that go beyond speech. This emphasis on the voice rather than just on speech works to spotlight the body producing the oral testimony so that a sense of presence is felt despite the documented body remaining unseen.

My aim is not to defend the credibility of animated documentaries, but rather to analyse the means by which they work to secure a sense of credibility. It is, therefore,

important to keep in mind that, while the audio can contribute to animated documentaries' credibility by inducing believability based on its status as trace, this effect is just that – believability, not fact. *Slaves* begins with a dialogue between the interviewers about how to fix the malfunctioning microphone, during which the visualization is based on photographic logic. The animated imagery is styled like a camera filming the silent occupants in the room, showing the children and accompanying adults waiting for the technical difficulties to be resolved. This sets the stage for the viewer. Even though the children do not speak, they are "shown". This arguably hints at the gap in animated documentaries whereby viewers are shown elements that may seem reasonable but in fact there is no proof or reason why this is what should be shown. In this case, despite the fact that the only audio evidence or link to the real is that of the interviewers, who could potentially have been recording in an empty room, the other protagonists are depicted as present, which may or may not have been the case. This is analogous to Wells' *Subjective Mode*, which aims to expose the falsehood of objectivity or the "real" by emphasizing the gap between aural and visual components. It further serves as a reminder that, as Doel and Clarke claim, it is no longer possible to tell "reality" and "fiction" apart.<sup>66</sup> This in itself is an unsettling statement about documentation and the inability to reach definite knowledge but also an indicator that animation, through its unique characteristics, draws attention back to these central issues.



Figure 3.10: *Slaves*, 2008, by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn



In 1993, Nichols observed that whereas in the past "documentary" suggested complete, final, disembodied knowledge and facts, more recently, embodied knowledge of corporeal, specific, subjective and the everyday has begun to receive more attention.<sup>67</sup> Animation has the potential to expose what would otherwise remain un-representable when engaging with immaterial aspects of life, such as subjective accounts of events. Themes depicted in animated documentaries are often very personal, as is exemplified by Ruth Lingford's 2010 *Little Deaths*, about experiences of orgasm, or John Canemaker's 2005 *The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation* about the filmmaker's father.<sup>68</sup> This emphasis on the personal, for example, is characteristic of what Wells describes in his *Subjective and Fantastic modes*, Patrick describes in his *Extended structure* and Honess Roe defines in her *Interpretive function* or, as I see it, a mask that "gives a face" when no other perceivable visualization exists. In *Slaves*, viewers are presented with a visualization of the children's worst memories, fears and nightmares, each styled differently, which I claim also contributes to the work's believability.

When dealing with horrific or unusual events, animation may be more successful than photography in conveying a fuller spectrum of the protagonist's experience. While the camera may be presumed to obtain a direct record of events, it cannot simultaneously record what the witness' eyes see as well as what this vision evokes on a personal level.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, animation provides additional insights into what could have been presented photographically, which allows the viewer to gain a more comprehensive sense of the portrayed experience of the (implicated) witness. In other words, the way in which the animated "face" given to what is otherwise "faceless" is stylized not only provides visualization but can add many layers of meaning. In those scenes in *Slaves* that portray the child's nightmare about the loss of his mother, the highly expressive and realistic animated form used for the interview sequences is replaced by elementary colours and basic shapes symbolizing a human form. The harsh contrast between the almost blindingly white head-shape and the black background manages to visually render the tension and anxiety of the dream, whilst the elementary colours and shapes befit the most primal horror of losing a mother. The shapes of the scar on the protagonist's face act as befitting visual metaphors for the pain and trauma described. One need not be shown all physical characteristics; on the contrary, visual

masking and metaphoric representation may construct a sense that viewers are "stepping into" the protagonists' innermost thoughts.



Figure 3.11: *Slaves*, 2008, by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn

Chion claims that "sight is generally what we rely on for orientation".<sup>70</sup> Hearing the personal stories of unseen protagonists may indeed leave a gap in the orientation and interpretation of what is presented on screen. I wish to point out, however, that the lack of photographic representation actually offers freedom for associative interpretation, in a manner similar to the difference between reading a book and watching a film. In the case of spectators exposed to fragments of data, the absence of visuals leaves a gap open to be fulfilled, with the potential of actively involving the viewer's imagination and interpretation, and demanding enhanced cognitive interaction in order to create meaning. What remains, I find, is to listen to the individual "behind" the image, which strengthens the "fleshing out" of the representation and points to additional, unseen aspects.

In their analysis of Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir*, Ohad Landesman and Roy Bendor claim that the use of animation intensifies the somatic experience of war for the viewer because it places viewers in a particular situation whilst still allowing room for their own interpretations. Honess Roe says something similar when she claims that "animated documentaries offer us an enhanced perspective on reality by presenting to us the world in a breadth and depth that live action alone cannot...[It] invites us to imagine, to put something of ourselves into what we see on screen, to make

connections between non-realist images and reality".<sup>71</sup> Landesman and Bendor claim that what is depicted in *Waltz with Bashir* through visceral hand-drawn images and strange movement is also distant enough from direct photographic representation that viewers can be released into their own imagination. The film becomes a *mnemonic device* that activates "our embodied engagement with the filmic text and constitutes an active participation in the war's collective perception".<sup>72</sup> In other words, animation can visualize un-photographed events, as is also the case in *Slaves*. Both viewer and viewed thus become implicated in the animated visuals since the protagonist's description acts as basis for the imagery, which is then left open for interpretation so as to solicit the involvement of the viewer's imagination as well. In other words, by not being photographic, there is no so-called (assumed) finality to the claim "this is how it was", thus leaving room for the viewer's imagination, and implicating her in the work in a new way. Not only does this complicate existing readings of animation as an aestheticized perspective that overshadows content and that relies upon a sense of the protagonists' absence but it further evokes a new form of viewer encounter. In this sense, the protagonist "behind" the masking visuals becomes a personalized version constructed by the viewer. The viewer becomes further engaged by the integration of the "self" into the cognitive construction of the "other", creating a link between them.

In contrast, it is also useful to take into account what I deem is the changing role and visibility of animation in non-fiction today where what it may have induced in the past is in a process of change. What I mean is that whereas the surprise of using animation in non-fiction content may have strengthened viewer awareness towards what is not shown, especially in comparison to photography, the reaction may slowly be changing as the novelty of animation in non-fiction wears off. On one hand then, using animation may evoke a desire to "fill in the gaps", which can potentially create heightened viewer involvement. On the other hand, as viewers become increasingly accustomed to animated representations of actual events, animation can be seen as just another form of representation. Thus, through a potential escalation in the acceptance of animation as documentary representation, its spectatorial effects may change. This is so because, through an acceptance of animation, its masking characteristics may seem less obvious and problematic, decreasing the need to "fill in gaps" and consequently weakening the potentially immersive characteristic of

animated documentaries since they may be received as more straightforward, rather than requiring interpretation. Also, whereas animation may allow freedom of imagination, it may also limit it by providing (partial and obviously stylized-interpreted) visuals that do not induce any more work on behalf of the viewer who accepts the animated visuals as sufficient, albeit non-naturalistic, representations of the documented people and events. Rather than the non-naturalistic aesthetic encouraging viewers to "fill in the gaps" and immerse themselves in the content and its interpretation then, the protagonists are depicted as not real, obliterating them further and leaving them in solely animated mode, rather than encouraging the spectators to further personally explore the content shown.

As Enwezor has acknowledged, a concern exists about the use of new aesthetics whose novelty may subsume the content. In such instances, a masking effect may obliterate the humanity of the protagonist, condemning them to dehumanization and invisibility. Implicating the viewer can potentially enhance immersion, which may result in a sense of believability towards a work deemed "true enough". In this sense then, involving the viewer also has an important ethical component, vital in an era of omnipresent visuals and desensitized viewing that reduces humans to an "image only", a concern especially pertinent to experimental representation such as animation. By focusing mainly on the novelty of the image and its effects, the content depicted may take second place, weakening the documentary relevance and influence of the work. This is obviously a potentially dangerous outcome, especially if the content depicted is of an urgent political nature.

Alternatively, however, new aesthetics may also have a contradictory effect that engages viewers in additional ways. Enwezor claims that novel documentary artwork configurations raise entanglements of ethics and aesthetics because they create a "truth process", which encourages reflexive and analytic spectatorship.<sup>73</sup> Whereas on one hand today's networked mediascape requires active users that participate in knowledge production and dissemination, the excess of information today may also lead to different approaches that respond to the fatigue and detachment that are potential effects of superfluous information. Accordingly, as Fred Ritchin describes it, contemporary media does not engage viewers in thoughtful and serious conversation, but rather endlessly bombards its audience with competing and trivializing imagery, which aims at the automatic establishment of authenticity rather than continual

collaboration with the audience.<sup>74</sup> The mode of documentary Enwezor describes is one that "doesn't confront the spectator with un-negotiable facts...Instead, it creates a possible space for an ethical encounter between the spectator and the other".<sup>75</sup> Enwezor describes such encounters as based on human rights and as demanding "a common ground within an unevenly globalizing world".<sup>76</sup> In order to create such an encounter and a sense of intersubjective viewing, both subjects must be "present" on some level, even if there is no physical or other direct interaction between them.<sup>77</sup> Implicating the viewer as "filling in the gaps" of animated representation that hide and disclose, show but also point to what is unseen, involves a sense of awareness and presence that may be one form of such encounter that involves viewers in ways that prevent a desensitized gaze.

Enwezor's notion of an ethical encounter between viewer and viewed as the basis for documentary viewing opens a new form of documentary spectatorship. I wish to consider if and how such a sense of encounter can be created in animated documentaries, despite their use of masked images in place of photo-indexical naturalistic imagery. The viewer may be implicated, but is the protagonist obliterated, or is there rather a sense of presence on the protagonist's side despite their masked visual representation? Sobchack asserts that documentary viewing originates from the viewer's identification with the on-screen protagonists through a realization of their shared materiality and mortality.<sup>78</sup> As he or she comes to comprehend their shared bodily limitations, the viewer creates a connection with the protagonist on-screen, leading to a sense of responsibility and thus ethical awareness through the documentary. According to Sobchack, the issue of ethics is what fundamentally differentiates identification with non-fictional protagonists from identification with fictional characters.<sup>79</sup> The question then arises as to whether the ethical dimensions of documentary viewing can be evoked when the physical form of the documented protagonist, which serves as the basis for identification on behalf of the viewer, is masked by animated imagery?

I would argue that identification is certainly possible. I would even go so far as to propose that animated visuals create experimental channels of identification, which do not rely on the physical body and its appearance, a theme I return to throughout the thesis. In *Slaves* a multi-layered masking effect is created. For example, in both the opening photographs and in most of the animated scenes there is a glaring white

background that in the photographs creates a blinding effect which washes out details and facial features. This blurring of facial features (and similarly the complete removal of the children's faces in a photo that shows only their feet) is an interesting aspect to consider in relation to my theory of masking for it continues throughout the film, despite the changing animated imagery. The use of animation in this film acts as a literal form of masking because it presents the interviewees whilst maintaining their anonymity, presumably because of their young age.<sup>80</sup> In fact, the two children are the only characters who have a dark horizontal line covering their eyes, reminiscent of a Zorro-like mask. Although this could potentially be interpreted in many ways, it is as if a double masking occurs: the characters are both literally masked and masked by the animation. As a result, instead of simply hiding the protagonists' identities, the act of concealment itself is specifically highlighted. Obliterating a person's face can act as a protection measure but might also serve as a way to evoke invisibility, as a way to de-individualize and de-humanize. In a film that describes enslavement, the dehumanization of victims is certainly an important aspect to consider. However, the complete obliteration of the faces of the enslavers, who are presented as silhouettes, adds additional layers of significance. Once those acting in inhumane manners are also represented as faceless, both victims and offenders can be anyone and everyone. This contributes to the film's significance since the "faceless" protagonists can now not only imply the thousands of un-rescued children still in captivity but also the fact that any person, in horrific circumstances and as history has so repeatedly proved, may be dehumanized by others. The masked representation can also be seen as alluding to the grotesqueness of evil that all humans are potentially capable of, rather than referring to specific immoral individuals, indirectly alluding to the idea of the banality of evil. An animated mask can thus create a "generic person", which on one hand may facilitate distancing and desensitization, but on the other hand can evoke an understanding of more general truths that surpass the documented individual.

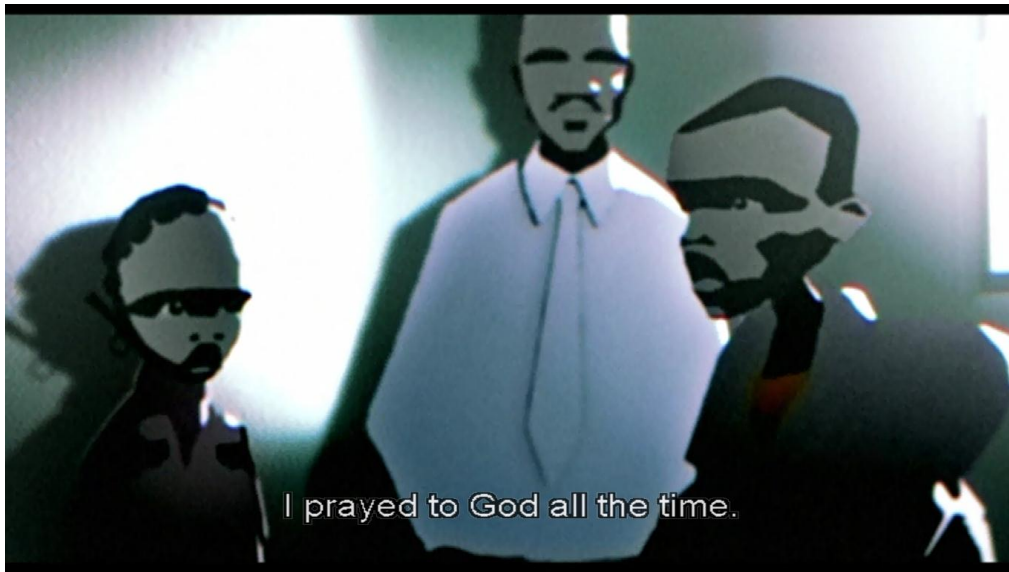


Figure 3.12: *Slaves*, 2008, by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn

The interviewed children are the only characters whose eyes are surrounded by black shadows, obliterating their facial features even further



Figure 3.13: *Slaves*, 2008, by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn

The enslaver, unlike the child protagonist, is depicted in silhouette form

An additional meaning of the masked representations of animation may also allude to a wider characteristic of our times, one that is often covered in animated documentaries, perhaps specifically for this reason. According to Jacques Rancière, the organizational system of law "separates those who take part from those who are

excluded, and it therefore presupposes a prior aesthetic division between the visible and the invisible".<sup>81</sup> Many recent animated documentaries do indeed deal with the figure of the refugee, whose depiction as unseen or invisible through animation may symbolically allude to their physical "invisibility" due to incarceration in detention centres and legal "invisibility".<sup>82</sup> The tension between absence and presence, representation versus disguise and obliteration, is central here because the refugee who is deprived of political representation is, inherently, politically invisible--the subject of "Bare Life", to use Giorgio Agamben's concept. The refugee, Agamben asserts, "deserves...to be regarded as the central figure of our political history".<sup>83</sup> The refugee is "deprived of any political representation, [and has come] to metaphorically embody the vicissitudes of globalization. He or she is the one who inhabits the fissures and gaps between states and corporations, and is left to the precariousness of a deregulated global sphere unbound by any rule of law".<sup>84</sup> As such, the refugee's political lack of representation and visibility raises the question about documentary aesthetics and the relation between documentary and the real, politics and poetics – how do and should these subjects be represented aesthetically and what significance does this visual representation hold? It is in this sense that the animated representations for these subjects are so potent, I think, because they enable the visualization of what took place in their homelands, often dangerous conflict areas which are therefore less reported upon visually. When tackling the issue of detentions or obliteration from society, animation can create visibility whilst maintaining anonymity for protection as well as commenting specifically on the refugee's simultaneous absence/presence in today's globalized world. Different forms of disguise and their meanings therefore become a central element of these animated films as they expose underlying messages about the people presented, the moral questions at hand, and the filmmaker's role as portrayer of the events.

The question then arises as to whether animated documentaries deny self-representation and maintain the political invisibility of those often unseen or marginalized in society, eliminating the ethical stance that a more direct encounter with an individual in a similar situation may evoke. Rancière asserts that in order to destabilize existing systems of control, those who are denied visibility and political presence must be reinserted and "seen".<sup>85</sup> I find that a further reconsideration of animation's representational capabilities is in order because the portrayal of animated



figures as invisible or as generic humans changes due to specifics of content and representation – when the personal attributes or experiences of a subject are exposed, they become individualized nonetheless. Where the enslavers in *Slaves* are depicted in silhouette form, for example, the child protagonists are depicted as more human and therefore potentially identifiable, thanks to character design.<sup>86</sup> Although different from photo-indexicality and despite animation's potential to evoke a sense of masked disguise, animation can thus nevertheless induce a sense of realism – and this is a choice that may or may not be made. By using animated styles that strengthen a sense of realism, a complete break with the physical world of the viewer is prevented, which may contribute as a warranting device to the film's documentary status. In this case study, even though mimesis is not attempted stylistically, a highly expressive and realistic representation of the children's characters is still evident. For example, the younger child, Abuk, is portrayed blinking frequently and her recurring eye movements add a sense of human-based naturalism. In this context it is useful to consider Masahiro Mori's hypothesis from 1970 about the Uncanny Valley, a theory in the field of human aesthetics which claims that when human features look and move almost, but not exactly, like those of natural human beings, it causes a response of fear or revulsion among some human observers.<sup>87</sup> This theory is important in animation practice and reception for degrees of mimetic visualization might have an opposite effect rather than evoking identification. It is for this reason that "human enough" or "realistic enough" representations may evoke easier viewer identification than hyper—realistic animated imagery. If we compare the representation of the child protagonists in *Slaves* to, say, blacked-out or pixelated views of depicted subjects, what is central is the degree of plausibility that the image evokes, engrossing the viewer in its content and preventing the protagonist from being perceived as "merely" an animated figure in a fantastical sphere while also having "enough" representational realism to evoke a sense of presence and existence similar to one's own. In other words, the masked representation can indeed reduce protagonists to generic humans or symbols but additional aspects such as these depict them in situations with which the viewer can more easily identify, accentuating parallels and resemblance rather than difference and distance.

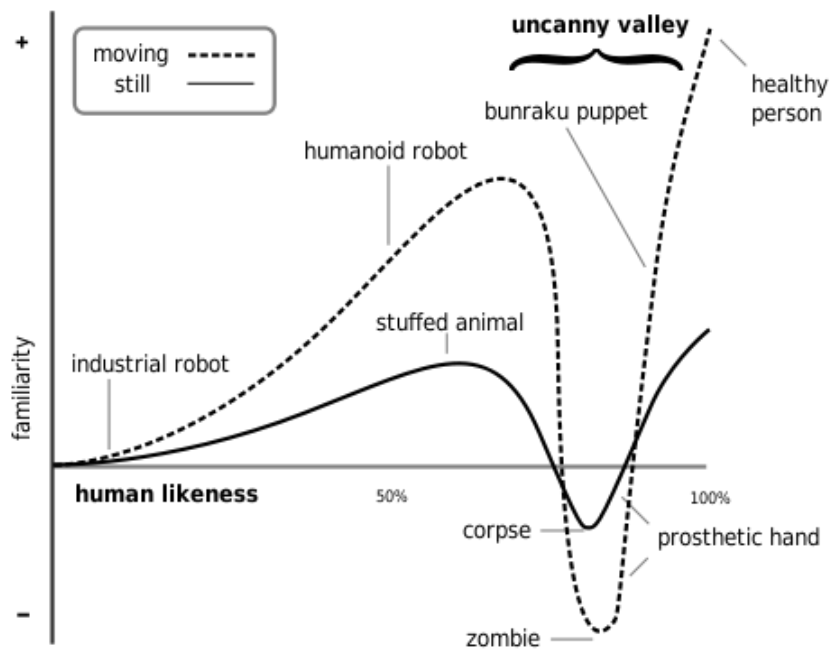


Figure 3.14: A diagram of Masahiro Mori's 1970 hypothesis about The Uncanny Valley

In regard to Enwezor's question about the potentially harmful aesthetic depiction of political content, it must be acknowledged at this point that, although an emphasis on the personal can highlight the individuality of protagonists, it may also disrespectfully expose those protagonists. Such a depiction would impede the form of documentary encounter described by Enwezor, which aims towards equality.<sup>88</sup> The subject of unequal exposure is a central topic in visual culture and identity politics. It is true that one-sided disclosure to a voyeuristic audience can give rise to a sense of "ownership" of depictions of minorities.<sup>89</sup> However, since the interviewed protagonist is not seen, and an animated graphic "stand-in" or avatar is rather used, their anonymity is easily preserved and their dignity maintained. Revealing private stories encourages viewer empathy and involvement through inter-human identification on a very personal and emotional level despite the inability to see the speaker's physical appearance. In this sense, while animated masks may be seen as distancing, an alternative reading is that they may actually facilitate identification rather than inhibit it.

The stylization and visual choices are also a central element in the reception of a work. Honess Roe claims that, in spite of the fact that animated documentaries do not directly represent the physical appearance of their protagonists, they do not lose their political significance or act as a form of disempowerment of their protagonists, but

use instead symbolism and styles of representation to get their messages across, "offering something additional to what we hear on the soundtrack".<sup>90</sup> This is clearly the case in *Slaves* when Abuk describes the insults she received from her enslaver. The visuals here illustrate Honess Roe's *Non-Mimetic Substitution* whereby an event that could have potentially been photographed is given additional meaning through the styles of animation used. Abuk is depicted cowering in one corner of the frame, thus emphasizing her diminutive size. The remainder of the frame is filled by a graphic form of the insult she describes, a derogatory term for her ethnic group, the Dinka. In comparison with the small child, the word is doubled, depicted in large capitalized letters, in garish red and black, overtaking the child completely and thus, through design, depicting the fear and violence of the presented situation, despite its utterly "un-realistic" visualization.



Figure 3.15: *Slaves*, 2008, by David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn

### Conclusion

The research on animated documentaries is a relatively new, but rapidly expanding, field of enquiry. By using existing research models alongside my notion of animation as masking in my analysis of the case study *Slaves* I have shown the complexity and multi-layered significance of animated documentaries. My reading of the film introduces the concept of masking as a useful and stimulating prism through which to investigate this new sub-genre, one which enables a consideration of the stylistic effects of animation as an art form as well as its masking uses in regard to documentary and the more general cultural characteristics this notion evokes.

The degrees of exposure and disguise, which may or may not verge on obliteration, are complex and depend on a more nuanced reading of individual animated documentaries, character design, content, additional visuals, audio, or, as I cover in the third part of the thesis, interactivity and immediateness. Each of these aspects may evoke different forms of representation, and varied possibilities of viewer reception and potential encounters between viewer and viewed, as will be explored throughout the thesis.

If the notion of an encounter promotes involvement, an engaging experience for the viewer is essential, which is why the "artificiality" of animation as a documentary aesthetic that creates the notion of masking is so essential. By stressing the constructedness of representation, the viewer is encouraged to delve deeper, aware of the fact she is only receiving partial information visually and compelled to "fill in" the contours provided. The emphasis on the viewer not only promotes an encounter but also a "truth process", as Enwezor calls it, which links the discussion back to the notion of truthiness (rather than any ultimate truth claims) that demonstrates animation's ability to highlight the multiplicity and complexity of reality and its representations as well as major themes in information culture today. Questioning the claim that non-physically-indexical depictions lead to the obliteration or invisibility of the protagonist, I argue that although this may sometimes be true, the partial invisibility in animated documentaries may also act as an empowering feature for viewers, encouraging them to delve deeper and to satisfy the curiosity provoked by what is referred to yet not shown. This greater engagement in the representation and content can prevent "image only", desensitized, non-ethical viewing which, according to Sobchack and Enwezor, is essential in order to promote documentary viewing.

This emphasis on the central role of the viewer in defining what constitutes documentary as well as in interpreting the complex signification of animation, which may have many and at times contradicting effects on spectatorship, requires a deeper understanding of the varied reception of animation in contemporary visual theory and culture. In the following chapter, I shall outline why a growth of animated documentaries production and theoretical interest has evolved since the 1990s and how this shapes the reception and understanding of animation today.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of the historical precedents for the convergence of animation and documentary see Annabelle Honess Roe, "Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion: Towards a Framework for the Study of Animated Documentary", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6:3 (2011): 215-230.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this chapter were published as Nea Ehrlich, "Animated Documentaries: Aesthetics, Politics and Viewer Engagement", in *Pervasive Animation*, ed. Suzanne Buchan (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 248-271 and the segment about masking was published as Nea Ehrlich, "Animated Documentaries as Masking", *Animation Studies* 6 (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, xi. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>4</sup> In this context it may be useful to reiterate Suzanne Buchan's previously quoted definition of animated worlds as the "realms of cinematic experience that are accessible to the spectator only through the techniques available in animation filmmaking". See Suzanne Buchan, ed., *Animated 'Worlds'* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2006), vii.

<sup>5</sup> See Gunnar Strøm, "The Animated Documentary", *Animation Journal* 11 (2003): 46-63 and Sybil DelGaudio, "If Truth be told, can 'toons tell it? Documentary and Animation", *Film History* 9:2 (1997): 189-99.

<sup>6</sup> Important to mention is Otto Alder, program curator of international animation festivals and director of the animation programme at the Leipzig Festival from 1993 to 2007, where he established the animated documentary (Animadoc) section. For more information on film festivals that spearheaded the inclusion of animated documentaries in their repertoire, see Strøm, "The Animated Documentary": 48.

<sup>7</sup> The earlier research on the topic, between the years 1997-2005, includes (in chronological order): Paul Wells, "The Beautiful Village and the True Village: A Consideration of Animation and the Documentary Aesthetic", in *Art and Animation*, ed. Paul Wells (London: Academy Editions, 1997); Sybil DelGaudio, "If Truth be told, can 'toons tell it? Documentary and Animation", *Film History* 9:2 (1997): 189-99; Michael Renov, "Animation: Documentary's Imaginary Signifier" (paper presented at Visible Evidence conference X, Marseilles, France, Dec 2002); Gunnar Strøm, "The Animated Documentary", *Animation Journal* 11 (2003): 46-63; Eric Patrick, "Representing Reality: Structural/Conceptual Design in Non-Fiction Animation", *Animac Magazine* 3 (2004): 36-47; Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> For more on attempts at definitions see Skoller, "Introduction to the Special Issue": 208.

<sup>9</sup> Sheila Sofian, "The Truth in Pictures", *FPS Magazine*, March 2005: 7-11.

<sup>10</sup> Strøm, "The Animated Documentary": 48 and Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 37.

<sup>11</sup> Strøm, "The Animated Documentary": 47

<sup>12</sup> Wells, "Frame of Reference", 15.

<sup>13</sup> Strøm, "The Animated Documentary": 49.

<sup>14</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 89.

<sup>15</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 8-9.

<sup>16</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>17</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, accessed March 20, 2013, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)

- <sup>18</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 39.
- <sup>19</sup> Wells, "The Beautiful Village", 42.
- <sup>20</sup> The influence of photography is evident also in the stylization of images drawn as if from the perspective of a photographer/witness standing from afar.
- <sup>21</sup> As Honess Roe explains, *The Sinking of the Luisitania* turns from journalistic to hyperbolic through intertitles and the depiction of the "cold-hearted and callous" Germans celebrating the event. Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 40.
- <sup>22</sup> Wells, "The Beautiful Village", 4.
- <sup>23</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 41.
- <sup>24</sup> See D. Buckingham, "New Media, Political Socialization and Popular Citizenship: Towards a New Agenda", *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 14:4 (1997): 344–366.
- <sup>25</sup> See Joyce Neys and Jeroen Jansz, "Political Internet Games: Engaging an Audience", *European Journal of Communication* 25:3 (2010): 227–241; B. Tonn and C. Petrich, "Everyday's Life Constraints on Citizenship in the United States", *Futures* 30:8 (1998): 783–813. The ethical and political aspects of this tendency will be engaged with in later chapters.
- <sup>26</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 35.
- <sup>27</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 45.
- <sup>28</sup> For additional details and examples see Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 42-53; Richard Shale, *Donald Duck Joins Up: The Walt Disney Studio during World War II* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1976).
- <sup>29</sup> Gerard Raiti, "The Disappearance of Disney Animated Propaganda: A Globalization Perspective", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2:2 (2007): 156.
- <sup>30</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 48-49.
- <sup>31</sup> For more on animated education see Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 53-58.
- <sup>32</sup> Richard Fleischer, *Out of the Inkwell: Max Fleischer and the Animated Revolution* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 34-5.
- <sup>33</sup> For more on the use of animation in sponsored informational and documentary productions see Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 58-73.
- <sup>34</sup> For more examples of censorship-oriented uses of animation, Honess Roe focuses on symbolic animation in Eastern Europe, see Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 73-81. A recent example of animation used in a documentary due to censorship is Ali Samadi Ahadi's 2010 *The Green Wave* about Iran's Green Revolution. Since live-action footage was difficult to obtain due to the regime's widespread censorship, the film used information from twitter accounts posted by Iranians and visualized them by using animation.
- <sup>35</sup> Wells, "The Beautiful Village", 40-45.
- <sup>36</sup> Patrick, "Representing Reality", 36-47.
- <sup>37</sup> Honess Roe, "Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion", 215.
- <sup>38</sup> Honess Roe, "Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion", 229 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>39</sup> Although caricatures and stylized representations of actual events can also be said to create a different and meaningful visual façade as representation, animation's movement embodies a sense of life that requires further attention as a characteristic that is central to the way such representations of events are received.

<sup>40</sup> These artistic explorations unfortunately exceed the scope of this research but it is interesting to consider, even momentarily, different kinds of invisibility: Maureen Burns explains that "Although the invisible as a concept has the potential to be all-encompassing, scholars like Dyer and Butler have typically focused on the invisible as that which is unseen, unknown, unacknowledged, unrecognized, misrecognized, marginalized, normalized, non-indexical, unidentifiable, illegible, absent, denied, forgotten, out of focus, taken for granted, hidden or trivialized within a specific perceptual landscape". Maureen Burns, "Invisibility", in *Theorizing Visual Studies*, ed. James Elkins et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 147.

<sup>41</sup> Burns, "Invisibility", 148.

<sup>42</sup> David Leigh and Luke Harding, *Wikileaks* (London: Guardian Books, 2011), 10.

<sup>43</sup> Leigh and Harding, *Wikileaks*, 247.

<sup>44</sup> Arguably, the need for secrecy and disguise in order to acquire and expose information may not be new but as a characteristic of information systems very much part of the reception of information as well, it has definitely become a main feature in contemporary culture.

<sup>45</sup> Wells, *Animation – Genre and Authorship*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Japan Airlines, Virgin America and El Al are three examples of many of airlines using animation for these purposes.

<sup>47</sup> Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité", 77.

<sup>48</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Stefan Jonsson, "Facts of Aesthetics and Fictions of Journalism", in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 182.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Frosh, "Telling Presences: Witnessing, Mass Media, and the Imagined Lives of Strangers", in *media Witnessing*, ed. Paul frosh and Amit Pinchevski (New York: Pgrave Macmillan, 2009), 67.

<sup>51</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, "Effacing the Face: On the Social Management of Moral Proximity", *Theory, Culture and Society* 7 (1990): 25.

<sup>52</sup> The list of awards the film *Slaves* received is extensive, includes several categories, such as "best short film", "best animation" and "best documentary" and is available here: [www.story.se/films/slaves](http://www.story.se/films/slaves)

<sup>53</sup> This case study focuses on animated documentaries of physical occurrences whereas case studies discussed later on also engage with the documentation of the virtual.

<sup>54</sup> Dealing with spectatorship demands clarification that I am not aiming to interpret *how* the work is perceived since all viewers cannot be generalized or assumed to interpret similarly. What I am interested in is the *place* the viewer is given as an authoritative role to create a personalized truth narrative and define the documentary value of the work.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Ward, "Drama-documentary, Ethics and Notions of Performance: The 'Flight 93' Films" in *Rethinking Documentary*, ed. Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008),198.

- <sup>56</sup> Roger Odin has claimed that spectators can produce a “documentarizing lecture” of films, which applies cultural constraints (rather than necessarily internal constraints in the work itself) that dictate how a work is viewed. For more on this see: Roger Odin, "For a Semio-Pragmatics of Film", in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. W. Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 213. Also, Bill Nichols applies a three part definition of documentary that relies on the way audiences engage through a documentary mode of reading which is based on a familiarity with and acceptance of the validity and integrity of these generic modes of representation”. See Craig Hight, "Mockumentary: A Call to Play" in *Rethinking Documentary*, ed. Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 204-5.
- <sup>57</sup> Noël Carroll, *Engaging the Movie Image* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 169.
- <sup>58</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2004), 261.
- <sup>59</sup> The visual trace will be covered in Chapter 5 on indexicality.
- <sup>60</sup> Renov, "Animation: Documentary's Imaginary Signifier".
- <sup>61</sup> Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs, ed., *Between the Sheets, In the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.
- <sup>62</sup> Michael Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 18.
- <sup>63</sup> Bill Nichols, "'Getting to Know You...! Knowledge, Power, and the Body", in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 175.
- <sup>64</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 1, 3.
- <sup>65</sup> Audio interviews are common in animated documentaries and further base them in documentary conventions, as seen in Bob Sabiston's 1999 *Snack and Drink*, Chris Landreth's 2004 *Ryan*, Ardman's 1989 *Lip Sync - Creature Comforts*, SLAG's 2003 *It's Like That*, Liz Blazer's 2003 *Backseat Bingo*, Jonathan Hodgson's 2011 *Wonderland: The Trouble With Love And Sex* and many others. For more on the animated interview see Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 149-207.
- <sup>66</sup> M. Doel and D. Clarke, "Virtual Worlds" in *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space, and Relations*, ed. M. Crang et al. (London: Routledge, 1999), 265.
- <sup>67</sup> Nichols, "Getting to Know You", 174, 181.
- <sup>68</sup> John Canemaker's 2005 film *The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation* portrays a son's communication with his father after the latter has passed away. The work is labelled as a documentary but is an example of content that stretches the boundaries of definition, as is accentuated by the film's title "An Imagined Conversation", questioning what documentary works can engage with and how.
- <sup>69</sup> Jane Blocker, *Seeing Witness: Visuality and Ethics of Testimony* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 54.
- <sup>70</sup> Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 17.
- <sup>71</sup> Honess Roe, "Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion", 217.
- <sup>72</sup> Landesman and Bendor, "Animated Recollection", 367.



- <sup>73</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 19. Such as works by Walid Raad or Chantal Akerman.
- <sup>74</sup> Ritchin, *After Photography*, 139, 161.
- <sup>75</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 19.
- <sup>76</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 20.
- <sup>77</sup> The notion of an encounter may be confusing as it may allude to simultaneous presence and interaction of all parties but, since Enwezor describes this notion in regard to photographic and moving-image documentary-oriented contemporary art, the one-sidedness of it is implied, focusing on the viewer's reception of the work.
- <sup>78</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 173.
- <sup>79</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 178, 283-4.
- <sup>80</sup> Maintaining their anonymity is made an obvious intention when the last names of the protagonists are "beeped" out in both the audio and translation, preventing viewer ability to identify the children.
- <sup>81</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 3.
- <sup>82</sup> To name several examples: the 2002 film *Hidden/Gömd* by the same filmmakers as *Slaves* about Giancarlo, a hidden refugee child who has no permit to stay in Sweden, describing what it's like to be chased by the police; The 2003 film *It's Like That* by SLAG (Southern Ladies Animation Group) is based on the voice recordings of three refugee children held in mandatory detention in one of Australia's Immigration Detention Centres under the Migration Act 1958. They were interviewed over the phone by ABC journalist Jacqueline Arias (<http://vimeo.com/31071014>); The 2010 film *1000 Voices* by Tim Travers Hawkins that visualizes real testimonies recorded in secret over the phone with asylum seekers who are being detained indefinitely in the UK, revealing their psychological trauma and isolation (<http://www.iloobia.com/1000-Voices>); A key part of UK's National Refugee Week in June 2012, the series of animated documentaries *Seeking Refuge* by Mosaic Films for BBC explore the experiences of young refugees living in the UK (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syPlfzEf3Oo>).
- <sup>83</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. V. Binetti and C. Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 22.
- <sup>84</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 20.
- <sup>85</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 3.
- <sup>86</sup> For more on the differing concepts of realism in regard to animation see chapter 6 of this thesis; Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation* (London: Routledge, 1998); Stephen Rowley, "Life Reproduced in Drawings: Preliminary Comments Upon Realism in Animation", *Animation Journal* 13 (2005): 65-85. The topic of character design in animation is a widespread field of practice and research in itself.
- <sup>87</sup> Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley", *Energy* 7:4 (1970): 33-35.
- <sup>88</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 20.
- <sup>89</sup> For further reading on the identity politics of representation see Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, Ziauddin Sardar, ed., *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory*. (London and New York: Continuum, 2002).
- <sup>90</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 174.

## CHAPTER 3

### Animated Documentary: Why Now?

#### Introduction

While the use of animation in documentary works may have seemed an odd and original research topic as recently as 2008, the amalgamation of factual content with animated imagery is becoming increasingly widespread.<sup>1</sup> When I began work on this thesis in 2009, research resources on animated documentaries were scarce. I was often asked if there were actually any other animated documentaries aside from *Persepolis*, *Waltz with Bashir* and *Ryan* and where it was that I found my examples.<sup>2</sup> The first stage of my research was indeed to create my own database of animated documentaries, assisted by past and on-going research, academic discussion groups, The Society for Animation Studies, online animation and documentary resources, personal contact with artists and filmmakers, film archives, art exhibitions and film festivals. In the few years since I began, however, the situation has changed dramatically. Although the Internet Movie Database IMDB website still lists only 8 animated documentaries, the last of which was made in 2011, Wikipedia, under the category Animated Documentary Films and last updated in May 2014, lists 37 films.<sup>3</sup> The Doco-anim channel on the popular Vimeo website was created in 2012 and lists 128 videos.<sup>4</sup> The Animated Documentary Facebook discussion group was created in 2012, within just a few months had over 100 members from more than 17 countries and by 2014 had over 800 members.<sup>5</sup> An associated website created in 2013 regularly shares updates about new animated documentary films, events and publications, listing hundreds of animated documentary films.<sup>6</sup> A search for the keywords "animated documentary" on YouTube in August 2014 leads to 897,000 results.<sup>7</sup> Animated documentaries can also be encountered in numerous display contexts today: in public spaces,<sup>8</sup> cinemas,<sup>9</sup> museums and art galleries,<sup>10</sup> online on personal artists' websites and video sharing websites,<sup>11</sup> databases specifically devoted to animation and animated documentary works,<sup>12</sup> and even on online newspaper websites.<sup>13</sup> Since animation is also closely linked to the field of gaming, as I shall go on to discuss in Chapters 7 and 8, some animated documentaries can be experienced as interactive simulations and have also been displayed as artworks in in-game virtual art galleries as well as in "actual" material art galleries.<sup>14</sup>

Although the categorization of films obviously depends on definitions, it is evident that a rise in the practice, display and dissemination of animated documentary has occurred in (very) recent years. This proliferation of animated documentaries has been accompanied by a concomitant rise in academic research: as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, scholarship on the topic began in the 1990s, and has accelerated dramatically since 2011. Because my goal in this dissertation is not to one-sidedly defend the acceptance of animation as a documentary language but rather to better understand the emergence and popularity of the sub-genre in recent years, the question then understandably arises, why now?

The query into "why now?", however, requires a further understanding of what this "now" is, implicating the question "what is the contemporary?" and what is the relation between the conditions of contemporaneity and emerging tendencies in visual culture. In other words, what is it that defines the contemporary period, which is the backdrop to the increasing interest and use of animation in non-fiction? And what is it that makes animated documentaries "new" and "contemporary"? Whereas defining the contemporary raises questions too vast to cover fully in this context, I will attempt to map out an understanding of contemporaneity that illuminates the rise of animated documentaries by borrowing from theorists such as Peter Osborne, Lev Manovich, Alexander Alberro and Fred Ritchen, who place the digital revolution in visual culture as a central characteristic of the contemporary today.<sup>15</sup>

### **Defining Contemporaneity**

According to common-sense, anything being produced in the present is always contemporary. Nevertheless, as Osborne explains, "'contemporary', is...a critical and therefore selective process: it promotes and it excludes. To claim something is contemporary is to make a claim for its significance in participating in the actuality of the present".<sup>16</sup> Terry Smith claims that the topic is actually "an interrogation into the ontology of the present, one that asks: What it is to exist in the conditions of contemporaneity?".<sup>17</sup> Alberro clarifies the importance of the issue by explaining that the way in which the contemporary is symbolized and historicized, is what will shape its very identity.<sup>18</sup> In order to understand the complexity involved, it is illuminating to consider how different theorists approach the definition and demarcation of the contemporary.

It is useful to begin with Osborne's discussion of contemporary art, where he maps out several possible periodizations of "the contemporary": Since the end of World War I in 1945; since the 1960s; and since the end of the Cold War in 1989, each with their own geopolitical and aesthetic characterizations. As Osborne puts it, "1945 represents the beginning of the international hegemony of US art institutions, and thereby of US art itself", privileging then-current Western forms and the heritage of abstraction.<sup>19</sup> The distinction between modern and contemporary was first established after 1945 in Eastern Europe, as part of the Soviet reactions against the categories of modernity and modernism.<sup>20</sup> A different periodization conceives of contemporary art as beginning in the early 1960s with new work that "ontologically broke with the prevailing object-based and medium specific practices, shifting instead towards a range of new types of art works such as performance, minimalism and conceptual art".<sup>21</sup> Geopolitically, this era is epitomized in the revolutionary 1968 and, more globally expansive, includes political and cultural radicalisms across the globe and the intensification of national anti-imperialist liberation struggles.<sup>22</sup> The third main periodization is after the end of the Cold War in 1989, marking the end of historical communism and the victory of a globalized neoliberalism.<sup>23</sup> According to Smith, "the system built on First-, Second-, Third-, and Fourth-world divisions has imploded...[and globalization has introduced the] global distribution of ever-expanding production and consumption".<sup>24</sup> Visually, this era is characterized by an internationally exhibited diversity of forms.<sup>25</sup> My focus in this research corresponds to the most recent periodization, focusing on aspects of visual culture that have thrived since the 1990s and continue into the early twenty-first century.

Whereas modernism was characterized by a linear vision of history, postmodernism saw the end of grand narratives and was unable to determine the direction of history, seeing this as the end of history or as time advancing in loops.<sup>26</sup> In regard to visual culture and art, Miwon Kwon explains that in most university art history departments, the subfields covering Western developments are organized chronologically, as periods, whereas the subfields that cover non-Western visual culture are identified geographically.<sup>27</sup> Kwon elucidates that the category of contemporary art history is "the space in which the contemporaneity of histories from around the world must be confronted simultaneously as a disjunctive yet continuous intellectual horizon, integral to the understanding of the present (as a whole)...[which] marks both a

temporal bracketing and a spatial encompassing, a site of a deep tension between very different formations of knowledge and traditions".<sup>28</sup> Similarly, James Elkins describes the contemporary as a "newfound universality (i.e., by definition "the contemporary" exists everywhere)".<sup>29</sup> Following the death of postmodernism and what he notes as the void that followed, Nicolas Bourriaud introduces the concept of the "altermodern" as a way to read the present. The altermodern, referring to "otherness", views the twenty-first century as an era constituted of "a multitude of possibilities, of alternatives to a single route...the struggle for diversity [in the face of globalisation's economic standardization]", characterized by chaos, complexity and disorientation.<sup>30</sup>

When asked to define contemporaneity, Alberro describes the years after 1989 as characterized most obviously by globalization and by the new information and communication technologies of the Internet with the ensuing shift from the analogue to the digital.<sup>31</sup> The rise of digital culture is central to an understanding of the present since, as Osborne explains, it generated an ontological anxiety about the loss of the real through the loss of indexicality.<sup>32</sup> As I explained in Chapter 2, a sense of unease, confusion and suspicion are central to the rise of the documentary turn and the issue of indexicality in relation to the changing status of photography since digitalization is a major theme in this thesis, illuminating how dominant characteristics of the present are directly linked to the research of animated documentaries.

In a discussion of the visual culture of today's digital mediascape, defined by instant communication and the global spread of information, Manovich introduces the concept of "info-aesthetics". He argues that "the exponential growth of information available to us is one of the main pressure points on contemporary culture "because it influences the way we understand ourselves and the world around us".<sup>33</sup> He explains that the culture of an information and knowledge society "changes existing cultural patterns and aesthetic preferences as well as creates new ones".<sup>34</sup> He is thus interested in the development of "a new vocabulary of forms, new design aesthetics [and] new iconologies" that befit the era.<sup>35</sup> As my research is technologically oriented in relation to today's mediascape and information age, and focuses on what I recognize as a shift in documentary aesthetics, using Manovich's ideas about the contemporary as a global digital communications network characterized by a surplus of information and the way this influences emerging aesthetics of the period, is highly relevant to this thesis.

Since I have shown that animation has been used historically in various ways in non-fiction, the question remains - what makes animated documentaries "new" or "contemporary" as an aesthetic of information? First and foremost, the staggering growth in quantity of animated documentaries in very recent years demonstrates that although animation may have been used earlier in non-fiction, it is more characteristic of the current era than any earlier period. Secondly, whereas in the past works that used animation in non-fiction often relied on animation's association with fiction and fantasy, such as in Disney's 1941 *Seven Wise Dwarfs* example where the dwarfs from Disney's *Snow White* march to the Post Office in order to purchase war savings certificates during World War II, today there is a blatant use of supposedly fictional visuals for non-fiction content. As will be developed throughout the thesis, I propose that this illustrates a change in animation's relation to fiction today, in which its associations with the fantastical are diminishing, thus illustrating new characteristics of animation. Thirdly, as I will show in the following chapters, the technological progress in animation production essentially changes the nature of animation, creating a real-time and newly indexical visual language, which means that animation today can be seen as different from animation in earlier periods, making it truly contemporary.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the meaning of newness is explained by Boris Groys as context-based, which demarcates newness as something that is recognizably different.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, Groys explains the present as something that "prevents our smooth transition from the past to the future".<sup>38</sup> In other words, the new and contemporary is something novel, original and unusual that breaks with past conventions (and/or makes us notice them as such and reflect upon them), signalling a shift or change from past to future. In this context then, the supposed "strangeness" or contradictory nature of animated documentaries, which is the starting point of my research, indicates such a shift by breaking with past conventions of documentary aesthetics based on photography and introducing a new form of representation to the field. Animated documentaries are thus such an example of a break between past and future because they question earlier conventions and force us to stop and scrutinize the present in order to understand the appearance of novel trends.

As Jonathan Crary explains in *Techniques of the Observer*, whilst new strategies of visualization proliferate, conventional forms of representation linger as privileged signifiers of truth claims, creating a fissure between the two.<sup>39</sup> This split is exactly the

backdrop to the rise of animated documentaries. It is my claim that animation is perceived in a paradoxical manner, one which recognizes its advantages as informational representation whilst simultaneously retaining past concerns surrounding animation as a non-factual mode of representation. Since the ambivalence that exists today in the reception of animated documentaries is based on the tension between emerging and conventional forms of representation, the new and the old, this chapter will focus on the reasons for a simultaneous rise in non-fiction animation alongside the waning (albeit not entirely) of photographically mimetic imagery and its assumed truth value.

### **Cartoons or News?**

*Next Media Animation (NMA)*, a Taiwan-based channel launched in 2009 produces more than 30 computer-animated dramatizations of news events every day, positioned on a continuum between the humorous and the informational. Currently targeting the Hong Kong and Taiwanese markets, the videos average more than 4.1 million hits a day, making *Next Media Animation* the second most watched news channel in Hong Kong.<sup>40</sup> Not all the videos use animation, but most of the news items incorporate them, giving their online broadcasts a visual edge. The use of animation not only enables the visual inclusion of what is not photographed but so too do the novel visuals play an important marking role, arguably serving to increase visibility and interest. Despite their clear local success, the company's signature tactics have been frequently criticized. As recently as 2010, Howard Kurz, *Washington Post* media critic and host of *CNN's Reliable Sources*, remarked, "Let's not confuse a bunch of cartoons with what people in the news business do".<sup>41</sup> *Next Media's* Jimmy Lai argued that, despite certain details perhaps appearing visually inaccurate, the images were based on other media reports and maintained the "integrity of the news" and the content depicted.<sup>42</sup> The question as to how far details may be changed and representations altered whilst still maintaining a sense of integrity of content resonates with John Grierson's well-known definition of documentary as a "creative treatment of actuality". In this sense, animated news is not so necessarily different from varied forms of documentary. This is ever more relevant in today's visual culture where documentaries are often experimental and/or hybrid and where doubtful reception is prevalent. In fact, comments on the *CNN* reportage on *Next Media* reflected unfavourably upon the sensationalism of many other (non-animated) news channels

today, claiming that "news is a joke", "journalism is dead anyway" and that "facts are a thing of the past".<sup>43</sup> Is it such a surprise, then, that animated news have emerged out of such widespread allegations against the regular channels?

The *Next Media* news agency is important not only because it demonstrates how extensive the use of animation is these days but because it exposes some of the central theoretical themes related to animation's reception. On one hand, this form of news reportage is described as "lacking in accuracy", as possessing "comical overtones" and as "a bunch of cartoons". On the other hand, and quite ironically to my mind, the *Next Media* news agency was fined for being overly graphic and exposing themes that may offend and wrongly influence viewers.<sup>44</sup> Although all inaccurate news may influence opinions wrongly, whether animated or not, the question arises – if the animated news sequences are indeed so obviously fictitious and comical, how can they be seen as possessing enough truth value to be able to influence (let alone ‘wrongly’) public opinion about the so-called "real"?



Figure 4.1: *Next Media* animated news, 2012

While the 2010 media coverage of *NMA* emphasized the "comical overtones" or "cartoon-like" qualities assumed of animation, a 2012 study analysing the effects of using animation in news reports conducted at the School of Communication of Hong Kong Baptist University found that the animation format neither enhances nor dampens news credibility. This implies that the way in which animation is used and received depends on changing cultural conventions.<sup>45</sup> "We're still being laughed at", said *Next Media's* officials in 2010 but predicted that by 2012 their clips would not just be known abroad as amusing novelty animations; they would become the norm for TV news.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the *Next Media* representatives' predictions have come true:



the use of animation in factual reporting is now clearly no longer only a marketing scam or quirky choice; in fact, it is quickly changing to become a norm. *Next Media* has worked with the *BBC* and *Reuters* on some joint animations, and, as noted in the previous chapter, in 2012 *BBC* and *The Guardian* broadcast a new series of animated short films, *Seeking Refuge*, about the experiences of five young displaced immigrants who sought asylum in the UK.<sup>47</sup> Unlike the *CNN* coverage of *Next Media*, in which the choice of animation for news coverage was treated with disdain, reviewers of these films now acknowledged the advantages of animation as a means "to maintain anonymity of the individual but to give a strong sense of visual metaphor about the experiences they've had, but can't film".<sup>48</sup>

Since 2012 *The Guardian* website has also included animated documentaries about the lawyer Mohammad Mostafaei's battle against executions of juveniles in Iran; as well as the video animation *Guantánamo Bay: The Hunger Strikes*, which is based on personal statements of detainees at Guantanamo Bay.<sup>49</sup> In 2014, as part of *The Guardian's* coverage of slave labour in the Thai fishing industry, it produced a horrifying expose which consisted of long animated sequences based on testimonies.<sup>50</sup> Significantly, *The Guardian* was involved in the *production* of these videos, demonstrating that animation has now become another form of legitimate news reportage, one that is accepted by one of the larger newspapers in the world today.<sup>51</sup>

It is also interesting to note is that, at the onset of the Guantanamo Bay and Thai fishing videos, a warning is included that states "Warning: contains scenes some viewers might find disturbing". Somewhat similarly to the concerns raised that *Next Media's* animation might potentially offend viewers, the warning indicates that, albeit an animated one, the representation may be perceived as "true enough" to provoke difficult sensations in its viewers. This raises further questions as to the link between ethics, documentary viewing and bodily identification with the protagonists on-screen, as theorized by Vivian Sobchack. Sobchack claims that an ethical view of events on-screen develops through the spectator's bodily identification with the protagonist based on an understanding of their potentially shared physical pain and mortality, thus differentiating documentary spectatorship from the experience of watching a fictional representation.<sup>52</sup> If the horrific violence of juvenile executions, force-feeding, and the torture and murder of slaves aboard Thai fishing ships, may

seem "disturbing" to viewers, the violence is clearly not disregarded, despite being animated. This is, in fact, unsurprising since, as Jose B. Capino has suggested in relation to animated pornography, animated bodies are able to provoke physical responses in viewers, who recognize the corporality depicted despite its different visual appearance and project onto those animated bodies as if they were filmed physical bodies similar to their own.<sup>53</sup> Animation's distancing effect, as discussed in the previous chapter, is thus neither conclusive nor straightforward, for the reception of animation in relation to factual content is rapidly changing. Animation is apparently deemed to be close enough to one's own sense of self, which supports my claim that it is high time that animation is conceptually removed from a distant and fictional world of fantasy.



Figure 4.2: *The Story of Mohammad Mostafaei*, 2012, by The Guardian and Sherbert



Figure 4.3: *Guantanamo Bay: The Hunger Strikes*, 2013, by The Guardian



Figure 4.4: *Globalised Slavery: Slave Labour in the Thai Fishing Industry*, 2014, by The Guardian

In order to understand some of the reasons why animation has now become sufficiently mainstream (although not entirely mainstream, as I will demonstrate with regard to photography) so as to be included in news coverage as a legitimate and believable means of depicting non-fictional events, several central cultural characteristics must be considered. These may be divided into two broad areas: the first, concerning a rise in non-mimetic visualisations; the second, concerning the demise of the mimetic.<sup>54</sup>

## **The Proliferation of Animation/Innovative Aesthetics in the Field of Non-Fiction**

**The Growing Ease of Animation Production:** An important element not to be overlooked in the proliferation of animated works today is the technological aspect that makes animation production more accessible. As Christiane Paul explains, animation is gaining "new momentum and popularity through the possibilities of the digital medium and software such as Flash™ and Director™, which have contributed to a new wave of animation".<sup>55</sup> As a result, more animated documentaries can now be made by non-animators, who are now able to bypass the artistic and technological know-how once necessary for the production of animated works. In addition, the real-time animation of digitally virtual worlds, which I shall go on to explore in the final chapter of the thesis, introduces a whole new field of animation that can potentially act as cinematic settings for non-animators to make films through animated performances and puppeteering.

**Documentary Changes:** The growing acceptance of animation as a legitimate mode of non-fictional representation is grounded in recent changes in the documentary field, in which varied forms of experimentation in both content and form have become dominant. As explained in the first chapter, the rise in interest in and production of documentary, defined as the documentary turn in visual culture, has many reasons. These include the massive social transformations of globalization, with its enormous political, economic and social upheavals, which have led to a desire to find ever more accurate ways to represent the real and explore what that "real" is today.<sup>56</sup> Cuts in public funding and the increasing privatization of media have in addition pushed documentaries into ever-more experimental and artistic realms.<sup>57</sup> The exploratory nature of these documentaries as well as art's ability to compensate for the blind spots in journalism have increasingly pushed documentary into the art field.<sup>58</sup> The art-oriented experimental production of reflexive documentary materials explains the widespread amalgamation of fact and fiction, while the wider range of aesthetic forms deployed acknowledges the useful effects of uncertainty today. These factors all lead to new, hybrid forms of documentaries, and may serve to explain the rise of the animated documentary.

**Animation's Visual Advantages:** Using animation for non-fiction has many obvious advantages. Animation can generate quick visualizations that cut production costs, grab viewer attention, and can liberate news media from the need to acquire actual footage whilst still providing visual materials in situations where imagery may be expensive, dependent on copyright, dangerous, censored or hard to come by.<sup>59</sup> In a contemporary visual culture characterized by the abundance and richness of visual imagery, surveillance and omnipresent DIY documentary footage, viewers' ever-rising expectations for visual aids can be satisfied by extending animated visuality to photographically un-representable and/or non-physical aspects. This strengthens my claim about the increasingly significant role to be played by animation in expanding and enhancing the existing visual field, and in facilitating the delivery of information visually, which is how viewers have become accustomed to receiving data in today's screen-based information culture.

**Information Culture:** The rise in the visual representation of information has to do with today's information culture, in which animation not only enhances visuality but is also central to the way in which information is "packaged" and presented to the viewer. As Manovich explains, in an era of pervasive computing, how people interact, the spaces in which they dwell, and how information is presented all change. In order to be useful to viewers/users submerged in information, data has to be "wrapped" in some external form.<sup>60</sup> Since the 1990s, when the Internet emerged as a widespread platform, design and visual representation became key, since website designers had to create easily understandable and navigable virtual spaces that provided information in the best ways. This already shows the increasing emphasis on visual information design in early computerized popular culture.

The exponential growth in available information means that new ways of presenting and receiving that information evolve. Animation simplifies by summarizing vast amounts of data and, due to its dynamic nature, is ideal for the representation of processes (more so than static data visualization such as charts and graphs). Through its infinite array of formal styles combined with movement, animation is visually arresting, an immensely important feature in an era of too-much-data that surrounds viewers today. In other words, in an era when viewers are surrounded by information that is mediated by screens and visualized in many ways, there is a marked shift away

from mimetic and naturalistic modes of representation. A wealth of innovatively stylized aesthetics has entered the realm of information culture, which may serve to explain the enhanced visibility of animation today.

It is, however, also important to bear in mind that all of the animated videos produced by *The Guardian* include photographs of the protagonists at the end of the work. This is evidence that, although animation is slowly being accepted as a useful representational choice in certain non-fictional contexts, it is not yet considered wholly reliable, hence the inclusion of photographs. The photographs actually illustrate nothing of the content described and do not really act as any form of proof. They merely show the faces of people identified as the protagonists described. The truth-value of the photographs is, therefore, completely assumed and convention-based rather than reliant on any information they actually provide for the viewer in relation to the content depicted. The photographs are no more a confirmation of events or documents than the animation preceding them but are nonetheless accepted as more believable without rational justification because of the habitual identification of photography with visual evidence. This goes to show the transitional status of animation today. As the examples discussed in this chapter demonstrate, animation is increasingly being used as a credible form of news reportage. Yet longstanding assumptions about more worthy and established modes of representation still persist. This is the case despite what I deem to be the weakening of mimetically based visualizations of reality, most particularly photography.

### **The Waning Truth Status of Photographically Mimetic Representations**

**The Demise of Photography:** The status of photography as the point of comparison to which animation has been held, and in relation to which the assumed fictitious nature of animation has been proclaimed, demands reconsideration. It is essential to remember that, although photography did become the dominant journalistic medium for conveying the news in visual form, this was not an automatic response.<sup>61</sup> Thierry Gervais explains that

no matter what its ontological status, photography in its earliest applications did not stand in as a complete trace of the world; or, rather the trace itself did not

have the currency to necessarily stand in as the best form of illustration of actual events, at least in the mass press.<sup>62</sup>

In fact, in the earlier days of photography, photographs were unfavourably compared to historical paintings and engravings, which were commonly included in news publications.<sup>63</sup> This is significant to my argument because it demonstrates that no form of imagery comes to be automatically or seamlessly accepted as an objective or authentic mode of conveying reality and, furthermore, that the criteria with which those assumptions are made are themselves also fluid. The acceptance of photography as a "direct" representation of events and referents may give the impression of transparency, as though what was seen was the reality depicted. The status of photography as a privileged mode of conveying information has, however, been in decline since the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> This move towards the demythologization of photography is reflected in Fred Ritchin's aptly named book *After Photography*, from which it becomes startlingly clear that photography now requires interpretation and can easily take on unexpected "meanings".<sup>65</sup>

Photographic imagery may surprise viewers by conveying information that is not necessarily visible, or meanings that seem to contradict initial readings. For example, the home video images of Rodney King's attack by Los Angeles policemen in 1991 were deemed insufficiently authentic in court to hold the perpetrators legally responsible. According to Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, "[b]y stressing the limitations of the image, the defence was able to reframe the meaning of what the image actually captured".<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Jane Blocker discusses Colin Powell's testimony at the UN in 2003, which utilised satellite imagery that showed Iraqi military bases. Powell drew upon the testimony of so-called "image specialists" in order to successfully convince the UN that these images contained more than what was actually visible, serving as proof of the supposed existence of weapons for mass destruction and thus providing justification for the invasion of Iraq.<sup>67</sup> These examples show that meaning in photographic imagery may contrast with the truth-value assumed of photography because of its supposed special link to reality. Instead, an emphasis is placed on the interpretation of imagery. The conclusion is that seeing is not necessarily understanding and nor is it always so obvious what exactly is shown. As Vanessa Schrawtz and Lynn Hunt explain, since the visual record is always incomplete, the reliance upon it as evidence is not always or clearly acceptable.<sup>68</sup> I am

interested in further pursuing what this may mean about the relationship between vision and knowledge through visual representation today. If photography requires interpretation to embody meaning and animation is an interpretive visual stylization of content, how does this affect the perceived difference between the two?

Photography becomes similar to animation because neither can be argued to contain indisputable evidence and both rely on interpretation in order to create meaning. The difference is that animation more obviously flaunts this incorporated interpretation, which is part of its inherent stylization. Photography is thus distanced from any sense of transparency because once it is acknowledged that it may have multiple meanings, any direct link to realities is open to doubt. Strangely perhaps, this brings photography back to its early days, when photographs were not accepted as evidence on their own accord but required additional visual and verbal context in order to explain to viewers the significance of what was shown.<sup>69</sup> This becomes all the more true with the development of digital photography, whereby analogue photography's physical link to represented referents was replaced with units of information recorded and restructured to produce an easily manipulated image, thus weakening photography's privileged truth value.

In discussing the declining faith in photography, Tom Gunning explains that, although manipulation in photography is possible, it is not necessarily the norm. He argues that photography is still used as a document and record of memory, and that there would be no point faking photographs if their authority wasn't assumed.<sup>70</sup> "Most faked photographs", he suggests, "announce their trickery as either an amusing joke or an exercise in satire".<sup>71</sup> While I agree that it would be foolish to deny photography's strength, I strongly disagree with his assertion that trickery can be expected or assumed to be announced or even noticeable. Not only are photographs increasingly being used, as Ritchin notes, to record constructed realities with political aims and repercussions, their technical veracity is, furthermore, never certain.<sup>72</sup> Although animation is already technologically capable of producing photorealistic imagery, as is the case in films like *Avatar*, unlike fantasy films, in which the content is sufficient to expose the fictional nature of the nonetheless hyperrealist imagery, there is no guarantee this is always the case.





Figure 4.5: *Avatar*, 2012, by James Cameron<sup>73</sup>

In 2012, during Hurricane Sandy, as an example, multiple images of the wreckage surfaced on the web and social networks. Media channels were under pressure to provide constant updates and were at times unable to obtain secure confirmation of the reliability of their sources. This, when coupled with the immediacy that instant tweeting and social networks have introduced into information systems, ensured that doctored images went viral. Some images were exposed as fake, which in itself required media attention so as to try and set the record straight, and proved to be neither immediate nor necessarily all-encompassing.<sup>74</sup> Realistically appearing photographs, and visual mimesis in general, have thus ceased to be a reliable criterion of truth, strengthening a sense of doubt in contemporary photography and diminishing its reliability.



Figure 4.6: Fake image of Hurricane Sandy is actually a screen-shot of the film *Day after Tomorrow*, 2004, by Roland Emmerich



Figure 4.7: Doctored image of a shark supposedly swimming in a flooded New Jersey street

The idea that one can no longer trust one's own eyes is a distressing concept, which is why I think that viewers would very much like to believe, as Gunning assures them, that trickery will be announced in order that visual deception may be recognized. This would mean that complete uncertainty of images may be avoided and trust in one's own eyesight maintained which, unfortunately, is not the case. By liberating animation from its assumed grounding in the realms of fiction, and by situating it in relation to a broader discourse concerned with vision and doubt, my research raises new and troubling questions about the status of visuality in contemporary documentary traditions. Martin Jay, in his book *Downcast Eyes*, describes the suspicion of vision and its hegemonic role in the modern era as a phenomenon of twentieth-century Western thought.<sup>75</sup> This is a continuation of the philosophical traditions of Kant, Descartes and Plato, who reflect upon the gap between what is seen and what is thought to be seen, which creates uncertainty about the world. Whether trickery is announced or not, the fact that audiences are aware that images *can* potentially and easily be deceptive means that a doubt in visuals, even those that appear realistic and mimetic, is growing. As animation techniques also include hyperrealist visuals, photographs are now easily retouched, and recurring media attention is directed towards allegations of reworked images that are marketed as authentic, I think it is safe to declare that viewers today are becoming increasingly aware of the possibilities of manipulation, weakening a sense of trust even in what appears "real" through mimesis.<sup>76</sup> Without denying its continuing strengths, photography is now treated with more suspicion than may have been the case in the past. This does, however, support the idea that animation's main point of comparison,

next to which it may appear artificial or fictional, is debased. This makes room for other documentary aesthetics, such as animation, that have historically been seen as less legitimate in comparison to photography. This is crucial to my discussion of animation because animation can only be considered artificial or fictional in comparison to what is not fictional and, if photography is destabilized, so too is animation's status strengthened.

**Machine Vision:** Whereas in the past photography was prized as a literal "eyewitness to events", the way in which information is visually presented today becomes progressively more distant from the way the viewer would have seen events directly herself, all the more mediated and visualized by technological means. On one hand, this may explain a distrust of aesthetics such as animation, expressing an anxiety regarding the rapid technologisation of visibility. On the other hand, however, due to the proliferation of such (non-human) visual representations, they may also be increasingly accepted as a form of believable visualization, which may potentially explain why animation is relinquishing its fictitious nature. Viewers increasingly learn about events through screens and machine-created visuals, rather than via ones that imitate human vision. Whereas the camera used to be the extension of the eye, capturing imagery that reflects what the viewer would have seen had they been personally present, technologies such as satellites and military imaging from battle grounds do not necessarily resemble the way the naked human eye would have seen the event. These technologies do not require human witnesses to be present in the vicinity of the event and in that sense, a new form of witnessing takes place today that must take into account new forms of vision, machine vision.

Machine vision is what occurs when machines that are independent of human operators "see" and record what is then shared with other machines until a world image is constructed that functions further and further outside human experience.<sup>77</sup> Paul Virilio's book *The Vision Machine* describes this phenomenon as the proliferation of images created by machine viewpoints, synthetic images, products of info-graphic software and data visualization that lead to a process of computer-aided design.<sup>78</sup> Although such new sources of imagery may also extend visibility, as I claim is the case with animation, what occurs for viewers as a result of machine vision is thus "synthetic vision, the automation of perception....[a] doubling of the point of view".<sup>79</sup> This corroborates the hypothesis that viewers are becoming increasingly

accustomed to information that is presented in non-mimetic ways, through aesthetics that break with human eyesight and the perception of physical appearances, such as animation.

Uncertainly regarding the source of imagery understandably influences its interpretation. In the 2006 P.S.1 exhibition, *Reprocessing Reality*, Swiss artist Christoph Büchel presented *AC 130 GUNSHIP*, an edited documentation of a US attack on a building complex in rural Afghanistan.<sup>80</sup> Much has been written about the way warfare is increasingly experienced like a video game, in which soldiers shoot moving targets through screens and via drones, see physical spaces translated into digitalized computer generated imagery, and thus distance themselves from the actual, real-world physical consequences of their actions.<sup>81</sup> By displaying Büchel's video in a museum without explanations, it was removed from its original context. Instead, what appears at first as an animated video game, forces viewers to confront their own reactions to the portrayal of human beings as "white dots", the immediate association of war games, and the realization that this is in fact not a game but the actual documentation of death, even though it appears very different from direct human vision.<sup>82</sup>

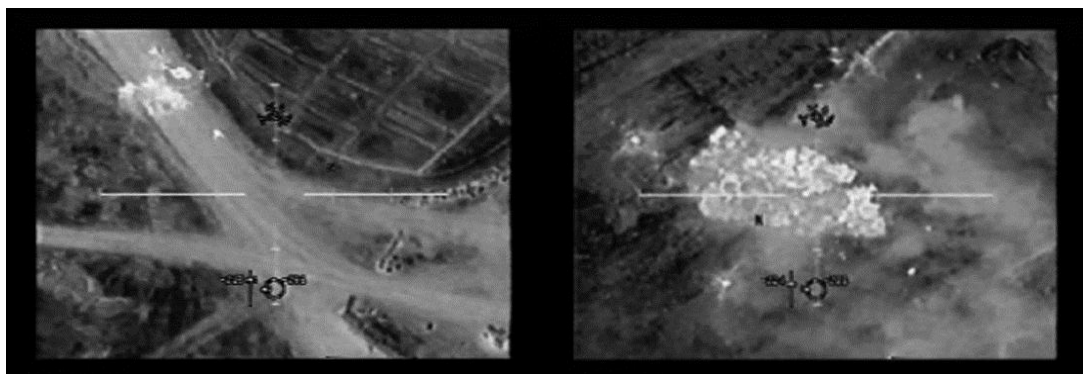


Figure 4.8: *AC-130 Gunship Targeting Video (Afghanistan 12/6/2002)*, 2004, by Christoph Büchel

The growing complexity of required interpretation indicates that the idea of "direct" viewing has diminished. What constitutes witnessing has become a lively subject in academic discourse, all the more so in a world in which the witnessing of events is mediatized. Guerin and Hallas regard imaging technologies that generate automatic images without a human agent, such as those embedded in processes of surveillance, science and industrial production, as providers of evidentiary proof but not as witnesses.<sup>83</sup> Blocker, on the other hand, refers to machines as witnesses and argues

that the fact that images have been taken by a machine "...adds considerably to their supposed neutrality, objectivity, and truth value".<sup>84</sup> She proposes that "the witness who is invisible, omniscient, and disembodied is more trustworthy than the witness who is visible, with finite knowledge and human limitations".<sup>85</sup> There is thus a widening schism between the concepts of "recording" and "witnessing".

What, then, is most credible form of imaging to evoke a sense of truth value? The machine non-witness that captures "directly" but in a manner often completely divorced from human vision, and which may at times require extensive interpretation to decipher? If an image is so very different from the way in which the human eye would perceive the event, if at all possible, then viewers have no way of knowing if the image has been manipulated and what exactly it is they are seeing, creating new reasons for rejecting it as reliable. Within the context of my academic analysis of animation's changing reception as a trustworthy language of representation, these sources of imagery and technologies of representation are converging into a multiple and uncertain world through myriad and indistinguishable forms of vision, culminating in the hyperreality of today. In this arena, viewers can no longer be certain as to what image they are regarding and what principles attest to its relation to its referent, credibility and meaning.

**Reconsidering Hyperrealism Today:** A controversial figure of postmodernity, Jean Baudrillard's theories about simulations, simulacra and hyperreality will be considered in relation to contemporary visual culture. Even though his ideas have not necessarily survived the test of time to remain relevant in today's post-postmodern computerized information age, his concepts nonetheless provide tools for analysis. Using his theories to engage with current trends in the visualization of non-fiction, it is interesting to see how certain aspects of his thinking may persist and where the contemporary mediascape breaks with theorizations of the bypassed postmodern, demarcating a new contemporaneity.

According to Baudrillard, the hyperreal world of simulations means that images are signs of nothing but themselves, destabilizing the idea of direct referencing and even of the existence of an external reality to the referent.<sup>86</sup> In the 1980s "The precession of simulacra" was Baudrillard's term for the situation in which images can precede their referents. As Baudrillard explains the concept, where previously "the image [was] a

reflection of a basic reality – it mask[ed] and pervert[ed] a basic reality", now "it masks the absence of a basic reality – it bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum".<sup>87</sup> Defining culture as "the collective sharing of simulacra", Baudrillard reduces truth and reality to a game of representation, obliterating the division between reality and unreality.<sup>88</sup> In his 1983 book *Simulations* he describes the masses as passive media consumers, whose sole purpose is entertainment, negating the possibility of audiences to be critically active.<sup>89</sup> On one hand, it can be argued that the difference between the image and its referent, or the relation between representations and realities, persists as murky and indistinct today too. On the other hand though, Baudrillard's theories about the absence of any reality, the implosion of meaning of mediatized imagery and the resulting passivity of viewers is more difficult to accept as characteristic of the twenty-first century, illustrating the complex status of imagery today.

Identifying aspects of Baudrillard's theories that persist today becomes clear when considering the confusing relation between reality and representations, destabilizing the ability to differentiate the two. As I demonstrated in relation to photography, the touching-up of images presented as representations of the real is symptomatic of the process of simulation. Whereas before digital culture and widespread photographic manipulation, the link and truth status of analogue photography was more authoritative, this is no longer the case.

Today, even a real event can be construed to feel like a representation. This was most evident, for example, when reactions to the 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre included terms such as "surreal" or "like a movie".<sup>90</sup> Baudrillard defined the simulacrum as "the point in which reality began to imitate its simulations...people were increasingly attracted to 'simulated' versions of reality, which, over time, had begun to efface reality itself – an effect that he referred to as hyperreality".<sup>91</sup> Indeed, in some respects, it is possible to see this process at work in documentaries today. As Manovich has claimed, "it is becoming clear that it is ultimately more advantageous to simulate the world than to film it directly. A simulated image can represent non-existent reality, it can be endlessly modified, it is more manageable, and so on. Because of this our society will try to use digital simulations whenever possible".<sup>92</sup>

An intriguing example, the *Kuma War Games* website features "playable recreations of real events in the War on Terror" under the strapline, "Real War News. Real War Games".<sup>93</sup> Reconstructing real-world military events, "players are thrown into recreations of various conflict zones".<sup>94</sup> Not only are the missions available to players on the Kuma website accurate re-creations of actual military operations, but the imagery is based on visual reference materials and the interface is graphically designed to mimic that of a news channel. These warranting devices include a "text crawl" at the bottom of the screen, which announces new missions based on recent headlines.<sup>95</sup> According to Tracy Fullerton, "using reference material such as wire sources, video footage and satellite images, Kuma has arrived at the game equivalent of the nightly news".<sup>96</sup> This is another aspect of the muddled informational spaces that now exist, converging actual worlds with game simulations and confusing the *kind* of information one can gain from such sources.<sup>97</sup> The field of games and documentary games will be further explored in the third part of the thesis but for now, this example typifies the murky waters of hyperreality as they become evident in new directions of contemporary non-fiction as well.

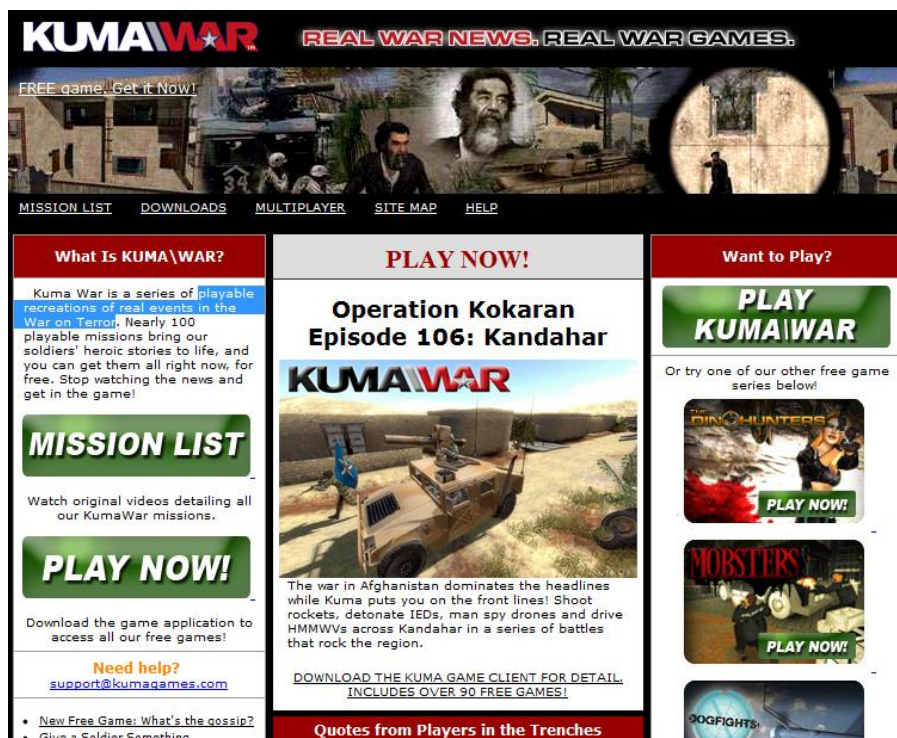


Figure 4.9: Kuma War Games Website

As Baudrillard has suggested in his imperative work on the 1990-1991 Gulf War, the conflict was presented more as a virtual video game than an actual conflict.<sup>98</sup> This

slippage between factual and fictional modes of representation has become increasingly widespread, contributing to a growing sense of uncertainty surrounding the media coverage of news events. To return to Gunning's assertion about the expectancy of an announcement of visual trickery, whereas *Next Media* and *Kuma War Games* are open about their use of animation, this is not always the case, thus further blurring the relationship between representations and realities.<sup>99</sup> In 2011, the UK channel ITV premiered a new prime time investigative show, *Exposure*, which attracted more than 1 million viewers. The first of six documentary episodes was about the former Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi's links with the IRA.<sup>100</sup> The documentary used clips of shaky camera footage, captioned "IRA film 1988", that purportedly showed the IRA shooting down a British Army helicopter using Libyan weapons.<sup>101</sup> However, as was eventually exposed online by angry viewers, the footage was actually computer-generated imagery from a video game.<sup>102</sup> The animated graphics labelled "IRA film 1988" were an edited version of someone's gameplay experience from the video game *Arma II*, a tactical shooter computer game based on an army's attempt to exert control over a war-ravaged country.<sup>103</sup> Animated documentation of game experiences thus masqueraded as photographic footage of the physical, somewhat similarly to the idea at the base of *Kuma War Games*. An ITV spokesman claimed that the network had the actual and correct footage of the event described, but that due to "human error" the video game footage had been incorporated in the editing process instead of the actual footage.<sup>104</sup> If this is indeed the case then the editors of the materials, like so many unsuspecting viewers, could not decipher the imagery's source. If it was an intentional decision, however, it still means that the TV crew decided that the game visuals looked "real enough" to potentially deceive viewers or at least "good enough" to try and get away with the hoax without announcing it as such. That false footage was incorporated in a documentary rattles the fundamental believability of documentaries. Such inability to decipher imagery and its reliability destabilizes viewers' trust in visual representation. This line of thought continues Baudrillard's theorizations of the postmodern and explains the declining truth status of mimetic representations today, which may be received as equally artificial or questionable as any other visual style of representation. In this sense, the acceptance of animation as equally true or equally artificial as other imagery such as photography can explain the growing uses of animation in non-fiction today since it does not differ from any other form of representation.



Nevertheless, it is vital to also keep in mind the shortcomings in Baudrillard's theories that separate postmodernism from today's contemporary information age. Although the status of images and their relation to reality may indeed be unclear in today's mediatized and networked world, I do not find Baudrillard's theories about the explosion of mass media leading to the "implosion of all meaning" true in today's twenty-first century information age.<sup>105</sup> Whereas in postmodernism the labyrinth of signs that Baudrillard describes led to the view that images substitute for reality and thus lead to a loss of reality, today, as Bourriaud suggests in his description of the altermodern, there is interest in that reality again and the signs that indicate the reality also influence it.<sup>106</sup> This is especially obvious in socio-political and documentary-oriented contemporary art, upon which I will further elaborate in my discussion of realism in Chapter 6. In other words, rather than images replacing reality, as Baudrillard suggests, today they explore and aim to influence that reality. Consequently, Alberro describes contemporary art as one where the image has replaced the object but where it nonetheless engages thoroughly with the contemporary reality of globalization through visual representations of global integration, large global exhibitions and counter-globalization artistic practices.<sup>107</sup>

Beyond the scope of contemporary art, this is true in more general visual culture as well. In the uber-visual computerized mediascape of today, images are used as a way to depict and shape reality. The varied forms of images used for this objective point once more to the tension between mimetic and non-mimetic visuals, yet demonstrate that images have not lost significance but rather persist as meaningful representations. Poignant examples are the 2010 Wikileaks release of the Collateral Murder video footage from a US Apache helicopter in 2007 that shows Reuters journalist Namir Noor-Eldeen, driver Saeed Chmagh, and several others as the Apache shoots and kills them in a public square in Eastern Baghdad. A similar and more recent example is the 2014 release of Islamic State (ISIS) videos of the beheading of American journalists Steven Sotloff and James Foley, images acting as proof of actions meant as "a message to America", revenge for US intervention in the area. This demonstrates a break with Baudrillard's theories because if the meaning of mediatized images had imploded as mere simulacra, the outcry surrounding these two examples would not have occurred. Instead, it becomes clear that images do manage to portray information

in a believable manner, thus shaping perceptions of reality and consequently, reality itself.

Interestingly, whereas both examples are photographic, the powerful and appalling Collateral Murder footage visually resembles video games and machine vision, and the edited version of it includes photographs of the journalists killed and explanatory texts, somewhat similarly to previously described animated documentaries. The ISIS example, however, visually horrific due to the close-up depiction of the victim and murder, has a visceral effect that I am not certain would have worked in an animated or machine-vision representation, which would arguably not have been received in the same way. In other words, although both forms of representation, mimetic and non-mimetic, clearly have significance and can be believed, their effects on viewers still differ. It is worth pointing out then that although there is certainly a rise in animated documentaries, it cannot be concluded that all animated depictions are necessarily accepted as truthful, illustrating the in-between stage I describe that animation is currently at in visual culture.

However, whereas animation may not always be received in the same ways as photography, varied visualizations can still have meaningful effects on viewers today. This negates Baudrillard's claims that mediatized imagery and simulations fully blur distinctions between reality and fiction. It is also important to remember in this regard that media corporations that already have power can afford to simulate; those who claim power but have less of it, however, cannot. This would explain why animation can be used in authoritative sources such as *The Guardian* or *BBC* but why groups such as Wikileaks or ISIS, trying to influence reality, do not use simulations and rely on more conventionally accepted imagery like photography as evidence of actions, as a way to directly refer to and attempt to influence reality. An on-going tension thus exists between the growing uses of animation and varying visuals as representations engaging with reality today and the rejection of new technologies as expanding truthful representation. These simultaneous tendencies in today's visual culture is what I am so interested in and what I deem both negates Baudrillard's claims about mediatized imagery's loss of significance as well as what points to animation's shifting status as legitimate representation of facts, characteristic of contemporaneity more than ever before.

Finally, due to what Baudrillard deems as the collapse of meaning and the loss of reality through simulacra and hyperreality, he also describes an audience that surrenders to passivity.<sup>108</sup> Although Baudrillard's theories of simulation and hyperreality do offer insights into the potential danger of spectator's decline towards indifference, which may remain relevant today, I do not agree with Baudrillard's notion of passivity as characteristic of contemporary media users. Today's internet viewer-users are inherently active, accustomed to a mediascape that is more interactive than ever before, leading to a participation culture where passivity is anything but characteristic. Negating Baudrillard's claims is the excessive use of the mediatized information culture in real-life actions and activism, as demonstrated in the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement since 2011 as well as the whole notion of hacktivism and cyber warfare that specifically use today's computerized and mediatized culture as the foundation of their actions. Although this interactivity may not always lead to political action, the notion of participation in relation to media and imagery and the understanding of reality that ensues will be further explored in Chapter 6 about realism and Chapter 7 about documentary games.

This mediatized participation leads me to the next part of the chapter about the different realities of today and their relation to images. Whereas postmodern theorists such as Baudrillard saw reality as image and the simulacra as the imposition of a virtual reality that replaces the "actual" reality, today's technologically-based digital virtual realities become part of reality rather than an effacement of it, explaining my use of "realities" in plural. Whereas the concept of hyperreality as advanced by Baudrillard addresses the blurring of simulations and realities within postmodern culture, in the next section of this chapter I wish to take the idea of simulations and imagery-based non-physical experiences in a new direction, by discussing today's post-postmodern computerized screen culture and the new kinds of realities subsequently introduced into contemporary culture.

**Screen Culture:** As already noted in the previous chapter, for the purposes of this research, animation is defined as "movement that is only visible on screen". It is my contention that the screen, a defining component of animation and a divide between animated worlds and the physical environment of the viewer, merits serious attention, as both a physical object and as a cultural characteristic. The significance of my research to today's highly technological, computerized screen culture thus becomes

evident. Existing scholarship has, however, only briefly remarked on different facets of this feature. Manovich asserts that animation is closer to the computer industry than to film or graphic design because of its reliance on software innovation.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Skoller claims that digital animation's ability to reflect technological innovation has become a way to experience technology itself.<sup>110</sup> These studies have, however, failed to acknowledge the relation between today's omnipresent screen culture and changing screen technologies to evolving documentary aesthetics, their reception and believability, and their potential repercussions on the field of non-fiction visual representations.

Animated documentaries may be viewed on a variety of platforms, including cinematic and other public screens, personal computers and even the mobile phone screen. Anne Friedberg asserts that, although different screens may retain their separate locations, the types of images available for viewing destabilize medium-based specificity and blur the differences between individual media.<sup>111</sup> As types and contexts of screen display change, theorizations of the viewer's relation to what takes place on-screen, once perceived of as a window or a frame to "other worlds", transform as well.<sup>112</sup> Throughout the history of visual culture, the transformation of a three-dimensional universe into a two-dimensional representation has been significant. Classical painting since the Renaissance managed distance by using central perspective, with its attendant implications of size and the single vanishing point framing space for the spectator ensuring that the painting gave the illusion of being like an "open window".<sup>113</sup> These techniques were also used in moving-image culture in which the simulated three-dimensional reality on-screen "might be experienced either as another world...or as a continuation of the spectator's own three-dimensional world".<sup>114</sup> As Manovich asserts, from painting to moving-image, the spaces depicted act as other three-dimensional virtual spaces that are framed and situated within the physical space of the viewer and which somehow coexist as a form of virtuality.<sup>115</sup>

The relation between viewer and screen, or more particularly the relation between the off-screen world inhabited by viewers and the visual on-screen world, are persistent themes in the study of moving-image culture.<sup>116</sup> Noël Carroll, in *Theorizing the Moving Image*, discusses how the virtual spaces on-screen are disconnected, phenomenologically speaking, from the physical space inhabited by the viewer,

creating "detached displays".<sup>117</sup> Carroll defines this as a "disembodied view", because viewers are incapable of orienting their body towards the actual profilmic space portrayed on the screen.<sup>118</sup> Although Carroll asserts that all photographic and cinematic images create this outcome, photographic imagery, unlike animation, still shares the visible properties a viewer would perceive if they were theoretically present in the depicted location.<sup>119</sup> Despite Carroll's "detached displays", then, photographic imagery on-screen shares a connection with the viewer's off-screen world. Is such a connection between animated worlds and the physical world of the viewer similarly possible?

The study of screens includes the physical-technological characteristics of, and alterations to, the screen as object.<sup>120</sup> Contemporary computerized culture places screens, a surface for retrieving and transmitting visual information, as a fundamental characteristic of our time.<sup>121</sup> However, rapid changes in contemporary screens influence the relationship between screen and viewer, and the reception of the information displayed upon them as well as their definitions. The cultural implications of such changes in an interdisciplinary research domain that links Film Studies, Art, Media Studies, Sound and Video Game Studies are great.

In the past, the viewing conditions of moving-imagery involved immobile spectatorship in an enclosed and darkened space that minimized distraction from the screen and expedited the metaphorical dissolve of one's physical surroundings whilst heightening an immersive experience in the events on-screen.<sup>122</sup> Alongside changes in the size and portability of screens, locations of display have also multiplied. Nowadays projections have left the cinematic space and instead have been transferred "to ever-larger screens, in multiplexes, IMAX theatres, town squares, open air venues as well as in the home".<sup>123</sup> *Changes in screens and viewing conditions mean that today more than ever before, on-screen and off-screen worlds co-exist and constantly merge.*

Virtual worlds appearing in frescoes and mosaics are, in a similar manner to large-scale contemporary screens, inseparable from their architectural surroundings. Paintings, however, and more recently, personal computer screens and mobile phones, make these virtual worlds easily commutable and accessible through their portable screens. Consequently, these "other", co-existing worlds accompany the physical

world and viewers can be constantly connected or always "plugged-in".<sup>124</sup> Erkki Huhtamo questions how often users of mobile screens "think about the curious shifts of perception between nothing less than ontological realms that take place when they move their gaze from the screen to other humans, to the surrounding landscape, to another screen, and back again, in rapid succession?"<sup>125</sup> If what transpires "in there", i.e. on screen, is seen as related and continuous to what takes place "out here", in the viewer's physical space, the perceptions of a divide between on and off screen worlds changes. A sense of continuity rather than innate separateness consequently emerges, facilitating the use of one to represent the other, as happens in animated documentaries.

A further connection between worlds is also created by changes in technologies of display that progressively break the containing limits of the screen's frame. The IMAX gets ever bigger and 3D cinema becomes the norm, breaking the margins of the frame and thus bringing the IMAX closer to the immersivity of virtual reality.<sup>126</sup> Projections allow an entirely different de-framing of the image process, migrating from the screen to other physical surfaces.<sup>127</sup> Advanced forms and scales of projection can similarly "invade" the viewing space of the spectator, creating unprecedented bodily relations between the image and the viewer, whether immersive, or no longer based on verticality. There are many examples of animation used in live-action performances, including the recent opening ceremony of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia, in which the famous Russian animator and Oscar award winner Aleksandr Petrov created four animation fragments for the ceremony. The entire floor of the venue was fully animated, using 120 projectors in total to create an entirely seamless animation that was integrated with live performances, creating visual amalgamations between the physical components and the animated visuals.<sup>128</sup> Another example is the 2013 Grammy Award Show, in which singer Carrie Underwood's dress was used as a screen upon which an animated lightshow was projected, generating media commentary for its originality and spectacle.<sup>129</sup> Reinforcing my arguments concerning the power of animation in a highly visual culture, Underwood herself commented that this allowed her to "stand still and sing...[and]...still created something visually attention-capturing and beautiful".<sup>130</sup>



Figure 4.10: Peter the Great animated boat sequence at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia



Figure 4.11: Singer Carrie Underwood with her "screen dress" at the 2013 Grammy Award Show

Even 2D animations can escape the regulated viewing institution as well as the screen in order to infiltrate the physical world of the spectator. By creating 3D digital projections, 3D buildings and objects become so-called screens so that what is

projected is no longer viewed as a 2D image but is given enhanced dimensions through the projection space.<sup>131</sup> The frame limiting the animation to a separate world is thus broken and it appears to physically "dwell" in our physical world. The screen, previously separated and kept at a distance from the immobilized viewer, is now the backdrop in which the viewer herself exists, the city and spaces she herself inhabits. As the physical world becomes the screen, the viewer finds herself "in the screen". As new interfaces and technologies of representation are developed "to enhance the illusion of their three-dimensional presence" (such as virtual reality and computer holography) these changes indicate growing convergences between worlds which are progressively becoming part of common viewing conditions.<sup>132</sup> Whereas in the past the "other" animated world used to be in, or on, the screen, changes in defined screen spaces introduce the notion of colliding worlds: the projected images or portable screens facilitate a sharing of space so that, in a metaphorical sense, spectators are now also in that "other" world. This may be considered indicative of what my research positions as a broader shift towards *life in-screen*, whereby more and more activities and life (in its everyday but also more unusual parameters) are based on omnipresent networked interactivity and are mediated through computerized screen culture. This will be explored in more depth in the next chapter about the digitally virtual.

Theodor H. Nelson, a pioneering sociologist and philosopher of information technology, claimed that, in order to see tomorrow's computer systems, one should look at gaming technologies.<sup>133</sup> "Deframing" technologies such as Microsoft Research project IllumiRoom use a Windows Kinect camera and a projector to blend virtual and physical worlds by creating real-time projected visualizations that are adapted to the dimensions of the physical space and extend the screen-world into the viewer's environment.<sup>134</sup> Since the images on-screen are no longer confined by the material screen frame, events "on" screen disrupt and are disrupted by the events occurring around them in the physical world.





Figure 4.12: IllumiRoom by Microsoft

As screen technologies advance, the screen as "a flat rectangle that acts as a window into the virtual world" changes and screen imagery can now, in principle, appear everywhere and anywhere.<sup>135</sup> Manovich prophesizes that the status of the screen as "separate entity" will diminish and instead "[t]he retina and the screen will merge".<sup>136</sup> Although Manovich is cautious about the inevitability of his prediction, mobile phones and the development of Google Glasses bring his forecast closer than ever before. According to Shane Richmond, "Juniper research says that 15 million wearable computing gadgets will be sold this year and expects that to increase to 70 million by 2017".<sup>137</sup>



Figure 4.13: Google Glasses

The screen makes accessible what cannot be seen with the naked human eye. This is similar to what the photograph and the microscope enabled at first, enhancing vision and revealing aspects of the real previously unavailable to viewers, and thus broadening epistemological ranges. However, through photography, microscopes or telescopes, what was seen was physical, whereas today new technologies of representation on-screen make visible what is not necessarily physical and cannot otherwise be viewed. Furthermore, whereas in the past "technologies of vision" were available to relatively few, today screens enabling "enhanced" vision are quite common, leading to a widespread shift in visuality and what it can encompass.

Augmented realities, which overlay digital data on the real-physical world, are another important area to consider. Although augmented reality can include static information, animation plays a large role within it because it visualizes the non-physical, which is then combined on-screen with the physical surroundings of the viewer-user. Augmented reality is currently most relevant to mobile screens because it is used to provide additional layers of information that engage with one's physical location and are visually layered upon that location.<sup>138</sup> Uses may vary but are common in games that take place "in" or "on" the setting of the physical world or in tourism applications where directions and information are provided about physical locations. In other words, the screen acts as both a window and an interface through which the physical and the animated are visually combined. The screen becomes a

lens through which to see into the physical world in which one exists, only to be presented with an augmented version of it.

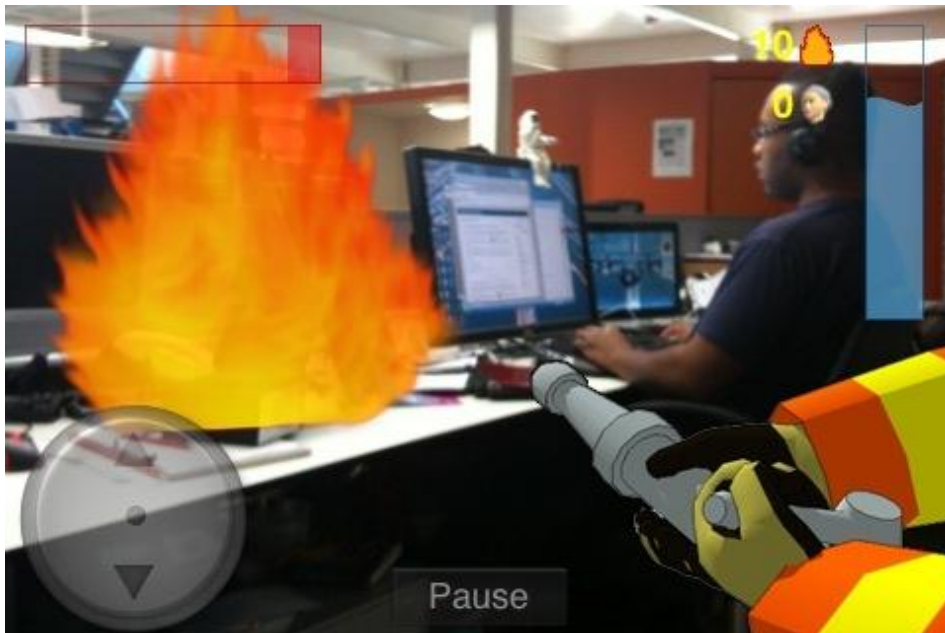


Figure 4.14: *Firefighter 360* is an AR game for smartphones that casts you as a hose-wielding hero, 2009, by Presselite

These augmented realities not only influence actions and as such shape realities, but they are also part of the contemporary "living in-screen" phenomenon whereby activities increasingly take place through screen mediation. Augmented realities thus embody how the world is now increasingly being seen and experienced, the physical simultaneously including the non-physical as well. The two worlds are converging and increasingly being reconstituted as one.

This demonstrates that once virtual screen worlds become interactive and the screen functions as interface, the worlds depicted on it no longer remain simply literally on its surface but invite the embodied viewer into a place and into a role, enabling him or her to dynamically act within these worlds. The screen as interface reinforces what I identify as a growing convergence between on-screen and off-screen worlds. The environment in which contemporary users act on a day-to-day basis is now largely a computerized virtual one.<sup>139</sup> In this sense, the *on*-screen world becomes an *in*-screen world, in which the user-viewer plays an active role. Whereas in the past, or even as early as the 1990s, it would have been easier to differentiate between "reality" as

physical (and therefore photographable), this is no longer the case. As I shall go on to discuss in the following chapter, the virtual is no longer separate from the physical.

As daily actions are increasingly screen-mediated, new visual representations are needed to construct and transmit information in these digital in-screen virtual worlds. Formerly, "[b]efore it came to be governed by principles of realism, the image operated as a symbolic representation like the word".<sup>140</sup> However, once photography became prevalent, the signifying relations of imagery changed and principles of realism based on analogical mimesis were prioritized, thus crowning photography as the privileged signifier/medium in a new representational hierarchy.<sup>141</sup> As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener explain, in current virtualized computer culture, "the use of images or pictorial signs are used as a symbolic language, in order to render visible a set of abstract data or processes: what we 'see' is information translated into a (conventionalized) language of vision, not something that is in any sense really 'out there'".<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, we engage with, and act according to, and within, the paradigms of these pictorial and in-screen worlds. *In other words, today, aspects of contemporary digital-virtual culture appear only on-screen and as such require representation that exceeds the photographic analogue mimetic representation that relies on materiality, thus serving to explain what I identify as the growing role of animation as a visual language of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

## **Conclusion**

The divide between animated worlds and the physical space of the viewer is based on the idea that animation does not exist in physical reality but that its sole visibility rather lies on-screen, and further rests upon its stylistic break with photographically mimetic appearances based on the physical. The presumed "problem" of animated documentaries is, therefore, that "they cannot objectively represent reality or depart from their innate facticity" and "that they are ontologically dissimilar with respect to [material-based] indexicality".<sup>143</sup> These characteristics contradict documentary conventions, which demand an "objective" and direct depiction of realities, while animation inherently highlights its constructed nature. In other words, whereas photographic representation relies on a physical imprint of the referent, which helps to legitimize photography as a believable documentary aesthetic, animation's relation to the "real" depicted is unclear, thus raising suspicion regarding its role as trustworthy

signifier. This discrepancy lies at the heart of the opposition "between the styles of animation and cinema [which] defined the culture of the moving image in the twentieth century... [whereas] animation foregrounds its artificial character...cinema works hard to erase any traces of its own production process...[denying] that the reality it shows often does not exist outside of the film image".<sup>144</sup> With regard to animated documentaries, their insurmountable difference from representations of the physically actual create what is deemed an unbridgeable gap between the two. It is my argument, however, that this assumption disintegrates as both the "actual", as well as conventions of documentary representation, change.

This chapter has identified a number of reasons to account for what I perceive as the changing status of animation as a new and increasingly prolific visual language in non-fiction. Animated documentaries have flourished in a contemporary situation that may be characterized by both a rise in new visuals and the demise of more traditionally accepted ones.

After examining the many and varied aesthetic forms used in contemporary visual culture it has become compellingly clear that what appears "real" may be deceitful and what appears divorced from anything humanly visible may be factual. In an era where the margins between image and reality disintegrate, what is animated and looks fictional may actually cover factual content. It could also be the case that what is presented as photographic is actually animated and what is directly photographed is visually mistaken for and interpreted as an animated video game. This means that, while visibility is today vital as a mode of information reception, what is deemed as an accurate or legitimate visual representation is more fluid and negotiable than perhaps initially assumed. The examples included in this chapter illustrate a current state in visual culture that widens the visual possibilities for imagery which breaks with human vision as a criterion for credible representation. Consequently, I claim, animation has assumed centre stage in the field of visual non-fiction.

However, the decentralization of human vision of the physical world as a basis for what may be considered "true" or credible representations raises two central areas of exploration. First of all, once imagery that may have appeared credible in the past, such as photography, is weakened, the status of signs as evidence or believable indications must be considered in order to see what, if any, new form can take their

place, a topic that will be discussed in chapter 5 through an analysis of indexicality. Secondly, enriching the variety of styles used to depict non-fictional content means that the physical appearance of referents as perceived by human vision becomes one visual representation among many. In today's technologized world, a break with the representation of physical appearance demands a further rethinking of assumptions about reality, which now surpasses the physical and, therefore, clearly requires additional representations that do not rely on mimetic appearance, such as photography.<sup>145</sup> The meaning and significance of the virtual in this context will thus be the focus of the next chapter.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The media and scholarly hype over Ari Folman's 2008 animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir*, for example, can be considered a sign of this.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix for film details.

<sup>3</sup> "The Internet Movie Database http", accessed April 25, 2014, [www.imdb.com/keyword/animated-documentary/](http://www.imdb.com/keyword/animated-documentary/) and "Wikipedia", accessed April 25, 2014, [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Animated\\_documentary\\_films](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Animated_documentary_films)

<sup>4</sup> "Vimeo", accessed April 25, 2014, [www.vimeo.com/channels/docoanim/videos](http://www.vimeo.com/channels/docoanim/videos)

<sup>5</sup> Information from "Animated Documentary", accessed April 25, 2014, [www.animateddocs.wordpress.com/about/](http://www.animateddocs.wordpress.com/about/) and "Facebook Animated Documentary Discussion Group", accessed August 14, 2014, [www.facebook.com/AnimatedDocumentary](http://www.facebook.com/AnimatedDocumentary)

<sup>6</sup> "Facebook Animated Documentary Discussion Group", accessed August 14, 2014, [www.facebook.com/AnimatedDocumentary](http://www.facebook.com/AnimatedDocumentary) and "Animated Documentary", accessed April 25, 2014, [www.animateddocs.wordpress.com/about/](http://www.animateddocs.wordpress.com/about/)

<sup>7</sup> "Youtube", accessed April 25, 2014, [www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=animated+documentary+](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=animated+documentary+)

<sup>8</sup> *Magnetic Movie* by Semiconductor from 2007, for example, was recently shown at Canary Wharf station in London as part of Animate Projects' *Move on Up* program. See the event program at [www.animateprojects.org/events/2012/move\\_on\\_up\\_at\\_canary\\_wharf\\_screen](http://www.animateprojects.org/events/2012/move_on_up_at_canary_wharf_screen)

<sup>9</sup> The many emerging film festivals that focus on animated documentaries are slowly growing as established film festivals begin including special programs dedicated to the sub-genre. Some examples of such film festivals include: *Dok Leipzig Film Festival* for documentary and animated film in Germany, [www.dok-leipzig.de/home/?lang=en&](http://www.dok-leipzig.de/home/?lang=en&); *DOCartoon-The Drawing of Reality* in Italy, [www.docartoon.it](http://www.docartoon.it); *DocAviv – The Tel Aviv International Documentary Film Festival* in Israel, [www.docaviv.co.il/en/2012/tag/animation](http://www.docaviv.co.il/en/2012/tag/animation); *Guangzhou International Documentary Film Festival* in China, [www.gzdoc.com/en\\_2012/index.asp](http://www.gzdoc.com/en_2012/index.asp); *Hot Docs – International Documentary Festival* in Canada, [www.hotdocs.ca/search/search.php?query=animation&search=1&x=0&y=0](http://www.hotdocs.ca/search/search.php?query=animation&search=1&x=0&y=0); In 2012 Animated documentaries were the big winners at the *Annecy International Animated Film Festival* with top prizes going to Anca Damian's *Crulic: The Path To Beyond* and Laurent Boileau and Jung Henin's *Approved for Adoption*, [www.annecy.org/home](http://www.annecy.org/home); *Mumbai International Film Festival* for documentary, short and animation films in India, [www.filmsdivision.org/miff/](http://www.filmsdivision.org/miff/) and more.

<sup>10</sup> Some examples of recent exhibitions that included animated documentaries are *WK5* – a 2009-2011 exhibition of William Kentridge's works shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the 2011 *Watch Me Move* exhibition at the Barbican Gallery in London; the 2009-2010 *Decode the Digital* at the V&A in London, the 2010-2013 travelling exhibition *The Body in Women's Art Now* at Rollo Contemporary Art in London; the 2009-2010 *Feedforward: The Angel of History* exhibition at the LABoral in Spain; exhibitions of the works of Kota Ezawa shown in myriad exhibitions including at The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York Seoul Museum of Art, Korea and more.

<sup>11</sup> Youtube and Vimeo are amongst the most popular.

<sup>12</sup> Two recommended databases are "Animate Projects", [www.animateprojects.org](http://www.animateprojects.org), and the "Facebook Animated Documentary Discussion Group", [www.facebook.com/AnimatedDocumentary](http://www.facebook.com/AnimatedDocumentary)

<sup>13</sup> These include, for example, *The Guardian's* 2012 Olympics video animation series, [www.guardian.co.uk/sport/video/2012/aug/10/brick-behind-scenes-video-animation](http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/video/2012/aug/10/brick-behind-scenes-video-animation), or their animated

shorts about the lives of five young refugees who have sought asylum in the UK, [www.guardian.co.uk/society/video/2012/jun/18/refugee-week-refugees](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/video/2012/jun/18/refugee-week-refugees).

<sup>14</sup> For more about art in virtual worlds and a useful list of artists and game-world galleries and links see Patrick Lichty, "The Translation of Art in Virtual Worlds", *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 16:4 (2009): 1-12. An example of such a work is the *Gone Gitmo* project discussed in later chapters.

<sup>15</sup> In Chapter 6 I will consider additional aspects of the contemporary, such as globalization and the viewer's role as participant in today's mediascape.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All* (London: Verso, 2013), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Terry Smith, *What is Contemporary Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", *October* 130 (2009): 60.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Terry Smith, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", *October* 130 (2009): 47.

<sup>25</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 21. This is an obviously necessary schematic description since the topic could cover the entirety of 20<sup>th</sup> century's art and avant gardes.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern", in *Altermodern*, ed. Nicolas Bourriaud (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 3, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Miwon Kwon, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", *October* 130 (2009): 13.

<sup>28</sup> Kwon, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", 13.

<sup>29</sup> James Elkins, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", *October* 130 (2009):11.

<sup>30</sup> Bourriaud, "Altermodern", 2-3, 10.

<sup>31</sup> Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", 56-57.

<sup>32</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 128.

<sup>33</sup> Lev Manovich, "Introduction to Info-Aesthetics", in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 338-339.

<sup>34</sup> Manovich, "Introduction to Info-Aesthetics", 334.

<sup>35</sup> Manovich, "Introduction to Info-Aesthetics", 340.

<sup>36</sup> These ideas will be developed further in the thesis conclusions.



- <sup>37</sup> Boris Groys, "The Topology of Contemporary Art", in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 78.
- <sup>38</sup> Boris Groys, "Comrades of Time", *E-Flux* 11 (2009): unpaginated.
- <sup>39</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990), 2.
- <sup>40</sup> Christopher Shay, "The Taiwan Company That's Turning News into Cartoons", *Time*, August 23, 2010, accessed November 10, 2010, [www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2012166,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2012166,00.html)
- <sup>41</sup> Pamela Boykoff, "The Blurry Lines of Animated 'News'", *CNN*, February 2, 2010, accessed November 10, 2010, [www.edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/01/30/taiwan.animated.news/index.html?iref=allsearch](http://www.edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/01/30/taiwan.animated.news/index.html?iref=allsearch)
- <sup>42</sup> Boykoff, "The Blurry Lines", unpaginated.
- <sup>43</sup> Boykoff, "The Blurry Lines", unpaginated.
- <sup>44</sup> Boykoff, "The Blurry Lines", unpaginated.
- <sup>45</sup> Benjamin Ka Lun Cheng and Wai Han Lo, "Can News Be Imaginative? An Experiment Testing the Perceived Credibility of Melodramatic Animated News, News Organizations, Media Use, and Media Dependency", *Electronic News* 6:3 (2012): 131-150.
- <sup>46</sup> Shay, "The Taiwan Company That's Turning News into Cartoons", unpaginated.
- <sup>47</sup> Shay, "The Taiwan Company That's Turning News into Cartoons", unpaginated.
- <sup>48</sup> Bim Adewunmi, "UK's Child Refugees Tell Their Unique Stories", *The Guardian*, June 18, 2012, accessed January 3, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/society/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2012/jun/18/uk-child-refugees-stories](http://www.theguardian.com/society/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2012/jun/18/uk-child-refugees-stories)  
Interestingly, Mosaic Films, the Bafta-winning company behind the films also made the award-winning series *Animated Minds*, which explored the thoughts of people living with mental illness.
- <sup>49</sup> "One Iranian Lawyer's Fight to Save Juveniles from Execution – Animation" (Series – Amnesty Urgent Action), *The Guardian*, accessed March 20, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/world/video/2012/mar/27/lawyer-fight-juveniles-execution-animation](http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2012/mar/27/lawyer-fight-juveniles-execution-animation)  
This is the story of Mohammad Mostafaei, a lawyer who has saved 20 of the 40 juveniles he has defended from execution in Iran. My Thanks to Kirsten Lloyd who brought the second work to my attention.  
"Guantanamo Bay: The Hunger Strikes – Video Animation", *The Guardian*, accessed June 10, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/oct/11/guantanamo-bay-hunger-strikes-video-animation](http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/oct/11/guantanamo-bay-hunger-strikes-video-animation)
- <sup>50</sup> "Globalised Slavery: How Big Supermarkets are Selling Prawns in Supply Chain Fed by Slave Labour – Video" (Series – Modern-Day Slavery in Focus), *The Guardian*, accessed July 8, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/global-development/video/2014/jun/10/slavery-supermarket-supply-trail-prawns-video](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/video/2014/jun/10/slavery-supermarket-supply-trail-prawns-video)
- <sup>51</sup> *The Guardian* produced the Guantanamo Bay video and, as part of Amnesty International's 2012 death penalty campaign, for the work on story of Mohammad Mostafaei video, *The Guardian* collaborated with animators from *Sherbet*, a BAFTA winning production company and animation studio that also produced the first full-length animated documentary made for British television, Jonathan Hodgson's 2011 *Wonderland: The Trouble with Love and Sex*.
- <sup>52</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 173.

- <sup>53</sup> José B. Capino, "Filthy Funnies: Notes on the Body in Animated Pornography", *Animation Journal* 12 (2004): 55-56.
- <sup>54</sup> Other reasons may of course be included but my interest in the technological context of animation proliferation in documentary and non-fiction explains my focus on the following.
- <sup>55</sup> Christiane Paul, "Expanding Cinema: The Moving Image in Digital Art", in *Film and Video Art*, ed. Stuart Comer (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 134.
- <sup>56</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 14-15.
- <sup>57</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 22.
- <sup>58</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 14, 22.
- <sup>59</sup> *NMA*, for example, uses motion capture techniques, which means that actors wear special head-to-toe suits and perform specific movements that are processed by motion capture cameras and integrated into final animations, creating quick and relatively cheap animation footage.
- <sup>60</sup> Manovich, "Introduction to Info-Aesthetics", 335.
- <sup>61</sup> Lynn Hunt and Vanessa R. Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment: Images and Eyewitnessing in History", *Journal of Visual Culture* 9:3 (2010): 265.
- <sup>62</sup> Hunt and Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment", 264.
- <sup>63</sup> Hunt and Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment", 264.
- <sup>64</sup> Hunt and Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment", 260.
- <sup>65</sup> Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2009).
- <sup>66</sup> Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 3.
- <sup>67</sup> Jane Blocker, *Seeing Witness: Visuality and the Ethics of Testimony* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xvi.
- <sup>68</sup> Hunt and Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment", 266.
- <sup>69</sup> Hunt and Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment", 265.
- <sup>70</sup> Tom Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real: What is the Difference?", in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 179.
- <sup>71</sup> Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real", 179.
- <sup>72</sup> Ritchin describes the disconnect between content and image so central in Postmodernism and notes Cindy Sherman's faked "film stills" as well as the virtual realities of politics, listing examples of American presidents who used constructed photo ops to create public images and "truths". See Ritchin, *After Photography*, 82.
- <sup>73</sup> Rather than defining animation such as this as special effects, it is interesting to note that the film *Avatar* was marketed as an animated film in France, as was noted by Ian Christie, keynote speaker at the 2012 London Symposium. Ian Christie, "The End of Representation? Beginning with the Audience" (paper presented at the London Symposium – Film and Media 2012, London UK, June 22-24, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Katie Rogers, "Fake Hurricane Sandy Photos: Help Us Identify #FakeSandy Pictures", *The Guardian*, October 29, 2012, accessed February 14, 2013, [www.theguardian.com/world/us-news-blog/2012/oct/29/fake-hurricane-sandy-photos](http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-news-blog/2012/oct/29/fake-hurricane-sandy-photos)

<sup>75</sup> See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>76</sup> One recent example of many of the media's attention to reworked imagery in popular culture is the cover of *Vogue* magazine featuring singer-performer Lady Gaga whose body was completely reshaped in image manipulation. See Cavan Sieczkowski, "Lady Gaga 'Vogue' Cover Photo Retouched? Magazine Takes Flak after Allegations of Photoshop Surface", *Huffington Post*, August 31, 2012, accessed April 20, 2014, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/31/lady-gagas-vogue-cover-retouched-video-\\_n\\_1846998.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/31/lady-gagas-vogue-cover-retouched-video-_n_1846998.html)

<sup>77</sup> Blocker, *Seeing Witness*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> See Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 62.

<sup>80</sup> For more on the *Reprocessing Reality* exhibition see "Reprocessing Reality", *MOMA PS1*, accessed July 10, 2010, [www.momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/111](http://www.momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/111) A comparable artwork from 2010 is Los Angeles-based artist Josh Bricker's work *Post Newtonianism*, a two channel video with sound, which consists of actual war footage taken from cameras mounted on American military aircraft during the first Gulf War in 1991 and the American occupation of Iraq contrasted with footage from the popular video game "Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare". The sound track is a mixture of audio taken from the video game and the footage released by Wikileaks in which the US military killed two reporters working for Reuters as well as a number of unarmed civilians. The end result is an approximately equal mix of sound from real and unreal sources, blurring the line of reality further. For more on this work see "Images of War: Post Newtonianism", *Instant Cinema*, accessed August 16, 2014 [www.preview.instantcinema.org/expdocs/1143/Images-of-war-Post-Newtonianism](http://www.preview.instantcinema.org/expdocs/1143/Images-of-war-Post-Newtonianism)

<sup>81</sup> For an example of research on the uses of virtual reality and gaming simulations for military training see Patrick Crogan, "Logistical Space: Flight Simulation and Virtual Reality", in *The Illusion of Life 2*, ed. Alan Cholodenko (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006), 368-399.

For artwork dealing with this topic, see Harun Farocki's "Serious Games I-IV", the main attraction at the 2011-2012 Museum of Modern Art exhibition "Harun Farocki: Images of War (at a Distance)". For more information see [www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1196](http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1196)

<sup>82</sup> An interesting aspect of this idea was raised by Orson Scott Card in his famous 1977 novel *Ender's Game* which has also been recently made into a motion picture, obviously commenting on the relevance of these issues to viewers today and the growing inability to necessarily differentiate between such "worlds". Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game* (New York: Tor Science Fiction, 1994)

<sup>83</sup> Guerin and Hallas, *The Image and the Witness*, 12-13.

<sup>84</sup> Blocker, *Seeing Witness*, xiv.

<sup>85</sup> Blocker, *Seeing Witness*, xiii.

<sup>86</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1-42.

<sup>87</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra", in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum, 1984), 256.

<sup>88</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories* (London: Verso, 1990), 50.

<sup>89</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 2.

<sup>90</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 21-22.

<sup>91</sup> Armstrong, "On the Border of the Real", 30.

<sup>92</sup> Lev Manovich, "Cinema and Digital Media", in *Perspectives of Media Art*, ed. Lev Manovich et al. Published in *Perspectives of Media Art* by Jeffrey Shaw and Hans Peter Schwarz (eds.) (Berlin: Cantz Verlag Ostfildern, 1996), available at [monovich.net](http://monovich.net), unpaginated.

<sup>93</sup> *Kuma War Games*, accessed June 4, 2013, [www.kumawar.com/](http://www.kumawar.com/)

<sup>94</sup> *Kuma War Games*, accessed June 4, 2013, [www.kumawar.com/](http://www.kumawar.com/)

<sup>95</sup> Tracy Fullerton, "Documentary Games: Putting the Player in the Path of History" in *Playing the Past: Nostalgia in Video Games and Electronic Literature*, ed. Zach Whalen and Laurie Taylor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), available at [www.tracyfullerton.com/assets/DocumentaryGames\\_fullerton.pdf](http://www.tracyfullerton.com/assets/DocumentaryGames_fullerton.pdf), 12 of 28.

<sup>96</sup> Tracy Fullerton, "Documentary Games", 12 of 28.

<sup>97</sup> Debra Benita Shaw, *Technoculture* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), 121.

<sup>98</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>99</sup> Even if *Kuma War Games* use imagery based on photographic footage of events, the interactive function of the game requires flexibility that necessitates the use of animation to depict the events that transpire based on the player's decisions and actions. In other words, even if at times the animation may seem realistic, more so than *Next Media*, it is still obviously animation.

<sup>100</sup> My thanks to Oded Erell for bringing this case to my attention.

<sup>101</sup> See Tara Conlan and John Plunkett, "'IRA' Footage was from Video Game, Admits ITV", *The Guardian*, September 27, 2011, accessed April 15, 2013, [www.theguardian.com/media/2011/sep/27/ira-footage-video-game-itv](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/sep/27/ira-footage-video-game-itv);

<sup>102</sup> Although it was eventually recognized as false footage, it is important to keep in mind that the viewers who called the bluff are a small percentage of viewers, those who spotted the imagery for what it was, game-play footage from a specific game. Others may or may not have noticed the fraud but could not be sure without familiarity with the original.

<sup>103</sup> Sara Nathan and Paul Revoir, "ITV admits it passed off clip from a VIDEO GAME as footage of IRA attack on British helicopter in new flagship news show", *The Daily Mail –Mail Online*, September 28, 2011, accessed April 15, 2013, [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2042568/ITV-fake-footage-row-new-documentary-passes-game-IRA-gun-attack-British-helicopter.html#ixzz2cQevwIFq](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2042568/ITV-fake-footage-row-new-documentary-passes-game-IRA-gun-attack-British-helicopter.html#ixzz2cQevwIFq); Conlan and Plunkett, "'IRA' footage", unpaginated;

<sup>104</sup> Conlan and Plunkett, "'IRA' footage", unpaginated; It is worthwhile to note that the footage was an extract from a longer clip available on Youtube and the amount of work and editing put into making the game footage usable for the documentary sheds much doubt on the innocence of said "human error".

<sup>105</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media", in *Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. M. Poster (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1988), 121.

<sup>106</sup> Bourriaud, "Altermodern", 9.

- <sup>107</sup> Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", 56-58.
- <sup>108</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "Metamorphosis Metaphor Metastasis", in *The Ecstasy of Communication*, ed. S. Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1988), 44.
- <sup>109</sup> Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 190.
- <sup>110</sup> Skoller, "Introduction to the Special Issue 'Making It (Un)real'", 209.
- <sup>111</sup> Anne Friedberg, "The End of Cinema: Multimedia and Technological Change" in *The Film Theory Reader – Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenu (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 270.
- <sup>112</sup> This topic will be further developed in chapter 6 on realism.
- <sup>113</sup> For more about Leon Battista Alberti and Filippo Brunelleschi, the "fathers" of single point perspective and the idea of the painting as open window, see Lev Manovich, "An Archeology of a Computer Screen", *Manovich.net*, 1995, [www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital\\_nature.html](http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital_nature.html); Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009) that trace these ideas into the modern screen.
- <sup>114</sup> Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 20.
- <sup>115</sup> Manovich, "An Archeology of a Computer Screen", unpaginated.
- <sup>116</sup> See Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, and Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*.
- <sup>117</sup> Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 62.
- <sup>118</sup> Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, 62.
- <sup>119</sup> Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, 63.
- <sup>120</sup> The study of screens can thus take on varied aspects, such as looking into topics of scale and technology (the analogue cinema, the electronic TV set and the digital computer, cell phone and iPod), for more on this see Jan Simons, "Pockets in the Screenscape: Movies on the Move" (paper presented at MIT 6, Stone and Papyrus, Storage and Transmission MIT, April 24-26, 2009 by University of Amsterdam), available at [www.web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit6/papers/Simons.pdf](http://www.web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit6/papers/Simons.pdf). For more on the shape, tactility, portability and location of screens as a continuation of early pre-cinematic apparatuses see Charles Musser, "Toward a History of Screen Practice", *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9:1 (1984): 59-69. See also Erkki Huhtamo's work that contextualizes the screen in the centuries-long trajectory to include billboards and spotlights in Erkki Huhtamo, "Elements of Screenology: Towards an Archeology of the Screen", *Iconics: International Studies of the Modern Age* 7 (2004): 31-82; Scott McQuire, Meredith Martin, and Sabine Niederer, ed., *Urban Screens Reader*, ed. (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2009) who give an expansive view of different networked screens, their urban concentration and their visual consumption; Charles R. Acland, "The Crack in the Electric Window", *Cinema Journal* 51:2 (2012): 171.
- <sup>121</sup> Lev Manovich asserts that "[w]e may debate whether our society is a society of spectacle or of simulation, but, undoubtedly, it is the society of a screen", for more see Manovich, "An Archeology of a Computer Screen", unpaginated.
- <sup>122</sup> For more on display spaces and their effect on the viewer's relation to the world on-screen, see Tanya Leighton, ed., *Art and the Moving Image – A Critical Reader* (London, Tate Publishing, 2008), 25; Sky Sitney, "The Search for the Invisible Cinema", *Grey Room* 19 (2005): 102-113.
- <sup>123</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 182-3. See also Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies and the Home* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord, ed., *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema* (Toronto, Buffalo, NY, London: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

- <sup>124</sup> Nanna Verhofen, "Grasping the Screen, Toward a Conceptualization of Touch, Mobility and Multiplicity", in *Digital Material: Tracing New Media in Everyday Life and Technology*, ed. Marianne van den Boomen et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 217.
- <sup>125</sup> Huhtamo, "Elements of Screenology", 144-5.
- <sup>126</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 175.
- <sup>127</sup> Michael Newman, "Moving Image in the Gallery since the 1990s", in *Film and Video Art*, ed. Stuart Comer (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 121.
- <sup>128</sup> Michelle Collins, "The 2014 Sochi Opening Ceremonies Recap: The Winter Olympics of our Discontent", *Vanity Fair*, February 8, 2014, accessed April 20, 2014, [www.vanityfair.com/online/daily/2014/02/sochi-opening-ceremonies-recap](http://www.vanityfair.com/online/daily/2014/02/sochi-opening-ceremonies-recap)
- <sup>129</sup> Ellie Krupnick, "Carrie Underwood's Dress at the Grammys was a Total Light Show", *Huffington Post*, February 11, 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/11/carrie-underwood-dress-grammys\\_n\\_2661487.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/02/11/carrie-underwood-dress-grammys_n_2661487.html) My thanks to Henry Kaplan who brought this example to my attention.
- <sup>130</sup> Zach Johnson, "Carrie Underwood Wears LED Dress for Grammys 2013 Performance", *US Magazine*, February 11, 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, [www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-style/news/carrie-underwood-wears-led-dress-for-grammys-2013-performance-all-the-details-2013112#ixzz2zQWmh49H](http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-style/news/carrie-underwood-wears-led-dress-for-grammys-2013-performance-all-the-details-2013112#ixzz2zQWmh49H)
- <sup>131</sup> An example of such works was included in the 2011 Nelson Arts Festival 3D in New Zealand where digital mapping projections created illusion through large scale projections on Nelson's Christ Church Cathedral and Church Steps. For more information see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ-feMRBKts](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJ-feMRBKts).
- <sup>132</sup> Lev Manovich, "'Reality' effects in Computer Animation" in *A Reader in Animation Studies*, ed. Jayne Pilling (London: John Libbey, 1997), 5.
- <sup>133</sup> T.H. Nelson, "The Right Way to think about Software Design" in *The Art of Human-Computer Interface Design*, ed. B. Laurel (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990), 235-243.
- <sup>134</sup> Robert Purchase, "Peripheral Projected Illusions", *Eurogamer.net*, January 10, 2013, accessed August 20, 2013, [www.eurogamer.net/articles/2013-01-10-peripheral-projected-illusions-microsoft-demos-illumiroom-kinect-idea-in-video](http://www.eurogamer.net/articles/2013-01-10-peripheral-projected-illusions-microsoft-demos-illumiroom-kinect-idea-in-video)
- <sup>135</sup> Manovich, "An Archeology of a Computer Screen", unpaginated.
- <sup>136</sup> Manovich, "An Archeology of a Computer Screen", unpaginated.
- <sup>137</sup> Shane Richmond, "Wearable Computing is Here Already: How Hi-tech got under our Skin", *The Independent*, July 19, 2013, accessed August 20, 2013, [www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/wearable-computing-is-here-already-how-hitech-got-under-our-skin-8721263.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/wearable-computing-is-here-already-how-hitech-got-under-our-skin-8721263.html)
- <sup>138</sup> This is done by utilizing the smartphone's compass, camera and GPS system.
- <sup>139</sup> This is not to say I am claiming the body has become obsolete. The role of the physical today and the consequent importance of its appearance in documentaries will be discussed in Chapters 4-5.
- <sup>140</sup> Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play – Derrida and Film Theory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 106.
- <sup>141</sup> Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 107.

<sup>142</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 178.

<sup>143</sup> Joost Raessens, in the theorization of documentary games, addresses the "problems" of documentary games, some of which are shared by animated documentaries due to their constructed nature and visual form. Raessens, "Reality Play", 220.

<sup>144</sup> Lev Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema?", Manovich.net, 1995, [www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html](http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html)\_(unpaginated).

<sup>145</sup> Since Surrealism used a variety of media to reconceive of reality long before the technology of today, Surrealism will be engaged with in Chapter 6 in my discussion of realism.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Virtual and Mixed Realities of Today

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explored the growing amalgamation of on-screen animated worlds and off-screen physical worlds from a technological, screen-based perspective. In this chapter, I pursue a related line of thought concerning the multiplicity of contemporary realities that exceed the physical and therefore require new languages of visual documentation. Some of these new realities are offshoots of the phenomenon wherein people spend parts of their "real" lives in "virtual" worlds. As Henry Lowood has observed, "as more people spend more time in virtual worlds, the events that take place in those worlds become part of the mixed realities – material and virtual – that the players inhabit and that define who they are. It will not be possible to tell the history of our times without including the history of these places and events".<sup>1</sup> This raises several inter-related questions, as to how it may be possible to show and preserve this history, and, furthermore, as to how the shifts identified by Lowood influence the practice and theorization of documentary in general, and animated documentary in particular.

While the field of animated documentaries studies has included exploration of non-physical realities that could not be photographed, the focus has remained on the personal and interpretive. It is my contention that animation, in serving to expose immaterial realities, is becoming an increasingly important component of documentary practice, enabling an engagement with the virtual features of contemporary life. Virtualized spaces and experiences may still be seen by some as fictional, but are becoming increasingly prevalent aspects of present-day culture. The virtual today reflects and shapes the physical, so that the virtual and non-virtual collide in various ways.<sup>2</sup> My research on the aesthetics of contemporary digitally virtual platforms of activity sheds new light on animation's role as a documentary visual language since it illustrates the prominence of animation in this new part of today's computerized realities and explains why, despite animation's break with photography and physical appearances, it holds much ground as an evolving and necessary documentary language.



The digitally virtual has been defined as 3D interactive platforms available on screen that create an immersive experience of telepresence through networked communications.<sup>3</sup> These computerized virtual realities are ones in which users are active daily, and where pictorial imagery visualizes actions and events. Manovich, in his examination of contemporary aesthetics, asks if

the arrival of information society [has] been accompanied by a new vocabulary of forms, new design aesthetics, new iconologies? Can there be forms specific to information society, given that software and computer networks redefine the very concept of form?...Can information society be represented iconically, if the activities that define it – information processing, interaction between a human and a computer telecommunication, networking – are all dynamic processes?<sup>4</sup>

My claim is that animation is an essential part of these new aesthetics. Since animation is based on on-screen movement and is free from the limitations of photography, which remains rooted in the physical, it is the ideal language for virtual worlds since it provides a means of visualization that can represent dynamic, non-physical realities in real-time that are otherwise unseen.

I am not claiming that the virtual is completely removed from the physical, for it obviously requires physical elements to work, be they technological machinery or human agents. However, the visual representation of the digital's physical components, such as wires or a hard drive for example, does not represent the activities and events experienced in these non-physical platforms, which is why animation is so important in the representation and documentation of these events. In addition, through a discussion of the relation of digital virtualities to non-physical spaces, as well as to some of the broader characteristics of globalization, I will also elucidate the visual languages used to depict these platforms. The chapter will also explore the relationship between the "virtual" and the "real" from both ontological and aesthetic perspectives.

Central terms in computerized culture include the User Experience (UX) and User Interface (UI). Animation is thus the Graphic User Interface (GUI) of digitally virtual activities. My claim throughout this thesis is that, as viewers spend more time in virtual worlds that make use of animated visuals, they become increasingly accustomed to this graphic representation of events and activities, making animation's

use in documentary settings appear more mundane, less extraordinary.<sup>5</sup> In order to further appreciate how understandings of the virtual and the digitally virtual have changed as well as how their representations contribute to documentary practice and theorization, it will be necessary to explore these issues in greater detail.

### **The Virtual**

Some things about the virtual are not new at all. As Rob Shields has pointed out, there has been a long history of virtual realities in the sense of fictions, simulation and perception games that "tricked the body and the mind into feeling transported elsewhere".<sup>6</sup> This succession of "virtual worlds" anticipates "the ability of information and communication technologies to make present what is both absent and imaginary".<sup>7</sup> Such a definition of "virtual worlds" closely resembles earlier definitions of animation that also centred on visualizations of the absent and the imaginary.<sup>8</sup> The digitally virtual spaces and gaming platforms discussed in this chapter are the latest manifestations of the virtual but, aesthetically, they illustrate the central role animation plays in these contexts today. Since the study of virtuality is replete with notions of fiction, make believe, non-presence and deception, it is no surprise that "the virtual" seems to have endured a murky, if not wanting, ontological status. Consequently, documenting contemporary digital worlds raises questions because these documentary works may easily seem more fictional than factual.

The complexity of "the virtual" is partly due to its conflicting and changing definitions and its relationship to similarly evolving conceptions of "the real". This research engages with the complex area of ontological and epistemological discussions insofar as it is relevant to the themes of animated documentary. Within the confines of my study, focusing on central definitions of the virtual is essential. Antony Bryant and Griselda Pollock explain that "the word 'virtual' is a contronym – a word that means its own opposite...Virtual means both 'not really existing' and 'almost the same'".<sup>9</sup> They elaborate by claiming that the "[v]irtual suggests something that is effective, operating in parallel to, but at a distance from the concrete, actual, material, or lived reality. There is similarity with the actual thing; but it is not the thing itself".<sup>10</sup> Although the virtual is often contrasted with "the real", an examination of other binary opposites frequently invoked in relation to the virtual can contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which virtuality has been theorized. I will

examine three aspects of this discourse: the philosophical perspective that widens the notion of virtuality by placing it in opposition to the possible and the actual, not only "the real"; virtuality's relation to materiality; and virtuality's conceptualization in contemporary technologized culture. Rather than maintaining binary classifications, the virtual becomes in my reading another aspect of contemporary realities.

Widening the excessively oppositional binary of "real" and "virtual", Gilles Deleuze draws upon the earlier work of Henri Bergson in order to theorize "virtuality [as] a gap rich with creative possibility".<sup>11</sup> Bergson's pairing of the possible and the real, and the virtual and the actual, led Deleuze to assert that the virtual has its own reality and should not, therefore, be opposed to the real. Deleuze argues that, by opposing virtuality to the actual, the "here and now", virtuality is potential--that which could become actual but is as yet unrealized.<sup>12</sup> The potentiality of digitally immersive virtual realities to become an exclusive actuality is a technical-philosophical question about the future. I insist that the immersiveness of gaming and also of the more general cultural characteristics of computerized and mediated experiences means that the "here and now", the actual, can no longer *necessarily* be differentiated from what is experienced in networked virtual worlds. The idea of the virtual's "own reality" is, therefore, useful for contemporary theorizations of the digitally virtual. The possible, on the other hand, as opposed to the real, "is only real in waiting; it must always fundamentally be similar to, and predetermined by, what is real".<sup>13</sup> The possible, in other words, is similar to the real and anticipates it, whereas the virtual is different from the existing real because of its own "reality".<sup>14</sup> From the perspective of my work on animated documentaries, it is in this regard particularly interesting to consider research visualizations that are only possible in animated form, such as in the case of nanotechnology, as a form of the virtual as a possible that, when proven, becomes real. The theorizations of the virtual by Bergson and Deleuze demonstrate that the situation is more complicated than models of reality omitting or devaluing the virtual would appear to suggest. In this respect, I concur with Rob Shields, who claims that "[t]he solution is not to debate the reality of the virtual, but to develop a more sophisticated theory of the real".<sup>15</sup>

Gilles Deleuze's *crystal image* is a helpful conceptual tool that sheds further light on the issue of the accommodation of animation in documentary and viewer reception. According to Deleuze's terminology, an understanding of the present is based upon

recognition and recollection of prior knowledge, which is the past apparent in the present. By Deleuze's definition, the present is our perception and is always actual, whereas the future and past, the future-past, are virtual. Since the past is embodied in the present, as are potential futures, and the present is destined to become past, our existence duplicates itself, being both actual and, simultaneously, virtual.<sup>16</sup> The virtual is external to the actual image but is what indicates meaning, since meaning is always outside of the film or cultural creation. The actual is not necessarily graspable in itself but only through virtual approaches to it. Since interpretation influences the meaning of the image, the virtual is constantly touching upon and influencing the actual, the one constantly becoming the other.

Crystal images, incorporating the actual and the virtual simultaneously, keep twisting within themselves so that the viewer's point of perception is destabilized, thus complicating interpretation. In the crystal image, viewers' ability to tell what is actual or virtual is suspended and the relation between the two keeps fluctuating and changing. The animated documentary image highlights this complex confrontation, in which viewers try to negotiate a larger system of meaning in order to interpret these new forms of referentiality and representation. Whereas photography captures a present, animation references but does so in a way that embodies interpretation in its stylization. In other words, the constructed nature of the animated image permits the creator to control the image and insert meaning into it in myriad manners. As such, animated representation embodies many contradictory aspects.

Any documentation of an event actualizes the event but is also virtual because it is interpreted for the viewer. Animated images can thereby act as actual images, actualizing events that viewers would be unable to witness otherwise. Since animation's relation to realities is, however, still morphing, the virtual is a shifting aspect of animation. This echoes the capacity of animated documentaries to expose information whilst still maintaining many masked elements, thus emphasizing what I have identified in Chapter 2 as the masking component of the representation itself. Because animation can be interpreted in varied ways, what is embodied in the images and what is part of the interpretation morphs endlessly. The virtual aspects of interpretation are far from fixed and, as such, the relation between the actual image perceived and its virtual "flip-side" of interpretation constantly change, echoing the Deleuzian idea of the crystal image. Since animation is a relatively new language of

representation in documentary, viewers are still working out the relation between the actual and virtual, the referent and its sign. Like the crystal image, it is not clear what is seen in animated documentaries, a topic to which I will return in the next chapter on indexicality.

Another pairing of terms that requires critical evaluation is the opposition of virtuality to materiality.<sup>17</sup> Rob Shields offers precise distinctions from the very onset of his study, proposing that, "the virtual captures the nature of activities and objects which exist but are not tangible, not 'concrete'".<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, he contends that concreteness and materiality raise issues of embodiment and perception, which seem to contradict the non-materiality associated with virtuality, whereby human space dissolves into synthetic dimensions. When examining how the word "virtual" is commonly used, it often seems to signify an absence or a non-existence, whereas what is "real" is in the media often equated with concreteness, material embodiment, and tangible presence. This suggests that the virtual is not real. As Shields explains, the term "virtual" is nonetheless also used to describe non-tangible aspects of reality that are important for our survival.<sup>19</sup>

These later clarifications resonate with contemporary visual culture. Gaming is an immensely popular virtual field of entertainment which is fully animated and acts as a reflection on, response to, and continuation of existing material realities. The field of gaming will be a recurring thread throughout this thesis but for now, it is important to note that, as gaming worlds evolve and multiply, and their impact and significance increase, so too do their intersections with aspects of the more conventionally accepted real, such as the economy and ecology, for example, thus weakening the distinctions between the two.<sup>20</sup> Once virtual objects have real-world monetary value, with child neglect occurring due to gaming immersiveness or avatars having carbon footprints, for example, the virtual is no longer altogether detached from the concrete and physical.<sup>21</sup> These examples support Shields's articulation that "[t]he virtual troubles any simple negation because it introduces multiplicity into the otherwise fixed category of the "real". As such, the tangible, actually real phenomena cease to be the sole, hegemonic examples of 'reality'".<sup>22</sup> I argue that defining the non-physical digitally virtual as non-real is, for these reasons, simplistic and inadequate. Instead, I find Derrida's notion of the supplement, allegedly secondary to an "original", useful in understanding virtuality's ambiguous relation to the real. Derrida explains the

supplement's status as un-decidable, for it can always be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, the supplement can be understood to fix what is lacking in the "original" or "natural", adding in order to replace, while on the other hand, the supplement can be seen to add to the "natural" state in the form of multiplicity and enrichment.<sup>23</sup> The virtual as an engaging and endless platform of anonymity and possibilities places it as a supplement that offers users what is missing from their "real" lives, at times replacing the latter for the former to varied degrees. On the other hand, as I claim here, the virtual is becoming yet another aspect of contemporary reality, contributing to its multiplicity. In both cases then, the virtual as supplement is vital to the understanding of contemporary culture and thus requires forms of documentation that are suitable to its differing characteristics from the non-virtual physical reality previously documented in photography. The growing virtualization of culture today may lead to the virtual becoming "more real than real", as I will explain, demonstrating the necessity to include the virtual in contemporary considerations of documentary practice and theory, as is the case in this thesis.

The discourse about virtuality must include some wider consideration of the role of technology and how the virtual is based on technology. According to Benita Shaw, technology is "the set of tools or 'techniques' that serve the requirements of any given culture", only then to emerge as more than just that, becoming technology as culture or, as the title of her book reflects, "technoculture".<sup>24</sup> Michael Heim's technical definitions of "the virtual" include "the appearance of simulated 3D space on 2D monitors; interaction with electronic representations; immersion in hard and software environments;...telepresence...; 'full body immersion' permitting interaction with digital environments without constricting hardware; and immersive networked communications, which allow more than one user to create and interact in virtual space".<sup>25</sup> These sound like perfect definitions of multiplayer online games as participatory and interactive simulated environments. The descriptions are also obviously true for a much wider virtual reality in which all networked subjects now take part.<sup>26</sup>

Jacques Ellul, in his work on computers and technology, claims that "technology is never simply a 'means' or an 'instrument', a 'medium', but always a 'mediation'".<sup>27</sup> It is clear that technological innovations penetrate perceptions of realities, and impact upon and shape everyday life, inevitably influencing how the world is experienced

and represented.<sup>28</sup> I would add that, since documentaries aim to explore and record realities, technological aspects of contemporary society and their representation also call attention to the ontological status of such technologically mediated realities.

The technological developments that created the internet, cyberspace, communication networks, and the resulting new virtual realities have blurred past distinctions between the biological and the technological, the natural and the artificial, the human and the mechanical. These changes have been accompanied by a re-figuration in ideas about "reality", due in part to the mediation of technology. In his 1982 novel *Burning Chrome*, William Gibson described cyberspace, later synonymous with the Internet, as "a consensual hallucination...A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system".<sup>29</sup> In this day and age, as a result and characteristic of contemporary computerized societies, all networked individuals inhabit this virtual, non-physical dataspace through varied forms of telepresence, creating the effect of being at different or imaginary locations. Telepresence is, therefore, similar to definitions and past examples of virtuality which "tricked the body and the mind into feeling transported elsewhere", and that, as previously stated, anticipated "the ability of information and communication technologies to make present what is both absent and imaginary".<sup>30</sup> Roy Ascott accordingly argues that

the individual human presence...has become multiple, distributed presences of a set of many selves, of multi-levelled, complex, diverse personalities. *L'homme éclaté*, as Paul Virilio has called it. The explosion of the one and the connectivity of the many is perhaps the single most important effect of the telematisation of our culture.<sup>31</sup>

This begs the question as to whether the cyberculture terrains and telepresence experiences familiar in popular digital productions today are still to be dismissed as "non-real" or merely a "hallucination"? Are online game experiences so different from the technologically mediated and other internet-based experiences people undergo daily? I suggest not. It is merely games' animated representation that appears to differentiate them.

Technologically mediated experiences surge and intensify as events are constantly witnessed through the media and virtual worlds become more popular. Edward Castranova describes an "exodus into the virtual", whereby people prefer to "inhabit"

virtual worlds rather than their own.<sup>32</sup> Digital culture, in which viewers/users live "in-screen" and witness events through varied forms of mediated representations raises the question as to whether, and at what point, the virtual becomes "more real than real", perhaps replacing it, as the Derridean notion of the supplement would appear to suggest. This echoes Jean Baudrillard's conception of the mediated world as simulacrum, as discussed in the previous chapter. In a mediatized culture, in which mass-produced representations lead to a loss of contact with "the real" due to a decline of strong referentials, the media seeks to reproduce the real more fully or faithfully, creating a hyper-reality, in which models of the real take over the real and eventually abolish it, thus replacing reality with an image of it.<sup>33</sup>

In the data-sphere of computerized networked society, icon-based and pictorial languages are used to envision abstract or non-physical concepts, constructing knowledge and allowing users to navigate in virtual space.<sup>34</sup> These non-physical or abstract concepts are, in other words, denoted by imagery that translates the invisible into the visible. Cubbit describes this as follows: "peering into the space, the browser interface invites you into cyberspace... the hardware becomes increasingly transparent as user-friendly, icon-driven designs invite you in to a space that has loosened its grip on materiality to present itself as a vast virtual playground".<sup>35</sup> Technologically mediated realities and cyberspace as culture, do not differ from online interactive and animated gaming worlds that are representationally detached from the physical. These symbolic graphic languages and, as an extension, animation as used in virtual spaces, may not seem realistic because of their non-photographic appearance. However, I claim that, as notions of realities change, the labels used to represent what was formerly branded "non-real" change as well.

### **The Changing Nature of the Physical Body as a Representational Truth Criterion in the Field of Documentary Today**

This thesis departs from the recurrent theorization of the virtual as contrasting with actual, material, lived reality in order to offer a critical interrogation of virtuality's relation to materiality as a basis for believable representation. As I have previously emphasised, since virtuality is associated with non-materiality, which suggests it is not real, and since conventional documentary aesthetics are based on photography and thus on the physical, it is vital to discuss the role of the physical as a truth criterion in



documentary aesthetics today. In focusing on non-naturalistic animation in documentary works, it is also necessary to take into account changing conceptions of the body and its accepted representation, shifts which may serve to explain the growing legitimization of the use of non-physically-mimetic visuals to represent the body, even in documentaries.<sup>36</sup>

The role of the body as visual validator of informational representation has emerged as a central theme in recent critical and cultural theory. While acknowledging the importance of the body as a marker of truth claims in documentary, I will demonstrate how the body's role and representation functions differently in contemporary documentaries. In evoking a sense of believability through new means, examples from popular visual culture as well as documentary-oriented works by artists Gillian Wearing, Jeremy Deller, Harun Farocki, Eva and Franco Mattes, and Jacqueline Goss raise questions about photography, virtualization and signification. Echoing Vivian Sobchack's *Carnal Thoughts* on embodiment and the moving image, John Durham Peters explains that the body, with its capacity for pain and even death, is often used in the broadcast media as a criterion of truth and authenticity.<sup>37</sup> The focus on the body insists on the reality of the violent and often lethal events represented.<sup>38</sup> While I agree that the role of the body can be an important factor in documentary viewing, I would propose that its physical appearance is not necessarily the way to achieve a sense of believability. As I argued in relation to the animated documentary *Slaves*, the lack of photographic visuals does not necessarily obliterate the protagonist depicted. In a virtualized culture, in which technology alters the conceptualization of the physical body and perception, this becomes an even more pressing matter. It is, therefore, imperative to examine if and how these theories about the body as validator of truth claims interrelate with the theorization of animated documentaries.

Assumptions about the contemporary body and its representation cannot be properly examined without taking into account the technological and virtual context of contemporary culture. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag notes that for a long time it was hoped that photography would work as potential shock therapy, because it was assumed that if the horror was made vivid enough, people might understand, and presumably object to, the insanity of war.<sup>39</sup> Sontag identifies a key shift in more recent times, and asks if viewers have now rather become inured to violence since "[b]eing a spectator of calamities taking place in another country [has

become] a quintessential modern experience".<sup>40</sup> In an era of simulations, in which viewers have become accustomed to a pornography of horror, and where even footage of real events may be acknowledged as mere images, the visceral impact and empathy-inducing effects of bodily images is weakened.<sup>41</sup> As mimetic images of actual physical bodies wane in affect, this paves the way for new forms of representation that can be just as powerful as photography may have been in the past, albeit in new ways. As I suggested in my reading of the animated documentary *Slaves* in Chapter 2 above, non-naturalistic imagery has the capacity to transcend desensitized viewing.

Living "in screen" in an increasingly networked culture means that varied forms of telepresence exist in which different visual signifiers can represent the absent physical body whilst communication technologies sustain a sense of presence nonetheless. As Paul Virilio maintains, in an era dominated by telepresence, "the material referent (or perhaps our belief in it), no longer exists".<sup>42</sup> While I would not go so far as to suggest that the physical ceases to exist, I would propose that the role of the physical and belief in its representation is shifting and declining as a result of the contemporary formation of digital non-physical realities. Artist Toni Dove claims that "[our] edges are blurry", referring to how perception of the self can extend beyond the physical body encapsulated by skin.<sup>43</sup> One may well conclude that the physical body is no longer exclusively the only visible representation of the self.<sup>44</sup>

Donna Haraway's 1985 'Cyborg Manifesto' remains a key contribution to this evolving discourse on the body and its relationship to new technologies of representation. For Haraway, the cyborg body is not only a body extended by technology but a transformation of the way in which the self is experienced and navigated in the world.<sup>45</sup> Embodiment is thus to be considered a process of construction that brings multiple bodies into co-ordination and agency in the world.<sup>46</sup> The body is thus not limited by the skin but exists beyond its physical appearance. This idea that the body, and thus the perception of the self, exceeds the physical flesh, is key to my discussion of animated documentary, for it serves to imply that representations that engage differently with the corporeal may be just as valid as photographic representations that are inherently linked to the physical. Whereas animation may once have been related to absence through its lack of physical capture (contrastingly embodied by photography), once animation is used in virtual worlds, it

becomes more than mere representation because it actually signifies the presence of the user whose actions are depicted on-screen in animated form. Animation's relation to presence is thus bestowed with an additional layer of meaning that surpasses the "non-obliteration" discussed in Chapter 2. For now, however, suffice it to say that online and "in-screen" actions become a continuation of the physical body that may require new forms of representation and a deeper understanding of the role of the physical body today.

As the body is mediated differently through varied media, new spaces and options of embodiment exist. In computerized culture users may become embodied differently, handling the cursor, for example, as an extension of the hand, or else using an avatar, which is, in a way, inhabited and manipulated like a digital puppet.<sup>47</sup> Elena Del Río points to the reconfiguration of the lived-body subject by multiple electronic "modes of technologically mediated perception and expression".<sup>48</sup> In my earlier analyses about screens and digital spaces as well as in my later consideration of real-time animated images that represent the user I come to similar conclusions. In Del Río's words, "[s]uch coexistence of images has the effect of dispersing the punctual and self-possessed body into a multiplicity of bodies inhabiting different temporal and spatial sites".<sup>49</sup> Christine Paul, in her research into digital art, similarly claims that online presence is inherently multiple, distributed and simultaneous, existing in various windows, spaces and contexts so that "multiple selves inhabit mediated realities".<sup>50</sup> In a related vein, Gunning asserts that "electronic doubles have been absorbed into our daily lives" and even in our closest relationships we are used to interacting with simulacra.<sup>51</sup> This is seen particularly clearly in Juan Carlos Piñeiro Escoriaza's 2008 documentary *Second Skin*, which is about gamers of MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games). In *Second Skin*, the representation of the documented protagonists clearly surpasses the limits of the physical body. Since the documentary engages with both online and offline experiences, the representation of each protagonist included their avatar as well. My investigation of how imaging of the body as signifier of the subject has evolved to surpass the photographic image in numerous ways would thus appear to confirm and extend the arguments of those including Del Río, Paul and Gunning, who have pointed to the changing conceptualization of the body within contemporary culture.



Figure 5.1: *Second Skin*, 2008, by Juan Carlos Piñero Escoriaza

Deborah Lupton has claimed that electronics marginalizing or trivializing the human body may realise the ultimate cyberculture fantasy, which is to "leave the meat behind and to become distilled in a clean, pure uncontaminated relationship with computer technology".<sup>52</sup> This may, however, be contested by the argument that such a fantasy actually reflects a fascination with the body through a desire to become immaterial and immortal by means of virtual surrogates.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, the body is not obsolete because even complete immersion in technology requires the sustenance of a physical body. Even so, it is evident that an alienated relation to one's body is a recurring theme in visual and technological discourses, an important topic in my discussion of animated representations.<sup>54</sup> Amelia Jones explores these themes through artworks that focus on the body in different ways, examining tensions between the body as actor vs. the body as object or image.<sup>55</sup> She asserts that through emerging and diverse technologies and aesthetics, new conceptions of the self can be formed.<sup>56</sup> If the body is merely an image, rather than the actor, cannot it not be one of many images that signifies the self? I am not advocating the obsolescence of the body but rather asserting that the physical body as visual signifier of the "I" has been replaced by a multiplicity of imagery used in varied platforms and mediated realities.

Visual signifiers of the subject thus no longer necessarily concur with the appearance of the corporeal body as perceived through human sight. As discussed in the previous chapter, representations of the self and the physical world are becoming increasingly "visible" via non-physically indexical visualizations or machine vision imagery that

differ from human sight due to new technologies of representation. As technology impacts upon contemporary culture, users become more accustomed to seeing representations of their physical bodies and surroundings filtered through technological mediators and visualized in varied forms, including animation.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, arbitrarily chosen images as signifiers of the self saturate social networks to the point where users become accustomed to identifying subjects through images that have no relation whatsoever to their physical appearance and yet have come to signify them.

Imaging advertised on Facebook between 2009-2013 encouraged people to “cartoonify” or to “cartoonize” themselves—to create non-photographic imagery of themselves as a form of avatar. The use of a non-photographic image as a portrait on Facebook, a platform and business centred on the representation of the self, is quite revealing in itself. Another interesting example in contemporary culture is the issue of online identity theft where no official relation to the body is required for one's legal-social-economic identity to be misused by others. This is an important cultural characteristic to keep in mind in the analysis and acceptance of animated documentaries. Animated documentaries' interpretive and arbitrary depictions of the physical form part of these myriad new ways of imaging of the body and in turn contribute to a changing sense of the believability of imagery in documentary contexts.

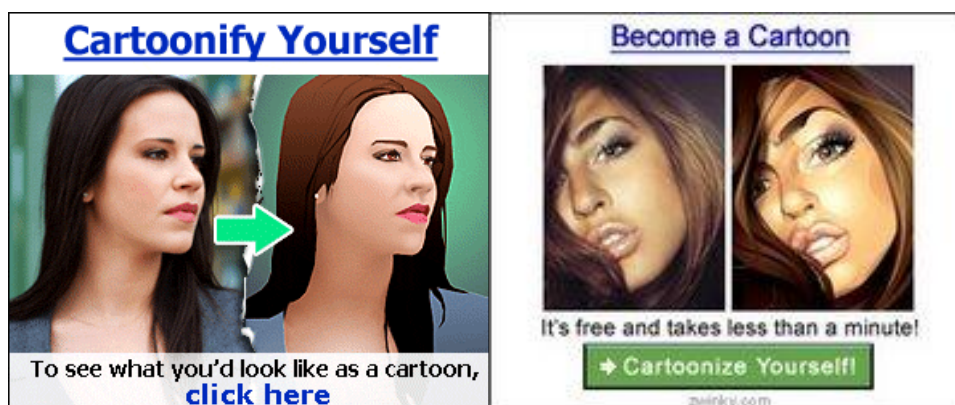


Figure 5.2: Facebook “cartoonify” and “cartoonize” advertisements, 2009-2013

The representational fluidity of signifiers of the body is also apparent in works of contemporary art that engage with documentary. A number of artists have

intentionally chosen to play with the body's physical appearance in the presentation of the protagonists of their documentary-oriented works. These works demonstrate the complexity involved in utilizing the outward appearance of the body as signifier of the subject in contemporary experimental documentaries, thus supporting my own argument about the growing fluidity of signifiers of the body and potential acceptance of such representations.

Gillian Wearing continues several themes explored by Cindy Sherman's works since the 1970s, questioning the discrepancy between what may be photo-realistic imagery of outward appearances and the inner life of the subject depicted.<sup>58</sup> Wearing explores a sense of masking in documentation and uses varied disguises to encourage personal exposure on behalf of documented protagonists in works such as *Secrets and Lies* from 2009. In the earlier work *10-16* (1997), she mixed bodily aspects, using adult actors to lip-synch the pre-recorded voices of children and adolescents making personal revelations.<sup>59</sup> The role of the physical body as signifier of depicted protagonists becomes all the more complex in documentary uses of re-enactments. Jeremy Deller's re-enactments in *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) probe the relation between performance and documentary, actors and the subjects they represent. Here, actors feature alongside non-actors, who were actual participants in the genuine battle of 1984-5 and who played themselves as well as the other side (miners and policemen), thus confusing the signification possibilities and authenticity involved.<sup>60</sup> Dealing with the issue of reenactments differently, Harun Farocki's *Serious Games: Immersion* (2009) digitally simulates soldiers' combat traumas, using gaming and military simulation technologies to restage events.<sup>61</sup> Experiences that were not necessarily filmed are thus given visual appearance, in a manner similar to animated documentaries, and trigger deep emotions through a virtual environment where no physical body is really seen.<sup>62</sup> Artists Eva and Franco Mattes, aka 0100101110101101.org, explore the issue of the preservation of performance art through documentation and/or re-enactment. They question the role of the body in contemporary culture and networked existence in an on-going series called *Synthetic Performances* (2006-present) where avatars re-enact important performance artworks in the virtual world of *Second Life*.<sup>63</sup> These examples from experimental artworks that engage with documentary would appear to confirm my fundamental argument that imaging explorations are now "loosening" the role of the body's physical

manifestation as the necessary or most credible visual referent of subject and event depicted. This flexibility in bodily representation is also to be seen in non-art-related documentary works and may, I propose, help to account for the increasing proliferation of animated documentaries. The break or distance in the representation in the physical appearance of subjects within experimental documentary more generally can serve to explain the growing credibility and acceptance of animated documentaries, with their innovative representation of the documented body.



Figure 5.3: *Serious Games: Immersion*, 2009, by Harun Farocki



Figure 5.4: *Second Life* reenactment of Valie Export and Peter Weibel's 1968 performance piece *Tap and Touch Cinema* where spectators were invited to touch the artist's breasts, 2007, by 0100101110101101.org

Further elaboration on the subject of signifiers and documentary filmmaking can be found in a publication from 1993 by Bill Nichols. He addresses changing conventions of documentary filmmaking and analyses how the authenticity attributed to certain practices changes over time. In historical documentary practice, re-enactments were often considered less worthy than "authentic" archival images. Nichols challenges this distinction between re-enactment and the recounting of events verbally in testimony and commentary, however, claiming that both can be deemed credible documentary practice.<sup>64</sup> Performance and re-enactments of events have become increasingly prevalent in contemporary documentary today and are used when imagery is unavailable or to disrupt certainties.<sup>65</sup> It is my argument that animation is coming to function in a similar manner.

The use of actors "playing" subjects in re-enactments of events strengthens my point about the changing role of the body as signifier of truth or veracity in several ways. First of all, the photographic image of a physical body is expected to act as legitimate documentary footage depicting "somebody".<sup>66</sup> In re-enactments, however, the actor becomes "some body", merely representing or filling in for someone else. This tendency, I claim, continues in animated documentaries where the "some body" evolves into a visual "no body", which functions as a different sign that symbolizes a specific someone. If the documented character, the "specific someone", is also increasingly not presented visually and directly in live-action forms of documentary practice, then the question arises as to whether animated documentaries are really so different if they use a different form of denotation in order to signify that specific someone? If signifiers and conventions change, the emphasis must instead be on the viewer's reception of these signifiers and hence on the meaning and validity which the viewer attributes to them.

**Somebody → Some Body → No Body**

The idea that changes in believable visual representations are occurring due to shifts in technology and the perception of the body links the issue of the growing virtualization of culture to evolving forms of documentary visuals. The following case study ties together several of the topics discussed so far in this thesis by linking the



issue of masking to contemporary conceptions of physical appearance in the globalized world. Furthermore, this animated documentary is a reflexive work that simultaneously remarks upon the virtualization of culture and the relation to non-virtual actualities, as well as recent developments in documentary practice and aesthetics, in which new and perhaps unexpected visual interpretations can arguably come to seem more poignant than photography.

### ***Stranger Comes to Town* by Jacqueline Goss**

Jacqueline Goss's 2007 documentary video artwork *Stranger Comes to Town* uses animated imagery in order to highlight issues of documentation, moving between virtual and non-virtual worlds, conceptualization and representation of spaces currently inhabited, identity formation and self-representation in relation to the physical body. This thought-provoking work challenges past assumptions about animation as well as documentary, engaging with the online gaming phenomena and virtual worlds in both form and content, and using them to document and critique realities that go beyond online games. Goss deliberately blurs the boundaries between virtual gaming and non-virtual non-gaming worlds, stressing the extent to which they are interconnected and, at times, confusingly indistinguishable.

In *Stranger Comes to Town*, six people are interviewed about their experiences of entering the US and using the border biometric systems that collect physical data about immigrants and visitors. Two main themes of the work are introduced at the very beginning where a blue screen is shown and the question "so this is anonymous?" is heard. The blue screen, which seems to be always on the verge of changing, as if about to expose more than is currently visible, leaves the viewer uncertain about what is actually being shown, if anything. This facet continues throughout the work, emphasizing the gap between visual signifiers and the meaning assigned to them. The lack of clear imagery underscores the significance of the audio soundtrack, which serves, in a similar manner to my discussion of the warranting devices used in *Slaves*, in order to strengthen the documentary status of the work. While the confusing imagery has a potentially destabilizing effect, the audio track serves to emphasise the "authenticity" of the work. The question about anonymity introduces the second major theme of the work, which deals with the representation of the self through the discrepancy between exposure and privacy, relating to my

discussion of animated documentaries as masking techniques that can both reveal and conceal.

The incongruity between the process of collecting information about a person through physical data and the feelings of alienation and depersonalization that this process evokes is made clear by the experiences described by the protagonists. One woman speaks of the unnaturalness of the pose required when being photographed, which is different from how she would usually look, as well as the elimination of any bodily contact between her and the immigration officers, who wore gloves whilst physically engaging with her. While the body is thus the focus of the biometric system, it is a body that is posed, moulded and treated as if separate from the human subject. This is clarified further in the next scene, in which Goss refers to an animated video made by the US Homeland Security Office called *US Visit*, rotoscoping it and incorporating it into her work.<sup>67</sup> The informational video shows black silhouettes of humans undergoing immigration processes and biometric tests and is meant to didactically explain to immigrants and visitors what is expected of them in the most clear and universal manner. As explained in the actual *US Visit* film, "the US is launching a new program, called 'US Visit' where in [the US] ports of entry advanced technology is used to verify the identity of in-coming visitors. This does not apply to US citizens. Using biometrics...enhances security while facilitating legitimate travel and trade".<sup>68</sup>



Figure 5.5: *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss

The use of this video is particularly interesting because, even though it is a rotoscoped version of the original, by incorporating a reference to it, Goss refers to animation not as an interpretive visual language but acknowledges its significance as a contemporary cultural document in its own right. She accentuates the proliferation of animation in contemporary culture as well as using it as primary source material, as a document or artefact in its own right.

Goss further questions the implications of this process of the verification of identity. *Stranger Comes to Town* describes the de-individualization process of the biometric tests that collect information about a person and, in categorizing them according to external and often secret criteria, completely overlook the individual at hand. She explains that what is seen in the *US Visit* film are "stick figures, unmarked surfaces of human beings, deracinated...an elaborate attempt *not* to identify these people".<sup>69</sup> By referring to an animated video that obliterates personal characteristics, Goss critiques the growing culture of surveillance that dehumanizes individuals whilst collecting personal information about them. This visual representation corresponds perfectly with the work's audio soundtrack, in which interviewees' testimonies of cold, alienated exchanges with the border control staff are once again reiterated. A second female interviewee explains that

you cannot see the results [of the biometric tests] yourself, they have a device so that you cannot see... I think it is for security reasons but I would like to see what is on their screens...You feel you are not free...You are being taken as cattle...The place has a lot of light, but not natural light. You feel observed.<sup>70</sup>

In a telling juxtaposition, Goss then incorporates a "voice of god" audio element of the *US Visit* film that explains "the data and information is used to assist the officer in determining admittance into the country and it protects privacy while enhancing...[the US] immigration system".

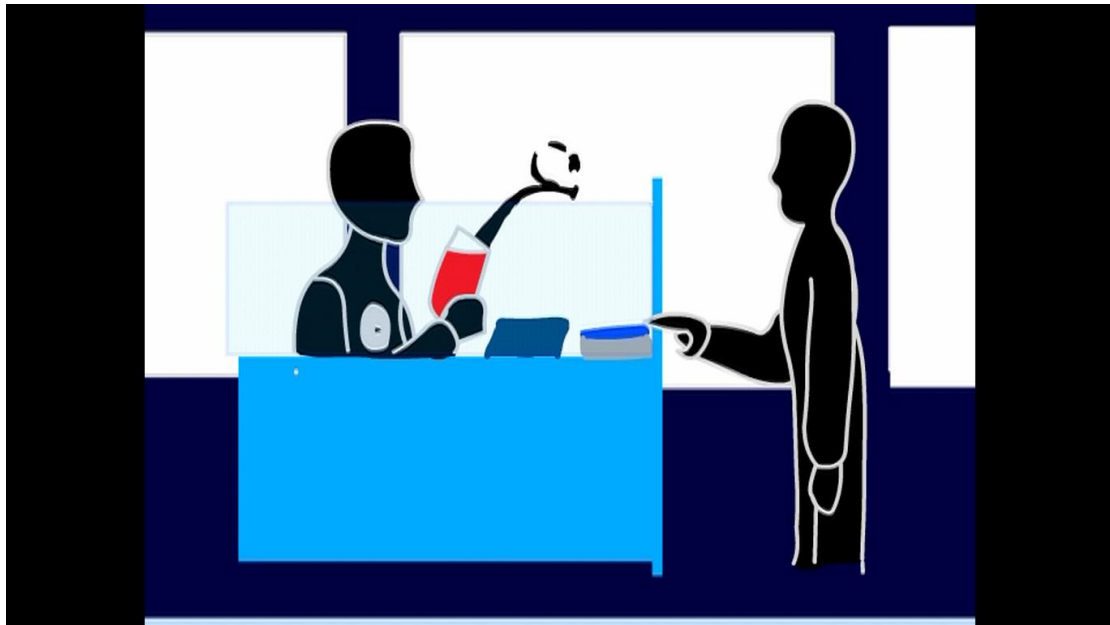


Figure 5.6: *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss

The rotoscoped version of *US Visit* in *Stranger Comes to Town*

The inconsistency between the collection of personal data that is then kept hidden from the individual in question highlights the contradiction between surveillance and exposure in the current era. As more information about an individual is exposed, more is kept hidden from that same individual, with people not even knowing how they are being recorded and categorized. Goss poses related questions in a lecture, asking "who are the people beside me in databases? What do we share and by which criteria?"<sup>71</sup> These profiles are used by larger infra-structures and, as a result, the creation of these profiles contributes to the construction of a *social identity* based on information about which the individual may know little or nothing at all.<sup>72</sup> In engaging with the question of external versus self-representation, Goss develops a particularly compelling and multifaceted visual language.

Goss explains that she wanted to counter the representation of de-individualization in the official *US Visit* film and to facilitate self-representation whilst protecting the privacy of her interviewees.<sup>73</sup> As a result, she requested each interviewee to design an avatar for themselves from the *World of Warcraft (WoW)* online role-playing game. This is important for two reasons. First of all, instead of using animation techniques in which the animator's control over the representation is central, the use of online game imagery facilitates the use of "pre-formed" animation created by the game engines,

which enabled the interviewees to design their animated characters themselves and puppeteer them.<sup>74</sup> The animation, as in other examples, acts as a mask that guarantees disguise whilst simultaneously exposing the personal preferences of the creators-protagonists. An animation tool that is accessible to non-animators is introduced, foreshadowing its potential influence and rapid growth in the animation field as a new instrument of animated self-expression.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, the use of avatars as online representations or symbols which represent an individual accentuates, I argue, the topic of profile construction as is also used in racial profiling and data collection by systems such as the immigration described. Yet while game avatars are usually chosen and are a form of self-representation, surveillance and data collection results in an externally-formed and often undisclosed profile construction.

By using online game animated imagery in a work about immigration, Goss indirectly references the growing incursion of "immigration" into virtual worlds, depicting those worlds as yet another space in which reality today takes place. While the virtual as "non-real" may seem a fictional place or else a fantasy-related pastime, Goss's representational choices are linked to wider conceptions of space and subjectivity in today's globalized and virtualized culture.<sup>76</sup> In portraying digitally virtual spaces as linked to, and continuous with, the physical non-virtual world, Goss's work serves to underscore my claim that the digitally virtual is merely one aspect of a multifaceted reality--one that can no longer be dismissed as "non-real", either in content or in form.<sup>77</sup> In *Stranger Comes to Town*, she creates a continuous geographical expanse comprised of virtual landscapes and Google Earth images. What seems like an uninterrupted view of a single landscape emphasizes the blurred boundaries between these "worlds", and the increasing representational difficulty in telling them apart due to changes in hyperrealist animation and computerized digital imagery. By incorporating avatars from online games as well as scenes focusing on maps and landscapes, Goss thus introduces the issue of space and geography, taking the virtual as contemporary space into account and portraying it as continuous with the physical.

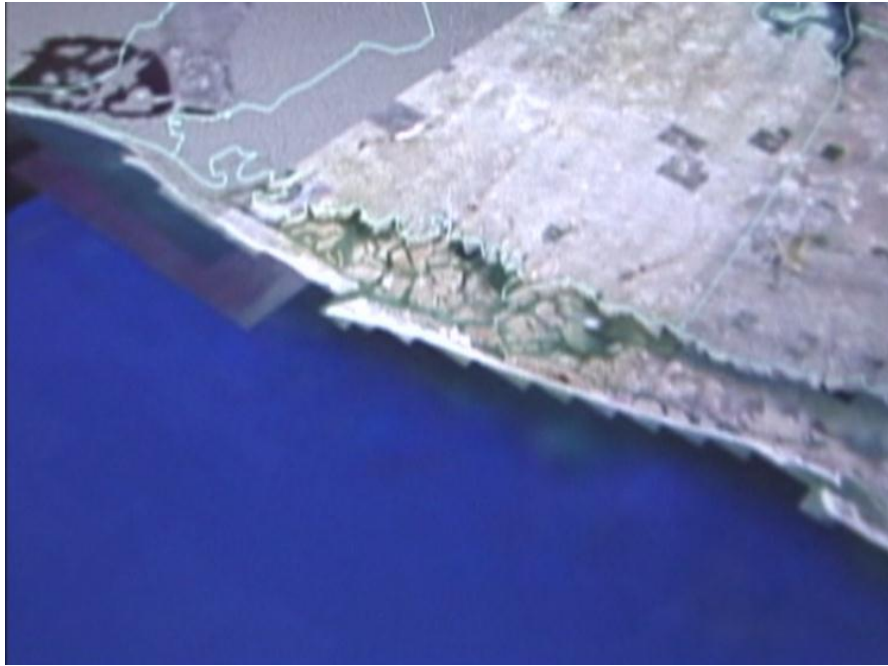


Figure 5.7: *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss

Virtual landscapes combined with Google Earth imagery in *Stranger Comes to Town*

Globalization's redefinitions of territorial and cultural characteristics have given rise to discourses about the significance of "other" spaces, spaces that people create for themselves which are culturally or emotionally significant. The result is a globalized culture in which notions of space have shifted and become more fluid, less based on the physical and more on conceptions of space, thus opening new directions for the theorization of the non-physical spaces we inhabit. Irit Rogoff explains that geography has become less essential as a material basis for subjects' lives, sense of belonging and identity-construction.<sup>78</sup> According to Rogoff's concept of "relational geography", new tensions and bonds evolve between physical and cultural spaces, material perimeters of territory are avoided, and the space of visual culture instead becomes a key reference point.<sup>79</sup> Echoing even earlier ideas about space and technology, the development of cultural geography elucidates that geography is no longer a physical construct but is based rather on people's understanding of it, which may change due to factors such as telepresence, ease of communication and the proliferation of expatriate communities. As a result, people who see virtual spaces as their "places of residence" may come to seem less peculiar than they did initially.<sup>80</sup> These changes in the conception of space and moves towards mixed realities in contemporary culture in turn generate a need for new visuals in documentaries.

The globalization of the Internet has also raised concerns about the cultural identities of individual nations. These concerns represent a different and central view of the globalized world that, on the contrary, attempts to maintain geographical state boundaries. As Jerry Everard explains,

in recent debates about globalization and about the global spread of telecommunications, several themes are presented in sets of binary oppositions: sovereignty as against the borderless society [of a wired world]; public access to information as against privacy; the state as against individual interests; the virtual as against the real...; and so on.<sup>81</sup>

While Everard underscores the simplistic nature of such binary oppositions, they are, nonetheless, useful categories through which to consider those aspects of contemporary culture to which Goss refers in her work. Everard explains that, if states are thought of as collective, albeit multifaceted, identities, they become visible when they are weakest, such as when they are questioned or contested by an internal or external "other".<sup>82</sup> Since states are produced through boundary making, the issue of boundaries becomes a key manner of state survival.<sup>83</sup> This is, of course, very apparent in post 9/11 USA, which Goss explores in her work, where human rights have been compromised in the name of the war on terror.

*Stranger Comes to Town* Goss illustrates these contradicting notions. On one hand, Goss bases her work on the issue of border control and immigration, which uses racial profiling to detect the "other" deemed dangerous to the state's identity. On the other hand, she uses virtual world imagery that blurs physical and national identities by emphasizing the non-recognizable and the non-human. Virtual worlds are potential spaces for virtual communities that transcend the borders and identity formation criteria of the state. This is important to keep in mind in today's Internet era in which national states have increasingly seized control of their corresponding virtual spaces, as can be seen by state restrictions on Internet options. The conceptualization of space, especially in regard to the physical versus the virtual, is in constant flux. In this context, the non-recognizable individual sitting in undetectable cyberspace symbolizes a threat that may be able to infiltrate, and perhaps succeed in destabilizing, a state's sovereignty from the external space of the virtual, as can be seen with hackers, hacktivists and the growing field of cyber warfare. I argue that this

idea relates to the use of monstrous, non-human game avatars, such as the blue and green troll-like creatures that represent the protagonists in Goss' work. The unrecognizable or invisible "other" deemed as threat is an important theme in Goss' work, in which the avatar guarantees anonymity but at the same time also exposes the idea of the immigrant as alien and the "other" as potentially monstrous. In many instances the interviewees' avatars speak yet barely move, thus imbuing them with a sense of passivity and helplessness that belies the monstrosity insinuated by the physical appearance of the avatars themselves and reinforcing the testimony of one of the interviewees that immigrants were "herded like cattle".

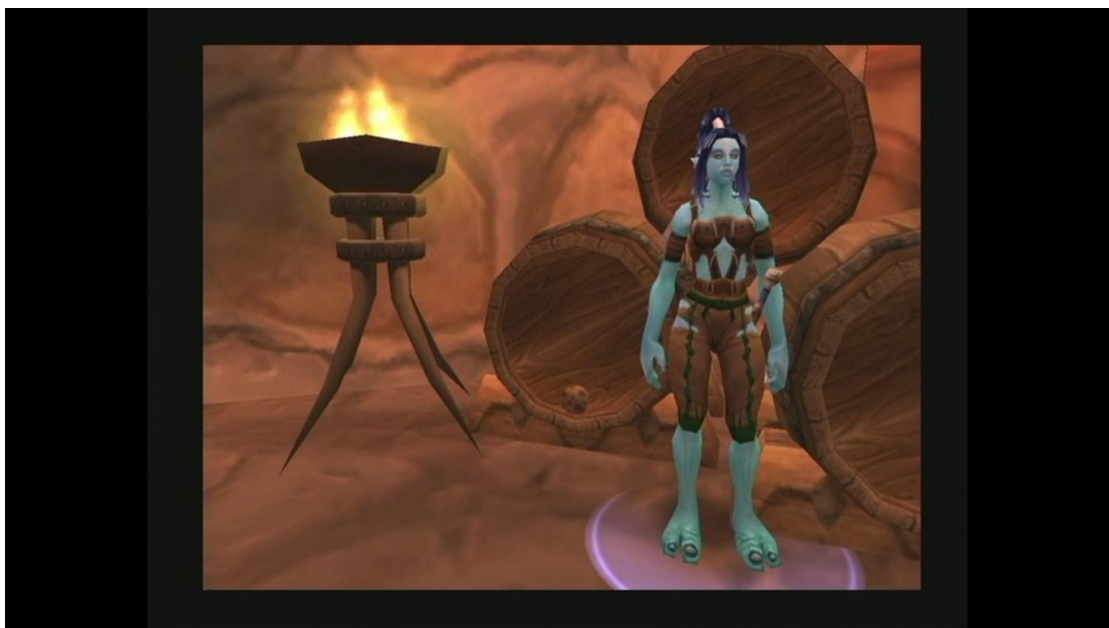


Figure 5.8: *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss

The emphasis on the dehumanization of the immigrant-avatar and the discrepancy between self-representation and external state categorization is reinforced in a different interview in which the protagonist discusses the Patriot Act which was passed after 9/11 in order to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools and state surveillance in the pursuit of suspected terrorists. The protagonist describes a trip with eight other male friends from college, all from Muslim countries. He recollects that, since he was from a Muslim country, he was required to go to a special immigration office for Muslims in the basement where he once had to wait for over 3 hours, almost missing his flight, without anyone providing him with any information. He identifies himself as an atheist male who grew up in a Muslim country and describes how he came to realise, as he grew older, that the way in which others view a person



influences the way that person comes to represent themselves. "I am a Muslim because other people see me as such, even if I would not have represented myself that way since I am not religious", he says. The gap between the way in which racial profiling is used to define a human being and the way in which they define themselves is the embodiment of the process of de-individualization so visible in the *US Visit* animated film and so persuasively critiqued by Goss. Another interviewee comments, with regard to the medical procedures required in the immigration process, "your body is the book he wants to read and everything you say is just a prologue". Still another interviewee recalls her shock when she discovered that she was required to undergo a "10 minute check up with a physician who...interestingly...check[s] your privates... [I said] 'check my genitals, no problem'". This is, of course, ironic and horrifying when compared to the *US Visit* film's statement about privacy being protected by the US immigration system that "[makes] travel safer for all by enhancing ability to confirm identity".



Figure 5.9: *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss

The avatar of the male interviewee from a Muslim country

The representation of the individual, their body, exposure, privacy and deindividuation are all shockingly manifested in the following example, which illustrates that animation can be far more revealing than photographic-naturalistic modes of representation. The manner in which travellers are depicted in the animated

*US Visit* can be seen as frighteningly similar to the way in which they are perceived in the material world in X-ray machines. With the implementation of new scanning procedures in airports, immigration staff have increasingly been able to see travellers as de-personalized human forms, whilst simultaneously invading their privacy and collecting information about them. These technologies generated much concern about personal privacy and, as a result, new scanning devices are now also being used where physical exposure may be reduced but depersonalization is ominously evident. Millimeter Wave Detection technologies generate a generic image of a person with specific areas of suspicion highlighted by boxes. Passengers are thus literally represented as generic humanoids. It is difficult to imagine a different documentary language that could have been as successful in conveying this message so powerfully and precisely.



Figure 5.10: A demonstration of the previously used 'backscatter' X-ray machine

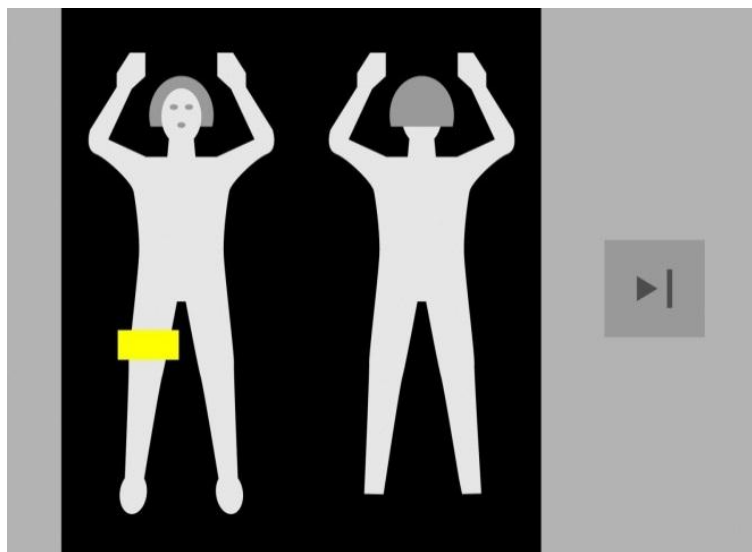


Figure 5.11-2: Milimeter Wave Detection - airport scanning technology images

In order to comment upon this process of representation, which exemplifies the loss of individualization, Goss visually accentuates the sense of physical disguise, visual layering and concealment. She represents her interviewees' avatars in three modes – as machinima game imagery (as they would appear in *World of Warcraft*), as hand-drawn animation and, finally, as black silhouettes. She ends by incorporating these non-human silhouettes into the *US Visit* Homeland Security video with which the film began. The decision to use non-human gaming-world avatars in the representation of her immigrant protagonists thus enables Goss to critique issues of race and the body in the US Homeland's security racial profiling with its reliance on biometric data.

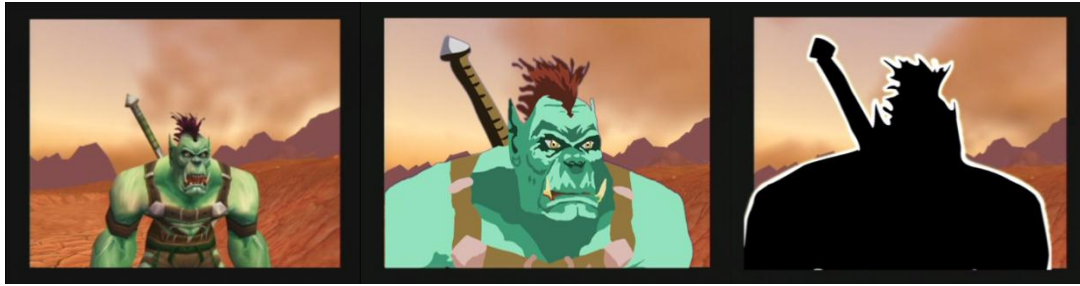


Figure 5.13: *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss

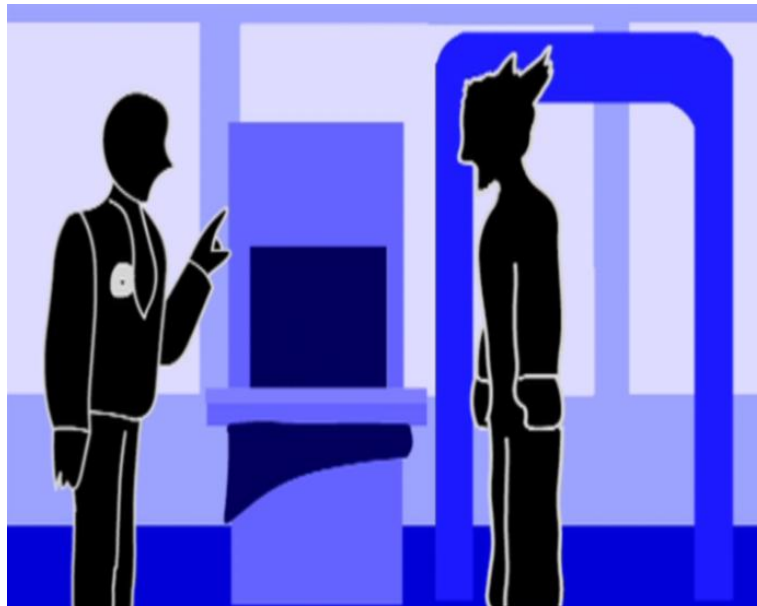


Figure 5.14: *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss

Incorporating silhouettes of *WoW* avatars into the rotoscoped *Us Visit* video

### Conclusion

This chapter explored the role of the virtual today and numerous aspects of its theorization, shattering binaries that place the virtual as non-real and placing it instead as an additional facet of contemporary realities. Accordingly, Jacqueline Goss' representational choices in the case study *Stranger Comes to Town* highlight contradictory tendencies in contemporary culture. On the one hand, the body remains a central signifier of the subject in today's bio-political climate. On the other hand, as this chapter has argued, virtualization and technological changes in the visualization of culture mobilize a disconnection between the subject depicted and the physical appearance captured, leading to the increasing use of other, more varied, imagery to denote the subject. According to Goss' work, which meditates on documentary

practice and documentary aesthetics, even an emphasis on the body can obliterate the individual so that it too no longer acts as a straightforward, singularized signifier of the subject depicted. Goss's work explores a globalized and virtualized world in which the non-physical is as "real" as the physical and can be used to reflect upon representations assumed as authentic or "direct" in new ways. These issues push the issue of reliable documentary aesthetics away from its traditional reliance upon photography as an apparently trustworthy and direct representation and raise many questions related to self and cultural representation as explored in identity politics.

The combinations of imagery in Goss's work create fascinating and original mash-ups that further blur the boundaries between virtual game and non-game worlds and representations, thus weakening the conception of games as closed systems of their own. Although animation may at first seem an unusual visual choice for documentary works, it actually serves to convey important points in an incredibly succinct and powerful manner. Goss's artwork demonstrates that new forms of visualization can depict what cannot otherwise be shown, representing the multiplicity and complexity of contemporary realities while engaging with them differently. This is an important achievement in an era in which photography and documentation are thrown into question and as we increasingly search for ways to represent realities in new and experimental ways.

*Stranger Comes to Town* illustrates the growing "factional" (i.e. no longer solely relating to fictional) status assumed of digital game aesthetics. It not only serves to demonstrate that game animation is sometimes indistinguishable from photographic or machine imagery, but also points to similarities between game worlds and non-game realities. While the virtual elements in this documentary work have a metaphoric significance, with game aesthetics being used to reflect upon documentary techniques and to critique existing systems today, the role of the virtual in contemporary documentaries works on still another level. *Stranger Comes to Town* introduces the tendency of mixing contemporary realities, physical and non-physical, and their aesthetics, a tendency to which I will return in later chapters, where I explore how game aesthetics come to represent physical realities, blurring the boundaries between the two all the more. While the virtual in Goss' work was used to indirectly explore non-gaming worlds, in the following chapters I will analyse additional aspects of the relationship between the virtual, animation and documentary.

Beyond the symbolic nature of animation I will show that animation takes on another status as a documentary visual language, sharing characteristics with photography. In the next chapter, I will draw upon theories of indexicality in order to explore how animation's relation to the physical body and to virtuality is even more complex and varied than has hitherto been perceived.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Henry Lowood, "Video Capture: Machinima, Documentation, and the History of Virtual Worlds" in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 21. Lowood is curator of History of Science and technology as well as Film and Media collections at Stanford University libraries. Since 2000, he has led the *How They Got Game* Project, a research and documentation project focused on the history of computer games and simulations. Among the many initiatives undertaken by the *How They Got Game* Project, he is curator of The Machinima Archive and the Archiving Virtual Worlds collection hosted by the Internet Archive and leads Stanford's work on the Preserving Virtual Worlds project, funded by the US Library of Congress. He has published widely in history of science and technology, library and archival studies, and digital game studies.

<sup>2</sup> One obvious example of many is the sparking of mass demonstrations through social network activities.

<sup>3</sup> Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: Sage, 1998), 31-32.

<sup>4</sup> Manovich, "Introduction to Info-Aesthetics", 340.

<sup>5</sup> See Edward Castronova, *Exodus to the Virtual World: how Online Fun is Changing Reality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Rob Shields, *The Virtual* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> See my discussion in chapter 1 of animation definitions where I quote Phillip Kelly Denslow who puts it, "for what is animation if not the desire to make real that which exists in the imagination?", see Denslow, "What is Animation", 4.

<sup>9</sup> Antony Bryant and Griselda Pollock, ed., *Digital and Other Virtualities* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Bryant and Pollock, *Digital and Other Virtualities*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Bryant and Pollock, *Digital and Other Virtualities*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans., Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994), 208.

<sup>13</sup> Bryant and Pollock, *Digital and Other Virtualities*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 208.

<sup>15</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Continuum, 2008), 76-77.

<sup>17</sup> The *CongressCATH 2005: Ethics and Politics of Virtuality and Indexicality* conference at Leeds University from which Pollock and Bryant's book, *Digital and Other Virtualities*, derives posited this issue as a major aspect of the generated research.

<sup>18</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, 19. Whereas new and also severed relations to the physical are, as I will show, a distinctive characteristic of cyberculture and digitally technologized culture, it is important to keep in mind that the non-physical can still nonetheless be a shaping and crucial aspect of the real, such as

religion and aspects of capitalism, as obviously seen in the 2008 financial crisis and its monetary repercussions. For more on the relation between virtuality and economy, see Weber, "A Virtual Indication", 63-78. For a discussion of virtualities in history, including discussions of virtuality in religion, rituals, architectural fantasies, optical spaces and utopias, see Shields, *The Virtual*, xvi.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, the varied and complex theories in the field of economy as well as ecological questions, their causes and possible modes of action, for example, demonstrate that most aspects of reality can also be disputed in many ways.

<sup>21</sup> Avatars' carbon footprints are calculated according to the electricity consumption of servers and data centers, for more information see Nicholas Carr, "Avatars consume as much Electricity as Brazilians", *Rough Type*, December 5, 2006, accessed May 5, 2013, [www.rough.type.com/?p=611](http://www.rough.type.com/?p=611); "The Energy Consumption of Avatars", *Life after Oil*, February 10, 2010, accessed May 5, 2013, [www.life-after-oil.blogspot.com/2010/02/energy-consumption-of-avatars.html](http://www.life-after-oil.blogspot.com/2010/02/energy-consumption-of-avatars.html) Cases of physical seizures and even murder and neglect have occurred due to gaming circumstances, as seen in the following example: Andrew Salmon, "Internet Gaming Addiction led to Baby's Death", *CNN*, April 2, 2010, accessed June 20, 2012, [www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/04/01/korea.parents.starved.baby/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/04/01/korea.parents.starved.baby/index.html)

<sup>22</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University press, 1998), 144.

<sup>24</sup> Benita Shaw, *Technoculture*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics*, 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> The growing virtualization of culture increases as interfaces that diminish physical restrictions are developed, enabling new forms of human computer interaction.

<sup>27</sup> Bryant and Pollock, *Digital and Other Virtualities*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> For research about representation in today's technologically mediated world see Damian Sutton, Susan Brind and Ray McKenzie, ed., *The State of the Real – Aesthetics in the Digital Age* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> W. Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: Grafton Books, 1986), 67.

<sup>30</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics*, 80.

<sup>32</sup> See Castronova, *Exodus to the Virtual World*.

<sup>33</sup> See Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra*.

<sup>34</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics*, 83.

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the divide between the representation of the self and the mimetic recording of corporeal appearance can also be linked to earlier representational tendencies such as the Surrealists' conception of the self-portrait, which often substituted the recognizable persona with a metaphorical allusion to an inner or hidden identity, emphasizing a state of mind rather than a physical exterior. Though the scope of this research prevents an in-depth analysis of surrealism in these contexts, this is a potential direction for future research since it is relevant both to the existing research of animated documentaries' relation to personal-subjective experiences as well as to my focus on the use of avatars as signifiers of the self.



For more information see Silvano Levy, ed., *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>37</sup> John Durham Peters, "Witnessing", "Witnessing", in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, ed. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 27-31.

<sup>38</sup> Susanne Østby Sæther, "Between the Hyperrepresentational and the Real: a Sampling Sensibility", in *The State of the Real: Aesthetics in the Digital Age*, ed. Damian Sutton et al. (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 54.

<sup>39</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> See my discussion of the simulacra and hyperreality in the previous chapter and today's reaction to shocking real-world events as "surreal" or "movie-like", as was the case with the 9/11 attacks.

<sup>42</sup> Amelia Jones, *Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 154.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Rieser and Andrea Zapp, ed., *New Screen Media – Cinema/Art/Narrative* (Karlsruhe: BFI, 2002), 208. For an avatar-oriented discussion of this topic, see James Paul Gee, *What Videogames have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> The philosophical discussion of the terms "self" vs. "I" vs. "subject" are beyond the scope of this chapter. In this context the terms will be used interchangeably to signify the person referred to by the image.

<sup>45</sup> See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Morse, "Sunshine and Shroud: Cyborg Bodies and the Collective and Personal Self", *Media Art Net*, accessed June 20, 2013, [www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/cyborg\\_bodies/collective\\_bodies/](http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/cyborg_bodies/collective_bodies/)

<sup>47</sup> Rieser and Zapp, *New Screen Media*, 209.

<sup>48</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 160.

<sup>49</sup> Elena del Río, "The Body as Foundation of the Screen: Allegories of Technology in Atom Egoyan's *Speaking Parts*", *Camera Obscura* 13:2 (1996): 109.

<sup>50</sup> Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 165.

<sup>51</sup> Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real", 180.

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Lupton, "The Embodied Computer/User", in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (London: Sage, 1996), 100.

<sup>53</sup> David Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 142.

<sup>54</sup> For more on the relation between contemporary virtual reality, disembodiment and Human-Computer-Interaction (HCI) see Paul, *Digital Art*, 125-132, 170.

<sup>55</sup> Jones, *Self/Image*, 169-170.

<sup>56</sup> Jones, *Self/Image*, 168-201.

<sup>57</sup> Differing and technologically-mediated imaging of the physical may go back as early as X-rays and medical visualizations but as technology permeates everyday life and is more personally accessible, these images become part of the way the "self" and the world is seen and experienced on a daily basis, as will be elaborated upon in Chapters 7-8.

<sup>58</sup> Eva Respini, "Cindy Sherman", *Museum of Modern Art*, accessed July 20, 2012, [www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/cindysherman/about-the-exhibition/](http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/cindysherman/about-the-exhibition/)

<sup>59</sup> See Elizabeth Manchester, "Gillian Wearing", *Tate*, accessed July 20, 2012, [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wearing-10-16-t07415/text-summary/](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wearing-10-16-t07415/text-summary/); Doris Krystof, "Call Gillian – Masks, Identity and Performativity", in *Gillian Wearing* (London, Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), 9-20.

<sup>60</sup> See Alex Farquharson, "Jeremy Deller - The Battle of Orgreave", *Frieze* 61 (2001), accessed July 24, 2012", [www.frieze.com/issue/review/jeremy\\_deller/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/jeremy_deller/); Andrew Wilson, "Jeremy Deller - The Battle of Orgreave Archive (An Injury to One is an Injury to All)", *Tate*, accessed July 24, 2012, [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/deller-the-battle-of-orgreave-archive-an-injury-to-one-is-an-injury-to-all-t12185/text-summary](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/deller-the-battle-of-orgreave-archive-an-injury-to-one-is-an-injury-to-all-t12185/text-summary)

<sup>61</sup> See Sabine Breitwieser, "Harun Farocki: Images of War (at a Distance)", *Museum of Modern Art*, accessed September 15, 2012, [www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1196](http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1196); Frédérique Joseph Lowery, "Harun Farocki: Touching Distance", *Art-Press* 385 (2012): 47-49.

<sup>62</sup> The issue of authenticity is also explored in Faroucki's work, contributing to the on-going theme in this thesis about documentary's truth value today.

<sup>63</sup> More about the artists and their works are available at <http://0100101110101101.org/>. These reenactments include Marina Abramovic's and Ulay's *Imponderabilia* (1977), Joseph Beuys's *7000 Oaks*(1982-87), Gilbert & George's *The Singing Sculpture* (1968), Valie Export's *Tapp und Tastkino*(1968), Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972), and Chris Burden's *Shoot* (1971). In these works, an animated body, rather than the actual physical subject, drains the "meaning", truthfulness (as art based on the body but also as a reenactment that assumingly would strive to create something similar to the original as a homage, introducing the work's subversive nature) or effect of the work, which was originally based upon the embarrassment, pain, shock, fear, danger and even potential death involved.

<sup>64</sup> Nichols, "Getting to Know You", 177.

<sup>65</sup> Ward, "Drama-documentary, Ethics and Notions of Performance", 192.

<sup>66</sup> Although other manipulations are obviously still possible and "the body" does not necessarily depict the "truth", as is evident from Grierson's ultra-fabricated 1922 "documentary" *Nanook of the North*.

<sup>67</sup> According to the Oxford English dictionary, to rotoscope is "to copy or reproduce (a photographed shot) as a drawn or animated one" or "to create (an animated sequence) from photographed scenes". In Goss' case she traces the already-animated clip, creating a second-degree animated representation of an animated primary source.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted from the soundtrack of the *US Visit* video as represented in Goss's work.

<sup>69</sup> Jacqueline Goss, "Jacqueline Goss at the Laguna Art Museum" (artist presentation of her *work at the 2009 WoW: Emergent Media Phenomenon* exhibition at the Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, California, July 26, 2009), accessed November 18, 2010, <http://lagunaartmuseum.org/wow-emergent-media-phenomenon/>.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted from *Stranger Comes to Town*, 2007, by Jacqueline Goss.

<sup>71</sup> Jacqueline Goss, "Jacqueline Goss at the Laguna Art Museum".

<sup>72</sup> These include systems such as immigration, police and marketing companies that influence the way a person is treated and what they are exposed to, such as in the case of branding and online personalized marketing.

<sup>73</sup> Skype conversations with the artist, July 2010.

<sup>74</sup> The free reign that Goss enables her interviewees in this case and due to her choice of using animation that is almost a form of puppeteering is interesting to consider in relation to Samantha Moore's writing on the collaborative frame in her research about the collaboration between animators and protagonists in documentary works. Samantha Moore, "Does this Look Right? Working inside the Collaborative Frame" (paper presented at the Animated Realities conference, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK, June 23, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> This is relevant to the discussion in Chapter 3 where I discuss the reasons for the proliferation of animated documentaries. For more on machinima as an easy-to-use and low-budget animation tool and techniques that provide new opportunities for film making techniques see Matt Kelland, "From Game Mod to Low-Budget Film: The Evolution of Machinima", in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 23-35.

<sup>76</sup> Globalization is a capitalist post-imperialist system that reproduces and maintains economic unevenness and is obviously an immense field of research. Whereas the economic aspects are too vast to elaborate upon further, due to the scope of the thesis, some geographical characteristics are taken into account here in order to make a point about the spaces people currently inhabit being non-physical, in relation to my argument about the centrality of the virtual today.

<sup>77</sup> A fascinating example that questions the boundaries between in-game and real world economy, resources, labour, commodification, race, racism, globalization and exploitation is the phenomenon of "gold farming". "Gold farming" is the accrual of in-game wealth, items, and prestige by Chinese players to be sold or traded for real-world resources, transferring Chinese labour to other parts of the world, only virtually. By using the game as an economic platform of activity unwelcome by some, instances of virtual racism against the avatars of these Chinese "professional gamers" have been known to occur, similar to xenophobic reactions towards certain cultural groups seen as "invading" others' turf. For more information see Julian Dibbel, "The Life of the Chinese Gold Farmer", *The New York Times*, June 17, 2007, accessed August 18, 2014, [www.nytimes.com/2007/06/17/magazine/17lootfarmers-t.html?\\_r=0&adxnlnx=1313771937-LPh0png8TiyVJ7a0Z6wyLQ&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/17/magazine/17lootfarmers-t.html?_r=0&adxnlnx=1313771937-LPh0png8TiyVJ7a0Z6wyLQ&pagewanted=print).

<sup>78</sup> Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma – Geography's Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

<sup>79</sup> Rogoff focuses more on capitalist economy as the basis for the distribution of culture but sheds light on new conceptualizations of space. For more on this see Carles Guerra, "Negatives of Europe – Video Essays and Collective Pedagogies", in *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), 144-164.

<sup>80</sup> "Residents of the virtual" is a quote from the film *Second Skin*, 2008, directed by Juan Carlos Pineiro-Escoriaza about gamers who prefer to spend endless hours playing online games in place of their "real-world" non-game personas and lives.

<sup>81</sup> Jerry Everard, *Virtual States – The Internet and the Boundaries of the Nation-State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

<sup>82</sup> Everard, *Virtual States*, 5.

<sup>83</sup> Everard, *Virtual States*, 5.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Indexicality**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter turns to the field of semiology in order to provide a theoretical framework through which to consider the signifying potentialities of animation as a documentary language. It critically examines one of the fundamental components of visual documents - the index – generally understood as the basis of referentiality upon which documentary definitions reside. To understand animation's changed status in documentary and the paradigm shifts that are relevant to this process requires a rethinking of a number of assumptions regarding what makes visual communication viable as documentary. In comparison to photography, non-naturalistic animated imagery has been considered "artificial", since it breaks with the indexical representation of photography, which is grounded in material reality. Contemporary animation is also separated from the physical world because it depicts content in a different manner to what is perceivable by the human eye and is only visible on-screen. Suzanne Buchan defines animated "worlds" as those "realms of cinematic experience that are accessible to the spectator only through the techniques available in animation filmmaking".<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I shall consider the impact that this perceived gap separating animated worlds from the physical world of the spectator has on the reception and acceptance of animation as documentary representation.

So far in this thesis I have examined the centrality of contemporary screen culture and the digitally virtual, and have explored their repercussions for what I identify as a growing convergence between on-screen animated worlds and the physical environment of the viewer. It is now essential to comprehend how the changing status of the physical in contemporary culture has affected animation's relation to indexicality, often theorized only in respect to its material trace. By pursuing new connections between the animated and the physical it becomes possible to reposition animation as a potentially reliable documentary language whose difference from photography is diminishing. As Tracey Fullerton has emphasised, "the documentary nature of a photograph or filmed image is not inherent to these media themselves, but is actually a socially negotiated sense of the image's 'believability', a

phenomenological artefact of our understanding of how images are made".<sup>2</sup> My research seeks to critically examine how terms such as the index have come to influence believability and hence to establish the criteria for what may or may not be considered a documentary. In so doing, my aim is to identify new perspectives through which to consider novel and alternative visualizations such as animation. Honess Roe has suggested that the icon has taken the place of the index today.<sup>3</sup> While I accept that the reception of the role of the index as trace is in flux, it is my contention that this subject could benefit from additional analysis, taking into account the double nature of the index as both trace *and* deixis.

### **Animation and Indexicality**

In this section I shall evaluate the standing of the index in a contemporary digital culture that no longer relies on the physical aspects of reality. Applying philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic trichotomy of signs, I will examine the relation between animated imagery and the indexical link to the "real" that is generally expected of documentaries.<sup>4</sup> I will demonstrate the complexity of the concept of the index in order to establish that it has an unexpected relationship with animation, consequently raising new questions about how indexicality is used to define and theorize contemporary forms of documentary.

The complexity of theorizations of the index and the growing interest it evokes is evinced by a special edition of the journal *Differences* in 2007, which was entirely devoted to indexicality. Edited by Mary Ann Doane, the journal issue brought together scholars from a wide variety of disciplines—art history, science studies, film studies, and analysts of digital media. All the contributors wrestle with questions raised by the notion of indexicality: issues addressed include the relation between the concept's multiple definitions; the role of indexicality in digital culture and the intricacy of contemporary referentiality as technologies of representation change. As Okwui Enwezor has suggested, the documentary is expected to embody a direct correlation to its physical referent as an evidentiary act.<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes famously elaborated on the prominence of the photographic image as evidentiary status, explaining that, unlike referents of other representational systems such as painting, the photographic referent has necessarily been placed before the lens, which consequently asserts that the object had indeed *been* in the physical space before the camera.<sup>6</sup> This

referential quality, or "indexing", is highly valued in documentary theory, where a validation that links the referent to its sign results in a certain "truth-value" that is expected of the genre. The recent theoretical return to the concept of "indexicality" marks the persistence of a photographic logic in art and theory despite the digitalization of culture.

According to Peirce's semiotic trichotomy of signs, an *icon* is a sign that shares qualities, often referred to as a resemblance or likeness, with its referent.<sup>7</sup> A *symbol* is based upon arbitrary conventions that define the sign as referring to the object it denotes.<sup>8</sup> The *index* occupies a more complex position, having a dual definition as both trace and deixis. The index functions as a trace or imprint of its object, as in cases such as the footprint or bullet hole, implying a material connection between sign and object.<sup>9</sup> Although the index as trace received privileged status in moving-image theory, Tom Gunning has argued that it is only one genre of index and not necessarily the most crucial or decisive. In emphasizing the trace, existing considerations of the index have, furthermore, overlooked the index as deixis.<sup>10</sup> According to the OED, *deixis* denotes cognitive reasoning processes, the function of showing, directly pointing out and specifying but also proving.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the deixis can demonstrate, illustrate and indicate but does not embody a trace to the referent and, unlike the icon, does not *have* to be based on resemblance. Peirce's discussion of the index includes a large range of signs and indications, including "anything which focuses attention".<sup>12</sup> The index has also been defined as "the general hailing and deictic functions of language and gesture", such as the pointing finger or the "this" of language.<sup>13</sup> Theorists focusing on the index have differed greatly in their discussion of the concept. Rosalind Krauss refers to the index's physical relationship to its referent, whereas Martin Lefebvre, in a similar manner to the differentiation between trace and deixis, distinguishes between direct indexicality, in which objects act as the efficient cause of the sign, and indirect indexicality, which acts as an indicator indirectly affected by the object.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly, Peirce himself proclaimed that there are no pure indices.<sup>15</sup> He regarded the photograph as an important example, since it is both iconic and indexical. The analogue photograph bears a mimetic visual resemblance to its referent but was also fashioned in a particular way *because* of the referent through its imprint in the photo-

chemical process, forming a trace.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the index itself can be both iconic and symbolic. As trace, the index shares a likeness to the object, becoming its iconic register. The index as deixis is symbolic, such as in shifter pronouns like "this", "I" or "here". To ensure denotation, the visual deixis may rely on varied degrees of recognisability, which means that the deixis can also take on iconic characteristics such as shades of visual resemblances. The issue of recognisability is complex, however, since the recognisability of a sign based on resemblance would make it iconic, whereas resemblance can be an issue of degree or even conventions, such as the sign of a star, which is also symbolic. I am interested in animation as an index that can be variedly placed on the continuums of trace and deixis, icon and symbol.

In my application of these terms, photographic indexicality is based on the relation between the sign and its physical referent. Since animation is most often compared to photography, a discussion of animation as an emergent documentary language further demands a consideration of indexicality in contemporary digital photography. In the digital photograph the link to the physical referent is radically redefined. Instead of containing a chemically-based physical trace to its referent through its mode of production, as was the case with analogue photography, the digital photograph is based on units of data and is consequently reduced to an icon, to use Peirce's terminology, rather than functioning as an icon *and* an index.<sup>17</sup> This means that, as a visual language that shares a resemblance with, but lacks a physical link to, the referent, digital photography becomes similar to a drawing, painting or, for that matter, some animations. As previously discussed in Chapter 3 above, the digital image's relation to any form of real is, furthermore, undermined by the impossibility of detecting manipulation.

In the shift from a photographic to a "post-photographic" digital visual culture, the physically indexical dimension of imagery is abolished.<sup>18</sup> Since the indexical trace of the physical is no longer a viable classificatory variable that can serve to differentiate between animation and photography, "less and less a margin of separation [exists] between the live-action and the not-live action parts of a production".<sup>19</sup> As digital technologies of moving-image production construct, rather than capture, depicted realities, digital photography can be understood as a particular instance of animation which uses live action footage as one of its many elements.<sup>20</sup> New technologies of

representation thus accentuate a rising equivalence in the truth value of animation and photography. Digital photography is highly constructed and stylized, while animation can achieve hyper-realist levels of naturalism that imitate photographic appearance. In other words, an impression of reality is separated from the perception of reality and the link to the physical is no longer visibly recognizable.

Even though the discussion of indexicality is central to digital media and despite Manovich's assertion that "[digital] cinema can no longer be clearly distinguished from animation", animation was barely covered in the indexicality special issue of *Differences*.<sup>21</sup> In fact, theorizations of the index continue to concentrate solely on material realities. According to Doane, as both deixis and trace, "the index is defined by a physical, material connection to its object".<sup>22</sup> Whereas the trace is modified by its object and thus physically connected to it, the index as deixis, as linguistic shifter or pointer, "in its intimacy with the symbolic, forces language to adhere to the spatiotemporal frame of its articulation".<sup>23</sup> This relation to the physical is complicated for several reasons, and raises a series of questions: First of all, does a connection to the physical necessarily require an iconic visual resemblance to the physical? Secondly, as computerized environments proliferate and screen-based virtualization flourishes, what is the status of the physical? Where is the physical of the digital, for example – is it the hardware? And is this really a sufficient criterion through which to define digital culture in all its widely varying manifestations? Can indexing even occur when reality is not materially based? What, in these circumstances, becomes the basis for documentary credibility? The relation of deixis to the symbolic as well as to the physical requires clarification, since its features are somewhat vague. The deixis indicates and points, which assumedly refers to the physical, which can be pointed to. However, the deixis is also defined as denoting cognitive contents, which are invisible. Thinking of the deixis visually may, therefore, be understood as similar to animation's fluidity of interpretation and indication of that to which there is no visual resemblance.

While technologized cultures can no longer necessarily be defined by their physicality, documentaries still appear to rely on the physically indexical nature of representation to evaluate truth-value, a dichotomy which ensures that either the issue of materiality and/or the conceptualizations of the index must be reconsidered. The



next section will, therefore, explore two definitions of the index and will consider its changing reliance on the physical. In this section, I shall examine the index as trace of the physical, the index as deixis of the physical and the index as deixis of the non-physical in its specific relation to animation.

### **Animation as Indexical Trace of the Physical**

Because the definition of index as trace was most commonly used in the theorization of photographic imagery, a connection between indexicality and iconicity has been established. As Mary Ann Doane comments, this has "unfortunately, suggested for many theorists an alliance with realism as both style and ideology".<sup>24</sup> This implied relation to realism is not, however, in itself part of Peirce's theories. Although animation may seem to break, or at least challenge, the link to the physical required by the index as trace, in this section I will provide a detailed analysis of some techniques of animation that are nonetheless directly indexical. While these techniques are not necessarily reliant upon mimetic iconicity, they do demonstrate animation's multifaceted indexicality.<sup>25</sup>

Some animation techniques rely on photography and thus share the dual signatory traits of icon and index, in a similar manner to the photography on which they are based.<sup>26</sup> Animation techniques such as stop-motion, whereby objects are photographed and then put in a sequence to create an illusion of movement, are based on physical objects and their photographic depiction. In the technique of rotoscoping, live-action footage is traced over frame by frame (manually or in a computerized fashion).<sup>27</sup> Even though the photographic imagery may be "veiled", and therefore not visually mimetic, the animated imagery is not entirely divorced from the indexicality of its source.



Figure 6.1: Winona Ryder in the rotoscoped film *A Scanner Darkly*, 2006, by Richard Linklater

Other techniques take this tendency further yet and depart from the visually mimetic conventions of realism. While they may still act as traces, they are no longer visually iconic. MoCap (motion capture) animation techniques record the actions of human actors, upon whose movements 2D or 3D computer animation is then based.<sup>28</sup> Like rotoscoping, the basis of the image and its movements are indexical; however, where rotoscoping aims for a degree of visual similarity, the final image produced by MoCap does not necessarily visually resemble its physical referent. Actors' movements may, for example, be used as a basis for anthropomorphic creatures. The *Next Media* Taiwanese news agency uses MoCap animation to produce inexpensive animated visuals in relative speed so as to guarantee imagery for breaking news but the technology can be used in a variety of fields.<sup>29</sup> MoCap thus combines an indexical trace with the iconic, based on a similarity of movement, and also an element of what Peirce names the symbolic nature because the visualization is stylized, and in that sense, arbitrary.

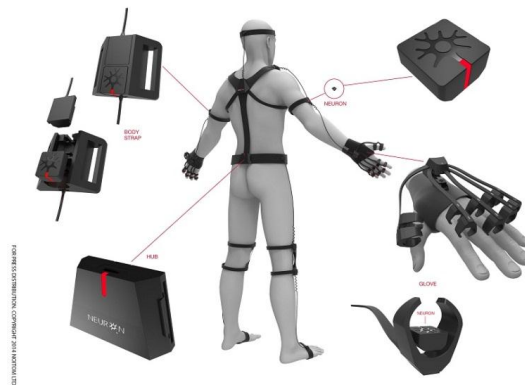


Figure 6.2: Perception Neuron – a new wireless full body motion capture system based on sensors that record the movements of human actors, upon which computer animation imagery is then embedded

Machinima, a real-time animation technique used in games and online virtual digital worlds, translates the player's commands and, increasingly, her physical actions, into animated game visuals.<sup>30</sup> Recorded through varying interfaces, ranging from a keyboard and mouse to motion-sensors, the user interacts with and manipulates items on screen via gesture recognition.<sup>31</sup> The player's physical movements are captured and translated into animated visual form, maintaining a trace of the physical referent that is then combined with visual possibilities ranging from an iconic avatar designed to resemble the player to the symbolic, which is, in this case, the endless and arbitrary options for visual imagery. In all such cases then, animation can act as an "index as trace", which operates on a continuum between iconicity and the symbolic.



Figure 6.3: Wii Boxing

### **Animation as Deictic Index of the Physical World**

Unlike the mimetic nature expected of the trace's iconicity (due to its centrality in photographic theory), the power of the index as deixis is a denotative one. The deixis forces attention to a particular object, designating without describing and pointing "there".<sup>32</sup> Having critically analysed existing theoretical discussions about the index as trace, I shall now go on to advance a reading of animation as deictic index. How can animation, in its role as documentary representation, deictically index the physical world, creating a link between the two in a referential rather than visually mimetic manner?

As imagery and the role of images change, it is necessary to challenge existing representational hierarchies, which prize photography and mimesis, and to reconsider the role and capabilities of non-mimetic representation. In a highly visual contemporary culture, images increasingly assume primacy over language and threaten to engulf us daily. In an era defined by an explosion of accessible information, new representations are needed in order to visualize complex ideas, structures, and systems, and to manage such vast amounts of data. It is, therefore, vital to understand the changing role of imagery in regard to the construction of knowledge.<sup>33</sup> The examples of MoCap and machinima demonstrate how the visually symbolic representation of the physical world is proliferating in contemporary culture. This is, I claim, pertinent to any consideration of the relation between animated documentaries and data visualization in that it serves to illustrate the varied visual forms to which viewers are becoming accustomed in their consumption of information today.

Aaron Koblin's artwork *Flight Patterns* (2009) serves to illustrate the multifaceted relationship between animation, symbolic, and iconic, imagery, in the representation of factual information. *Flight Patterns* visualizes the air traffic routes over North America over a period of 24 hours in animated colour and form. Each flight is represented by a symbolic single line, but could arguably also be interpreted as an icon, sharing the quality of a flight moving from point A to point B. As the work progresses, the many lines depicting flights come to form the recognizable geographical shape of the United States. The appearance of a map acts as an icon since it shares a likeness, in this case in form, to an identifiable concept, which anchors what is on display and contextualizes the information. Finally, the deictic indexing value of this work is due to the ability of the animated representation to illustrate the vast amounts of people and cargo flying each day. The animated representation thus points to an occurrence in an easily understood and simplified manner, identifying the vast financial, geographic, cultural and environmental effects of such extensive air traffic.

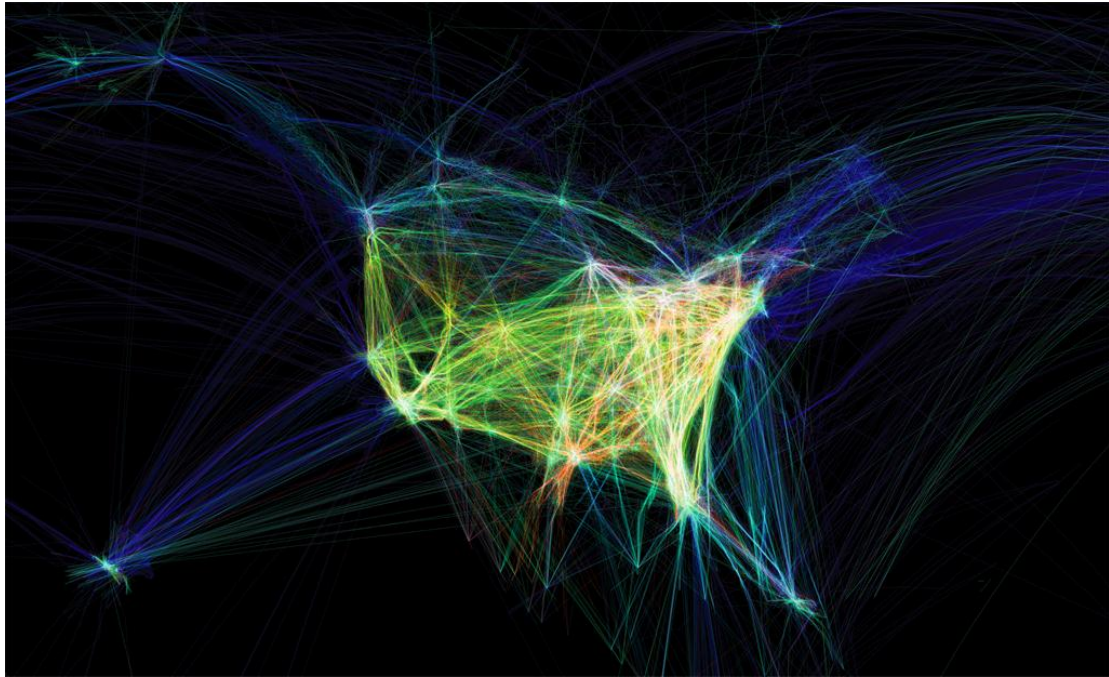


Figure 6.4: *Flight Patterns*, 2009, by Aaron Koblin

New information about the "actual" physical world that, for different reasons, cannot be, and is not, represented photographically is, more than ever, represented in animated form. In a similar manner to how photography was once used to visually represent what is not visible to the naked eye (such as Muybridge's depiction of movement split into single frames), animation is today used to extend visibility and thus to expand knowledge of realities that are un-photographable, as I suggested in my discussion of the virtual in Chapter 4 above. Animation may, for example, be used in cases when a scientist can "see" something no one else can and so needs the imagining power of a computer in order to think with images, as well as to make ideas like fractals or nanotechnology visible and understandable to the rest of the world. In the "Life of the Cell" series, researchers in the BioVisions Program at Harvard University collaborated with the XVIVO animation company in order to make a series of highly aestheticized and compelling animated informational depictions, including *The Mitochondria – Powering the Cell*.<sup>34</sup> Although these animated simulations may not, at first, necessarily be considered documentaries, after we concede that this is information that cannot be photographically represented, it becomes clear that animation is being used as a visual means of representing data that would otherwise remain optically unavailable to us, thus creating new knowledge.<sup>35</sup> As art historian and media theorist Oliver Grau has succinctly summarised, working with images

"concerns a different way of thinking. Images are much more than just objects of study; they are an important category of analysis. This entails thinking with images: images as an independent means of cognizance".<sup>36</sup> The proliferation of animation in contemporary culture would appear to confirm that imagery has the potential to overpower a fixation on language and text.

Shifting conventions ensure that imagery such as animation is increasingly accepted as reliable signifiers of information that indicate aspects of actuality. The animated images in *The Mitochondria* are not a trace, but they are iconic and they are an index. They are iconic because the way in which they are visualized is not arbitrary, but based on scientific research into the topic portrayed, like the cell, even if the human eye is incapable of distinguishing this resemblance. This means that animation, even if portraying the physical world, can do so without representing anything recognizable to the human eye precisely because it acts as a new form of visualization. Animation can thus be iconic (based on resemblance) but not recognizably so, which introduces a gap between iconicity and recognisability. These images are also deictically indexical because, by visualizing what cannot be perceived (beyond a textual description), they point, making viewers aware. This means that viewers become more and more accustomed to learning about their "own" world through animation.



Figure 6.5: The Mitochondria - *Powering the Cell* by Harvard University and John Liebler/XVIVO

Using animation to signify what cannot otherwise be perceived allows scientists to enhance their understanding and to inform others. Animation is thus used as a deixis of concepts, which expands the epistemological framework and understanding of

realities by pointing to aspects of actuality to which viewers may otherwise have remained oblivious. As Renov explains, the etymological roots of documentary lie in the Latin *docere*, meaning "to teach". The "documentary desire" is thus a desire to know.<sup>37</sup> Using animation as illuminatory representational imagery teaches viewers and fulfils their "documentary desire" to know. By drawing attention to a certain object, process or phenomenon and by doing so in a way that does not attempt mimesis, new information *can* be uncovered. If documentary is thus to be defined as a way to make sense of documents and to uncover otherwise unknown information, animated representations such as *The Mitochondria – Powering the Cell* fulfil these criteria.

As this chapter has demonstrated, documentary definitions are conventions which are historically and culturally produced. In rethinking theorizations of documentary based on indexicality, animation emerges as a new form of documentary representation. This chapter has, therefore, acknowledged the deictic capabilities of animation. In order to further elucidate the ways in which animation as deixis can be recognised as a valid documentary representation that refers and "points" to what is not seen, I will now turn to Deleuze's concept of the out-of-field and Cynthia Poremba's explanation of the indexical chain.

In his two *Cinema* books, Deleuze makes use of Peirce's semiotic theories. Deleuze is especially interested in the non-linguistic status of semiotics, which he uses to explain the experience and perception of film imagery. Deleuze discusses the frame of the cinematic image as creating a relationship with the out-of-field, that which was not photographed and is beyond the frame. The out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere, "what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present".<sup>38</sup>

Instead of the cinematic image isolating the environment seen within it, the concept of the out-of-field extends the cinematic image into larger sets and systems of meaning.<sup>39</sup> As such, each image is not a self-contained unit of information but exists always in relation with, and pointing to, what is not seen and what is beyond its limits, making it all the more dynamic. While Deleuze writes with specific reference to photographic imagery, I am arguing that, as deictic index, the animated image can also point to what is beyond its frame, breaking the "confines" of the animated world.

Animation's ability to deictically refer to physical phenomena in a credible manner means that, although the physical is not seen, it remains present within the animated representation. The idea of presence through signification is a recurring theme in the thesis, referred to here as the creation of a sense of the presence of the signified for the viewer through animation. This happens despite the fact that evidence of such presence is not embedded within the signification, as is the case in analogue photography. This presence can be achieved in different ways, adding to the complexity of animation's relationship to indexicality all the more.

Whereas the index as trace is specific, the deictic index can be more fluid in its indicative possibilities. I have been arguing that animation may be considered a deixis that "points" to a certain referent without acting as a trace of it. This means that animated documentaries can point to several referents simultaneously, without necessarily relying on visual resemblance. This is related to another definition of the deixis, which is linked to varied denotational meanings that can only be fully understood with additional contextualizing information. In Aaron Koblin's *Flight Patterns*, for example, the line does partially resemble a flight by mapping its motion from starting point to destination but it is nonetheless a very abstract signifier that overlooks many of the defining visual features usually used to denote flights or airplanes (like an actual airplane, sky, a map with a dot upon it etc). On the other hand, this abstractness arguably facilitates layered meanings to be signified since it does not denote just one referent, as is made clear by the many meanings understood from the work. The line is mainly recognizable due to context. In other words, the lines denoting flights may not be understood as such without an explanation or an awareness of the work's title at the very least. The same may be said about the geographical shape of the United States that is consequently formed. In a different context, these might function as symbolic shifter indices that do not clearly denote anything since the further a sign is removed from recognisability, the more it is reliant upon narrative, which makes it symbolic.

Poremba explains this as an indexical chain in which the status of an indexical trace can "bleed" into other representations that are detached and not indexical, or else can bind these images to other, indexical images.<sup>40</sup> She describes the chain as an "indexical status [that] may bleed into representations that maintain a level of instrumental detachment".<sup>41</sup> An example given is the testimony used in



documentaries. Whereas testimonies actually only refer to the interview or communication that took place, they come to represent the actual event described, even though no trace of it is involved. An indexical chain serves to "bestow" the status of the indexical trace (presumably higher and more believable than the deictic) upon those that are not necessarily traces. Although I agree that the deictic index can be a more inclusive indicator that points to more than one referent, Poremba's concept of the indexical chain seems to me reliant upon a somewhat muddled use of the concept of indexicality versus believability. What Poremba defines as an indexical bleed should, in my view, instead be considered a line of deictic indices pointing back to an index as trace, which attains heightened believability due to this fact. It is not indexicality that is being "transferred", in other words, but a sense of credibility through interpretation. This strengthens the notion of truthiness, where believability is based on interpretational and convention-based assumptions rather than on any clear notion of evidence. This aspect is, however, worth noting as an additional warranting device used in animation.

In animated documentaries, animation can point to different aspects that may serve to enhance the status of the representation as believable documentary. Animation can point to an occurrence which is familiar to the viewer through inter-textual knowledge, functioning in a similar manner to the past that enables recognition in Deleuze's concept of the crystal image. The animated documentary *Slaves* can, for example, be accepted as deictically indexing subject matter that would be known to viewers through other, less questioned, media coverage. The documentary's believability in pointing to actual events is based on familiarity with the subject from other sources, even if its form of representation is novel. Nonetheless, animation's ability to invoke the physical as a deictic index introduces a sense of the multiplicity of tangent worlds, easing the transition into the "other space" of the animated world. The animated and materially manifested worlds thus continue to intersect through these innovative forms of referentiality.

### **Animation as Deictic Index of the Non-Physical**

The notion of the deictic index as a form of pointing can serve to expose assumptions about the physicality of what can be pointed to. The categorizations of animated documentaries discussed in the second chapter, as well as my own positioning of

animated documentaries as a form of masking, point to the varied uses of animation to depict what is otherwise un-representable visually. This is also reinforced by Grau's discussion of "visualization" as both an imagining technique that aims to produce cognitive knowledge as well as the translation of the invisible into the visible.<sup>42</sup> While animation has been widely used in documentaries in order to portray subjective accounts of events and to explore personal interpretations of realities, the type of non-photographable non-physical realities upon which I will expand are of the progressively prevalent digital-virtual kind.

Whereas the index, as conventionally used in visual cultural theory, relies on a material connection to its referent, the digital is grounded in "mathematics, the most abstract of epistemological realms".<sup>43</sup> As the world becomes increasingly computerized and digitized, dematerialization becomes a significant aspect of contemporary culture. This raises a central question as to how these developments redefine animation's indexing status, and documentary truth claims more generally.

Unlike cases in which animation is used to depict the personal or the physical, in the portrayal of digital worlds, animation is not an interpretive visual language. Animation that is used to depict the visualization of virtual worlds is designed, of course, but it is not stylized according to content, as are other animated works. Instead, animation in digital worlds portrays varied unplanned activity based on user input. When used in digitally virtual worlds, such as online game environments, animation is the direct visualization of code. In these cases, animation is, in other words, the visual surface of the virtual world that all users see and the façade through which they experience the platform. As will be demonstrated in the third part of the thesis, recorded animated fragments of these digital occurrences become more like a photographic document than an interpretive language because they capture the visual façade of these online activities. In this sense, animation can be theorized as a deixis of the non-physical, or as a trace of occurrences in the realm of code, but not as a trace of the physical.

Indices are "limited to the assurance of an existence; they provide no insight into the nature of their objects; they... simply indicate that something is "there".<sup>44</sup> I am arguing that, in a virtualized culture in which "non-material" realities are given visual form, a new form of indication is conceived through changing uses of animation which are

used to point to the existence of such realities, and which further influences conceptions of reality. These issues are obviously central to the reconsideration of assumptions about the real and its believable signification or proof in documentaries, most of all in regard to the document, upon which the documentary is grounded. So, what is a document and how does animation's role as index relate to documents?

### **Animation, the Index and the Document**

As suggested in earlier chapters, documentary definitions are and always have been ambiguous. Where Renov's discussion of documentary's etymological roots resulted in an emphasis on teaching and the "documentary desire" to know, Philip Rosen investigates documents and their relation to documentaries.<sup>45</sup> According to Rosen, the etymological genealogy of the noun "document" has two chief derivations from its Latin and Old French roots, one having to do with teaching and/or warning, and the other with evidence or proof.<sup>46</sup> The idea of evidence and, concomitantly, the status of the index as trace, remains central in documentary theory but is in itself insufficient for documentary status.

According to Rosen, indexicality "is only a precondition for documentary. This is why [Grierson's] higher type of documentary cinema is necessarily an *aesthetic* of the document".<sup>47</sup> Rosen claims that an indexical image is insufficient for documentary, which requires a narrative that makes sense and bestows meaning upon the images seen, and is, therefore, prone to various interpretations.<sup>48</sup> Poremba also claims that an indexical document alone does not constitute a documentary. She refers to narrativisations or sequentiality as expressive frames which present documents in certain ways in order to indicate what those documents are intended to mean. Without expressive framing, asserts Poremba, only documents remain.<sup>49</sup>

Rosen and Poremba's conceptualization of the documentary is vital to any consideration of animated documentaries since they destabilize the essential role of the document as proof as well as pointing to the constructedness of all documentaries, regardless of their aesthetic style. Animation merely highlights this last aspect, emphasizing the constructedness (rather than capture) of the images themselves, forcing viewers not only to consider the truth value of documentaries today but also to question the conception and supposed truth-claims of visual documents more generally. By unapologetically emphasizing constructedness, animated documentaries

contribute to epistemological explorations of the documentary genre by questioning and casting new light on the capacity of the moving image to act as a record of the world.

This questioning of conventional (photographic) representation's indexicality as evidence raises the need to rethink both indexicality and documentary conventions. Rosen analyses the overlapping nature of distinctions between evidence and interpretation.<sup>50</sup> Since the index as proof is insufficient for documentary status, it is now time to reconsider documentary definitions and purposes. According to Rosen, the 1989 revised edition of the OED notes that the documentary's prime uses are for instruction or record purposes.<sup>51</sup> This is quite similar to the index, if and only if, *both* definitions of Peirce's index are accounted for, since one acts as record and the other points to, instructs or informs. In revisiting Peirce's original definitions of the index as well as the etymological roots of documentary, it becomes evident that *similar meanings reside in both*. For this reason, existing theorizations of documentary, which rely on only one aspect of the index, the "index as trace", and which seem as a consequence to exclude animation, are insufficient. If a document both teaches and proves, and if an animated index can similarly deictically point and consequently teach as well as acting as trace, it can be argued that animation is itself an emerging form of documentation.

The relation between animation's indexicality, documents and evidence can be reflected upon through the field of forensic animation, a close cousin of animated documentaries, in both form and practice, which uses new visualizations to create usable evidence and consequent truth claims. By merging the work of an animator with that of a forensic reconstructionist in order to portray crime scenes based on varied factual data, forensic animation has begun to replace the more traditional illustrations, photographs and verbal descriptions conventionally used in forensics.<sup>52</sup> Like animated documentaries, animation is used forensically as a way to draw attention, to simplify complex information, and to visualize what cannot otherwise be seen. Some court reconstructions even incorporate the police audio tracks of events, in a similar manner to the use of audio interviews and recordings in animated documentaries.<sup>53</sup> These new forms of evidentiary graphics are "usually classed as either substantive evidence (used to prove or disprove something) or illustrative (a demonstration or visual aid)".<sup>54</sup> Similarly to the trace as evidence and the deixis as

demonstration or visualization then, forensic animation illustrates how an acknowledgement of more than one kind of index might expand the exploration processes that lead to truth claims.

As documentary definitions today become more fluid due to varied exploration and experimentation in the field, one must be careful to ensure that expanding a definition does not involve deleting meaning altogether. By viewing documentaries as part of an epistemological exploration of realities, it becomes apparent that the OED definitions still hold. Correspondingly, rather than attempting to completely abandon or destabilize the notion of the index as a basis for the acceptance of representation's epistemological stake and documentary value, I have argued that accounting for the index's dual definitions maintains its relevance in today's evolving digital cultures and technologies of representation. If the multiple meanings of the index supposedly lead to its collapse, the notion of a document collapses as well, thus eliminating any base for documentary. It is for this reason that I emphasize the importance of grasping and addressing the complexity of the concept of indexicality and its repercussions, rather than dismissing it altogether.

An in-depth analysis of definitions of the index alongside a discussion of the production methods and growing uses of animation today demonstrates that animation can indeed act as index in multiple and complex manners. Firstly, as realities change due to technological developments, the referents indexed and referentiality in general demand attention. An analysis of the digitalization and virtualization of contemporary culture foregrounds the limitations of conventional theorizations of documentary, which are based solely upon physical realities. While "non-physical realities" have existed throughout the history of humanity, in the shape of systems of belief and constructions of knowledge, today's digital realities differ in the sense that they appear visually uniform to all who have technological access. Secondly, the animated index, as both trace and deixis, is not only capable of indicating the mixed realities of today, it also fulfils the function of a document as the legitimate grounding for documentary.

The third part of the thesis will pick up this thread and will analyse how contemporary animation ventures into otherwise visibly un-documentable virtual worlds that are not physical and which, therefore, defy existing documentary languages of photography. This ability to convey concepts and otherwise visually unperceivable aspects of our

contemporary world highlights the potential of animation to act as trace of the physical, and as a visualizing trace of digital actions, as well as a deixis of the physical and the non-physical. This links the changing modes of informational representation to one of the central aims of documentary, which is, according to Bill Nichols, to stimulate a desire to know about the world, i.e. *epistephelia*.<sup>55</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Technological developments, new forms of documentaries and an explosion of imagery and info-aesthetics in the visual culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, signal an imperative need for visual literacy as well as a deeper understanding of how new representational forms relate to the construction of knowledge.

Existing research has emphasised that the definition of documentaries is dependent upon an understanding of the conditions of their production and reception. The work of scholars including Tracy Fullerton and Bill Nichols supports my argument.<sup>56</sup> Their comments reflect my own contention that it is vital to comprehend the enormity of the technological changes which influence imagery and to deepen our understanding of new aesthetics so as to understand their relation to any potentially acceptable claim to truth.

Changes in regimes of visual believability and of forms of representation entail a perspective which concentrates on the viewer, on the process of interpreting imagery, and on shifts in visual literacy. As Michael Newman states, "[w]hat seems to be at issue today is not so much the relation of image to reality, for we have accepted that images form a part of reality, but rather the relation of the spectator to the image".<sup>57</sup> This chapter has consequently focussed on the relation between notions of indexicality, an often relied-upon criterion of an image's truth value, and animation in today's physical, as well as non-physical, screen culture, in order to further the understanding of the representational shifts of our time. Rather than continuing previous theorizations in visual culture of the index as reliant on a physical link to the referent, by introducing another aspect of the index as deixis, I have aimed to expand the discussion about indexicality as a measure of visual trustworthiness. Furthermore, by including an analysis of the document as a basis of documentary creations, I argued that only by recognizing the index's dual role as trace and deixis can the

fulfilment of visual document take place, expanding what may be considered a document as a result.

Animated documentaries have risen to the challenge of developing new viewer-oriented authenticating strategies that do not depend on an aesthetic of photo-realism. The understanding that realities can take on many visual forms changes views about what constitutes realities and forms part of a phenomenological shift that contributes to broader changes in representation. For this reason, before moving on to the documentation of virtual worlds as contemporary realities and the repercussions of this new documentary direction, it will be necessary to develop a more nuanced understanding of realism, as the relation between the reality depicted and its representation. This leads me to the next chapter.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Suzanne Buchan, *Animated 'Worlds'* (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing, 2006), vii.
- <sup>2</sup> Tracy Fullerton, "Documentary Games: Putting the Player in the Path of History", in *Playing the Past: Nostalgia in Videogames and Electronic Literature*, ed. Zach Whalen and Laurie Taylor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), 4-5.
- <sup>3</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 142.
- <sup>4</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) is known, amongst other things, for his pioneering work in theories of language.
- <sup>5</sup> Okwui Enwezor, "Rules of Evidence: Text, Voice, Sight", *Berlin Documentary Forum Web Magazine*. (2010): 10, accessed July 4th, 2010, [www.BDF\\_magazine\\_web\\_e.pdf](http://www.BDF_magazine_web_e.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 1993), 76.
- <sup>7</sup> T. L. Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 215, 229. It is important to note the difference in how we use the word "icon" today and how Peirce meant it (today an iconized image has a readily recognizable reference attached to it).
- <sup>8</sup> Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs*, 220-221.
- <sup>9</sup> Mary Ann Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18:1 (2007): 136.
- <sup>10</sup> Tom Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18:1 (2007): 30.
- <sup>11</sup> Oxford English dictionary, accessed May 15, 2012
- <sup>12</sup> Justus Buchler, ed. *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover, 1955), 108.
- <sup>13</sup> Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index", 30.
- <sup>14</sup> See Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (London: MIT Press, 1985), 198 and James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 231.
- <sup>15</sup> Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs*, 218, 226.
- <sup>16</sup> Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs*, 215
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Willemen, "Reflections on Digital Imagery: Of Mice and Men", in *New Screen Media – Cinema/Art/Narrative*, ed. Martin Rieser and Andrea Zapp (Karlsruhe: BFI, 2002), 19.
- <sup>18</sup> See Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity", 128-152 and Ritchin, *After Photography*.
- <sup>19</sup> Denslow, "What is Animation", 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Lev Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema, the Art of the Index", [www.manovich.net](http://www.manovich.net), 1995, unpaginated
- <sup>21</sup> Manovich, "What is Digital Cinema", unpaginated
- <sup>22</sup> Mary Ann Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18:1 (2007): 2
- <sup>23</sup> Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign", 2.
- <sup>24</sup> Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign", 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Although animation is not visually mimetic, the elements of realism in animation will be covered in the following chapter.
- <sup>26</sup> This is, of course, only relevant to analogue photography.



<sup>27</sup> Marco R. Della Cava, "Through a 'Scanner' dazzlingly: Sci-fi brought to graphic life", *USA Today*, August 2, 2006, 4, accessed January 22, 2012, [www.usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2006-08-01-rotoscoping\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/news/2006-08-01-rotoscoping_x.htm)

<sup>28</sup> Even though the movement is captured from the physical, the images/forms moving cannot be seen moving anywhere but on screen, placing this still in the definition ground of animation that I am basing my research upon. For an interesting discussion of motion capture techniques and the on-going debate about its relation and status as animation as perceived by its changing degrees of rendering, see Yacov Freedman, "Is it Real...or is it Motion Capture?: The Battle to Redefine Animation in the Age of Digital Performance", *The Velvet Light Trap* 69 (2012), 38-49.

<sup>29</sup> For further discussion of *Next Media*, see Chapter 3.

In August 2014 a Kickstarter campaign for a low-cost full-body motion capture system called Perception Neuron was launched. As a system based on tiny, wireless and light-weight sensors that are adaptable so the user can choose where to locate them, providing anything from detailed finger movements to full-body motion, the system enables an affordable and variable option, enabling users to decide what to do with the technology. The potentially wide-ranging effects of such technology become clear upon consideration of the various fields this system can be used in. So far Perception Neuron motion capture has been used for applications in the fields of film, special effects, animation, game making and virtual reality. Furthermore, due to the 360 degree view of movement that the technology facilitates, it is also used for sport training, sport analysis and medical rehabilitation.

<sup>30</sup> Machinima will be discussed in Chapter 7.

<sup>31</sup> Nintendo Wii remotes, similarly to the Kinect for Xbox console that is based on web-cam technology, enables users to control and interact without the need to touch a conventional game controller.

<sup>32</sup> See Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, ed., *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 24; Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs*, 230.

<sup>33</sup> For more about how varied forms of visualization create new insights into data, see Oliver Grau, ed., *Imagery in The 21st Century* (London and Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>34</sup> From XVIVO website press release: "XVIVO's award-winning animation studio creates internationally acclaimed 3D animation for pharmaceutical, medical device and bio-tech companies, advertising agencies, educational organizations, museums and broadcast companies. XVIVO develops customized animation and communication tools that are scientifically accurate as well as visually compelling". For more information, see [www.ultimedia.mcb.harvard.edu/](http://www.ultimedia.mcb.harvard.edu/) and [www.xvivo.net/mitochondria-press-release/](http://www.xvivo.net/mitochondria-press-release/), accessed January 12, 2013

<sup>35</sup> The documentary has always been about making visible what was not visible to audiences, for varied reasons, whether conceptually or in a perceivably visible sense. For example, photography cannot capture the infinitely large, infinitely small or complex processes. Philip Rosen explains that even the earliest documentaries focused on this goal: "up to 1907-08 the money-making strategies of popular cinema included claims to make sights of the real available to audiences". For more see Philip Rosen, "Document and Documentary: On the Persistence of Historical Concepts", in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 73.

<sup>36</sup> Grau, *Imagery in the 21st Century*, 6, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Renov, ed., *Theorizing Documentary* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 5.

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16-17.

<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> Cynthia Poremba, "Real/Unreal: Crafting Actuality in the Documentary Videogame" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2011), 49.

<sup>41</sup> Poremba, "Real/Unreal", 49.

- <sup>42</sup> Grau, *Imagery in The 21st Century*, 11.
- <sup>43</sup> Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity", 143.
- <sup>44</sup> Doane, "The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity", 135.
- <sup>45</sup> Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, 5.
- <sup>46</sup> Rosen, "Document and Documentary", 65-66.
- <sup>47</sup> Rosen, "Document and Documentary", 76.
- <sup>48</sup> Rosen, "Document and Documentary", 62-76.
- <sup>49</sup> Poremba, "Real/Unreal", 36.
- <sup>50</sup> Rosen, "Document and Documentary", 70.
- <sup>51</sup> Rosen, "Document and Documentary", 66.
- <sup>52</sup> Minhua Ma, Huiru Zheng, and Harjinder Lallie, "Virtual Reality and 3D Animation in Forensic Visualization", *Forensic Sciences* 55:5 (2010): 1227, 1229
- <sup>53</sup> Damian Schofield, "Playing with Evidence: Using Video Games in the Courtroom", *Entertainment Computing* 2:1 (2011): 51.
- <sup>54</sup> Schofield, "Playing with Evidence", 56.
- <sup>55</sup> Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 31.
- <sup>56</sup> Fullerton, "Documentary Games", 4-5; Nichols, *Representing Reality*, xi.
- <sup>57</sup> Michael Newman, "Moving Image in the Gallery since the 1990s" in *Film and Video Art*, ed. Comer, Stuart (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), 119.

## CHAPTER 6

### (Re)Considering Realisms

#### Introduction

Realism, as the articulation of the real, or what is accepted as a believable delivery of the real, is central to the study of the documentary field.<sup>1</sup> Most obviously, a framework of representation and relation purporting to tell "the truth" raises questions about what that truth is, what reality is being presented, how and why, and what (if any) communication modes can potentially make viewers accept the work as consisting of truth and hence having documentary value. With its unlimited capabilities of visualization, which easily exceed the physical, animation expands the parameters of moving-image visual culture more generally. Animated documentaries in particular also broaden conceptions of reality. Having analysed the virtual as an additional aspect of contemporary reality and having considered the complexity and believability of indices and icons, I shall now go on to examine the relationship between animated documentaries and realism for, as Jane M. Gains states "[t]o return to documentary is to return again to cinematic realism and its dilemmas".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some of the themes central to understanding the field of documentary, as set out in the first chapter, are shared by the discourse of realism.

Realism is a vast and interdisciplinary terrain, greatly unresolved and therefore impossible to cover fully in the present context. My discussion will, therefore, be confined to the specific context of moving-imagery. In this regard it is important to distinguish between realism as an aesthetic style, and realism as a social-political objective in varied forms of representation. As an aesthetic, realism is based on precise and accurate visual representation of the physical world, also called "realistic", "naturalistic", "mimetic" or "illusionistic". As an art movement, realism is based on subject matter that privileges the quotidian, which will be referred to as "realist".<sup>3</sup> Since animation in documentary is most often compared with documentary conventions based on photography (and is often deemed "artificial" due to its lack of both photorealist visuals and assumed indexical trace) my focus will be on the relation between mimetic visual realism and evolving documentary aesthetics, as well as on realist and documentary social-political aims.

At the same time as realism has been prominently related to the mimetic representation of the physical, mimesis, mimicry and illusionism have, in a corresponding theoretical move, been criticized as naïve, misleading and/or insufficient representations of reality. This means, as pointed out in Chapter 3, that the role of mimetic visuals in this field exists in paradoxical tension. Realism is not one relation between representation and the real but rather comprises multiple relations that are ever-fluctuating. John Roberts explains that realism is "based on the socially produced and self-qualifying nature of signification, in which things and their relations and representations are in *dynamic* movement and tension".<sup>4</sup> On one hand, despite the digitization of culture and widespread changes in the photographic field and its believability, familiar paradigms that privilege photography as a documentary aesthetic persist and, as Roberts asserts, "claims to 'knowledge' and 'truth' still haunt the social functions of photography today".<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, realism is no longer as reliant upon photographic conventions and, as Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello explain, can function in audiovisual media in a broader manner through recording, resemblance and/or the creation of a more ambiguous "reality effect", expanding the field significantly.<sup>6</sup> As I will argue, this shift not only entails a transformation in the ways in which the world is experienced and represented, but a consequent change in the assumed relation between vision and knowledge, which now increasingly rely more on belief, persuasion and trust than on any expectation that it is possible to *know* definitively from the visual.

"Mimesis" is, moreover, based upon the notion that it is an "imitation of the real world", which assumes that the "real" world looks a certain way, i.e. is physical and therefore photographable.<sup>7</sup> More precisely, materiality—as a basis for actuality—and naturalism—a form of visual aesthetic based upon the way in which the human eye perceives of the physical—still serve as binding criteria for truth claims and it is in opposition to these criteria that animation comes to be defined. According to this binary logic, the "artificiality" of animation is observed in contrast to the presumed "non-artificiality" of photography and animation thus continues to be compared to the supposedly more direct and authentic representation of cinema. As a result, non-hyperrealist animations that break with the visual appearance of photography may be still considered an unusual visual choice for documentaries. In other words, even if, practically and theoretically, animation may converge with

cinema, as demonstrated in my discussion of definitions of animation, when it comes to non-photographic visual forms, especially in the realm of documentaries, animation is still viewed very much as a different and separate aesthetic. However, new directions in philosophical debates about realism question the positioning of human perception at the centre of such assumptions, which further destabilizes mimesis as a counterpoint to animation in documentary. My aim in this chapter is not to produce a defence of animation's realism but rather to track the ways in which it is positioned in relation to past and new theorizations of this ever-changing framework of representation. By analysing the fluctuating role of mimesis in realism, this chapter will also open up new ways of considering the potential reception of animation in non-fiction.

The chapter is divided into five sub-sections meant to illustrate the historical establishment of realism as an artistic and social movement, the complexity of the field and different directions in its current theorization, all of which will be explored in relation to the field of contemporary documentary and with specific regard to animation. In the first section, I shall offer an historical survey of realism. I shall then go on to examine three central topics in the discussion of realist aesthetics: transparency, opaqueness and parafiction. In the third section, 'Paradigm Shifts and Realisms in the Plural', I shall address the mutability of how realism is perceived and theorized. Next, I shall examine the relation of the socio-political objectives of the realist movement to contemporary documentary practice. Finally, in the section titled 'Reality Effects, Vividness and Simulations of Witnessing', I shall identify key shifts in the way in which realism is more broadly theorized in audiovisual media, and shall assess how this corresponds with what are seen as defining conditions of contemporaneity.

### **Historical Survey**

The term "Realism" has, since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, been applied to art that aimed to reproduce nature and humanity without idealization, theological determinations or preconceived notions, and which dealt instead with contemporary social and economic realities.<sup>8</sup> Realist art was not intended as an ornament to pleasantly entertain the bourgeoisie; realism as an art form and as an attitude is rather one of opposition to the ruling classes.<sup>9</sup> The political aspects of realism include an aversion

to escapism and a demand for honesty and facts; a shift towards the unemotional and depersonalized; a striving for objectivity and social solidarity; and an activism that seeks not only to know and reveal reality but to change it as well, aiming for popularity by creating art that speaks to the masses.<sup>10</sup> Gustave Courbet's 1849 painting *The Stonebreakers* is an example of nineteenth-century concepts of realism, not only because of its naturalistic appearance but because of its historical veracity. Instead of creating a more conventional and idealized artistic portrayal, the work confronts an uncomfortable political truth by sympathetically depicting the hardships of rural workers, bluntly and provocatively portraying a moral and social-political message about the period.<sup>11</sup> Though originating in France in the mid nineteenth century, realism has since been used to describe several movements and trends in art, some involving naturalistic modes of representation, such as photorealism, and others the depiction of "realist" subject matter in a social sense, or attempts at both. The notion of realism as a depiction of "real life" that focuses on real people busy with real activities raises an obvious connection to the field of documentary.

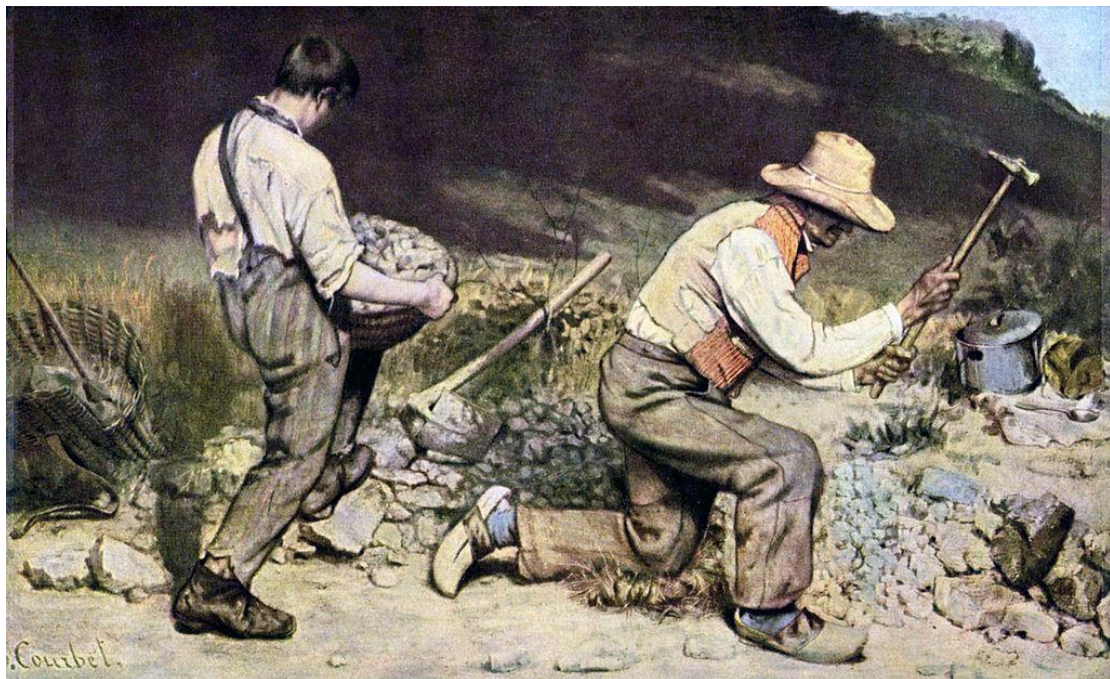


Figure 7.1: *The Stonebreakers*, 1849, by Gustave Courbet (destroyed)

The complexity of realism is indicated by the immense and multiple philosophical questions that the field raises, varying from the ontological to the epistemological, moral, semantic, physical (in the sense of perception theory, sensory experience and visual regimes, for example), humanism and post-humanism (raising the question as

to if and what kinds of conceptual schemes can deliver ultimate measures of truth), and many more.<sup>12</sup> While Realism as the depiction of "real life" may be regarded as an attempt to present objective reality without interpretation, that is based on the belief that such a reality exists as ontologically independent of human perceptions - a view which has been deemed naïve by numerous philosophical and political thinkers (but which have certainly re-emerged recently in Speculative Realism).<sup>13</sup> In fact, "[r]ealism has often been contrasted with idealism, the view that nothing exists except minds and their states and contents", thus placing the human-world relation as central.<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant claims that, rather than "the way it is in itself", the world can only be discovered by individuals and their perceptions, which means that the world is based on knowledge that is grounded in thought categories.<sup>15</sup> This is a form of antirealism that refutes the idea of realism as based on the notion that things are a certain way regardless of the manner in which they are conceived.<sup>16</sup> John W. Yolton accordingly explains that "[t]he history of perception theory from Descartes to Kant reveals a move from ontological talk of the *being* of objects in the mind, to the epistemic notion of 'the being of being known'", which he characterizes as an "epistemic shift".<sup>17</sup> This epistemological shift emphasizes objects as they are perceived, accentuating the perceiving subjects as well as the issue of appearances (as based on both the objects themselves as well as the perceivers) and representation, introducing additional and certainly immense fields into the discussion.<sup>18</sup>

This relates to the concept of truthiness, introduced earlier in the thesis (see Chapter 1 above). 'Truthiness' refers to an elusive sense of truth in today's mediatized information age, which is based on shifting representations and changing paradigms of believability. Truthiness has thus come to replace the more traditional expectancies of so-called objectivity and truth claims of a documentary that may have existed in the past. In June 2014 the award-winning online magazine *Slate*, for example, ran a story titled "The True Story of Pocahontas - at least, Today's True Story". In fact, "true enough" has now come to replace "Truth", a shift that also explains the central role of today's viewer as the target of persuasion, who must decide when she is satisfied with a degree of truth and who then ceases to look for further information, consequently acting as a definer of a work's truth status and documentary value.<sup>19</sup> These broader cultural trends have ensured that the move Yolton identifies from an ontological to an epistemological perspective in the realism debate has further developed into what I

deem is a communication-grounded persuasion effort in documentaries today to assert a truth claim deemed "true enough".

### **Transparency, Opaqueness and Parafiction**

Bruno Latour has suggested that the relation between representation, reality and the truth claims that are capable of being obtained leads to unrealistic expectations. "[W]e are asking from representation something it cannot possibly give, namely representation *without any representation*".<sup>20</sup> He explains that people have been sold the idea of transparent representation and have come to believe that, if only there was no mediation, the better our grasp of "Truth" would be.<sup>21</sup> The problem is, of course, that we have no access to "reality" other than through representation, which is not reality itself but stands in for reality as exactly that, RE-presentation.

Nowhere is the idea of transparency more apparent than in film theory, where "realism" considered cinema as a window to the world. In this sense, the essence of cinema has been defined as "its ability to record and reproduce reality and its phenomena".<sup>22</sup> This is in contrast to "formalism", which viewed cinema as a frame, rather than a window, and focused on the "alteration and manipulation of filmic perception, distinct from everyday perception".<sup>23</sup> As Peter Wollen explains, behind these judgments stand Romantic ideals that divided the natural from the artificial, the organic from the mechanical.<sup>24</sup> The enduring nature of these Romantic ideals can be seen in the longstanding tendency to view animation as artificial (when in fact all representations of reality may also be seen as such). The issue of direct capture and equivalence between representation and referent, versus a sense of falsification, are central in the discussion of realism. In fact, ever since Aristotle's discussion of mimesis and later *trompe l'oeil* modes of realism, attempts to "touch the real" have always also raised questions about imitation and the deception inherent in copies too similar to their originals.<sup>25</sup> These age-old discussions find a contemporary incarnation in debates surrounding new representational technologies that are capable of constructing startlingly hyper-realistic animation, which are easily confusable with photography, as well as the varied combinations of blatant fiction and trickery in documentaries today.<sup>26</sup>

Following the previous chapter about indexicality, it is useful to consider how signification informs central debates about realism in moving imagery, especially



with regard to which and how certain aesthetics have been deemed more transparent than others (“direct capture” versus formalism, for example). Peirce's taxonomy of signs is essential to an understanding of cinematic realism through the prism of semiology.<sup>27</sup> While Barthes did not use the category "indexical", he nonetheless regarded the photograph as an icon that presented a "being there" of the object in question.<sup>28</sup> In his work on cinematic realism, André Bazin similarly examined the ontology of the photographic image, which he saw as an imprint, an impression made through the manipulation of light. Bazin's claims are based on the idea that film, more so than other plastic arts, is destined to realism because of its photographic basis, which transfers "the reality from the thing to its reproduction".<sup>29</sup> For Bazin, the photographic image is, therefore, "the object itself".<sup>30</sup> The resemblance and connection between image and referent is, then, what evokes a sense of transparency. In other words, like Peirce's indexicality, the existential bond between sign and object, between photographic image and referent, is considered central to cinematic realism, in a similar manner to documentary's reliance on the evidentiary.<sup>31</sup> However, Bazin did not only focus on indexicality as photography's way to capture reality, but also noted that realism was only attained through artifice since "some measure of realism must always be sacrificed in the effort of achieving it".<sup>32</sup> A similar critique of simplified notions of realism appears in film studies and is based on the idea that "recording" reality assumes there is a real "out there" which "can be shown (or that will reveal itself) without the use of linguistic or cinematic signs".<sup>33</sup>

As a result, even though photography may have once been theorized as a central feature in moving-image realism, the idea of the photograph as direct and/or transparent has been increasingly refuted in recent years. The relation between the photographic image and referent as a basis for realism versus the artifice that is also a facet of realism, as explained by Bazin, continue to be an issue of debate today. As recently as 2012, a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* was dedicated to the role of photography today, positioned between art history and philosophy.<sup>34</sup> Photography is indeed at an interesting intersection – while it is both a significant medium in contemporary art practice and continues to occupy centre stage in contemporary visual culture, its character, status and believability are seen as increasingly inconsistent as digitalization, manipulation and postproduction techniques take centre stage in an era that has been termed post-photographic by some theorists.<sup>35</sup> The

*Critical Inquiry* special issue continued to debate issues raised in Michael Fried's 2008 *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*, which considers topics including the varied and perhaps opposed creative forces upon which photography depends, as both a (non-artistic) mechanical trace and as an (artistic) representation intentionally created by the photographer.<sup>36</sup> Questions of agency versus automatism in the photographic process thus continue to influence the philosophical understanding of its constructed versus transparent visual account of referents and are, therefore, still central to the contemporary understanding and theorization of photography.

Using these same criteria to analyse animation raises thought-provoking conclusions, which elucidate animation's dual status, placing animation on a continuum, rather than conflicting, with photography. Since animation has no stylistic limitations, it has commonly been viewed as a subjective and interpretive art form where the animator is omnipotent. In a perhaps contradictory manner and in a stance currently more aligned with the field of information design than animation studies, animation can also be the visual end product or graphic interface of a technical apparatus or algorithm that translates data into visuals, as is the case of digital clocks where numbers automatically change on-screen or in the work *Stockspace* by Marius Watz, which is a digital visualization of stock market movements.<sup>37</sup> This second scenario can be linked to my previous discussion of machine vision since, although animation is initially designed, it is also the on-going outcome of a non-living agent, an image of the world that is formed automatically. This is somewhat similar to the way Bazin described photography's mechanical nature.<sup>38</sup> In other words, rather than viewing animation as opposed to photography, similar analytic approaches may be used for both. If we accept Bazin's viewpoint that mechanical visualization is more neutral and transparent because it is not based on the subjectivity of its operator, automated animated infographics may be deemed similar and potentially transparent and trustworthy as well, although in both cases, however, it is the overlapping between mechanical apparatus and human agent that creates uncertainty about how to define the end product. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in my last chapter, when capturing animated virtual worlds, animation can act as a supposedly neutral or direct recording, similar to photography, rather than as subjective visual interpretation of events, further demonstrating the complexity of the topic.



Figure 7.2: *Stockspace*, 2009, by Marius Watz

The ambiguous nature of animation, as direct mechanical capture or as interpreted design, creates a sense of confusion and uncertainty. This corresponds to the idea of "truthiness", whereby truth is understood as a question of degree based on exploration. In the current information climate, viewers are highly aware of the possibilities of misinformation, the unintentional spreading of false or inaccurate data, and disinformation, the manipulative, deceitful and deliberate spreading of false information, which generates suspicion.<sup>39</sup> *In documentation (of physical events at least) animation as masking alerts viewers to a lack of transparency whereby, for every segment exposed, more seems to be hidden.* While my research explains why animation can no longer rationally be considered fiction, animation's shifting uses and changing status in relation to realities, or realism may, as I will show, understandably ignite a premonition of confusion, trickery and/or mis/disinformation. The subject of deception is, therefore, still a pertinent issue in the reception of animated documentaries. Should animation be believed or is it a distortion of events which takes advantage of its lack of any firm signifying link to referents? What is deceitful then – that which appears transparent, readable and direct, or rather that which appears so artificial it may be fictional?

This on-going confusion about believability raises further questions about what has become the barely discernible line between a sense of transparency, of seeing things "as they are" in a believable manner, and utter deception and misinformation. What does this mean then about the role of documentaries today? Carrie Lambert-Beatty confronts this very issue and coins the term "parafiction" to address the advantageous effects that such ambiguous documentary works may have. Lambert-Beatty writes about a body of contemporary art practice that is presented as fact, in which artists

investigate issues of truth in new ways, and thus "draw attention to the relativism and subjectivity of truth", or else are oriented towards the search for truth.<sup>40</sup> These genres may be considered new kinds of documentary, in which the logic of facts and the logic of fiction are indelibly blurred.<sup>41</sup> Another option is to see them as evidence that "there are no documentaries, only pseudo-documentaries".<sup>42</sup> Recurring themes in this field of artistic creation are the examination of truth perceptions, collisions of trust and betrayal and an aesthetic of disorientation. My own analysis of animation in relation to the Deleuzian concept of the crystal image, which denies a single and clear vantage point from which to view and interpret the constantly shifting meanings of the image, serves to position animation in documentaries as part of this wider field of disorienting aesthetics.

Lambert-Beatty's observations reinforce my own conclusions about believability and truthiness. She claims that, through intersections of the imaginary with the world as it is lived, "post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less towards the disappearance of the real than towards the pragmatics of trust".<sup>43</sup> She explains parafiction as part of a deception, a "gotcha" moment of being fooled in which, "with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact. They achieve truth status".<sup>44</sup> Unlike the non-naturalistic animated imagery which forms the focus of my analysis and that supposedly announces its status and break with photography, Lambert-Beatty explains that sometimes the revelation in parafiction is key and sometimes it is withheld.<sup>45</sup> She discusses the work of artists including The Yes Men, the Atlas Group, Johan Grimont and Eva and Franco Mattes (aka 0100101110101101.org) as examples: these artists use varied amalgamations of fact with fiction to the point that the two become indistinguishable. The importance of these kinds of artistic works, she claims, is that they create more critical consumers of information because "[b]eing in on the trick" or aware of deception is an incentive to uphold criticality, since it advocates the need to be on the lookout so as not to be duped. As Lambert-Beatty explains of parafictional art, the fact of having been deceived once encourages a continuing search for meaning. "It changes you, leaves you both curious and chastened. It also forever changes one's interface with the media, art, museums, and scholarship...[it creates an] alertness to the possibility of play".<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Maureen Burns maintains that the assumption that what is hidden holds a higher truth than what is visible causes

"devastating effects to our knowledge-making... [and] fosters a perpetual neurosis for uncovering what may be hidden...paranoia, manifesting itself through our need and practice to forever recover meaning".<sup>47</sup> While Lambert-Beatty is writing about the truth processes inherent in parafictional viewing today, her remarks are also relevant to animated documentaries, which highlight a sense of what is *not* seen and disclosed as part of their masked visual representation. An awareness of what is not seen prevents the concretization of any truth claim. Instead, a variety of overlapping options remains present and one's interpretation is always lacking, awaiting additional exposure and acknowledged as one of many. The ability of animation to tantalize viewers creates an opacity of meaning that prevents satisfaction and thus preserves the search. I welcome the idea that lacking certainty is the maximum certainty obtainable - as Lambert-Beatty suggests, this means "admitting and even valuing the provisionality of our knowledge".<sup>48</sup> There is something humbling about this, so that even if a truth narrative is created by viewers, they are wary that it is not the only one, leaving other options and perspectives as valid alternatives of meaning. The curiosity and even "neurosis" this may trigger has the potential to postpone the "post-documentary" moment.<sup>49</sup> This leads me to the plurality of possible realisms and their dependency upon shifting cultural conventions.

### **Paradigm Shifts and Realisms in Plural**

It is vital to remember that what viewers recognize as realistic depictions is based on familiarity and conventions of representation. Nelson Goodman contends that "the realism perceived in a picture arises not from the quantity of information provided but from the ease with which it is read...the more stereotypical and familiar the...modes of representation that generate an image, the more natural and true it seems".<sup>50</sup> Once the aesthetics of representation are no longer perceived as aesthetics, they become transparent because the representation is read as if it were reality itself.<sup>51</sup> This has important political implications, since once representation is no longer seen as such, what is represented can be viewed as natural, making it seem "real" rather than cultural and constructed. From a Marxist perspective, the ruling classes produce an ideology that works in their own self-interest, and which is put forward through naturalizing effects of the mechanisms of ideology, so that ideology, as the mediation of human beings' relation with their real conditions of existence, remains unrecognized.<sup>52</sup> Ideology is thus unseen. Representation aiming to engage with the

real either complies with ideology, and is, therefore, complicit with an oppressive system, or else aims to subvert and reveal these underlying systems.

In this sense, simply because animation is a relatively new documentary language, less readily "readable" or comprehensible, it may initially be considered less realistic, in that it emphasizes its constructedness. We might, therefore, be tempted to come to the conclusion that, as the uses of animation flourish in contemporary visual culture in general and specifically in non-fiction, it is potentially only a matter of time until animation too may be so widely accepted and familiar that it is not questioned and comes to be read as transparent or realistic as well. In fact, due to the familiarity of animation from childhood and its growing use in informational contexts, I claim that it is quickly approaching this point so as to be seen as seemingly transparent as other visual forms (if perhaps not yet entirely, as is obvious from photography's continuing centrality in the field of documentary) and I shall in the conclusion to the thesis point to the potentially broader repercussions of this phenomenon. This tension in animation's cultural role in the contemporary moment is part of its allure.

"Truthiness", according to Gunning, is that which seems real because it is recognized and which depicts the world in familiar fashions that reassure viewers that reality is as they think it is.<sup>53</sup> What seems transparent is thus, for Gunning, the biggest form of deceit. In contrast to what *seems* real, realism, or the "more real", involves defamiliarization and indicates a breakthrough to a *fresh perception* that involves a multiplicity in one's understanding of reality.<sup>54</sup> New modes of representation thus have the potential to evoke a self-reflective spectatorship stance. The issue of construction versus transparency, or an illusion of such, is what led to a realization for the need for anti-illusionistic, alienating or rupturing techniques, such as those as those developed by Marxist German leftist playwright and director Bertolt Brecht in his work from the 1920s-1940s.

Responding to the conventional, commercial "bourgeois" theatre of his time, which he saw as reliant upon emotional manipulation that encouraged a suspension of disbelief, Brecht explained the importance of and need for fresh forms of representation that might combat emotional manipulation in the theatre and understand reality anew. Since seeing has to do with power, Brecht's idea, informed by Marxism and socialism, was to subvert the position of the subject so as to reveal

the workings of ideology by pointing to truths otherwise unseen.<sup>55</sup> Brecht claimed that "our conception of realism needs to be broad and political, free from aesthetic restrictions and independent of convention...Realist means: laying bare society's causal network/showing up the dominant viewpoint...And we shall let the artist apply all his imagination, all his originality, his sense of humour and power of invention to its fulfilment...Reality alters...to represent it, the means of representation must alter too".<sup>56</sup> Brecht's theories of epic theatre and the "Verfremdung" alienation effects he used in his plays suggest that, in order to rethink the familiar and to consider it in new ways, an original form of representation is required.<sup>57</sup> In this sense, what may seem to break with conventional modes of realism, to destabilize traditional modes of viewing and perhaps to cause confusion, is actually useful and trustworthy. Realism has thus always taken on many forms of expression and has included an urge to expose the hidden meanings, either through caricature and exaggeration, or through imagination and metaphors.

It is in this context also useful to consider Surrealism, another form of realism, whose artists were active in the same era as Brecht. The first Surrealist manifesto, written by André Breton in 1924, defined Surrealism as a revolutionary movement that aimed to liberate the imagination. At times aligned with communism and anarchism, Surrealism suggested that the freeing of the imagination and the mind was directly linked to liberation from repressive social structures. Rather than a clear aesthetic or formal movement, however, Surrealism was more a philosophical orientation which was interested in psychic reality as much as in external reality, that engaged with and blurred the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality, and whose aim it was consequently to change life and reality.<sup>58</sup> Although the scenes depicted by some Surrealist artists, such as René Magritte and Salvador Dali, are clearly not 'real,' they are nonetheless executed in a style that remains faithful to external appearances. Other artists, such as Max Ernst and Joan Miró, suggested ideas without concern for exact representation, and these latter may be considered relevant to my discussion of deictic indices as denoting ideas in a more representationally fluid yet nonetheless understandable manner. What all the Surrealist artists shared, however, was "a desire to find, over and beyond appearances, a truer reality, a kind of synthesis of the exterior world and of the interior model".<sup>59</sup> By creating strange and sometimes shocking juxtapositions and breaking conventions and/or expectations, the

"surreality" of the works often causes a sense of bewilderment.<sup>60</sup> This sense of bewilderment ensures that the works do not invite a direct interpretive reading, or yield a stable explication, but rather create manifold signification, thus linking this discussion back to my earlier reading of animated documentaries as crystal images.<sup>61</sup> According to Conroy Maddox, the potential reactions of bewilderment and confusion make Surrealist representations more than pictorial and poetic methods of investigation, also acting as politically operative tools for social subversion through antagonism and conflict.<sup>62</sup>

These Brechtian and Surrealist ideas can be usefully brought to bear on current discussions about the growing uses of animation in non-fiction. As long as animation is still deemed "strange" in documentary or until such time as it becomes more fully integrated into the mainstream and is accordingly "made transparent", animation's unique and endless visual potential grants it an ability to destabilize existing conventions and expectations, and to represent events and circumstances in powerful, thought-provoking ways, as was the case in Goss's *Stranger Comes to Town*.

A possible legacy of postmodernism and poststructuralism may indeed be a suspicion of single perspectives in a world too complex to be thus reduced and unified. For this reason and to prevent complacency, disruptions are often used and constructedness is emphasized, in order to "[heighten] our unease about our assumptions".<sup>63</sup> By using new aesthetics like animation in documentary, which break with the traditional forms of more accepted or normative realistic representations, such as photography, the underlying constructedness, as well as a multiplicity of perspectives and options, can be revealed and emphasized. A new aesthetic regime, such as animation, "has the effects of raising doubts about the truth-value of the traditional regime...not because one is better than the other (or more efficient), but because the appearance of both brings focus to the aesthetics itself, this way denouncing the claim that the system of representation is the same as what it represents".<sup>64</sup> By demonstrating that no representation is equivalent to the referent itself, the idea that all languages of representation are constructed and, therefore, never transparent thus becomes central in maintaining and promoting criticality.

According to research into forensic animation, mixing visual metaphors and modes can be potentially disorienting to some viewers and may create an unnatural



experience for others.<sup>65</sup> This reinforces the idea that changing visual styles may cause a sense of disruption for viewers, who must continuously and repeatedly readjust and find their bearings in the visual world represented. This form of spectatorship is important if the goal is to induce alienated and critical, rather than immersed and complacent, viewing. In fact, many animated documentary works, such as *Snack and Drink* (1999), *Ryan* (2004), *In the Same Boat* (2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), *Slaves* (2008) and *I was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2010) alternate between varied styles of animated imagery and also include the photographic alongside the animated. The shifts in representational styles are often used to signify a transition between different stages or aspects of the narrative, such as memories, dreams and actual events, but the result, whether intentional or not, conveys that the entire representation could have taken on different forms, emphasizing its constructedness. Once again, these examples show that the vast variety of animated styles, which can each depict realities in different ways, exemplifies that no "transparent" representation is ever possible.



Figure 7.3: *In the Same Boat*, 2007, by Emily Bissland



Figure 7.4: *Waltz with Bashir*, 2008, by Ari Folman



Figure 7.5-8: *Snack and Drink*, 1999, by Bob Sabiston

Realism can thus be thought of not only as an easily legible and seemingly transparent form of representation but also in opposite terms - as encompassing radically new forms of representation which destabilize existing assumptions and generate new ways of seeing, or which at least potentially enable defamiliarized viewing through novel forms of representation. These contradicting notions of realism, of the familiar and easily understandable versus the new and the strange, are central to the discussion of animation in documentary, which in different ways personifies both.

Animation now occupies a seemingly contradictory position. There are now many reasons to accept it as no longer fiction. At the same time, however, in order to maintain its advantages as a documentary visual language, something of the old paradigm that places animation as less transparent and somewhat fictional or artificial must be preserved, otherwise animation would potentially make a perfect visual language to be used for disinformation.<sup>66</sup> As long as animation is overtly constructed and emphasizes itself as such, i.e. as "non-transparent", its integrity is central. As Paul Ward asserts, what is presented as factual and straightforward information rather than as an argument, is in fact covert and not overt because viewers are encouraged to take what is presented as truth.<sup>67</sup> The question then arises as to whether it is possible to maintain animation's representational benefits and to prevent compliant viewing or

whether all signs eventually become familiar and thus doomed to some degree of perceived transparency? How do these paradigm shifts occur and what does this mean about realism?

Documentary history is full of changing codes of realism, exemplifying that its epistemological status is anything but secure.<sup>68</sup> The recent theoretical realist turn has sparked lively discussions surrounding the overcoming of postmodernism and the development of new directions in philosophical debates about realism. In trying to break through the dispute between realism, which claims that reality exists outside of the human mind, and idealism, which proclaims that reality exists only in the mind, it is useful to consider the recent philosophical movement of Speculative Realism. Speculative Realism takes its name from a 2007 conference at Goldsmiths College in London, whose participants differ on several accounts but all of whom, "in one way or another, have begun speculating once more about the nature of reality independently of thought and of humanity more generally".<sup>69</sup> They also all share a critique of correlationism.<sup>70</sup> One of the prominent members of the movement, French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux uses 'correlationism' to refer to the dominant ontological background of the continental philosophy of the past century which asserts the impossibility of thinking of humans without the world or of the world without humans, thus emphasizing the correlation between the two.<sup>71</sup> Meillassoux does not attack correlationism in order to return to old-fashioned realism; instead he attacks it only partially. While he affirms that the human-world relation continues to stand at the centre of philosophy, as his book title *After Finitude* suggests, he at the same time rejects the idea that all knowledge is therefore finite. For this reason he tries to overcome correlationism by creating another position of 'very strong correlationism', or 'speculative materialism', which claims that even though things in themselves are unknowable and unthinkable, that does not necessarily mean they do not exist, thus differentiating his position from idealism.<sup>72</sup> "It is unthinkable that the unthinkable be impossible", claims Meillassoux.<sup>73</sup> Meillassoux's claim is that, whereas correlationism means that we cannot know what is true beyond thought, speculative materialism claims that "we *can* know that *any* of [the possibilities] could be true, and without reason": not because shadowy hidden reasons may exist but because no hidden reason exists.<sup>74</sup> Realizing that what may be beyond thought may indeed exist moves us beyond the closed circle of thought of correlationism and

replaces it not with the finitude and ignorance about what may exist beyond thought but with "absolute knowledge that the world might be other than we think", since the possibilities are absolutely potential.<sup>75</sup> Meillassoux proposes, therefore, to replace facticity with factiality, in order to describe the speculative essence of facticity.<sup>76</sup> The problem that arises is that rational discourse about the in-itself is no longer possible and instead the unknowable in-itself, untouchable by reason, justifies the status of belief as the only form of access to the absolute.<sup>77</sup> The de-absolutization of thought means it is no longer universal, which instead positions the individual subject as central with a world view impenetrable to reason.<sup>78</sup> This resonates with the sense of truthiness that characterizes contemporary times, in relation to the media engagement with non-fiction and to more general theorizations of truth claims, and also strengthens my claim that, in today's documentaries, a shift towards persuasion in order to evoke belief in viewers has taken a central role.

Other Speculative Realists such as Graham Harman differ from Meillassoux, accepting the claim that knowledge is finite whilst rejecting the idea that the human-world relation is central, and emphasizing other perspectives.<sup>79</sup> This overturns forms of philosophy that privilege human beings, claiming the human-world relation is insufficient as a basis for ontology and epistemology. The New Realism, as described by Umberto Eco and Hilary Putnam, is a negative realism, in the sense that, as it becomes clearer that human conceptual schemes cannot deliver ultimate measures of truth, this does not mean that a desire for objectivity and reality should be relinquished but may rather serve as proof of the existence of an independent world.<sup>80</sup> This explains how different life forms can interact in the same environment without sharing conceptual schemes, philosophically focusing on conceptual and perceptual schemes beyond the human. This relates to additional contemporary philosophical movements that cut across the living and non-living, such as Object Oriented Ontology (aka Triple O) or Object Oriented Philosophy (OOP), which put things at the centre of being and consider the existence of things in a more equal manner, rather than placing human thinking at the centre of philosophy.<sup>81</sup> Although the scope of my research prevents covering these philosophical trends fully, their mention here serves to demonstrate the continuous relevance of realism today and the shifts in the apprehension of its meaning.

Film historian Thomas Elsaesser uses these ideas about no longer taking for granted the centrality of the human agent in his theorization of what he terms a new form of cinematic realism. He gives examples of "new realism" films, in which objects have a kind of presence or agency that aims to produce a perceptual insecurity that develops into ontological doubt.<sup>82</sup> These ideas are highly relevant to the study of animation, which has become famous for its ability to give agency to objects (in varied degrees of anthropomorphism) and other non-human subjects, creating elaborate worlds that are different from the viewer's own yet consistent in their own way. In most Disney films, for example, magical elements, talking mice and teapots are combined to create a separate world based on its own logic. Some of the earliest drawn and painted animation, such as the Mickey Mouse films of the 1930s, were defined by what Sergei Eisenstein termed a plasmation, or a theory of "plasmaticness", where characters were stretched and squashed "like quicksilver scattering and rolling back into a cohesive little ball".<sup>83</sup> Since the rules of physics did not apply, the animated spaces seemed like separate spheres from the physical world. This can also be associated with the genre of magical realism, in which the rules of "our" world are broken, creating new situations and mental perspectives.<sup>84</sup> This forces viewers to readjust the way the presented world is viewed, to make a kind of cognitive switch, which makes them reconsider their assumptions and view differently but also, as Elsaesser explains, ensures that viewers become intensely aware of their own presence as spectators.<sup>85</sup> As I suggested in my discussion of animation as a crystal image in Chapter 4, images that are able to cause doubt can potentially defy complacent viewing and are important as new vantage points through which to consider one's access to and understanding of reality.



Figure 7.9: *Beauty and the Beast*, 1991, by Walt Disney Pictures

Since the subject of realism is closely related to ontological and epistemological debates about the human-world relation and the kind of knowledge that it is feasible to obtain from that standpoint, a realism that is based on object agency and perspective obviously breaks from that context. Brecht claimed that, as realities change, so must their representations. These object or non-human philosophical perspectives, as well as the growing interest in the field of trans-humanist or post-humanist studies more broadly, can open up new directions in the discourse surrounding realism and its aesthetics. Transhumanism is a field of practical and intellectual research focusing on the transformation of the human condition through science and technology which enhances human capabilities, speculating upon the benefits, dangers and ethical aspects of such developments.<sup>86</sup> The suggestion is that, through technology, humans may eventually transform into a "posthuman" condition in a perceived progression from human to transhuman to posthuman.<sup>87</sup> Although a more detailed consideration of these ever-expanding fields of thought falls outside the scope of this thesis, it is nonetheless important to consider how changes in the way in which human perception, and even the essence, role or status of the human in today's world, are understood influence the way in which the world is represented. These moves towards the transhuman or posthuman demand new kinds of realism that reveal more than past modes of realism did. Elsaesser's ideas emphasize this exact ontological uncertainty by exploring focus points that are not human-centred and thus relate to my earlier discussion of machine vision. Seeing events through visual translations of machines which differ from the human vision of the physical causes a "splitting of the reality principle" through a "splitting of viewpoint, the sharing of perception of the environment between the animate (the living subject) and the inanimate (the object, the seeing machine)".<sup>88</sup> Machine vision relates the discussion back to the mimetic versus non-mimetic discussion, since it questions the superiority of mimesis once again by viewing the world through non-human visual perceptions. This may arguably be seen as less realistic than if one's stance is human-centred because of animation's visual break with the way in which events would have been seen directly. However, I would propose that animation may also be considered a contemporary form of visual realism that takes into account technology and the way in which the human's relation to technology changes the manner in which the world is experienced and viewed, which understandably influences the way in which it is visually depicted and what may thus be considered realistic portrayals.

Jonathan Crary suggests that "computer-aided design...holography, flight simulators, computer animation, robotic image recognition...are only a few of the techniques that are relocating vision to a plane severed from a human observer...vision is being relocated from the human observer to the machine".<sup>89</sup> As my discussion of screen culture shows, screen technologies become both a platform for actions - what I called "living in-screen" - and an extension of the human eye. The idea of a split in reality linked to a split in vision relates to my earlier chapters, in which I argued that worlds of contemporary existence, physical and screen-based, converge through visualization and display means so that screens facilitate the augmentation of human eyesight and animation introduces alternative visualization tactics.<sup>90</sup> This coincides with Crary, who asks "how is the body, including the observing body, becoming a component of new machines...an apparatus?"<sup>91</sup> As I suggested in my discussion of the changing conceptions of the body and machine vision, not only are viewers accustomed to varied machine visualizations, but machine witnesses that visualize in styles that may differ from human perception can now be considered more neutral and objective than human ones.<sup>92</sup> Rather seeming less realistic, then, these depictions may actually seem more realistic to some. Visualizations that appear different from anything that the human eye would directly have perceived of the physical world are comparable to animation that differentiates itself stylistically from naturalism. In other words, vision is becoming more machine-oriented, rather than only human-oriented, which means that human vision as a criterion for defining any clear-cut aesthetic of realism, such as was once the case with naturalism or mimesis, is losing prominence. This may lead in turn to varied visualizations of the real that do not necessarily abide by the expectations of photorealism.

Elsaesser's theorization of realism also includes questions about what "human sight" is by emphasizing a multiplicity of options and perspectives. Elsaesser's new realism films correspond to surrealist explorations of psychic realities, and are described as featuring protagonists whose view of the world is "marked by limits placed on their physical or mental faculties: restrictions, which, however, turn out to be enabling conditions in some other register".<sup>93</sup> This is significant to any consideration of animation's relation to realism because the ability to portray highly unusual and multiple perceptions of realities is a characteristic of animated documentaries that have long focused on multiple outlooks and ones otherwise difficult to depict visually,

as in the case of protagonists whose experiences include autism, trauma, synesthesia and more.<sup>94</sup> Examples include *Snack and Drink* (1999) and *Tying your Own Shoes* (2009) about autism, *Ryan* (2004) about drug and alcoholism-related deterioration and *An Eyeful of Sound* (2010) about synesthesia. In these instances, animation is used to break down barriers and prejudices, to expose the myriad ways in which "reality" can be seen, and to demonstrate very different and diverse perspectives. In this regard, in my own interviews with Israeli soldiers, I was told that the representations of war in the animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir* actually seemed to them more, rather than less, realistic in comparison to live-footage. They explained that, when depicting such horrific events that cannot be compared to anything else and which may be understood only by those who experienced them personally, only an uncommon and unconventional form of representation can come close to embodying the extraordinary and bizarre sensations involved.<sup>95</sup> In this sense, the film's realism is all about its success in enabling viewers to grasp some aspect or dimension of "reality" otherwise unavailable to them. Elsaesser claims that "such a concept of cinematic realism responds to the unknowability of 'other minds', but also 'shows some respect' for this otherness. This is a challenge, but also a chance for a new way of 'being in the world'".<sup>96</sup> In attempting to create a new kind of reality effect for viewers by acknowledging varied and "strange" perspectives, this new mode of "being in the world" thus also indirectly comments upon what realism may be. Experiencing the world through someone else in new forms of reality effects will be further explored in interactive animated documentaries in the next chapter.



Figure 7.10: *An Eyeful of Sound*, 2010,  
by Samantha Moore

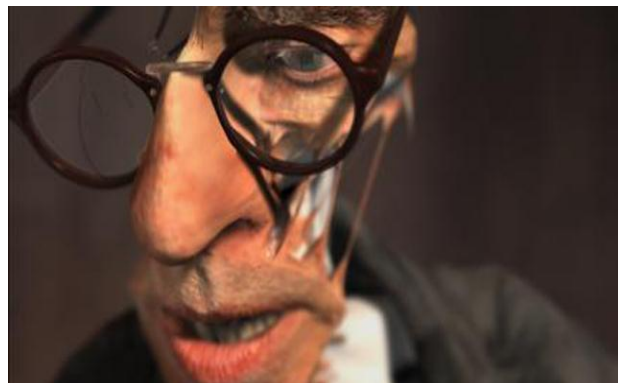


Figure 7.11: *Ryan*, 2004, by Chris Landreth





Figure 7.12: *Waltz with Bashir*, 2008,  
by Ari Folman



Figure 7.13: *Tying Your Own Shoes*, 2009,  
by Shira Avni

As Lind and Steyerl have suggested in their discussion of documentary practice in the field of contemporary art, there is an on-going "documentary quest for ever more authentic representations of the real".<sup>97</sup> As technologies and forms of representation change, mediations of realities change as well and it is more a question of convention and trust than of privileged access to any truth claim. Actually, as Ward explains, "realism" is a difficult concept to determine because it is often understood in relative rather than absolute terms: "Realism" can refer to the capturing of "a close approximation of...the world exterior to the representation" or can be judged against what "has already gained the status of the 'realistic' (a particular form of cinematography, for example)".<sup>98</sup> In other words, realism can be understood in terms of its relation to direct vision, technology or ideology. In this sense, realistic representation must always be in flux. As John Ellis has claimed, there is no realism but instead realisms in plural.<sup>99</sup> As such, different forms of realism embody different relationships to the real.<sup>100</sup> Rather than representing *the* world visually, animated documentaries can thus nonetheless "represent the real, or offer illuminating comment on it".<sup>101</sup> It is, then, cultural paradigm shifts and what creates them that dictate what is deemed believable and why.

Before photography, the representation of realities was obviously not mimetic to visual appearance but resembled it to varying degrees and through a vast range of styles, which acted as recognizable and acceptable denotative (i.e. "deictic") indices. Stylized representation was thus "real enough" in order for it to be believed and/or accepted as true. Nevertheless, when more accurately mimetic visual apparatuses are created, it may seem that the imagery of the past slowly comes to be seen as less precise, and therefore less believable as real, which may serve to explain the

persistent bias that emerged towards the photographic. After Courbet, the realism of photography and cinema were considered more convincing documentation than painting because they "captured" reality and produced imagery that was closer to how the human eye sees.<sup>102</sup> This remarkable similarity between the world before the camera and the photographic image is seen as photography's major achievement, creating a fascination with mimetic technologies and their spectacularly successful illusionism. Nichols asserts that resemblance is, therefore, a central aspect of documentary aesthetics.<sup>103</sup> Following my discussion of indexicality in the previous chapter, the question thus becomes: what is the degree of resemblance that is needed in order for documentary aesthetics to evoke clear signification and believability? How different can images appear from their referents for them still to be accepted as documentary-worthy? How far from mimesis can signification venture for it still to be understandable, immediately meaningful and potentially persuasive as a means of communicating aspects of the real? Is mimesis essential? Is the indexical trace key? Can varying resemblance and iconicity still seem believable? Can an arbitrary symbol eventually evoke trust as well? These questions are particularly pertinent to any consideration of the use of animation, which may be easily recognizable and comprehensible, albeit not necessarily mimetic or indexical.

In his examination of what is considered realistic in animated depictions, Stephen Rowley asserts that realism can be described in multiple ways. He accordingly lists various types of realism, including visual realism, aural realism, realism of motion, narrative and character realism; and social realism.<sup>104</sup> It is also important to consider how changes in conceptions of the index further influence our understanding of realism. In his article "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality", Gunning argues that "the index may not be the best way, and certainly should not be the only way, to approach the issue of cinematic realism".<sup>105</sup> Gunning gives prominence to motion as a form of realism, which is obviously central to any discussion of animation, for which movement is key. He quotes Christian Metz's description of a sense of realism through moving imagery as the ability "to inject the reality of motion into the unreality of the image and thus to render the world of imagination more real than it had ever been".<sup>106</sup> In other words, there are many components of the constructed and imaginary worlds of animation that "inherit" a sense of realism which can arguably then influence their reception.

## Socio-Political Realist Goals

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Realist movement was concerned with social-political reality and was motivated by a desire to expose problems and inspire social change, an aspiration which has been often associated with documentary and that has been revived in recent years. Realism continues to represent a vitally important aim to attempt a deeper understanding and further explanation of realities. Although spectatorship is now acknowledged as varied and wide-ranging, realism is an important aspect in the process of exploring and shaping reality. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of post-structuralism's most lasting and engaging propositions was that representation is not a mere reflection of reality but that it actively participates in the latter's construction. This probing of what in fact connects art (and representation more broadly) and social existence continues in documentary practice today, extending the imperative to elucidate contemporary assumptions about realism.

Although definitions of realism shift and vary, the uses to which realism is put often return to the idea of disclosure and consequently, to seeing and understanding one's world and one's place within it anew or critically, as was characteristic of the realist movement from its start. As Bazin himself stated, "realism was the vocation of the cinema, not to signify but to reveal".<sup>107</sup> To raise questions and to present information that reveals more than what was initially presented or thought to be seen is to expose the presence of forces hitherto hidden. It is no surprise then that the move to politics, activism and ideology is an easy one to make and has been an essential part of the study of realism. A focus on social engagement is evidenced in the wide scholarly interest in advocacy and activist documentaries, which have been important aspects of documentary research, reflecting the historic role of documentaries as voices of dissent and criticism.<sup>108</sup>

After the late 1950s-1960s realist theories experienced a decline as they were seen as an ideological fiction and became associated with classical Hollywood cinema and "bourgeois ideology".<sup>109</sup> "Bourgeois realism" is, as Gains explains it, "a narrative form that denies its own devices".<sup>110</sup> Echoing the discussion about transparency versus constructedness, Colin MacCabe dismissed realism per se, claiming that it "allows reality to appear and denies its own status as articulation".<sup>111</sup> As explained by Brecht, writing in conditions of urgency in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the importance of

disruptions in the representation of reality has a clear socio-political goal, and as Alexander Alberro has claimed much more recently, this tendency has become essential in the junction between art and society for

while the forms of critical art practice vary...many assume a process of reconsideration, re-elaboration and revision. From this perspective, the primary aim of art [as related to the social world] is to defamiliarize, to estrange the viewer or reader from habits of understanding, troubling that which seems patently acceptable in cultural terms [in order to potentially influence that same reality].<sup>112</sup>

In this sense, when considering realism as a relationship between representations and reality, it is impossible to overlook the fact that, in this day and age, life has become the object of technical and artistic intervention, blurring the boundaries all the more.<sup>113</sup> Lind and Steyerl specifically state that "contemporary documentary production [works]...do not represent reality. They are the reality".<sup>114</sup> The relationship between representation, signification and the ability of or experimental artistic works to represent whilst also changing the reality in question was the topic of a 2012 issue of the contemporary art and culture publication *Frieze*, which focused on the question of how art influences society and intersects with social life.<sup>115</sup>

The *Frieze* issue dealt with art that caused real change in the world, ranging from feminist art practice from the 1970s-1980s to media interventions such as The Yes Men's 2004 Union Carbide exposé in which a fake spokesperson claimed on the *BBC* that the Dow Chemical Company was accepting their responsibility for the 1984 gas leak at a pesticide plant in India in which thousands were killed, causing Dow's shares to plummet. Other examples include research-based art practices that do not result in traditional art objects but in performances, conversations, recreations and archives, creating encounters and discussion spaces that elaborate on meaning collectively and which can shift the topic to include both what must be opposed and that which can be imagined. Art works are thus seen as more than aesthetic objects but as necessary and important social practices and cultural forms that create new meanings, ideas and activities. As Alberro summarizes it, art practices cannot necessarily effect change directly but "are part of a whole epistemological and philosophical shift in the way

people comprehend the world and their place within it".<sup>116</sup> Realism as an articulation of the real can thus take on many varied forms.

In his discussion of a post-photographic era, Ritchin speaks to the problems inherent in trusting human eyesight. He explains the persistence of photography as follows:

We have tried to use the photograph to concretize the probabilities...reassuring us that reality is more solid than what our theories tell us. It is this profound anxiety that explains why we are so readily convinced that the photograph is credible. The alternative may be too disconcerting, if not terrifying.<sup>117</sup>

On the other hand, the opposite is also occurring: Whereas realism as a method was once seen as a window to the world, representations of non-fiction that do not attempt to achieve a sense of transparency can serve to expose the changing believability of non-mimetic visuals. As Gemma Sieff asks:

Why is it that images we trust are now most often the lowest resolution or blurred images, so-called poor images? Perhaps it's because there seems to be a trade-off inherent in these images: a compromise on quality (resolution, composition, focus) for speed and authenticity.<sup>118</sup>

Although she is clearly referring to photography, her remarks also seem pertinent to my consideration of animated documentaries for two reasons. First of all, Sieff's observations suggest that, whereas in the past realism was associated with naturalism, today an opposed trend is occurring, as if the "non-perfect" image is more believable and has more truth value. As the examples of Rodney King and Colin Powell discussed in Chapter 3 above demonstrate, since even "clear" photographs do not always contain the meaning expected, unclear images leave even more open to interpretation. Depending on the degree of its blurriness and/or stylization, this kind of so-called "poor" image could potentially be placed on a continuum whose extremes vary between photorealism and the abstract. In other words, non-mimetic "deficient" images could include a deictic index rather than indexical trace or even an icon based on varying resemblance to the referent. This relates to my earlier discussion of animation as a non-mimetic sign, in which I interrogated the degree of similarity and relation between sign and referent that is deemed sufficient to be accepted as bearing

truth value. If non-mimetic and non-indexical imagery can, under certain circumstances, be regarded as true, then the acceptance of animation as a visual documentary language becomes more understandable. Secondly, the trust of imagery whose relationship to its physical referent is less than clear in appearance but which displays other links to the referent, such as immediacy and speed, is also a step in the understanding of animation's documentary value and potential believability. In other words, despite a break with the appearance of materiality, animation may still convince viewers by utilizing different warranting devices, such as real-time depictions, for example, as I will explain in the following chapters.

The relation between any notion of the real and signifying systems has been a major theme in poststructuralism and postmodernism. As Gains explains in her work on documentary in relation to the real and realism, the general vagueness of postmodernism is based on the idea of "the indistinguishability between the real and its image or the state in which there is no reality outside representation".<sup>119</sup> This is most obvious in Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist and postmodernist oft-quoted declaration that, "there is nothing outside of the text", which shatters the idea that a stable and exterior reality pre-exists representation.<sup>120</sup> Although this claim is disputable and raises questions about physical realities that most certainly do exist, most obviously considered through examples of pain and death which I will engage with in the following chapter, the postmodern discussions of the complex relation between reality and its representation stress that there is no true or absolute meaning since that would require a belief in extratextual information outside of the image or word as signifier.<sup>121</sup> This acknowledgement that realities may be as equally constructed as their representation makes the use of animation as a documentary language appear less problematic and more revealing of a much wider school of thought in regard to contemporary reality itself. However, since postmodernism, an even more ambiguous relationship between sign and referent must be considered. Hence, Mark Nash has suggested that it is no longer beneficial to try and distinguish fiction from reality since post-structuralism and ideas such as the simulacrum illustrate that reality cannot be distinguished from its representation. At the same time, however, Nash explains that the documentary is an attempt to re-establish a relationship to reality, by questioning what kind of reality is proposed.<sup>122</sup> This is useful in order to understand the revival of interest in documentary in recent years.

Nagib and Mello explain that, in the *post*-postmodern era since the mid-1990s, a "realist revival" was begun by movements which "signalled the end of irony and intertextuality, and the reestablishment of moving image's ties with objective reality".<sup>123</sup> What an "objective reality" means in this setting and age, especially in a documentary context, refers more to a political and activist perspective based on the exploration and change of social realities, than on more philosophically-oriented ontological enquiries into the nature of reality.

It is no surprise then that the documentary turn in contemporary art has taken a distinctly political and social character. Okwui Enwezor, the artistic director of the important 2002 documentary-oriented exhibition *Documenta 11*, states in the exhibition catalogue that "to understand what constitutes the avant-garde today, one must begin not in the field of contemporary art but in the field of culture and politics, as well as in the economic field governing all relations that have come under the overwhelming hegemony of capital".<sup>124</sup> Rather than intending to formulate a unified narrative about art and its institutions, the exhibition had five global locations, multiple and varied cultural works on display, as well as conferences, debates and workshops that all aimed to rethink post-colonialism in an era of globalization, multiculturalism and difference in a dialectical intersection between the contemporary art and culture of the globalizing world. Similarly, Terry Smith, as explained in Chapter 3, emphasizes that in a post-postmodern era characterized by doubt and anxiety, there is need to understand the "multiple modernities" and antinomies of contemporaneity, which is divided into economic-geopolitical worlds. The focus is rather on the need to grasp complexity which, "in the longer or shorter run, may stand a chance of being effective", in the sense of political principles and forms of activist intervention, among others.<sup>125</sup> The strong emphasis on socio-political realities in documentary-related art today thus appears to stem from an understanding that, rather than viewing globalization as an era of cultural homogeneity, the widening economic asymmetry creates heterogeneity and that, in order to understand art, it is therefore crucial to understand the specific social and historical circumstances in which it is being made and how it encounters its publics.<sup>126</sup> As Angela Dimitrakaki explains it, "globalization can be understood as a particular stage in capitalist economy where capital operates *fully* as a social relation, making any neat distinction between [spheres such as economy] and 'art' hard to grasp".<sup>127</sup> In this sense then, the goal of art-oriented and experimental documentaries today has

shifted from the attempt at supposedly objective truths or highlighting epistemological and ontological debates. Instead, the field of documentary that often deals with the current realities of globalization primarily attests to a diversity and complexity of forms and paradoxes or discrepancies where organizing complexities is prioritized over documenting reality.<sup>128</sup> In this context of socially-aware work, it is understandable that ethics and, as discussed in Chapter 2, an emphasis on human rights have become a central theme. Social-political aspects and activism have thus always been and continue to be central in the discussion of realism, linking the goals of the early realist movement with the interwar Left/Marxism and the avant-gardes and the documentary field today.

Media theorist Alexandra Juhasz suggests that "[r]ealism can function in any number of ways, including, but not limited to, the confirmation, perpetuation, and reflection of bourgeois...reality. It can testify to alternative, marginal, subversive, or illegal realities; it can critique the notion of reality".<sup>129</sup> According to Renov, the functions of the documentary are to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express.<sup>130</sup> The notions of revealing and persuading link his functions of documentary to potentially political uses of the genre, meant to convince and sway opinions. Lind and Steyerl explain that, "the way signs, images and statements function in contemporary economies...contribute to the emergence of the possible as well as to its realization. A documentary image therefore becomes a catalyst for a different reality instead of being its representation".<sup>131</sup> Their observations thus not only point to the potential activist nature of documentary as a way to intervene in the production of the real rather than only to represent it but also relate to my previous discussion of reality and virtuality since, if representations of the real incorporate the possible, it means that the virtual, as the yet-unrealized potential of the actual, may potentially be incorporated within representations of the real and realism in documentary in new ways.<sup>132</sup> The virtual is, therefore, once again positioned not as opposed to the real but as embodying what that real may become, thus introducing entirely new ways to think of virtuality and documentary today.

The issue of documentary's influence through the successful spreading of certain world views obviously raises questions about the way to achieve precisely that. In her research on activism and documentary, Gaines explains that, since the 1970s, much theoretical and practical work has focused on developing a revolutionary aesthetic



through which to pose the right questions in the struggle against capitalism.<sup>133</sup> The question as to what kind of aesthetic may yield such power and evoke such a reaction returns my discussion back to a focus on the twofold aspects of realism – style and objectives - and the complex issue of what kind of stylistic representations may contribute to the realist social-political goals. While Gaines discusses documentary's potential for social-political change, unlike the *Frieze* publication, she focuses more on mimesis and mimicry as indispensable components of such revolutionary aesthetics.

Gaines claims that, "the reason for using the documentary to advance political goals is that its aesthetic of similarity establishes a continuity between the world of the screen and the world of the audience".<sup>134</sup> She uses the term "political mimesis" to explain scenes of struggle that impact upon the bodies of the spectators who view similar bodies on screen before them, so that "the ideal viewer is poised to intervene in the world that so closely resembles the one represented onscreen".<sup>135</sup> She claims that "documentary realism stands as stirring testimony or evidence of what has gone before".<sup>136</sup> Linking documentary realism to photography's ability to act as evidence through its indexical capability as trace, Gains thus associates "documentary realism" with its "aesthetic of similarity", and, in the process, elevates the role of mimesis.

Gains argues for the importance of similarity on the grounds that "the documentary film that uses realism for political ends has a special power over the world of which it is a copy because it derives its power from that same world".<sup>137</sup> This is, however, a problematic assertion, firstly because it overlooks the visual similarity that exists in fictional works. Secondly, if we take into account Gunning's observations on the centrality of movement to realism, it becomes apparent that an image can share other resemblances as well, such as movement, and is, therefore, not limited to a purely visual resemblance to physical appearance. Thirdly, as I explained in my discussion of indexicality and digitalization, and of the increasing scepticism towards photography in contemporary culture, the status of the photograph as evidence has changed. Finally, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, the use of animation is, for numerous cultural and technological reasons, now steadily increasing in non-fiction platforms. I am arguing that, as a result, even animated depictions can now be increasingly perceived as a continuation of the viewer's physical world. My analysis of virtuality, screens, and animation as an indexical trace of the physical, thus challenges Gains'

reliance on visual mimesis for this goal. Although Gaines herself is aware of such problematics, claiming that "mimesis and mimicry carry connotations of naïve realism and mindless imitation, mechanical copying, and even animality", her repeated return to the importance of similarity and mimesis nonetheless demonstrates their continuing centrality to the discourse of realism and documentary.<sup>138</sup>

### **Reality Effects, Vividness and Simulations of Witnessing**

A more encompassing and multiple view of realism is offered by Nagib and Mello, who summarize the multi-layered nature of realism in audiovisual media as follows: (a) Unlike other representational arts, as recording media, an indexical or ontological relation with objective reality is established. For example, in the animated documentary *Slaves*, the recording element, as is the case in many other animated documentaries, was audio rather than visual. (b) On a perceptual level, the combination of movement and time in audiovisual media creates a resemblance to the phenomenological world that is like an "impression of reality". This relates to Gunning's emphasis on movement as realism, but also strengthens the focus on iconicity as resemblance, rather than only on indexicality as trace, as different and multiple contributors to a sense of realism. (c) Audiovisual media can also evoke a "reality effect" for viewers through graphic and audio representations that can create physical and emotional impact.<sup>139</sup> The idea of a "reality effect" is elusive at best but it becomes important in an era and field where trust of the visual as pertaining to any believable link to the referent is destabilized, expanding the view of what may be accepted as realistic representation beyond the realms of the visual to something that is very much based on the overall experience of the viewer. This relates realism to documentary in yet another way, since as I stated earlier, a number of theorists today broadly define documentaries as anything deemed as such by the viewer.

"Reality effects" are not entirely new. As Patricia Aufderheide has suggested, John Grierson and Robert Flaherty, the forefathers of documentary, both anchored documentary to a tradition of realism, which "creates the illusion of reality for the viewer. Thus, realism was not an attempt to authentically capture reality but an attempt to use art to mimic it so effectively that the viewer would be pulled in without thinking about it".<sup>140</sup> Since an "effect" is defined as "a mental or emotional impression produced", the question of what can arouse a

"reality effect" in an era of suspicion towards the mimetic (unlike in the past, when the camera was presumed to "capture the moment" and therefore enjoyed a distinctive status as "eyewitness" to events) is, I deem, a more inclusive sensory experience, based on a simulation of presence rather than on mimetic visuality and photographic techniques.<sup>141</sup> What, then, is necessary for the creation of such an experience and where is animation located in this respect?

Gunning identifies an expectation of contemporary media to create a sense of transparency, or the illusion of immediacy, by creating a medium so vivid that it disappears in order to maximize the sense of perceiving a reality.<sup>142</sup> "Vividness" is defined as an adjective signifying intensity, liveliness, presented in a distinct and realistic manner which can form striking mental images, such as in the case of a memory or imagination.<sup>143</sup> Pointing out that, "images offer greater 'vividness' than verbal narration or written description", Charles Hill has created a continuum of vividness which is also useful to an analysis of animation's possible reality effects, which in turn influence their reception as realistic, credible and thus potentially of documentary value.<sup>144</sup> Hill's spectrum is as follows:

### **Most Vivid Information**

- Actual experience
- Moving images with sound
- Static photograph
- Realistic painting
- Line Drawing
- Narrative, descriptive account
- Descriptive account
- Abstract, impersonal analysis
- Statistics

### **Least Vivid Information**

Animation is representation so, like all representation, it is clearly not identical to actual experience.<sup>145</sup> However, despite the seeming artificiality that has been deemed to characterize animated documentaries and that has served to dissociate them from the physical world of actual experiences, Hill's vividness continuum provides a new perspective through which to consider animated documentaries. According to Hill, the closest form of representation to actual experience is moving images with sound. Animated documentaries are based on just that, and although Hill may have predominantly been referring to photography, moving images nonetheless appear higher on his list than still photographs and realist paintings. This supports Gunning's assertion about movement, rather than the index, as the new form of realism. As realism distances itself from a necessary dependence upon visual mimesis, different combinations of vividness-elevating aspects can create new forms of vivid representations that are currently missing from Hill's continuum, which use new technologies that strive to reproduce the "actual experience" as much as possible.<sup>146</sup>

This relates vividness to contemporary characteristics of the mediatized information age. Nagib and Mello describe one aspect of realism as a sense of immediacy that creates another form of a seemingly more direct access to reality.<sup>147</sup> In today's media culture, in which viewers are constantly informed of global events, a constant gap develops between what is personally experienced and what is learned through varied mediated means and in a variety of forms. John Durham Peters refers to a "veracity gap", which designates the problem of mediation as a process whereby "the *experience* of a person present at an event is transmuted into *discourse* about that experience for others who were not present".<sup>148</sup> Bridging the epistemological gap between experiences and the opacity of discourse or representation is a difficult goal whose mediating techniques demand careful analysis. A key factor has been the attempt to make mediated events be received as if through the more accountable first-hand form of witnessing, i.e. as vividly as possible. In order to grasp this issue, it will be necessary to explore in greater depth the concept of witnessing, which links vivid representations, believability, and the varied forms of realism that can be deployed as documentary warranting devices.<sup>149</sup>

Ellis has discerned a growing emphasis on witnessing from the twentieth century onwards. Through broadcast moving images in the media of photography, film and television, audiences have been supplied with visual evidence of the worldwide events

of their time.<sup>150</sup> Any analysis of the term "witnessing" is complex because, as a noun, it involves all aspects of a communication triangle: the agent who bears witness, the utterance or text, and the audience who witnesses. Ellis elaborates on the term in several helpful ways. As a verb, "to witness" is both the passive sensory experience of witnessing an event but also the active discursive deed of stating that experience for others, an audience who was not present.<sup>151</sup> Like the camera substituting for the eye of the distant viewer, "witnesses serve as the surrogate sense organs of the absent".<sup>152</sup> In other words, "a witness...can be an actor (one who bears witness), an act (the making of a special sort of statement), the semiotic residue of that act (the statement as text), or the inward experience that authorizes the statement (the witnessing of an event)".<sup>153</sup> Of greatest relevancy to my analysis is the issue of witnessing as the communication between agent and/or text and the audience, since this communication is created for the viewer's experience and is meant to simulate presence in the different time and space of the depicted event.

Tamar Ashuri and Amit Pinchevski distinguish between two central approaches in studies of witnessing in media scholarship: the "vicarious witness" and the "implicated witness", the former receiving information through varied media and the latter through physical presence at the event.<sup>154</sup> The idea of more than one kind of witness, not only one who was physically present at the event, propels me to explore documentary aesthetics that, through shifting modes of realism, attempt at creating, through representation, a reality effect for the viewer that is so vivid that it would make it seem as if she were present and as directly implicated as possible. Realism that aims for a reality effect that pulls the viewer in is, as I see it, an attempt to create an illusion of presence by trying to reduce the gap between the "vicarious witness" and "implicated witness" in any way possible, and thus attempting to make the vicarious witness feel personally involved in the event depicted.

This can be related again to Elsaesser's exploration of what he describes as a new realism, which privileges a sense of presence, a "new way of being in the world" under the contemporary "conditions of visibility and presence that include invisibility and virtual presence".<sup>155</sup> Although Elsaesser does not specifically mention documentary, his ideas can nonetheless contribute to an analysis of post-photographic aesthetics of realism in documentary, in particular animation. In exploring visibility and presence in a virtualized world, Elsaesser addresses similar issues to my own,

technologically-oriented research. His understanding of realism as a way to represent new ways of "being in the world" raises questions of reality effects and presence, and of ways to simulate implicated witnessing through representation. Shifting attention away from Gaines' idea of a political mimesis that relies on shared physical appearance, and which is meant to potentially engross viewers in scenes of struggle on-screen, the idea of presence relates to new forms of (tele)presence in a virtualized world and the role of the body in circumstances that do not necessarily rely on the naturalistic depiction of that body. In her recent book *Cinema and Sensation*, Martine Beugnet follows critiques in contemporary visual theory of Western ocular-centrism and examines contemporary filmmaking practices that give precedence to cinema's sensory impact in order to evoke embodied experiences as alternative ways of approaching sociocultural issues. Beugnet proposes that, by emphasizing cinema's capacity to move viewers viscerally and intellectually, a compassionate and unflinching immersion in reality can be obtained.<sup>156</sup> This idea that a reality effect may also include visceral and physical responses will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter, but also serves to support my main argument in this chapter that realism today can no longer be *exclusively* related to mimesis but rather extends perception beyond the visual register. This perspective on realism can greatly assist the analysis of animated documentaries, as this will develop in the next few chapters to deal with bodily sensations, virtual presence and "new ways of being in the world".

In his exposition of different modalities of witnessing, Durham Peters takes into account determinants of presence and absence in time and space, but ultimately prizes witnessing that involves presence in both time and space.<sup>157</sup> Paul Frosh, however, proposes that we may relate differently to events from which we are absent in both time and space. Frosh uses examples of religious ceremonies that reconstruct past events, such as the Jewish Passover Seder, during which parts of the biblical story are re-enacted. He claims that participation through performance "allows participants to make themselves imaginatively present at the event...in which [all participants] are imaginatively 'co-present' at the same moment in *another* place and time".<sup>158</sup> This will be explored in the context of interactive documentary games in the next chapter. In the context of museology and curating, the term "virtual witnessing" is used in relation to museum displays of historical content that are meant to recreate a sense of presence or "visually induced vicarious experiences".<sup>159</sup> The idea of a simulation of

witnessing, mediated to some degree or another, has thus become a prominent theme in the study of the relationship between representation and realities, and is central to the understanding of documentaries as well as to the evolving nature of what may be theorized as realism in its contemporary theorizations.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, 'realism' remains highly unresolved. In this chapter, I have examined the fluctuating yet persistent strain within contemporary theorizations of realism between mimesis and a search for novel and experimental imagery capable of revealing and exploring the real in varied ways. This exploration of a broader and on-going tension between mimesis and new forms of representation confirms my main argument that animation can no longer be simply regarded as "nonrealistic" because realism itself embodies several and contradicting lines of thought.

If realism is a changing method for approaching reality, in order to understand which features of realism are relevant today to place animation as a plausible documentary mode, it is essential to understand more about the reality in question. This consequently requires a return to my discussion of the contemporary as introduced in Chapter 3 and a reconsideration of the relationship between the characteristics of animation in non-fiction and what it means to exist in the conditions of contemporaneity. In other words, in order to explore animated documentaries as realistic (or not), it is important to recognize if and how animation in non-fiction manages to capture and express the present, conveying it in a convincing manner or at least in a way that, albeit ambiguous, "rings true".

Smith, in his introduction to the 2008 book *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity and Contemporaneity*, includes the following as central characteristics of the twenty first century: "globalization's thirst for hegemony in the face of increasing cultural differentiation"; "the accelerating inequity among peoples, classes, and individuals"; "an infospace...a regime of representation".<sup>160</sup> Relating to the digital revolution described in Chapter 3, he also claims that an essential quality of contemporaneousness is "its immediacy, its presentness, its instantaneity."<sup>161</sup> I find animation can engage with aspects of today's reality in varied ways, and can act as a diverse form of realism, either as direct representation and capture, allegory or defamiliarization, all depending on the facets of reality discussed. The multiplicity of

realisms and the complexity of contemporary reality illuminate shifting relations between animation and realism, which explains the intricacy of the issue and why viewers may be convinced (or not) of animated documentaries' realist and realistic status.

Animated documentaries not only enable a visual exploration of realities that may not or could not have been filmed but also, can be used to visually engage with the supposed cultural and economic homogeneity of globalization versus a growing heterogeneity of narratives within it. By deploying a variety of visual styles that may break with mimesis and human vision and/or alternate throughout the work, animated documentaries can visually depict the sense of instability and multiplicity of reality and the narratives that explain it today. The exploration of realisms in plural in this chapter demonstrated the myriad focal points, such as human versus non-human, or external versus internal-subjective, through which an understanding of what may be deemed realistic can be established, as well as the ensuing shifting theorizations of the field. On the other hand, the simplifying aesthetics possible in animation can be used to organize the diversity and complexity of realities today as well as the masses of data characterizing today's mediatised infospace. This tendency may, of course, also alternatively lead to a dangerous over-simplification of information and realities due to the elimination and/or emphasis of any aspects preferred by the creator of the animated representation.

In his description of the contemporary Nicholas Bourriaud links the socio-political and technological characteristics of the twenty-first century through the themes of travelling and nomadism, which he identifies as central in the era of globalization. Bourriaud uses the journey format to refer to the hypertext, where users of today's networked computerized age wander from one link to the next in an instantaneous and interactive infospace.<sup>162</sup> In a related manner, Manovich describes the twenty-first century as the transition from *old media* (such as photography and film) to *new media* (the computerized and digital) and, more recently, to an era of *more media*, which, following the development of the World Wide Web, refers to the sheer volume of information around us today.<sup>163</sup> He consequently explores the visual forms that are developing as most suitable to express these cultural changes. As I explained in previous chapters and as will be further developed in Chapters 7-8, I find animation to be a significant element of today's mediascape and virtual realities because animation



can both simplify vast amounts of information in an attention-grabbing manner and be used to represent dynamic and interactive processes that occur online due to user input. This real-time element of contemporary animation also explains the relation between animation and the immediacy of the present, as explained by Smith. In other words, as a deictic index animation can denote vast amounts of information and, due to its movement, is ideal for illustrating (even complex) processes. As a trace of the physical, animation today can also capture the evolving relationship between the physical and virtual, combining the two, thus contributing to animation's potential realism as a visual way to capture contemporary mixed realities.

If realism is understood as a direct and transparent mode of representation, the depiction of non-physical worlds, such as fully-animated virtual realities, in animated documentaries may be deemed realistic. In fact, animation in these instances can be compared to the photographic capturing of reality, rather than being viewed as imagery that interprets events visually, as is often the case in the theorization of animation.<sup>164</sup> However, if realism is regarded as an attempt to reach deeper understandings about realities rather than to portray them naturalistically, then animation's endless visual possibilities can be seen to enable the exploration of realities and the conveying of messages by varied visual means, as I demonstrated in my analysis of Jacqueline Goss' *Stranger Comes to Town* in Chapter 4. Finally, if realism is a means of defamiliarization, revealing reality anew, animated depictions of the physical can symbolically introduce new meaning, clearly acting as a realistic aesthetic. In other words, the shifting theorization of realism positions animation as realistic (or not) in different ways, demonstrating the complexity involved. Further research into the field of animation and its complex relation to the aesthetic of realism would thus clearly be beneficial to the understanding of animation today.

Animation and animated documentaries' relation to realism takes on additional meaning when considering their engagement with socio-political aspects of contemporary reality. An on-going aspect of realist works, as I've explained in my survey of realism since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the focus on socio-political realities and individuals in their everyday lives. This, as I have demonstrated, continues today, and is defined by Alberro as contemporary art practices that reconnect with the life order in order to transform it, exemplified by "a resurgence of interest...in concepts of utopia, community, collaboration, participation, and responsible government, all of

which encode a desire for change".<sup>165</sup> This is true for many animated documentaries as well, especially in socially-engaged works such as the case studies I have analysed throughout this thesis.

As I explained in my discussion of existing theorizations of animated documentary in Chapter 2, Gunnar Strøm proposed that "'animation' is a technical term and 'documentary' is a content-related approach, and...the terms do not exclude each other".<sup>166</sup> It is therefore no surprise that animation has often been used to engage with highly political topics, such as refugees, slavery, globalization and surveillance. On one hand, animated documentaries may be seen as desensitizing by depicting protagonists unnaturally and therefore as non-human, thus decreasing the work's political value. On the other hand, animated documentaries may take on a potentially activist political tone as a result of their ability to depict non-existent realities (and "bring them to life" through movement) as future alternatives to aspire to or beware of. A poignant example is the 1986 animated film *When the Wind Blows*, made in the midst of the Cold War, which depicts an atomic attack as a clearly political message.<sup>167</sup>



Figure 7.14: *When the Wind Blows*, 1986, by Jimmy Murakami

As explained in regard to the shifting definitions of documentary and the proliferation of documentary works that rely on fiction or allegory in varied ways, the use of animation and varied forms of fiction to narrate facts may act as a contemporary form of realism that reflects, as Alberro puts it, that "the real is so mind-boggling it is easier

to comprehend by analogy".<sup>168</sup> The need for novel representations and simplification in today's information age and multiple contemporaneities may be understandable, but it may also lead to a potential over-simplification. This may perhaps enable information to be easily grasped and believed, perhaps even without thinking, but also strengthens the idea of truthiness over truth, where belief overshadows knowledge. This also points out the unclear boundaries between realism as exposing new aspects of the real, persuasion and perhaps even propaganda, which shows a very specific and even skewed view of events. As discussed in Chapter 2, animation was often used as propaganda in its early days and, as the field of documentary becomes ever murkier in its definitions, so too do the consequent boundaries between documentary, informational, educational and propaganda works.

The instability of the meaning of the term "realism", the complexity of today's reality and animation's relation to it is what may potentially create a sense of confusion and parafiction in the reception of animated documentaries. This may ensure that the viewer is aware of potential deceit, placing him or her in a position of on-going questioning. According to Lambert-Beatty, and in conjunction with my previous discussion of animation as masking and the notion of the crystal image, this spectatorial position is what potentially encourages critical and further exploration of the topic depicted. However, as I will discuss in the thesis conclusion, such confusion may also lead to twisted and misinformed views of reality. In other words, animation may be seen as a useful way of representing the complexity of the contemporary real, or rather, as creating a non-realistic and lacking representation of reality, depending on viewer reception.

In Chapter 1 above, I established the centrality of truthiness as a contemporary characteristic and further demonstrated a shift in the theorization and definition of documentaries towards the viewer's reception of the work and the labelling of it as documentary. The viewer's experience and persuasion have, therefore, become fundamental to documentary practice today. This centrality of the viewer as arbiter of documentary status and the notion of reality effects leave more leeway in the discussion of realism. Discussing the contemporary, Alberro similarly claims that a new construction of the spectator is taking place, shifting from the cognitive aspects of a work of art to the affective, focusing on "the experience-based knowledge that requires an active participation on the part of the public".<sup>169</sup> A reconsideration of

documentaries' realism that shifts from the information depicted to the experience they provide can be highly relevant to the discussion of what may evoke "reality effects" in new kinds of documentaries, leading to a heightened sense of realism. This has led me to an exploration in this chapter of different modes of evoking vividness in the sense of actual experience through theorizations of simulations of witnessing as a basis for believability. Rather than necessarily aligning realism with a specific aesthetic, my work thus contributes to a line of research into realism that engages with the, admittedly more ambiguous, yet ever shifting and on-going search for "reality effects" that persuade (or not) the viewer of the truth value of the work. As such, the issue of witnessing and the ways to create a simulation of witnessing was a major aspect of my discussion of realism. In the next chapter, I will, therefore, provide a close analysis of evolving representational ways through which to conjure a sense of presence through immersion that exceeds the mimetically visual and evoke what I describe as a "*documentary experience*".

The creation of a sense of presence and perception that surpasses specific visual representation is closely related to characterizations of the contemporary virtualization of culture. This relates to Elsaesser's discussion of new modes of realism that engage with a "new distribution of the visible and the invisible which no longer coincides with presence and absence".<sup>170</sup> In a highly mediatized visual and informational culture in which simulations become dominant and the meaning of a visual signifier is anything but clear, a sense of personal connection to what is depicted as real seems vital. This is all the more so in an era of desensitized spectatorship where the viewer is central in defining the degree of truthiness required for believability and, consequently, a work's documentary status. The issue of presence and absence was introduced earlier as one of the defining characteristics of animation, which generates imagery and therefore embodies absence, as opposed to photography which, through physically indexical traces, captures presence. Presence and absence thus become important as a means through which to examine the reception of animated documentary works today.

It is, furthermore, important to consider what it may mean to "be present" in the world in relation to issues both of aesthetic styles and the socio-political goals of realism. This is true both in the sense of an access to the real and its representation as well as with regard to realist socio-political goals of representation, in which to be present or

to witness is also to be responsible in some way - as both Enwezor and Sobchack have suggested, ethics stand as a basis for the establishment of documentary viewing today.<sup>171</sup> By engrossing the viewer, impersonal information she would receive as a distant "vicarious witness" potentially creates a personal connection through simulated "implicated" witnessing. The question thus arises as to how this sense of engrossed presence on behalf of the viewer can be evoked? And how can the field of animation contribute to the on-going attempts to create reality effects for viewers in audio-visual media today?

The issue of presence and witnessing has to do with the body, which will be a major thread throughout the next chapter, however, it is also important to note that presence in a virtual culture is linked to the idea of interactivity. In *The Art of Interruption* Roberts befittingly states that "interactive art ...is concerned with the distribution of the human presence".<sup>172</sup> New forms of realism and a reflection upon presence are, therefore, imperative in encouraging a sense of believability that is not biased towards the photographic. This idea will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter, in which I shall develop this insight and link it to technological developments and cultural trends in a virtualized culture of user participation that reconsiders the role of the viewer in documentary works. These new directions in animated documentaries will be analysed through the emerging field of animated documentary games.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This is not to say that realism is exclusively related to documentary since it is also used in fiction.
- <sup>2</sup> Jane M. Gaines, "Introduction 'The Real Returns'", in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gains and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Kerstin Stremmel, *Realism*, (Cologne: Taschen, 2004), 6-9.
- <sup>4</sup> John Roberts, *The Art of Interruption* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1998), 5.
- <sup>5</sup> Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello, "Introduction" in *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, ed. Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xv-xvi. I will elaborate upon these aspects of realism further later on in this chapter.
- <sup>7</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, accessed March 20, 2013, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).
- <sup>8</sup> See Raymond Williams, "A Lecture on Realism", *Screen* 18:1 (1977): 63, 65; H. W. Janson, *History of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 618. Other chief exponents of the French realist movement were Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Millet, Honoré Daumier, and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot.
- <sup>9</sup> Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art Vol II* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 179-181. Although exceeding the scope of this thesis, in this context it is also useful to note the realism debates about aesthetics and politics in the European Left between the 1930s-1950s and their historic influence, such as that between Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukacs. Wherein Brecht saw the importance of new modernist aesthetics that portrayed the world as changeable and emphasized the role of the disenchanted individual as a motivating force of change, for example, Lukacs' ideas defended traditional realism and claimed they had true revolutionary power that could lead to a Marxist revolution by making evident to the working class the true nature of social relations. For more information see Theodor Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007).
- <sup>10</sup> Hauser, *The Social History of Art Vol II*, 182; John Berger, "The Politics of Courbet" in *Selected Essays*, ed. Geoff Dyer (London: Bloomsbury, 2001).
- <sup>11</sup> Sutton, Brind and McKenzie, *The State of the Real*, 8; "Realism", *Washington National Gallery of Art*, accessed June 13, 2014, [www.nga.gov/collection/sfp/noflash/realism/1941\\_6\\_1.htm](http://www.nga.gov/collection/sfp/noflash/realism/1941_6_1.htm).
- <sup>12</sup> Although clearly a partial list, for more on each of these related fields see respectively: On the ontological and epistemological aspects of realism and appearances in the theories of central Western philosophers see John W. Yolton, *Realism and Appearances: An Essay in Ontology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); for a social and ethical perspective on realism through representation in recent decades see Roberts, *Art of Interruption*, and Mark Reinhardt and Holly Edwards, ed., *Beautiful Suffering* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2006); For a semantic discussion of realism see Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London : BFI, 1997); for more on perception theory and the changing cultural role and context of the observer see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990); and for an introduction into the discourse of humanism versus post humanism and the role of the human-world relation versus other object-oriented ontologies, see Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010) and Iain Bogost, *Alien phenomenology or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
- <sup>13</sup> William P. Alston, ed., *Realism & Antirealism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1-9

- <sup>14</sup> Alston, *Realism & Antirealism*, 1.
- <sup>15</sup> C. D. Broad, *Kant: an Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
- <sup>16</sup> Alston, *Realism & Antirealism*, 1.
- <sup>17</sup> Yolton, *Realism and Appearances*, 134-5.
- <sup>18</sup> Due to the scope of the study these issues will not be covered further but are important elements in understanding the vastness of realism and its related fields.
- <sup>19</sup> Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 138.
- <sup>20</sup> Bruno Latour, "Emancipation or Attachments? The Different Futures of Politics", in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 317.
- <sup>21</sup> Latour, "Emancipation or Attachments?", 317.
- <sup>22</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 15.
- <sup>23</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 15. An interesting discussion of this topic appears in Stephen Prince, "True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory", *Film Quarterly* 49:3 (1996):27-37.
- <sup>24</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 135.
- <sup>25</sup> Mark Levy, "From the Real to the More Real: A Brief Historical and Philosophical Sketch of Hyperreality and Its Roots in Realism, Impressionism, Surrealism, Pop Art, and Postmodernism", in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 89; See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press, 1994).
- <sup>26</sup> See Dan North, *Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2008).
- <sup>27</sup> See Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*.
- <sup>28</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 124.
- <sup>29</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 2*, trans., Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 14.
- <sup>30</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 14.
- <sup>31</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 126.
- <sup>32</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 30.
- <sup>33</sup> Gaines, "Introduction 'The Real Returns'", 2.
- <sup>34</sup> See Diarmud Costello and Margaret Iversen, "Introduction: Photography between Art History and Philosophy", *Critical Enquiry* 38:4 (2012): 679-693.
- <sup>35</sup> See Costello and Iversen, "Introduction: Photography between Art History and Philosophy", 688.

- <sup>36</sup> See Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).
- <sup>37</sup> For more information see [www.mariuswatz.com](http://www.mariuswatz.com)
- <sup>38</sup> Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, 13.
- <sup>39</sup> See Fred Ritchin, *After Photography*.
- <sup>40</sup> Armstrong, "On the Border of the Real", 56.
- <sup>41</sup> Armstrong, "On the Border of the Real", 56.
- <sup>42</sup> Levy, "From the Real to the More Real", 89.
- <sup>43</sup> Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", 118.
- <sup>44</sup> Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", 118.
- <sup>45</sup> Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", 131.
- <sup>46</sup> Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", 137, 141.
- <sup>47</sup> Maureen Burns, "Invisibility", in *Theorizing Visual Studies*, ed. James Elkins et al. (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 148.
- <sup>48</sup> Lambert-Beatty, "Make Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility", 142.
- <sup>49</sup> For more on the discussion of the "postdocumentary", see J. Corner, "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions", *Television and New Media* 3:3 (2002): 255-69.
- <sup>50</sup> Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real", 185.
- <sup>51</sup> Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*, 23.
- <sup>52</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus", in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (London: New Left Books, 1977).
- <sup>53</sup> Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real", 184.
- <sup>54</sup> Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real", 178.
- <sup>55</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 23–24.
- <sup>56</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 108-112.
- <sup>57</sup> John Willet, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (London: Methuen, 1977), 79.
- <sup>58</sup> Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 7.
- <sup>59</sup> Waldberg, *Surrealism*, 8.
- <sup>60</sup> Waldberg, *Surrealism*, 8.
- <sup>61</sup> Silvano Levy, ed., *Surrealism: Surrealist Visuality* (Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997), 9.
- <sup>62</sup> Levy, *Surrealism*, 9.



<sup>63</sup> Ritchin, *After Photography*, 146.

<sup>64</sup> Cramerotti, *Aesthetic Journalism*, 22.

<sup>65</sup> Schofield, "Playing with Evidence", 53-4.

<sup>66</sup> It is important to emphasize that this potential deceitfulness is of course one of many possible uses of animation and *not* an inherent characteristic of animation.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Ward, "Animated Realities: the Animated Film, Documentary, Realism", *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 8:2 (2008): 19.

<sup>68</sup> Karen Beckman, "Animation on Trial", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6:3 (2011): 272.

<sup>69</sup> Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman, ed., *The Speculative Turn – Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 3.

<sup>70</sup> A full discussion of these philosophical trends and their predecessors clearly exceeds the scope of this research but the initial conference featured presentations by Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux.

<sup>71</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 5.

It is worth mentioning, as Meillassoux explains, that the nature of this correlation can also be theorized in different ways, understanding the correlation differently if focusing on aspects of language or consciousness based on the thinker, the abilities of human understanding or the referentiality involved, to name a few of the possible perspectives that complicate the issue even further.

<sup>72</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 35-41.

<sup>73</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2011), 26.

<sup>75</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 59; Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux*, 27-28.

<sup>76</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 79; Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux*, 17.

<sup>78</sup> Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux*, 18.

<sup>79</sup> For a comparison of Harman and Meillassoux see Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux*, 123-158.

<sup>80</sup> See E. P. Charles, *A New Look at New Realism: The Psychology and Philosophy of E.B. Holt* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> See Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988), 69.

<sup>84</sup> For more about "world-making" in animation, to use Donald Crafton's terms, see Donald Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief and World-Making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, 10.

<sup>86</sup> At least one aspect of the ethical discourse of posthumanism is the political definition of "human". This is related to my discussion of Agamben's theories of Bare Life and the centrality of the figure of the refugee in contemporary culture, those who are excluded from such definitions.

<sup>87</sup> For more on posthumanism see Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago and London: Chicago University press, 1999); Andy Miah "Posthumanism: A Critical History", in *Medical Enhancements & Posthumanity*, ed., B. Gordijn and R. Chadwick (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>88</sup> Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, 59, 75-6.

<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 1-2.

<sup>90</sup> A useful example from the related field of forensic animation is the fact that some forensic visualizations are not only designed with the help of a machine but are based on "computer vision technologies that automate the process of obtaining original data and generating 3D models from it". This highlights the fact that jurors-viewers literally see realities (as visualized based on facts) through "the eyes" of a machine, basing their decision for what acts as truth or a "legal fact" upon these visuals. See Ma, Zheng and Lallie, "Virtual Reality and 3D Animation in Forensic Visualization", 1230.

<sup>91</sup> Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Blocker, *Seeing Witness*, xiv.

<sup>93</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, 9.

<sup>94</sup> For more on animated documentaries and the expression of subjectivity, see Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 208-266. The recurring connection between animation and the depiction of varied states of mind has led to the 2011 establishment of the annual event *Animation on Prescription* as part of the Bristol Short Film and Animation Festival.

<sup>95</sup> This may explain the use of the film *Waltz with Bashir* as part of a training program of *Natal – Israel's Trauma Center for Victims of Terror and War*, where therapists specializing in war trauma watch the film to better understand their patients' experiences and use the film as part of the treatment. See Michaela Schäuble, "'All Filmmaking is a Form of Therapy': Visualizing Memories of War Violence in the Animation Film *Waltz with Bashir* (2008)", in *Violence Expressed: An Anthropological Approach*, ed. Maria Six-Hohenbalken and Nerina Weiss (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 211.

<sup>96</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 15.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Ward, "Videogames as Remediated Animation", in *ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces*, ed. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (London: Wallflower Press, 2002), 125.

<sup>99</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1982), 8.

<sup>100</sup> Rowley, "Life Reproduced in Drawings", 82.

- <sup>101</sup> Ward, "Animated Realities", 3.
- <sup>102</sup> Levy, "From the Real to the More Real", 88-89.
- <sup>103</sup> Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 28.
- <sup>104</sup> Rowley, "Life Reproduced in Drawings", 70-71.
- <sup>105</sup> Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index", 31.
- <sup>106</sup> Christian Metz, "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema", *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 15.
- <sup>107</sup> André Bazin, "Will CinemaScope Save the Film Industry?", *Esprit* 21:207-208 (1953): 683.
- <sup>108</sup> See Gaines, "Introduction 'The Real Returns'", 1-3.
- <sup>109</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, xvii.
- <sup>110</sup> Gaines, "Introduction 'The Real Returns'", 2.
- <sup>111</sup> Colin MacCabe, "Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses", *Screen* 15:2 (1974): 10.
- <sup>112</sup> Alexander Alberro, "Life Models", *Frieze* 148 (2012): 157.
- <sup>113</sup> Boris Groys, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation", in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 108.
- <sup>114</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 26.
- <sup>115</sup> See the special issue "Social Currency: How Does Art Influence Society?" *Frieze* issue no. 148, June-August 2012.
- <sup>116</sup> Alberro, "Life Models", 156-157.
- <sup>117</sup> Ritchin, *After Photography*, 180.
- <sup>118</sup> Gemma Sieff, "Bertolt Brecht and the Media Today", *Frieze* 148 (2012): 31.
- <sup>119</sup> Gaines, "Introduction 'The Real Returns'", 3.
- <sup>120</sup> Jacques Derrida, *of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.
- <sup>121</sup> Blocker, *Seeing Witness*, 125.
- <sup>122</sup> Mark Nash, "Reality in the Age of Aesthetics", *Frieze* 114 (2008), accessed September 9, 2010, [www.frieze.com/issue/article/reality\\_in\\_the\\_age\\_of\\_aesthetics/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/reality_in_the_age_of_aesthetics/), unpaginated.
- <sup>123</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, xiv.
- <sup>124</sup> Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box", in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 45.
- <sup>125</sup> Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question", 13.
- <sup>126</sup> Angela Dimitrakaki, "Art, Globalisation and the Exhibition Form", *Third Text* 26:3 (2012): 307.

- <sup>127</sup> Dimitrakaki, "Art, Globalisation and the Exhibition Form", 308.
- <sup>128</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 22.
- <sup>129</sup> Alexandra Juhasz, "They Said We Were Trying to Show Reality – All I Want to Show Is My Video: The Politics of the Realist Feminist Documentary", in *Collecting Visual Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 194-5.
- <sup>130</sup> Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, 21-25.
- <sup>131</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 15.
- <sup>132</sup> This is a continuation of my discussion of virtuality as theorized by Deleuze and Bergson in Chapter 4. For more information see Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994).
- <sup>133</sup> Jane M. Gaines, "Political Mimesis", in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gains and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 88.
- <sup>134</sup> Gaines, "Political Mimesis", 92.
- <sup>135</sup> Gaines, "Political Mimesis", 90. The relation to the viewer's body will be discussed in the next chapter.
- <sup>136</sup> Gaines, "Political Mimesis", 92.
- <sup>137</sup> Gaines, "Political Mimesis", 95.
- <sup>138</sup> Gaines, "Political Mimesis", 93.
- <sup>139</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, xv-xvi.
- <sup>140</sup> Patricia Aufderheide, *A very Short Introduction to Documentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 26.
- <sup>141</sup> For more about the camera as eyewitness, see Hunt and Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment", 260.
- <sup>142</sup> Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real", 181.
- <sup>143</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, accessed March 20, 2013, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)  
Interestingly, Dictionary.com also describes "vividness" as "animation". Dictionary.com, accessed March 20, 2013, [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).
- <sup>144</sup> Charles A. Hill, "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images", in *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, ed. Marguerite Helmers and Charles A. Hill (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 31, 34.
- <sup>145</sup> Although of course, as explained earlier, in an era where art and life have amalgamated and the virtual is as real as the non-virtual, the differentiation between "actual experience" and other forms of experiences such as simulacra, simulations, reenactments and varied artistic and theoretical representations become blurry at best.
- <sup>146</sup> This topic will be elaborated upon in Chapter 7 in relation to interactivity.
- <sup>147</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, xv-xvi.
- <sup>148</sup> Paul Frosh, "Telling Presences: Witnessing, Mass Media, and the Imagined Lives of Strangers", in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of ass Communication*, ed. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 51-52. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>149</sup> In this chapter I am not getting into holocaust, trauma studies or memory, even though they often overlap with the study of witnessing. Neither am I covering language as opposed to the visual. Instead, I am more interested in how the topic of witnessing ties in with discourses about contemporary documentaries. I am trying to look at the act of witnessing as a way to contemplate new aspects of representation and its reception.

<sup>150</sup> John Ellis, "Mundane Witness", in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, ed. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 74.

<sup>151</sup> Durham Peters, "Witnessing", 25-6.

<sup>152</sup> Durham Peters, "Witnessing", 25.

<sup>153</sup> Durham Peters, "Witnessing", 25.

<sup>154</sup> Tamar Ashuri and Amit Pinchevski, "Witnessing as a Field", in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, ed. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 134.

<sup>155</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, 19.

<sup>156</sup> See Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).

<sup>157</sup> Durham Peters, "Witnessing", 38.

<sup>158</sup> Frosh, "Telling Presences", 58. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>159</sup> Hunt and Schwartz, "Capturing the Moment", 261.

<sup>160</sup> Terry Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question", in *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, ed. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 16-17.

<sup>161</sup> Smith, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity Question", 8.

<sup>162</sup> Bourriaud, "Altermodern", 3-4.

<sup>163</sup> Manovich, "Introduction to Info-Aesthetics", 339.

<sup>164</sup> This will be further explored in Chapter 8.

<sup>165</sup> Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", 59.

<sup>166</sup> Strøm, "The Animated Documentary", 47.

<sup>167</sup> *When the Wind Blows* is a 1986 British animated film directed by Jimmy Murakami and based on Raymond Briggs' graphic novel of the same name. Following Tom Gunning's argument about movement, rather than indexicality, as a higher form of realism, animation would potentially make the representation more realistic than the static graphic novel mode.

<sup>168</sup> Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", 58.

<sup>169</sup> Alberro, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'", 60.

<sup>170</sup> Nagib and Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media*, 16-17.

<sup>171</sup> For more on the relation between witnessing and responsibility, see Durham Peters, "Witnessing", 24. This will be further explored through the topic of ethics in the next chapter.

<sup>172</sup> Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 223.

## CHAPTER 7

### Encounters in Animated Documentary Games

#### Introduction

The third part of the thesis focuses on new directions in the field of animated documentaries. This chapter will explore the role of interactive animated documentaries in immersive participatory information systems today.<sup>1</sup> In it, I shall argue that, in today's hyper-visual mediatized culture, in which media images encounter a desensitized and sceptical gaze, animation can act as a defamiliarizing aesthetic that can capture attention whilst also visualizing viewer input on-screen in "live" moving-image form, thus placing the viewer "within" the content of the documentary. Building upon my discussion of the notion of simulated witnessing as enhancing documentary credibility in the previous chapter, I maintain that interactive animated documentaries bring the event closer to the personal world of the viewer, or media witness, thus implicating her in varied ways. The chapter additionally analyses if and how these new non-fiction platforms engage with existing definitions and assumptions about documentary.

In her work on embodiment in moving image culture, Vivian Sobchack claims that an empathetic identification on part of the viewer with the protagonist and a sense of continuity between the film space and the world of the viewer evoke a realization of similarity and consequent ethical responsibility, which serve as the basis for documentary viewing. Sobchack thus emphasizes the importance of heightened immersion, which inspires identification with the viewed. Writing in relation to film, she focuses upon how the physical body functions as a point of reference through which to induce a realization of resemblance between spectators and protagonists. She also analyses how the depiction of violence works as a means to shatter fictional space and to exemplify that what is shown is very real, as pain and death cannot be argued against. Okwui Enwezor also sees the connection between viewers and viewed as essential to documentary viewing and theorizes this issue in relation to new documentary works that give rise to a new relation of ethics and aesthetics, which he calls *vérité*, based on a sense of encounter and "truth process".<sup>2</sup> This chapter will extend these arguments into a consideration of interactive animated documentaries, in

order to explore how a connection is made between the viewed and viewing body in animated documentary games, despite a break in the visual representation of the physical body as it appears to human vision.

I will demonstrate how, through a deeper understanding of the potential relationship between the spectator-player and the gameworld avatar that represents the documentary protagonist, the avatar ceases to be perceived in a desensitized manner as solely an image and comes to represent a complex subject.<sup>3</sup> Once the avatar becomes a "who" rather than a mere "what", a shift in the processes of identification and encounter between viewers and protagonists occurs. This is enhanced by animation's dual indexical nature as deixis and trace, which creates an additional form of encounter between viewers and viewed. In Chapter 2, I argued against the idea that animated visuals obliterated the protagonist, and suggested instead that animation can be seen as a representation that evokes presence rather than absence, albeit that it does not visually capture physical appearances in a naturalistic manner. The genre of documentary games accentuates the connection between animated protagonist and spectator in a different manner. In interactive animated documentaries, the spectator becomes an active participant in the paradigm of the work and an experience that virtually interchanges vicarious and implicated witness is created. Heightened engagement and varied forms of interactivity are, I maintain, essential in an era when participatory networked culture has shaped the ways in which viewers/users interact with information. In the cultural and technological context of the networked digital age, such participatory characteristics demonstrate how wider cultural tendencies are now being integrated into the realm of the documentary. This alters the way in which information is represented and received. Through interactivity the viewer-player is made virtually present in the documentary content. Viewer engagement is, therefore, an authenticating aspect of animated documentaries. I will claim that animated documentary games enable the personalization of documentary content in new ways, which enhance a sense of encounter with the protagonists and promote the central role of the viewer in defining documentaries today. In order to explain how animated documentary games can create a simulation of witnessing that can potentially evoke an ethical mode of documentary viewing I will contextualize the field, explain its relation to documentary theory, and then explore characteristics of gaming in order to elucidate how the amalgamation of animated games with non-fictional content



contributes to a broader field of research into both animation and documentary, and their complex inter-relationship.

### **Documentary Games and Immersive Non-Fiction**

Simulations that combine non-fiction content and news coverage with gaming platforms are proliferating today. Gaming technologies which create interactive animated simulations are currently being used as journalism, documentaries, training exercises and recruiting tools, such as in the case of *America's Army* which, similarly to *Kuma War Games*, is based on eye-witness reports of veterans.<sup>4</sup> This is also the case of the September 2014 release of an Islamic State video game where players consist of jihadis battling Iraqi and American forces, meant to "raise the morale of the mujahedin and to train children and youth how to battle the West and to strike terror into the hearts of those who oppose the Islamic State".<sup>5</sup> In this context, it is well worth considering the differences between more conventional and new modes of documentary, and what facilitates the reception process of documentary viewing in such cases. Cynthia Poremba asks, "[i]f traditional documentary viewing can already be conceptualized as a sublime intersection between an inaccessible past and contemporary embodied audience, what does a game do differently? Games take what is a cognitive interaction construct in traditional documentary, and extend it into explicit interaction".<sup>6</sup> Eric Zimmerman identifies four modes of interactivity: *Cognitive* or *interpretive* interactivity emphasizes the psychological, emotional, hermeneutic and semiotic "reading" of content; *Functional* or *utilitarian* interactivity involves the total experience of reading (or in this case, viewing) interaction; *Participation with designed choices* is the most obvious sense of "interaction", and is based on choices made within dynamic simulations; *Cultural participation* is the interaction outside the experience of a single text, or what exceeds the work's limits, such as fan culture.<sup>7</sup> It is my contention that the interactive element is a crucial facet that links a central characteristic of contemporary culture to this emerging form of documentary and which serves to differentiate between viewers of time-based documentaries and viewers/players of documentary games. However, since all computational systems today are interactive, it is important to acknowledge the vagueness and complexity of the term.

Lev Manovich, for example, proposes that all computer media is interactive, since "the user [controls] the computer in real-time by manipulating information displayed on the screen".<sup>8</sup> Janet Murray suggests, however, that mere interactivity, as seen in the simple click of a button, is not sufficient to cause "agency", which she defines as genuine embodied participation in an electronic environment.<sup>9</sup> According to Murray, "immersion" refers to a form of engagement whereby the viewer is taken out of their immediate context and brought into the realm of a digital fiction, "agency" refers to the ability to feel as if users are participating in the fiction, and "transformation" is the potential to "role-play" characters within that fiction.<sup>10</sup> Murray argues that, in order to create a heightened sense of immersion, rather than a merely interactive experience, environments must be meaningfully responsive to user input, citing as an example the pleasures of navigation in a potentially infinitely expandable space such as occurs in video games.<sup>11</sup> The joint sense of exploration in a game's virtual space and parameters, alongside the control facilitated through program manipulation and differing game trajectories - the functional interactivity, as Zimmerman defines it - explicates the potential, although varying, immersive quality of documentary games.<sup>12</sup>

Animated documentary games, also known as serious games, are a rapidly growing genre in the field of documentary, forming part of the developing category of interactive documentaries, or I-Docs.<sup>13</sup> I-Docs combine the documentary genre with interactive digital media, drawing on the growth of digital online informational and/or educational platforms and the exponential popularity of the gaming industry. These serious games, also known as news games and games for change, may be defined as "games used in areas such as education, training, and politics that go beyond mere entertainment purposes".<sup>14</sup> Tracy Fullerton characterizes them as "games that attempt to place the players in specific historical moments".<sup>15</sup> Although some serious games use static imagery, I think that animated sequences are imperative, for they can be used to bring the user input "to life", changing the game in a dynamic manner, and vivifying the content and its immersive potential.

Since the mid-2000s, newsgaming.com has created games based on news events. In late 2012, *Game the News*, which has received major press coverage regarding its gamified exploration of the conflict in Syria, described itself as "the world's first news correspondents who cover global events as games...[creating] playable forms...

to explore what is going on around us".<sup>16</sup> The non-linearity and open-endedness of game narratives arguably makes games an interesting and important form through which to explore current events and their possible developments and outcomes, adding to an understanding of the complexities involved and of the many possible trajectories. While the inclusion of multiple potential outcomes may appear to complicate the informational status of the representation-simulation, it will be my argument that such open-ended narratives do not necessarily degrade a work's grounding in factual content.<sup>17</sup>

Debra Benita Shaw discusses the immersion involved in these games, which she compares to journalism from a military perspective, and claims that they create "sufficient immersion in the space of the hyperreal to be oblivious to the difference between pixelated space and the very real, historically determined and economically contested spaces in which the theatre of war actually takes place".<sup>18</sup> Pursuant to the notion of truthiness in non-fiction today, these role-playing platforms of interactive information consumption, which combine personal experience with active engagement, may create engaged viewers who feel more personally towards the documented content but may also lead to a *sense* of believability based on immersive game experience that is not necessarily stable or even based on facts. Additionally, these new platforms of informational presentation strengthen my claim that the gap between environments only available on screen and the physical world of the viewer is constantly shrinking, with the former being increasingly used to explore the latter, and the two becoming mixed in the eyes of the viewer in terms of their imagery, content and sense of engaged experience.

Researcher, artist and journalist Nonny de la Peña describes her 2007 work with Peggy Weil, *Gone Gitmo*, as immersive journalism, rather than as a documentary game. *Gone Gitmo* is defined as "a virtual installation of Guantanamo Bay prison in *Second Life*", a simulation of reality based on factual content available in the virtual world of *Second Life* in which one's avatar undergoes a virtual imprisonment that is based upon the testimonies of inmates of Guantanamo Bay.<sup>19</sup> De la Peña describes her work as part of a genre in which non-fictional events are experienced through embodied digital representations in the forms of avatars.<sup>20</sup> Although these simulations may seem to contradict journalistic integrity, de la Peña argues that, "virtual reality constructs should be considered in the same light as any documentary or news report,

with the relevant factor being the transparency surrounding the sources and research material used to support the factual underpinnings".<sup>21</sup> The goal, she explains, is to allow the audience to enter a virtually recreated scenario that represents the story.<sup>22</sup> While the viewing experience is obviously different from non-interactive works, the logic is similar: in *Gone Gitmo*, photographs, video and audio from the physical world act as warranting devices, reinforcing the concept that participants are experiencing a representation of non-fictional events.



Figure 8.1: *Gone Gitmo*, 2007, by Nonny de la Peña and Peggy Weil

This direction of animated documentary practice thus appears to demonstrate that engagement and immersion produce an important aspect of believability and may, therefore, act as a potential alternative to mimetic visuals. According to Ian Bogost, greater interactivity is often considered especially immersive or engaging.<sup>23</sup> In his analysis of digital games, Bogost challenges Hill's previously cited "vividness spectrum" by questioning the place of simulation and interactivity on Hill's continuum.<sup>24</sup> Bogost explains that digital games

can muster moving images and sound, and software and videogames are capable of generating moving images in accordance with complex rules that simulate real or imagined physical and cultural processes...they rely on user

interaction as a mediator, something static and moving images cannot claim to do. These capacities would suggest that [games are] more vivid than moving images with sound, and thus earn the second spot on the continuum, directly under actual experience.<sup>25</sup>

This can be further related to reality effects and to questions of what is needed to create a persuasive simulation of witnessing through utmost vividness. Since animation enables the reconstruction of scenarios and the visual representation of dynamic platforms/actions/changes and user-input, the ability of immersion to evoke a sense of transformation and hence realism and/or a sense of truthfulness overrides the supposedly "artificial" visual style of non-mimetic animation.

De la Peña raises the contrast between documentary games and immersive non-fiction, claiming that games do not attempt to delineate any individual case. She suggests that, "what happens to the player is based on his/her choices rather than reflecting the facts connected to one or more physical world events that have already transpired".<sup>26</sup> She therefore comes to the conclusion that "games are better at reproducing the conditions under which events unfold rather than outlining the details of the events themselves".<sup>27</sup> De la Peña suggests that, where immersive journalism uses an "embodied experience in an immersive and unchangeable narrative that allows queries to the environment without changing an individual's story trajectory", games facilitate control over the order of events. For de la Peña, this difference is what makes immersive journalism "more in keeping with traditional journalistic or documentary practice".<sup>28</sup>

Her argument is puzzling, since many games portray past events that enable exploration of an environment. To cite just one example from a continuously changing and developing field, in the *Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* game, the player plays the murderers of the 1999 Colorado school shooting, and must make her way to the cafeteria where the shooting began, acquainting herself with the environment, and with the obstacles that had to be overcome in order for the event to transpire.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, even though the non-linear and/or open-ended narrative in documentary games could arguably be seen to decrease their documentary value, the degree of open-endedness varies and is limited by the parameters of the game's design. This means that, although different trajectories of events are potentially

possible, the significance of the narrative is usually transparent and, if the game is designed well, it will convey the information and message that it is trying to get across. As Bogost explains it, "interesting choices do not necessarily entail *all* possible choices in a given situation; rather, choices are selectively included and excluded in a procedural representation to produce a desired expressive end".<sup>30</sup> Also, it is the varied open-endedness of games which provide players with choices that increases a sense of agency and, therefore, transformation within the game parameters, thus heightening a sense of immersion. Research into target audiences for serious games development has shown that "[potential players] wanted a lot of control...Choice is important...they were not playing like mindless sponges. They applied a lot of their own agency in the [playing] process".<sup>31</sup>

Since the field of both documentary games as well as immersive journalism is nascent and the attempt to differentiate them is not the focus of this thesis, and because they both share characteristics and aims, I will refer to them interchangeably. In both documentary games as well as immersive non-fiction it is clear that the aim, as de la Peña claims about immersive journalism, is that these works do not "aim solely to *present* 'the facts' but rather the opportunity to *experience* 'the facts'".<sup>32</sup> Quite similarly, Susana Ruiz, co-founder of Take Action Games (TAG), which specializes in games for change, explains that their design methodology is meant to construct an experience that enables the player to become emotionally involved and that offers a broader informational context for complicated issues.<sup>33</sup> Since both kinds of work thus convey factual information by constructing a personal experience through interactive role-playing simulations, enabling the viewer-player to become emotionally invested by experiencing the represented information personally, there is an obvious point of connection to documentary's aims for achieving (emotional-mental and physical) reality effects. I will, therefore, refer to these genres more generally as *interactive animated documentaries*.

It is my contention that the increasing interactive element in documentary works is reflective of the new ways in which information consumers now engage with information. Furthermore, since digital data can be customized in response to viewer input, the entire online activity process is based on variability: following links produces a particular version of a website.<sup>34</sup> It is, therefore, very likely that, as

technologies change and forms of interaction with information vary, documentary traditions and theories will change accordingly. The open-endedness or flexible variability of the documentary narrative in these games is reflective of wider cultural tendencies. The documentary player becomes a quasi-director, calling upon available information parcels and in-game choices in a similar manner to the active user and navigator of information in the internet age.

Despite the difficulty of positioning games within strict taxonomies of documentary theory, in order to understand the documentary value of these interactive animated documentaries and to analyse how they provide what I call a “documentary experience” for viewers, it is nonetheless useful to revisit Michael Renov’s explication of the purposes of documentary filmmaking. According to Renov, the functions of the documentary are to record, reveal, or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyse or interrogate; to express.<sup>35</sup> Although interactive animated documentaries do not directly record physical realities, they can, in a similar manner to time-based animated documentaries, *reveal* information by depicting aspects otherwise not visualized, such as experiences of war that are not photographed due to the dangerous circumstances, and can *preserve* the information by raising awareness of the depicted situations. Interactive animated documentaries can *persuade* by promoting specific perspectives on an event and, by facilitating a first-hand experience of a simulation, do so quite convincingly. The game *Darfur Is Dying*, which will be discussed at greater length below, enables the player to assume the role of a refugee avatar seeking water for the camp and attempting to escape the Janjaweed militias.<sup>36</sup> By creating the character of a modern day refugee, the game developers strive to present refugees not as “illegals” or “threats”, but as heroes who fled life-threatening situations and have now become victims of immigration systems, thus *promoting* a specific ideological stance.<sup>37</sup> Renov’s third function of documentaries is the *analysis* and *interrogation* of an issue. Unlike most digital games, many interactive animated documentaries are not commercially distributed, but are available online for free download, and include forums, discussion areas and external links about the topic presented. Games create new experiences for information representation but are also part of larger platforms for learning, discourse and action. Interactive animated documentaries are informational entryways that connect players to larger databases for further analysis of the topic. The combination of data with an

engaging interface forges a new relation between truth value and credibility. Engaging with a familiar topic or event from varied sources in a new and interactive way means that the basic truth value of the work exists by reason of being based on well-known information whilst also evoking additional play-oriented immersion. After playing a documentary game about Darfur, the next time that country's name is mentioned, the player will remember her own personal experience of the simulated events so that the topic subsequently evokes not just general knowledge but "simulated participatory knowledge" as well. Relying on one's self to reach a certain understanding encourages a sense of believability since a personalized truth narrative emerges, based on one's own analysis of the sources provided as well as memories of the gaming experience. The final function of documentaries that Renov identifies is *expression*. Animated documentary games enable an immersive interactive experience that can potentially empower viewers as active agents and, by virtue of being highly stylized and interpretive, facilitate prominent expressive power.

In his 2007 book *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, Bogost claims that videogames open up a new domain for persuasion and analyses the ways in which they mount arguments and influence players. Videogames can, he proposes, "disrupt and change fundamental attitudes and beliefs about the world, leading to potentially significant long-term social change".<sup>38</sup> Bogost coins the term *procedural rhetoric* to describe the core representational mode of videogames, which he defines as "the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images or moving pictures".<sup>39</sup> Since computers are grounded upon proceduralism, generating behaviours based on rule-based models like the interaction of algorithms, and since computer processes are representational, Bogost claims that they are, therefore, "particularly adept at representing real or imagined systems...the computer magnifies the ability to create representations of processes".<sup>40</sup> In *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, game designer Jane McGonigal also examines how what is learned through gaming can be used to change and improve the non-game life and world. She explains that, although the experiences may be virtual or even based on fictional settings and imaginary systems, the agency involved as well as the emotional rewards, are very real.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Andrea Gunraj, Susana Ruiz and Ashley York claim that, since serious games aim to identify and challenge dynamics of oppression



and privilege, they can persuade or inspire people to critically examine mainstream systems of norms and behaviours.<sup>42</sup> In the light of my earlier discussion of the socio-political goals of realism, in this chapter I shall examine how games manage to alter or affect players' opinions and actions outside of the gameworld.

The question as to how one may identify or quantify the advantage of using an animated gaming platform to engage with a political or social situation will be central to this discussion. In order to elaborate upon this topic, I shall examine different forms of games as well as their likely outcomes. Asi Burak, an award-winning game creator and President of *Games for Change*, a non-profit corporation founded in 2004 that facilitates the creation and distribution of social impact games that serve as critical tools in humanitarian and educational efforts, has proposed that games may be divided into five main categories: games may firstly be used as "tools for communication", in which the objective is to raise awareness or spread a message. In this case the outcome must be to shift how an issue is framed so as to prioritize its importance, urgency and/or significance and to reach more people. Secondly, games can act as a form of "civic learning", in order to empower participants with new skills and knowledge. The third category of games "augment a program" so as to structure the participation and activity related to a certain issue, both online and offline. This category shares characteristics with gamification and crowdsourcing by creating committed participation meant to accomplish a common aim.<sup>43</sup> Fourthly, games can focus on group-level outcomes by "building collective power", creating social ties and movements, networks and peer accountability, alongside building capital. Finally, games can be used, often on the individual level, as a tool to drive "behaviour change" in real-world activities that can be quantified.<sup>44</sup> Although not all Games for Change can necessarily be labelled as documentary games, they are definitely informative and their categorization does shed light on the varied goals as well as the potential outcomes that different kinds of games may evoke. Burak's categories can easily be understood in correlation with Renov's described documentary goals to reveal, promote, analyse and express information in varied ways, depending on the necessary outcome, thus strengthening the relation to documentary all the more, even if at first glance it may seem unclear. In the next section of this chapter, I shall, therefore, go on to examine the unique "documentary experiences" provided by games, and shall

analyse in particular how they can evoke ethical encounters that are the basis of documentary viewing.

## **The "Documentary Experience" of Player-Viewer Interactive Engagement**

### **a. Player-Avatar Relationship**

According to Sobchack, the sense of ethics and responsibility that is part of documentary spectatorship is grounded in a realization of similarity with the on-screen protagonists. The viewer must grasp the on-screen space as related to his or her own space and existence as a material, mortal and moral being.<sup>45</sup> In order to understand how this works in relation to documentary games, the player-avatar relation must be examined. To create a reality effect, the onscreen space must be experienced as continuous with the viewer's own, and a mental-emotional as well as a physical reaction must be evoked.

While it should not be overlooked that some animated games may be criticized as grim, exploitative and distancing platforms, they do nonetheless successfully engage viewers with content in new ways using media-specific methods which, I claim, contribute to the varied forms of encounters possible in documentary works. The documentary game *9/11 Survivor*, made in 2003 by University of California students John Brennan, Mike Caloud and Jeff Cole, received massive media attention and provoked an immediate outcry online. The main line of criticism was that, although violence was predominant in video games, a line must be drawn somewhere and the depiction of real-world casualties in gameplay form was disrespectful. The medium of gaming can, however, only be perceived as disrespectful if it remains associated with childhood entertainment, for it implies that someone would enjoy re-enacting a real-life tragedy, when in fact games today have assumed a different function: that of a new platform through which to convey information. They may appear childish due to their animated visuals, yet they are anything but. *9/11 Survivor* was never planned for commercial release, but was an art-class project that was created in order to "reinterpret a historic moment by transplanting it to the medium with which [the creators] were most familiar: computer games. Inured to the distant televised images of Sept. 11, they hoped an immersive, interactive version would restore immediacy to the day's horrors".<sup>46</sup>

I would agree with the game designers who aimed to re-sensitize viewers by representing an image that has become so familiar it is almost clichéd in a manner which vivifies it as if seen anew. The gaming platform strengthens viewers' initial confrontation with these images by making them virtually relive the experience from a different and previously unseen perspective. In *9/11 Survivor* the events are depicted as if from within the World Trade Centre, for no such visual documentation survived. The game re-enacts the experiences of a protagonist trapped within the World Trade Centre and clearly bases its imagery on the well-known photographic footage of the falling/jumping man from the actual event, albeit from a different perspective made possible by animation. *9/11 Survivor* forms part of a growing field of documentary and serious games made in the past decade. In order to understand these works differently and to grasp the potential power of this medium, it will be necessary to engage with a broader discourse that has theorized gameplay and has examined shifting assumptions about games.



Figure 8.2: *9/11 Survivor*, 2003, by John Brennan, Mike Caloud and Jeff Cole

Over the past decade, it has become increasingly problematic to view avatars as mere representational proxies in virtual realms. It is now acknowledged that a more holistic approach, which combines the player, the representation and the medium, is necessary. James Paul Gee has described the relation between players of digital games and their avatars as a "tripartite identity" which includes the real person playing, the virtual character, and a "projective identity" that signifies both the actual person projecting herself onto the virtual character (the scripted character and the actualization of that avatar in each instantiation) as well as the virtual being as a project in the making defined and shaped with time.<sup>47</sup> The manner in which computer-

generated experiences influence the way users perceive of themselves is explored extensively in important books such as Sherry Turkle's aptly-named *The Second Self* and *Life on the Screen*, which explore users' personal investment in virtual worlds, and which acknowledge an extended sense of self that surpasses the physical through avatars and computer experiences.<sup>48</sup> Alexander Galloway argues that, although an imaginative aspect of the expressive action exists within the game diegesis, a physical translation and aspect of the same act also occurs, thus grounding the virtual experiences as having physical repercussions and influences nonetheless.<sup>49</sup> This is often used to suggest that the actions re-created through game rules are in fact *real*, or at the very least, partially real. Interactivity, or participation, I maintain, can thus be seen as a form of realism, endorsing a connection between one's role in "real" (non-game) experiences and in game environments. This further reinforces my central argument about participation as a developing aspect of realism that overrides the "artificiality" of the image by providing a heightened sense of engagement. Online digital actions and experiences today are part of the "real" as well as part of the viewer-user's self, evoking credibility and thus potentially enhancing the documentary status of such games.<sup>50</sup>

The depiction of documented characters in game mode can be argued to exemplify a double absence because the humans on whom they are based are neither directly seen nor heard. There are no interviews such as those in *Slaves*, which may contribute to a sense of obliteration, rather than the respectful portrayal of documentary protagonists. Despite this, I argue that the sense of a personal connection on behalf of the viewer can nonetheless be achieved. Research on avatar-player connections sheds light on the power of game experiences, which elucidate the potential of documentary games to create a bond between the player and avatar and, indirectly, between the player and the actual protagonist whom the avatar represents. Through the avatars, documentary games place players "in" someone else's real-world "role", enabling them to experience, albeit virtually, what would otherwise remain distant and completely inaccessible. Documentary games can thus enrich the experience and understanding of character by "crafting...an 'inside view', engaged in and through performance".<sup>51</sup> Rather than watching a recounting of events and/or their reenactments, the player of documentary games is the actor in the reenactment that is based on witnesses' recounts. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman refer to outcomes of re-enacted

experiences as moments in which "elements that are 'not me' become 'me' without losing their 'not-me-ness'".<sup>52</sup> This duality within the player's sense of self, itself due to new forms of interactivity, immersion and participation, stresses a notion of encounter. It is important to state that the idea of an encounter in documentary, as was described by Enwezor earlier, is, of course, one-sided and focused on the viewer, as is the case in photography-based documentaries as well.<sup>53</sup>

Uri Rapp claims that games facilitate the testing of situations and their outcomes, shaping the human as a social being by enabling him or her to assume different roles in order to explore what is not immediately available or directly exists elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> The ability to "re-live" or experience an event in a novel way creates new directions in interpretation which Poremba defines as "an experience-centred performative enquiry".<sup>55</sup> Both scholars thus highlight the learning impact that these experiences could have for participants. This emphasis upon the role of active participation and the interpretative possibilities offered to the viewer-player, as well as the different form of narrative enabled in interactive non-linear game platforms, resonates with Renov's suggestion that information transferal is one of documentary's fundamental aims and with Enwezor's work on the "truth process" in new documentary artworks.

According to Bill Nichols, re-enactments create the sense of a fold in time – a sense of "breathing life into the lived experiences of others".<sup>56</sup> The interactive aspects of a reenactment of an event facilitates the transformation of the "then and there" into the player's "here and now", creating a sense of presence in the here and now, and thus breathing new life into the event and its interpretation. As Fullerton claims in her analysis of the 2003 Playstation 2 game *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, this means that players become "virtual veterans" of events that they would not otherwise have been able to experience via a personal connection.<sup>57</sup> Fullerton's argument demonstrates that, in the case of documentary games, it is not only a connection to an avatar that is produced for the player but a reconnection to an historical or current event. Documentary protagonists as well as players are thus momentarily "present" in the same realm, which prevents distanced viewing and can instead facilitate a sense of encounter, as both characters become part of a larger, shared system.

## **b. Embodiment and Ethics**

According to Sobchack, the viewer's identification with what is seen on screen—an identification that is, furthermore, based on “an empathetic recognition of [one's] own material and mortal possibilities”—creates an ethical form of viewing that disrupts the diegesis of fiction and introduces documentary spectatorship instead.<sup>58</sup> This idea that the establishment of a sense of empathy rests on the shared physicality of viewer and viewed raises interesting questions with regard to animated depiction. In animation, the physicality of the protagonists is not depicted, which may arguably create a desensitization and a lack of empathy on the part of the viewer, influencing the ethical and, therefore, also the documentary reading of the work. How can the gap between the animated game world and the viewer's own be diminished? What is the role of the body, both of the protagonist and of the viewer in the establishment of documentary viewing and how does this relate to gaming platforms? Can the body presented “emerge through” the animated image as well as reverberate through the viewing body, thus arousing empathy? How does an encounter transform experimental works into works that may be perceived as valid informational documentaries?

Nichols places particular emphasis upon the role of violence in documentary viewing, claiming that “[t]he sight of brutal violence, or its extreme manifestation, brutal death, engages us quite differently in documentary. This is not a simulation...The imprint of history registers on the flesh”.<sup>59</sup> Nichols focuses on the undeniable status and truth value accorded to the injured body and raises the issue of viewer engagement with the imagery of the wounded or violated body, thus introducing the role of the viewer's body in the reception of documentary. His assertion that, “History registers on the flesh” is true both for the viewed as well as viewing body, who realizes that what is viewed “is not a simulation”. The truth value of the represented physical body thus becomes intertwined with a more ambiguous relation to depicted truth claims, namely the credibility of the image of violence as measured through its effect on the viewer. This idea echoes Hal Foster's well-known book, *Return of the Real*, where engagement with the real is described through its traumatic nature as exemplified by art that involves the abject and brutal focus on the body and which can consequently cause visceral physical reactions in the viewer.<sup>60</sup> The relationship between the body on-screen and the body of the viewer is an on-going field of research that shows correlation between the two. Sergei Eisenstein considered emotional responses and

theorized about what film does to the body of the politicized spectator as well as about the powers of imitative practices. He claimed that the bodily senses *lead* the spectator whose involvement is not strictly intellectual but also emotional.<sup>61</sup> Gaines introduced the idea of political mimesis which is based on the relationship between the body on screen, which in documentaries stand in for real historical people, and the body of the viewer. Linda Williams discussed body genres, film genres that influence the body (horror evokes screaming, drama crying and porn arousal) and "produce" on the bodies of the spectators an almost involuntary mimicry of emotion or sensation of the body onscreen.<sup>62</sup> As previously cited, studies about the physical reaction towards animated on-screen bodies find the response is similar to photographed cinematic bodies through studies of animated pornography.<sup>63</sup>

Sobchack elaborates on this connection and asserts that it is the body which can create a sense of empathy for the viewer, who recognizes a similarity between herself and the materiality of the subjects on-screen. According to Sobchack, the ability to feel another's pain arises out of one's own capacity to suffer and bleed: "the lived body...provides me the material premises and, therefore, the logical and ethical grounds for the intelligibility of those ethical categories that emerge from a bodily sense of gravity, finitude and...pain".<sup>64</sup> Although empathy can also occur when viewing fiction, the unique experience of documentary film viewing invokes not only empathy but ethical judgment as well. Sobchack emphasizes the body as lived, rather than merely seen, and acknowledges its ability to make meaning in ways that "include but far exceed the particular sense and image-making capacities of vision".<sup>65</sup> She claims that lived experience "has been thinned to the superficiality of two dimensions" and cites Martin Heidegger's notion of modernism as an age in which the "society of the spectacle" has culminated in an impoverished and alienated epistemological relation to our own bodies as well as to the bodies of others.<sup>66</sup> Sobchack argues that the counteraction needed is "not to rid ourselves of images but to flesh them out".<sup>67</sup> Her argument would appear to imply that, in contemporary visual culture, realism exceeds naturalistic visual depiction, thus requiring a new conceptualization of the term. When visual realism is no longer a mark of informational authenticity and when photographic images lose their affective power, new viewer-oriented authenticating strategies are needed that exceed the merely visual. It is in this sense that I argue that animation does not overshadow political

content or un-ethically obliterate protagonists, but can rather be used as a new aesthetic and strategy of representation that re-sensitizes viewers and establishes new forms of encounter which transform the "documentary experience".

Sobchack's ideas about the epistemology of the body as a sense-making site that constitutes meaning and realizes the subject in the world form part of a broader attempt to think about how we absorb visual information in ways that transcend and expand upon the straightforwardly visual. Much of this work has drawn upon the discourse of phenomenology, which emphasizes the lived spatial experience that emerges from the body's interaction with the world.<sup>68</sup> Laura Marks advances a theory of haptic visuality, in which visual perception is seen as analogous to tactility, as the eye becomes responsive to qualities usually perceived through contact.<sup>69</sup> Martine Beugnet describes the cinema of sensation as a multi-sensory experience of film which undermines the distinction between subject and object so that the inscription of the other is felt in the subjective space and body through empathy and embodiment.<sup>70</sup> Such phenomenological perspectives can provide some insight into how, despite a changing and non-mimetic representation of the self as avatar, interactive animated documentaries can nonetheless evoke physical sensations that encourage identification with the gameworld avatar and, indirectly, I claim, with the represented protagonist as well. Since animation that is not object-based lacks an obvious materiality, the documented body "emerges" through the animated image, enabling the depicted subject's presence to be felt and acknowledged through the player-viewer's own body, even if not seen directly.

Although there are obvious differences between real physical experiences and virtual simulations, there is in fact often a notable tension between a player's awareness of the artificiality of simulations and the frequent and very visceral fear and anxiety that such games may evoke. It has been found that "people tend to respond realistically to virtual situations and events even though they know that these are not real".<sup>71</sup> It is this aspect of immersive virtual worlds that explains their suitability to depict non-fiction: despite a reduced level of fidelity in the representation of physical reality, such as I claim occurs in all forms of non-mimetic animated documentaries, the response-as-if-real (RAIR) to virtual situation occurs nonetheless.<sup>72</sup>



Many Game Studies theorists have argued that virtual experiences are becoming part of the "I" of the player. This corresponds with my earlier assertions about the multiplicity of the self in an era of endless technological-digital non-physical platforms on which one is active daily. In a similar manner to the experience of a game, the player's sense of self is what connects the physical and non-physical environments, the player's world and the on-screen world of the documentary work. In the early 1990s, Julian Dibbell acknowledged the connection to one's avatar, or technological self, by describing the virtual rape of avatars in online worlds after which the players "behind" the avatars described feeling that they themselves had been violated, even if nothing had actually happened to their physical bodies.<sup>73</sup> Not only does this reflect the bodily connection to one's online personification, it also continues the line of argument presented in earlier chapters with regard to how the contemporary (technology-using) subject is no longer bound to their physical body. The boundaries of the self are no longer physical but now include extensions that facilitate not only visual representations that exceed physical appearances but also strong sensations that are not only based on physical bodily experiences. Whereas in the past computerized representations were based on textual representations, visual representations of the self have now, as de la Peña acknowledges, become increasingly visceral.<sup>74</sup> De la Peña describes multiple studies that "directly connect the sense of one's physical body to the virtual one".<sup>75</sup> By using virtual reality technologies, these studies proved that viewers can perceive their physical location as based on the visual representation of their virtual self, rather than on their physical-world location.<sup>76</sup> In another experiment, viewers registered a physical sense of threat and anxiety when their virtual representation was under threat of harm.<sup>77</sup> This connection to the virtual body acknowledges that what users see evokes further physical responses, thus adding another level to how the "self" is determined. In fact, de la Peña states:

It seems that we are hardwired to adopt representations of ourselves as real. These studies underscore the importance of our perception of what is happening to our physical representation. They also offer a critical explanation of why an avatar becomes relevant so rapidly to users and why they become so invested in the experiences of their particular avatar.<sup>78</sup>

Dibbell consequently declared that what happens in virtual worlds “is neither exactly real nor exactly make-believe, but profoundly, compellingly, and emotionally meaningful”.<sup>79</sup> An "emotional truth" is, of course, different from factual certainty but it may indeed form part of the basis for understanding what reinforces the believability aspect of documentary games as invokers of reality effects that consist of emotional and physical reactions. This is all the more true in an age of truthiness, in which facts take second place to what one wishes to be true.<sup>80</sup> Documentary games can consequently become acceptable as documentary works for viewers, "ringing true" in terms of both their content (due to extra-textual knowledge), as well as in remembered personal experiences from the game.

The documentary value of games has relevance for inexperienced as well as experienced gamers. Since documentary games are often casual games, characterized by simple rules that do not require extensive time-commitment or skills, they are accessible even to those who are unfamiliar with the world of games.<sup>81</sup> People who are inexperienced gamers are thus introduced to new documentary formats that inform in an incredibly personalized and engaging manner. Experienced gamers may find the simplicity and straightforwardness of animated documentary games only justify a one-time consumption in a way similar to how once-viewed films may act as informational platforms. Whether for experienced or inexperienced gamers, then, these new works have immense documentary potential to convey information.

### **Darfur Is Dying**

The following case study, the 2006 documentary game *Darfur Is Dying*, about the crisis in Darfur, illustrates the power of an interactive animated documentary in treating a sensitive topic in current affairs. Through an in-depth analysis of the game, I will reveal how documentary interactive games are constructed and impact on the spectator–player. It is an excellent example of the encounter that, I argue, occurs in new ways between documented protagonists and documentary viewers-players, creating an ethically-oriented truth process as a result. Furthermore, the choice of a slightly older example enables the incorporation of different statistics and existing scholarly research.

In 2005 mtvU – the college network arm of MTV – announced a contest for university students to design a videogame that would end the crisis in Darfur. The

winning game was designed by a group of MA students from the University of Southern California, led by Susana Ruiz. *Darfur Is Dying* is defined on its website as a documentary game whose creators travelled to refugee camps near Sudan and who worked closely with humanitarian aid workers with on-the-ground experience.<sup>82</sup> The game is described as a "narrative-based simulation where the user, from the perspective of a displaced Darfurian, negotiates forces that threaten the survival of his or her refugee camp. It offers a faint glimpse of what it's like for more than 2.5 million who have been internally displaced by the crisis in Sudan".<sup>83</sup> The game creators define it as an "informational entryway to the humanitarian crisis in the Sudan [which] weaves uncomplicated and immediate mechanisms into the gameplay that seek to effect real world change".<sup>84</sup>

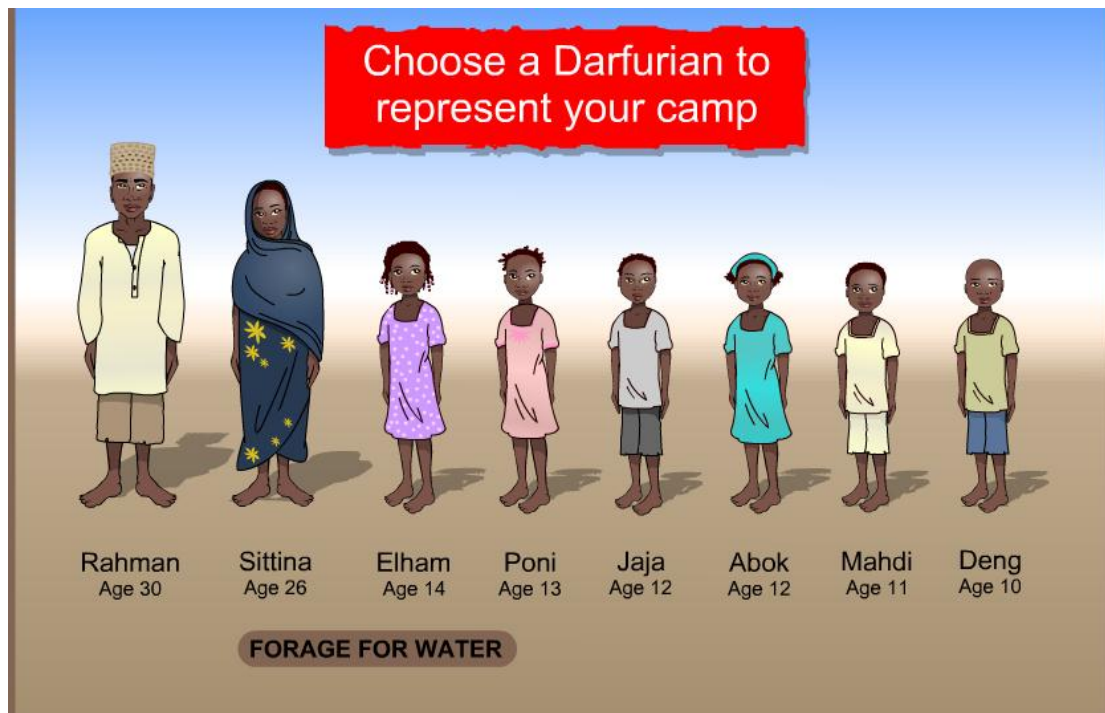


Figure 8.3: *Darfur is Dying*, 2006, by Susana Ruiz

The game has several segments that each depict information differently. The player firstly assumes the role of a refugee avatar out of eight named male and female characters ranging in age from 10-30. The ability to choose which avatar will represent the player is in itself an important element in the construction of player identification and engagement, as explained earlier. In a similar manner to the film *Slaves*, *Darfur Is Dying* presents textual information about the conflict in Darfur and

the living conditions in refugee camps in order to set a documentary tone. This is done in two ways: First of all, as part of the game parameters, the player's avatar can explore the refugee camp, receiving textual information about elements of the camp and its inhabitants, based on the personal narratives of Darfurian refugees and statistical information about living conditions in the camp. The virtual exploration of the camp is accompanied by a "threat meter" that measures for village health, water and food supplies, which will dictate when the player must continue to a different aspect of the game, the foraging for water outside of the camp limits. Additionally, the [darfurisdying.com](http://darfurisdying.com) website includes links for further background information about the genocide in Sudan, providing alternative sources of information about the issue that are not game-oriented.



Figure 8.4: *Darfur is Dying*, 2006, by Susana Ruiz



Figure 8.5: *Darfur is Dying*, 2006, by Susana Ruiz

Foraging for water is a segment of the game where, due to insufficient water supply, the player, cast as her Darfuri refugee, must leave the camp and search for a well from which to fetch water while fleeing the heavily armed and vehicle-aided Janjaweed. As Bogost explains it, "the game leverages a common videogame design model: the player as hero runs to avoid an enemy. Inverting the common videogame power fantasy, the game puts the player in the role of the powerless rather than the powerful actor in the struggle".<sup>85</sup> Even though the game does not make a procedural argument about conflict resolution, Bogost claims that the design may increase viewer empathy, which may lead players to interrogate the situation further.<sup>86</sup> This coincides with the three-step design methodology described by the game's creators, who aimed

first of all... [to] construct an experience in which the player could become emotionally invested via personal narratives and testimonies. Secondly... [to] pull back and...offer her a broader context of the extremely complicated issue. Thirdly... [to] ensure that she had an immediate and simple means to make a difference in the real world in some small way.<sup>87</sup>

Both the foraging for water game and the *darfurisdying.com* website accordingly include a "take action" segment which includes further information about the conflict;

the options to send a message to US congress, to "join the growing divestment movement", or to donate; as well as a link to "find more ways to get involved".<sup>88</sup>

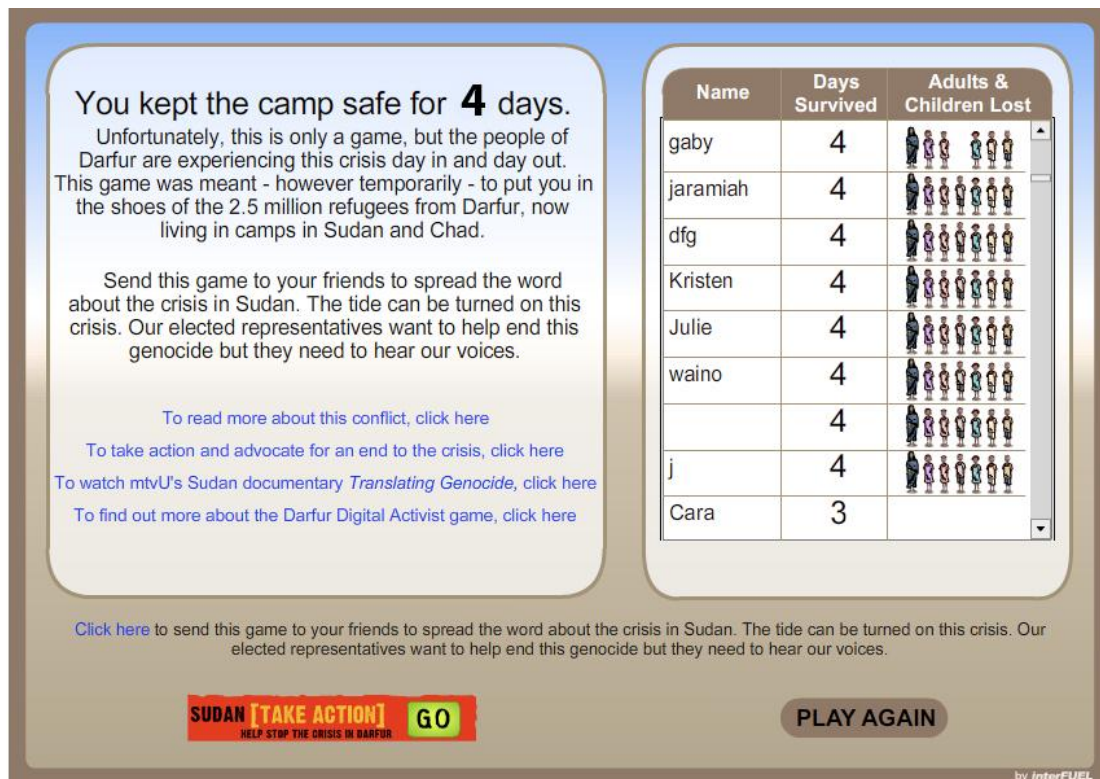


Figure 8.6: *Darfur is Dying*, 2006, by Susana Ruiz

When the player is unsuccessful in the search for water, the "Game Over" screen presents the following message, "You have been captured by the militia. You will most likely become one of the hundreds of thousands of people already lost to this humanitarian crisis". Depending on the avatar selected, probable outcomes of the capture are listed on screen such as rape, abuse, kidnapping and murder. The use of the word "you" in the "Game Over" information addresses the player but also acts as an interpellation that purposefully confounds the "I" playing and the "I" presented by the avatar. Such effects disrupt the diegesis of the game, removing the distancing effect or masking "screen" of animation as a novel and non-naturalistic visual representation. Instead, political urgency and documentary knowledge are inscribed into the supposedly fictional animated world and experience of play.

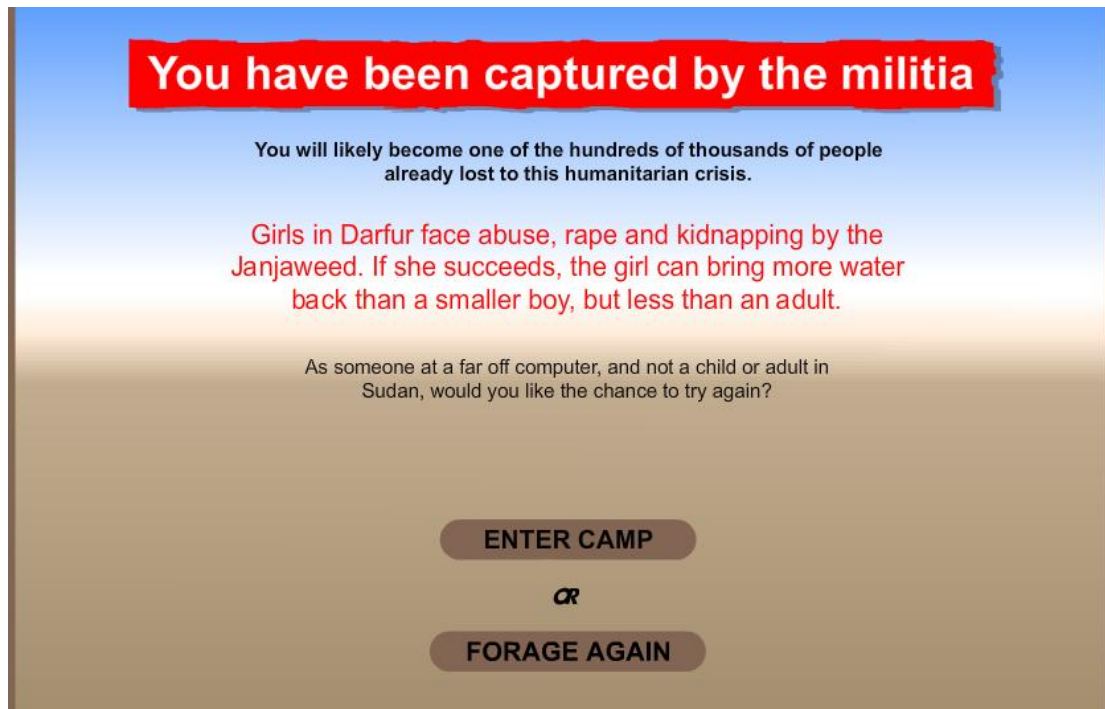


Figure 8.7: *Darfur is Dying*, 2006, by Susana Ruiz

Although physical and virtual experiences are of course different, by role playing in a simulated reenactment of an event, players of documentary games embody the documented protagonists symbolized by avatars. To embody is to personify and express but also "to provide with a body; incarnate; make corporeal".<sup>89</sup> This can be viewed in a dual manner. On one hand, even though the depicted corporeal body is not visible, the connection sensed by the player in their own body and materiality "provides" the protagonist with a substitute corporeal body, the player's own. By blurring the boundaries between player and avatar, the player becomes linked, by proxy, to the actual Darfurian refugee. New forms of intersubjectivity and encounter thus emerge. On the other hand, unlike the actual protagonist of the documented content, the player has the choice to participate or not, unlike the "actual body" of the protagonist. From this perspective, these games may be seen as simulations where one person's gruesome reality becomes another's game experience, entering or leaving at will. The relation between the game paradigm and the external reality it represents and what can potentially make the viewer use the former to understand the latter, rather than experience it at face value only, is the recurring question.

This can be further related to some of the themes I have discussed in previous chapters, in which I examined documentary viewing in relation to indexicality and to

the convergence of on- and off-screen worlds through a sense of participation. From the perspective of indexicality, the player's body, which plays the role of the protagonist through physical interactivity in documentary games, becomes a deictic index to the protagonist's actual body in the situation depicted. In addition, since physical activity on the part of the player is simultaneously translated into animated visuals, the animated character on screen is a physically indexical trace of the player/user's body whilst also a deictic index of the documented protagonist, thus signifying both subjects. This shared signification between viewers and viewed may be used as a potential device to evoke documentary viewing by encouraging a form of connection felt by the spectator-player (albeit the connection admittedly being one-sided as it does not include the protagonist depicted). Spectator and protagonist are, in different ways, the flip sides of the same represented body image. Sharing a signifier "fleshes out" the image of the avatar by indicating the real-world presence to which it refers, notwithstanding the animated non-naturalistic aesthetic. Even though no corporeal body is actually seen, this shared signifier creates a sense of similarity and encounter, which connects player and protagonist. This reinforces Sobchack's emphasis on the body as a focal point through which the viewer is able to grasp their own similarity and shared materiality and mortality with the on-screen protagonist. The fact that new forms of participation and interactivity can create a shared sense of materiality even without the physical representation of the documented protagonists thus serves to demonstrate my contention that new forms of representation, such as animation, may evoke sensations that can encourage documentary viewing.

The documentary content is further vivified by the fact that the player becomes involved in the work through cognitive as well as physical interaction. This helps to prevent an apathetic reception of the work as a deflated image. Instead, it is sensed as more immediate, as more directly related to the player, as more "alive" and therefore "real". As Poremba explains, the re-enactments in documentary games are "vivified through embodied encounters". A reflective encounter takes place "that allows our experience to inform our understanding of another".<sup>90</sup> In other words, the player is, through an interactive experience that enables a form of virtual presence in a reenactment based on actual events, granted an opportunity "to be in the world" differently, to evoke Elsaesser's descriptions of a new realism. The vivification of the event in new ways diminishes the perceived gap between implicated and media



witnesses (even if only in the player's mind), thus creating a believable representation since, as Hill argues, vivid information "seems to be more persuasive than non-vivid information".<sup>91</sup>

The concept of "documentary spectatorship" is largely based on the idea of a connection between on-screen and off-screen worlds and recognizes the important position of the viewer in relation to depicted content. It is my claim that the user-player-viewer of documentary games evokes a multifaceted mode of spectatorship: as a detached user engaging with an onscreen application; as a player identifying with the selected avatar and engrossed in the mission of the game; as a viewer in "documentary mode", who is familiar with the event described from other informational sources and is aware of the complexity of the relationship between the game's subject matter and its representation.<sup>92</sup> The opening screen of *Darfur is Dying* addresses these three different roles: The title "Darfur is Dying" is both the name of the game but addresses the documentary viewer, introducing and contextualizing the game's subject matter; "Start your experience" refers to the player who is about to engage in the personalized experience of the game; "Help stop the crisis in Darfur" addresses the "removed" user whose power extends beyond the game and who can, through links provided on the [darfurisdying.com](http://darfurisdying.com) website, act further to aid the situation represented. This introduces a level of cultural interactivity to the game, exceeding the work's limits and connecting it to larger systems that break the "magic circle" of the game.<sup>93</sup> I would even go so far as to claim that the powerlessness of the player's status in the game as she forages for water and is inevitably captured by the Janjaweed, is an indirect message to the viewer, who is *not* as powerless as the depicted protagonist, the gap between the two thus emphasizing the user's potential agency to act and impact upon the portrayed situation. Whereas the connection or encounter previously described may be one-sided and only refer to the viewer-player, only actions on behalf of the viewer-player to influence the portrayed situation have the potential to make the encounter more mutual, hopefully impacting the lives of those depicted.

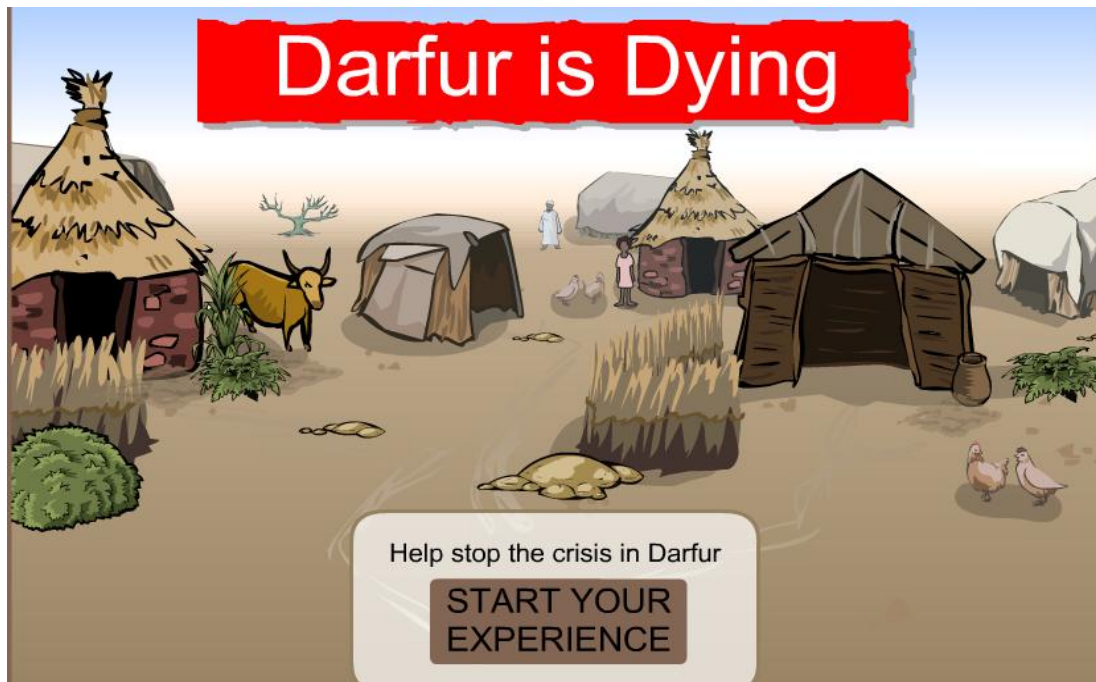


Figure 8.8: *Darfur is Dying*, 2006, by Susana Ruiz

While online digital games are generally engrossing epic systems, and are hence often described as "magic circles", many documentary games which, like *Darfur Is Dying*, aim to raise awareness are quite simple and straightforward. There is a subtle tension between immersion and rupture in these games: although immersion is clearly desired, too much absorption will put the emphasis on the game experience rather than on the documentary content on which it is based. Using similar strategies to the alienating effects that Brecht describes, animated documentary games thus encourage immersion whilst also highlighting mediation. In *Darfur Is Dying*, the graphic and conceptual simplicity of the in-game goals ensure that even inexperienced players may effortlessly become immersed. The minimal visual style of the game includes such details as a dead cow when the avatar flees the militias in order to enhance realism and/or create atmosphere, but little else besides strips of blue sky and beige sand. This requires an understanding of the complex and delicate balance that game and character design may contribute to the game experience.

Hyperrealist imagery in games may make occurrences seem less "artificial" but may also lead to desensitization, inuring the viewer to scenarios of carnage and atrocity, even as an interactive player within them. Minimalistic and non-naturalistic character design may have the reverse effect but may also influence the emotional engagement

of the player differently. If a scenario of violence is portrayed whilst the avatars appear nonchalant due to minor facial expressivity, for example, the real-life urgency of the situation may be lost on some players. Such design choices can thus have crucial repercussions on the game experience and may potentially further de-humanize the protagonists depicted. Since human reactions to a scene are crucial in bringing the story to life, if a player's avatar and the other in-game characters do not depict distress, the reality effect of the experience may be weakened. Such issues are what place this emerging field in the on-going debate on ethics and aesthetics.

Contributing to the ambivalence about whether such games succeed or fail to achieve empathy, another interpretation is that less naturalistic depictions may have diverse effects, which may lead to an unexpectedly contradictory experience, as I find is the case in *Darfur Is Dying*. On one hand, a familiarity with animation from childhood and contemporary visual culture makes it "receptor-friendly". It is an accessible and un-antagonistic representational form that expedites entry into fictional worlds, even if the simulation is one of horror and hardship. The immersive playing further simulates a sense of presence and thus of non-mediation. On the other hand, however, the use of animation calls attention to mediation through the overt visual constructedness of the non-photographic representational form that nonetheless announces itself as "documentary". It is only by maintaining a sense of critical viewing that documentary consciousness can prevail within the new informational interactive platform. The experience of feeling immersed whilst remaining aware of mediation, coupled with the inter-textual knowledge that the game content is based on the "real", sets off a wake-up alarm which ruptures the non-thinking in-game action trance and invokes the inherent political significance of the experience. By rupturing the game flow and emphasizing mediation, the gap between the gameworld and the reality depicted is sharpened, rather than blurred.<sup>94</sup> Rather than mindless gameplay, the emphasis on mediation maintains a focus on the reality, rather than only on the representation of that reality, a vital aspect of documentary viewing.



Figure 8.9: *Darfur is Dying*, 2006, by Susana Ruiz

The rupturing of the game mode is an important device in conveying real-world non-fictional information through gameplay and may be seen in games such as *Darfur is Dying*, in which the depiction of a real death and a fictionalized death appear in the same story-telling frame. Writing in the context of film, Sobchack explains that what she calls "ferocious reality" occurs when the reality of one death is made clear through comparison with another, fictionalized death.<sup>95</sup> The realization of a "ferocious reality" is related to documentary consciousness, and evokes both a bodily responsiveness and "an empathetic recognition of [one's] own material and mortal possibilities".<sup>96</sup> By way of an example, Sobchack discusses Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (1939), in which the actual death of a filmed rabbit disrupts fictional nature of the film, and demarks the different orders of an existential and a cinematic space.<sup>97</sup> The disruption is caused by the realization that the death is not just in a fictional world, but occurs in the same world as the viewer. Such an upheaval results in an understanding of the protagonists as living creatures. The generality and fictional status of a work is thus discarded and documentary consciousness is called forth.

It is a central argument of this thesis that innovative forms of representation have the potential to awaken slumbering emotions in a numbed culture that has become

accustomed to images of atrocities.<sup>98</sup> Statistics reveal that playing political serious games does impact on players' knowledge and opinion of the game's subject matter and that "the construction and expression of a 'political self' through the act of playing a political game may have consequences in the real world".<sup>99</sup> The potential of such games to expose systems and to encourage a sense of agency may indeed encourage varied forms of activism, or at least effect a change in players' way of thinking. In September 2006 Susana Ruiz, creator of *Darfur is Dying*, stated in an interview:

According to mtvU's traffic numbers, more than 800,000 people have played the game over 1.7 million times since its launch on April 30th. Of those, tens of thousands have participated in the activist tools woven into the gameplay – such as sending emails to friends in their social networks inviting them to play the game and become informed about Darfur, as well as writing letters to President Bush and petitioning their Representatives in Congress to support legislation that aids the people of Darfur.<sup>100</sup>

Putting the player "in" the virtual Darfur creates an encounter between the experiences of the actual survivors and the documentary game player. Although perhaps not directly inter-subjective because of the multi-faceted mediation, players are nonetheless subsequently invited to negotiate their own sense of "self" and their relationship to these "others". By placing strangers within a framework of those who are recognized as equally human and similar to oneself, fundamental non-hostility and universal human rights are extended to them, evoking a moral reaction to their plight.<sup>101</sup> Recognition of the "other" that is being documented is vital for documentary viewing and for an ethical understanding of the content. It is for this reason that I claim that animated documentaries, which emphasize and create a sense of presence for the unseen protagonist as well as implicating the viewer in varied ways, succeed in creating new forms of encounter that strengthen their documentary status, rather than overshadowing political content or disrespectfully obliterating documented subjects. "Only in such a world where the citizen has been able to recognize the refugee that he or she is", Agamben writes, "is the political survival of humankind today thinkable".<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter builds upon my discussion in Chapter 6 of simulations of witnessing that enhance believability by evoking a sense of presence for the viewer through reality effects, and analyses how these ideas are seen in interactive animated documentaries. Interactive documentaries share characteristics with today's interactive computerized and participatory culture, evoking a sense of presence through virtual simulations, heightened immersiveness and agency.

In a computerized culture, presence can also be understood as telepresence, which means that varied imagery can evoke a sense of presence. The question of what it is that exceeds the image's denotation of an event to really "pull" the viewer in, making her feel personally involved in the content at hand, has been central to my discussion. I have demonstrated the potential of animation to vivify the representation so that content and people shown are not perceived as "merely" images viewed apathetically in an anesthetized manner but as similar to one's self and sharing a continuous world, as part of the same larger system.

Existing scholarship on the source of documentary consciousness and spectatorship has emphasized the importance of an ethical bond which relates the viewer to the protagonists and occurrences on screen. Enwezor has examined how the encounter between viewers and viewed in documentaries creates a "truth process" and exploration for meaning. Sobchack suggested that empathy may arise through physical similarity which, just like the idea of an encounter, requires a form of intersubjectivity that evokes a sense of connection between viewer and viewed. Building on this existing research, I have argued in this chapter that documentary experiences in new interactive animated documentaries which foreground a sense of involvement for the viewer also create a sense of trustworthiness.

Although animation can be assumed to create a documentary aesthetic that distances viewers from the events and people portrayed because of its break with photographic aesthetics, it essentially acts as an informational "boomerang". While the novel and unfamiliar representational form may create a supposed division between "actual" and represented worlds, engagement with the difficult political content is facilitated alongside a potential to draw viewers' attention in a highly visual information age.

Despite what may seem to be an initial distancing effect, viewers/players are brought full circle back to the subject matter at hand, albeit only after going through intricate processes of cognitive and physical interactivity that enhance their engagement with the content and protagonists' experiences. At the same time, however, my discussion of the need to break the game's "magic circle" revealed that too engrossing a simulation may diminish the documentary status, leading the player to become lost in the entertainment aspect of the game experience. Furthermore, although simulations of witnessing may be a new form of documentary, it must be taken into account that, in an age of truthiness, they may have confusing and potentially dangerous implications. Although simulations of witnessing may be successful in enhancing believability by making players *feel* like first-hand witnesses through varied reality effects, they may also confuse a "documentary experience" with the need for criticality and the ability or attempt to tell what can really be concluded as factual from the experience. This emphasizes the difficulty in today's documentary field and visual culture more generally in grounding truth claims on any clear criteria. Taking my research of new directions of the field further - whereas this chapter points to the role of games as documentaries on physical world events, the next chapter will examine the documentation of games.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter have been previously published as Nea Ehrlich, "Animated Documentaries: Aesthetics, Politics and Viewer Engagement", in *Pervasive Animation*, ed. Suzanne Buchan (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 248-271.

<sup>2</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 19.

<sup>3</sup> The avatar is the animated persona representing the player in the game.

<sup>4</sup> Kuma War Games were discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Crecente, "ISIS Terror Group Releases Trailer for GTA-like Recruitment and Training Video Game", *Polygon*, published September 19, 2014, accessed September 20, 2014, [www.polygon.com/2014/9/19/6559243/isis-terror-group-releases-trailer-for-gta-like-recruitment-and](http://www.polygon.com/2014/9/19/6559243/isis-terror-group-releases-trailer-for-gta-like-recruitment-and); Leon Watson, "Islamic State mocks up GTA game to recruit young fighters", *The Telegraph*, September 19, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Poremba, "Real/Unreal", 141.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Zimmerman, "Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games: Four Naughty Concepts in Need of Discipline", in *First Person New Media as Story, performance, and Game*, ed. Pat Harrigan and Noah W. Wardrip-Fruin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 158.

<sup>8</sup> Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 128.

<sup>10</sup> Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 97-182.

<sup>11</sup> Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 127-9.

<sup>12</sup> For further reading on the complexity and differing forms of immersion in serious games see Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Other names include serious games, persuasive games, interactive games, digital games, educational games, virtual reality, alternative purpose games, edutainment, infotainment, digital game-based learning, immersive learning, simulations, social impact games, games for good, synthetic learning environments, new media documentaries, digital documentaries, interactive film, database narrative, online forum, digital art pieces, news games, 3D worlds, educational product and more.

<sup>14</sup> Joyce Neys and Jeroen Jansz, "Political Internet Games: Engaging an Audience", *European Journal of Communication* 25:3 (2010): 230.

<sup>15</sup> Fullerton, "Documentary Games", 215.

<sup>16</sup> [www.gamethenews.net](http://www.gamethenews.net) accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> In this context it is interesting to consider my discussion of virtuality as a perception of reality that includes the possible as well as the actual since games such as these demonstrate the multi-layered nature of realities to include more than just the actual of the past.

<sup>18</sup> Benita Shaw, *Technoculture*, 121.



<sup>19</sup> [www.gonegitmo.blogspot.co.il](http://www.gonegitmo.blogspot.co.il), accessed Nov 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013. The work has most recently been displayed at the Museum of Modern Art Moscow as part of the exhibition "Expanded Cinema 3 - Mockumentary: Reality is not enough" in June 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Nonny de la Peña, "Physical World News in Virtual Spaces Representation and Embodiment in Immersive Nonfiction", *Media Fields* 3 (2011): 1.

<sup>21</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 1.

<sup>22</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 1.

<sup>23</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> For a further discussion of Hill's "vividness spectrum", see Chapter 6 above.

<sup>25</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 35. The relative vividness of different kinds of interactions such as screen-based applications compared with augmented reality, virtual reality or other forms of interfaces exceeds the scope of the dissertation but is a potential direction for future research.

<sup>26</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 9.

<sup>27</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 9.

<sup>29</sup> There is clearly much more to be said about this particular game and ones like it. "Its creator, known for over a year only as the alias 'Columbin', has been described as a "genius", a "sick human being", a "real philosopher", and even "the Antichrist". The game's success comes not from its technical accomplishments or engaging gameplay but rather the provocative polarization it elicits from audiences". More information can be found at [www.columbinegame.com](http://www.columbinegame.com), accessed February 8, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 45.

<sup>31</sup> More information can be found in Andrea Gunraj, Susana Ruiz and Ashley York, "Power to the People: Anti-Oppressive Game Design" in *Designing Games for Ethics: Models, Techniques and Frameworks*, ed. Karen Schrier and David Gibson (New York: Information Science Reference, 2011), 262.

<sup>32</sup> Nonny de la Pena et al., "Immersive Journalism: Immersive Virtual Reality for the First Person Experience of News", *Presence, Teleoperators and Virtual Environments* 19:4 (2010): 301. Emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> Gunraj, Ruiz and York, "Power to the People", 259.

<sup>34</sup> Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 36-45.

<sup>35</sup> Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*, 21-25.

<sup>36</sup> *Darfur is Dying* was created in 2006 by Susana Ruiz, Ashley York, Mike Stein, Noah Keating and Kellee Santiago of the University of Southern California.

<sup>37</sup> Continuing my discussion of animated documentaries that engage with the topic of refugees, another example worth noting is the game *Escape from Woomera* (2003) by Julian Oliver and Kate Wild about the lives of the detainees in The Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre (IRPC) in Australia. The game was partially a response to the lack of access that the media were faced with at the time and attempts similar goals as that of *Darfur is Dying* by presenting each detainee's personal story in order to re-humanize the protagonists in a system that does exactly the opposite.

- <sup>38</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, ix.
- <sup>39</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, ix, 29-40.
- <sup>40</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 4-5.
- <sup>41</sup> Jane McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), 60-61.
- <sup>42</sup> Gunraj, Ruiz and York, "Power to the People", 258.
- <sup>43</sup> Gamification is the use of game strategies and paradigms in non-game contexts to engage users, a topic that exceeds the scope of my research.
- <sup>44</sup> This categorization is based on *Games For Change's* Impact Typology, sent to author by Asi Burak in an email correspondences from December 19, 2013.
- <sup>45</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 284.
- <sup>46</sup> Matthew Mirapaul, "Online Games Grab Grim Reality", *The New York Times*, September 17, 2003, accessed May 24, 2012 [www.nytimes.com/2003/09/17/arts/online-games-grab-grim-reality.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/17/arts/online-games-grab-grim-reality.html).
- <sup>47</sup> James Paul Gee, *What Videogames Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 54-5.
- <sup>48</sup> See Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984); Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).
- <sup>49</sup> Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota, 2006), 25.
- <sup>50</sup> All games or role-playing scenarios can be considered real-life experiences, which may have additional significance to the game paradigm itself. However, the advantage of digital online games is their relative availability and the wide selection that offers different content to be explored by the player from within their own home.
- <sup>51</sup> Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 140.
- <sup>52</sup> Zimmerman, "Narrative, Interactivity, Play, and Games", 110.
- <sup>53</sup> It may be argued that photography-based documentaries engage with the protagonist more directly than animation since the photograph or footage demand more contact with the referent. This, however, can hardly be argued to always be the case since photographs can be taken from afar, without interaction between photographer and photographed or can be captured by photographic apparatuses that operate without a human agent. Furthermore, since many documentary games are based on research and the experiences of actual protagonists, even though the protagonists may not be seen directly in the graphic interface of the game, an interaction with them on behalf of the creator, such as through interviews, marks a similarity to the photographer of time-based documentaries.
- <sup>54</sup> Uri Rapp, *The World of Play* (Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defence, 1980), 23.
- <sup>55</sup> Poremba, "Real/Unreal", iii.
- <sup>56</sup> Poremba, "Real/Unreal", 141.
- <sup>57</sup> Fullerton, "Documentary Games", 220-1.

- <sup>58</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 283.
- <sup>59</sup> Bill Nichols, "'Getting to Know You...!' Knowledge, Power, and the Body", in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 189-190.
- <sup>60</sup> See Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996).
- <sup>61</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, "The Montage of Film Attractions", in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 49.
- <sup>62</sup> Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess", *Film Quarterly* 44:4 (1991):4.
- <sup>63</sup> Capino, "Filthy Funnies", 55-56.
- <sup>64</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 173.
- <sup>65</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 187.
- <sup>66</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 181-2, 187.
- <sup>67</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 187.
- <sup>68</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 190.
- <sup>69</sup> See Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
- <sup>70</sup> Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 58-59.
- <sup>71</sup> Mel Slater, "Place Illusion and Plausibility Can Lead to Realistic Behaviour in Immersive Virtual Environments", *Philos Trans R Soc Lond* 364 (2009): 3549- 3557.
- <sup>72</sup> De la Peña et al., "Immersive Journalism", 291 – 301.
- <sup>73</sup> Julian Dibell, "A Rape in Cyberspace", *The Village Voice*, first published December 23, 1993, published online October 18, 2005, unpaginated, accessed June 10, 2010. [www.villagevoice.com/2005-10-18/specials/a-rape-in-cyberspace/](http://www.villagevoice.com/2005-10-18/specials/a-rape-in-cyberspace/)  
Once again, this is not to claim that physical experiences are identical to virtual ones, it does, however, point to the strong sense of identification players can feel towards their avatars and virtual experiences.
- <sup>74</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 6.
- <sup>75</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 6.
- <sup>76</sup> Bigna Lenggenhager, Tej Tadi, Thomas Metzinger, and Olaf Blanke, "Video Egro Sum: Manipulating Bodily Self-Consciousness", *Science* 317 (2007): 1096-1099.
- <sup>77</sup> Henrik Ehrsson, "The Experimental Induction of Out-of-Body Experiences", *Science* 317 (2007):1048.
- <sup>78</sup> De la Peña, "Physical World News", 7.
- <sup>79</sup> Dibell, "A Rape in Cyberspace", unpaginated.
- <sup>80</sup> Irene Hofmann, "Foreword", in *More Real? Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2013), 6.

<sup>81</sup> Casual games are typically played online and therefore do not require additional gaming technologies or interfaces, which means anyone can play them. Furthermore, they have comparatively low production and distribution costs for the producer, in contrast to more complex games.

<sup>82</sup> *Darfur Is Dying* is available online at [www.darfurisdying.com](http://www.darfurisdying.com) and was the winner of the Darfur Digital Activist Contest launched by mtvU in partnership with the Reebok Human Rights Foundation and the International Crisis Group at the G4C conference in October 2006.

<sup>83</sup> Darfur is Dying, accessed October 6, 2012. [www.darfurisdying.com/aboutgame.html](http://www.darfurisdying.com/aboutgame.html)

<sup>84</sup> Taken from the work samples portfolio of Susana Ruiz, sent to author via email on December 20, 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 96.

<sup>86</sup> Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 96.

<sup>87</sup> Gunraj, Ruiz and York, "Power to the People", 259.

<sup>88</sup> Darfur is Dying, accessed October 6, 2012. [www.darfurisdying.com/takeaction.html](http://www.darfurisdying.com/takeaction.html)

<sup>89</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, accessed May 10, 2014, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>90</sup> Poremba, "Real/Unreal", 139.

<sup>91</sup> Hill, "The Psychology of Rhetorical Images", 31.

<sup>92</sup> Relating the user-player-viewer spectatorship to Zimmerman's modes of interactivity relates the three types of viewing/interacting to functional interactivity–participation-cultural participation.

<sup>93</sup> The term "magic circle" is accredited to Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Breacon Press, 1955). Huizinga argued that playing a game meant the entrance into a "magic circle", a separate sphere or second order reality. The use of the term in the context of virtual realities and online games belongs to Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004).

Straight forward serious games differ from serious games that propose modes of action and demand increased in-game concentration and creativity, such as *World Without Oil* which analyzes the current uses of energy sources in order to predict potential future scenarios and their solutions or *FoldIt*, a game that lets players contribute to scientific research in protein folding.

<sup>94</sup> This is arguably also the case in non-interactive animated documentaries where photographs at the end of a work may attempt a similar effect, breaking the viewing of an animated, supposedly separate, world by reminding the viewer through photographs that the events are grounded in the physical world. There are many ways to achieve this.

An interesting example is the game *Phone Story* by Molleindustria. This serious game is described as "an educational game about the dark side of your favourite smart phone. Follow your phone's journey around the world and fight the market forces in a spiral of planned obsolescence". Interestingly, the game was designed for smartphone devices so that whilst learning about the inhumane aspects of the smart phone industry, a player cannot overlook their own role within the system since the interface of the game one holds in their own hand is also the topic of the game played. The game thus provokes a critical reflection on its own technological platform. For more information see [www.phonestory.org](http://www.phonestory.org).

<sup>95</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 283.

<sup>96</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 283.

<sup>97</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 268-270.

<sup>98</sup> As Sontag explains, whereas in the past photography was thought to have a "shock therapy" effect, once viewers become so inured to images of horror and their quantities, in order to evoke a similar sense of shock, new methods are required. See Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

<sup>99</sup> Neys and Jansz, "Political Internet Games", 227.

<sup>100</sup> S. Parkin, "Interview – Darfur is Dying", *Eurogamer*, September 4, 2006, accessed June 5, 2010, [www.eurogamer.net](http://www.eurogamer.net).

<sup>101</sup> Frosh, "Telling Presences", 68.

<sup>102</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 22.

## CHAPTER 8

### **The Animated Document and Documentary Animation**

#### **Introduction**

Following my discussion of the virtual and mixed realities that define contemporary networked culture, this chapter explores fully-animated screen-based virtual realities and online game worlds. As these digital animated platforms become increasingly popular environments for daily activities, they surpass the limited definitions of "games" and become a new form of documentation.

Through a technological and theoretical consideration of this emerging documentary field, I will identify a key shift in the role of animation as a documentary language, and will suggest that it should now be considered a central cultural characteristic that can no longer be overlooked or denied. This chapter will introduce the terms "animated document" and "documentary animation", in order to establish animation as a legitimate and necessary component of contemporary documentary.

#### **Gaming and Documenting Animation**

My research interest in digital online games stems from their status as a growing field of animated contemporary virtuality. These "games" may seem non-real to the uninitiated, or to those who assume games to be merely fictional worlds popular with youth. However, a consideration of definitions of games gives rise to a more complex understanding that liberates games from any constraining association with childhood and fantasy or escapism. Philosopher Bernard Suits defines games as "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles".<sup>1</sup> Jane McGonigal describes games as having goals, rules and a feedback system, and as based on voluntary participation.<sup>23</sup> As illustrated in the previous chapter, gamification approaches that implement game mechanics in non-game contexts in order to engage users and solve problems in creative ways accentuate the growing slippages in definitions of game and non-game realms. Many social scientists have chosen to further explore these growing worlds of contemporary play, drawing attention to their psychological, sociological, anthropological and technological characteristics.

Statistics show that the gaming industry has become the largest entertainment business to date, consequently influencing and engaging with larger forms of contemporary culture.<sup>4</sup> Although the figures change daily and are constantly growing, it has been suggested that the online gaming industry is now larger than the film industry and in September 2014, the global revenue for games was estimated as \$20 billion higher than that of the music industry.<sup>5</sup> The gaming industry has grown from 10 to 50 billion dollars in the past two decades and in 2007 already counted over a quarter of the total worldwide internet population as its customers. By 2012 digital games have been expected to become a \$68 billion dollar industry annually.<sup>6</sup> Specific game examples include *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, which sold nearly 5 million units in one day, and *World of Warcraft*, which in 2011 boasted a worldwide subscriber base of more than 11 million registered users.<sup>7</sup> The numbers of people who play digital games at least 13 hours a week, and who define themselves as gamers include: 200 million in China, 183 million in the USA, 105 million in India, 100 million in Europe, 15 million in Australia, 13 million in Central America and 4 million in the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> In the United States, 69% of all heads of household play digital games; 40% of gamers are women; 25% are over the age of fifty; the average gamer is thirty-five years old and has been playing for over twelve years.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps most tellingly, 97% of youth play digital games.<sup>10</sup> These statistics illustrate that, in the developed economies, the youth of today, the audiences of the future, grow up experiencing these worlds on a regular basis. In an interview with *Time* magazine in 2014, Michael Frazzini, vice president for Amazon Games, explained vividly and simply that "at this point...on anything with a screen, games are the No. 1 or 2 activity".<sup>11</sup>

People are, therefore, growing accustomed to experiences in virtual animated environments, to seeing themselves represented by animated virtual personae, and to communicating with others through their animated avatars. The perception of virtual experiences as equal or similar to those experienced physically becomes evident in contemporary self-representational platforms such as Facebook, where users even include screen-shot images of their avatars engaging in virtual experiences as part of their profile pictures.<sup>12</sup> It is, therefore, to be anticipated that digitally virtual experiences may also be documented as part of one's actual experiences and memories. Paul Virilio confirms my analysis when he writes that, "...play is not

something that brings pleasure; on the contrary, it expresses a shift in reality, an unaccustomed mobility. To play today, in a certain sense, means to choose between two realities".<sup>13</sup> Although Virilio here writes of a distinction between "two realities", this does not in any way contradict my claim that there are today multiple realities, the documentation of which requires a reconsideration of key assumptions in the field.



*Second Life*

*Farmville*

Figure 9.1-2: Avatars and virtual experiences included in users' Facebook pictures, samples from my own social network acquaintance profiles

Douglas Gayeton's 2007 HBO documentary film *Molotov Alva and his Search for the Creator* may be considered a landmark example of the evolution of gaming documentaries which document animated realities--or, as I term it, *documenting animation*.<sup>14</sup> The film is about a man named Molotov Alva who disappeared from his California home in January 2007. The film begins by explaining that "recently, a series of video dispatches by a traveller of the same name have appeared within a popular online world called *Second Life*. What follows is his story".<sup>15</sup> The film is available in a series of episodes, or "dispatches", including a narrated version of events alongside conversations Alva has with the virtual residents whom he encounters. Defining Alva as a traveller can be understood to allude to early historical documentary production in which, in a similar manner to the exploration of new online worlds, documentary films were once used to capture lesser known destinations and cultures, displaying them for the audiences "back home". The film's subtitle *A Second Life Odyssey* introduces the main themes examined in both *Molotov Alva* and Homer's *Odyssey*: travel, experiences along the way and, finally, the meaning of "home". Having chosen *Second Life (SL)* over the carbon based world, Alva searches for new territories within this virtual world. Similarly to *The Odyssey*,



the film follows his adventures and discoveries. The idea of "home" also relates to Edward Castronova's book *Exodus to the Virtual World*, and to the notion that 20% of Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) players define themselves as residents of a virtual world.<sup>16</sup> This growing migration into the virtual means that the back story of *Molotov Alva*, which concerns a man who disappears from the "first world" into *Second Life* echoes a dominant cultural trend and is, therefore, more meaningful than may initially seem to be the case.

In the film, the avatar Alva constructs a new identity for himself by creating an avatar, who explores lifestyles and varied online communities, meets people, creates personal relationships, and investigates the *SL* world. It begins with Alva pondering what he left behind in his physical life, which now remain as irrelevant memories due to his "evolution" as a protagonist in *Second Life*. He begins by constructing his avatar, choosing an appearance that is similar to the physical body he left behind, and building a home for himself, until he realizes that material aspects, or their representations in *SL*, have no meaning. "Everything was ornamental", he says. Alva comes to realize that memories are important merely as signifiers of the material world and the feelings that these may evoke, such as the virtual representation of sand on a beach triggering the associations of what that may feel like in the physical world. Who one is in the physical world has no meaning in this virtual one. One character whom Alva meets, Dee Dee, explains that in the virtual world, where corporeal looks don't matter and appearance is unlimited, people are more interested in who she "really" is, on the inside. This relates back to my earlier discussions about the fluidity of visual representations of the "I" in contemporary society in which, as a result of varied forms of technology, one's identity increasingly transcends the physical body, and representations of the self thus break with the physical appearance of that body as well.<sup>17</sup>

Dee Dee and other characters describe the social connections they have made in these virtual worlds, speaking to the growing role of such platforms as significant modes of contemporary communication, despite the artificiality some may see in communication through avatars.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Alva, who chose an avatar that supposedly resembles his physical body, potentially infinite options for self-representation enable users to mask themselves in ways that may feel "more true" to their "real nature" or what they sometimes cannot otherwise show.<sup>19</sup> Self-definition and self-actualization is

a major theme in a virtual world in which everything is potentially possible and people may reinvent the world to fit their needs. The constructedness of the *SL* platform means it is more of a sandbox option in which the player also has the tools to create and modify the world and their own activities.<sup>20</sup> As suggested in the previous chapter, the availability of choices enhances immersion. This flexibility in *SL* becomes apparent, for example, when Molotov Alva describes a community of avatars who live in a virtual Victorian age. "These people weren't made for the 20<sup>th</sup> century, let alone the 21<sup>st</sup>", he claims, which is ironic, since the only way these participants can recreate a different era is through advanced technological means. "The idea that you could be anything or build anything was intoxicating", Alva realizes.

This sense of a limitless universe raises many questions both about games, as well as about the realities that are constructed and documented within them, that are important both for an understanding of the field of documentary as well as to an analysis of the film *Molotov Alva* specifically. In his exploration of the world of *SL*, Alva fluctuates between a sense of there being endless possibilities and no rules, and an impression that the virtual world is a very close impression or reconstruction of the first world. This ranges from an attempt to add greenery to the virtual environment as a way to make a real-life income through in-game capitalism to the moves by corporations to gain control over increasingly larger aspects of *SL* spaces and activities.<sup>21</sup> The exploration of the game world and its meaning leads Alva to search for the creator of the world, introducing a religious element, which evolves into an existential one as Alva realizes that "in this new world, everyone is the creator".

Indirectly then, the constructedness of the virtual world and its similarity, at times, to the physical world, raises larger philosophical questions about the constructedness of realities in general and the individual's role and agency within them. The almost unlimited in-game activities of many virtual game worlds relate to the physical world in varied ways, as can be seen in such examples as Barack Obama's 2008 *SL* campaign or Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Michael Bubl  making a 2011 (digital) appearance in popular Facebook game *CityVille* to promote his album and mingle with fans (by mediation of their avatars, of course); conferences, educational and commercial activities that have in-game aspects as meeting and discussion platforms; reenactments of Guantanamo Bay, as described in the previous chapter;

and many more. Since 2013, professional gamers have even been awarded athlete visas by the United States, which sheds new light from a legal perspective on the status of games today as a sport (known as eSports or electronic sports), a realm of expertise, a profession and more.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the success of game tournaments or e-sports already mirrors the achievements of major-league sports, e-sports are financially sponsored by high fliers such as Coca Cola and American Express, offer millions of dollars in prize money and are estimated to be followed by more than 70 million people world-wide who watch over the internet or on TV.<sup>23</sup> Since these games enable so many non-game functions, it is superficial to think of them as mere entertainment, or as a childish or frivolous activity.<sup>24</sup> The term "gaming widows" to describe (often) women who have "lost" their partners to in-game activities, as well a fear of game addiction, thus coexist today with a growing realization that games may not only be escapist entertainment but are another and legitimate way of life that encompasses many, even if certainly not all, of the needs and interests of many users-players. Once games begin to be acknowledged as less different from non-game platforms/realities than may initially seem, despite the animated settings and avatars that inhabit them, then the documentary of a game-world seems not only logical but even necessary as more people spend more time in such worlds. The field of contemporary gaming thus sheds new light on my arguments in previous chapters with regard to the growing amalgamation of and collision between animated screen worlds and the physical environment of the viewer.



Figure 9.3: Barack Obama's 2008 *Second Life* political campaign

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the film *Molotov Alva*, as an original exploration of virtual worlds, immediately drew a substantial audience. The protagonist documents his experiences in the film with his video camera "to keep a diary, a digital record of my experience here".<sup>25</sup> While the camera seen does not record, of course, it nonetheless indicates more traditional modes of documenting, appealing to historical, film-based conventions of the field presenting an avatar with a camera in the process of documentation accentuates the film's self-reflective character as a new form of documentary, that documents the virtual. Additionally, some of the images in the film are presented to the viewer as if from the perspective of the photographer, with a "recording" sign flashing on the upper left corner. This "record" element obviously refers to documentary conventions, indirectly elevating the ontological status of the virtual which, by being "captured", is made to seem less fictional and more similar to the physical world that the viewer is accustomed to seeing represented photographically. Although a camera can theoretically be seen as a distancing mechanism through which the world is viewed, in this instance it turns the viewers into photographers of the virtual world, as if they too are filming from "within" *SL*. By turning the viewer's screen into a camera lens in this manner, the virtual world is equated with the physical world, which the viewer is sure periodically to have seen through a photographer's lens. This process of watching virtual events through a figurative camera ensures that a familiar gaze is constructed for viewers, thus making the virtual seem less foreign and different from the viewer's physical world.



Figure 9.4: *Molotov Alva: My Life in Second Life*, 2007, by Douglas Gayeton

*Molotov Alva* is also significant as a novel form of documentary that uses animation as a documentary language of representation in a new manner. The film further testifies to the need to create documents which capture elements of new realities that may otherwise not be preserved, either due to changes within the virtual worlds or the technologies they are based on. As Henry Lowood has suggested, "Gayeton was aware that part of his work was to document history that would otherwise be lost...Indeed, most of the [virtual game] locations captured through his character's Odyssey have since been removed from *SL* without a trace other than documents such as Gayeton's video".<sup>26</sup> The question of how digital virtual worlds can be documented is also inscribed into the film on a technical level. *Molotov Alva* reflects developments in the uses of both animation and photography. As Lowood explains, many of the scenes in the film "were recorded literally as cinema verité; Gayeton...simply pointed a high-definition camera at his computer monitor".<sup>27</sup> Gayeton thus used photography to record animation from his computer screen because there was supposedly no other way to capture it. This is, however, no longer the case.<sup>28</sup>

The documentation of virtual worlds has evolved significantly, as is evidenced by the creation of "Machinima" and other real-time animation techniques. The term Machinima is a contraction of "machine" and "cinema" and may be defined as the convergence of filmmaking, animation production and game development technology through the filming of animated interactive virtual spaces. Machinima can document online worlds directly as they appear on-screen as if from "within" the documented "world". As Joshua Diltz asserts, "[m]achinima provides a record of the social evolution of our increasingly technologically-driven society. Like film, it preserves themes, trends, and ideas in visual form. [The virtual records captured are likened to] artefacts [that] can be used to interpret humanity's migration into the digital frontier".<sup>29</sup> Diltz therefore contends that, "the need for machinima can only grow as we become increasingly virtualized".<sup>30</sup> Such records of virtual materials are important in many ways: They obtain data for digital ethnographers interested in game communities, and can also be part of gaming tutorials for other players. In addition, they may be a means of documentary self-expression, and they can be helpful when the technologies depicted become obsolete. They may thus become an inherent part of the formation of an historical archive of game worlds and may also serve as a way for non-gamers to familiarize themselves with this widespread, yet unknown and

"invisible", contemporary sub-culture. Machinima is now recognized as a category in several major film and animation festivals and is having a growing impact upon the field of contemporary art.<sup>31</sup>

Within the context of my theoretical analysis, the documentation of virtual events reaffirms what I have identified as the progressively blurred boundaries between gaming and non-gaming worlds and cultures. This is particularly evident in Eddo Stern's discussion of "non-fiction machinima". Stern describes how "the live nature of online gaming expands the cinematic possibilities of machinima and allows the emulation of cinematic genres such as live action documentary, cinema *vérité*, and surveillance video".<sup>32</sup>

The machinima work *Drakedog's Suicide* (2006) documents the virtual suicide of a well-known Korean player in the *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) game. As the soundtrack indicates that the end is imminent, Drakedog is seen deleting his online *WoW* user profile, studying his inventory screen and removing one item at a time. The meticulous account of his suicide is embedded with the sense of a slow death because each item signifies a trophy earned through "days and weeks and months and years of dedicated gameplay at the highest level possible. In *WoW* you are what items you have, and when those items are gone, you have nothing and there is no going back".<sup>33</sup> For audiences familiar with game culture, this painstaking deletion of items is not only high-wire drama but very emotional. The emotional tension of the film is built through the lingering of the mouse on each item before it is deleted, and culminates in the momentary hesitation of the mouse over the permanent delete button just before Drakedog removes his entire avatar profile. The emotional responses of players to this film would appear to confirm one of the central arguments of this thesis concerning blurring of boundaries between virtual animated and physical realities: "In the comments left on the original video posting, 'Simon' writes: 'anyway, as a *WoW* player I too felt the severity of his action. To those who understand this is as gruesome as a live execution ... rest in peace'".<sup>34</sup>

The emotive aspect of this work should come as no surprise for, as Shields explains, "commentators have not failed to remark that...avatars...and virtual objects not only stand in for flesh-and-blood persons and physical places but they can have significant and shocking impacts on the real-time status and well-being of people".<sup>35</sup> As early as

the 1990s, Julian Dibbell acknowledged that what occurs in virtual worlds is, at the very least, "profoundly compelling and emotionally true".<sup>36</sup> This particular machinima documentation embodies this intricate correspondence between game worlds and non-virtual non-game worlds, a connection that at times diminishes the games' ludic nature.<sup>37</sup> Drakedog's decision to delete, rather than to sell, his hard-earned trophies is a meaningful political anti-capitalist choice made in an era where virtual objects have actual "real-world" value due to the development of an entire economic system based on virtual worlds' currency and the consumption of virtual goods.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 9.5: *Drakedog's Suicide*, Drakedog, 2006

The convergence between game and non-game realms is also seen in the non-fiction machinima known as *Serenity Now* (2008).<sup>39</sup> As Stern succinctly describes it, the film depicts a "WoW player [who] dies in real life, people come to pay respects in the game for the funeral. Rival guild shows up and kills everyone".<sup>40</sup> The documented event created much debate around the specific ethical questions that arose out of the mixing of worlds – a "real life" memorial that was defiled due to game battle conduct and rivalry. Taking us beyond any consideration of individual emotional response, the incident raises broader questions about the place of morality and ethics within the in-game community and its organization.

Dibbell's article "A Rape in Cyberspace", which discussed the on-screen sexual abuse of another player's avatar, illustrated how, early in the construction of these virtual worlds, offensive in-game actions resulted in demands to create in-game codes of ethics and societal structures that borrowed from existing social norms in the non-game world.<sup>41</sup> New technologies often raise such questions, and in turn impact upon and shape everyday life, influencing how participants experience the world as well as how societies are constructed.<sup>42</sup> As such, the ethical questions about social structures and accepted conducts, as well as about authority and punishment procedures in case of violations, are only some of the social aspects recreated and evolving in game worlds. Such questions illuminate the attempts to structure game worlds according to non-game values, laws, conventions and structures, as well as the inherent difficulties in this translation: How can you punish an avatar? According to which rules? And who has the authority to decide?



Figure 9.6: *WoW Funeral Pwnage (Serenity Now)*, 2008

As Philip Rosen has suggested, documentaries require narrativisation and contextualization in order to bestow meaning on the documents included.<sup>43</sup> In both *WoW* documentary works, the emotional impact of the in-game experiences recorded would be most acutely perceived by viewers acquainted with gaming culture. Yet, as Stern claims, these two non-fiction machinima works also "resonate as powerful films



and cultural artefacts unhindered by the contextual boundaries of the game world from which they originate. [These] films offer windows into virtuality's powerful hold on the human heart and mind and a glimpse towards the shape of more things to come".<sup>44</sup> These two case studies demonstrate the diversity that is involved in digital game platforms and reinforce my assertion that they can no longer be regarded only in terms of escapism, or as childhood or youth-oriented games, but rather need to be acknowledged as components of contemporary realities only visible in animated form. Animation can, I propose, play an important role as documentary representation within these worlds and it is in this sense that I position works such as *Molotov Alva*, *Drakedog's Suicide* and *Serenity Now* as *documenting animation*.

### **Machinima**

The Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences defines machinima as "the art of making animated films within a real-time virtual 3D environment".<sup>45</sup> Machinima is a new form of play, animation technique and documentation practice.<sup>46</sup> As the visual surface of games as well as the translation of code into imagery, machinima is both representation *and* ludic action. Although the animation still generates worlds visually, it also, as a documentary language, functions in a similar way to the directness of photography, capturing its referents as they would appear without further stylization on behalf of the documentary creator. Machinima is thus the visual surface but also the interactive event of the game itself, part of the code and the game-play. The gap between reality and representation, or referent and representation, is different from instances in which animation is used to describe either physical events or personal experiences which have no visible form. In this chapter, I will explore Machinima's dual status as event and representation in specific relation to documentaries, documents, footage and artefacts, thus shedding new light on machinima as a novel form of animation that challenges existing preconceptions about the use of animation in documentary contexts. In order to grasp the new possibilities that machinima offers to a theoretical consideration of the place of animation within an expanded documentary field, it is vital first to understand the technologically differentiated techniques of machinima filmmaking.

Different production methods illustrate the multi-layered engagement of animation as used in virtual digital game worlds with notions of documentary. In the context of

gaming and documentation, the animated representation of these worlds takes on an innovative role as the visible surface of these virtual realities made available to all users. In the past, non-physical realities, such as belief systems, were interpreted differently in diverse media, whereas in today's networked world the visualization of digital non-physical realities has a uniform appearance familiar to all users. This is important because it differentiates contemporary non-physical realities from past examples, bestowing visibility upon this new form of dynamic digital reality. Terry Smith explains that invisibility and the multiplication of visualizations are linked because "it is precisely the multiplicity of visualizations that sustains the invisibility of the invisible; since, were the invisible to be associated with a single, or even a few stable visible forms, the invisible would become identified with them, and would henceforth be rendered visible after all".<sup>47</sup> *Animation therefore becomes a direct representation of these otherwise non-visualizable platforms.*

Used in documentary contexts, machinima thus introduces a new perspective to research into animated documentaries by blurring the lines between reality and its representation. The use of animation as a documentary language of the physical accentuates the visual difference between referent and representation. With machinima, the fissure becomes smaller and animation's obvious mediation and constructedness become less prominent. In other words, animation does not function as interpretation or a substitute for photography in documentaries, but rather as what I name: *documentary animation*.

Henry Lowood's nomenclature for the primary methods of machinima productions is extremely helpful in elucidating my theory about machinima's dual status as action *and* representation. The three primary methods of machinima production that Lowood identifies are based on Demo Recording, Screen Capture and Asset Compositing.<sup>48</sup> These correspond to the three ways of documenting the history of virtual worlds: replay, player's point of view recording, and asset extraction.<sup>49</sup>

### **1. Demo Recording and Replay based on Code**

As Ward explains "[i]n the case of a videogame (or any computer-generated, digital imagery) objects and actions are mathematically modeled and manipulated, and the text is stored as binary code".<sup>50</sup> As the earliest form of machinima, Demo Recordings

are not movies, per se, but rather code-based visualizations grounded in sequences of commands. The game engine, in other words, repeats the effects of the actions executed by players. Through programming hacks that extend the possibilities of the game, the game can transform into a new performance space that creates moving imagery through camera options that transcend the game view of a specific player-actor. This means that, in the beginning, the production of in-game films required gaming literacy and technological savvy in order to make the necessary modifications to the game to create original content. These early machinima works are viewable only in the game-engines within which they were created, and are sometimes already obsolete, accentuating the dependence on game technology as a replay engine in post-production and distribution.

## **2. Screen Capture and Player's Point of View Recording**

By 2004, new machinima technologies, which were unrestricted by the game engine through which they were made, became more popular.<sup>51</sup> This type of Machinima no longer relied on the game engine for replay and distribution, but was solely a tool for production. Audiences no longer necessarily had to be experienced gamers with specific technological equipment and know-how. This type of machinima is referred to as "Screen Capture" because it "captured what was displayed on the screen (or perhaps more accurately, the graphics card) as video...could no longer be edited as code...[and] could only be produced [and viewed using]...digital video formats".<sup>52</sup> This made both production and spectatorship more accessible to wider, non-gamer audiences and enabled new mash-ups that further blurred the boundaries between game worlds.<sup>53</sup>

Michael Nitsche acknowledges the implications of this new method for machinima as a documentary medium for virtual worlds: "This is a paradigm shift from the recording of the event (in a demo) to the recording of a viewpoint to the event (in a screen capture)".<sup>54</sup> In other words, this technical change effects a shift from the ludic to the cinematic, the game now acting as a performance space for a cinematic-like work. As I shall go on to argue below, this distinction opens up new possibilities in the theoretical grounds for documenting animation.

### **3. Asset Extraction and Compositing: Models and Artifacts of Virtual Worlds**

The third form of machinima work production employs game assets and content, including models, characters, sets, costumes, props, maps and textures, which can be imported into the artist's studio and used as components that may be combined with other imagery from other visual sources. Game worlds thus become sources in which to create animation, and are used as cinematic spaces that facilitate increased independence in creativity and production. This explanation differentiates the third type of machinima from the earlier ones. Technological advances have facilitated an ever-enriching repository that, within the context of my consideration of how animation can function as a documentary language, acknowledges the prolific nature of this medium. "Compositing game assets resembled demo in the sense that it depended on game data, but at the same time this technique primarily called on artistic prowess in realms such as 3D model, animation, or video editing rather than coding (demo) or gameplay and puppeteering (screen capture) skills".<sup>55</sup> The varied techniques of machinima illustrate the multi-layered relation animation has with documentary in these cases, acting both as record and event, as captured image as well as platform of activity and creation.

#### **The Impact of Machinima on Theorizations of Documentary**

Lowood and Nitsche's categorization of machinima as three primary methods of production based on differences in technology reveals a complexity whose value to contemporary theorizations of documentary has hitherto been overlooked. I will argue that machinima's impact on theorizations of documentary is enhanced once its manner of production is taken into consideration. According to Rosen, the term "documentary" first appears in the nineteenth century and was used as an adjective indicating a reference to documentation. Machinima's technical form of production dictates its role as artefact or document, as I will explain, and completely change its relation to documentary and to previous theorizations of animated documentaries which have overlooked this aspect of the field. Discussing machinima's impact on theorizations of documentary requires a renegotiation of machinima's relation to photography and, consequently, of animation's role as document and documentary. As this thesis has proposed, illustrating how animation can act as a document is vital in

the consideration of animated documentaries and their reception. The study of games is helpful in this context, since a recurring issue within the broader field of game studies is whether games should be examined as narrative works (known as the narratology approach) or as unique structural systems with specific characteristics (the ludology approach).<sup>56</sup>

In order to understand machinima's complex role as documentary, it is essential to conceptualize machinima from both a ludic as well as cinematic perspective. Both are crucial to the ontological status of the digitally virtual. If seen as ludic, machinima becomes the event or artefact upon which a documentary bases itself, while as a cinematic format, machinima can act as document or record, and resembles photography, which can be similarly edited to create certain meanings.

Machinima can, therefore, act both as fabula, the raw material of a story, when perceived as an event in its ludic form, but also, in its cinematic and edited form, as representation and as the means through which the story is narrativised, thus organizing that raw material. If machinima is perceived as ludic, it is the event itself, and as such, it is the referent that is being depicted which means that it is the animation being documented. However, if machinima is cinematic, it is a form of representation, and as such, it is somewhat removed from the event itself, making it the documentary animation. It is, therefore, necessary to differentiate between *machinima as a technique* of real-time interactive animation--the ludic, and *machinima works*, films that are no longer themselves interactive but are rather based on captured footage of game data--the cinematic.

All machinima techniques inherently require real-time rendering within the original 3D game software, emphasizing their ludic aspects. Machinima is based on game paradigms, artificial intelligence (AI), and other players' actions and, as such, "generat[es] content as part of the interaction with the performer".<sup>57</sup> Machinima thus represents complex and multi-layered content and interaction, rather than just imagery. From a ludic viewpoint then, machinima is a form of digital performance, the visual form of in-game actions where players puppeteer their characters inside real-time 3D game engines, acting as "real-world actors mapped into virtual performance spaces".<sup>58</sup> Hence, machinima is the event of gaming.

Games operate through image *production* whereas traditional cinema is grounded in image *recording*. For this reason I claim that the cinematic aspects of machinima works are based on machinima as a visual preservation of in-game occurrences, somewhat like photography of physical events. Transforming interactive non-linear platforms into linear works meant for viewing demands editing and sequencing or narrativisation, similar to the way in which any physical event can be depicted differently.

The debate about machinima's ludic or cinematic facets can be clarified by using terms from the previous chapter, which argued that machinima's indexical nature can be twofold. As ludic event, it embodies a physical trace of the players' actions and movements while, as cinematic work, machinima acts as a deixis, pointing to the in-game event or objects. Documentary requires an expressive frame or narrativising aspect that structures and creates meaning out of documents, artefacts or footage.<sup>59</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an artefact is an "object made or modified by human workmanship", while a document "furnishes evidence or information".<sup>60</sup> It is important to recall that, although all of machinima's techniques are based in the ludic event production, all three machinima production techniques relate to these components and necessities of documentary differently. Where Demo Recordings and, slightly differently, Asset Compositing act as artefacts of the ludic, Screen Capture and Asset Compositing are, in different ways, more similar to documents and the cinematic in that they construct raw footage into a new and narrativised whole.

The ludic aspect of machinima is embodied in Demo Recording, where what is preserved is the game code of the human-computer interactions (HCI) that created the event within its original domain, the game engine. It is therefore not only visualization: even though the player may no longer be involved in an interactive role, it is the event itself that is being recreated, not just its visual record. Demo Recording machinima acts both as a technological artefact (of the series of actions stored in code to recreate the event) as well as its visual footage (since the code is translated into visuals) and thus serves as a visual document. Although this footage of gaming worlds is a direct artefact and can thus be compared to photography of physical events, it in itself does not suffice as a documentary, in which it is the sequencing and narrativisation of raw materials that creates meaning.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike Demo Recording, which records events as data, Screen Capture preserves what is seen on screen, thus drawing it more in the direction of the cinematic and photographic. With regard to documentary production, Screen Capture is not only based on artefacts or footage but rather encompasses the particular perspective of the camera view, which is then sequenced in order to create a cinematic and edited linear work. Since editing is involved, Screen Capture also becomes similar to Asset Compositing. Since Asset Compositing involves components extracted from game worlds, these can be acknowledged as artefacts, documents or footage, but because the end-product, the final linear segment, is edited and composed of varied sources, it is also similar to the edited and narratively constructed nature of Screen Capture.

As representation, Machinima is real-time animation that destabilizes assumptions about animation, especially in comparison to photography. Machinima recordings differ from other animated techniques because they are not interpretive visuals that are created by the animator. Instead, machinima works are a record of externally designed visuals that capture events in the only visible form of the gaming platform so that what is recorded is a direct portrayal of protagonists and events. Machinima thus acts as footage of the virtual in the sense that viewers are presented with what occurred in the virtual environments as it was seen by its "inhabitants". Because recording techniques include what takes place on screen in the online environments, I claim that machinima can thus be understood as similar to photography although only in its ability to record non-physical elements. In these cases, animation is thus a "virtual document", a document of the virtual.

Theorizing machinima as photography of the virtual raises questions as to the ontological status of these virtual platforms. In his discussion of photography in the digital era, Damian Sutton explains that a photograph can either be interpreted as real or as not real only on the grounds that what it photographs is actually real.<sup>62</sup> "[T]wo conflicting ontologies appear – the photograph-as-transparent, and the photograph-as-object [as representation]".<sup>63</sup> In this sense, if machinima is a direct, rather than interpretive, record of a virtual occurrence, then it is inferred that it is transparent, which, as a result, positions the virtual events recorded as "the real".

The ontological status of machinima and gaming domains is largely based on the live-nature characteristic of machinima. David Cameron and John Carroll raise the

question as whether there is "a difference between recording human interaction with a computer game and recording...[a] performance in front of a video camera?"<sup>64</sup> As previously discussed, some animation techniques used in documentary may produce a sense of absence due to animation's break with its physical referent. While Greenberg claims this apparent lack of a clear "presence" or visual index is a defining characteristic of animation, I argue that, as the uses and technologies of animation evolve, absence is not necessarily typical of animation. This is indeed the case with machinima, which relies on human-computer interaction (HCI), that dictates the actions visualized, as well as on the presence of players, who control their avatars and interact with others. Machinima thus indexes the actions of those players and signifies a presence, albeit technologically mediated, by visualizing in real-time player movements and actions. Animation is, therefore, in these instances an indication of presence, while in machinima works, it is also a representational device. Whereas animation was once a form of representation it now evolves to be both representation AND, in regard to the virtual, also a signifier of presence.

A central element in the discussion of presence or a sense of presence is one introduced by Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello in regard to realism, namely the issue of immediacy. As I have suggested, machinima evokes a kind of presence which is not physical, but where there is nonetheless definitely a sense of involvement and immediacy. One does not have to be physically "there" (wherever "there" may be in regard to the virtual) in order to sense some form of presence due to the smoothness of the interaction and the rapidity of reply, or the outcomes of the user input. The question is, what creates that sense of involvement? While Janet Murray has suggested that the issue of agency is central in this respect, I propose that the issue of time is also of critical importance: Real-time interaction is vital.<sup>65</sup> Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska claim that, "immediacy is based on the creation of an impression of 'liveness' or 'presence'...A sense of presence can be defined in terms of 'inhabiting' or exploring a digitally produced landscape".<sup>66</sup> In his book *War and Cinema*, Virilio discerns a central shift from the nineteenth century, during which space was a defining issue, to the contemporary moment, in which the central issue is one of time, as real-time communication and data transferal have come to triumph over the issue of space.<sup>67</sup> In other words, distance in space becomes less of an issue in real-time interaction. Since actions are no longer performed only within physical spaces, online



gaming platforms are not so very different from other non-physical virtual computerized environments. In this sense, the digitally virtual takes on a notion of space, becoming connected to physical reality by virtue of shared time. The issue of presence is thus a vital aspect of contemporary animation, since viewers can see themselves as "present" in animated form, thus evoking the realization that the realities in which they are active can appear both as physical appearance but also in varied visual form.

All three machinima production techniques are characterized by real-time visualization, which I have in this chapter explored in terms of the relation between virtual and non-virtual worlds. Moreover, the immediacy of real-time visual mapping of one's physical movements onto corresponding avatars creates a form of presence that, I maintain, creates a sense of realism that compensates for animation's non-naturalistic form/visuals.<sup>68</sup> Users of virtual worlds are encouraged to feel that they can be "in-there", in the digitally virtual, technologically mediated space of the internet, as well as "out here", in the physical world. The distinctions between mediating technology, avatar performance and embodied player are condensed in video gaming's audiovisual setup because programming establishes the "relation between rapid finger twitches and 3D illusion", namely that "they mean each other, point to each other, supplement each other".<sup>69</sup> The concluding chapter of this thesis will elaborate how real-time animated visualization exceeds the visualization of virtual worlds and is increasingly being used in representations of physical realities as well, merging the two even further. This not only strengthens my earlier claim about the amalgamation of animated worlds with the viewer's physical world but also reinforces my claim that animation is being increasingly accepted and used as a documentary visual language because viewers are growing accustomed to seeing themselves, their actions and environments (whether physical or virtual) in visual representations that increasingly break with human perception and include more than can be depicted in photographic means.

## **Conclusion**

In the present day, the virtual and the material can no longer be seen as opposed, but rather as complementing facets of a mixed reality. Under these circumstances, new visual languages of documentation that surpass the photographic are needed. It is,

therefore, my contention that animation, when released from its reliance on the physical, becomes a pertinent representational strategy through which to explore and document evolving forms of non-physical, digitally virtual realities. This chapter accordingly focused upon digital gaming platforms as an example of virtual worlds that are a) immensely popular and, as such, influence contemporary visual culture at large and b) a form of the digitally virtual that takes pictorial representation one step further, being fully animated. Gaming domains thus represent a particular aspect of computerized virtuality, but also share characteristics with the digitally virtual that will be familiar to all internet users, not just gamers.

The chapter explored the documentation of realities whose visual appearance was animated. By examining the role of digitally virtual animated environments, I drew attention to the phenomenon of *documenting animation*. I showed how, in these instances, animation is part of the features of the environment presented and not a separate form of representation chosen for documentary reasons. I argued that the visual language of animation as documentary depiction must now be conceived of differently, thus adding an additional tier to the understanding of animation today, its contemporary uses, and role in documentary theory. While most existing discussions of animated documentaries refer to actual physical events depicted in animation or to subjective experiences given visual form, the case here is different. Within documentary games, animation is both ludic--an event and form of presence that signifies the players' actions--whilst also simultaneously acting as a cinematic form of representation that directly captures animated realities. In these instances, then, animation is not interpretive but a direct capture, an *animated document*. Yet documentaries of animated virtual worlds do not "just happen" to be animated; animation is rather a direct record of the visual surface of virtual 3D environments, making the animation "*documentary animation*". A crucial differentiation thus emerges between animated documentaries and documentary animation, as will be mapped out in the conclusion below.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 22.

<sup>2</sup> McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> The distinction and relationship between games and play is a complex field in itself, which exceeds the scope of my essay. It is, however, useful to note Brian Sutton-Smith's explanation for the reasons people play and the cultural function of that play, which is "placed in context within broader value systems", in order to understand how the concept of play actually relates to vast and very serious areas of life. Sutton-Smith identifies seven categories of play, which include: play as progress, fate, power, identity, the imaginary, the self, and frivolity, each of which orchestrates play in different ways and for different ends. For more information, see Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8-12.

<sup>4</sup> For historical and conceptual studies of gaming, two valuable resources are Ian Bogost, "Comparative Videogame Criticism", *Games and Culture* 1 (2006): 41-46; Alex Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Nick Wingfield, "Video Games Go Big League", *International New York Times*, September 1, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Joshua Diltz, "Digital Voices", *Journal of Visual Culture* 10:1 (2011): 56.

<sup>8</sup> McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*, 3.

This not only goes to show the vast numbers of people who experience these realities but also the schism between those who live in the technological world, whose realities are enhanced and who experience the contemporary world in a certain way versus those who are "limited" to the physical world. As I proceed to show how these virtual platforms become another aspect of reality, this highlights yet another divide between different socioeconomic groups around the globe, an important topic for future research.

<sup>9</sup> "Essential Facts About the Game Industry: 2010 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data", Entertainment Software Association, June 16, 2010 [www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA\\_Essential\\_Facts\\_2010.PDF](http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_Essential_Facts_2010.PDF).

<sup>10</sup> "Essential Facts About the Game Industry: 2010 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data", Entertainment Software Association, June 16, 2010 [www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA\\_Essential\\_Facts\\_2010.PDF](http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_Essential_Facts_2010.PDF).

<sup>11</sup> David Carr, "\$1.1 Billion: This Isn't Child's Play", *International New York Times*, September 1, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> In this regard it is also useful to clarify that physical and gaming experiences are obviously inherently different but not always mutually exclusive. Gamers often experience physical reactions to gaming experiences such as heightened adrenalin and/or anxiety. For more information see the following journals: *CyberPsychology & Behavior*; *Teleoperators & Virtual Environments*; *Journal of Media Psychology*.

For an interesting exploration of personal and social identities shaped online at the beginning of the twenty-first century, see photographer Robbie Cooper's *Alter Ego* project that includes portraits of online gamers and virtual-world participants from America, Asia and Europe who are paired with images of their avatars. Images are available online at [www.robbiecooper.org/small.html](http://www.robbiecooper.org/small.html) and in print: Robbie Cooper, *Alter Ego: Avatars and their Creators* (New York: Chris Boot, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Paul Virilio and Jerome Sans, "Games of Love and Chance" in *Games of Architecture: Architectural Design*, ed. Maggie Toy (Boston: Wiley, 1996), 96.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Gayeton is a multimedia artist who has created award-winning work at the boundaries of traditional and converging media, his work has been added to the collections of the San Jose Museum of Art, New York's Museum of the Moving Image, and Trento's Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali.

<sup>15</sup> *Second Life (SL)* is an internet accessed virtual world launched in 2003 by Linden Lab. *SL* users, or residents, are represented by avatars, animated characters representing the player, that can interact with other users, explore the game space and create virtual property.

<sup>16</sup> See Edward Castronova, *Exodus to the Virtual World: How Online Fun is Changing Reality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Quoted from Juan Carlos Piñeiro Escoriaza's film *Second Skin* (2008).

<sup>17</sup> An interesting example from the world of gaming is the character of Leeroy Jenkins who, in the mid-2000s, became famous for his botched game strategy actions in the game *World of Warcraft*. The game documentation of the unusual event went viral. What is interesting is that in this case, the avatar Leeroy Jenkins, rather than the player Ben Schultz, became famous, pointing at a significant difference between film actors who shed their characters and are known for their non-film selves whereas in-game personas became part of (or perhaps in this case seize dominance over) the player-creator behind them. A decade later, however, the distinction between game-players and film-actors is less clear in some ways. As the field of e-sports reaches heights of popularity, famous players nowadays are known both for their in-game personas as well as their non-game identities, shifting the boundaries between in-game and non-game selves all the more and pointing to the multiplicity of the self which, once again, exceeds the corporeal appearance of one's body. For more on the story of Leeroy Jenkins see Joel Warner, "The Legend of Leeroy Jenkins", *Denver Westword News*, March 8, 2004, accessed April 8, 2014, [www.westword.com/2007-03-08/news/the-legend-of-leeroy-jenkins/6/](http://www.westword.com/2007-03-08/news/the-legend-of-leeroy-jenkins/6/); for more on e-sports see Wingfield, "Video Games Go Big League".

<sup>18</sup> The social function of games is in itself is a huge field of research and discourse, especially in an era where virtual communications exceed game worlds. In fact, the multiple forms of avatars most technologically-connected people use on a daily basis in varied online profiles creates a similarity between such profiles and in-game avatars.

<sup>19</sup> Juan Carlos Piñeiro Escoriaza's 2008 film *Second Skin*, for example, included an interview with a handicapped teenage boy who, when living through his avatar, can walk and even fly like everyone else around him, leaving his bodily limitations behind.

<sup>20</sup> The term "sandbox" refers to a form of categorization of game design that can be placed on a continuum between sandbox, open or free-roaming games versus more structured game designs where in-game restrictions enforce a certain linearity, gameplay or objectives. In sandbox games players can roam freely through a virtual world with minimal barriers and a freedom regarding how to approach objectives, and tools with which to create and modify the world and their activities.

<sup>21</sup> The virtual economy is also called "the secondary market" or "virtual currency trade". For more information on the topic of virtual economies, see Edward Castronova, "On Virtual Economies", *Game Studies* 3:2 (2003), unpaginated, accessed March 12, 2012, [www.gamestudies.org/0302/castronova/](http://www.gamestudies.org/0302/castronova/); Samuel Weber, "A Virtual Indication" in *Digital and Other Virtualities*, ed. Antony Bryant and Griselda Pollock (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> For more information about the US granting athlete visas to professional gamers see Yannick Lejacq, "Score! Professional Video Gamers Awarded Athletic Visas", *NBC News*, July 20, 2013, accessed July 29, 2013 [www.nbcnews.com/tech/video-games/score-professional-video-gamers-awarded-athletic-visas-f6C10679998](http://www.nbcnews.com/tech/video-games/score-professional-video-gamers-awarded-athletic-visas-f6C10679998).

In 2014 Robert Morris University in Chicago will be the first academic institution to award more than \$500,000 in athletic scholarships to gamers. See Wingfield, "Video Games Go Big League".

<sup>23</sup> Wingfield, "Video Games Go Big League".

<sup>24</sup> Whereas some games require in-depth involvement, rule-learning, collaboration with others and time, others may offer quick respite that is also important in understanding their growing popularity. Jane McGonigal discusses the importance of what games teach their players, which can then be used in the "real world". These may include strategy learning, collaborations and even long term goal oriented actions in non-casual games or the immediacy of satisfaction and success in casual games, which fill the player with a very real sense of motivation, control, agency and a sense of the ability to impact, even if the goals achieved were virtual. She thus explains the growing tendency to play games at work, even if for a short while, as a kind of "game boost" on a regular basis. For more see Jane McGonigal's 2011 book *Reality is Broken*.

<sup>25</sup> Quote from Douglas Gayeton's 2007 film *Molotov Alva: My Life in Second Life*.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Lowood, "Video Capture: Machinima, Documentation, and the History of Virtual Worlds" in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>27</sup> Lowood, "Video Capture", 13. Director Joe Goss used a similar technique in his work on *Quad God*. For more on this see Matt Kelland, "From Game Mod to Low-Budget Film: The Evolution of Machinima" in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 24.

<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that the animation is on the screen but it is not like recording from the TV because what is seen is not a film or TV show but a real-time interactive environment which is being preserved. Rather than equate it to recording from one's TV screen, it makes more sense to compare this to photographing an occurrence taking place in front of you, albeit not a physical occurrence.

<sup>29</sup> Diltz, "Digital Voices", 58.

<sup>30</sup> Diltz, "Digital Voices", 58.

<sup>31</sup> There are already existing machinima festivals today and a move toward integrating machinima with officially sanctioned art exhibitions has also already begun. For example, Robert Nideffer and Antoinette LaFarge curated '*Alt-Ctrl*' at the Beall Center for Art and Technology in California in 2004 ([www.beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions/altctrl.php](http://www.beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions/altctrl.php)); and in 2009, Grace Kook-Anderson curated '*WOW: Emergent Media Phenomenon*' with assistance from Blizzard's curator Tim Campbell and Eddo Stern at the Laguna Art Museum in California ([www.lagunaartmuseum.org/wow-emergent-media-phenomenon](http://www.lagunaartmuseum.org/wow-emergent-media-phenomenon)). For more information see Robert F. Nideffer, "Eight Questions (and Answers) about Machinima", *Journal of Visual Culture* 10:1 (2011): 73

Also, reviews of machinima works have been covered in academic journals. See Phylis Johnson, "Machinima Reviews Editor's note", *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* 3:1 (2011): 83–88.

<sup>32</sup> Eddo Stern, "Massively Multiplayer Machinima Mikusuto", *Journal of Visual Culture* 10:1 (2011): 45.

<sup>33</sup> Stern, "Massively Multiplayer Machinima Mikusuto", 47.

<sup>34</sup> Stern, "Massively Multiplayer Machinima Mikusuto", 47.

<sup>35</sup> Shields, *The Virtual*, xv.

<sup>36</sup> Dibell, "A Rape in Cyberspace", unpaginated.

A rich research culture on these topics can be seen in the multitude publications of, among many others, the following journals: *Cyberpsychology – A Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*; *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social networking*.

<sup>37</sup> Ludology is the study of games and gaming, especially of video and digital games. For more information see Gonzalo Frasca, "Simulation vs. Narrative: Introduction to Ludology" in *The Video Game Theory Reader*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> According to Steve Salyer, a former game developer and now president of Internet Gaming Entertainment, as early as 2005, "players spend a real-world total of \$880 million a year for virtual goods and services produced in online games...not counting sales of the games themselves". Mark Wallace "The Game is Virtual. The Profit is Real", *New York Times*, May 29, 2005, accessed July 12, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> The film is available [www.wn.com/Serenity\\_Now\\_bombs\\_a\\_World\\_of\\_Warcraft\\_funeral](http://www.wn.com/Serenity_Now_bombs_a_World_of_Warcraft_funeral)

<sup>40</sup> Stern, "Massively Multiplayer Machinima Mikusuto", 49.

<sup>41</sup> Dibell, "A Rape in Cyberspace", unpaginated.

<sup>42</sup> Benita Shaw, *Technoculture*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> See my discussion of Rosen's notion of document and documentary in Chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup> Stern, "Massively Multiplayer Machinima Mikusuto", 49.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Marino, *3D Game-Based Filmmaking: The Art of Machinima* (Scottsdale, AZ: Paraglyph Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Nitsche, "Machinima as Media" in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 113.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 130.

<sup>48</sup> Lowood, "Video Capture", 4.

<sup>49</sup> Lowood, "Perfect Capture", 114.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Ward, "Videogames as Remediated Animation", in *ScreenPlay – Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, ed. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002), 123.

<sup>51</sup> Kelland, "From Game Mod to Low-Budget Film", 23.

<sup>52</sup> Lowood, "Video Capture", 11.

In 2004 *Sims 2* by Electronic Arts (EA) was one of the first games to include simple movie-making tools, expanding the possibilities of in-game film production immeasurably. Although this ensured greater viewing potential and visibility, it also reduced machinima to a production technique that fed into traditional media formats, putting the emphasis on the image recording rather than the event production. For more on this see Nitsche, "Machinima as Media", 113-26.

<sup>53</sup> Katie Salen, "Arrested Development: Why Machinima Can't (or Shouldn't) Grow up", in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 47.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Nitsche, "Claiming Its Space: Machinima", *Dichtung Digital: Journal für digitale Ästhetik* 37 (2007), unpaginated. Accessed January 27, 2010) [www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2007/Nitsche/nitsche.htm](http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2007/Nitsche/nitsche.htm)

<sup>55</sup> Lowood, "Video Capture", 16.

<sup>56</sup> For more Game Studies research from a narratology perspective see works by Janet Murray and Lev Manovich, and for the ludology perspective of the field see Espen Aarseth and M. Eskelinen.

<sup>57</sup> David Cameron and John Carroll, "Encoding Liveness: Performance and Real-Time Rendering in Machinima", in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 128. I will not venture into AI works both due to the scope of this research and because, in order to create a narrative, even if there are AI characters, they are not the main characters.

<sup>58</sup> Ali Mazalek, "Tangible Narratives: Emerging Interfaces for Digital Storytelling and Machinima" in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 96.

<sup>59</sup> See my discussion of Rosen and Poremba in the previous chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online [www.dictionary.oed.com](http://www.dictionary.oed.com) accessed June 5, 2013.

<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note the comments by historian Timothy Burke about the difficulty of carrying out qualitative research on virtual worlds when historians lack personal experiences in such environments so that even if the data is available, the interpretation and narrative history is limited because "context and personal perspective are needed to supplement historical documentation". Timothy Burke, "The History of Virtual Worlds", post and comment on the blog *Terra Nova*, December 1 2006, accessed September 12, 2012 [www.terranova.blogs.com/terra\\_nova/2006/12/the\\_history\\_of\\_.html](http://www.terranova.blogs.com/terra_nova/2006/12/the_history_of_.html)

<sup>62</sup> Damian Sutton, "Real Photography", in *The State of the Real – Aesthetics in the Digital Age*, ed. Damian Sutton, Susan Brind and Ray McKenzie (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 163.

<sup>63</sup> Sutton, "Real Photography", 163.

<sup>64</sup> Cameron and Carroll, "Encoding Liveness", 129.

<sup>65</sup> Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, 127-9. For a more extensive discussion of Murray's observations in this respect, see Chapter 7 above.

<sup>66</sup> Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska "Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces", in *ScreenPlay – Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, ed. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>67</sup> See Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema* (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

<sup>68</sup> The aesthetics of machinima are often compromised and sacrificed for better real-time performance, in contrast with the graphical quality of other 3D animation techniques with high definition depictions of human faces, textures, emotions etc.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Krapp, "Of Games and Gestures: Machinima and the Suspension of Animation", in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche (London: MIT Press, 2011), 163.

## CONCLUSION

Through a close consideration of the emerging field of animated documentaries this thesis has identified a major shift in the relation between animation and documentary. The starting point for my research was prevailing assumptions around the conflicting nature of animated documentaries which, I contended, could no longer be upheld in light of major developments in technology and theory. The assumed "artificiality" of animation rests on its comparison with photography: it is generally seen to break the physical link with and likeness to the represented physical object that is embodied by analogue photography. The viewing experience of animated documentaries is, furthermore, presented as a rift between what viewers know to be actual (as they have personally perceived it) and a visual form that is foreign to their lived physical space, yet which is labelled as factual. Whereas animation has been theorized as separate from the physical world, I claim that, due to technological developments which place the digital and virtual as central to contemporary culture, the gap between animation and the physical, as well as between animation and photography, is narrowing, thus contributing to the loss of animation's assumed fictitious nature. Since animation is an ideal form of real-time representation for shared, dynamic, non-physical realities, the rise of the virtual can serve to account for the proliferating uses of animation in the realm of non-fiction. An analysis of the changing uses of animation in contemporary culture thus points to an expansion of what is now understood to constitute reality as well as of what is accepted as documentary aesthetics.

The existing literature on animated documentaries focuses on animation's ability to stand in for un-photographed footage of physical-world events or to convey subjective or fantastical accounts of experiences. My thesis identifies a gap in the field of study. In seeking to explain the remarkable rise both in the production of, and the theoretical interest in, animated documentaries, I have embarked on an interdisciplinary study, focusing on the defining characteristics of contemporary digital culture. My research suggests that animation has become a central visual language of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, encountered in many contexts. Through the increasing proliferation of animation as a visual language I sought to clarify the seemingly strange choice to use animation to refer to contemporary realities and to re-examine animation's reception and status in relation to documentary. In this final chapter, I shall conclude by exploring the



ramifications of animation's changing cultural uses and addressing how the latter impact upon the ways in which information is presented and perceived, shaping truth claims as well as reality itself.

The chapter integrates issues and concepts introduced throughout the thesis to engage with my key research questions and to reaffirm my main arguments. The research questions posed are:

The key questions guiding my research have been:

1. How has the role and use of animation changed in visual culture since the 1990s and how has the integration of animation into new cultural fields influenced the theorization and spectatorship of animation?
2. What are the advantages of using animation in documentary practice?
3. Why now? What are the reasons for the rise of animated documentary production and research at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
4. Can animation be used as a document or to document?
5. How do changing uses and conceptualizations of animation influence the discourse on and assumptions surrounding documentary today?

In the first part of the conclusion, I shall synthesize my findings about animation in present-day culture, which, I argue, shape a paradigm shift in animation's uses and reception. In the second part, I affirm the significant contribution that this research makes to the theoretical discourse around animated documentaries. The conclusion places its emphasis on documents, credible aesthetics, indexicality, and the need to reconsider assumptions about realism. I also discuss the possible implications of the changes I illustrate for contemporary visual and information culture, speculating on future trends and identifying the need for further research into this emerging subject area.

### **Animation's Changing Role in Contemporary Visual Culture**

In the past, animation was associated with fiction and with childhood content, mostly due to animation's widespread cultural uses and its ability to portray the fantastical.<sup>1</sup> In many early works that used animation in non-fictional contexts, such as

propaganda or informational films, a relation to humour and/or fantasy often persisted. This is obvious in the emphasis on the frightened fish in *The Sinking of the Luisitania* (1918), Disney's *Seven Wise Dwarfs* (1941), which featured the dwarfs from the *Snow White* film (1937) marching to the Post Office in order to purchase war savings certificates, or else the entertaining watering down of content through humorous animations in the 1982 film *Atomic Café* about nuclear explosions. Although the imbrication of animation with documentary modes is a paradigm shift in progress, I claim that animation is increasingly losing its assumed fictitious and/or comical status. Animation is now increasingly being used in non-fiction contexts by authoritative sources, such as *BBC*, *Reuters* and *The Guardian*, thus facilitating its acceptance as a legitimate and believable visual form through which to depict factual information.



Figure 10.1: *Atomic Café*, 1982, by Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty

The thesis has identified a number of reasons to explain the growing use and acceptance of animation in contemporary culture, including the search for new forms of imagery in an uber-visual culture; today's progressively experimental documentary explorations of reality; an increased expectancy of images alongside a growing mistrust in them; the shifting role of the virtual in daily lives, both as a new form of reality and as a basis for visualization that is now used to depict the physical as well.

First of all, the growing interest in animated documentaries since the 1990s coincides with a wider transformation in the field of documentary. The documentary turn in visual culture arose in an era of enormous upheavals and confusion about emerging

globalization, which invoked a desire to "touch the real" and to "organize complexities".<sup>2</sup> This is seen in a body of experimental documentary practice and imagery that constructs the present in many ways. Animation plays a significant role in this broader documentary turn in that it enables the generation of dynamic visual representations of events that were not or could not otherwise be visually depicted. These include photographically unrecorded or censored content; un-photographable fields and materials, including the subjective, microscopic or vastly-large—space, for example; and the non-physical--the digitally virtual, large quantities of data or theoretical explanations that use animation for demonstration and clarification. Increasingly omnipresent in a visual culture in which surveillance and personal cameras have created an expectation for and of imagery, animation fulfils the demand for attention-capturing visuals due to its endless stylistic variety.

Secondly, animation in documentaries self-reflexively engages with many of the issues surrounding current crises in representation and mistrust in the field of information consumption today. While documentaries are, on one hand, more powerful than ever, on the other hand, they are less trusted in a contemporary culture increasingly characterized by suspicion towards the visual.<sup>3</sup> This existing sense of uncertainty in regard to non-fictional representations generates a need for new forms of representation as well as ones that directly acknowledge this present state of affairs. Animated documentaries as a form of masking, as I define them, highlight exactly this. Emphasizing the limited and always partial nature of information disclosure, animated documentaries reveal whilst also disguising information and blatantly declare themselves as representation. Especially when depicting physical events that could have been photographed, the stylistic forms of animation emphasize the fact that the content is an interpretation and could have been represented differently as well. The contemporary viewer is constantly reminded of the mediated nature of information and of the need to actively consider the problematics of transparency and analysis presented as "truth". The topic of trust comes to the forefront as a consequence. In an era in which truthiness replaces truth, convincing communication becomes central to information representation and reception.<sup>4</sup> In a culture in which viewers must ascertain when something is "true enough", the viewer plays a central role in defining a work's documentary status.

In my critical analysis of the existing discourse on realism—a discourse which is to be characterized by an on-going tension between a reliance on mimesis versus an unending search for new forms of representation that will articulate the real anew--I accordingly focused on what could evoke believability for the viewer, regardless of formal qualities. The work of Charles Hill on the concept of vividness as well as Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello's work on varied reality effects led me to acknowledge the importance of witnessing as an authenticating device that promotes documentary status by simulating presence and directness for the viewer. "Witnessing" is, however, a complex notion in an era in which realism is theorized, ontologically and epistemologically, in a manner that decentralizes human perception. My own research suggests that the growing reliance upon technology, and upon augmented and machine vision results in "synthetic" images to which viewers become increasingly accustomed, and which include many such "non-human" views of the world. This led me to acknowledge a multiplicity of viewpoints and aesthetics that do not rely on the single criterion of human vision or upon an aesthetic accepted as realistic, but that rather enhance a sense of viewer presence and immersion through interactive, virtual simulations of "actual experience" for viewers.

Thirdly, the changing nature of animation since the 1990s and its growing reception as non-fictional and believable imagery is, furthermore, closely linked to the virtualization of culture. As moving imagery only visible on screen, animation is becoming increasingly central to today's computerized and networked screen culture and its changing relation to the physical. As culture becomes increasingly screen-based and virtualized, there is need for new forms of visual representation that exceed the capabilities of photography and are better represented by forms of dynamic real-time visualization, such as animation. By engaging with contemporary forms of reality that are shared by many, the capturing of events and actions in virtual animated realities produces an entirely new form of animated documentary that differs from the subjective and fantastical interpretations of events that have formed the focus of existing research into animated documentaries. I define these new forms as "documentary animation", a direct recording of animated realities that also enables the emergence of "animated documents".

Finally, a major change I point to in regard to new and increasingly believable visualizations of non-fiction, is how aesthetics of the virtual are now also being used to visualize the physical, narrowing the gap between the two all the more. Not only have virtual platforms come to constitute what is considered reality, so too have aesthetics developed for virtual platforms, such as real-time animated visualization of code, come to exceed the non-physical digitally virtual and are now being used to represent the physical as well. In today's media and technologically saturated environments, omnipresent on-screen worlds converge with off-screen physical surroundings as a result of our simultaneous involvement in both. Game environments such as Wii, or GPS cartographical applications, use real-time animation in order to depict the user either in a different visual space or else to direct the user to explore their physical vicinity not upon the basis of what they see directly but according to the visual translation of that space on screen in animated form. First developed for military training and communications, real-time 3D computer graphics technology now invades our lives and guides us regularly, regardless of our familiarity with gaming theory or technology.<sup>5</sup> Two everyday examples demonstrate how the everyday use of real-time animation that acts as an indexical trace of the physical has become an aesthetic shared by both virtual and non-virtual platforms. *Get Taxi* is a smartphone app that allows you to call a cab and to "Track your ride approaching on the map in real time. Now that you have more X-Ray Vision than Superman, you can kick back and get up only when your taxi pulls up".<sup>6</sup> The physically real is thus tracked in real-time through an animated image on screen. The animated, non-physical space on-screen completely merges with the physical when the animated icon you've been following on your screen pulls up before you as a real-life taxi cab. Similarly, through the GPS system, users-drivers view their own physical space represented in minimalist animated form that remains relevant and reliable solely because of its real-time rendering. Corporeal space is reconstituted through cartographic depiction, so that what is seen in GPS systems is the "inhabiting" of virtual and animated screen space through an avatar, in this case a small dot or icon representing one's car. The idea of converging worlds is further strengthened by the fact that GPS systems monitor screens are often placed in the vicinity of the car's windshield. The user thus has a dual view of his or her immediate surroundings, which are seen simultaneously in physical and animated form, generating an equation between the two. These novel aesthetics of navigation translate the physical

environment into animated form. What used to be only relevant for game worlds and avatars is, as a result of new technologies, mediation and forms of representation, now seeping into the way the world is viewed in a much more general sense. This demonstrates how the aesthetics of the virtual also transfer onto the visualization of the physical.



Figure 10.2: GPS system

Once viewers become accustomed to viewing and experiencing realities in ways that differ visually from those based upon human eyesight of the physical, they may become more receptive to animated depictions of reality. As a result, I maintain that animation's new uses posit it less as a foreign and artificial form of imagery and more as a significant documentary language of representation. The question remains though: how does the development of, and growing interest in, animation in documentaries shape the broader discourse on documentary today?

### **Animation's Contribution to Documentary Discourse**

Even though certain aspects of the thesis touched upon ontological questions, my research is largely concerned with the issue of visibility. The relation of animation to documentary aesthetics is, therefore, central to the thesis' conclusions. My analysis of animated documentaries in today's technological settings and of the changing role of animation as a contemporary visual language identifies four key areas in which the impact of animation on documentary can be observed. These are: (1) the relation between animation and the augmentation of reality through technology as well as the

subsequent need for documentary visualizations that capture this enhanced real; (2) new theorizations of animation's indexicality and capacity to act as document, a central element in the documentary field; (3) the contribution of changes in animation production and use to the development of new aesthetics of documentation, culminating in what I deem to be a *post-photographic* mentality of documentation (4) the redefinition of animation from a documentary perspective, demonstrating just how far animation has come since its earlier uses, techniques and attachment to fiction. The above have prompted the growing acceptance and 'legitimation' of animation in documentary contexts, and are also central to my discussion of the broader effects of animation on documentary discourse.

### **1. The Augmentation of Reality**

The merging of physical and virtual realities leads to an augmented view and experience of reality, which exceeds the merely physical. This is made possible because of technology and is becoming ubiquitous due to personal portable screens and wifi. In her research into the subjective additions that animation makes to documentary, Bella Honess-Roe concludes by discussing the *desire* to transcend the limitations of photographic media.<sup>7</sup> She states that, "we have come to expect to see a picture of the world that enhances our ability to see, imagine and understand...expand our audio-visual experience of the world and to offer us an *intensified* version of life as we live it".<sup>8</sup> While I concur with Honess-Roe on the importance of animation as a documentary aesthetic, it is my contention that such an expectation is not limited to documentaries but permeates the actuality of life in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whereas Honess-Roe places her emphasis on the subjective, I argue that technology provides an augmented view and experience of realities that *must* be translated into a documentary aesthetic in order for the documentary to remain a relevant and/or "realistic" depiction of contemporary realities. Advanced technology's impact on daily life is such that transcending the limitations of photography in documentary is an objective *necessity* rather than a subjective 'desire'.

This is true on two levels: first, the need for documentary aesthetics which can capture realities that are non-physical and, second, the need for an aesthetics that can visually represent the augmented experience of the physical that has arisen as a result of today's omnipresent technology. The use of animation to visualize virtual realities

and actions ensures that the exclusion of animation from contemporary documentaries would result in a diminishing of the scope of documentary in an era defined by its "mixed realities".<sup>9</sup> Even more so than carrying a portable phone which enables communication with distant others, portable smart technology acts as an extension of the self and a porthole to other realms. Nowadays a person can be active within virtual platforms whilst crossing the street, and can thus be present in two "places" at the same time. Limited documentary visual languages, which are based solely on the capture of the physical, such as photography, fail to grasp today's simultaneous realities and are thus obviously lacking. Animation, on the other hand, can easily capture, or at least depict, virtual actions which, whether standing alone or accompanied by photographic footage of the physical, succeed in delivering a fuller and, therefore, perhaps more accurate view of realities today.

The web channel *Twitch*, for example, specializes in live videos of people playing games, both regular players as well as professional gamers who use *Twitch* to let spectators watch their practices. Here gamers' experiences are depicted simultaneously in the physical as well as the virtual world, through the juxtaposition of animated and photographed events and actions. What is displayed thus includes the game being played along with a video feed of the player's face and a chat window for viewers to communicate with the player and others watching the action.<sup>10</sup> Far from an esoteric phenomenon, *Twitch* was founded in 2011, had more than 55 million visitors per month by 2014, has been ranked among the 15 most-trafficked websites around the world and in August 2014 was purchased by Amazon for \$1.1 billion.<sup>11</sup> With the rise of the gaming industry and e-sports events, Google and Amazon's battle over purchasing *Twitch* "strongly [suggests] that these companies think the era of video-game viewing is just starting", demonstrating yet again the necessity of documentary aesthetics that include the virtual alongside the non-virtual.<sup>12</sup>





Figure 10.3: *Twitch Web Chanel, 2014*

The second reason animation is needed is because smart technology increasingly provides augmented views of physical realities, which means it becomes ever more important to find new means of representing those realities that transcend the limitations of photography. Photographic documentation can only capture partial aspects of contemporary experience. Thanks to smart personal technology, reality extends beyond what is in one's immediate vicinity or even what is perceivable "organically", creating a fuller and augmented view and/or understanding of reality. Drawing upon Paul Virilio's ideas about machine vision, Fred Ritchin explains that "today...we have multiple visions through machines...each eye watches a different world".<sup>13</sup> Examples presented in the thesis (of augmented reality apps and Google Glasses) emphasize the constant split between human vision of the physical world, on the one hand, and a mediated visual interpretation, on the other. This latter increases one's capabilities to see and construe the world in which one exists. Technology provides additional strata of realities that are often depicted in iconic and animated mode on-screen and which can be represented in animated form in documentaries of such experiences. These augmented realities may include additional information about one's vicinity in real-time, such as recommendations about nearby attractions or alerts about acquaintances who have virtually "checked in" to nearby locations, real-time interactive maps or informational apps based on physical locations. This augmented experiencing of reality can best be conveyed in documentary form by animation's

capacity to portray reality as multi-layered, beyond what can be directly perceived or photographed.

This phenomenon has already been manifested through the extensive use of dynamic diagrams and data visualization. These have become part of information consumption in an era of 'big data', in which visualizations are needed as simplified summaries.<sup>14</sup> Suitable visualizations are as a consequence incorporated into documentaries to add, and often simplify, layers of information. The inclusion of animation in different aspects in digital culture may be seen in "the use of graphs, maps, statistical information, photographs, paintings, and drawings in documentaries and instruction films, since Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*".<sup>15</sup> These remix the "fundamental techniques, working methods, and ways of representation and expression" of other media into what Lev Manovich calls a "meta-medium" that combines "cinematography, animation, computer animation, special effects, graphic design, and typography".<sup>16</sup> In the field of forensic animation, for example, data demonstration can explore and illustrate "what if" scenarios, testing competing hypotheses and possibly exposing inconsistencies and discrepancies within the evidence. This is closely related to animated documentaries, in which animation is also used to construct "fuller" views of realities which incorporate several layers of information that would be unperceivable in an un-mediated or direct representation. It is, therefore, unsurprising that depictions of realities which include the physical as well as the technologically augmented require documentary visualizations that exceed both human perception and photography. The way in which technology influences the experience of realities thus understandably also has an impact upon the documentation strategies that represent these realities, which can serve to explain the influence of animation on documentary practice more generally. In other words, *animation enables the expansion of both reality and documentary aesthetics simultaneously.*

## **2. Animation's Indexicality**

A central part of my research has been to identify a number of key shifts in the relation between animation and the document. For the purposes of this analysis, I define documentaries as *the narrativisation of documents meant to record, reveal, inform, or persuade, and accepted as a documentary by its viewers.* Purposely inclusive, this definition draws points from other theorists, but ultimately places its

emphasis upon spectator reception. This work has further entailed a broadening of the term ‘indexicality’—a concept which is crucial to the definition of the document itself.

Any discussion of the relation between the actual, or real, and its representation also requires a consideration of the issue of realism--a central theme in documentary theory. Since the field of documentaries evolved as part of the culture of moving images and photography, the veracity of documentaries has often been associated with the mimetic and naturalistic visual styles defined by photography's assumed indexical truth value. Whereas photographs are as a consequence accepted as documents, other visualizations have been seen to lack the sufficient link to the real that was embodied by (analogue) photography. Realism, as the representation of what constitutes reality, requires reflecting upon the constitution of both the real and its document (or a link to the portrayed reality), in order to evoke a sense of truth value and believability. This is essential for the acceptance of new documentary aesthetics. Although animation may in the past not have been considered realistic, my analysis of the varied aesthetics of realism and their relation to realist social-political goals around revealing and reconsidering aspects of reality, and of the multiple and shifting definitions of realism, have led me to the conclusion that the contemporary discourse on realism should now also include and reflect upon animation. By analysing both the document and the index, I have demonstrated how a document is intended both to inform and record, which is exactly what the index does, if considering *both* its roles as deixis and trace of the physical. My discussion of the relation between animation's indexical role and function as document in Chapter 5 above thus contributed to contemporary scholarship on realism, by showing how a critical analysis of animation in its documentary function can serve to liberate the discourse on realism from its historical reliance upon visual mimesis, necessitating deeper understanding of the nuances involved.

My research examines the virtualization of culture and reveals animation's essential role in this process as a deictic index that indicates the non-physical, or what cannot be otherwise portrayed. The role of the physical in relation to existing conceptions of reality, the index and document are not, however, overlooked. Whereas previous research in animation focused exclusively upon rotoscoping, or the traces of the

creator's actions upon the animated imagery, I pursued a different kind of material link, one based on technologically advanced animated interactive platforms, in which animation *becomes* an indexical trace of the user's actions and movements. This aspect of animation's indexicality has not, however, been addressed in the existing critical literature. By focussing specifically upon graphic user interfaces (GUI) that link viewer and visualized code, my research thus shifts attention away from the existing critical emphasis upon an indexicality that is based on the creator's trace or an animated index of the photographic materials used, such as in rotoscoping.

In virtualized platforms where users are increasingly active, a sense of presence and interaction is, I argue, more crucial as a characteristic of realism than visual mimesis. In animation that is indexical as a trace of the physical, the translation of one's movement into the animated virtual integrates the physical with the virtual, mapping the physical as virtual. This contemporary index as trace relies on the physical, but does not necessarily visualize it in an iconic manner, thus ensuring that there is no longer necessarily a resemblance to the physical appearance of the subjects depicted. As the indexical trace of physical human-computer interactions (HCI), animation indicates that, despite the virtualization of culture, the body is not obsolete and remains a major 'component' of what is considered real, even if its appearance is no longer central. I maintain, therefore, that the index is still an important concept for documentary theory since it establishes both a reliance on the physical as document but also the document's dual capacity to inform *and* record. Although it converges with the symbolic (in the sense of potentially arbitrary and varied stylizations) rather than only with the iconic (which is based on shared likeness with the referent, as is most evident in photography), the index is thus still central to any discussion of the topic of documents.

### **3. Post-Photographic Documentary Aesthetics**

Whereas Honess-Roe proposes that iconicity may take the place of the indexical, I argue that the trace remains important, albeit that it no longer necessarily visually resembles the referent. Honess-Roe writes of an epistemological blurring of icon and index, whereby "we do perhaps still take the iconic as evidence of witnessable events, illustrated by the use of animation in forensic contexts".<sup>17</sup> Although I too acknowledge the importance of the iconic as a recognizable sign that refers to what

would otherwise not be identifiable, especially when considering animation as a deictic index meant to inform, I take issue with Honess-Roe's suggestion concerning the blurring of the icon and index. Since an icon, according to Peirce's definition, shares a likeness with its referent that has most often been understood as visual resemblance due to the term's centrality in photographic discourse, this is no longer the case. Instead, I propose, the physical trace is now also combined with the symbolic yet still maintains its indexical (albeit not its iconic) nature. For example, through varied interfaces, in digitally virtual spaces, the user-player interacts with and manipulates items on screen via gesture recognition.<sup>18</sup> My arguments in this respect are, moreover, not only applicable to gamers or animated virtual worlds but are relevant to all users of contemporary technology: all touch screens embody animated traces of physical actions as the user's finger "drags" icons across the screen.<sup>19</sup> The animation in these cases thus acts as a trace of the physical referent combined with the symbolic that surrounds computer users on a daily basis.

This conceptualization is not only fundamental to any consideration of animation's relation to documentary, but also intervenes in existing theories about indexicality and realism. In his landmark essay "Moving Away from the Index", Tom Gunning proposes that realism is based on movement, rather than the photographic index as trace, or, more specifically, a photo-indexical aesthetic based on naturalism. I agree and disagree. On the one hand, I endorse his claims regarding the distancing of the referent from naturalism, arguing that this does not necessarily challenge the referent's indexical nature. On the other hand, I do still see the importance in the index, both as indicator and recorder, as *deixis* but nonetheless also as *trace*.<sup>20</sup> Without the index the entire notion of documents collapses, which as a result depletes the idea of a documentary.

In continuing to maintain the importance of the index as a basis for documents and thus documentaries, this thesis evokes what I name a *post-photographic* mentality. In this post-photographic aesthetic, the logic of the photographic as based on indexical trace is maintained, albeit not the photographic aesthetics that rely on resemblance. In other words, the indexical trace of the physical is, I propose, still vital, for even if growing aspects of one's life are virtual and screen-based, one's engagement with them is still reliant upon their presence and physical actions. In Chapter 6 above, on

realism and simulations of witnessing that break with mimesis (upon which the photographic simulations of witnessing were previously based), I accordingly continued to place emphasis upon a sense of presence. The importance of the physical, in its relation both to realism and to what constitutes a document, still exists, albeit in new ways. The thesis has accordingly focused on animation's relation to indexicality as a ground for its believable incorporation in documentary, stressing its new relation to the physical as trace. I have argued that the translation of actions into animated forms, even if these do not resemble the physical body, does not diminish the role of the physical within what is being documented. Contrary to what Honess-Roe claims, the icon is thus increasingly replaced with the symbol.<sup>21</sup>

Honess-Roe proposes what I would suggest is almost a pre-photographic logic, in that what is similar in appearance to the referent is considered sufficient, an observation which can arguably be considered similar to the attitude to drawing and modes of visualization that predated photography. I however stress the emergence of a post-photographic logic in that the elements that made photography credible, most specifically its analogue relation as trace of the physical, are maintained, whilst the aesthetics of photography are modified. This can serve to explain the importance of animation as physical trace in a documentary theory based on indexicality, while also making room for visual changes which embrace the symbolic in an increasingly virtualized culture that is necessarily less grounded in physicality and appearance.

#### **4. Redefining Animation**

In conclusion, the findings of this research justify a redefinition of animation as a result of technological developments and changes in the use of animation, most tellingly in relation to real-time animation in virtual settings, as summarized in the table below. Rather than being associated with fiction, animated realities have now become part of the real; rather than a lengthy production process, real-time animation provides immediate visualization; rather than visualizing the animator's subjectivity, animation visualizes a code; instead of serving as a marker of absence, animation now marks presence and activity by representing users' actions; instead of a physically un-indexical visual language that breaks the link with the physical referent, animation is now demonstrably a symbolic trace of the physical. These changes in animation production and theorization are the basis for my thesis on animated documentaries

that lead me to propose a shift and evolution *from animated documentaries to documentary animation*. Whereas past assumptions about and theorizations of animation may have made its use in documentary contexts seem questionable or at times challenging, my conceptualization of documentary animation reshapes these conventions. Documentary animation is the depiction of virtual platforms of reality whose visual representation is essentially animated, and from whence animated documents also originate. Documentary animation is thus the direct, rather than the visually interpreted or stylized, representation of events which would otherwise appear differently. The relation between animation and documentary, therefore, changes significantly.

<b>Animation in the Past</b>	<b>Documentary Animation Today</b>
Associated with fiction	Animated realities become part of the real
Lengthy production process	Real-time animation
Visualizing the animator's subjectivity	Visualization of code
Marker of absence	An indication of presence and interactivity
A physically un-indexical visual language that breaks the link with the physical	A deictic index as well as a symbolic indexical trace of the physical

### **Future Trends and Research Directions**

My research has revealed how new uses of animation have changed its relation to documentary. As animated versions of information, and animated representations of the virtual as well as the physical world, and even of one's self and surroundings, come to play an increasingly prominent part in contemporary visual culture, this gives rise to what I call a *shift in visuality*--a change in ways of seeing and obtaining information about the real. This in turn changes the relation between mimetic portrayals of physical appearances and what are widely perceived as potentially believable visual depictions. In other words, realism and believability as based on visual mimesis of physical appearances are now more commonly accepted as one aesthetic among many. This alters assumptions about photo-indexical naturalism as

the exclusive ground for truth-value and broadens the aesthetic of documentary as a result.

Although I assert the growing need for non-photographic documentary representations in today's technological culture, this in no way means that I am interested only in justifying the role of animation as documentary visualization. Instead, it is also important to consider the complexities that animation introduces into the field of documentary and its potentially dangerous ramifications on information reception more generally. It is thus time to reflect upon the new directions my research leads to, guided by the idea that a problem is exhausted when it mutates into something else, into new questions. Since the shift in visuality and in animation reception that I claim is now occurring is still in process and has yet to be finalized, its full implications have still to be determined.<sup>22</sup> It does, however, raise a series of questions and generate a number of potential directions for future research.

The first of these directions for future research involves the changes I describe in animation's ontological status. As animation comes to be used to depict the virtual and generates new links to the physical, past ontological assumptions are destabilized, which thus in turn influence its reception. Honess-Roe concludes that, "there can be no mistaking the wholly fabricated nature of the animated image. By wearing its ontology on its sleeve, animation circumvents any potential for duping or trickery".<sup>23</sup> She claims that the distrust of photography is overcome in the viewing of animation because the constructedness of animation is apparent. Paul Ward similarly talks about the honesty of animation as constructed.<sup>24</sup> Despite these being valid and important points that initially guided my own enquiry, having now completed my research I am compelled to challenge them. Whereas animation may have initially declared its own constructedness and the mere novelty of combining animation with documentary may have demanded more aware and critical viewing, this is no longer necessarily the case. As animation's role in visual culture changes, so too does the reaction towards it in documentary.

I began this thesis with my own initial reaction of horror towards the use of animation combined with disturbing 'adult' content, in such examples as *Kill Bill* and *Waltz with Bashir*. As time passes and examples of the sub-genre proliferate I have become increasingly accustomed to such uses of animation and consequently inured to their



initial spectatorial impact. Many viewers have, or are undergoing, a similar process of spectatorial modification. As animation comes to be accepted as another documentary aesthetic, its constructedness as well as its changing indexical nature ensure that its ontological status is no longer as straightforward as Honess-Roe claims it to be. As a result, what may have seemed strange in the past or evoked a sense of masking that ignited awareness of the concealed and mediated nature of information representation, may slowly come to seem less unfamiliar. In other words, once a new form of representation loses its novelty, its initial advantages of raising questions, suspicion and criticality may also subside, placing animation's role as masking in potential threat as reception changes. What might some future implications of this be?

As viewers become increasingly accustomed to animation in documentary settings they stop questioning and eventually begin to accept these new forms of representation, which may potentially diminish criticality. As documentary aesthetics shift and expand and as new forms are accepted, the criteria that legitimized traditional documentary representations, such as the indexical trace and mimesis of analogue photography, lose importance. Instead, new criteria for legitimization and believability come into play and, as a result, the principles upon which to base the truth value of a signifier become multiple and, potentially, increasingly murky. This has important implications for visual culture more generally, since the status of the visual as reliable or truthful signifier is thrown into question. Once the aesthetics of photography become destabilized in the discourse on visual realism, *form is no longer fixed*. If photography can be manipulated and if animation is now becoming an increasingly believable mode of delivery for non-fictional content, despite its unlimited stylizations, *do (and will) viewers potentially believe nothing or everything?* And can this binary be broken down as representations continually change?

An additional implication of the growing use and acceptance of animation in documentary contexts is its influence upon the reception of the documentary content covered. While this thesis has claimed throughout that animation can still convey a sense of shock and can invoke powerful feelings in its viewers due to its assumed allusion to childhood and its complex modes of information delivery, once animation loses its novel characteristics, an alienating effect may take place. This alienating

effect is provoked by seeing oneself and others as stylized animated forms, which in turn creates a dis-identification on the part of the viewer towards the viewed. In other words, in the past animation was associated with fantasy, ensuring that its use in documentary may have weakened the documentary status of the work. Once animation began to be incorporated into non-fiction works, in the period covered by my research, the effect on viewers can potentially be complex and multi-layered. Viewers may find themselves struggling with the suspension of disbelief and the additional signification that can thus be introduced into the work, as was exemplified in my discussion of the case studies of *Slaves* and *Stranger Comes to Town*. However, once animation is accepted as "just another" documentary aesthetic, it may lose its potency and return the content full-circle to the initial starting point, ensuring that it is viewed as if it were mere fantasy, distanced from one's own sense of reality. Although even today apathy exists in regard to images of atrocity, in severing the link to the visual appearance of the physical body, its pain and expressions, animated depiction further risks evading what Vivian Sobchack has claimed as essential to documentary viewing: namely, a realization of shared materiality. Although I have emphasized presence as a way of elucidating a sense of encounter between documented protagonist and viewer, changes in animation reception and a growing break with the physical (due to the increasing ubiquity of screens) may boost desensitized documentary viewing.

Many of these concerns are reflected in the dystopian futuristic British television drama series *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker. Brooker has described the series as, "all about the way we live now – and the way we might be living in 10 minutes' time if we're clumsy".<sup>25</sup> The *Fifteen Million Merits* episode from 2011 describes a society's insatiable thirst for distraction, and depicts a world in which almost everything is mediated by animation. Animation is used in this dystopian culture as spectacle, as a way to dumb-down daily existence through on-going and varied simulations, and to depict what remains of public spaces in which alienated subjects, who are physically shut in cells made of screens, participate only as animated avatars who are individualized through animated merchandise bought with actual currency, or 'merits'. Although this may seem extreme, it is easy to identify resemblances to our own, already highly technologized, culture. The latter is characterized by omnipresent attention-capturing animation, which demands of lonely

and alienated people that they spend most of their time alone (in a physical sense at least), facing screens, interacting only virtually with others, and increasingly represented by avatars. Somewhat similarly, in Ari Folman's partly animated film *The Congress* (2013), new technology enables people to transform themselves into animated avatars. While they are enjoying themselves in this mutable illusory state, their world is deteriorating around them. Although theorist Jane McGonigal has asserted in her 2011 book *Reality is Broken* that skills learned in virtual and animated worlds can be used to fix real-world problems, this may be an overly optimistic analysis. Desensitized viewing already exists, and may possibly be altered momentarily by the novelty of new visualizations of information. As animation becomes widespread and conventionalized, however, will an ever-greater apathy develop? *Will apathy increase because any and all content can be easily disregarded as false because of visual signifiers' unclear criteria for truth value as well as the fact that people are not even depicted as human but rather as a variety of animated forms?* Will increasing uses of animation create alienation from others deemed as "only" avatars rather than as real people, so that documentary impact and its (potential or hoped-for) consequent action will be reduced? Or will the growing popularity of animated depictions make animation just as believable as photography, opening new directions in the field of representation that will aim to draw attention, and to shock and motivate action in the material world as much as the virtual one in as yet unthinkable ways?



Figure 10.4: *Black Mirror - Fifteen Million Merits* episode, 2011, by Charlie Brooker

Other questions arise as the visual takes on a larger role in contemporary screen culture and the tension persists between the uber-visuality of today's information culture versus the diminishing clarity of the visual's relation to truth and credibility. Animation may have an important role to play as the documentary field expands in order to maintain its relevancy as realities change, but if, as a result, reliability of the visual is undermined, then what is left of the visual as a criterion of truth value? As such, how might these changes influence the field of visual documentary? Will viewers become more compliant as criticality diminishes? If documentaries are already imbued with mistrust, as well as notions of parafiction and truthiness, despite the on-going epistophilia at the heart of documentary creations, what role does the visual play in documentary assertions of truth value? Will new criteria for the theorization and reception of documentary's relation to facticity develop? And, if only trust remains, what is left of any truth value assumed of the documentary? Is this process part of the theorization of a post-documentary era?<sup>26</sup>

What tools, if any or ever adequate, do viewers have today to navigate the wealth of varying informational representations presented as truths? In the era of big data, information aesthetics and data visualization are increasingly central characteristics of contemporary visual and information culture. As such, issues regarding the reception and believability of documentary representations as well as the ability of spectators to critically analyse and comprehend varied visualizations of information are vital areas of future research. Animation becomes a key site across which these debates are carried out, since it is currently used in a dual manner - as a form of escapist and spectacular entertainment, but also as a means of depicting non-fictional events that is now aiming to gain credibility. A recent example of the way these dual manners may influence each other is seen in *The Guardian's* coverage of human trafficking in the Thai fishing industry (2014), in which the depiction of a slave trader is surprisingly similar to the character stylization of Disney's villains, especially in the sneering expression and in the design of the eyes as heavy lidded. Although allusions to villains may here be appropriate, it is an example of the way in which familiarity with one area of animation, fiction and entertainment, may subconsciously influence the way it is perceived in a different field, i.e. documentary. This can easily alter the reception and meaning of images without viewers necessarily being aware that they are adding their own connotations in their interpretation of the information depicted,

thus weakening the role of the viewer as active consumer of information and affording greater power to the creators. As Jonathan Crary has suggested, in any analysis of spectator reception in changing regimes of the visual, it is important to understand the continuity that links novelty with older organizations of the visual so as to understand the mutation of one into the other.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 10.5: The slave trader from *The Guardian's* 2014 coverage of human trafficking in the Thai fishing industry



Figure 10.6-7: Disney villains Hades from *Hercules* (1997) and Jafar from *Aladdin* (1992)

This is important for documentary studies as well as for much wider interrogations of visual culture. The need to develop nuanced and critical visual literacy relates my topic to art history, which is both my field of origin and what Manovich describes as "the history of new [encoded] information interfaces developed by artists, and the new

information behaviours developed by users [to extract the information]".<sup>28</sup> Just as art history has been mapped and taught as the study of visual creations and developments in, and across, different cultures, eras and ideologies, the same must now be achieved in the field of animated documentaries and, more broadly, in relation to how information is transferred visually today. Since the way information is depicted can construct, and not just reflect, reality, the choices of stylization are essential to what will eventually be apprehended as reality, making these areas of research relevant to much wider fields of interrogation.

Enhanced skills of visual analysis are crucial for contemporary consumers of information, especially in an age characterized by media disinformation and evolving aesthetics of representation. Perhaps the time has come for detailed accounts and specific research of emerging techniques and styles of animation (rather than more general theoretical conceptualizations of animation as a whole), just as this thesis has focused on the field of computer-generated non-naturalistic animations of recent decades in specific non-fiction contexts. I would welcome studies in aspects of animation similar to how visual movements and trends in art and film have been analysed in-depth historically. This goes to show that as animation matures and its uses multiply, the breadth of research and variety of questions needed for a fuller understanding of the field expand accordingly and require more theoretical focus than has hitherto been paid to it.

To sum up the contribution of this research to the field of animated documentaries, I began by looking into the previously under-researched virtual and technological features of contemporary culture that impact upon the relation between animation and documentary. The thesis went on to illuminate new aspects and characteristics of animation and to present new theoretical conceptualizations. By identifying the major novel characteristics in the use and reception of animation in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, I have provided a critical analysis of animation's current documentary capabilities and have reconsidered animation's established relation to documentary. The thesis has offered a rigorous theorization of 'documentary animation' as a complex visual language which will become, I believe, even more pervasive as technology-sustained relationships between humans and realities continue to advance.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I am referring to Disney's major role in the field of animation, leaning less towards the perhaps different uses of animation in Eastern Europe or parts of Asia.

<sup>2</sup> Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> See Lind and Steyerl, *The Greenroom*, 10-27.

<sup>4</sup> Feldman, "Foreword", 6.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the military origins of these technologies, see Lev Manovich, "Navigable Space", (1998): unpaginated, accessed February 2, 2013, available at [www.manovich.net/DOCS/navigable\\_space.doc](http://www.manovich.net/DOCS/navigable_space.doc).

<sup>6</sup> Get Taxi, accessed December 12, 2013, [www.gettaxi.com](http://www.gettaxi.com).

<sup>7</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 89-90. Emphasis added.

<sup>8</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 319. Emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> These "mixed realities" include the material and digitally virtual realities of today.

<sup>10</sup> Nick Wingfield, "What's Twitch? Gamers Know, and Amazon Is Spending \$1 Billion on It", *International New York Times*, August 25, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Nick Wingfield, "Video Games Go Big League", *International New York Times*, September 1, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Wingfield, "Video Games Go Big League".

<sup>13</sup> Ritchin, *After Photography*, 171.

<sup>14</sup> An understandable element of concern in such cases is that animation will be used to over-simplify complex facets of reality, creating impossibly unified narratives in a world based on fissures and multiplicities.

<sup>15</sup> Simons, "Pockets in the Screenscape", 10.

<sup>16</sup> Lev Manovich, "After Effects, or Velvet Revolution", *Artifact* 1:2 (2007): 68.

<sup>17</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 142.

<sup>18</sup> Such interfaces are based on web-cam technology that enables users to control and interact without the need to touch a conventional game controller. For more information about new interfaces and how they are translated into virtual spaces see Mazalek, "Tangible Narratives", 91-110.

<sup>19</sup> This is clearly also true of the computer's mouse actions activated by the user's movement and translated into a moving icon visible on screen. The touch screen is merely a more-up-to-date example that illustrates the trace of movement more directly.

<sup>20</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term "deixis" derives from Greek and means "to indicate, to demonstrate or to point out".

<sup>21</sup> Resemblance based on movement is, of course, maintained in the indexical trace but as imagery it is closer to the symbolic sign than the icon, which is associated with resemblance in appearance to the referent.

<sup>22</sup> As I explained throughout the thesis, the fact that many animated documentaries still include photographic images within the work exemplify that a full trust of animation has yet to be completed for there still seems to be a need to legitimize the animations by photographic means, even if the photographs themselves no longer act as proof of any sort.

<sup>23</sup> Honess Roe, "Animating Documentary", 318.

<sup>24</sup> Ward, "Animated Realities", 19.

<sup>25</sup> Charlie Brooker, "The Dark Side of our Gadget Addiction", *The Guardian*, December 1 2011.

<sup>26</sup> For more on the "postdocumentary" see Corner, "Performing the Real", 257.

<sup>27</sup> Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Manovich, "Post-Media Aesthetics", unpaginated.



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## APPENDIX: WORKS REFERENCED

(In chronological order)

- The Stonebreakers* (Gustave Courbet, 1849)
- The Sinking of the Luisitania* (Winsor McCay, 1918)
- Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (Dave and Max Fleisher, 1923)
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Disney, 1937)
- Seven Wise Dwarfs* (Disney, 1941)
- Stop that Tank* (Disney, 1942)
- Why We Fight* (Frank Capra, 1942-45)
- Atomic Café* (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, and Pierce Rafferty, 1982)
- Conversation Pieces* (Aardman, 1983)
- When the Wind Blows* (Jimmy Murakami, 1986)
- Lip Sync - Creature Comforts* (Ardman, 1989)
- The Atlas Group Archive* (Walid Raad, 1989-2004)
- Aladdin* (Disney, 1992)
- 10-16* (Gillian Wearing, 1997)
- Hercules* (Disney, 1997)
- Snack and Drink* (Bob Sabiston, 1999)
- The Battle of Orgreave* (Jeremy Deller, 2001)
- Hidden/Gömd* (David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn, 2002)
- 9/11 Survivor* (John Brennan, Mike Caloud and Jeff Cole, 2003)
- Animated Minds* (Andy Glynne, 2003)
- Backseat Bingo* (Liz Blazer, 2003)
- Destino* (Disney, 2003 - production began in 1945 as a Disney collaboration with  
Salvador Dalí)
- Escape from Woomera* (EFW Collective, 2003)
- It's Like That* (Southern Ladies Animation Group, 2003)

*Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003)

*AC 130 Gunship* (Christoph Büchel, 2004)

*Day after Tomorrow* (Roland Emmerich, 2004)

*Kuma / War* (Kuma Reality Games, 2004)

*Ryan* (Chris Landreth, 2004)

*Super Columbine Massacre RPG!* (Danny Ledonne, 2005)

*The Moon and the Son* (John Canemaker, 2005)

*A Scanner Darkly* (Richard Linklater, 2006)

*An Inconvenient Truth* (Davis Guggenheim, 2006)

*Darfur is Dying* (Susana Ruiz, 2006)

*Drakedog's Suicide* (Drakedog, 2006)

*Synthetic Performances* (Eva and Franco Mattes, aka 0100101110101101.org,  
2006-present)

*Gone Gitmo* (Nonny de la Peña and Peggy Weil, 2007)

*In the Same Boat* (Emily Bissland, 2007)

*Molotov Alva: My Life in Second Life* (Douglas Gayeton, 2007)

*Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud, 2007)

*Stranger Comes to Town* (Jacqueline Goss, 2007)

*World Without Oil* (Ken Eklund, 2007)

*FoldIt* (University of Washington's Center for Game Science and Department  
of Biochemistry, 2008)

*Second Skin* (Juan Carlos Pineiro-Escoriaza, 2008)

*Slaves* (David Aronowitsch and Hanna Heilborn, 2008)

*Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008)

*Z32* (Avi Mograbi, 2008)

*Firefighter 360* (Presselite, 2009)

*Flight Patterns* (Aaron Koblin, 2009)

*Secrets and Lies* (Gillian Wearing, 2009)

*Serious Games: Immersion* (Harun Farocki, 2009)

*Stockspace* (Marius Watz, 2009)

*Tying your Own Shoes* (Shira Avni, 2009)

*1000 Voices* (Tim Travers Hawkins, 2010)

*An Eyeful of Sound* (Samantha Moore, 2010)

*I was a child of Holocaust Survivors* (Ann Marie Fleming, 2010)

*Little Deaths* (Ruth Lingford, 2010)

*Post Newtonianism* (Josh Bricker, 2010)

*The Green Wave* (Ali Samadi Ahadi, 2010)

*Exposure* (ITV, 2011)

*Phone Story* (Michael Pineschi and Molleindustria , 2011)

*Wonderland: The Trouble With Love And Sex* (Jonathan Hodgson, 2011)

*Avatar* (James Cameron, 2012)

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*One Iranian Lawyer's Fight to Save Juveniles from Execution* (The Guardian and Sherbert, 2012)

*Seeking Refuge* (Mosaic Films for BBC, 2012)

*Guantanamo Bay: The Hunger Strikes* (The Guardian, 2013)

*The Congress* (Ari Folman, 2013)

*Globalised Slavery: How Big Supermarkets are Selling Prawns in Supply Chain Fed by Slave Labour* (The Guardian, 2014)

*The Mitochondria – Powering the Cell* (Harvard University and John Liebler/XVIVO, no year listed)