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A Comparative Analysis of the Contemporary Documentary Films *Ryan* and *Waltz with Bashir* as Animated Representations of Autobiographical Reality

by

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Supervisor: Christo Doherty

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted towards the degree of Master of Arts by coursework in the field of Digital Animation at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination.

ROBERT MILLS _____.

_____day of_____2010.

Table of Contents

Abstract 4

Introduction 6

Structure 9

Chapter One:

Postmodern Cinema 11

The Animated Form 20

The Documentary Genre 28

Chapter Two:

The Animated Documentary 51

Chapter Three:

Ryan and *Waltz with Bashir* 63

Comparison 76

Chapter Four:

Conclusion 92

Works Cited 97

Abstract

This research paper aims to explore the nature and implications of two animated films where graphic depiction is used to document the complexities of an individual's account of non-fictional events and situations. Within this position of animation and actuality, a "reality"[1] is represented[2] by the unreal[3] in the form of created (not captured) moving picture images, and therefore the elements found in the live action dominated documentary genre are significantly affected. Animation has become a more acceptable form of documentary filmmaking in the context of postmodernist scepticism about the traditional claims of representation. However, its uniqueness in this situation has led to further developments in the dominant mode of discourse creation within this genre. These developments will be explored in relation to contemporary scholarship in the field of animation. Certain theoretical postulates will then be invoked to set up a comparison between the two films chosen for case study, seen as examples of the subjective[4] in animated representations of individuals' realities, so as to identify and describe their contribution to the contemporary documentary genre. The essential research question may thus be posed as follows: how do these two animated films contribute towards the present notion of actuality representation, through a postmodern autobiographical style, within the developing contemporary documentary genre?

[1] What we know, understand and share with each other about the external world.
[2] A creation that is a visual or tangible rendering of someone or something.
[3] Man-made and invented, not merely captured from reality on a medium like film.
[4] Indicating a dependence on personal taste or view.

More specifically, the use made of verbal audio interviews within the animation processes in the case studies will be compared in order to address this question, because it is the particular use of interviews (and through them, the contributions to collective memory made by the interviewees) that really sets these two films apart from other autobiographical accounts within animation.

Introduction

The two films chosen for examination are the animated documentary works of Chris Landreth (*Ryan*, 2004) and Ari Folman (*Waltz with Bashir*, 2008). Both films centre on the personal journeys undertaken by the individual filmmakers as they seek to represent actual events and inevitably become involved in these events through the documentary process. What makes the films unique to this paradoxical genre is that they are not just pure renditions of the directors' memories, but are also driven by outside input in the form of recorded audio interviews, which are then united with animation to form integral sections of the productions. Both directors go on to discover new insights into themselves as individuals through this process, and both end their scripted films with cinematic renditions of their discoveries. The use of verbal audio sound tracks in these films grounds them in a collective reality, and since these recordings comprise the voiced insights of others, they are not as easy to manipulate as the imagery of animation. But when coupled with animation they lead to an interesting new subjective account of the topic.

The short film *Ryan* is a three-dimensional digitally animated personal documentary by Chis Landreth about Ryan Larkin, a great animator in the Canadian film industry during the 1960s. Larkin subsequently turned to drug and alcohol abuse, stopped animating altogether and became a homeless person. Many years later, Chris Landreth, a long-time fan of Larkin's artistic work, found

and befriended this lost character. He conducted and recorded interviews with Larkin in a homeless shelter, and then used these recordings as the basis for expressing and documenting the emotions and states of mind of both of them in an animated form. In sum, digital three-dimensional forms are used by Landreth in a significant manner to represent the physical and mental state of the characters and their environments (Fernandes).

Waltz with Bashir is a feature length animated documentary by Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman. Folman realizes that he is lacking memories of a certain time in his life and sets out to find the truth of his past. He uses vibrant, hand-drawn “cut-out” animation to document interviews conducted with some of his associates. These people, like Folman, were involved in the Lebanese war in the early 1980s and tell of the horrors of war, which are in turn expressed in the animation as part of the narrative. For example, the film starts out with a pack of twenty-six dogs running down a street and stopping outside a window to growl at a man standing at the window. As it turns out this man has a recurring nightmare about these dogs as a result of the effects the war has had on him (Voynar). The film is digitally produced using a mixture of animation styles. The characters are depicted in a two-dimensional, very comic book graphic style, and are animated using a complex “cut-out” technique. The backgrounds are often created in 3D but are made to appear 2D with painterly textures.

This research paper offers a critical analysis of the two films, first examining the current standings of the postmodern film, the medium of animation and the documentary genre, and then reviewing the significant pronouncements by key animation theorists such as Paul Wells and Paul Ward concerning the animated depiction of reality. More specifically, the paper will investigate how their insights contribute to the possible evolution of a new prevailing mode within the documentary genre.

Once these topics have been canvassed, they will inform a comparative analysis of the two films, involving investigation into how the directors use verbal interviews to set up related representations of their experiences. The novel elements within this method of personal/autobiographical filmmaking will be brought to the fore through the question of how the directors reproduce themselves and their surroundings via the re-interpretation of recorded conversations. How do they use the combination of the captured (audio interviews) and the constructed (the animated form) to represent their stories? How do they interpret this information and use it to reproduce their historical situation within the filmmaking process? These considerations will be discussed in relation to each film, indicating similarities and differences between them.

Structure

In the first chapter the current situation of postmodern film will be examined in order to establish the contemporary media environment in which the two films selected for study exist and from which they might contribute towards future developments. Animation itself and its relationship with representation will be briefly examined alongside the existing fundamental concepts and conventions of representing reality within the documentary genre. Specific attention will be paid to the representation of subjective experience within this genre, where ideas like Nichols' Reflexive and Performative Modes will be discussed as well as the question of how the interview is integrated into the process. This material will provide a conceptual base for an exploration of the notion of the animated actuality film.

Chapter Two will comprise a theoretical analysis of the debates surrounding the topic of representing reality within animation, as conducted by leading animation academics such as Wells and Ward. Again, specific attention will be focused on the personal or subjective factor within this type of filmmaking.

The third chapter will focus on the two chosen case studies, which will be described and then formally examined and compared with each other, drawing on the insights reached in the previous chapters. The findings will be compared with published ideas on the topic as well as on the related notions of

Documentary and Animation theory. The result will be a considered estimation of the films' significance as examples of subjective documentary through the animated representation of actuality, where the combination of audio and constructed image produces a complex self-portrait.

The fourth and final chapter will discuss the conclusions reached in the course of the research as a whole.

Chapter 1

Postmodern Cinema, Animated Form and the Documentary Genre

This chapter will cover the notions of the postmodern, of animation, and of the latter's relationship with representation. The chapter will also examine the fundamental concepts and conventions of representing reality within the documentary genre, with a specific focus on the move towards a more subjective or personal control over film within autobiographical documentary. This will involve investigating the use of interviews within the contemporary genre, in order to establish a context for the use of real audio within the animated documentary. The chapter will therefore serve as a base from which the notion of the animated actuality film will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Postmodern Cinema

The unique film style of employing animation to depict non-fiction evokes aspects of the approach to film typical of the postmodern era. Both *Ryan* and *Waltz with Bashir* possess qualities that characterize them as postmodern films, where an overall emphasis is placed on the acknowledgement of construction, play, and the involvement of the artist in the work (Bignell 162). It is important to understand how they operate as postmodern texts, so that they can be situated in the development of the current documentary mode.

Generally speaking, postmodernity can be viewed as the complex and qualitatively new social, economic, and cultural landscape in which we live, and in which new dominant ways of experiencing time and space have emerged (Harvey 2). Postmodernity is at its core a reaction to modernity, when human beings were seen to be on the path of liberating themselves, though a dialectical struggle of understanding themselves and the world around them made possible by the spread of technologies and democracy (Bignell 167). The possibility of this authoritative mode of understanding falls away in the postmodern era because of a loss of confidence in historical progress, and a concomitant openness to "decontextualized voices" (Connor 176). Attempts to arrive at an absolute like "truth" are seen in the postmodern light to be vain.

For the purposes of this discussion, a focus on the postmodern contribution to the idea of constructing a message through communication is relevant because the case studies are examples of the cinematic medium. The postmodern media style is characterized by self-conscious play or "reflexivity" within the artwork, in terms of which attention is drawn to aspects such as generic conventions, or the revealing of technologies, in order to decontextualize the production of meaning (Bignell 162).

Contemporary cinema can no longer be categorized and neatly labeled in terms of visual style, genre or narrative because of the continual intermixing that is reflective of the global community (Connor 176). The postmodern is not so much

a dominant style of creating discourse as a mixing of various styles and conventions that has conduced to the corrosion of the very idea of a dominant style (Connor 177).

This intermixing and remixing has led to film becoming a source of meaning-making through referencing preexisting films, media or pop culture (Jameson 304). Postmodern film does not necessarily make an attempt to represent a real history or a lived world, but uses experience of this world (often via other films or media such as television) to create a reference within the text, from recognition of which meaning may or may not be found (Connor 177). Jean Baudrillard, a theorist of postmodern culture, calls this the creation of a “hyperreality,” in terms of which “reality” is merely a part of the production of meaning that results in something more intensive than reality itself (Connor 57). This has resulted in the intertextuality, self-referentiality, parody and pastiche characteristic of postmodern film, often the result of recourse to various past forms, genres, and styles (Conner 178). Through these devices, films seek to blur the past and present by projecting a certain era within the piece while allowing the comforts of other periods to be seamlessly and often playfully incorporated into the projection (Jameson 18). “The producers of culture now have nowhere to turn but the past, the imitation of dead styles, speech, through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture” (ibid.).

Audiences are now invited to participate in the acknowledgement of the past through their understanding of these previous events and are encouraged to be entertained, often comically, by their own identification of these situations (ibid.). A certain nostalgia arises from such recognition of intertextuality,[5] and the audience can relate to a greater collective outside of the film as a single work (Jameson 32). For instance, in the film *Blade Runner* (made in 1982 but set in the year 2019), a female cybernetic organism (cyborg) character dresses in 1950s fashion, which gives the audience fuel to conjure up an interpretation of the character incorporating their own understanding of such apparel. Such references are not essential to the viewer's interpretation, but do enrich the film for those who can recognize the allusions (Bignell 163).

A comical example in the film *Wayne's World* (1992) has the main character overtly exposing popular commercial products and bringing their catch phrases into his conversation, while explaining how artists should not sell out to mass consumerism. Holding a *Pepsi* can in his hand, Wayne says "The choice of a new generation" (the company's advertizing catch-phrase at the time), thereby creating humour out of the audience's knowledge of the product's commercial exposure in other media, and their recognition of its ironic re-presentation in this film.

Postmodern films often go further than just creating this outside relationship, asking their audience to think for themselves about topics where more questions

[5] A relationship between different texts

than answers about our world or society are subtly (often through metaphor) brought to the fore (Connor 179). This form of hyperreality, where real-world issues are set up for questioning, is the reaction of the postmodern to the modern didactic form of understanding created through film (Bignell 167). For instance, the treatment of cyborgs as a theme in *Blade Runner* can be viewed as a metaphor for current ethical issues such as racism. Here “unpresentable” or taboo topics are engaged with in the mass medium of film in order to incite the audience to question current social ideologies (Connor 179).

This instilling of a questioning attitude within the audience is further enforced by postmodern film’s self-reference, whether it be through the revealing of cinematic techniques or through performative gesture where a character speaks directly to the audience (Bignell 162). Here the audience is purposefully reminded that they are in fact watching a represented construction of a situation and not the situation itself, and that this medium of creating meaning is therefore relative and not absolute (Bignell 167).

The postmodern film also resists being boxed into a single genre and is more interested in hybridizing a multitude of real-world media genres (Bignell 164). For instance, *Blade Runner* can be viewed as being part science-fiction and part detective noir, with its futuristic robots and technologies, on the one hand, and on the other, the dark undertone of an anti-hero following a trail through a menacing city.

It is only through the recognition and acceptance of these postmodern characteristics in our evolving idea of cinema that the films *Ryan* and *Waltz with Bashir* can receive credit as significant contributors to a growing documentary genre. Unless they are situated in the context of the contemporary expansion of the documentary genre, these animations would probably not receive attention as documentaries because of their heightened construction and lack of indexical position. Both films are postmodern because they reflect their construction (through animation) and indulge in intertextual play, but also because they ask the audience to ask questions about both their subjects and – through defamiliarization – about the narrative forms in which these are typically presented.

Ryan and *Waltz with Bashir* (bracketing for the moment the fact that they are animations and documentaries) share the characteristic of finding a relationship with the lived world through a hyperreality. For instance in *Ryan*, Chris Landreth confronts Ryan Larkin and asks him to give up alcohol, to which Ryan responds: “Am I supposed to give that up for tea or something?” (*Ryan* DVD). From this interview response, the reinterpreted film then cuts to a shot of the animated representation of Ryan, directly addressing the audience with a big grin on his face, holding up a cup of tea in one hand and a saucer in the other. The hand holding the cup has all its fingers except the index and thumb, daintily sticking outwards in the caricaturial British style of drinking tea, and the background is

pink floral wall paper. Ryan is wearing a green pullover, a red tie and a white long sleeve shirt (figure 1 *Ryan* DVD).



Figure 1

This outfit is a take on the famous attire of the British animated character, Wallace, from Aardman studios' *Wallace and Gromit* series (Figure 2).



Figure 2

This character is well known for his enjoyment of tea, and Landreth is creating humour through this cultural reference by ironically giving his alcoholic character the clean-cut, tea loving look that Wallace embodies. At the same time, by referencing the Wallace outfit Landreth is acknowledging and paying homage to the great stop-frame[6] animators from the Aardman studios, and thereby bringing a past or lived world into the "present" of his film. But one does not necessarily have to have an understanding of the Wallace character or animation history to enjoy this moment, as the ironic juxtaposition of mild tea drinking and Larkin's character is enough to produce meaning at a "surface" level. This scene also follows the postmodern trend of bringing an explicit aspect of the lived world out into the open (Conner 179) by identifying and dealing with the subject of alcoholism. By using humour to do this, the film pushes limits on the freedom of expression and freedom of thought.

An example of postmodernist style in *Waltz with Bashir* can be found in the scene where Ari Folman as a young solider receives orders from a commanding officer who is watching a pornographic video tape on a television set. The scene cuts away from Folman and the officer and focuses on the on the television screen. A set depicting a kitchen is seen with a skimpily dressed blond woman standing at the sink. A hairy plumber walks onto the set and a cheesy retro front appears which spells out "The Plumber is Coming 2" in German (Figure 3 *Waltz with Bashir* DVD).

[6] An animation technique where material puppets are physically moved between each shot of a frame.



Figure 3

The plumber asks if he can check the lady's pipes, and they start engaging in a sexual act. A sound boom is seen "falling into the shot" from the top of the screen and a second woman enters the set with a dog. The tape is then stopped and changed and the scene carries on with Folman and the officer.

This "porn scene" expresses several postmodernist characteristics in that it playfully depicts pornography at its most stereotypical level. The film assumes on the part of its audience a shared cultural understanding that one of the most hackneyed porn scenes is that of the plumber "unexpectedly" becoming involved with the lady of the house. This is further stereotyped by the German actors and the cheapness of the production, as highlighted by the sound boom and the cheesy title. These are again common characteristics of pornography as found in the lived world. Folman uses this familiar scene to find a relationship with his

audience by combining a cultural understanding of the past texts with exaggeration to make his rendition of it overtly outrageous. He does this to create humour but also to highlight this crude aspect of war that may not have been given much attention before. Folman explains that he and many other young soldiers had their first encounter with pornography through the war (waltzwithbashir.com). He therefore draws attention to this cultural phenomenon and leaves the audience to ask questions of the situation for themselves. The inclusion of explicit erotica in this war film also embodies the mixing or hybridizing of genres often found in the postmodern artwork.

Having established that these films are postmodernist texts that use the hyperreal to elicit existential interpretation and thereby announce themselves as worthy contributors to currently evolving trends in cinema, we can now begin to look at them in terms of genre and form of construction.

The Animated Form

Animation as a medium can be traced back as far as the earliest developments in moving images, alongside the emergence of live action “film” itself (Wells, “Animation: Form and Meaning” 238). According to Paul Wells, live action film’s increasing popularity during their initial developments has often led to animation’s own uniqueness and cinematic language being overlooked (“Animation: Form and Meaning” 238). Animation is a significant film art that has its own codes and

conventions to contribute to the greater development of cinema, but like all media, animation has limitations and overlapping similarities with other art forms that must also be acknowledged in order fully to grasp its potential (Darley 73).

Animation is a very diverse and multifaceted art form that is difficult to define coherently because of its many methods of production and styles. Wells suggests animation can be described as film that is executed by photographing or capturing each frame individually; and then as it is put together, frame by frame, the illusion of movement or life is achieved without directly recording it ("Animation: Form and Meaning" 238). The word animation derives from the Latin verb *animare* which means "to give life to" (Wells, *Understanding Animation* 10). This description is a useful point of departure for considering animation as a means to represent "reality," because life is the subject of any documentary film and animation is the art of making "life."

To animate is to breathe life into objects, and this life is signified by change. Change materializes as the growth, movement and dynamism that imparts this "life" to objects, whether they are physical creations, drawings or digital renditions (*Understanding Animation* 10). Animation allows for an audience to attribute characteristics of existence to objects that would not ordinarily express such vitality.

A master of the medium, Norman McClaren, points out that it is not just the objects and their captured frames that are important but also what is manipulated each time that creates this life: "Animation is not the art of drawings that move, but rather the art of movements that are drawn. What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame" (quoted in *Understanding Animation* 10).

Using the example of hand drawn animation, McClaren indicates the essentials within the production of animation that lead the viewer to relate to this embodiment of life, concentrating on how the animator alters their subject rather than the frame before or after this execution.

Wells also continues exploring this notion of creating "life" by using a definition from the Zagreb Animation School (in the former Yugoslavia) further to illustrate the aesthetic and philosophic aspects of the craft. "They suggest, that to animate is to give life and soul to a design, not through the copying but through the transformation of reality" (*Understanding Animation* 10). The Zagreb School believes that animation is unique in that it creatively gives life to the inanimate through its techniques, in a manner that no other media can. In this way it renovates this "reality" into a novelty (ibid.). "Animation can redefine the everyday, subvert our accepted notion of 'reality', and challenge the orthodox understanding and acceptance of our existence" (*Understanding Animation* 11). This is certainly so in the case of the two animations chosen for examination,

because these films use the medium to design and give life to a representation of an alternative to our conception of reality.

From this we can see how the world as we know it could be transcended by any subversive form an animator can perceive and apply through his or her animation technique. Wells implies that this exclusive form of discourse is what sets animation apart from live action: the medium's "unique vocabulary" pushes it towards a supreme form (*Understanding Animation* 11).The discourse is seen to manufacture a metaphysical[7] reality where the symbolic rather than the iconic is dominant: "Not how things look but what they mean" ("Animation: Form and Meaning" 238). This is the unique potential for expression that animation holds for the creative human imagination. Animation has the power to represent life in a similar manner to live action, but it also has the potential to create fresh alternatives to this. Animation gives life to imagined images and therefore can express more that just the physical world ("Animation: Form and Meaning" 259). This strength of animation can equally be seen as the drawback of live action, its confinement to literal or surface representation (Ward).

"Animation can create the conditions to express new visions by creating a vocabulary which is both unlimitedly expressive and always potentially progressive because it need not refer to or comply with the codes and conventions that have preceded it" ("Animation: Form and Meaning" 259).

[7] The philosophical study of being and knowing.

But this potential may only be realized in extreme examples of animation like that of Norman McClaren, where only geometric forms are used to produce moving patterns. Overall, the art form still overlaps to a large extent with other media and especially live action film, where discourse is produced through similar cinematic language (Darley 73). Animation makes use of iconography[8] in many situations, and these iconics share a real world relation, similar to the relationship between the indexical live action image and the real world. But animation is not physically captured, which makes it important to note that while one should always be aware of the dissident potential that lies within the image of animation, one should not allow the art form as a result to be singled out or separated from other media in terms of how it produces its discourse. When an animated film is analyzed, both the subversive potential and overlapping characteristics should be given equal attention in order to create a better understanding of how they create discourse.

Wells goes on to acknowledge and explore how animation can strive to execute almost the same function as live action, in terms of which an external "reality" is reproduced (*Understanding Animation* 25). This will comprise an important section in this discussion of the animated form, as it is the representation of actuality in combination with the potentially annihilated image that will be later be the focus in the case studies.

[8] Signs that resemble their source for example; drawings.

Live action has the ability to directly capture an external physical world through its process of recording light reflected from this material world (*Understanding Animation* 24). Live action film will always produce subjective reproductions of this external world through its filmmaking processes, yet it is still a direct recording and therefore embodies legitimate evidence of a physical world (ibid.). Animation can be viewed as a "fake" medium because of its artificial nature of production, as discussed above, but there are certain animated films that seek to replicate the external world through this fake constructing in order to sharpen the sense of "life" within the presented world (*Understanding Animation* 25).This type of animation is referred to by Wells as "hyperrealism" in that it seeks to reproduce physical reality through identifying its characteristics and reproducing counterfeit images of it (ibid.). The concept is not dissimilar to Baudrillard's, but here Wells identifies a "reality" which is extended within the production of the imagery and not the overall construction of meaning through the medium. For example, Disney films are considered as hyperrealism because of the manner in which external elements are used as reference points in order to render the life and soul of the design more believable (ibid.). For instance, animators from Disney studied the anatomy and movement of real lions in Africa long before they began production of *The Lion King* (1994). This real world reference was then used to formulate the design and movement of the characters in this film in order to install "life" within the aesthetic of the animation (*The Lion King* DVD). These films do not wish to represent actuality (as a documentary would), but they do use suggestions of the physical world to enhance the representation of their

fictional story. It is this indication and intent within an animation that can create a yardstick for comparing animated films with respect to how they create meaning (*Understanding Animation* 26). The extent to which a certain animation makes use of or does not make use of the hyperreal can contribute to a critical analysis of the film's constructed meaning. The comparison can be extended even further when live action films are brought into the equation and seen as part of a continuum.

In *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, Maureen Furniss suggests that one way of defining animation is by contrasting it with live action: "The use of inanimate objects and certain frame-by-frame filming techniques suggest 'animation,' whereas the appearance of live objects and continuous filming suggest 'live-action' (Furniss 5). But in terms of aesthetics there is a large area of overlap between these two tendencies, and Furniss therefore finds it necessary to place them on a continuum under the rubric of "motion picture production" in order to produce more accurate analyses (ibid.). This continuum is also termed the mimesis/abstraction line, with the mimesis end being the place of reproducing natural reality (the height of live action where capturing is essential), and the abstraction end being the place of movement of pure form (the height of animation where creation is essential) (Furniss 6). In between these two poles is a gradated progression; somewhere close to the middle (maybe a little closer to the abstract end) you would find a film like Disney's *Snow White* (1939), which to a large extent draws on reality for models of its characters, environments and

movements, but on the other hand is still “hand made” and therefore can be described as a caricature of reality. This is the vicinity of the notion of Wells’ “hyperrealism” along the continuum. The point of the continuum is to provide a frame of reference in terms of which animation can be positioned and, along with live action, compared and discussed (Furniss 7). This is important in the analysis of the case studies, because the documentary genre has hitherto been dominated by live action.

The animated form also brings its own unique attributes to postmodern cinema. Animation can be viewed as intrinsically postmodern because its very method of production means that self-reflection is essential to its construction. Animations are not indexical and therefore do not conceal their constructedness. They seek reference to the real as an essential communication tool within their design and therefore acknowledge the physical world as a source from which meaning is constructed. But this acknowledgement is found in a very subjective medium that embraces the postmodern notion of rejecting normative and didactic forms of ideology (Connor 176).

With the ability now to recognize and approach the chosen films in terms of their animated aesthetic form as contrasted with that of live action, we can begin to discuss the idea of representing reality in an indexical cinematic language.

The Documentary Genre

In film theory the documentary is a wide ranging, keenly debated, constantly evolving genre rooted in the notion of representing “reality” through film (Nichols, *Representing Reality* 12). The aim of this research is to explore the contributions that the animated films selected for case study make to this evolution, more specifically to the contemporary tendency towards a more subjective mode of representation (Bruzzi 252). It is therefore necessary to explore the fundamental principles of the genre first.

Bill Nichols, a theorist of the documentary element in film, explains in his book *Introduction to Documentary* that “Every film is a documentary” (1). In other words, any film made by human hands is in some way documenting certain elements of the real world: whether it is the scriptwriter’s imaginative ideas or the clothing fashions of an era, the film produces records of these elements. No matter how fictional the film may be, it indirectly documents the culture and period that produced it. Therefore two types of film making are distinguished, according to the manner in which they record or encode reality: the “Documentary of Wish-Fulfilment” (the fictional film) and the “Documentary of Social Representation” (ibid.). The latter refers to non-fictional films that attempt to produce accurate representations of the world we share. These are more commonly known as documentary films.

Even though Nichols is discussing live action film here, his approach of looking at all film as a record can also be adopted for the animated film. Any animated production is a documentation of human creativity, but certain animated films, like their live action equivalents, set out deliberately to create testimony of a lived world through cinema. The films chosen as case studies would fall into this category because they imply that they are representations of a shared world through their documentary or social representation tendencies. It is these characteristics that are vital to the analysis of these films and that will therefore be addressed with reference to the theory of the subject.

Nichols does not seem to find it feasible to give a concrete definition of documentary film because of its great variety of forms and its constant development – the latter of which, because of the addition of the medium of animation to the genre, is the focus of this paper. It will have to suffice to say that this form of film making in all its manifestations shares the common goal of creating awareness or knowledge about the lived world (*Representing Reality* 11):

> Documentary as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory. It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes. The term documentary must itself be constructed in much the same manner as the world we know and share. Documentary film practice is the site of contestation and change. Of greater importance than the ontological finality of a definition – how well it captures the "thingness" of the documentary – is the purpose to which a definition is put and the facility with which it locates and addresses important questions, those that remain unsettled from the past and those posed by the present. (*Representing Reality* 12)

According to Nichols, then, there are no set boundaries to the manner in which any type of represented realities are formed, and it is the knowledge created by a documentary that is the constant and obligatory aspect of the genre. This knowledge results from the bringing of certain real situations to the attention of the audience. Of course, this understanding of the genre is the product of its various manifestations in the history of its evolution.

In “The Documentary Form,” Paul Wells points out that the origins of the documentary film are closely tied to the origins of film itself. Most of the first moving pictures captured on film were of actual subjects as they occurred in reality. For example, the Lumière Brothers’ *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895) was the simple everyday event of people leaving their jobs, recorded to show the potential of the static camera to capture “reality” (“The Documentary Form” 215). The potential of this device would be the cornerstone of the development of the representation of the “real” through the indexical nature of film and the eventual organization of this tendency as a genre (ibid.).

Perhaps the first historical developments strongly to influence the characteristics of the documentary film came from the Russian Revolution in 1917, where works by such filmmakers as Dziga Vertov grappled with the art form as well as the politicized “reality” that it recorded (ibid.). The recording process itself was emphasized, with complex editing and unusual camera movement in films like *The Man with the Movie Camera* aimed at making the audience more alert and

perceptive (“The Documentary Form” 216). Film was seen here as an educational tool, but one making use of a formalist style that deconstructed the process and therefore created awareness through aesthetic preoccupation with the image (Hayward 73). Interestingly, this type of filmmaking often included sections of stop frame animation to highlight the deconstructive mode of creating perception. This developmental filmmaking would only be studied closely and become influential later on in the development of the genre, because at this stage of the documentary’s history a solid understanding of the term was still not established. It embodied a completely different notion of the “representation of the real” from that which was developing in England at about the same time, and which would become the dominant notion of the documentary (Hayward 72).

The term documentary was defined by John Grierson, a British filmmaker and theorist, as an example of the “Travelogue” film – footage shot in foreign locations that introduced to audiences the adventures of exploring exotic people and places (“The Documentary Form” 216). Grierson, who was influential in determining the nature of documentary in the 1920s, saw this type of film as an instrument for information and education as well as for the creative treatment of reality (Hayward 72). Here emphasis was placed on the production process, in terms of which raw footage is used to represent meaning. The simplistic notion that captured image equals reality would become the basis for the stereotypical understanding of documentary film (“The Documentary Form” 216). This romantic outlook on documentary filmmaking continued with Robert Flaherty,

whose key film *Nanook of the North* (1922) provides us with a basic example of documentary's limitations in respect of representing reality. Flaherty staged many of the situations in the Eskimos' life in order to create a representation of a more primitive era of their existence ("The Documentary Form" 219). It is such simple manipulation that characterizes the human subjectivity that is distilled into reality when it is captured. This manipulation is much greater in the films to be studied in this paper, because it is the image itself that is staged in animated films. But in their case the sense of human subjectivity is more acceptable because the visuals do not assume that natural indexical claim to be real, as the live action image does.

Grierson later continued to define this genre through his own filmmaking in more politicized terms, when the necessity to educate the masses about certain issues such as democracy had emerged during the 1930s ("The Documentary Form" 219). Grierson started producing sociologically rather than aesthetically orientated social commentary which sought to show how environments and institutions affected the lives of the people (ibid.). Here emphasis was placed on the post-production, where meaning was created in the editing processes (ibid.). When World War Two broke out this project to produce information for social awareness turned into the effort to produce and promote information about public consensus in the form of propaganda.[9] These films used visual and rhetorical methods of persuasion to unify their audiences, and led to a more authorial style

[9] Information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution or nation.

within the genre, through the use of devices such as voice-over, which gives direct information to the viewer (“The Documentary Form” 220).

The concept of “direct cinema” came about in the sixties and seventies, when the impact of lightweight portable camera equipment meant a heightened sense of observation could be achieved, and therefore a “greater truth” could come about because of a less deliberately authored approach than that which had dominated the genre up until this point (“The Documentary Form” 225). This technology allowed the filmmaker to film more spontaneously and therefore capture unexpected developments and, in theory, a more truthful version of reality.

Cinéma vérité also saw and embraced this technology and its ability to be intimate with its subject, but the actual film making process was also critically recognized, specifically the role played by the recording process in the overall production of content. With their recognition of the involvement of the film process in the representation of events, these films produced a breakthrough in social and personal “truth” (“The Documentary Form” 226). The style still proved problematic, however, because even though the filmmaking process was acknowledged in even the most intimate representation, the films still laid claim to an objectivity that denied their makers’ personal perspective on the events portrayed (Bruzzi 73).

With the spread of postmodernism and in the general liberal climate of the eighties, many documentary practitioners started to challenge the established ideas of documentary, in terms of both topics covered and methods of construction (Hayward 74). Previously-avoided topics like feminism, gay rights and racism found a new voice through documentary, and the conventions of the avant-garde art film (where a hybrid array of cinematic forms is used) were employed to highlight the arbitrariness and relativity of notions such as "objective," "reality" and "truth." Fiction-like narratives and conventions were now used to represent factual situations, in order to emphasize the emotional value of the event ("The Documentary Form" 230). This period and the nineties also saw the advent of video technology, which introduced a process of democratizing camera work and film making (Hayward 75). The new technology allowed for a documentary to become more independent because the mass-produced camera apparatus was now more available to the general public. Another result was greater diversity within the genre (ibid).

It is necessary to position the concept of the autobiographical documentary as a sub-genre within this evolution of the postmodern era of documentary. The autobiographical documentary or autodocumentary is a documentary film made in the same manner, where creative interpretations of real life events are constructed as subjects using the language of film. But unlike most documentary films, the autodocumentary covers the personal subjectivity of the filmmaker him- or herself. Because of their highly subjective nature, such films have long been

excluded from the genre of documentary and seen as avant-garde or experimental film. But with the advent of the postmodern era and new theorizations of the notion of documentary, these films started to gain acceptance as representatives of a sub-genre (Anderson). This sub-genre adds another dimension and layer of complexity to documentary, because not only are we asked to consider a “reality” through the problematic conventions of film where the maker is creatively constructing their own representation from inspirational raw material that is the subject, but this subject is now none other than themselves. This type of documentary therefore provides us with a good example of documentary as pure reflection, in that the filmmaker who has control over the production places himself at the centre of attention and therefore reveals the construction of the film by using the medium to express his own story. This gives the viewer an extremely subjective and therefore emotional insight into a situation (Anderson).

All these tendencies have contributed to making the documentary into the multifaceted and complex genre that it is today. Next we need to develop a theoretical understanding of how these documentaries of social representation use a cinematic film language as a medium to embody a reality, and what problems arise in this process.

In his book *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, Erik Barnouw explains that as a “documentarist” or maker of documentary, one must be

dedicated to not “inventing” and remain passionate towards “the found” (Barnouw 288). This limitation is seen by Barnouw as the documentarist’s path towards his or her own expression, which depends upon the stance s/he has taken on the subject. Barnouw stresses two functions of documentary: to faithfully record images and sound and to accurately interpret these foundations (Barnouw 287). Here it is implied that there is a distinct bond between a photographic image and what it records, and this for Barnouw guarantees the presence of reality in film (ibid.). But Barnouw goes on to allow that a creator of documentary, like any communicator in any medium, has endless choices and options when putting together this “accurate interpretation;” and therefore, no matter what, a documentary will always be a subjective product (ibid.). Barnouw therefore appears to contradict his first statement that a practitioner should not invent with the second, which unambiguously informs us that this is a subjectively creative and therefore inventive process. This “traditional” perspective on documentary provides a useful point of entry, but is actually somewhat outdated: more contemporary theorizations need to be considered and discussed.

In *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, Patricia Aufderheide provides a solid definition: “They are portraits of real life, using real life as their raw material, constructed by artists and technicians who make myriad decisions about what story to tell to whom, and for what purpose” (Aufderheide 2). This definition appears to characterize documentary film as a live action medium, but it is also equally applicable to the highly constructed animated version of the genre. The

definition points toward a broader conception of documentary as an art form where the real is seen as the inspiration to the end product and not the end product itself.

With this in mind Aufderheide goes on to discuss two crucial elements that have always been a source of contention in this media field: the notions of representation and reality (9). Like any film, documentaries represent ideas, but unlike fiction film they claim to be representing truth – even if it is a distorted and manipulated rendition thereof (ibid.). This declaration sets these kinds apart, no matter what method is used to produce the end product, and therefore establishes separate genres (ibid.). Reality is a problematic notion because in order to represent it we have to channel it through a limited medium, thus putting limits on something that is potentially limitless. We then ask an audience to accept these partial representations as being an accurate record of the real (10). This problem of trustworthy storytelling through film has troubled the documentary from its inception and continues to create debate.

Bill Nichols proposes six important types or modes of documentary that he uses as contemporary non-definitive guidelines for discussing documentary film ("Introduction to Documentary" 100). The modes follow a historical pattern tracing the rise and fall of dominant forms of representing documentary throughout the development of the film medium (ibid.). These are the Poetic, the Expository, the

Observational, the Participatory, the Reflexive and the Performative ("Introduction to Documentary" 99).

Poetic documentaries share common terrain with the Modernist avant-garde and were a reaction against both the content and grammar of the early fiction film. The poetic mode moved away from continuity editing and instead organized images of the material world by means of associations and patterns, both in terms of time and space ("Introduction to Documentary" 103). This mode would include the works of Dziga Vertov. Expository documentaries speak directly to the viewer, often in the form of an authoritative commentary employing voice-over or titles, proposing a strong argument and point of view or recounting of history ("Introduction to Documentary" 105). This mode would include the works of John Grierson. Observational documentaries attempt simply and spontaneously to observe lived life with a minimum of intervention, like the works of the direct cinema era ("Introduction to Documentary" 109). Participatory documentaries believe that it is impossible for the act of filmmaking not to influence or alter the events being filmed, and therefore embrace the process within the whole representation ("Introduction to Documentary" 115). This mode would include the *cinéma vérité* style. Reflexive documentaries do not see themselves as a transparent window on the world but instead draw attention to their own construction, and the fact that they are representations ("Introduction to Documentary" 125). Finally, Performative documentaries stress subjective experience and emotional response to the world. They are strongly personal,

unconventional, poetic or experimental. This mode attempts to demonstrate how accessing such personal knowledge can help us understand more general processes in society (“Introduction to Documentary” 131). These last two modes evoke the current approach of the postmodern in documentary film.

Stella Bruzzi acknowledges these six modes in her book *New Documentary*, but goes on to make the point that the modes are far more interconnected and hybridized than Nichols allows for, and that they do not follow such a strict chronological order (4). A modern example of documentary could employ aspects of the Expository mode as well as elements of the Performative but still operate as a coherent documentary. This must always be kept in mind when discussing these modes, which nevertheless remain useful as conceptual discriminations.

Each mode lends itself, albeit somewhat abstractly, to the idea of animation as a medium that is developing the documentary genre towards a more subjective style in some way or another. But as I have already indicated, it is the Reflexive and the Performative modes that are most pertinent to this discussion and will be focused on. Nichols describes the focus of attention within the Reflexive mode as being the “processes of negotiation between filmmaker and viewer” (“Introduction to Documentary” 125). Not only is the historical world represented but also a variety of issues pertaining to the very process of representation: “Instead of seeing through documentaries to the world beyond them, reflexive

documentaries ask us to see documentary for what it is: a construct or representation" (ibid).

This self-awareness of the medium is characteristic of postmodernist film.

For example, Nichols uses the films *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* and *The Man with a Movie Camera* to illustrate the idea of the Reflexive mode. In *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* the interviewed subjects are only revealed to the audience half way through the film as being actresses reenacting actual interviews ("Introduction to Documentary" 126). In *The Man with a Movie Camera*, play with the conventions of representing reality is seen in a scene where a cameraman is shot filming a horse-drawn carriage. The scene then cuts to a scene of an editing room where an editor pieces together film strips of the previous shot, thereby exposing, in a non-linear manner, the way in which a film is created and produced as a final product (ibid.). Both examples seek to deconstruct the audience's sense of encounter with represented realities and to reflect on the process of this representation in order to heighten audience awareness ("Introduction to Documentary" 128).

The problem with the Reflexive mode is that it has a tendency to focus too much of its attention on this deconstruction rather than pursuing the outcome of documentary filmmaking, which is highlighting a particular situation for the information of the public ("Introduction to Documentary" 129).

One could look at animation's "constructedness" as being one of the purest of examples of the Reflexive mode. Even though not that much attention may be focused on the idea of exposing the filmmaking process itself within the animated documentary film, the fact that the viewer is always aware of watching created pictures leads to a sense that these films are a sustained reflection on the medium as a flawed communicator of actuality. This could lead to an even greater lack of objectivity in these films, because animation automatically reflects upon itself as a whole and therefore leads the audience to question (subconsciously or consciously) the authenticity of the representation. This questioning can be used by the creator to highlight ideas surrounding the subject of his or her animated documentary. But like its live action counterpart, the animated documentary faces the challenge of not over-deconstructing to the point of losing sight of the real events or conditions intended to be represented by the film.

The Performative mode is the most recent of the modes identified by Nichols, and is characterized by the use of "performance" within a non-fiction film to draw attention to the utopian idea of authentic representation. The resulting film is highly subjective and personal in order to draw attention to the specific real world situation evoked (Bruzzi 185).

Bruzzi argues against Nichols's definition, in that there are in fact two types of performative documentary films. First there are documentary films that

deliberately utilize very performance-oriented subjects and stylized visuals to bring about their subjective representation, and then there are performative documentary films that share common elements with the participatory mode, where the presence of the camera and filmmaker bring out a dramatic presence on the part of their subjects (Bruzzi 187). For the purposes of the argument in this paper, I will be focusing on the former kind, because the animated documentary consists precisely of highly constructed “performance.”

The performative mode accepts that the process of creating meaning is always subjective and that every person reacts differently to certain situations and interpretations (“Introduction to Documentary” 131). Embodied knowledge is seen here to provide the viewer with a greater understanding of society (ibid.). Therefore the performative mode underscores the complexity of our own knowledge by addressing the audience in a highly subjective manner (ibid.): “Performative documentaries primarily address us, emotionally and expressively, rather than pointing us to the factual world we hold in common” (“Introduction to Documentary” 132). This is done, as in the Reflexive mode, by accentuating and not masking the methods of film production; but here it is the creation of narrative through dramatic technique that is emphasized (ibid.).

This is often done directly through the reconstruction of the experiences or personal story of the filmmaker him- or herself (“Introduction to Documentary” 131). The act of remembering reality is given precedence over the attempt to

create a truly factual film, which results in a more personal or personalized expression (ibid.). The Performative mode can therefore be associated with the autobiographical sub-genre in which the “diaristic” style found in participatory documentary is employed to emphasize the qualities of experience and memory (ibid.). The audience member is invited to experience what it is like to occupy the unique subjective position of the subject(s) within the film (ibid.). Performative documentaries herald a new notion of ‘truth’ in that they acknowledge the constructed process of personal filmmaking, even in the non-fiction film (Bruzzi 186).

The Performative mode thus lends itself to a more personal style of filmmaking within the genre of documentary through the new postmodern liberty found in the construction of narrative forms (Bruzzi 198). With a greater freedom of expression within a medium that is now self-aware a shift is occurring that sees the documentary film becoming a site for the development of subjective expression (ibid.). The example of Michael Moore comes to mind. Moore can be seen as a “performer-director” who activity participates in his own films (ibid.). The intrusion of the filmmaker into the world of his subject inevitability reveals the filmmaking process. At the same time, Moore is overtly exposing his personal intentions by performing in as well as directing his films. The control that he exerts upon his films leads to their displaying a very subjective outlook on their subjects. Moore places his own personal views on his subject and therefore becomes a part of the subject. But I would argue here that this is still not an auto-

documentary because Moore is concerned with expressing his personal opinion on the subject, rather than with registering the subject's influence on him. I feel that an auto-documentary would probably include both, in order to create a holistic representation of the individual himself and not just the subject, through both reflection and personal performative subjectivity.

Furthermore, the Performative mode shares with animated documentary similar methods of construction, in that control over the medium is enforced. Animation can be placed in this category because of the animator's ability to produce character within the art of "character animation," where acting or performance is included in the very process of making "life" within the medium. But more importantly, the concept of the created image itself is where a premeditated performance lies. This is a performance of the actual image which, like acting, is a premeditated idea. It therefore conforms to certain fictional characteristics in that it can be manipulated until perfected in terms of its intended discourse, which is then seen in the final rendition by the audience. Once again, this "unreal" image highlights the dilemma of authenticity because of the creator's ability to have absolute control over what the final product will look like. In the case of animation, this adds an extra dimension to the heightened control over meaning found in the Performative mode. It is animation's scripted performance and greater control over image construction that can lead to its being perceived as a strong developer of the subjective form.

The idea of the Performative mode's ability to question the formation of knowledge though embodiment also raises Nichols's notion of magnitude within documentary filmmaking, as a means of measuring the relative enormity of an event as it is presented to and recognized by the viewer. Nichols uses a juxtaposition of two disasters to illustrate his ideas of questioning the magnitude within a cinematic representation of a real event ("Representing Reality" 229). These are the burning of the Hindenberg in 1937 and the exploding of the Challenger space shuttle in 1986. Both were tragic events involving the loss of human life, but they were reported very differently by the people broadcasting at the time that tragedy struck ("Representing Reality" 230). The reporter witnessing the Hindenberg disaster exclaims at what he is seeing in a very emotional manner, often choking on his words and sobbing while he tries to express what is happening to the burning blimp full of passengers. This grief-stricken account is in sharp contrast to the manner in which the Challenger's explosion was reported. This similar catastrophe was summed up with the emotionless phrase: "There seems to be a major malfunction" (ibid.).

Nichols uses this example of sharp contrast to demonstrate how "representable" an historical event can be. All documentary films are representations of real situations, but it is the manner in which cinematic language is used to represent that creates the intensity of the event to be inferred by the viewer. It is this degree or magnitude within the representation that emotionally engages us with the subject. And it is the effect that a documentary has on its audience that raises

questions of an ideological correspondence between a film and the historical world (“Representing Reality” 232). The Performative mode seems to have an advantage in terms of effectiveness because of the emotional content intrinsic to dramatic representation, which allows its audience to engage with the subject on a personal level conducive to greater intensity or magnitude.

The contemporary animations selected as case studies fall into the current Performative/Reflexive dominant mode of address through their performance of the image. Their delivery of magnitude would be affected by the characteristics of animation’s cinematic language, and therefore the effect of this language on magnitude must be considered in the analysis section.

Another area of the documentary genre that is vitally important to the analysis of the case studies is the combination of sound and image in relation to the depiction of non-fiction. I argue that this combination in the form of the animated interview is what sets these animated documentaries apart from other animated documentaries or live action interview-based documentaries, and therefore creates new possibilities in the genre.

Nichols regards the combination of sound and image as a foregrounding of the early direct-address style of the Expository documentary mode made famous by Grierson through didactic voice-overs (“The Voice of Documentary” 48). This mode was the first to use this combination, which became the dominant style of

representing “reality” through a authoritative yet often presumptuous off-screen narration that created quite biased and instructive accounts of historic events, but – as Nichols points out – a successful dominant mode will always breed its own overthrow because of the heightened scrutiny it attracts while in the spotlight (“The Voice of Documentary” 49). The successor to the Expository mode, the Observational mode of direct cinema, conveyed the impression of having captured events on film without tampering with them, and therefore image and sound were represented as recorded in the field (ibid.). The authoritative postproduction voice-over was abandoned for a “transparent” window through which the viewer could watch actual people and their conversations as they happened, and draw their own conclusions from such representations (ibid.). This now dominant mode also generated problems, as its unaided representation of image and sound did not give enough context to the history of the event and left the viewer with a weak sense of constructed meaning (ibid.). This led to the rendering of image and sound through the Participatory mode, where a direct-address style was again used, though this time the voice came from the subjects themselves in the form of the interview (ibid.).

Such reliance on oral history became the predominant mode of documentary filmmaking because the interview allowed for a clear representation of information about a topic without the harsh intervention of an authoritative figure (“The Voice of Documentary” 55). Interviews allow for authority to be diffused, which in turn encourages the viewer to be less suspicious when it comes to the

validation of such information (ibid.). This is unique to the interview, as the political is presented as personal and enables a confidential relationship between the viewer and the film (ibid.). The interview method also has its problems: as Nichols points out, it may start to undermine the intention of the filmmaker by creating a gap between the intended awareness (that the creators of the film are hoping to establish) and the social perception displayed by the interviewee (ibid.). This can lead to manipulation of the interview so as better to fit the desired narrative of the filmmaker.

Like the previously dominant modes of combining image and sound in documentary, the interview style of the Participatory mode has begun to transform into alternative structures of representing the non-fictional, which may for in time come to seem more natural or even more "realistic" ("The Voice of Documentary" 49). The interview as well as other image/sound techniques can now be absorbed into the methods used by the Performative/Reflexive dominating mode. This is what has happened in the case of the contemporary animated documentaries in question, which feature in their animation a combination of the interview and the performance of the image. Both image and sound are in fact constructions or re-presentations: thus the filmmaker's recorded voice can be used as voice-over to convey information, because this exposes the filmmaker as a participant in the history/reality. This makes for a diary-like approach that is recognizable in the form of the autobiographical documentary (ibid.).

As stated above, the present moment is witnessing a critical stage in the evolution of the documentary, and this paper hopes to contribute to that evolution by analyzing the impact that the animated films selected as case studies will have on the current image/sound mode of representation.

Bruzzi's overall argument aims to explore the currently developing forms within documentary through the general notion of performativity, [10] where such elements as reconstruction, acknowledgement of and interplay with the camera, image manipulation and performance are producing ideological transformation within the genre (Bruzzi 252):

> Documentary now widely acknowledges and formally engages with its own constructedness, its own performative agenda; it is not that reality has changed, but rather the ways in which documentary – mainstream as well as independent – has chosen to represent it. (252)

I would suggest that the auto-documentary exemplifies this contemporary dominant mode of actuality filmmaking, because of its combination of self-reflexivity and deeply subjective performance.

Nichols too is aware of and acknowledges this transformation within the contemporary form: "More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction. A shift of epistemological proportions has occurred" (*Blurred Boundaries* 1). But Nichols is not as welcoming of this progression as Bruzzi tends to be, construing it as a siege to which historical

[10] A collective term for films that fall into both the Reflexive and Performative modes.

reality is being subjected (2). He suggests that contingent subjectivities can only restore magnitude if they create meaning in a collective environment (16). This may be possible through an interview placed within a performative context, which is the case in the two films chosen for analysis.

Bruzzi and Nichols are still only discussing a live action version of documentary, and I would wish to augment Bruzzi's favorable view of current developments in documentary film by bringing it to bear also on the animated medium. Importantly, the developmental context recognized by the various theorists referred to in this discussion will help us to assess the contributions of the animated case studies towards a sense of where the genre is heading.

Chapter 2

The Animated Documentary

This chapter will compare the views of leading animation academics such as Wells and Ward in a theoretical analysis of the debates surrounding the topic of representing a “reality” within animation. Again, attention will be focused on the personal or subjective factor of autobiographical filmmaking.

Sheila Sofian, a practising animator and Associate Professor at the University of Southern California, describes the animated documentary as “any animated film that deals with non-fictional material. It can utilize documentary audio interviews, or it can be interpretation or re-creation of factual events” (Sofian 7). This definition covers a wide variety of animated films, each with its own unique manner of producing non-fictional representations. These can include a total visual re-interpretation of actual interviews to create new meaning, or a rendition of an individual’s personal memories to create a history (ibid). Both the films selected as case studies use a combination of verbal reinterpretation and personal reminiscing to produce animated autobiographical documentaries.

Paul Ward examines animated documentaries by questioning how animation relates to representations of the real world, material actuality and, crucially, history. Ward highlights the hyperreal as the realism characteristic of animation, but points out that we are still being ask to consider “a world and not the world,”

no matter how realistic the animation may look (Ward). He thus puts his finger on the problematic conventions of the animated documentary, in terms of which the viewer is aware of the abstractness of the representation, which results in a difference in perception (Ward). To gain a sense of the historical in animation, a viewer has therefore to relinquish the notion of a correspondence between the physical world and the image and seek a "reality" in other mannerisms (Ward): "Any realism obtained in these films is to do with generic/narrative conventions and verisimilitude rather than any sense of the film resembling the world we live in" (Ward).

The very idea of animation as documentary goes against the traditional view of what the fundamentals of this live action-dominated field are. The traditional perspective projects a responsibility towards representing the "truth" in established ways: "what is stressed is the indexical link between an external reality (the lived world of actuality) and the thing that purports to represent it. In the case of live action, the mimetic power of the image is often considerable" (Ward). Therefore a technological device like the camera is used more frequently in this genre because of its ability faithfully to capture reality's image. This is of course a Realist perspective that assumes that there is an objectively "real" world out there that is independent of our perceptions (Ward). But as we have seen in the foregoing discussion of the documentary genre, all film is ultimately a creative and constructed process, and therefore "reality" lies rather within the process of how we conceptualize it (Ward).

Reality cannot always simply be successfully and conclusively represented by any mechanism. In the case of a camera and its live action product, a multitude of features of the experience represented could be lost in the simple surface recording and representing of an external physical world. Its necessary limitation or partiality has always been an issue in the live action mode of representing the real (Ward).

Animations are also subject to the difficulties of representing reality; however they also provide alternative understandings of this evolving concept. As mentioned earlier, animations are made of iconic moving pictures and these icons are images used to represent people, places or ideas. These representations find their inspiration in a reality and therefore have the ability to communicate ideas about a reality. But they are not direct recordings of this actuality and can therefore depict *more* than just what is seen in external life. They can be pushed towards the abstract end of Furniss's continuum and therefore propose new interpretations of the "realistic" depiction of reality. With its obvious lack of visual recording boundaries and its self-reflexive nature as found in its unbounded pictorial vocabulary, animation would seem to have a great deal to offer to this mode of factual communication – though its limitations must also be kept in mind.

The use of animation in the documentary can vary. Often documentaries are made with animation purely because of the fact that there was no camera or such apparatus around at the time of the event to record the situation, and

therefore animation can represent the event using its crafted imagery (Sofian 7). In other instances animation is chosen because of its ability to represent the non-physical aspects of a reality. For instance, creative animation can represent aspects of life like the emotions or a state of mind: “Animation is especially persuasive in depicting such states of consciousness – memory, fantasy, dream, and so on – because it can easily resist the conventions of the material world and the ‘realist’ representation that characterizes live action cinema” (Animation: Genre and Authorship 49).

The notion of animation as documentary stretches almost as far back as animation itself, to Winsor McCay’s *Sinking of the Lusitania* in 1915. Winsor McCay was one of the first major names in the development of animation as a medium. This early animation was used to document the horrific events of the bombing of this cruise ship by German U-Boats. McCay used interviews with eye witnesses to create a visually spectacular propaganda film that played on the emotions of Americans. The initial inspiration for the animated documentary as seen here can come from many sources, such as audio interviews or interpretation of actual events (Wells, “Genre and Authorship” 7). But this film was made before the invention of syncing sound and moving image, so these interview voices are not part of the end production. This film also shows animated documentaries’ significant relationship with propaganda, which would be enhanced further during the Second World War, when large animation studios like Disney and Warner Brothers created animation for this purpose.

In the interests of a clearer conceptualization of the workings of this genre, Paul Wells has offered a typology of four modes for the animated documentary in his article "The Beautiful Village and the True Village: A Consideration of Animation and the Documentary Aesthetic." This article sets out to address the complications that arise from the “intrinsically fictional vocabulary” (40) of animation when it is used to represent non-fictional material. Wells begins with an account of Hans Richter’s notion of traditional documentary filmmaking, specifically that idea that participants in the process embody a creative personality which has to disguise itself in order to achieve a greater semblance of objective reality (40). Richter noted that cinema (including the documentary film) had taken over the established modes of “the beautiful” from the fine arts and that film now had the poetry of painting in its aesthetic. This picturesque aesthetic overpowers filmmakers and leads to the falsification of the truth in any representation of actuality (40). Therefore “the beautiful village” was not the “true village,” and ultimately one must always view the subject of such films not as an idyll but as a social entity offered by the “truth” of the cinematic medium itself.

Wells argues that animation as a medium is even closer to this picturesque aesthetic, which allows it to provide more “cinematic truth.” Animation in his view is a highly important art form operating within the documentary mode (45). Animation is seen to also highlight John Grierson’s seminal dictum that documentary is “the creative treatment of actuality,” in that it is the product of selecting and creating visuals and their movement and therefore ultimately offers

the simultaneity of recording and interpreting (40). This very “hand made” approach to the image material allows for films to diverge from the mode of photographic realism and create cinema that asks questions of itself and its subjects that “prick the social conscience” (41). For Grierson, this was one of the paramount aims of the documentary form.

Animation, according to Wells, can therefore be viewed as an interrogation of the ways in which “the real” has been constructed through its own hybrid aesthetics. It is animation’s uniqueness in this respect that Wells sets out to examine, and he does so by exploring the medium via his own re-constituted classificatory categories (41).

These categories are a set of hybridized views of the animated documentary subject based upon traditional documentary theory: the imitative, the subjective, the fantastic, and the postmodern. Like Bill Nichols’s modes of live action documentary, they offer a framework for critical debate on the subject. But as Stella Bruzzi points out about Nichols’s modes, Wells’s modes are neither discrete nor set in stone, and one example of animated documentary may contain several aspects of each mode.

First, the Imitative animated documentary is seen by Wells to use techniques that produce an animated mimic of live action documentaries, where certain conventions or generic elements that are normally played out in stereotypical non-fictional films are used to evoke a greater sense of actuality within the

animation (41). These could include conventions like voice-overs, which are used to install a sense of the real with the “expert” narrating the facts to you, or the visual stating of information through text which comes across as fact, a convention established by traditional documentary filmmaking (ibid.). The imitative mode is the most recognizable form of animated documentary simply because of its close assimilation of the codes of live action documentary. This mode also seems to be the favoured approach of studios wishing to make educational or informative films with the aid of animation (ibid.). For instance, Disney’s educational film for children entitled *The Living Machine* (1955) made use of simple animation depicting mechanical moving parts as metaphors for how the human body operates. This creates a “clarification through simplification” (ibid.) of the imagery, and this has become a hallmark of the animated documentary. Simplified forms allow the audience to relate to the subject more easily. The film was also narrated by the famous Disney character Jiminy Cricket, who gives instructions to the viewer about healthy living, which suggests how easily documentary can become indistinguishable from propaganda. *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1915) is also given as an example of this type of animated documentary, in that it provides the viewer with a vast amount of information through text – albeit a very one-sided account (again exposing its propaganda element) – as a means to foreground its highly emotive and dramatic imagery in a real and factual world. Wells points out that this mode shares certain features in common with Nichols’s expository mode in that it is ultimately didactic (41). This is an important point because it underlines animation’s overlapping

commonalities with other media, and reminds us that animation may be uniquely expressive but is not a supreme or ultimately unique medium.

The Subjective mode questions the notion of authenticity within the non-fictional filmmaking process. Like all film, these animations are subjective, but in contrast with the subtlety of this component in live action documentary, these films use their production methods to flaunt their subjectivity (42). The films exploit the fine line between the plausibly "real" and the overtly "surreal" in animation, which in turn exposes the falsehood of objectivity: "Animation facilitates the 'realist' mode and its collapse into the subjective because of its intrinsic fictiveness" (43). The power of control over the medium allows for the flourishing of a subjective recollection within the representation of a reality (ibid.). This blurring of parameters can challenge dominant ideologies while at the same time illustrating personal subjectivity to clearly articulate individual points of view (ibid.). This may range from dream-like states of consciousness to fully articulated individual perspectives. Wells also notes that this type of animated documentary often moves beyond the basic narration of an individual's personal story and establishes a strong correspondence with the audience, which in turn highlights the social circumstances of the story (ibid.). Again, it is this effect that can be viewed as one of documentary's most important outcomes. Wells describes this type of animated documentary as a mixture of the Observational and the Participatory modes, in that the animator observes by recreating what has happened from an aural source but at the same time limits this recreation to a

single view point on history: “this subjective style re-politicizes the form while mounting an implied critique of it” (44).

The Fantastic mode is one that challenges the certainties of the expository by dwelling on what lies beneath the orthodox surface of everyday, common sense reality, usually with "surrealist" results (44). Here the suggestion is that objective reality is an illusion that is ultimately misleading, offering only a relative point of comparison (ibid.). Animation is seen here to be a vehicle through which an alternative and more creative form of expressing a conventional history is achieved. These works can only be effective if their construction of a “reality” breaks down notions of received knowledge in a fantastic form: “This is documentary not as ‘film of record’ but as film of recognition, revealing the underlying value systems and relationships beneath rationalized, supposedly civilized, naturalized cultures” (44). Wells compares this mode to the live action mode of the reflexive, in that it blatantly reveals itself in the process of recreation. The danger of this mode is that in trying (too hard) to “de-familiarize” the documentary object (44), the film may lose sight of its ostensible subject.

The Postmodern mode suggests that documentary is a mode with no special claim to "truth" or "reality," a mere image rather than an authentic representation (44). Wells describes the postmodern as being similar to the subjective mode in that it is prepared to follow a single point of view as a relevant source from which history can be represented, except that the postmodern mode goes one step

further and allows for far greater incoherence in the rendition of this subjective idea (ibid.). The postmodern allows for even the most unrealistic of events to be represented in animation because it is predicated upon expressing acts of memory and not fact (45). This takes the idea of documentation to a whole new level, one that includes the recording of fictional ideas because someone claims that they are real. Wells also suggests that this mode is closely allied to that of the performative documentary in that it suspends realist representation in order to explore the experiential, even if this is based completely within the solipsistic (45).

As with the live action modes that Nichols proposes, it is not always easy to classify specific examples of animated documentary in terms of one of Wells' modes, and it is often better to use aspects of various modes to support discussion of a work. The modes are useful, for instance, in consideration of the debate around the use of audio within the animation processes in order to establish the medium's contribution towards a more personal style of autobiographical documentary filmmaking.

In ending this chapter on the animated documentary, I feel it is important to reveal Ward's rethinking of Nichols's idea of magnitude within the production of a representation of a "reality," and how this has come to affect the animated representation. The clear distinction between images of the real world in live action documentary and the manufactured images of its animated counterpart

allows for the latter to move beyond the naturalistic, surface representation and engage with a deeply personal, even inarticulable understanding of these events through the subjectivity of the filmmaker (Ward). Ward sees this engagement with the viewer as animation's ultimate strength in the documentary, because it is able to give the audience a direct and simple expression of the intensity of the emotions felt by the makers themselves. This allows the viewer to enter into a unique relationship that allows for a higher level of magnitude to be experienced in relation to the subject (Ward). As discussed above, it is this magnitude within the representation that emotionally engages us, and it is this effect that raises questions of an ideological correspondence between a film and the historical world ("Representing Reality" 232). Ward uses the example of Karen Watson's mixed media animated film *Daddy's Little Bit of Dresden China* to illustrate his point about magnitude within the animated documentary. Here Watson explores the subject of child abuse – a subject often addressed in live action documentaries – by channeling her own experiences from childhood into her animated film (Ward). Watson was abused by her own father and therefore the subject is very close to her. The film demonstrates how the medium can affect the magnitude of the viewer's experience. The film uses symbolism, with, for instance, characters taking the form of puppets made from razor blades, feathers and bandages. These representative figures are animated to set up an artistic abstract tension surrounding family life, media representations, sex, violence and mythology (Ward). Rather than simply documenting the notion of abuse this animated film acts as an outlet for the maker and enables her to express

unspeakable feelings aroused by her horrific experience. As viewers we can involve ourselves in this deeply personal rendition, and the extent to which we are affected emotionally serves to create greater social awareness of such phenomena (Ward).

This recognition of the animated documentary's capacity for magnitude will therefore be applied in the analysis of the films chosen as case studies, in the context of the interview process featured in these films. This should grant some insight into how these animations are developing the documentary mode in a new and important direction.

Chapter 3

Ryan and *Waltz with Bashir*

This chapter will describe the films chosen for study and then formally examine them and compare them, using the knowledge and perspectives presented in the previous chapters. The goal is to determine their significance as examples of subjective development in documentary through the animated representation of actuality, where the combination of audio and constructed image produces such self-portraits.

Ryan:

The first case study involves the Oscar-winning independent short film *Ryan. Ryan* was written, directed and animated by Chris Landreth. A small team of animators and creative personnel provided technical support to his vision on the film. The film is a personal, emotional as well as psychological documentation of the lives of the film's subject, Ryan Larkin, and of the director himself (Fernandes).

Landreth did not begin his career as an animator or director of films, and it was only after he was employed by a software company to test the programming of their animation software packages that he discovered a love for animated film. Prior to *Ryan*, he had produced other award-winning animated shorts that

included *the end* (1995) and *Bingo* (1997). Both these films illustrate Landreth's unique and personal approach to storytelling and film making in general. It is this signature trait that also distinguishes his first animated documentary *Ryan*: "He gives us interpretative visuals that go beyond photo-realism into a pioneer realm where the visual appearance reflects the character's evolving pain, insanity, fear, mercy, shame and creativity. A realm that he calls psycho-realism" (*Ryan* DVD).

The film uses three-dimensional computer graphics to create an autobiographical documentary animation with a postmodernist slant. *Ryan* ironically presents a certain history of animation through an animator within the medium of animation. This suggests a heightened sense of self-awareness on the part of this film: animation is deliberately used to highlight its own historical context as well as the human emotions involved in this history. The initial subject of the documentary is a talented artist, and at the beginning of the film, the focus is this person's life journey and personal character. The character is animator Ryan Larkin. Larkin was a famous experimental animator in the 1960s who was employed by the National Film Board of Canada along with other legendary animators such as Norman McLaren. Larkin created many extraordinary and influential animations that have cemented his place in the history of animation. These included the films *Walking* (1969) and *Street Musique* (1972), the former of which was nominated for an Academy Award (*Ryan* DVD).

After this successful period in his life, Larkin became heavily addicted to cocaine and began to rely on the substance for further artistic inspiration. Larkin's addiction finally began to affect his work and he stopped producing films in 1973. In 1978 he was forced to resign from the NFB as a result of his lack of productivity. He subsequently battled to maintain any kind of employment and eventually ended up living on the streets of Montreal. This is a period that Larkin describes as a "haze." He currently lives in a homeless shelter in Montreal and spends his days begging for spare change from passers by. Although Larkin is no longer taking cocaine, its toll is evident in his slurred speech and twitchy movements, and he still continues to consume alcohol heavily on a daily basis (*Ryan* DVD). Landreth uses his documentary to create awareness of this great talent and his fall from grace.

The film was inspired by the meeting of the two animators, but it was only after Landreth began to record his conversations with Larkin that the actual foundations for the production were laid. Landreth uses these recordings as the basis for the narrative of the animation, and has therefore also constructed a representation of himself in the film. This character narrates the film and gives the viewer information about its "psycho- realistic" presented world. But he inevitably becomes directly involved in the narrative, adding a powerful autobiographical dimension to the film.

Ryan starts off with a three-dimensional digitally rendered representation of Landreth explaining, in the bathroom of a homeless shelter, the concept he calls “psycho-realism,” one of the main premises of the film. Landreth points out colourful scarring on his face that seems imbedded in his skull ,and a yellow smiley face made of sunflowers indented on the side of his head, and goes on to explain that these are representations of emotional episodes from his own past that have “scarred” his present existence (Figure 4, *Ryan* DVD).



Figure 4

This concept of psycho-realism therefore manifests in a “physical” manner the character’s state of mind in that particular time and space as a product of their past experiences. Landreth has said in an interview:

> I wanted to do something that was metaphorical as well as realistic. Something that had all the elements of photo-realism, but that also had some metaphorical elements. I portrayed people how I saw them, their psychological state and personalities. The depiction of a metaphorical reality of people’s personality is something I call psycho-realism. (Fernandes)

Landreth uses this conceptual device throughout the film to represent the characters, all of whom are based on real people who reside in the shelter and are modelled according to their particular character or state of mind. According to Landreth:

> Some of them are actually people from Ryan's scene at the mission. For example, there's a guy he calls St. Christopher, who shuffles around the mission and will for no reason at all lay a coin down in front of you. Cone Boy (the guy with the cone head) sort of came out of that. There were also other people who were my own interpretation of people I've seen or known who are vagrant or street people, or fucked up in one way or another. (Fernandes)

The mind itself is also physically represented, and in the opening scene Landreth explains his fear of "personal failure" by showing himself when he was a child. He expresses his restless mind as colourful hair-like protrusions that extend from the back of the head and wrap around his face, smothering it completely.

The background environment depicted within the animation is also subject to this concept of psycho-realism: for instance, the walls in the opening scene are continually morphing and smudging, depending on the character's state of mind at that point in time. This can also be seen in the posters found on the walls where the wording is backwards. Such a "shifting perspective" continues throughout the film and adds to the surreal feel of the story and the motif of the psyche's physical manifestations (*Ryan* DVD).

Landreth's interpretation of Ryan is first seen when his narrating character walks through the dining hall of the shelter, passing all the other warped individuals

who live there and eventually meeting Ryan at the last table. Ryan is the most ravaged of all the characters and the effects of his life struggles are clearly evident: most of his head is missing and only half his face is present, with a crop of hair balanced above. His actual thoughts can be seen playing inside this open space where his “mind” should be. His arms are also disfigured – twisted and vine-like in appearance, ending in hands that are missing fingers (Figure 5, *Ryan* DVD).



Figure 5

Ryan has been affected both neurologically and psychologically, which is reflected in his personality as the animated representation gesticulates and stutters along with the actual audio conversation when he is stimulated by Landreth’s questions. This impediment is a side-effect of years of drug abuse.

Landreth goes on to discuss aspects of Ryan’s life, using animation to interpret the interviews. Topics such as Ryan’s films and the people who were close to

him before he “fell on hard times” are explored. The viewer is exposed to original hand drawn animations made by Larkin, and interviews with important characters in his life are recreated. These characters, manifested as three-dimensional recreations of Larkin’s own sketches, go on to explain how the present day Larkin came to be. The characters are also affected by psycho-realism, but because they are based on Larkin’s own renderings, they are represented through his perspective and state of mind, as interpreted by Landreth. When Larkin expresses his still strong love for Felicity, one of these characters, his face starts to “grow back” slightly, again showing the constant changing effects that psycho-realism has on representation. It is almost as if Larkin becomes somewhat more human again when he has this contact with a past love.

Landreth finally reveals his “good intentions” to Larkin, asking him to give up alcohol and become creatively productive again. A neon halo and finger-waving hand that grows out of his head represent Landreth’s good intentions. After a lengthy pause, Larkin explodes into a violent rage regarding the power of money and his creativity being exploited by this commercial force. This state of mind is again expressed as a “physical” manifestation, as Larkin’s appearance morphs: red spikes extrude from his head and in his rage his tuft of hair is loosened and lands in Landreth’s lap. The background is also affected by this rage and swirls into an unrecognizable space.

Larkin's anger subsides and as he pauses mid sob, the focus of the story shifts to Landreth, who reflects on his actions and motivations (i.e. the film becomes autobiographical). Landreth regrets having imposed on Larkin, and tries to understand why he has done it. Through a montage of old photos we discover that Landreth's mother also had an addiction to alcohol and subsequently died from it. The old photos of Landreth's mother are invaded by a black mould-like substance: as she ages in the pictures, so this dark matter grows until it fully covers her face. It is at this point that we gain an understanding of Landreth's personal contribution to the story and how it has affected the production of the film. Landreth clearly relates his own experience of the disease to Larkin's situation, and has consequently subconsciously tried to control this situation. Evidently Landreth has realized this and has represented this personal epiphany within the film.

In the closing scene we see Larkin begging for money on the streets. Landreth appears to Larkin from across the street and his "physical" appearance has changed. Landreth now appears in much the same way as Larkin, with most of his head missing, and this change in "physical" appearance indicates the new understanding of himself and his own situation that has resulted from his meeting and interaction with Larkin. Landreth argues: "We don't see things as they are but we see things as we are" (*Ryan* DVD). Landreth was unknowingly forced into a personal journey of discovery through his communication with Larkin, and as a result learnt things about himself.

Waltz with Bashir:

Waltz with Bashir, the second case study, is the autobiographical work of Israeli filmmaker Ari Folman. Folman was born and raised in Israel; after completing his military service in the mid eighties, he began to study script writing and filmmaking. He went on to produce several award-winning films and documentaries and had a lengthy career in television writing and directing. Folman only began experimenting with animation in his television documentary series *The Material that Love Is Made of*, where a five minute animation opened each episode and was used to illustrate scientific principles. It was this initial experiment with animation that led Folman to use the medium to document and express his personal war story, *Waltz with Bashir* (waltzwithbashir.com).

Waltz with Bashir took Ari Folman and a group of eight artists a total of four years to complete, and this included a whole year of research when testimony from war veterans was gathered in interviews and formulated into a feature length screenplay by Folman himself. The film follows the retelling of war-related stories by seven interviewees, through which Folman builds his own personal retelling. The interviewees include close friends of Folman, while others are simply Israeli veterans who happened to be in the same areas of the war at the same time as Folman (waltzwithbashir.com).

Folman chose to use animation as the medium for the film because of its lack of visual storytelling boundaries, which enabled him to use elements of surreal imagery to help tell his own story: “I thought that animation is the only way to tell this story, with memories, lost memories, dreams and the subconscious. If you want to feel any freedom as a filmmaker to go from one dimension to another, I thought the best way to do it was animation” (Erickson). Here I would argue that Folman uses animation to represent the traumatic effects that war has on things such as memory, remembering and the conscience. Folman is therefore using this documentary to create awareness of the lingering distress within and among veterans of this particular war.

The film begins with a nightmarish scene of a pack of rabid dogs running through a built-up urban area. The visual aesthetic is very reminiscent of a graphic novel style, where the use of dark outline gives the film a sinister and edgy appeal (Figure 6, *Waltz with Bashir* DVD).



Figure 6

The dogs crash through public property and scare the public as they furiously charge towards their goal. They congregate below the window of a second story room in an office building. They all look up and begin to bark viciously at the window, where appears the face of Boaz Rein Buskila, a middle aged man wearing glasses, who guiltily looks down at them. Buskila's voice is heard over the barking, as he begins to describe how he has been having a recurring dream in which these twenty-six exact dogs come to his place of work and ask his boss to throw him out to them or they will eat his customers. This scene then cuts from the exterior with the barking dogs to an interior shot where Buskila (right) is in a bar, explaining this story to an animated representation of Ari Folman himself (Figure 7, *Waltz with Bashir* DVD).



Figure 7

It is at this point that we begin to establish the fact that these scenes are a mixture of fantasized flashbacks and regular “present day” reality. Buskila continues to explain that this nightmare has haunted him for the last two years, and that it stems from the time at the beginning of the Lebanon War when he was one of a team searching for wanted Palestinians.

At this point another flashback begins, this time of Buskila when he was much younger, in full military gear, carrying a rifle and walking down a path with a line of soldiers. Buskila explains that he was considered too weak-willed to shoot humans by his comrades and was therefore given the duty of shooting the dogs as the team entered a village, so that the dogs would not alert the fugitives as to their whereabouts. The flashback continues with Buskila taking aim and shooting a dog.

The flashback ends and the two men are seen at the bar again. Buskila continues to explain that he had shot a total of twenty-six dogs during this time in the war, and that he has distinct memories of each dog. Buskila asks Folman if he has any such lingering terrors from his involvement in the Lebanon war, and how he deals with them. Folman thinks for a moment and then tells Buskila he has no such memories. The two leave the bar together and say their goodbyes.

Through these scenes we begin to understand how animation will be used throughout the film to illustrate certain surreal events of memory and present day "reality", both as interpreted by Folman. The conversation in the bar leads to disclosure of the premise of the film: Ari Folman has a flashback of his own as he travels home, and this triggers an epiphany. The flashback is of a brief moment in his lengthy war-time service when he was swimming in the ocean outside of Beirut with a couple of his fellow soldiers. Folman realizes that he is lacking other such memories; more specifically, that he has no recollection of his involvement in the 1982 massacre in Lebanon during the height of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He therefore begins the quest which leads him to the other interviewees scattered around the world and results in the production of the film itself.

Through these conversations Folman slowly starts to uncover the narrative of his past, recovering his personal feelings about the massacre, when he was a young soldier ordered to launch flare lights over West Beirut which inevitably aided in

the killing of innocent Palestinian refugees. Folman comes to realize that it was this simple involvement and subsequent remorse that has caused his mental block on these events, and that his quest has resulted in his own personal therapeutic redemption as well as the shedding of some light on this historical time. After this point of self reflection the film climactically cuts over to archival live action newsreel footage of the aftermath of the massacre, where gruesome images of dead bodies and wailing widows are depicted in a grainy television manner. It is as if at this stage Folman decides to really bring home the magnitude of this epic event by turning to the fundamentals of the indexical nature of live action to have a devastating emotional effect on the audience. This may seem to express the limitations of animation's ability to convey certain magnitude because of its constructed imagery.

Comparison

Both these films are clearly animations that deal with reality from a very subjective point of view, from which an autobiographical account eventually emerges. The films may at times not resemble autobiography in that they focus for lengthy periods not on the filmmakers themselves but on their premise subjects – Larkin and the Lebanon war – but I would argue that by focusing on these subjects so intensely the films reflect the filmmakers' huge emotional investment in them and therefore never actually desert their personal subjectivity: it is as if the films are insisting that the premise subjects are inescapably part of

the filmmakers' identity. Folman intentionally sets out to make an autobiographical account in that he is the main character in the film, and we follow his story as it unravels through his journey of interactions with others. Landreth, on the other hand, only comes to discover this autobiography subsequently in his preproduction when he realizes the nature of his subconscious reflections on Larkin throughout the process. This autobiographical generic identity is important because it situates the filmmakers' extreme involvement in each piece and ultimately captures the importance of the principles of reflection and subjectivity in the contemporary documentary genre. But even though these auto-documentaries are examples of work produced in the performativity era, their construction is still shaped by the influence of the documentary subjects on the individual filmmakers, and it is this influence that creates an alternative within the development of film in the performativity era.

Because of their extra involvement within the image, visually these films effectively embody what Bruzzi refers to as performativity. The characteristics of animation allow the directors to take the ideas of the Performative/Reflexive mode and extend them further, thanks to their unique control over the medium and the premeditated "performance" of the image itself. But this is done by the director to visually reinterpret the recorded audio, and therefore the film is similar to live action in that a physicality is directly captured from the external world and then manipulated to form the interpreted narrative. But unlike the situation with live action, this external record also inspires the creation of the images.

The presence of the interview in these animations evokes Wells's Imitative mode and Nichols's Participatory mode. The interview style exploits the live action documentary tendency within the animated form to create a relationship between the ideas of "real" representation found in the Participatory mode and the intended reality produced in the animation. In this postmodern manner, the audience is asked here to relate their lived world experiences – in the form of embodied knowledge about the conventions of interviews – to these animated films, in order to make an attempt at representing "reality" through this intermixing within the medium. Secondly, Nichols suggests, the interview is used to diffuse the authoritative figure in live action documentary, and this seems true also of these two animations ("The Voice of Documentary" 55). With their added control over image production, animated documentary films could become highly didactic, even propagandistic. In other words, the intrinsically subjective nature of the created image could create overtly biased representations. As discussed above, this is a trait prominent in the performativity era that works to produce greater magnitude within the documentary experience through creating a personal, emotional relationship with the viewer. Paradoxically, this intensity of experience may be diminished because of the authoritative aspect of the filmmaker's insistent subjectivity. The use of interviews thus disperses filmic authority and produces accounts that offer both intimacy and objectivity in respect of the topic at hand. This could enhance the magnitude experienced by the viewer.

Nichols suggests that the interview in live action documentary can be problematic because it has a tendency to undermine the intentions of the filmmaker, but this could well be countered by an astute choice of animated imagery. The undermining nature of the interview (stemming from the personal views of the interviewee) could be reduced or even reversed by the subjective reinterpretation made by the animator in the performance of the image.

The director is able to design and give visual life to the audio interview. Elements such as character design (which forms a big role in the visual formation of animation) and movement of forms and figures (the “life” given to the design by the manipulation between frames) now start to become representations of real people and events. Landreth and Folman do this in very different ways.
Both at some stage used external reference material to form their depictions, for instance photographic studies of Larkin were the inspiration for the character’s basic facial design (Fernandes). Thereafter, the filmmakers differ significantly in terms of how they create filmic discourse through their reinterpretation of the interviews.

It is also necessary at this stage to point out that neither film consists entirely of animated renditions of interviews. Often these autobiographical filmmakers will include diary-like sections in which the director addresses the audience directly, providing plot information to fill in gaps in the narrative. Therefore the animation in these scenes is also diary-like in that it is created out of the director’s personal

thoughts on the subject. These sections are used to make the film flow as a narrative structure and they conform to the performativity of the auto-documentary. And while they provide important support for the interview sections, they are not the focus of this research.

Character design in *Ryan* uses a system of layering of discourse to achieve the representation of people. For example, the character of Landreth himself has a foundational layer in terms of which he is extremely iconic: his figure practically embodies the notion of animation's hyperreality by being almost a "photo realistic" (Fernandes), mimetic, three-dimensional figure. But added to this level of representation are other smaller, more symbolic gestures of design that evoke the abstract, such as the colourful scarring on his cheek or the smiley face crater on the side of his head. With the commencement of the interview we are introduced to Landreth's constructed rendition of Larkin's personal character. The Larkin character appears to be designed in an opposing manner to Landreth's, in that the symbolic level is the foundation and mimetic gestures make up lesser levels of the design. The reason for this is presumably a sense that Larkin's complete descent into substance abuse could only be evoked through metaphor. His knotted arms and gaping head express Landreth's reinterpretation of features noticed and experienced during the interviews; in this way an added level of subjective meaning is installed directly within the character design.

This type of layering system seems to fall within Wells's idea of the Fantastic mode, in the sense that non-realist or subversive forms allow for ideologically charged symbolism, and that this is a form of recognition and not record (Wells, "The Beautiful Village" 44). But as stated earlier, what obtains is a layered system of visual meaning, and therefore the idea of the fantastic does not apply to the whole film and is only relevant in regard to certain aspects of the represented figures. Therefore unlike live action film, animation has the potential to add extra visual meaning to a verbally embodied character through the subtle use of symbolic abstract details. But this is layered over a hyperreal base design, which means that this animation still relies heavily on an initial iconic "live action" like reference, from which it creates its own further meaning.

Landreth takes this a unique step further when he uses the audio interviews in conjunction with these abstract details by forming his own animated responses from conceptual features in the character designs to add even more levels of subjective meaning. A good example is the scene in which Larkin's represented character explodes into a rage about his lack of creative productivity and the power of money in his situation. At the climax of this rage, red spikes violently extrude outward from his head cavity and the background of the shot becomes blurry and breaks down. This symbolism of red, which signifies passion and anger, and spikes, which denote harmful intentions, coupled with the swift action of the movement and the morphed background, adds to and reinforces the

extreme verbal expressions of Larkin's words through Landreth's reading of the event (Figure 8, *Ryan* DVD).



Figure 8

As Wells explains with reference to his Subjective mode, this highlights the medium's unique ability to form an independent expression of a multifaceted collective reality, in that a recorded form is re-mediated by an author to embody his own vision of the material (Wells "The Beautiful Village" 43).

But the symbolic animated movement is found only on the abstract features of the character, while the movement of the base "skeleton" of Larkin's character is still very naturalistic. In the rage scene, three-dimensional human movement is used to evoke the anger that Larkin is experiencing in his interview. Larkin's character arches violently, with his head thrust backwards while his hands reach upward and contract into fists. The animation here would therefore be placed in

the middle of Furniss's continuum within the hyperreal, because it is clearly iconic of detailed human expressive motion. This base layer of movement therefore highlights what Wells fails to recognize in the Subjective mode, which is the reliance on the iconic side of animation to express meaning in the reinterpretation of the maker. This is again a case of a characteristic of live action discourse making overlapping with animation design.

Another overlapping area with live action in this rage scene is the cinematic use of cinematography and editing to create emotional engagement. Extreme close-ups and violent three-dimensional "camera movements" are used in conjunction with the animation to interpret the heated verbal recording according to Landreth's vision (Figure 8, *Ryan* DVD). This can be viewed as another example of the Imitative mode, because the animation imitates the Participatory mode in which the camera is directly affected by the subject. The "shaking camera" suggests a sense of direct reaction to the violent outburst, and is used by the director to add magnitude to the audience's experience.

Folman on the other hand uses a simpler two-dimensional character design that uses not a layering system but a very direct iconic style. This is evidenced in the "comic book" style of drawing. Again, external reference must have been used to identify key characteristics for each figure. Line and colour are used to create uncomplicated renditions of characters that give the viewer just enough external or physical information to recognize them. This technique would fall at about the

three-quarter mark on Furniss's continuum, between the middle point of hyperreal aesthetic design and end point of complete abstraction: the figures assume the external physical characteristics of their originals, but are subjected to abstraction to reduce them to a simple but recognizable state. This three-quarter point allows the depiction to enjoy the benefits of both ends of the animated form spectrum, the hyperreality of the iconic and the subversive image of the abstract. Here an iconic character reality is formed but in such a way as to have the potential, given the conventions of animated movement, easily to transform into a more symbolic, subversive form. But Folman only draws on this potential in a subtle way on certain occasions in the interviews.

One example is the dream sequence that fellow war veteran Carmi Cna'an describes in his interview and that becomes an animated scene in Folman's film. Cna'an recalls in his interview one of his earliest wartime memories, of a journey on a commando boat through the night to be dropped into battle the next day. Cna'an explains how he became sick from nervousness during this trip and then fell asleep on the deck of the boat. He dreamed about a woman who takes him away from the boat and then takes his virginity. Folman combines the film's style of character design with a subtle abstraction of drawing technique to represent Cna'an's description in a surreal manner. As Cna'an begins to describe the event, the film portrays him as his present-day older self in his home, but as he continues he slips via memory into the past and is depicted as a much younger version of himself on the boat. The film cuts back and forth between present and

past as he recounts his story. The female in his dream is illustrated as being half the length of the boat. This surreal woman towers over the young Cna'an and picks him up with ease. The little Cna'an lies on this giant woman's stomach as they float out to sea (Figure 9, *Waltz with Bashir* DVD).



Figure 9

This reinterpretation of the interview allows Folman to present Cna'an's character as being vulnerable and in awe of the situation because of his size difference from this symbolic woman, while the simple graphic colour tones of blue and turquoise in the hallucinated scene attribute a certain tranquility and somberness to the memory. The idea of time is also transcended by the iconic distortion of animated image, in that Cna'an can be presented as both his present-day self and the younger wartime version. So again, in terms of the Subjective mode, meaning is found in animation's ability to create reinterpreted symbolism; but unlike the dense layering of this in *Ryan*, here it is slight iconic distortion within the basic colouring and design that influences the mood and theme. For

instance, the female character is oversized to emphasize the frailty in Cna'an's character at this point. This distortion also highlights the Fantastic mode's ability to create film not as record but as recognition (Wells, "The Beautiful Village" 44), where the giant woman is recognized as meaning-bearing, not as an iconic rendition of the physical world or a "word for word" recreation of Cna'an's dream, but as a cinematic vehicle for Folman's reinterpreted discourse. But this fantastically charged discourse is not a constant throughout the film, and therefore this dimension of meaning makes only a partial contribution to the overall interpretation of the film.

The cut-out animation, even though it is much more complex than most animations using this style, still finds itself on the three-quarter mark of the continuum because, like the imagery in the rest of this film, it creates a suspension of disbelief that allows the viewer enough information to recognize and understand the movement of a character on a simple level. For instance the movement of the giant woman swimming backstroke in the ocean is recognizable as an iconic human/water interaction, though there is not as much detail in this motion as in the motion of the base humanoid figures in *Ryan*. This basic movement is made by independently moving the "pieces" that make up the character design, which allows for the inferred symbolic discourse to be clearly produced through simple moving images. Again, this is animation's strength in the Subjective mode, where a "real" experience is redefined in the performance

of the image while still being expressed with recourse to aspects of iconography shared with live action imagery.

Another important overlap with live action film in this scene is the use of a musical score to influence the atmosphere in the representation and the experience of the viewer. The 1980s pop song *Enola Gay* by OMD is used to introduce the scene on the boat, a song that references the era of the experience recalled. When Cna'an's hallucination begins, an eerie ambiance is created by an original score that employs the violin's ability to convey a sense of the uncanny.

So the difference here is that Landreth uses his layered symbolism within the reinterpreted character design and animated movement of the symbolic features as reactions to the interview, in order to create a consistently realized additional level of inferred meaning on top of the photo-realistic iconography. Folman differs slightly in that he occasionally uses simple but subtle design distortion along with basic iconic design to create fine symbolic cinematic meaning within reinterpreted scenes. Folman does not react visually to the interview in his animation as much as Landreth does, but rather develops narrative ideas from the events recounted in order to create his own meaning in and through the rendition of the interviews. But both these directors still rely on conventions associated with live action in combination with animation to produce the overall discourse.

As Ward suggests, it is the questioning of magnitude within an animated documentary that leads to the unveiling of the medium's strength in the genre (Ward). With the foregrounding of construction in animation, the clear difference between the real world and its animated counterpart allows these films to move beyond naturalistic, surface representation and engage with the embodied inarticulable aspects of experience through the personalization of the filmmaker (Ward). Landreth and Folman allow us into their personalized experiences of their subjects through animated expressions of their recorded conversations. This allows us to share their subjective experience of these meetings and be moved emotionally closer to the collective reality that is produced by the interviewees. That is why it is important that these films be recognized as autobiographical: the film style employed situates the filmmaker within his "reality," which in this instance comprises his reinterpretation of other personal voices. In this way we are able to engage with a collective life world on the filmmaker's level of emotional involvement. The result is a greater sense of magnitude for the audience.

The ultimate personal insight into the collective life worlds evoked is represented in the climax of both these films, where the magnitude of the experience of their involvement has come to a pinnacle for the directors. A self-reflective discovery made through participation in this filmmaking and scripted into the film secures the total subjective participation of the viewer. Landreth expresses this personal

involvement in the final scene by revealing that his own animated character has morphed to resemble Larkin (Figure 10, *Ryan* DVD).

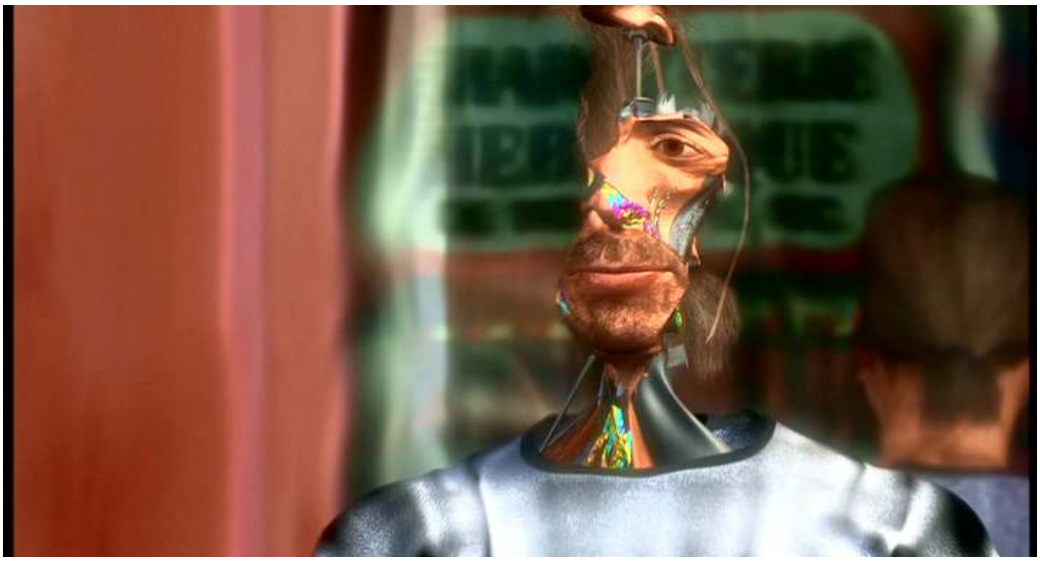

Figure 10

This animated representation reveals Landreth's personal reflection on Larkin's life story and how he relates it to his own. There is no interview audio in this scene, but the magnitude of the emotions produced by sharing interactions with Larkin's story is easily conveyed through the animation because of the performativity of the image, a powerful metaphorical gesture. This is not the case in the climax of *Waltz with Bashir*, where we see a desertion of the animated form to enable the communication of magnitude. Folman comes to realize his part in the massacre through conversations with his therapist, and once this occurs he visually recreates the massacre through the interview with the reporter, Ron Ben-Yeshai. Ben-Yeshai describes how he entered the camp after the troops had been ordered to stop the killing. Folman animates this gruesome

account and towards the end of the scene reveals his own younger soldier self (in animated form) at the site of this horrific event, among hysterical widows and heaps of dead bodies.



Figure 11

A close-up of his face reveals his emotional distress (Figure 11, *Waltz with Bashir* DVD); but at that point the film cuts to the live action newsreel footage of the massacre. I would argue that Folman ceases to rely on his personal engagement through animation and reverts to a more conventional source of magnitude to express the harrowing emotion of this event (Figure 10, *Waltz with Bashir* DVD).



Figure 12

Animation's deconstruction, no matter how well it works in the communication of subjective experience, is seen here as unable to express the sheer magnitude of the physical mass slaughter as effectively as indexical images of the event. Therefore Folman uses both media to the best of their abilities: animation for its ability vividly to convey personal insight within collective experience, and live action for its direct depiction of extreme experience through the indexical.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This research set out to discover how *Ryan* and *Waltz with Bashir* contribute towards current notions of representing actuality through a postmodern autobiographic style, within the documentary mode of filmmaking. This was done by examining the way in which captured audio from participants in the event to be documented was combined with animated imagery. This method sought to create a different or heightened awareness of the situation through creating a new discourse.

In the postmodern era, films engage with an external lived world in order to create a discourse through embodied knowledge. This spills over into the documentary genre, which seeks to express an external lived world. In order to create an emotionally engaging representation for the viewer of documentary, the now dominant performative mode allows for knowledge or experience to be embodied through fiction-like methods of premeditated production.

Animation is seen to offer a unique angle on the representation of the real because it foregrounds its constructedness to a greater degree than live action, and therefore creates a clear difference between its images and the physical world: it thus moves beyond surface representation and embraces the experience found in performativity. Here it is a matter of artists creating “lies” to

explain a “truth.” As such it is a reminder that documentaries have always offered a re-presentation and never an absolute view of “reality.” But historically animation has suffered neglect because of an alleged lack of objectivity consequent on its commanding premeditation and dramatization (“Introduction to Documentary” 138).

With the addition of audio interviews within these case studies, directors Landreth and Folman have been able to engage their audience in a collectively produced “reality.” But because of the performativity found in the visuals of animation, the emotional magnitude of the experience created by the director in capturing these stories and subsequently felt by the viewer is increased. This higher degree of involvement comes about because the director’s personal connection to the situation is created and visually expressed through animation, which is more easily interpreted by the viewer. The aim of creating awareness on the part of the director is not disturbed by personal views expressed in the interviews, as can happen in live action, because the director ultimately redefines these views through animation to accommodate them within his own created discourse. The undermining tendency of the interview is reversed because of the subjective reinterpretation made by the animator in the performance of the image. This subjective ability to involve the viewer’s emotions in a communal situation without undermining the intention of producing awareness can be viewed as a major strength of animation within the documentary genre.

Ryan achieves this by creating animated symbolic reaction to the verbal discussion in the interview, which in turn affords personal insight into the situation. *Waltz with Bashir* achieves this by distorting the basic iconic design in order to redefine the narrative of the interview, and this creates the personal insight into the event. Both films use this audio animation technique, in slightly different ways in accordance with their respective discourses, to create for the viewer personal insight into and emotional relationship with the subject of the film.

This is a development in the Performative/Reflexive dominant era, because it uses an aspect of the Participatory mode (the interview) and mixes it in with the subjective and self-reflexive manner of animation's production of magnitude. Here the premeditated image is used to draw attention to specific real world situations through embodied knowledge, where experience and memory are emphasized rather than real world fact. This is still a dramatized production in the Performative mode because of the high level of premeditation and preparation, but it incorporates an aspect of the Participatory mode in order to include an element of objectivity, or rather inter-subjectivity, within the extremely vivid responsiveness of the filmmaker's insight.

Awareness of the lived world is created through an oblique invitation to engage in an individual's visual creative treatment of their emotional insight into the testimony of others. The combination of animation and audio filmmaking as seen

in *Ryan* and *Waltz with Bashir* offers itself as an alternative personal engagement in collective “reality” which is also steeped in the ideology of the performativity era. Having said this, it is important to recognize that animation is not necessarily the supreme medium in this context. It adds its uniqueness in the performance of image making and subsequent reactions to this, but the films still rely on live action characteristics that evoke Nichols’s Imitative mode in order to create their final discourses. Certain characteristics are shared with the live action film medium, such as reliance on camera movement, editing and music scores to produce meaning. The formation of indexical meaning and the formation of iconic meaning are similar in that both share a link with the physical world. Therefore, while features of this method provide important alternatives, animation cannot stand alone as sole contributor to the dominant documentary mode.

Through this development we can see a new stage in the evolution of the Performativity era, where dramatic image construction can lead to emotional association with documented events; while, as Nichols suggested, it is through the use of collective involvement that these dramatized films start to find a greater historical magnitude.

These films have opened new avenues for animators and documentarians to explore through the remixing of media and the remixing of old and new documentary modes of address. As has been the case with the documentary genre in the past, this type of discourse making will become normalized and

repeated (“Voice of Documentary” 49). I believe there will be more interview-based personal animated documentaries to come, and that these will add further to the continuing evolution of the dominant form though new remixing and subsequent development.

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