

**MEMORY MIGRATIONS:  
BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY ANIMATED FILM**

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I, Meghan Annette Gilbride, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.



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*for my dad*

## ABSTRACT

Animation plays with time and space. The image can be moved forward or backward. It can be built upon. It can be erased. Cinema scholar Alan Cholodenko posits that the act of animating – of endowing the inanimate with motion and life – 'cannot be thought without thinking loss, disappearance, and death'. In this research, I focus on four animated shorts produced between 1992 and 2010 that have capitalized on the medium's potential for temporal and spatial convolution, each returning to the outmoded form of hand-drawn animation to revitalize the past: Michael Fukushima's *Minoru: Memory of Exile* (1992); Mark Middlewick, Samantha Nell, and Anna-Sofia Nylund's *A Kosovo Fairytale* (2009); Ann Marie Fleming's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2010); and Marie-Margaux Tsakiri-Scanatovits' *My Mother's Coat* (2010). Beyond their visual ties, the films connect thematically. Each unfolds as a familial narrative in which one generation passes its experience onto the next. Each chronicles geographical movements and cultural dislocations, often the result of war and exile. Heavily personalized, each film was crafted by the children of the main protagonists and by extension becomes an autobiographical exploration of intercultural heritage. This dissertation contends that the production of these films signals a larger trend within cinematic representations of the past, in which – rather than attempting to reconstruct sweeping historical narratives – the medium of animation serves to highlight stories of individual experience and memory. This study considers how these films operate strategically to visualize remembrance, more broadly asking why animation has become a privileged form to do so. It is an investigation into the intricate connections between art and life and considers how the works produced are corporeally bonded to their modes of making, to the past, and to family. It examines the ways these films negotiate the past from generation to generation, while inquiring how personal stories can become collectively shared.

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## INTRODUCTION

It all starts with a line. ‘That single, honest delineation,’ describes animator Chuck Jones.<sup>1</sup> For Jones, the line is candid, offering ‘no subterfuge’.<sup>2</sup> Or so it seems. It is the line’s very simplicity that yields its complex malleability. In both practice and perception, the line does not always offer a straightforward path or simplified definition. Not reductive, the line is productive. It establishes the space of things, the multidimensionality of the image. This is no more apparent than when set into motion. An animated line implies not only geometric perimeters; it also alludes to the figurations and computations of bodily movement. It reaches toward the essential permutations of existence: momentum and stasis, inhalation and exhalation, life and death. ‘Figurative or not,’ Maurice Merleau-Ponty contends, ‘the line is no longer a thing or an imitation of a thing. It is a certain disequilibrium...a certain constitutive emptiness...which upholds the pretended positivity of things.’<sup>3</sup> From the line, the world unfolds.

It is perhaps this minimalist potential that encourages animation’s proliferation within contemporary visual culture. Its elasticity makes it adaptable to a broad range of applications. With the widespread use of animated imagery – which surpasses its presence in movies and television to online advertisements, mobile phone apps, and video games – animation has become so fully ingrained into our daily lives as to go unnoticed. In her 2013 overview of the medium, aptly titled *Pervasive Animation*, Suzanne Buchan speaks to the ubiquity of animated forms within moving image culture. Buchan emphasizes its presence in both high and low visual cultures, citing its ability to shift between experimental modes, artistic works, information technologies, scientific visualizations, and even propagandist efforts that exploit

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<sup>1</sup> Chuck Jones, *Chuck Amuck: The Life and Times of an Animated Cartoon-ist* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie, trans. William Cobb, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 184.

the medium's powers to 'astonish, influence and coerce'.<sup>4</sup> It is an aesthetic method available across discipline and platform, a feature Buchan notes has only escalated since the digital shift: 'As screens become part of everyday life – phones, laptops, pads, and future technologies to come – animation will increasingly influence our understanding of how we see and experience the world visually.'<sup>5</sup>

In this study, I examine a particular subset of animated production that has emerged amidst these varied transformations. Long associated with fantasy, comic, and children's genres, animation as a narrative form has been rethinking its categorical boundaries. The past three decades have seen an upsurge in the production of animated films that explore a diversified set of realist themes, with topics including climate change and the environment, space travel, the economic crisis, architecture, and mental health. Recent animated examples of such issues include Esther Casas Roura's *Creamen* (2012), Erik Wernquist's *Wanderers* (2014), Jonathan Jarvis' *The Crisis of Credit Visualized* (2009), Bernard Friedman's *American Homes* (2010), and Andy Glynne's series *Animated Minds* (2004), respectively.<sup>6</sup> Of particular interest to this research, animation has also become a privileged mode for first-person narratives, testimonials, and survivor stories. Animated cinema has increasingly served as a vehicle for elucidating personal recollections of social conflict, political exile, and traumatic experience.

My interest in this cinematic genre began with the release of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* in 2007.<sup>7</sup> Satrapi's film – like her graphic novel of the same name – told of her experiences growing up in Iran during the Iranian Revolution and subsequently under the repressive regime of the Islamic Republic. In consideration of the intensity of Satrapi's story – its intimate nature, the darkness of its subject matter – I wondered how both visual forms,

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<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Buchan ed., introduction to *Pervasive Animation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>6</sup> Esther Casas Roura, *Creamen* (Brooklyn: Charged Studios, 2012), DCP; Erik Wernquist, *Wanderers* (self-distributed, 2014), DCP; Jonathan Jarvis, *The Crisis of Credit Visualized* (self-distributed, 2009), DCP; Bernard Friedman, *American Homes* (self-distributed, 2010), DCP; and Andy Glynne, *Animated Minds* (London: Channel Four, 2004), DCP.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent Paronnaud and Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (New York: Sony Pictures Classics, 2007), DCP. See also Satrapi, *Persepolis I: The Story of a Childhood* and *Persepolis II: The Story of a Return*, trans. Matias Ripa (New York: Pantheon Books, [2000] 2003-2004).

the animated image and the comic, were able to tell it. How were these understated modes of representation able to make a harrowing account of war and exile accessible? At once lighthearted and dark, the simplicity of Satrapi's playful visuals appears to heighten the narrative's terrifying moments, accentuating its themes of despair and loss. For my master's thesis, I weighed this juxtaposition, assessing how this aesthetic tension worked to create a particularized mode of storytelling.

Since then, several animated films dealing with past traumas have emerged, including feature-length works like Ari Folman's *Waltz With Bashir* (2009), which reflects on his memories of the Lebanese-Palestinian conflict; Ali Samadi Ahadi's *The Green Wave* (2010), a documentary chronicling Iran's 2009 Green Revolution; Jeff Malmberg's *Marwencol* (2010), which employs stop-motion animation in connection with the rehabilitative processes of traumatic memory loss; and Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013), a cinematic depiction of Panh's memoir, in which animated figurines portray a childhood spent under Cambodia's Khmer Rouge.<sup>8</sup> With the production of these films, the question began to shift from not only how animation was functioning within traumatic narrative contexts but also why this filmic genre had developed to address these difficult subject matters. Do the aesthetic strategies of animation challenge more traditional modes of historical representation? What might these memory narratives suggest about the ways we interpret the past? Examining the contemporary rise of this representational trend might reveal particular facets pertaining to the current state of the aesthetics and perceptions of cinema more widely.

Approaching this research, I set out to contextualize this emergent cinematic category within this socio-historical moment. I traced the history of this genre while also looking for animated nonfiction films that were newly materializing along the film circuit. I attended conferences, screenings, and film festivals and spoke with filmmakers and scholars working on cinema and animation. From these relevant resources, a lengthy list of animated films

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<sup>8</sup> Ari Folman, *Waltz with Bashir* (New York: Sony Pictures Classics, 2008), 35mm and DCP; Ali Samadi Ahadi's *The Green Wave* (Brooklyn: Visit Films, 2010), 35mm and DCP; Jeff Malmberg, *Marwencol* (New York: The Cinema Guild, 2010), 35mm; and Rithy Panh, *The Missing Picture* (Paris: Les Acacias, 2013), DCP.

dealing with personal remembrance started to form.<sup>9</sup> These films explore subject matters ranging from the complex issues of sexual abuse, schizophrenia, and the aftermaths of war across cultures and countries. Though thematically disparate, there was an observable thread running through many of the films in question, which underscored relationships between broader political, social, and cultural events and more localized individual and familial histories. In these instances, narratives of war and exile provide the context for personalized, ancestral stories that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Aiming to engage with the complicated issues these films raise – how personal and collective histories are interwoven, how memory and history are defined and redefined over time, and how these changing definitions are informed by a shifting visual or representational landscape – I decided to concentrate on animated films that explore the intergenerational transference of lived experience.

The following four animated shorts, each featuring biographical or first-person narratives, became the focus of this study: Michael Fukushima's *Minoru: Memory of Exile* (1992), Mark Middlewick, Samantha Nell, and Anna-Sofia Nylund's *A Kosovo Fairytale* (2009), Ann Marie Fleming's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (2010), and Marie-Margaux Tsakiri-Scanatovits' *My Mother's Coat* (2010).<sup>10</sup> Each film was initially located and screened at film festivals held in Europe and the United Kingdom, with the exception of the earliest film included, *Minoru*, which had been made available online by its distributor, the

<sup>9</sup> Examples from this list include: Marjut Rimminen and Christine Roche, *The Stain* (London: Channel Four, 1991), 16mm; Paul Fierlinger, *Drawn From Memory* (Arlington: Public Broadcasting Services, 1995), 16mm; Bob Sabiston, *Project Incognito* (Austin: Flat Black Films, 1997), DCP; Sylvie Bringa and Orly Yadin, *Silence* (Burlington: Yadin Productions, 1997), 35mm and DigiBeta; Michèle Cournoyer, *The Hat* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 1999), 35mm; Jonathan Hodgson, *Camouflage* (London: Animate Projects, 2001), 35mm and DigiBeta; David Aronowitsch, Hanna Heilborn, and Mats Johansson, *Hidden* (Stockholm: Story, 2010), 35mm and DCP; Alys Hawking, *Crying and Wanking* (self-distributed, 2002), video; The Southern Ladies Animation Group, *Its Like That* (self-distributed, 2003), 35mm and DigiBeta; Chris Landreth, *Ryan* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 2005), DCP; Ian Gouldstone, *guy101* (London: Pachinko Pictures, 2006), DCP; Jonas Odell, *Aldrig som första gången!* (Stockholm: FilmTecknarna, 2006), 35mm; Marie-Josée Saint-Pierre, *McLaren's Negatives* (Montréal: MJSTP Films, 2006), 35mm; Rimminen and Päivi Takala, *Learned by Heart* (self-distributed, 2007), DCP; Nina Sabnani, *The Stitches Speak* (Watertown: DER Documentary, 2009), DigiBeta; Thor Ochsner, *1989 (Den gang jeg var fem år gammel)* (self-distributed, 2010), video; Hendrik Niefeld, *Warmes wasser aus der wand* (self-distributed, 2011), DCP; Jae-hee Hong, *My Father's Emails* (self-distributed, 2012), 35mm; Ellie Land, *Centerfold* (London: Wellcome Trust, 2012), DCP; and Greek Kallikorm, *Jam* (self-distributed, 2012), DCP.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Fukushima, *Minoru: Memory of Exile* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 1992), 35mm; Mark Middlewick, Samantha Nell, and Anna-Sofia Nylund, *A Kosovo Fairytale* (self-distributed, 2009), DCP; *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, Ann Marie Fleming (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 2010), 35mm (hereafter abbreviated as *IWACHS* in footnotes); and Marie-Margaux Tsakiri-Scanatovits, *My Mother's Coat* (self-distributed, 2010), DCP.

National Film Board of Canada (NFB).<sup>11</sup> The films share narrative parallels, as they all chronicle familial stories of geographical and cultural displacement. They each employ hand-drawn animation, and the animated visuals have all been produced by the protagonists' children.

A central question driving this research is, why now? Why has animated film become a representational tool for historical interpretation in recent years? Within the current literature, it is often asserted by researchers working on animated film – including prominent animation scholars Paul Ward and Paul Wells – that the medium opens itself up to expansive possibilities for visualization, making it an appropriate – if not ideal – venue for representing that which cannot be represented: an irretrievable past, a place or person that no longer exists, the psychic processes of remembrance itself.<sup>12</sup> It is a form able to quite fittingly 'reanimate' the past, figuratively bringing the dead back to life. But what are the suppositions underlying this premise? What informs the frequently taken for granted conceptualization of animation as an especially expressive or flexible medium? Any visual mode may be argued to convey 'the illusion of life' – to borrow a phrase from animation theorist Alan Cholodenko – an illusion entirely contingent upon innumerable externally imposed interjections, projections, and mediations.<sup>13</sup> What distinguishes animated cinema from other representational modes in this regard? I ask this not to deny the medium its potential for visual conjure but to ascertain how and why it has become a favored method to address the past and remembrances of it. Rather than arguing in support of animated film's superior capacity to represent the unrepresentable – establishing for itself an aesthetic rivalry with live action, photography, painting, illustration, or live re-enactment – I am more focused on gauging the inimitable and

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<sup>11</sup> 'Minoru: Memory of Exile', The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) online, accessed 24 April 2016, <https://www.nfb.ca/film/minoru-memory-of-exile>. The other films examined in this research were initially screened at the following: *IWACHS*, 'Animadoc', DOK Leipzig, Leipzig, October 2010; *My Mother's Coat*, 'Adventures in Motion', onedotzero film festival, British Film Institute, London, October 2010; and *A Kosovo Fairytale*, 'Animadoc', DOK Leipzig, Leipzig, 23-27 November 2010.

<sup>12</sup> See Paul Wells ed., *Art and Animation* (Winterbourne: Academy Editions, 1997), 2-3; and Paul Ward, 'Some Thoughts on Practice-Theory Relationships in Animation Studies', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 1.2 (2006): 229-245.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Cholodenko ed., *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1991); and *The Illusion of Life 2: More Essays on Animation* (Sydney: Power Institute of Fine Arts, 2007).



complex network of intervening factors that have promoted the production of this genre in this particular moment.

This is different than confining the emergence of these films to this current point in time. Instead, I want to understand how we have arrived here. I view each film not in a vacuum but as simultaneously existing within this instant and beyond. These films bear past and future implications and can be hypothesized in reference to a constellation of considerations. They arise out of a layered topography that spans the fields of history, aesthetics, technology, methodology, ideology, economic viability, industry standards and structure, and viewership practices. This research is consequently skeptical of cohesive linearity and alternatively embraces the possibility for multiple taxonomies and continua. Rather than provide a broad overview of the genre, I examine each film on its own terms. I analyze them in relation to their specific narrative and historical contexts, while providing a close visual reading that is attentive to their materiality and hybridized modes of production. I explore the intermedial bifurcations these films take, which create oscillating movements between the worlds of art, cinema, and historical representation. This is an interdisciplinary project situated between animation theory and practice, art history, and memory studies.

Attributed in part to the contemporary autobiographical turn in literary and artistic production, current investigations within memory studies have been integral to this analysis. In *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (2000), James Olney traces a recent renaissance in autobiography to its roots in the life writings of St. Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Samuel Beckett. In the prelude, he explains that ‘an agonized search for self, through the mutually reflexive acts of memory and narrative, accompanied by the haunting fear that it is impossible from the beginning but also impossible to give over, is the very emblem of our time’.<sup>14</sup> Literary scholar Geoffrey Hartman describes this period of self-reflexivity as the ‘new biographical culture’, while Nancy Miller, an advocate for the

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<sup>14</sup> James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xiv-xv.

emergent field of autobiography studies, characterizes it the ‘age of the memoir’.<sup>15</sup> I situate the advent of this burgeoning category of animated film in connection with trends in memory representation and scholarship, which have been analogously exploring the interrelations between life writing and historical depiction.

Also significant for this study is the rise of migration research within memory studies, identified as ‘the new transnational memory studies’ or a ‘transnational turn’ by memory scholar Michael Rothberg.<sup>16</sup> The recent political climate has made clear the urgent need to address the complexities inherent to mass migrations, in connection with making visible those who have crossed geopolitical borders while assessing the aftermaths that confront them and all impacted communities. Rothberg advocates a field of intercultural memory studies that deemphasizes cultural conflict and embraces the movements between local, national, and cultural scales of memory. This, he posits, is a departure from memory scholars who might deem migration a precipitating factor of ‘cultural amnesia’ rather than the promotion of noncompetitive intersubjectivities.<sup>17</sup> The films I explore in this project tell stories of geographic displacement. The relocations and migrations chronicled are the result of exilic periods both ‘involuntary’, defined as ‘political or punitive’, and ‘voluntary’, which involves expatriation for personal, social, economic, or sexual motivations.<sup>18</sup> Examining how these films aesthetically and narratively approach matters of cultural memory and migration is a key component of my investigation.

To this end, especially useful are Laura Marks’ writings on intercultural film, a cinematic genre she discerns is evocative of the interconnections between far away

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<sup>15</sup> See Geoffrey Hartman’s chapter, ‘Realism, Authenticity, and the New Biographical Culture’, in *Scars of the Spirit: The Struggle Against Inauthenticity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 55-66; and Nancy K. Miller, ‘The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir’, *PMLA*, 122.2 (2007), 537.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Rothberg, ‘Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings: The Case of Post-Holocaust Germany’, in *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Sales*, eds. Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 127 and 128.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 130, quoting Paul Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99.

<sup>18</sup> Christine Brooks-Rose, ‘Exsul’, in *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 11.

homelands, processes of displacement and diaspora, and current homes.<sup>19</sup> Focusing on works made by intercultural artists and filmmakers who find themselves caught between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, Marks submits that these films seek to create new conditions for new stories and subjectivities to emerge. Through their material and sensory modes of production, these works open up the historical archive to reveal its silences and gaps, making room for the voices of minorities or oppressed cultures, whose histories may have been forgotten, erased, or slipped through the cracks. For Marks, this process is reliant upon the use of personal narrative and sensual knowledge, both of which have the power to communicate human experience across cultures, while remaining unique to individual and cultural experience. This theorization of intercultural cinema has been integral in establishing the foundation of this research. Marks' ideas regarding the materiality of film are crucial for evaluating the animated medium's capacities for embodied spectatorship, some of the ambiguities of which I more fully flesh out in my discussion of *My Mother's Coat* in chapter three.

As an art historical inquiry, investigation into the material and visual aesthetics of each film has been central to their respective analyses. Much emphasis has been placed upon their modes of artistic production. I treat the works as filmic objects, contemplating not only their visual and narrative structures but also their material forms, how they are crafted, handled, received, and shared. I consider these works of handmade animation as forms of animated drawing. This approach falls into a methodology that art history has recently been developing, which brings critical focus onto the materiality of art, the labors of its production, and an embodied form of reception that encourages somatic or haptic connections between viewer and viewed. It is a mode of critical inquiry espoused by visual culture scholars and art historians including Marks, Petra Lange-Berndt – especially apparent in her newly published edited volume *Materiality* – as well as by Liz Watkins, whose research relates to film

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<sup>19</sup> Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000); and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2002).

materials as living documents that can inform visual and narrative content.<sup>20</sup> Both an aesthetic exploration and a thorough examination of the cinematic process, my research acts as a close-up encounter with each film's material production, an inquest conducted in conjunction with narrative and historical contextualization.

As a contribution to the wider field of animation studies, I hope to promote greater interdisciplinary exchange between art history and animation studies. My investigation arrives amidst several appeals for the fuller interpretation of animated film through the lens of artistic practice. Animation scholars like Buchan and María Lorenzo Hernández, as well as art historians Cholodenko and Spyros Papapetros, have all worked to mitigate the lack of these discursive interactions.<sup>21</sup> Papapetros' *On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life* is particularly compelling in this capacity, due to its methodological departures from those typically employed in animation studies. Taking an explicitly transdisciplinary approach, Papapetros reads animated film and television through the writings of art historians Aby Warburg, Wilhelm Worringer, and Aloïs Riegl, as well as the artistic processes of Fernand Léger, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Salvador Dalí, to demonstrate how art history and animation studies can substantially inform and transform one another.<sup>22</sup>

The films I examine require such a hybridized tack to their visual and material practices. Correspondingly, I engage with an interdisciplinary range of methodological frameworks throughout this project. In order to fortify the collaborative shifts and potentialities between art history, animation, and memory studies, my research scrutinizes the animated medium's intricate connections between artistic representation and lived experience.

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<sup>20</sup> See Simon Brown, Sarah Street, Liz Watkins eds, *Color and the Moving Image: History, Theory, Aesthetics, Archive* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Nicholas Chare and Watkins, 'The Matter of Film: Decasia and Lyrical Nitrate', in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a New Materialism Through the Arts*, eds. Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 75-88; Watkins, 'Unsettling Perception: Screening Surveillance and the Body in *Red Road*', *Paragraph* 38.1 (2015): 101-117; and Petra Lange-Berndt ed., *Materiality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> See Buchan, introduction to *Pervasive Animation*, 2; Buchan, 'Animation, in Theory', in *Animating Film Theory*, ed. Karen Beckman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 111-130; María Lorenzo Hernández, 'Through the Looking Glass: The Self-Portrait of the Artist and the Re-Start of Animation', *Animation Studies* 5 (2010): 41; Spyros Papapetros, *On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), xv.

<sup>22</sup> Papapetros, *On the Animation of the Inorganic*, xv.

I work to supplement the current scholarship related to these animated memory narratives with rigorous visual analysis and scholarly criticality. I assess the material and bodily bonds that adhere to these handmade cinematic objects, which I suggest reinforce the connections between past and present. This research is concerned with the ways personal experience is able to influence the fabrication of collective history and vice versa. It considers the past's boundless mutability, the shifting shape it continuously takes from generation to generation, variations linked always to the migrating tides of visual cultures and technologies.

The remainder of this introduction provides a focused discussion of the relevant scholarship pertaining to the fields of animation theory and practice, memory studies, and artistic production, while further delineating the specific terms crucial to my research. Throughout this study, I contextualize how the films examined employ traditional handmade animation in relation to their respective narratives of remembrance. To begin, I first situate these films within current debates concerning animation studies and production. I observe that the heterogeneity of animated cinema has produced an underlying and somewhat debilitating disciplinary schism, as there appears both a craving for and fear of the field's academic institutionalization and the establishment of a comprehensive definition of 'animation'. This heterogeneity, however, is precisely what yields the fertile environment within which animated nonfiction has been able to thrive. I grant particular attention to the rise of this cinematic genre, voicing my position in regard to its contentious classification as 'animated documentary'. Following this, I locate specific currents within the field of memory studies that bear particular cultural and representational significance for these films and their narratives, which are identified here as an emphasis on trauma, multidirectional memory, and postmemory. These disciplinary synopses lead to an investigation of their interdisciplinary overlaps, which have informed my filmic analyses. Stressing a dialogue between medium and memory, I argue that the animated films discussed in this inquiry espouse an artisanal, handcrafted aesthetic – emblematic of a current trend within animated cinema to emphasize the medium's labor-intensive and material processes – as a means to explore the intricate interconnections between history and its myriad interpretations.

## I. Defining 'Animation'

Karen Beckman's *Animating Film Theory*, published in 2014, opens with the following assertion: 'Cinema and media studies in the early twenty-first century needs a better understanding of the relationship between two of the field's most unwieldy and unstable organizing concepts: "animation" and "film theory".'<sup>23</sup> Beckman is not alone in this sentiment. Recent years have seen the precipitous rise of a long-held dissatisfaction with the medium's definition and by extension the taxonomy of its materiality, the lineage of its history, and the establishment of its position within film theory and visual culture. Buchan agrees, valuating animation theory as something that 'needs urgent, critical re-examination', while film theorist Tom Gunning refers to the academic marginalization of animation as 'one of the great scandals of film theory'.<sup>24</sup>

But pleas for a more rigorous theorization of animated cinema are not exactly new. They echo the efforts of scholars Jayne Pilling and Maureen Furniss, who each issued missives decrying the field's lack of a critical language in the late-1990s.<sup>25</sup> They reiterate the sentiments of animator and film producer Walter Lantz, who was an advocate for the medium's future in the 1980s, as well as Harvey Deneroff, a professor of animation studies at the Savannah College of Art and Design, who in 1987 founded the Society for Animation Studies (SAS), the first international forum dedicated to the study of the form.<sup>26</sup> Finding it difficult to publish in most academic journals, members of the SAS founded *Animation Journal* in 1991, the first peer-reviewed publication related to animation history, theory, and criticism. Subsequently, other journals and research societies began to develop around the world. The Japan Society for Animation Studies (JSAS) started a Japanese-language journal to discuss the medium in 1999. *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, which describes itself as the first international and interdisciplinary peer-reviewed animation journal, was

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<sup>23</sup> Karen Beckman ed., 'Animating Film Theory: An Introduction', in *Animating Film Theory*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Buchan, introduction to *Pervasive Animation*, 7; and Tom Gunning, 'Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18.1 (2007), 38.

<sup>25</sup> See Jayne Pilling ed., introduction to *A Reader in Animation Studies* (London: John Liberty and Co., 1997), xii-xvii; and Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 3-12.

<sup>26</sup> Harvey Deneroff, 'The Society for Animation Studies', in *Reader in Animation Studies*, vii.

established in the UK in 2006.<sup>27</sup> ‘Animation and the Manipulated Moving Image’, a research group within the Network for European Cinema Studies (NECS), formed in 2009, and a number of its German and Austrian members have since founded an independent association of animation scholars, known as AG Animation.<sup>28</sup> In parallel with these developments, university-level animation history and theory courses have been incorporated into many film and media studies programs, supplementing practice-based curricula.<sup>29</sup>

These expansions within the field have pushed previous perceptions of the animated form while sparking an upturn in its critical attention. Over the past three decades, animation scholarship has been freeing itself from the constraining perception that it exists tangentially to other fields of research (i.e. film, media, or cultural studies). This has prompted numerous scholarly inquiries into the medium’s techniques, aesthetics, and ideologies, as well as its position within academia, emerging technologies, and visual culture more widely. These studies have been produced in multiple countries and translated into several languages. They have explored animation through a variety of critical lenses, including semiotics, psychoanalysis, postmodernism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, phenomenology, and gender studies. Recent contributions to the discipline include Beckman’s *Animating Film Theory*, an edited volume that offers investigations into early and contemporary experiments with animation, Japanese animation theory and practice, and the medium’s relationship with identity politics. Buchan’s *Pervasive Animation* also brings together a range of scholarship from writers like Ward, Siegfried Zielinski, Sean Cubitt, and Nea Ehrlich, each of whom examine the material processes of animation as a challenge to various cultural, media, and technological hegemonies. And within the last few years, *Animation: An Interdisciplinary*

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<sup>27</sup> For the journal’s description, see their page at Sage Publications online, <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/journal/animation>.

<sup>28</sup> ‘About NECS’, European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS), accessed 24 April 2016, <http://necs.org/about-necs>; and ‘AG Animation: Eine Arbeitsgruppe der Gesellschaft für Medienwissenschaft’, AG Animation, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://ag-animation.de>.

<sup>29</sup> Buchan, introduction to *Pervasive Animation*, 8.

*Journal* has had special issues dedicated to distinct topics including animation's affiliation with comics, pre- and early cinema, Rotoscope practices, and space travel.<sup>30</sup>

Despite these significant strides within the field, however, the appeals of Beckman, Gunning, Buchan, and others to grant the medium its much-deserved recognition remain clear and persistent. Though largely similar in content to the petitions of Pilling, Furniss, Lantz, and Deneroff throughout the 1980s and 1990s – which urged more scholarship dedicated to the form and additional academic spaces for animation scholars to connect and communicate – these more recent calls seem different in tone. There is a palpable feeling of frustration caused by the field's seemingly slow immersion into academia. Take for example the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), which – though it was founded in 1957 and currently holds a membership of over three thousand scholars in five hundred institutions across thirty-eight nations – only recently formed its first animation research group in 2011.<sup>31</sup> But upon examining the relevant literature, I suspect that the sense of urgency attached to both justifying animation as an object of study and establishing for it a concise definition is rooted in the hybrid nature of the medium itself. Though desired, an isolated definition of animated cinema has not been the outcome, while an expansive field spanning media and discipline continues to grow.<sup>32</sup> I discern the succeeding factors to have exacerbated this tension: first, the perception of a rising digital crisis; second, animation's extensive etymology; and third, the innate heterogeneity of animation as a filmic practice.

### ***Animation and the Digital Crisis***

With the inception and prevalence of computer-generated imagery (CGI), animation practices have flourished within emergent applications and software. However, though appearing to

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<sup>30</sup> See the following special issues of *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*: 'Comics and Animation', 4.3 (2009); 'Animation, Pre- and Early Cinema', 6.2 (2011); 'Rotoshop and the Work of Bob Sabiston' 7.1 (2012); and 'Animating Space and Scalar Travels', 9.2 (2013).

<sup>31</sup> 'About Us', Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS), accessed 24 April 2016, [http://www.cmstudies.org/?page=about\\_us](http://www.cmstudies.org/?page=about_us); and 'Animated Media Scholarly Interest Group (Founded 2010)', SCMS, accessed 24 April 2016, [http://www.cmstudies.org/?page=groups\\_animatedmedia](http://www.cmstudies.org/?page=groups_animatedmedia).

<sup>32</sup> Pilling provided an overview of the field's simultaneous motivation to and discomfort with establishing a 'Grand Theory' of animation in her introductory remarks to *A Reader of Animation Studies* in 1997, an analysis of a disciplinary unrest that still resonates two decades later, xii-xvii.



promote a verdant environment for animation to thrive, some animation scholars and filmmakers worry that increased digitization has threatened traditional modes of animated production.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, animation's connection to the digital becomes, as Beckman describes it, 'a synonymous relationship [that] is too easily presumed'.<sup>34</sup> This conflation risks the suppression of animated film's long history, where its pre-digital and nongraphic iterations are discarded in favor of CGI, resulting in the 'loss of its material object'.<sup>35</sup> We have already seen this anxiety play itself out within the related scholarship. Attempting to recognize the significance of animation practices within film history, Lev Manovich made a provocative claim in 2001: 'Born from animation, cinema pushed animation to its periphery, only in the end to become one particular case of animation.'<sup>36</sup> While Manovich's estimation has been thoughtfully debated by several critics and filmmakers who consider it a direct challenge to the established hierarchies of film theory, Alla Gadassik notes the argument's error in its equating of early animation to digitization. Though Manovich 'admires animation's hand crafted-tradition', Gadassik states, 'his vision of digital cinema does not foreground the constructed character of the early animated image...In this network of digital technologies, the hand of the animator is seen as an antiquated curiosity, which has been rendered obsolete by faster, more powerful machines'.<sup>37</sup>

Viewed in this light, the fervency with which some scholars advocate the establishment of animation studies as a scholarly discipline appears entirely rational. With the initial attempts to historicize the medium coinciding with the rise of new technologies during the 1980s, fears of the digital's usurping of traditional animation should now be nearing peak levels. As prominent animation scholar Ward cautions, with ties growing between art schools and movie studios that privilege CGI and 3D animation, the field should be concerned with

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<sup>33</sup> Beckman, 'Animating Film Theory', 1-19; Buchan, 'Animation, in Theory', 111-130; Alla Gadassik, 'Ghosts in the Machine: The Body in Digital Animation', in *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture*, eds. Esther Preen and María del Pilar Bianco (London: A&C Black, 2010), 225-238; and Gunning, 'Moving Away from the Index', 29-52.

<sup>34</sup> Beckman, 'Animating Film Theory', 2.

<sup>35</sup> Buchan, 'Animation, in Theory', 111-130.

<sup>36</sup> Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 302.

<sup>37</sup> Gadassik, 'Ghosts in the Machine', 229.

what is being taught about the form.<sup>38</sup> To avoid catering exclusively to industry demands, Ward advises how increasingly essential it has become for animation studies to solidify itself as a comprehensive discipline that acknowledges its myriad genealogies, histories of aesthetics and processes, and interdisciplinary modes and practices. Gadassik explains animation's need to situate itself as an academic discipline 'as a crisis of identity, for at its heart lies a question of definition: what IS animation?'<sup>39</sup> It is a question that continues to be asked and answered in innumerable ways. If we are going to establish what animation is, we cannot ignore what it has been.

### ***An Extensive Etymology***

'Animation' derives from fourteenth-century Middle French. It alluded to the 'vital principle', or 'the animal spirit' of life.<sup>40</sup> Its earliest recorded appearance within the English language dates back to the late sixteenth century: 'They are...not simply surges, but such are strengthened by the arm and animation of God.'<sup>41</sup> The word signified divinity, a reference to the godly power to generate life. This ethereal qualification reflected its etymology; in classical Latin, *anima* connoted the soul, the invisible and indefinable spring of vitality.<sup>42</sup> This remained its predominant association until the eighteenth century when 'animation' indicated the antithesis of any technical or mechanized movement: 'Mere mechanism...can never account for Animation, or the animal life of even the lowest insect.'<sup>43</sup> By the nineteenth century, the term's connection with divine faculty stretched beyond the spiritual, as its generative capacities became linked to human faculties. In addition to denoting the human ability to breed life, 'animation' was used to describe figurative resurrections of the dead within literature and the arts. As fictionalized in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, humans had

<sup>38</sup> Ward, 'Animation Studies as Interdisciplinary Teaching Field', in *Pervasive Animation*, 317-337.

<sup>39</sup> Gadassik, 'Ghosts in the Machine', 225.

<sup>40</sup> 'Animation', *Oxford English Dictionary Online (OED Online)*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) accessed 24 April 2016, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>41</sup> Bishop John King, *Lectures upon Jonas, Delivered at Yorke in the Yeare of Our Lorde 1594* (London: Joan Broome [1594] 1597), 348, as quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> 'Animation', *OED Online*, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>43</sup> George Cheyne, *The English Malady: Or, A Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal, and Hysterical* (London: G. Strahan, 1733), 90, as quoted in *ibid*., capitalization in original.

become ‘capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter’.<sup>44</sup> Eventually, the category of ‘lifeless matter’ broadened to include both organic and inorganic entities, and – between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries – inert, nonhuman objects could also be granted an aura of life by the human hand. Machines were not only automated but also animated: ‘And no subject was more fascinating in an age seeking to demystify the workings of the mind and body than machines which closely duplicated the animated functions of living things.’<sup>45</sup> What was once seen as superior to mechanical movement in the eighteenth century was thought to go hand in hand with it by the twentieth.

It is at this point in animation’s discursive history that cinema entered the etymological equation. In 1897, four centuries after its earliest known idiomatic usage, the first definition of animation to include the cinematic process was formulated, conceiving it as ‘capturing acted or real-life action’; a ‘motion picture’.<sup>46</sup> For many critics during the days of early cinema, the revised notion of animation as a filmic or mechanical medium seemed irreconcilable from the movements of life. In 1912, science writer Frederick A. Talbot insisted that cinematic animation ‘is not animation at all. All that happens is that a long string of snap-shot photographs...are passed at rapid speed before the eye’.<sup>47</sup> Film theory continued to promote this sentiment, asserting the intrinsic differences between the illusory movements of the motion picture – something automated and calculated – and the ‘real’ movements of organic life.<sup>48</sup>

The last twenty-five years – particularly since the publication of Cholodenko’s *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* in 1991 – have seen a revival of these disputes over the

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* (London: Printed for Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mayor & Jones, 1818), 85.

<sup>45</sup> James W. Cook, *Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 36. For further reading on automata see Jean-Claude Beaune, ‘The Classical Age of Automata: An Impressionistic Survey from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century’, in *ZONE: Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part One*, ed. Michael Feher (New York: Urzone, 1989), 433-434; Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Jessica Riskin, ed., *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> ‘Animation’, *OED online*, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>47</sup> Frederick A. Talbot, *Moving Pictures: How They Are Made and Worked* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1912), 7.

<sup>48</sup> Vivian Sobchack, ‘Animation and Automation, or, the Incredible Effortfulness of Being’, *Screen* 50.4 (2009): 381.

medium's designation. In her 1998 overview of animation theory and practice, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics*, Furniss lamented that though various filmmakers and scholars were expending significant energy in their efforts to produce a precise yet inclusive definition of animation, 'little ha[d] been achieved'.<sup>49</sup> Particularly disappointing were the findings of researchers Edward S. Small and Eugene Levinson, whose article 'Toward a Theory of Animation' concluded with the following explanation of the form: 'the technique of single-frame cinematography'.<sup>50</sup> Furniss found this to be most 'simplistic', offering only the 'basic characteristic of the practice'.<sup>51</sup> A more developed version of this definition appeared in Charles Solomon's 'Animation: Notes on a Definition', which established specific criteria for classification into the genre. According to Solomon, for a work to be categorized as 'animation' it must meet two key requirements: '(I) the imagery is recorded frame-by-frame and (II) the illusion of motion is created, rather than recorded.'<sup>52</sup> Furniss deemed this description overly pragmatic, clinging too closely to mechanical understandings of animated practice. Its mentions of 'illusion' and 'creation', however, are reminiscent of one of the more conceptual definitions of animation, provided by animator and founder of the NFB, Norman McLaren: 'Animation is not the art of drawings that move but the art of movements that are drawn; What happens between each frame is much more important than what exists on each frame; Animation is therefore the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames.'<sup>53</sup>

The above interpretations exemplify a tension underlying many attempts to define cinematic animation. Scholars working to articulate the parameters of the medium inevitably encounter a clash between theory and practice. Where McLaren's characterization alludes to the elusive relationship between movement and stasis, Small, Levinson, and Solomon are more interested in establishing the disciplinary boundaries of animation as a technical

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<sup>49</sup> Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Edward S. Small and Eugene Levinson, 'Toward a Theory of Animation', *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film and Television* 24 (1989): 73.

<sup>51</sup> Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Charles Solomon, 'Animation: Notes on a Definition', in *The Art of the Animated Image: An Anthology* eds. John Canemaker and Charles Solomon (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1987), 10.

<sup>53</sup> Norman McLaren as quoted in Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 5, capitalization in original. Furniss attributes this quote to a statement McLaren made at the National Film Board of Canada in the 1950s.

process. A critical contribution toward reconciling these positions came in the form of Cholodenko's *The Illusion of Life*. Throughout his argument, Cholodenko advocates a view of animation that takes into account the term's lengthy history – its connotations of life and death, creation, and the 'animatic' – and how these connections might shape the way we approach animation as a cinematic practice. Cholodenko has continued to stress the interdependence of practice and theory in his subsequent writings, which include a second volume of *The Illusion of Life*, published in 2011: 'Animation as idea (concept, process, etc.) informs the animation film, and vice versa, so the animation film is *open* to the idea of animation, and vice versa.'<sup>54</sup>

*The Illusion of Life* has been lauded for its role in revolutionizing the field of animation studies. But it is also heavily contested within film theory more widely. This is not solely for its provocative declaration that all film is a form of animation (a point Cholodenko made ten years prior to Manovich's similar proposition but which he acknowledges was made before him by theorists Alexandre Alexeieff, Ralph Stephenson, Taihei Imamura, and Sergei Eisenstein).<sup>55</sup> Rather, *The Illusion of Life*'s primary critique alleges that Cholodenko's argument is weakly grounded on poetic meditation and metaphor, which foreclose the technical specifics of animated cinema. One of his most vocal critics, animation researcher Andrew Darley, characterizes Cholodenko's vision of animation as one that denies its value as 'a mode of representation and art' and as 'a particular cultural practice of film making'.<sup>56</sup> For Darley, it is imperative that inquiries into animated film refrain from what he deems nonessential philosophical meanderings. However, Darley's appeal for strict categorization has its own internalized problems, complications that have plagued the medium since its inception. Film scholar Hervé Joubert-Laurencin has detailed how the introduction of

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<sup>54</sup> Cholodenko, 'Animation (Theory) as the Poematic: A Reply to the Cognitivists', *Animation Studies* 4 (2009): 10, emphasis in original.

<sup>55</sup> Cholodenko, *Illusion of Life*, 9-36 and 209-242; *Illusion of Life* 2, 13-98; 'The Animation of Cinema', *The Semiotic Review of Books* 18.2 (2008), 1-10; and "'First Principles" of Animation', in *Animating Film Theory*, 98-99.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Darley, 'Bones of Content: Thoughts on the Study of Animation', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2.1 (2007): 71 and 73.

‘animation cinema’ into the film festival circuit at Cannes in 1953 was met with significant dismay:

[T]he use of the expression was not self-evident and represented a verbal problem that could not be resolved, even among cinema specialists...advertisements, press releases, technical specification sheets, blithely mixed everything together, confusing marionettes and animated cartoons. As soon as animation film was being discussed, whether they were English or Japanese, translators no longer knew their language and gave in to the same incompetent Esperanto.<sup>57</sup>

One year before Furniss disclosed her dissatisfaction with ascertaining a suitable definition, animation scholar Phillip Denslow likewise elaborated on these inadequacies, describing how shifts in studio production and independent filmmaking might also influence formulations of the medium in excess of a concise lexicon.<sup>58</sup> For these scholars and filmmakers throughout the twentieth century, deciding on a singular and fixed definition of animation would risk minimizing the diverse fluctuations within the conception, production, distribution, and reception of animated cinema.

These consternations persist. In an essay published in 2014, Buchan stated that the term animation remains ‘an imprecise, fuzzy catchall that heaps an enormous and historically far-reaching, artistically diverse body of work into one pot’.<sup>59</sup> Her article stands as a call for action to emergent scholars who might remedy this aggravation within the field, while also providing a thorough overview of previous (failed) attempts to do just that. Buchan does not, however, sponsor a definition of animation with disregard to its etymology. She concludes her essay with a strong ‘appeal to future researchers and makers of animation to be sensitive to the historical continuum of authorship and creating in the (mainly digital) striving ahead’.<sup>60</sup> This seems a reasonable sentiment, but it points to a continuing conundrum within animation studies: the field needs to be keenly observant of its historical lineage, without throwing ‘an

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<sup>57</sup> Hervé Joubert-Laurencin, ‘André Martin, Inventor of Animation Cinema: Prolegomena for a History of Terms’, trans. Lucy Swanson, in *Animating Film Theory*, 85-97. See also, André Martin, ‘Films d'animation au festival de Cannes’, *Cahiers du cinéma*, 25 (1953): 39.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Denslow, ‘What is Animation and Who Needs to Know?’ in *Reader in Animation Studies*, 1-4

<sup>59</sup> Buchan, ‘Animation, in Theory’, 113.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

enormous and historically far-reaching artistically diverse body of work into one pot'.<sup>61</sup> This friction between broadening the spectrum of what constitutes animated cinema while simultaneously keeping it as concise and differentiated as possible has persistently repeated itself within animation studies.

### ***The Heterogeneity of Animated Film***

Animated film draws lineages and inferences spanning an array of fields including graphic design, illustration, painting, comics, and film. The diffusion of these explorations across genre, technique, and form has also made it difficult to define animation as a medium and a cohesive area of study. Animation scholarship undertaken prior to the launch of *Animation Journal* was often unable to build on other research, as it was performed by individuals working within a diversified range of disciplines like cultural studies, comparative literature, and experimental cinema. Moreover, throughout most of the twentieth century, animation at the university level was largely connected to artistic practice rather than filmmaking, and this training was often carried out in isolation from the medium's history and theory.<sup>62</sup> Instead, animation history was predominantly documented and preserved by a small group of fans, collectors, and practitioners, many of whom later banded together to form the Association Internationale du Film d'Animation, or the International Association of Animated Film (ASIFA), in 1960.<sup>63</sup> Relatedly, Buchan describes that in her massive endeavor to scan thousands of film books and journals for content regarding animation, what she found is relatively scant. However, she notes that the brief mentions of animation that have been uncovered point to a rich theoretical terrain just waiting to be tapped.<sup>64</sup>

But some animation scholars would take issue with this last point. Both Cholodenko and Wells have recently stated their opposition to the frequent declaration that we are at a

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>62</sup> Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> 'About: ASIFA', ASIFA: Association Internationale du Film d'Animation online, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://asifa.net>.

<sup>64</sup> Buchan, 'Animation, in Theory', 116.

‘starting point’ in animation studies.<sup>65</sup> Cholodenko has qualified his research as only a ‘supplement’ to the vast amount of previous scholarship performed on the medium.<sup>66</sup> He further offers a cautionary word concerning hopes for a ‘definitive, final definition of animation’, which he postulates will never be realized since ‘language and definition will always come up against their limits’.<sup>67</sup> Singling out Buchan specifically in this regard, Wells warns that the perpetuation of animation as a ‘new’ field pushes aside the decades of research that have already been devoted to the form, long before the conceptualization of animation as an academic discipline.<sup>68</sup> He takes issue with the premise that animation studies has not established itself enough on its own terms and asserts that there have been clear and abundant efforts to identify animation as unique while reaching out to a wide range of academic fields, including philosophy, narratology, aesthetics, feminist theory, and cognitivism.

The positions taken by Cholodenko and Wells suggest that the field of animation – in both theory and practice – has been aware of its interdisciplinary status for some time and needs to move beyond debates that oscillate between essentialist and more versatile ideations. While the back-and-forth deliberations of the previous three decades continue to repeat themselves, the perspective of Cholodenko and Wells epitomizes a growing fatigue with this cyclical discourse. It is instead necessary to acknowledge the field’s many methods and forms in order to forge new analyses. In this study, I accordingly approach the medium’s heterogeneity as an asset rather than a dilemma.

### ***The Emergence of Animated Nonfiction***

The interest in and production of animated nonfiction is one branch within the growing network of animation theory and practice. As the exposure of this cinematic genre has increased online, at film festivals, and through wider theatrical release, pertinent scholarship has correspondingly emerged. Academic conferences, like the University of Edinburgh’s

*Animated Realities: Animation, Documentary and the Moving Image* held in June 2011 and

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<sup>65</sup> Wells, ‘Battlefields for the Undead: Stepping Out of the Graveyard’, *Animation Studies* (2007): 8-9.

<sup>66</sup> Cholodenko, ‘Animation (Theory) as the Poematic’, 2.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>68</sup> Wells, ‘Battlefields’, 8.



film festivals specializing in the animated ‘documentary’, including the annual documentary and animation film festival DOK Leipzig and the London International Animation Festival, have seen a steady incline. Publications of book-length inquiries into the genre, such as Judith Kriger’s *Animated Realism: A Behind the Scenes Look at the Animated Documentary Genre*, Jayne Pilling’s edited volume *Animating the Unconscious: Desire, Sexuality, and Animation*, and Annabelle Honess Roe’s *Animated Documentary* have sought to explore the medium in relation to theories of subjectivity and indexicality.<sup>69</sup> In 2011, *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* published a special issue guest edited by filmmaker and theorist Jeffrey Skoller, ‘Making it (Un)real: Contemporary Theories and Practices in Documentary Animation’.<sup>70</sup>

Yet despite heightened interest, research into this particular genre of animated film remains relatively nascent. Of the films examined here, only a handful of scholarly articles have been produced, with the earliest of them – *Minoru* – having received the most academic mentions. Though it had garnered critical attention upon its initial release in 1992, *Minoru* has also recently regained attention, reemerging at various screenings and festivals and becoming the subject of formal analyses – a development indicative of the escalating interest in animated representations of the past.<sup>71</sup> But animation’s use in nonfictional contexts bears a weighty history, the medium having elucidated complex subject matters since the days of silent film. In the early twentieth century, animation was often employed to illustrate intricate scientific processes for both theatrical and educational purposes. Thomas Edison used animation in his instructional films as early as 1910.<sup>72</sup> In 1923, Max and Dave Fleischer – known for bringing characters like Superman, Popeye, and Betty Boop from the comics page

<sup>69</sup> Judith Kriger, *Animated Realism: A Behind the Scenes Look at the Animated Documentary Genre* (Waltham: Focus Press, 2012); Pilling ed., *Animating the Unconscious: Desire, Sexuality, and Animation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1-16; and Annabelle Honess Roe, *Animated Documentary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey Skoller ed., ‘Making it (Un)real: Contemporary Theories and Practices in Documentary Animation’, *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* Special Issue 6.3 (2011): 203-398.

<sup>71</sup> Recent film festival screenings of *Minoru* include *Riot in Vancouver*, Cineworks and Anniversaries of Change, exhibition and film screening held at Gallery Gachet, Vancouver, Canada, 15 September 2007; 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Vancouver Asian Film Festival, Vancouver Asian Film Festival (VAFF), Vancouver, Canada, 6-9 November 2008; The 13<sup>th</sup> Annual International Animation Festival Hiroshima, ASIFA, Hiroshima, 7 August 2010; and a film screening of *Minoru* at the Japanese Canadian National Museum, Burnaby, Canada, 2 June 2011.

<sup>72</sup> Roe, ‘Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion: Towards a Framework for the Study of Animated Documentary’, *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6 (2011): 220.

to the big screen – released *The Einstein Theory of Relativity*, a silent film that incorporated animated sequences to explicate Einstein’s theoretical principles.<sup>73</sup> Animated vignettes were employed in a similar capacity by Soviet filmmaker Vsevolod Pudovkin, whose 1926 film *Myekhanika golovnogo mozga* [*Mechanics of the Human Brain*] sought to visualize Ivan Pavlov’s research into respondent conditioning.<sup>74</sup> Taking advantage of the medium’s educational aptitude throughout the early 1900s, both the British and United States Governments commissioned animators and filmmakers like Walt Disney, F. Percy Smith, John Randolph Bray, and the Fleischer Brothers to produce instructional films for national audiences on topics ranging from health and hygiene to wartime efforts.<sup>75</sup> During the First and Second World Wars, animated film was charged with illuminating warfare. In 1915, British filmmaker Smith created a series of films that employed animated maps to depict conflict zones; in 1917, Max Fleischer produced US military films that provided instructions to American soldiers stationed in Europe; and from 1942 to 1945, Frank Capra collaborated with The Walt Disney Studios in the production of a series of seven propaganda films titled, *Why We Fight*.<sup>76</sup>

Investigating wartime experience through animated film was not exclusive to government propaganda, however. Considered a pioneering figure in the development of animated cinema as a realist medium, Winsor McCay produced in 1918 what is often categorized as the first ‘animated documentary’, *The Sinking of Lusitania*.<sup>77</sup> The American animator, previously known as the vaudevillian director of animated films *Little Nemo* (1911) and *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914), created a nonfiction film about the deaths of several civilians

<sup>73</sup> The Fleischer Brothers, *The Einstein Theory of Relativity* (New York: Fleischer Studios, 1923), 16mm.

<sup>74</sup> Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Myekhanika golovnogo mozga* (Moscow and Berlin: Mezhrabpomfilm, 1926), 35mm.

<sup>75</sup> Beckman, ‘Animating Film Theory’, 16-18. For further reading see Thomas Cripps, *Making Movies Black: The Hollywood Message Movie from World War II to the Civil Rights Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 151-213; ‘The Public Health Film Goes to War’, U.S. National Library of Medicine online, accessed 24 April 2016, <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/digicolls/phfgtw/films.html>; and Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999).

<sup>76</sup> See F. Percy Smith, *Fight for the Dardanelles* (London: British Film Institute, 1915) 16mm; Richard Fleischer, *Out of the Inkwell: Max Fleischer and the Animation Revolution* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 27; and Frank Capra, *Why We Fight* series (Washington DC: Office of War Information, Bureau of Motion Pictures, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, and Atlanta: War Activities Committee, 1942-1945), 35mm.

<sup>77</sup> Winsor McCay, *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (Los Angeles: Jewel Productions, 1918), 35mm.

in the sinking of the British passenger liner, Lusitania.<sup>78</sup> In the absence of filmed footage or photographs, McCay portrayed the events through animation in accordance with survivor testimony, a strategy employed by each of the four films examined in this dissertation.

Decades later, NFB animator McLaren won the Academy Award for best documentary short for his 1952 anti-military and anti-war film, *Neighbours*, which used a stop-motion technique known as pixilation to tell the story of two neighbors who fight to the death over a flower.<sup>79</sup> Such animated shorts about human aggression proliferated during this period, and animated film became an accessible medium for political messages throughout the postwar era.<sup>80</sup>

### ***Animated Nonfiction Today***

Animation continues to function in edifying capacities, condensing vast amounts of data, as in Melih Bilgil's *History of the Internet* (2009), or breaking down complex fields of science, as seen in the BBC's *Wonders of the Solar System* (2010) and *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* (2014), which engaged with the medium in the style of the original series, Carl Sagan's *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* (1980).<sup>81</sup> Animated films may also provide figurations of things that cannot be photographed, such as the subjects depicted in the BBC's *Walking With Dinosaurs* (2013) or the mental processes explored in Samantha Moore's *An Eyeful of Sound* (2010).<sup>82</sup> In documentary films including *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), *Blue Vinyl* (2002), and *She's a Boy I Knew* (2007), animated sequences are juxtaposed against live-action scenes to bring levity to otherwise serious examinations of society and politics.<sup>83</sup> And animation maintains its distinctive association with war, which has brought about productions like *Waltz*

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<sup>78</sup> McCay, *Little Nemo* (Brooklyn: Vitagraph, 1911), 35mm; and *Gertie the Dinosaur* (Fort Lee: William Fox's Box Office Attractions Company, 1914), 35mm.

<sup>79</sup> McLaren, *Neighbours* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 1952), 35mm.

<sup>80</sup> Pilling, *Animating the Unconscious*, 5.

<sup>81</sup> Melih Bilgil, *History of the Internet*, (self-distributed, 2009), DCP; Paul Olding, *Wonders of the Solar System* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2010), DCP; Brannon Braga, Bill Pope, and Ann Druyan, *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* (Los Angeles: Fox Entertainment Group, 2014), DCP; and Adrian Malone, *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* (Arlington: Public Broadcasting Service, 1980), video and 35mm.

<sup>82</sup> Tim Haines and Jasper James, *Walking with Dinosaurs* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, and Burbank: Warner Home Video, 2013), 35mm and DCP; and Samantha Moore, *An Eyeful of Sound* (London: Wellcome Trust, 2010), 35mm and DCP.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Moore, *Bowling for Columbine* (Los Angeles: United Artists and Beverly Hills: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2002), 35mm; Daniel B. Gold and Judith Helfand, *Blue Vinyl* (Los Angeles: Cinedigm Entertainment, 2002), video; and Gwen Haworth, *She's a Boy I Knew* (Durham: Shapeshifter Films, 2007), video.

with *Bashir* and *Persepolis*, and the historical reconstructions of military combat and equipment in programs including The History Channel's *Battle 360* (2008).<sup>84</sup>

One of the most expansive subsets of animated nonfiction to have developed since the 1950s comes in the representation of the everyday, a type of observational cinema that marries direct audio with animated imagery in lieu of live-action camerawork. Since the silent film era, cinematic experiments with sound have brought about opportunities to animate the recorded world. From 1959 to 1973, American husband-and-wife animation team John and Faith Hubley created a series of films that set their imaginative illustrations to soundtracks of their children playing.<sup>85</sup> Following their lead, British animation studio Aardman began to produce stop-motion Claymation films based upon covertly recorded conversations between people in public spaces. Peter Lord and David Sproxton, founders of Aardman, produced a series of two short films for the BBC in 1978, titled *Animated Conversations*.<sup>86</sup> The success of these shorts enabled Aardman to develop the similarly conceived *Conversation Pieces* (1982) and *Lip Synch* (1989).<sup>87</sup> *Lip Synch* led to Aardman's Academy Award-winning *Creature Comforts* franchise, which used interviews with members of the British public in places like nursing homes and housing estates to give voice to a cast of Plasticine zoo animals, who mused about their treatment and living conditions in captivity.<sup>88</sup> The practice of visually interpreting direct audio through animation has since increased to the point of convention. It has been employed for purposes both humorous, for instance *The Ricky Gervais Show* (2010-2012), and solemn, as in the Swedish film *Gömd [Hidden]* (2010), which animates an interview with a young refugee.<sup>89</sup> Two of the films focused on in this project, *Minoru* and *A Kosovo Fairytale*, also employ this technique.

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<sup>84</sup> Tony Long, *Battle 360* (New York: The History Channel, 2008), DCP.

<sup>85</sup> See John and Faith Hubley, *Moonbird*, *Windy Day*, and *Cockaboody* (New York: Hubley Studios, 1959, 1967, and 1973, respectively).

<sup>86</sup> Peter Lord and David Sproxton, *Animated Conversations* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1977-1978), 35mm.

<sup>87</sup> Lord and Sproxton, *Conversation Pieces* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1982), 35mm; and Aardman Animations, *Lip Synch* (London: Channel Four, 1989), 35mm.

<sup>88</sup> Aardman Animations and Nick Park, *Creature Comforts* (London: ITV, 1989-2006), 35mm and DigiBeta.

<sup>89</sup> Craig Kellman and Dan Fraga, *The Ricky Gervais Show* (London: Channel Four and New York: Home Box Office, 2010-2012), DCP; and David Aronowitsch, Hanna Heilborn, and Mats Johansson *Gömd* (Stockholm: Story, 2010), 35mm and DCP.

### ***The Documentary Debate***

Early inquiries into the genre of animated nonfiction were largely concerned with classification. In 1997, two pivotal scholarly essays published on the topic surfaced, animation director Sybil DelGaudio's 'If Truth Be Told, Can 'Toons Tell It? Documentary and Animation' and Wells' 'The Beautiful Village and the True Village: A Consideration of Animation and Documentary Aesthetic'.<sup>90</sup> Both articles positioned the cinematic trend relative to documentary filmmaking. These articles were followed in 2003 by Gunnar Strøm's 'The Animated Documentary'.<sup>91</sup> In March 2005, animation magazine *FPS (Frames Per Second Magazine)* released a thematic issue on the animated documentary, asking on its cover 'what happens when the real meets the unreal?'.<sup>92</sup> Later that year, Ward published *Documentary: The Margins of Reality*, dedicating a chapter to the genre.<sup>93</sup> Of these preliminary investigations, most focused on delineating animated nonfiction in accordance with the parameters of traditional documentary cinema. The categorizations of documentary filmmaking laid out by Bill Nichols in his 1991 overview of the filmic mode, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, became an essential resource for animation scholars who used it to critically assess animated nonfiction and position it within an established structure of cinema theory.<sup>94</sup>

The seemingly swift categorical alignment of animated nonfiction with documentary theory and practice is perhaps not solely due to certain resemblances in the genre's content and execution. Animation scholars including Roe, Ward, and Ehrlich locate the legitimization of the animated documentary as a cinematic classification within a specific moment in film history, determining that the genre's emergence was made manifest by a broader shift in

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<sup>90</sup> Sybil DelGaudio, 'If Truth Be Told, Can 'Toons Tell It? Documentary and Animation', *Documentary and Animation* 9.2 (1997): 189-199; and Wells, *Art and Animation* (London: Academy Editions, 1997), 40-45.

<sup>91</sup> Gunnar Strøm, 'The Animated Documentary', *Animation Journal* 11 (2003): 46-63.

<sup>92</sup> Emru Townsend ed, 'The Animated Documentary: What Happens When the Real Meets the Unreal?' *FPS (Frames Per Second Magazine)* 2.1 (2005): 1-23.

<sup>93</sup> Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2005), 82-99.

<sup>94</sup> Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

documentary representation.<sup>95</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s – while animated nonfiction films were gaining traction and animated cinema was beginning to address its apparent ‘identity crisis’ in the face of digitization – documentary film was experiencing its own epistemological shift. As film theorist Mark Nash describes it, the end of the twentieth century saw an increase in the use of documentary materials in cinema, television, and the visual arts, which he named ‘The Documentary Turn’.<sup>96</sup> This period highlighted a contemporary fascination with the complicated relationship between reality and fiction, forcing a confrontation with documentary’s truth claims or avowals of any objective knowability of the world. Viewers became more skeptical of supposedly factual cinema, questioning the authenticity, construction, and interpretation of included evidence. Add to this an upsurge in digital innovations and hyperrealistic CGI that could subtly manipulate the image, and the demarcations between reality and simulation had significantly deteriorated by the arrival of the twenty-first century.

Roe finds a political parallel in the production and reception of both traditional documentary and animated nonfiction, noting that ‘these twin intellectual and cultural developments can also be seen as a reaction to hegemonic systems of power’.<sup>97</sup> Roe hypothesizes that just as the availability of consumer video and the Internet created new platforms for socially and politically activist documentary practices and audiences from the mid-1970s forward, animated film has similarly provided an outlet for filmmakers to share subjective experiences outside the mainstream.<sup>98</sup> Relatedly, Ward points out that animated cinema’s overt fabrication is especially able to critique the manufacturing of reality, making it uniquely capable of exploring the dynamics of factualization versus fictionalization.<sup>99</sup> In her essay ‘Animated Documentaries as Masking’, Ehrlich echoes this assertion, avidly arguing

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<sup>95</sup> See Roe, *Animated Documentary*; Ward, *Documentary*, 82-99; and Nea Ehrlich, ‘Animated Documentaries as Masking’, *Animation Studies* 6 (2011): <http://journal.animationstudies.org/nea-ehrllich-animated-documentaries-as-masking/>, accessed 24 April 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Mark Nash, ‘Experiments with Truth: The Documentary Turn’, in *Experiments with Truth, Fabric Workshop and Museum*, exhibition catalog (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Fabric Workshop and Museum, 2004).

<sup>97</sup> Roe, *Animated Documentary*, 144.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. See also Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xii.

<sup>99</sup> Ward, *Documentary*, 82-99.

that the animated documentary is not only emblematic of the collusions of the real and the simulated – referred to as the ‘uncertainty of our age’ – but also ideally suited to expose ‘the constructedness of reality itself and question what, if anything, lies beneath these cultural constructions’.<sup>100</sup> Frequently activist in tone, these arguments assume that animation can distinctively lead viewers to interrogate the world as presented in order to reveal multiple perspectives of reality.

As it stands, any animated film recounting a past event, including those which engage personal memory and testimony, is most often categorized within scholarship and the festival circuit as an ‘animated documentary’, bringing with it the perception that it is a direct challenge to the representational status quo. But this classification is not without its detractors. The term’s use produces considerable consternation for many scholars and filmmakers who vocalize its inadequacies. At a panel session held at the DOK Leipzig film festival in October 2010, a question pertaining to the descriptor of ‘documentary’ was raised to the panelists, who included filmmaker Fleming, director of *I Was A Child of Holocaust Survivors*.<sup>101</sup> After much deliberation, the subject was laid to rest with the reluctant consensus that ‘documentary’ is simply the best available term. In Roe’s *Animated Documentary*, she likewise considers how productive it is to ‘shoehorn’ the rising trend of animated nonfiction films into pre-established taxonomies of documentary film, even as she promotes the classification.<sup>102</sup> Some scholars have begun to address their discomfort with this nomenclature by adopting substitutive qualifiers emphasizing the genre’s interplay of fact and fiction, which may denote that such works are close to – but not quite – documentary. Christina Formenti, who has admonished the animated documentary category on the whole, opts instead for the labels ‘docudrama’ or ‘docufiction’.<sup>103</sup> Looking at McCay’s works, Lorenzo Hernández has conversely suggested ‘documentary fable’ or ‘false documentary’ as

<sup>100</sup> Ehrlich, ‘Animated Documentaries as Masking’: <http://journal.animationstudies.org/nea-ehrllich-animated-documentaries-as-masking/>.

<sup>101</sup> Fleming, Glynne, and Annegreat Richter, ‘Close Up and Personal: DOK Podium 2010’ (panel discussion held at DOK Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany, 21 October 2010).

<sup>102</sup> Roe, *Animated Documentary* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 19.

<sup>103</sup> Christina Formenti, ‘The Sincerest Form of Docudrama: Re-framing the Animated Documentary’, *Studies in Documentary Film* 8.2 (2014): 103-115.

viable alternatives.<sup>104</sup> But these terms appear imperceptibly close to the genre of ‘mockumentary’, undermining the realist traits these films espouse.

While the films at the center of this thesis have all been dubbed animated documentaries along the festival circuit, I agree that it is not an entirely satisfactory classification. Each film examined combines elements of historical documentary, biography, first-person narrative, and fantasy. I posit that they support analyses that are not exclusively confined in relation to documentary film but also engaged with an expansive spectrum of narrative practice and area of study. I share Roe’s concern over constricting these films within overly stringent categorizations and would press the issue even further, as I am altogether wary of petitions to solidify these films within the documentary genre. For her part, Roe advocates an organizational structure Wells had previously advanced in the efforts to define animated documentary, which she discerns is able to bypass or relax the constraints imposed by documentary models presented by Nichols, Ward, and DelGuadio.<sup>105</sup> Wells’ ideation of documentary forms may be less limiting than others, but – as a variation of a taxonomy proposed by Richard Barsam in 1992, which Wells reformulated into the four dominant modes of imitative, subjective, fantastic, and postmodern – it is still tethered to explicitly defined traditional classifications.<sup>106</sup> Roe notes this aspect of Wells’ framework but settles on it as it appears to offer a more flexible and inclusive genre. Moreover, she presents the additional forms of mimetic substitution, non-mimetic substitution, and evocation, with the preemptive defense that ‘this is not just categorization for the sake of it’.<sup>107</sup> But it ultimately remains unclear why these ancillary justifications are not superfluous. Roe’s instinct to locate a flexible system seems instead to point to the flaws inherent to regimentation.

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<sup>104</sup> Lorenzo Hernández, ‘Through the Looking Glass’, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Roe, *Animated Documentary*, 19. According to Roe, each model seems to impose specific limitations on the genre, which would exclude many of the films emerging out of this style of animated filmmaking. Where Nichols stresses a mode of performative production, Ward establishes a set of criteria that includes interactivity and voiceover, and DelGuadio ignores animated films that do not actively seem to be critiquing the capabilities of live action.

<sup>106</sup> Wells, ‘Art and Animation’, 41. See also Richard M. Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (New York: Dutton, 1973).

<sup>107</sup> Roe, *Animated Documentary*, 23.



It is a peculiar tack for Roe, given the arguments for more categorical flexibility she makes in her discussion of the genre, which she presents as her research objectives. While promoting the radicalizing potential of the animated documentary – observing that the medium ‘goes beyond the mere indexical capacity of photographic images’ – she simultaneously stresses that her ‘object here is not a postmodern quest to undermine the strength of documentary’s claim to evidence reality’.<sup>108</sup> Of animation’s material differences from live-action, Roe acknowledges these variations, not to challenge live action as a cinematic mode, she assures us, but to envision animated film within a continuum of representation that offers alternative ways of seeing.<sup>109</sup> These appraisals indicate a theorization of animated cinema that encourages their position within a variety of intersecting genres, media, and modes of production. So why fight to restrain these films within the category of ‘animated documentary’?

The uncertainty with which Roe supports this classification is symptomatic of the broader disciplinary unease with defining animation, where the medium’s terminology and categorization are at once coveted and rejected. Circumspective of these tensions, I prefer to use a range of signifiers – autobiography, testimonial, historical representation, memory narrative – that are not necessarily interchangeable but aim to contextualize each individual film while allowing discursive latitude. If a general classification is necessary as a pragmatic matter, ‘nonfiction’ offers a wider umbrella underneath which many of these narrative modes may reside, and – as Elizabeth Cowie chronicles in *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* – it is a label that historically has not precluded fictive elements.<sup>110</sup>

This is not to suggest that animated film cannot function in documentary capacities. The examination of animated nonfiction, testimonial, autobiographical, or biographical films vis-à-vis documentary cinema is a fruitful way to engage with them. And I agree that animation has the potential to subvert certain representational norms. But viewing animated nonfiction cinema with regard to documentary film is only one perspective, reliance upon

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 155 and 36.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 20-25.

which may prove overly restrictive. Rigid definition cuts both ways. Securing this genre of animated film within documentary practice inversely invites arguments that animated film cannot behave in documentary fashion along categorical lines. Already, challenges to the cataloguing of animated documentary have most resolutely stemmed from perceptions that animated imagery shares a weak indexical relationship with its referent. Nichols – who has incidentally never acknowledged animated film within his formal analyses of documentary practice – characterizes documentary as ‘dependent on the specificity of its images for authenticity’.<sup>111</sup> Within this definition, authenticity is determined by the representation’s correlation to a real-world source. This leads Ward to conclude that ‘even the most “realistic” animation [...] will be watched as animation, rather than as a “recording” of an actual pro-filmic world. That is, despite any truth claims made, or real-world situations and relationships shown, the “animatedness” will still be an overriding feature of the film for the viewer as they watch the film’.<sup>112</sup> These suppositions enable the critical position of Formenti, who estimates that ‘if a necessity of justifying the animated documentary’s allocation within the documentary realm is felt, it is because these audio-visual texts hold only a tenuous relation with the factual domain’.<sup>113</sup> Formenti further insists that animation is a wholly subjective form and that its material aesthetics are incapable of evoking the ‘flesh and blood’ of human experience.<sup>114</sup>

This argumentation distracts us from what is principally at stake within the wider polemics surrounding animated cinema and notions of indexicality, specifically an expanded reconceptualization of what constitutes indexical representation. Ehrlich has argued that animated nonfiction poses a threat to live-action documentary, as it provides ‘indirect’ or ‘second degree’ connections to its antecedents.<sup>115</sup> For Ehrlich, animation opposes the more direct indexicality provided by photography and live-action footage, where the physical

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<sup>111</sup> Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 29.

<sup>112</sup> Ward, *Documentary*, 89, emphasis in original.

<sup>113</sup> Formenti, ‘Sincerest Form’, 103.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>115</sup> Ehrlich, ‘Animated Documentaries as Masking’, <http://journal.animationstudies.org/nea-ehrich-animated-documentaries-as-masking/>.

object has acted ‘as the efficient cause of the sign’.<sup>116</sup> But I would caution that – in contrast to embracing more expansive readings of realist representation in light of the newly emergent field of animated nonfiction – this line of inquiry too easily conflates indexicality with live action and documentary modes. Lorenzo Hernández, on the other hand, considers animated nonfiction within a continuum of reality and simulation, the medium presenting not a ‘balance between them, but rather a mutual radicalization’.<sup>117</sup> But instead of exploring such ‘mutual radicalizations’ between reality and simulation, petitions for the label of ‘animated documentary’ continue to be mired in debates regarding classification. Rather than engaging in the conversation about an augmented spectrum of both document and index – a discussion Roe and Ehrlich intend to spark and build upon and which I contemplate throughout this thesis – this discursive thread winds up in a counterproductive battle between the merits of live action and animated cinema. My focus in this study is not on a competition for aesthetic superiority but is instead concerned with the ever-expanding ways we see the world.

## II. Memory and Representation

Concurrent to the disciplinary development of animation theory and practice, memory studies has been expanding as an academic field. In *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past*, Michael Roth provides a detailed overview of the formation of memory studies as a mode of cultural and historical inquiry, charting its interrelations and competitions with history as an institutionalized profession.<sup>118</sup> Tracing a philosophical shedding of traditional historical thinking, first emerging within the writings of French structuralists and poststructuralists – including Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Claude Lévi-Strauss – Roth pinpoints a major perceptual shift in the late 1980s, in which historical scholarship began to promote the emergence of an individualized memory culture.<sup>119</sup> A consequence of postmodernism and postcolonialism, the rise of a ‘contemporary memory

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. See also, James Elkins, *Photography Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 231.

<sup>117</sup> Lorenzo Hernández, ‘Through the Looking Glass’, 47.

<sup>118</sup> Michael S. Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History: Essays on Living with the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, xiv.

industry' or 'memory culture' started to take shape.<sup>120</sup> Despite their prior characterization as inherently incongruous – as posited by scholars Pierre Nora, Maurice Halbwachs, and Yosef Yerushalmi – lived memory and the historical record became increasingly interconnected by researchers working within both history and memory studies.

Tensions between memory and history remain, however, with the foregrounding of memory often seen as an overt rejection of established forms of historical documentation and scholarship. Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin have observed that postmodernism's influence on memory studies has yielded a cultural trend to employ memory and its representations in order to 'destabilize the authority of the "grand narratives" with which History has become associated'.<sup>121</sup> For those seeking to disrupt dominant histories – for any suppressive or exclusionary practices – the personal dimension of memory makes it a favored strategy. The radicalizing potential of individual historicism within the public record has become particularly apposite in attempts to rectify cultural and social imbalances. These personalized efforts might aim to open up official archives to voices that had been previously excluded as a means to counter or dismantle them altogether.<sup>122</sup> With escalating frequency, literary and visual narratives that are biographical, autobiographical, or testimonial in nature are offering alternative archival histories. These works act as a form of redress, seeking to deconstruct ideations of purportedly objective social realities through subjective representation. As the fields of Holocaust studies, postcolonial studies, and trauma studies began to develop and intersect with each other in the aftermath of the Second World War, Western media landscapes became entrenched in artistic and literary representations of individual experience. More than documenting history, contemporary generations have personalized it. Throughout this research, I situate the films examined within this narrative

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<sup>120</sup> For further reading see Ekaterina V. Haskins, *Popular Memories: Commemoration, Participatory Culture, and Democratic Citizenship* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); and Russel J.A. and Eleanor Ty eds., *The Memory Effect: The Remediation of Memory in Literature and Film* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).

<sup>121</sup> Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone eds., *Memory Cultures: Memory, Subjectivity, and Recognition* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 10.

<sup>122</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), 13.

mode, premising that each film stands as a form of memory production that actively interrogates history's fabrication. I further locate specific trends within this representational strategy that have been adopted by these films, namely an emphasis on personal trauma, multidirectionality, and intergenerational memory.

### ***Trauma***

A rising number of films within the genre of animated nonfiction – including those discussed in this project – use animation to relate intimate stories of painful pasts, losses, and traumatic experiences. In parallel, the subject of trauma has gained significant traction within the humanities. Roth points to the rise of scholarship regarding the Holocaust, feminism, and identity politics within the past two decades as cultural movements that have particularly reinforced the contemporary 'currency of trauma talk'.<sup>123</sup> Though Holocaust scholarship has been an established part of public and academic discourse since the 1960s, Roth observes that the field's more recent valuations of the intangible or internalized effects of the Holocaust have opened up its findings for explorations of other cultural avenues. Studies concerning Holocaust trauma, survivorship, and identity formation have become crucial for understanding survivor experience more broadly.

Throughout the last four decades, literary and artistic representations of trauma have been employed to challenge the 'conspiracy of silence' inherent to dominant hegemonies, emphasizing the personal as political.<sup>124</sup> Within art historical discourse, Hal Foster described the trend in contemporary art to represent lived realities that are painful or abject as an aesthetic of 'traumatic realism'.<sup>125</sup> An alternative to surrealism and expressionism, Foster presented traumatic realism as a response to the traumas of modernity, which would encompass the destructive forces of systemic poverty, widespread violence, the AIDS epidemic, and a consumerist culture devoid of value.<sup>126</sup> For Roth, traumatic realism in the arts

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<sup>123</sup> Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, 94.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>125</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, London: October Books, 1996), 128-168.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 167.

is an extension of Giorgio Agamben's ideological position that 'the extreme situation can no longer function as a distinguishing criterion. The extreme situation's lesson is rather that of absolute immanence of everything being in everything'.<sup>127</sup> What we are able to feel as 'real' – what we can know or learn from experience – is derived only from traumatic suffering.

There appear to be two primary suppositions enabling the use of trauma as a weapon against exclusionary official histories. The first posits that any kind of 'objective' historical record would be incapable of accounting for subjective experience, especially in cases of experienced or witnessed atrocity. The second basis for trauma's combative political potential is its perceived untouchability. Under the guard of subjectivity, trauma is widely characterized as being off-limits from social critique and political debate. Roth explains, 'I can acknowledge the traumas that have shaped your life or the shame that at times overwhelms you. But I can neither share it nor critically analyze it'.<sup>128</sup> A prevalent form of institutional denunciation within contemporary discursive strategies, the cultivation of trauma, shame, and despair promotes dehistoricization in support of individuation. Testimonials and other autobiographical reports of trauma have in turn garnered a moral supremacy, in which 'speaking becomes its own truth'.<sup>129</sup>

### ***Multidirectionality***

For many scholars critical of trauma as a political stratagem, the tactical overuse of lived experience has created a dangerous environment of cultural competition, where personalized accounts are able to trump hard evidence or pragmatic justification. Literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels advises that in the fostering of a culture entrenched in victimization and affirmation, the skeptical and investigative methods of humanities research have been polluted and devalued.<sup>130</sup> Other critics, like historian Carl Schorske, have warned that the

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<sup>127</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 50.

<sup>128</sup> Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, xxii.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>130</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006), 55-56; 'Plots Against America: Neoliberalism and Antiracism', *American*

constant narrativization of trauma hastens its banalization.<sup>131</sup> In *History and its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence*, Dominick LaCapra outlines the deceptive duality adhered to trauma studies. Plotting its pluralistic relations with psychoanalysis and postcolonialism, LaCapra acknowledges that theoretical approaches to trauma have both challenged the historical record while paradoxically obfuscating its own critique. As Roth describes, ‘we have seen in recent years a variety of attempts to claim ownership over some communal trauma’.<sup>132</sup> Without a more adaptable notion of trauma, the danger it poses rests in recreating the very thing it seeks to dismantle: cultural exclusivity.

Discussing these complications in connection with national and transnational memory formation, Rothberg advocates for a standard of collective memory that circumvents competitive and divisive practices. Pointing to a global rise in multicultural societies, Rothberg contemplates the relationships between different narratives of victimization in order to propose ‘a transcultural ethics of memory for an age of transnational migration’.<sup>133</sup> His thesis poses as its central questions, ‘What happens when different histories confront each other in the public sphere? Does the remembrance of one history erase others from view? When memories of slavery and colonialism bump up against memories of the Holocaust in contemporary multicultural societies, must a competition of victims ensue?’<sup>134</sup> Historical research and representation of the Holocaust have become particularly exemplary of the philosophical complications involving trauma and its rights of ownership. Can this event have far-reaching implications for the study of war, genocide, persecution, or survival? Or do these analogies merely threaten the Holocaust’s inimitability? Rothberg concedes that, yes, as the discourses centering on the Holocaust expand, a degree of relativization ensues. However, excessive and persistent maintenance of the event’s exceptionality can also serve to obstruct the deserved recognition of other genocides, both past and present. These issues are

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*Literary History* (2006): 289-90. For further reading see Rothberg’s critique of Michaels’ positions on posthistoricism in ‘Against Zero-Sum Logic: A Response to Walter Benn Michaels’, *American Literary History* (2006): 303-311.

<sup>131</sup> Carl E. Schorske ‘History and the Study of Culture’, *New Literary History* 21.2 (1990): 407-420.

<sup>132</sup> Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, 97.

<sup>133</sup> Rothberg, ‘Multidirectional Memory in Migratory Settings’, 128.

<sup>134</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

particularly pertinent for an analysis of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, a film that raises the questions of whether the Holocaust can be narrativized and by whom.

Finding the reinforced subjugation of traumatic experience to be a far greater risk than the dilution of a past event's uniqueness, Rothberg challenges competitive memory with what he terms 'multidirectional memory': a transformative and intersectional exchange of individual and collective remembrance. Within this model, memories can be divulged, circulated, and interpreted across national and cultural parameters, provoking social transformation. For Rothberg, Holocaust studies can and should contribute to the awareness of other histories.<sup>135</sup> Multidirectional memory suggests a new form of critical 'comparatism', where the marginalized archives can inform dominant histories and the legacies of colonialism, apartheid, or pre- and post-Nazi genocides can be cross-referenced with that of the Holocaust.<sup>136</sup> However, while Rothberg views memory as always both individual and collective, he disagrees with Halbwach's overestimation that memories will eventually merge into one shared memory or 'singularity' of experience. Memory is and will continue to be individually and collectively layered, mediated, articulated, and rearticulated. It is within these multidirectional overlays and reverberations where new interchanges with the past thrive, without necessarily becoming one and the same. Rothberg's theorization of multidirectionality is significant within this research as it supplies a framework for my examination of intercultural memory as it pertains to these films.

### ***Intergenerational Memory***

In her analysis of Rothberg's argument, Gabriele Schwab aptly zeroes in on transference as its thematic principle.<sup>137</sup> As a productive and interpersonal exchange of experience, multidirectional memory necessarily calls for 'transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance'.<sup>138</sup> This transferential dynamic enables the creation

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>137</sup> See Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 11.



of shared or collective memory. It is, as Rothberg argues, what empowered W.E.B. Du Bois to identify Black and Jewish experiences as ‘common property’ and relate racial ghettos to the ghettos of Auschwitz.<sup>139</sup> Across spans of space and time, the past can be examined with new eyes, through a ‘second-sight’ that seeks not to divide but to evolve and diversify what we can know in the present about the past.<sup>140</sup> In this capacity, multidirectional memory imagines something not solely transnational but also transgenerational. Schwab describes this as the past’s ‘haunting legacy’.<sup>141</sup> Henri Raczymow characterizes it as a ‘memory shot through with holes’.<sup>142</sup> Ellen S. Fine and Nadine Fresco refer to it as ‘absent memory’.<sup>143</sup> But perhaps most prominently, Marianne Hirsch designates such intergenerational transferences of lived experience ‘postmemory’.<sup>144</sup>

The theory of postmemory postulates that children of survivors continue to mourn or ‘work through’ the traumatic experiences of their parents. Haunted by the past’s absent memories and inescapable legacies – experiences that, though not lived firsthand, are still felt by the next generation – the postgeneration is compelled to process their traumatic histories through research and artistic production.<sup>145</sup> Productive processing of the past necessitates belatedness, and the extension of this process to the next generation turns individual mourning into an aspect of the collective.<sup>146</sup> Hirsch initially formulated her concept with regard to the Holocaust and the post-Second World War generation, but she has since promoted its application to a wider spectrum of intergenerational survivorship.<sup>147</sup> Rothberg deems postmemory useful in addressing numerous postcolonial conflicts, specifically relating it to the Algerian War and its aftermath.<sup>148</sup> Postmemory’s postulation of the belated

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*.

<sup>142</sup> See Henri Raczymow, ‘Memory Shot Through with Holes’, *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994): 98-106.

<sup>143</sup> See Ellen S. Fine, ‘The Absent Memory: The Act of Writing in Post-Holocaust French Literature’, in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 41-57; and Nadine Fresco, ‘Remembering the Unknown’, *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 11 (1984): 417-427.

<sup>144</sup> Marianne Hirsch, ‘Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile’, *Poetics Today* 17.4 (1996): abstract; and *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)

<sup>145</sup> Hartman, *Scars of the Spirit*, 59.

<sup>146</sup> Hirsch, ‘Past Lives’, 106, emphasis in original.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 662.

<sup>148</sup> See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 267-308.

transmission of lived experience grants it an affinity for making multiple connections across space and time. Borrowing from Raczynow, Hirsch elucidates, ‘European Jews of the postwar generation are forever turning left, but we can never catch up with the past; inasmuch as we remember, we remain in perpetual temporal and spatial exile. Our past is literally a foreign country we can never hope to visit. And our postmemory is shaped, Raczynow suggests, by our sense of belatedness and disconnection’.<sup>149</sup> This, for Rothberg, is what makes Hirsch’s theory precisely emblematic of multidirectionality, as it reaffirms the constant variability of memory: that it is anachronistic, displaced, and always mediated.<sup>150</sup>

Each of the above debates surrounding memory and representation are rife with tensions between reparation and exploitation. Scholars critical of a contemporary trauma culture decry the dangers inherent to a media landscape inundated with tales of victimization. Not only is the possible banalization of experience concerning, as Schorske cautioned, but the overuse of traumatic experience as a basis for identity-formation might also manipulate suffering while making way for character assassination. Of trans- or postgenerational claims to WWII experience, Michaels rebukes such narratives as they make ‘the Holocaust available as a continuing source of identitarian sustenance’, a charge insinuating a mode of faux-victimization that is fundamentally self-serving and inauthentic.<sup>151</sup> Others, like literature scholar Amy Hungerford, warn that the condoning and satisfying of socially acceptable obsessions with grief and tragedy essentially promote an idea that it is ‘more important to “remember” the Holocaust than simply to learn about it’.<sup>152</sup> As Roth states, ‘the empirical veridicality of testimony takes a back seat to its potential healing power, pragmatic concerns winning out over some “big T” notion of Historical Truth’.<sup>153</sup> In these contexts, the therapeutic purposes of giving voice to an event come to outweigh historical veracity.

Questions concerning the unreliability, unrepresentability, and triviality of subjective

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<sup>149</sup> Hirsch, ‘Past Lives’, 663.

<sup>150</sup> See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 267-308.

<sup>151</sup> Michaels, *Shape of the Signifier*, 146.

<sup>152</sup> Amy Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 155.

<sup>153</sup> Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, 95.

narratives will continue to emerge throughout this thesis, as will a thorough investigation into how each film navigates through its particular representational pitfalls.

### **III. Medium and Memory**

In *Multidirectional Memory*, particular attention is granted to the mediations of remembrance. According to Rothberg, equally important to the transference of lived experience is the manner in which it is transmitted.<sup>154</sup> As time shifts forward and fewer people are able to remember a specific historical moment, the way past subjectivities continue to be relayed becomes crucial for the proliferation and safeguard of those memories. Of the films investigated here, I aim to draw out the connections between the stories told and the forms they take. It is an examination of particularized relations between medium and memory and what they reveal in the context of these intercultural and intergenerational narratives. I premise that the aesthetic strategies of each film come to mirror particular narrative objectives, as the rethinking of the animated form leads to a re-examination of the past and its production. In both form and content, these films consider how history and memory are continuously shaped and reshaped.

In this introduction, I have so far established the project's various issues within the disciplinary contexts of animation theory and practice and memory studies. I would now like to add another critical lens through which I view these films. Recent years have seen an upsurge in the use of traditional animation practices within animated film production. This aesthetic mode stands in contrast to increasingly pervasive CGI techniques. It is a strategy that has developed irrespective of – but concomitant with – the rise of animated nonfiction. I am interested in jointly analyzing these trends as they pertain to the specific memory narratives at the core of this research. Each film I address was produced via low-tech methods of production. All of the animated imagery has been produced by hand. The films embrace a collage aesthetic, where multiple forms of artistic practice have been combined. These visual

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<sup>154</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 271.

strategies place particular emphasis on material construction, labors of production, and multimodal configurations and exchanges.

In the following, I detail the resurgence of traditional and handcrafted modes within current animation production. This representational strategy comes as both a response to the rise of digital animation and a negation of animation's more illusory or magical connotations, a rhetoric that has historically promoted the animated image as not a mere imitator but a generator of life. The prevalence of digital technologies has posed a perceived threat for animated cinema's ties to foundational physicality, CGI having reignited a preoccupation with the immaterial, magical, and illusory aspects of film. Though animation may allude to the enigmatic conjuring of life and movement, many animators and scholars stress that this line of interpretation undermines the rigorous filmmaking techniques entailed in the animated process. The return to more artisanal modes of animation signals a reclamation of the medium's material roots in the face of virtuality. I submit that the return to an outmoded form of representation has distinct inferences within these personal and intergenerational narratives, a partnership that I consider throughout the chapters of this thesis. I argue that by complicating the manufacture of the past, these films do not work to provide narrative cohesion with defined origins and endpoints but instead keep the focus on their processes of production.

### ***Animated Film as Artistic and Material Process***

Analogous relations between artistic production and the endowment – or 'animation' – of life have been visually and narratively explored since the days of antiquity. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the tale is told of Pygmalion, a sculptor who falls in love with his own creation – a statue of an idealized female figure – which comes to life with the help of Venus.<sup>155</sup> The tale remains one of the most prominent myths of artistic creation. In Victor Stoichita's *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*, he chronicles how the story became particularly fashionable throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when

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<sup>155</sup> Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses in Fifteen Books*, ed. Samuel Garth (London: Jacob Tonson, [8 AD] 1961).

representations of the myth began to detach Pygmalion from Venus. During this period, the sculptor was reimagined as having created life through the sole force of his enthusiastic vigor and artistic inspiration.<sup>156</sup> Similarly, an artistic desire to create human flesh on canvas was portrayed in Honoré de Balzac's 1831 'Le chef-d'œuvre inconnu' ['The Unknown Masterpiece'], which tells of an artist's futile and ultimately fatal attempt to bring his painting to life.<sup>157</sup> The Greek myth of Prometheus, who created mankind at the behest of Zeus, serves as another example of this representational history. Referenced in the original subtitle of Shelley's *Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus*, the Promethean narrative has come to signify confrontations between progeny and creator, or between generations more broadly.<sup>158</sup>

Upon tracing animation's etymology, what becomes apparent are the complex overlaps of the term's material and immaterial, machinic and organic interpretations that have emerged and dissolved in a continuous oscillation of movements. The medium's shifting definitions appear to double down on the elusive sense of motion it denotes. Animation bears synchronous themes of seamless illusion and intensive labor. The underlying paradox of animated film's persistent 'creation myth' is that the conceptualization of the artist- or animator-as-magician does not negate material process but instead indicates rigorous technique. As purveyors of 'trick' film, animators have historically had a particular investment in cinematic innovation, competing with their peers in the execution of technological illusion and taking ownership of the artist-as-creator mythos. Early film scholar Donald Crafton explains that 'part of the animation game consisted of developing mythologies that gave the animator some sort of special status. Usually these were very flattering, for he was pictured (or implied to be) a demigod, a purveyor of life itself'.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Victor Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 111-159. See also J.L. Carr, 'Pygmalion and Philosophies: The Animated Statue in Eighteenth-Century France', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 23.3.4 (1960), 239-255.

<sup>157</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *The Unknown Masterpiece and Gambara*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The New York Review of Books, [1831-1837] 2001), 3-44. For further reading see Dore Ashton, *A Fable of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1980] 1991); Jon Kear, "'Frenhofer, c'est moi': Cézanne's Nudes and Balzac's 'Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu'", *Cambridge Quarterly* 35.4 (2006): 345-360; and Mateus Salwa, 'The Unknown Masterpiece by Honoré Balzac, or the Practical Trap of Theory', *Art Inquiry* 12 (2010): 127-142.

<sup>158</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* (London: Printed for Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mayor & Jones, 1818).

<sup>159</sup> Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1898-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 11.

Animation has not escaped these deifying or mystical associations, with researchers including Scott Bukatman, Papapetros, and Andrew Johnston presently approaching the medium as emblematic of dream worlds, nightmares, and mystery, respectively.<sup>160</sup>

But many working within animated film are wary of propagating an animator-as-magician mythos. Contemporary assessments that poetically contemplate animated film in regard to its figurative life-endowing attributes risk accusations of exhibiting an outdated attitude toward the medium that many animation researchers and filmmakers have long tried to overturn.<sup>161</sup> Downplaying animated cinema's more transcendental overtones has been an uphill battle since the time of filmmaker McCay, who actively worked against the image of the animator as some kind of alchemist rather than skilled craftsman.<sup>162</sup> Over the past three decades, anxieties over animated film's purportedly tenuous connection with substance and technique have been exacerbated by a new challenge, the aforementioned digital crisis. Today, we see scholars like Buchan, Gadassik, Pilling, and Gunning fret over the 'celluloid casualties' left behind in the wake of CGI.<sup>163</sup> Relatedly, it has increasingly been digital animation that has become tethered to deifying language. As Pixar Animation director Andrew Stanton states, 'the winning side of [computer] animation is that you have a godlike control of everything'.<sup>164</sup> Manovich takes the metaphor even further, writing that the digital animator is 'in a somewhat better position than God was' during the biblical story of

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<sup>160</sup> See Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012); Papapetros, *On the Animation of the Inorganic*; and Andrew R. Johnston, 'Signatures of Motion: Len Lye's Scratch Films and the Energy of the Line', in *Animating Film Theory*, 167-180. Where Bukatman describes animation as an escape from the everyday into an enchanting reverie, Papapetros warns of the medium's more duplicitous spellbinding qualities, citing recorded cases of animation-induced seizures and paralyses. In 'Signatures of Motion', Johnston champions animator Len Lye's work for its emphasis on the illusory and intangible qualities of movement, prizing it over the substance of material forms.

<sup>161</sup> See especially Pilling, introduction to *Reader in Animation Studies*, xiii-xiv; and Darley, 'Bones of Contentment', 70-74. Both authors take issue with Cholodenko's theoretical practice.

<sup>162</sup> Lorenzo Hernández, 'Through the Looking Glass', 42. At the beginning of McCay's *Little Nemo*, a title card reads: 'Winsor McCay agrees to make four thousand pen drawings that will move, one month from date.' Lorenzo Hernández notes that the message says 'drawings that will move' and 'not *characters that will become alive*' (emphasis hers) to make the point that McCay aimed to stress animation as a time-intensive and laborious practice.

<sup>163</sup> See Buchan, 'Animation, in Theory', 111-127; Gadassik, 'Ghosts in the Machine', 225-238; Pilling, *Animating the Unconscious*, 1-16; and Gunning, 'Animating the Instant: The Secret Symmetry Between Animation and Photography', in *Animating Film Theory*, 37-53; and 'The Transforming Image: The Roots of Animation in Metamorphosis in Motion', in *Pervasive Animation*, 52-69. I borrow the phrase 'celluloid casualties' from Buchan, 'Animation, in Theory', 116.

<sup>164</sup> Andrew Stanton, as quoted in Gadassik, 'Ghosts in the Machine', 230.

creation.<sup>165</sup> Such statements do nothing to abate the concerns of a growing segment of filmmakers and scholars who seek to deemphasize animated cinema's ties to magic and mythos, which has been perceived to denigrate the laborious aspects of the medium. Such concerns have prompted a contemporary dilemma that is twofold, as the apprehension over magical narratives has been conflated with a kind of technophobia.<sup>166</sup> How can the field approach discussions concerning the materiality of a form that has historically been aligned with illusion and abstraction and is increasingly connected to virtual reality and digitized worlds?

To quell fears of a disappearing medium, many filmmakers and researchers instead emphasize the strenuous material process that takes place behind each animated frame. On the production side, animator Tereza Stehlíková observes that there has been an upsurge in the weight filmmakers place on the material production of object-based and handcrafted animation, which she sees as a countermovement to the technological, digital, and virtual cinematic processes.<sup>167</sup> No longer the medium relying on its mythological allusions – as digital animation is now staking its claim on that – traditional animation is able to assert itself as the medium of matter, labor, and embodied production. Animators are highlighting the formal parameters of production, focusing on 'shot length, image composition, lighting, camera movement, point of view and angle, lenses, music, sound, transitions'.<sup>168</sup> Film scholars Gunning and David Rodowick have recently sought to make transparent the historical and technical alignment between cel animation and analog photographic practice, a largely unacknowledged relationship Gunning dubs their 'secret symmetry'.<sup>169</sup> Artists like Gregory Barsamian and Dennis Dollens have been merging animation with various aesthetic forms and materials, combining animated film with the practices of sculpture and architecture. Within curatorial practice, there has been an upswing in museum and gallery

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<sup>165</sup> Manovich, 'Image Future', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.1 (2006): 30.

<sup>166</sup> See especially Lorenzo Hernández, 'Through the Looking Glass', 41-50; and Gadassik, 'Ghosts in the Machine', 225-238.

<sup>167</sup> Tereza Stehlíková, as noted in her introductory remarks at the SAS Conference, 'The Animated Body', 18 May 2013.

<sup>168</sup> Buchan, 'Animation, in Theory', 116.

<sup>169</sup> See Gunning, 'Animating the Instant', 37-53; and David N. Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3-73 and 105-162.

exhibitions exploring the medium's craft. These include *Shudder*, held at The Drawing Room in conjunction with artist collective Animate Projects, the Barbican Centre's *Watch Me Move: The Animation Show*, and installations of Jeremy Blake's time-based paintings at the San Francisco Museum of Art and the works of George Griffin at the Santa Fe Biennial. Through an examination of pro-filmic animation techniques, these displays have presented alternatives to popular and academic historical canons of animation, challenging audiences' perceptions of the animated process and the outcomes of varied technological mediations. Such attempts to shake up the way animation has been widely perceived – reassessing its origins and limitations – have sought to break down animation to its various elements in order to put things together in modified shapes and considerations. Rather than capitulating to any deceptive wholeness, viewers are invited to pull back the curtain to see how the magic trick works.

### ***Memory Migrations and Mediations***

It is self-evident that the myth of animator as divine creator is most assuredly just that, a myth. However, the perception that the mechanics of production stand in opposition to the illusions they create – or that a focus on the more lyrical side of the animated image somehow negates the efforts of its design – is an untenable one. A presumed bipolarity between magic and its mechanics is reflective of the terminological dispute had between the 'cognitivists', in Cholodenko's words – those who champion technique over theory, including Darley, Pilling, Small, and Levinson – and those who linger on the 'poematic' or metaphorical – like Cholodenko, McLaren, and Sergei Eisenstein – within the field of animation studies.<sup>170</sup> While Darley's criticism of Cholodenko is perhaps the most strident in this regard, it is worth cautioning that readings neither theoretical nor practical should take a backseat to the other within the broader discourse. Artistic labor and its metaphorical implications are not mutually exclusive but profoundly intertwined. In 'Animation and Automation, or, the Incredible Effortfulness of Being', Vivian Sobchack contends that an awed response is an inescapable

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<sup>170</sup> See Cholodenko, 'Animation (Theory) as the Poematic'.



feature of the cinematic screen: ‘However much we may disavow it, we still engage in “magical thinking” and tend to confer on inanimate matter both anima and mobility. Even in these most sophisticated times,’ Sobchack proclaims, ‘we kick the tires, engender objects and wonder about the “secret life of things”.’<sup>171</sup> In addition to being unattainable, a strict divide between practice and poetry is altogether undesirable. We need magic, and moreover, we need a balance between imagination and technique. My engagement with the materiality of these films contemplates where labor and illusion intersect and to what ends. I find that the films in this project promote a partnership between technical rigor and fantasy and that this is an aesthetic calculation. The return to hand-drawn animation – a choice accentuating filmic process, materiality, and craft – is not a means to demystify or downplay the medium’s magical underpinnings. It is instead a mode that takes advantage of their thematic signification in light of embodied production and personal narrative. What might the utility of a medium heavily associated with childhood, wonder, and nostalgia evoke? What might such themes elicit within these stories of memory, family, trauma, and the passages of time?

Seeing animated film’s connotative potential to ‘bring things to life’, these films appear to examine not simply ‘the illusion of life’ but also life as an illusion, as something that is rendered. Pointing to their madeness, the films interrelate art and life to think through the indefinable connections between them. They ruminate on how lived experience is shaped and what shapes it. Where do the edges between embodied production and image meet? The formal embrace of material process within each film suggests not only a physicality of labor but also ideations of continuation, of a spatio-temporal interim between points of being, between geneses and endings. This emphasis on modes of making brings attention to the transitional moments, the ‘in-between’ often ascribed to the animated medium, with imagery that arises between motion and stillness or, to recall McLaren’s words, ‘the invisible interstices that lie between the frames’.<sup>172</sup> Reiterated throughout its related scholarship, animated film revels in the ongoing processes of becoming: temporal progressions,

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<sup>171</sup> Sobchack, ‘Animation and Automation’, 382.

<sup>172</sup> McLaren, quoted in Furniss, *Art in Motion*, 5.

transitional spaces, emerging forms, figures that are brought to life or dissolved into nothing. Highlighted is a dynamic process of creation and possibility, of collaboration and change. Animation is then not solely emblematic of life and death, of momentum and deceleration; it also epitomizes the ambiguity between the two. What demarcates the past from the present? What constitutes the 'whole story'? How are the lines between history and memory drawn? Between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, lived experience and remembrances of it?

Within these films, process comes to reinforce the past as a living entity, as a history always in the making. I view the films in consideration of their spatio-temporal overlays of memories, experiences, and timelines, in which the interminable processes of remembering and forgetting are done not toward the goal of a fixed endpoint but as part of the ceaseless movements that illuminate subjectivities. Though each film engages with its specific narrative in unique ways, I identify particular aesthetic motifs that thread them together and come to self-reflexively exemplify the dynamic and complex interconnections between medium and memory. These include an emphasis on intermediality, remediation, metamorphosis, and movement.

### *Intermediality*

Underscoring animation production as a lively and transformative process, the films in this project are premised upon intermedial and multimodal configurations, where disparate materials interrelate across temporalities and genres. Literature scholar Irina Rajewsky views intermediality in connection with works that emerge in the interactions between various media.<sup>173</sup> Within each film, heterogeneous aesthetics composed of archival documentation, photography, illustration, and cel animation promote collisions between modes of realism and fantasy, documentary and fiction, journalism and autobiography. These intersections may yield representational possibilities, new media forms that can record lived experience in unorthodox ways. Intermedial production stresses such confluences of materials, artistic

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<sup>173</sup> See Irina O. Rajewsky, 'Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality', *Intermediality: History and Theory of the Arts, Literature and Technologies* 6 (2005), 43-64.

performance, and viewership. It endorses a productive crossing of borders, and within these traversals, media are never static in their function but always transmuting relative to their fluctuating positions.

My engagement with these films is heavily invested in these heterogeneous assemblages and how these visuals function in regard to their respective narratives of remembrance. Taking a tip from photography scholar Philip Dubois, who suggests that conceptualizing a medium ‘in light of another, through another, in another, by another, or like another’ is a superlative method for discerning the stakes of individuated representational modes, I am interested in ascertaining the interplays between each of the disparate materials these films deploy.<sup>174</sup> For example, recurrent in these films exists a relationship between photography and animated imagery. I work to understand how these visual modes interact and influence each other. Do they help shape or negate one another? How does the stillness of the photograph intermingle with animated movement? For these stories of the past – of history, memory, and family, of life and loss – what might these aesthetic forms and their relationships infer?

### *Remediation*

The films in this study are products of active formations and overlaps. They emerge from multiple intersecting histories that are both stratified and active. They conflate multiple geographies and chronologies. In each film, the past and its corresponding memories are made contemporaneous. Their content has been shaped by the enmeshed perspectives of first- and second-generation storytellers, as both parent and child work together to create each narrative. These merged temporalities insinuate a communicative reciprocity between memory and history, familial generations, and wider historical and contemporary collectivities. Employing animation to work through these crisscrossed chronologies becomes more than a metaphor of the moving image as shifting frames of time. I posit that its use

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<sup>174</sup> Philippe Dubois, ‘Photography *Mise-en-Film*: Autobiographical (Hi)stories and Psychic Apparatuses’, in *Fugitive Images, From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 152.

indicates much broader notions about the progression of media in an evolving visual, cultural, and technological landscape. The interactions between media both old and new – where archival footage, photographs, and documents are made animate through the cinematic form – emphasize the correlations and fluctuating interpretations that have been projected onto material culture and its artifacts over time.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin refer to such collaborative interactions as ‘remediation’, where past visual technologies reemerge within present-day media practices.<sup>175</sup> Aptly suited for these stories of remembrance, the juxtaposition of their representational modes may cause us to reconsider the past and its facilitations. As an artistic practice, remediation invites a kind of critical inquiry that revisits past media in order to inform our current visual culture. The practice of placing a medium’s conventional model of chronological linearity under scrutiny by inspecting its multilayered and diachronic histories falls into a methodology often labeled ‘media archaeology’.<sup>176</sup> Emerging out of varied aesthetic practices – each with its specific lineages – the films at the center of this project are able to raise issues concerning the affiliations between memory, history, and representation. As such, I examine each as not only formal allegories of such relations but also cultural objects deeply embedded within these shifting discursive terrains. What does the convergence of new and traditional media practices signify for these films? How does handmade animation engage with historical documentation? What do these exchanges reveal about the intangible distinctions between history and memory, or the public and private spheres of life?

While the films’ intermedial fabrication points to layers of remediated interaction, this aesthetic mode is most overtly underscored by their return to handmade production. Of the threat digitization is perceived to pose for traditional animation, animator Dave Clark has gone as far as declaring the irrelevancy of the animator’s hand. For Clark, the ‘hand of the

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<sup>175</sup> See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

<sup>176</sup> For further reading see Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan, eds., *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); and Jussi Parikka, *What is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

animator' now refers to the 'code that controls' the cinematic image.<sup>177</sup> Written with codes that replicate artistic technique, animation software is able to bypass levels of creative intention and practice. In her article 'Ghosts in the Machine: The Body in Digital Animation', Gadassik makes the case for computer animators who – under the threat of becoming overshadowed by CGI's mystifying capabilities – have attempted to reassert artistic intention within digital production. Taking a different approach, the animators discussed in this research have returned animation production to the artist's hand through outmoded hand-drawn practices, underscoring a personal and embodied form of artistic creation. Animated cinema has a history of emphasizing or revealing the hand, accentuating a mode of production that is both dedicated and personal. As early as 1900, J. Stuart Blackton's *The Enchanted Drawing* combined silent film with stop-motion techniques to show an artist creating cartoons on an easel.<sup>178</sup> And films like Daniel Greaves' *Manipulation* (1991) and Osvaldo Cavaldoni's animated series *La Linea* (1971-1986) make visible the animator's hand, emphasizing its active filmic role.<sup>179</sup>

Handmade production becomes for these films a way to mirror their intimate natures. The stories told are sentimental. Remediating this traditional cinematic practice expresses a fittingly nostalgic sensibility, one that underlines the interconnections of past and present, of older generations and new. Within narrative context, there appears a doubling of nostalgic relations: a nostalgia for the filmic form and a nostalgic concern with the past. Themes of childhood, home, familial cohesion, and nurturing become the backbone for stories told through an ingenuous medium. But nostalgia also suggests something not exactly mawkish. To be nostalgic is to yearn, to ache; it alludes to a painful act. Handmade practice draws attention to an intergenerational motif that bears difficulties, where the past has been shaped by experiences of trauma, displacement, exile, and fracture. In Svetlana Boym's recent research into diasporic experience and representation, she encourages that nostalgia should

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<sup>177</sup> Dave Clark, 'The Discrete Charm of the Digital Image: Animation and New Media', in *The Sharpest Point: Animation at the End of Cinema*, eds. Chris Gehman and Steve Reinke (Toronto: YYZ, 2005), 144.

<sup>178</sup> J. Stuart Blackton, *The Enchanted Drawing* (Santa Monica: Edison Studios, 1900), 16mm and 35mm

<sup>179</sup> Daniel Greaves, *Manipulation* (London: Tandem Films, 1991), 35mm; and Osvaldo Cavaldoni's *La Linea* (Milan: QUIPOS, 1971-1986), 35mm.

not be dismissed as a kitschy or evasive approach to the past or personal responsibility. Instead, it should be acknowledged for its active role within the shaping of present conditions.<sup>180</sup> In her evaluation of individual memories of geographical and cultural exile, Boym identifies two different types of nostalgia: reflective, which absorbs itself in the ruins of a lost home and cherishes the fragments and debris of the past; and restorative, which seeks to preserve or reconstruct what was. Boym's analysis is useful in contemplating the ways in which these films are linking to the past and how they are employing personal remembrance as a tool to engage with it. Do these films long to return to the past? Bring it into the present? Or, do they present a more complex vacillation between both?

### *Movement and Transformation*

Each film addressed in this research represents particular moments along intercultural journeys. In most cases, these movements are the products of non-deliberate relocations and enforced migrations. Through their modes of production, these films convey crossings of spatial boundaries, raising issues about exilic experience and foreignness. Such movements do not always come in a straightforward directionality, however. Rather, a porous possibility of motion is emphasized. These fluctuations are geographic and bodily, cultural and individual. Audiences are invited into filmic spaces where viewer and viewed are encouraged to merge symbiotically. In this capacity, animation not only underscores the movement of the filmic frame but also presents cinema as a physical space for imaginative and transformative opportunities.

In this study, I approach the engagements between medium and narrative, history and memory, viewer and viewed as such dynamic interactions. 'Animation' implies a universe of movement. It is physical, whether organic, embodied, and corporeal in form, or alluding to the motion of inorganic objects and materials. It denotes temporal shifts: the pace of cinematic time, the reanimation of past events. Animated movement can be staccato or fluid, it may progress or decelerate. It is spatial. It is dimensional. It works across planes and

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<sup>180</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

peripheries. Animation emotes energy. When one is ‘animated’ they are spirited and engaged. ‘Migration’ implies not just movement but patterns of movement, networks of crisscrossing pathways forged between cultural and geographical borders and the accumulation of these physical passages over time. I invoke ‘migration’ in this thesis to accentuate the network of exchanges and interchanges that have long underpinned animation theory and practice. I use the term to express the field’s ceaseless interrelations between diversified media histories and narrative modes, as well as the epistemological shifts that ‘animation’ has witnessed throughout its history. Contemporary animated cinema is currently undergoing such a shift, a transformation expansive in both reach and range. Exceeding lyrical metaphor – though ‘migration’ does speak to the kinesthetics of the cinematic form – the concept highlights a field that is migrating into other disciplines and applications. These engagements are transmutative, creating new relations and ideations while enabling a self-discovery of the medium, a period of exhaustive definition and redefinition.

But migration is also literalized within the films discussed here. It holds significance for these stories of cultural displacement, for their reflections on home and homeland. These are narratives about mobility and immobility, about persons positioned between disparate cultures and loci who have been caught in undefined processes of migration. They are explorations of inclusion and exclusion, hybridity and multiculturalism. Their visual modes exemplify the interrogation of hegemonic constraints, the heterogeneity of self-inscription, and the navigation of cultural identity. Within these narratives, memories speak to the past, signaling a history in flux. They avow that memory is alive and dynamic and that generations of past, present, and future can call out and respond to one another. ‘Migration’ reinforces this grid of fluctuating perceptions; ‘animation’ stresses these metamorphoses and becomings. Fully involved with one another in practice and ideology, their engagement is rigorously investigated throughout my inquiry into these films, in regard to their intercultural, intergenerational, and interdisciplinary dimensions.

The following four chapters focus on one film and with it, one migration. I approach each film as a case study of this specific genre of animated cinema, and the chapters provide an in-depth analysis of their respective aesthetic forms, narrative contents, and modes of production. Viewing them side by side enables the demarcation of their analogies and disconnects. Though only a select few, the films are revealing about the expansive ways this medium can operate in contrasting contexts. They point to a range of historical backgrounds and aesthetic processes. Placing *Minoru* alongside more recent films provides access to the early stages of this genre's rise in production. It also gives insight into how a film studio might differently handle the genre over time, as two decades later the NFB also produced *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. While both *Minoru* and *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* were directed by more established filmmakers, *My Mother's Coat* and *A Kosovo Fairytale* were made by student animators. Two films were created by collaborative teams – *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* and *A Kosovo Fairytale* – and two were produced by filmmakers working alone – *Minoru* and *My Mother's Coat*.

As the preceding pages aimed to make clear, each individual story of migration speaks to the broader theoretical issues at stake. Each animated short complicates the surroundings of their production, both within the medium of animated film and the discursive and socio-historical fields in which they are situated. Their representational modes are indicative of the vast and varied ways the past can be historicized, politicized, and personalized. The films suggest how private memory might be instrumentalized for or negated within the fabrications of social memory and history. They consider the extent that remembrances of the past can ever exist autonomously from external imposition. How is memory manipulated and negotiated? How can it change from moment to moment, re-contextualized over the mutable planes of time and space? These films raise such questions while pointing to the complexity of their intercultural and intergenerational movements. It is my objective to steer through these unpredictable pathways, exploring how each film attempts to traverse its spatio-temporal boundaries, while interpolating a changing and diversified field of visual media.



**MIGRATION ONE. Canada-Japan.**  
*Minoru: Memory of Exile*

It wasn't talked about. There was a vague understanding that World War II had significantly impacted his family history, but filmmaker Michael Fukushima recalls being largely unaware of these issues during his childhood.<sup>1</sup> He knew that Japanese Canadians were interned during the war. He knew that his father's family had moved to Japan and that his father, Minoru, later returned to Canada. But the details were scant, and any information with regard to the breadth or complexity of the institutionalized discrimination against Japanese Canadians during WWII was not easily accessible. Things were hidden. His father never spoke of it. But these events happened.

Politically sanctioned anti-Japanese sentiment had a lengthy history in Canada.<sup>2</sup> But after the bombing of the Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii on 7 December 1941, the cultural climate of discrimination against Japanese Canadians was violently altered. Immediately labeled enemies of the state, Japanese Canadians were fingerprinted, photographed, and required to carry registration cards at all times. While Japanese-language newspapers were shut down, mainstream outlets spread propaganda warning of the dangerous 'Yellow Peril' Japanese Canadians posed to the general populous. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police were granted expanded powers to search Japanese Canadians without warrant, impose curfews, and confiscate property. In 1942, the War Measures Act, which sought to remove the civil rights of all persons of 'Japanese racial descent', was authorized under then Prime Minister Mackenzie King. A systematic plan was then implemented by the Canadian Government with the mission to first segregate and eventually exile the almost twenty-three thousand Japanese Canadians who lived in British Columbia. An evacuation of all people of

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<sup>1</sup> Fukushima, interview with author, 2 December 2011, appendix i.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading regarding Japanese Canadian history and the period of internment, see Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976); Anne Sunahara *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981); and Cassandra Kobayashi and Roy Miki, *Justice in Our Time: The Japanese Canadian Redress Movement* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991). I refer to each of these sources for the summary of the Japanese Canadian internment provided in this paragraph.

Japanese heritage – which included both the *Issei* generation, those who had immigrated to Canada, and the *Nisei*, the Canadian-born second generation – was ordered and carried out by the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC). Individuals were detained at temporary ‘clearing sites’ until internment camps were made available. Families were broken apart. Women and children were interned, and the men were sent to live and work in road camps. Young adults were relocated to central Canada to work as domestics or farm hands. Fearing an escalation of protests, the Canadian Government allowed some families to relocate as a unit and work together on beet farms in the Canadian countryside. Those who protested the government’s actions were stripped of this choice and instead sent to prisoner-of-war camps in Ontario. Subsequent to these evictions, Japanese Canadian properties and possessions were taken over and liquidated by the government at a fraction of their value, without the owner’s consent. And in a final attempt to expel all persons of Japanese ancestry from the country, thousands of Japanese Canadians were presented with two options: relocate to east of the Rocky Mountains or repatriate to live in exile in war-torn Japan. Ten thousand individuals signed up for the latter.

Though documentation of these events is now more widely available, these actualities became increasingly opaque following the end of WWII, buried under years of a purposeful forgetting. Categorized as ‘enemy aliens’ during the war, Japanese Canadians were judged a threat to the progress of modern civilization.<sup>3</sup> Public authorities and institutions endeavored to write Japanese Canadians out of Canadian history.<sup>4</sup> The economic and social contributions made by Japanese Canadians toward Canada’s modernization, together with the mass uprooting, internment, and eventual exile of the Japanese Canadian population were excluded from the public record. Access to government files verifying these events was denied to the public, and mentions of this historical event were erased from school curricula, museum archives and exhibitions, literature, news and media programming, and national commemorative events. The government’s ardent refusal to acknowledge that any rights had

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<sup>3</sup> Adachi, ‘Enemy That Never Was’, 200.

<sup>4</sup> Kirsten Emiko McAllister, ‘Narrating Japanese Canadians In and Out of the Canadian Nation: A Critique of Realist Forms of Representation’, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 24.1 (1999): 79-103.

been violated, even after granting full franchise to all Japanese Canadians in 1949, reiterated the subjugation of those who had been exiled and interned.<sup>5</sup>

The lack of visibility of the Japanese Canadian community within the political and social spheres of postwar Canada was reinforced by the community's reluctance to speak out on the issue.<sup>6</sup> The Canadian Government ceased the forcible relocation of Japanese Canadians to Japan in 1946. But by then, over four thousand individuals had found themselves overseas in what was – for many – a foreign country. In March of 1949, the last of the War Measures Act directives were finally lifted. Japanese Canadians were free to travel, return to the Canadian West Coast, and vote in all elections. But separated from kin and community, stranded in Japan or dispersed throughout Canada, many Japanese Canadians felt isolated and were perhaps fearful of reassociating with Japanese Canadian communities. Up to this point, there had been no acknowledgment on behalf of the Canadian Government of any civil rights violations. An initial reparations package presented in 1950 by a special commission led by Justice Henry Bird recommended a \$1.2 million compensation to individuals for property loss.<sup>7</sup> The package did not address any human rights abuses. It did not take into account the sale of property without owner's consent, the damages incurred from lost and potential earnings, the disruptions in education, or any psychological traumas inflicted. After the deduction of legal fees, the Bird Commission's offering translated to a paltry \$52 payment per individual.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, many Japanese Canadians eligible to file a claim did not bother to pursue recompense.<sup>9</sup> Fearing further economic, social, and emotional ruin, most coped instead by attempting to leave the past behind and assimilate into the mainstream.<sup>10</sup>

In the years following the war, the Nisei largely did not speak of their exile or internment. Additionally, in an effort to shield their children – the *Sansei* generation – from

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*, iv; Sunahara, *Politics of Racism*, 1; Kobayashi and Miki, *Justice in Our Time*, 101 and 132; and McAllister, 'Narrating Japanese Canadians', <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1083/989>.

<sup>7</sup> Adachi, *Enemy That Never Was*; Sunahara, 327-331; *Politics of Racism*, 138-142; Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2005), 111-132.

<sup>8</sup> Miki, *Redress*, 125.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> McAllister, 'Narrating Japanese Canadians', <http://cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1083/989>.

the prejudices they had faced, Nisei parents encouraged the cultural integration of their children.<sup>11</sup> But though information regarding the internment was long suppressed, the Sansei continued to feel its effects in the aftermath. The second generation began to interrogate this cryptic past. In the early 1970s, young Japanese Canadians – inspired in part by the period’s social and political atmosphere of grass-roots activism, as well as the concurrent U.S. civil rights movements – started asking questions about their communal histories. Many were unaware that their parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents had been separated, dispossessed, and in some cases exiled at the hands of their government. During this period, the Canadian Government’s ban on open access to wartime documents was lifted, which enabled many individuals to research the archives for information pertaining to this shameful history. By the early 1980s, a movement demanding redress from the Canadian Government was in full operation. On 22 September 1988, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) and the Canadian Government came to an agreement on the conditions for reparation. The terms included a package of significant financial recompense and a formal acknowledgement of the injustices committed against Canadians of Japanese descent during and after WWII.<sup>12</sup>

*Minoru: Memory of Exile* was produced as a direct result of the Redress Movement. Commissioned by the NFB, its production was part of the Canadian Government’s reparations initiative to chronicle this history within the public record. In this chapter, I examine how *Minoru* works to pronounce a silenced past within its present moment of production. Prismatically layering the virtual within the actual, the film’s visual and narrative structure exposes the nature of historical narrativization, bringing to issue the complicated ways in which the formation of individual and collective pasts are intricately interwoven. The film’s assemblage of mixed media – including animation, testimonial narration, photography, and archival documents – reflects through its composite imagery the multifaceted character of memory and its relationship to historical representation. My analysis attempts to understand how the film’s intermedial aesthetic functions within its socio-historical context of production

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> For more information, see ‘National Association of Japanese Canadians’, National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.najc.ca/>.

and subsequent viewings. Approaching its filmic materiality as the embodiment of both ‘living documents’ and ‘living memories’ of the past, I pay significant attention to the way the film deals with the photograph. *Minoru*’s animated interplays reconsider the typification of the photographic image as a medium yielding death and animation as one generating life. Instead, the film asserts that the photograph is also animate, active, and dynamic. I contend that the film’s animated engagement with the photographic image becomes not a form of ‘reanimation’ but rather points to the life that was already there. Perhaps unseen and unheard, but there.

### **Part I. Living Document**

It was one year before the redress package was formally granted that Fukushima and his father discussed the war for the first time. In the fall of 1987, the filmmaker found himself standing along what he describes as the ‘periphery’ of the Redress Movement. Though not directly involved with the activist initiative, he was motivated to ask his father about the war. He did, and his father obliged. Minoru recounted to his son the experience of being removed from his home and forced to live in an internment camp at the age of nine. He told him that when his father had been confronted with the decision to either relocate or repatriate, it was decided that the family would move to Japan, a place Minoru knew little about. Years later, at the age of eighteen, Minoru was able to return to his native Canada by joining the Canadian military. This initial conversation between father and son was a brief one, lasting only an hour or so. But it laid the foundation for Fukushima’s cinematic interpretation of his father’s account.<sup>13</sup>

Cultural memory scholar Marita Sturken postulates that for the children of those interned during the war, this event is experienced not as history but as a known yet ‘untold story’.<sup>14</sup> The Sansei, she explains, have been troubled by their parents’ willful resistance to discuss a past that has permeated their lives. As filmmaker Rea Tajiri – whose experimental

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<sup>13</sup> Fukushima, interview with author, appendix i.

<sup>14</sup> Marita Sturken, ‘Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment’, *Positions* 5.3 (1997): 698.

video works *The Journal of Lennie Itoh One Year After the Death of Her Aunt Mako* (1986), *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991), and *Strawberry Fields* (1997) explored the complexities of Japanese American identity – divulges of her process:

I began searching for a history, my own history, because I had known all along that the stories I had heard were not true and parts had been left out. I remember having this feeling growing up that I was haunted by something – that I was living within a family full of ghosts. There was this place that they knew about. I had never been there, yet I had a memory of it. I could remember a time of great sadness before I was born. We had been moved, uprooted. We had lived with a lot of pain. I had no idea where these memories came from, yet I knew the place.<sup>15</sup>

Like Tajiri's work, Fukushima's film presents this particular history as an assemblage, a culmination of the remnants and perforations of the past that had accrued over time. Newspaper clippings declaring that 'BC Members Demand Japs All Go by Aug. 15', warning decrees issued by the Canadian 'Office of the Custodian', and notices of eviction to all 'Male Enemy Aliens' (Figures 1.1-1.3) are presented within the film's introductory minutes, establishing the discriminatory practices that had been enacted by the Canadian Government.

Sociologist Iwona Irwin-Zarecka finds that, for Nisei and Sansei redress activists, the 'official' historical or governmental document was integral to the pursuit of compensation and reparation.<sup>16</sup> Long employed by the Canadian Government to exert political authority over the Japanese Canadian population, the public or institutional document became a tool for the extrication and persecution of Japanese Canadians. In precipitation of the internment, government documents in the form of official exams that had to be taken by Japanese Canadians – the failure of which formed the basis of the repatriation of nearly 10,000 individuals – and propagandistic materials served to ignite fears about the Issei and Nisei's futures within the country. Those who were not exiled to Japan remained enemies of the state and were forced to carry alien registration cards. In the meantime, newspaper articles,

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<sup>15</sup> Rea Tajiri as quoted in *ibid.*, 698-699. See also Tajiri, *The Journal of Lennie Itoh One Year After the Death of Her Aunt Mako*, (self-distributed, 1986), video; *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (New York: Women Make Movies, New York: Electronic Arts Intermix, and Chicago: Video Data Bank, 1991), video; and *Strawberry Field* (Los Angeles: Vanguard Cinema, 1997. 35mm.

<sup>16</sup> Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 83.

archival photographs, and political cartoons had encouraged the proliferation of biased representations, enflaming racial tensions within the public sphere.<sup>17</sup> For those working within the Redress Movement, the implementation and recording of public forums and community meetings throughout the 1970s and 1980s – along with the publication of written materials that catalogued and reported all wartime property losses, human rights violations, and the individual experiences of coerced uprooting and relocation – were essential in counteracting the power of official documents. This endeavor, Irwin-Zarecka contends, was successful in legitimizing a personalized narrative of the internment and formally renegotiating the historical record.<sup>18</sup>

As confirmation of this urge to authenticate experience, *Minoru* consonantly addresses a censored past by pointing to its material forms. But beyond employing these physical fragments to serve as evidence of individual and collective histories, the film points to the past's continued existence within its moment of production. Since the past was never spoken of – the gaps in the historical record having been left vacant for decades, never having been uncovered or filled in – its belated telling unfolds as if experienced for the first time. The following investigates how *Minoru* attempts to bear witness to the Japanese Canadian internment by engaging with the event's tangibility, detailing the film's interactions with material remnants of the past.

### ***The Artifactual***

Fukushima initiated contact with the NFB about the project in December of 1988. The filmmaker had regularly been in touch with the NFB regarding various film proposals, but this one struck a chord with the government agency. Immediately prior to Fukushima's submission, the NFB had become eligible to receive financing for projects pertaining to the Japanese Canadian experience. As an extension of the government's redress package of apology and compensation, funding had been made available for media productions that

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<sup>17</sup> Namiko Kunitomo, 'Intimate Archives: Japanese-Canadian Family Photography, 1939–1949', *Art History* 27.1 (2004): 129.

<sup>18</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 83.

would help document or explicate Japanese Canadian history. The proposal for *Minoru* stood out for its potential to diversify the field of news or information-based projects stemming out of the Redress Movement. Fukushima notes that there were other films in the ether exploring the internment and relocation of Japanese Canadians –notably Linda Ohama’s live-action documentary *The Last Harvest* (1992), which recounted her family’s relocation to a prairie work farm – but none about the nearly four thousand individuals who were exiled to Japan.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, there were no plans for anything that was to be short in length, documentary in nature, and animated.

The initial proposal for the film was a simple one: an exclusively animated film narrated solely by the voice over of the filmmaker’s father. It was to be a subjective narrative told through a subjective medium. There were no plans to incorporate any archival materials or photographs, or supplementary historical narration. But in its early stages of production, this strategy was considerably revised. After being reviewed by other members of the NFB, the film was felt to be lacking in context. It was at this prompting that Fukushima decided to integrate the archives into the film, along with his own voice narration, which primarily serves to provide historical background to his father’s testimony.

Funding for the film was made available through the Japanese Canadian Redress Secretariat, a subministry of the Ministry of Canadian Heritage, which was responsible for administering the government funds for Redress compensation.<sup>20</sup> With its mission geared toward cultural awareness and education, the Ministry was open to the medium of animation as it could lend itself to a wider, specifically younger, audience.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, after the film’s completion and release in 1992, it has largely been distributed for educational purposes and has since been regularly viewed within public schools as part of curriculum pertaining to Canadian history.<sup>22</sup> The medium of animation, it would seem, was viewed as a mode of simplification. It could visually translate the complex political history of the Japanese Canadian internment and relocation into a straightforward representation, one that would

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<sup>19</sup> Linda Ohama, *The Last Harvest* (Vancouver: Harvest Productions, 1992), 16mm.

<sup>20</sup> Fukushima, discussion with author, appendix i.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> McAllister, ‘Narrating Japanese Canadians’, <http://cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1083/989>.



appeal and relate to a general audience. But any notion of animation's reductiveness proved unsound from the onset of the film's production. In the end, the use of animation raised more questions than it offered succinct explanations, complicating the film's very narrative structure and interrogating modes of historical representation.

Critical inquiry into the film is relatively minimal. It receives a brief overview in Monika Kin Gagnon's 2007 essay, 'Cinematic Imaginings of the Japanese Canadian Internment', and a more substantive examination in Kirsten Emiko McAllister's 'Narrating Japanese Canadians In and Out of the Canadian Nation: A Critique of Realist Forms of Representation', published in 1999. While Gagnon's argument offers a comparative analysis between *Minoru* and other cinematic interpretations of the internment with respect to Japanese Canadian experience and identity, McAllister employs the film to support much broader conclusions about issues of historical representation. In her argument, McAllister premises that in order for the Japanese Canadian Redress Movement to succeed, Japanese Canadians had to be assimilated into a historical narrative that emphasized the community's Canadianness and deemphasized their Japanese roots. This linear narrative begins with the Japanese 'pioneer' who first arrived in Canada in 1877 and ends with the contemporary contributions that Japanese Canadians had made to the Canadian economy.<sup>23</sup> *Minoru*, McAllister suggests, employs a nontraditional documentary structure and an autobiographical perspective in order to counteract this larger narrative, which favors statistical evidence over personal background. She concludes, however, that *Minoru* ultimately fails at these endeavors, as it is simply too difficult to disengage from the institutionalization of 'realist' representation.

While McAllister's contention that *Minoru* is unable to achieve autonomy amidst the larger cultural, historical, and political mechanics at play is well taken, my analysis builds upon a slightly different critical framework. Rather than evaluating whether *Minoru* acts as a naïve participant in a more calculated or overriding historical narrative as laid out by the Redress Movement, the Canadian Government, or other cultural or socio-political entities, I

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

view *Minoru* as a work that reveals and explores its representational predicaments. The film does not stand in opposition to documentary modes or institutionalized narratives but instead navigates through them. *Minoru* is in fact quite traditional. It employs narrative voice and provides historical context by way of archival materials and personal testimony, all of which are standard tropes of documentary film. It is not anti-narrative or especially experimental, notwithstanding its use of animation. Through its engagements with the official archives, it directly acknowledges that personal and public histories are inextricably linked, rendering representational independence from external projections of history unfeasible. If the film's visuals are indicative of larger socio-political constraints, I posit that this aspect in and of itself is useful for aesthetic analysis. The primary aim of this section is to identify the ways in which *Minoru* evokes the fabrication of history through its emphasis on multimodal production.

#### *The Performance of Heritage as Cultural Tourism*

Cultural traditions and historical artifacts reveal much about the formation of collective memory. History books, educational curricula, memorial sites, and museum exhibitions point to the remembrance, interpretation, and reinterpretation of the past. This process is constitutive of the social conditioning of history – what should be remembered versus forgotten, what of the past deserves narration and by whom. As a collective undertaking, memory is often schematized, shaped by not only those who have stood witness to history but also those who orchestrate its retelling. This politicization of historicization creates a complicated atmosphere for the representation or performance of memory, where notions of authenticity do not evade interrogation.

Japanese Canadian poet Roy Miki proposes that although those operating in the aftermath of the Redress Movement acknowledge the significance of the evidentiary record – what anthropologist Tom Selwyn has referred to as the ‘authenticity of knowledge’ or ‘cool authenticity’ – the activists, writers, and scholars working to rectify the historical record are cognizant of the inadequacies of such an inquiry to bring about an idealistic ‘healing

democracy'.<sup>24</sup> The underlying assumption of any search for historical veracity is that a form of documented authenticity indeed exists, when essentially, as new media scholar Sarah Rubidge reminds us, authenticity is not intrinsic to an object but is something socially ascribed to it.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, the Post-Redress Movement has made considerable efforts to provide a platform for those who can testify to their experience in internment or exile, as personal accounts are perceived to offer more direct access to the past. These undertakings have materialized in the form of several memory projects, which have included various assemblages of oral history and memorial sites and events. Such work has been well catalogued by McAllister in her recent analytical overview, *Terrain of Memory: A Japanese Canadian Memorial Project*.<sup>26</sup>

However, as Jenny Kidd observes in 'Performing the Knowing Archive: Heritage Performance and Authenticity', historical projects rooted in the experiential and autobiographical – described by Selwyn as the 'authenticity of feeling' or 'hot authenticity' – can just as summarily be viewed with skepticism.<sup>27</sup> 'Performances within heritage contexts,' states Kidd, 'more often than not conceived with educational intent, have been seen as troublingly and crassly fictionalizing in their response to the challenges of history. They have also been seen...as exemplifying an increased trend toward cultural tourism.'<sup>28</sup> Intimate memories of the past are just as susceptible to accusations of inauthenticity. They may manifest in testimonial representations that too provide little more than staged, cosmetic, or falsified versions of history. Lying between these two modes of documentation – each employed by redress and post-redress activists – *Minoru* attempts to reconcile such mediations through its formation of a personally and historically inclusive narrative, an interplay of the 'hot' and 'cool' historicizations of the past. Central to this harmonization is

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<sup>24</sup> Miki, *Redress*, 234; and Tom Selwyn, *The Tourist Image: Myth and Myth Making* (Chichester: Wiley and Sons, 1996), 21-28.

<sup>25</sup> See Sarah Rubidge, 'Does Authenticity Matter? The Case For and Against Authenticity in the Performing Arts', in *Analysing Performance: Interpretations, Issues, Ideologies*, ed. Patrick Campbell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 219–233.

<sup>26</sup> McAllister, *Terrain of Memory: A Japanese Canadian Memorial Project* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Selwyn, *Tourist Image*, 21-28.

<sup>28</sup> Jenny Kidd, 'Performing the Knowing Archive: Heritage Performance and Authenticity', *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 17.1(2011): 22.

the film's reliance upon the photograph.

### *Photographic Evidence*

In 1942, the Canadian Government was responsible for the incarceration of over 15,000 Japanese Canadians. Fifteen hastily built internment camps located within the isolated mountain valleys of British Columbia housed these prisoners.<sup>29</sup> The camps served as the preliminary phase in a systematic plan to remove all 'people of Japanese racial origin' from British Columbia throughout the remainder of the decade.<sup>30</sup> Today, what remains of these camps is sparse, an exiguous amount of heavily redacted letters, records, and a few hundred photographs. Many of these surviving records are now located at the Japanese Canadian National Archive and Museum, which offers one of the largest photographic collections of the Canadian internment camps. But other than the evidentiary research carried out by community activists and volunteers involved in the Redress Movement, very few theoretical studies have been conducted on these records, and information about the photographs in the Japanese Canadian National Archive and Museum's collection is scarce, other than cursory labels listing the date, place, and identity of their respective donors.

Of the internment photographs on display at the museum, most are believed to have been taken by internees who were professional photographers prior to the war.<sup>31</sup> Forbidding the possession of photographic equipment by any persons of Japanese heritage even before the relocation, the BCSC had confiscated hundreds of cameras owned by the internees.<sup>32</sup> The Canadian Government had, however, permitted professional photographers to keep their equipment if they agreed to document only pre-approved activities. This would account for the numerous institutional group photographs available in the archives, as opposed to the relatively negligible number of personal snapshots. But the museum does have a collection of photographs that were taken surreptitiously by prisoners, who had managed to smuggle in

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<sup>29</sup> McAllister, 'Photographs of a Japanese Canadian Internment Camp: Mourning Loss and Invoking a Future', *Visual Studies* 21.1 (2007): 133.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> See Annette Kuhn and McAllister eds., *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Kunimoto, 'Intimate Archives', 136.

their own cameras and seek out helpful allies – most usually church ministers – who could take their rolls of film to be developed.<sup>33</sup> For *Minoru*, the lack of personal documentation is made apparent by a lengthy animated sequence detailing Minoru’s memories of New Denver, and what little photographic imagery is shown appears to be that of professional stock (Figures 1.4-1.5).

Such photographic records of the internment are fundamentally different from the memory projects meant to commemorate the events. These memorials were produced long after the fact, nearly thirty to sixty years after the government had closed the camps. In contrast, the internment photos make visible the precise moment of violation. Images of the camps were not shaped through a retrospective lens but instead captured what prominent postwar photography critic Watanabe Kosho called the ‘darkness right next to us’.<sup>34</sup> However, as McAllister noted in her investigation of internment-era photography, what is unexpected about many of these images is the dichotomy they present between the harsh realities of life in the camps and the idyllic representations of communal gatherings in scenic landscapes.<sup>35</sup> With the retrospective knowledge that the internment camps were part of a larger scheme to methodically exile each person of Japanese descent from Canada, these images might be viewed as eerie denials. The photographs appear to reveal little about the prisoners, their lives, or their brutal subjugation.

The research and analyses conducted by the Redress Movement have detailed the inhumane living conditions within the camps.<sup>36</sup> Located within the mountainous terrains of British Columbia, these makeshift shantytowns were barely able to sustain the region’s extreme weather conditions. Each shack – measuring a meager 28’ x 14’ – quartered two families and often housed up to sixteen occupants at once.<sup>37</sup> Though the government had stripped the personal financial standings of all interned individuals, each family was still

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>34</sup> Watanabe Kosho, from the original Japanese, ‘mijika na kurasa’, as quoted and translated by Julia Adeney Thomas, ‘The Evidence of Sight’, *History and Theory* 48.4 (2009): 382.

<sup>35</sup> See McAllister, ‘Photographs’, 133-156.

<sup>36</sup> See Rolf Knight and Maya Koizumi, *A Man of Our Times: The Life-History of a Japanese-Canadian Fisherman* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Rose Murakami, *Ganbaru: The Murakami Family of Salt Spring Island* (Salt Spring Island: Japanese Garden Society of Salt Spring Island, 2005), 25.

required to pay rent. Each family was also forced to provide their own water supply, hauling it from nearby rivers and lakes. In their later testimonies, former internees spoke of their feelings of humiliation, fear, and desperation during this period. Yet many of the photographic representations of the camps convey a pleasant making-do of this substandard treatment. They act as visual euphemisms, on par with the government's insistence that the locations of internment be named 'relocation centers' and not 'prisoner of war camps'.<sup>38</sup>

Reading the larger photographic archive of the camps in light of the photographic imagery presented in *Minoru* raises complex issues pertaining to the photograph as evidence. Forensic terminology has long been part of the analytical discourses on photographic capture. Posited William Mitchell, the photograph 'is a direct physical imprint, like a fingerprint left at the scene of a crime or lipstick traces on your collar'.<sup>39</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce writes that the photograph 'not only excites an image...but owing to its optical connection with the object, is evidence that that appearance corresponds to a reality'.<sup>40</sup> And Barthes, acknowledging the elusive reality captured by the photographic image, described the 'certain but fugitive testimony' it provides.<sup>41</sup> By the conclusion of the Redress Movement and the making of *Minoru*, the elusory and fragile qualities of photographic evidence had been thoroughly ingrained within visual culture. However, as each image fades into the next throughout *Minoru*, as the viewer perceives an assemblage of this cinematic slide show – a feeling exacerbated by the voice over narration, which brings to mind commentary that might accompany a private viewing of a friend's home photos – the potential for other ways of seeing the photographs begins to emerge.

Far from emphasizing a hermetic totality or wholeness, these images advocate the existence of varied realities within the photograph or the photographic collection. The

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<sup>38</sup> McAllister, 'Photographs', 138.

<sup>39</sup> William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 24. For a critical overview of theories of photography and the index, see Peter Geimer, 'Image as Trace: Speculations about an Undead Paradigm', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 18.1 (2007), 7-28.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume III: Exact Logic (Published Papers) and Volume IV: The Simplest Mathematics Principles of Philosophy and Elements of Logic*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 359.

<sup>41</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [1980] 1981), 93.

supplementation of contrasting visualizations of the internment throughout *Minoru* acknowledges the complex network of perspectives involved in the shaping of historical representations. This fluctuating interpretation presents the past as an entity open to revision, open to the multiple viewpoints that can be contained and projected onto the photographic still. The presence of one perceived reality does not negate the other. Rather, they are able to shed light upon one another. Though in my view *Minoru* does not appear to operate as a challenge to the veracity of historical documentary film, it does point to the strictures of the genre, particularly within the context of its subject matter's politicized historicization. In its dealing with the photograph, the film suggests that documentations both communal and personal, actual and virtual, public and private can merge together in spite of their potential incoherence. Essential to this assertion are two key aspects of the narrative's structure that directly usher the photograph into such a process: animated revelation and temporal duration.

First, in the quest to acknowledge the elusiveness of whole truths, *Minoru* operates at a significant disadvantage, as animated abstraction appears incongruous with the concrete realities that contribute to a totality of readings. But throughout the film, animation also illuminates a crucial feature of a diversified spectrum of perspectives, one that makes the heterogeneous readability of the photograph possible: the imperceptibilities of the perceptible world. Aside from the physical realities we may overlook, remaining undetectable are the invisible properties that surpass sensory observation. Infrared light, ultraviolet waves, electromagnetic fields – all characteristics of the lived world that remain imperceptible to the human eye. Color itself is the result of scientific processes we cannot nakedly observe, each seeable hue corresponding to its absorption of light's energy. At the hands of Fukushima, *Minoru*'s animations work to unearth the possible energies of the past that remain embedded in the present but are not registered in the visible. These are realities that may exceed our sensory capabilities. The ceaseless overlays of ethereal marks, patterns, and traces that float atop the film's visuals speak to these ghostly yet vibrant invisibilities, as do the colors that saturate and stain the old photographic images. The tone and quality of a highlighter pen, these colors function as just that, an accentuation of details that had perhaps previously gone

unnoticed. Pinks, greens, and yellows seep into the images, but only an assortment of them. They draw attention to a piece of luggage, a tree, a sign in the background. These engagements with animation do not simply work to reanimate a personal or historical past. Instead, they make transparent what appears opaque. Here lies the possibility for the hidden lives, experiences, and knowledges that have long been frozen in time to reveal themselves. Lying dormant for years, they have awaited this emancipation.

Beyond this, the very nature of the analog image requires that even if the photographer intends to capture a certain reality, there remains potential for its non-compliance. Misperception, obscured visibilities, or the accidental may disrupt the designated moment. Many instances can elude the photographer, who is always partially aware of the arrested externality. When we consider images of the harsh living conditions of the camp – the deficient structures set against a sunny, bucolic landscape, as seen in Figures 1.4 and 1.5 – we might find that realities desolate and peaceful are not mutually exclusive. We can scan the images for such anomalies. Take for example this photograph from *Minoru* (Figures 1.6-1.7). In the left portion of the image, the viewer is barely able to make out a small dog. A possible creature of comfort has made their way into the picture plane. Like McAllister's description of the idyllic camp photos and the shocking incongruity they imply, such moments might induce a strange tension. It is unsettling to imagine life in destruction or pleasant memories of painful pasts; to recognize that there is hope to be found in traumatic terrains. This aspect of the internment's representation is highlighted in the film's vibrant animations of the camp at New Denver (Figures 1.8-1.10), which illustrate Minoru's positive reminiscence of his time spent there. Stories of internment may elicit tales of family and friendship alongside remembrances of loss and despair. This distinctive awareness evokes possibilities that discount the camp as a pause in space and time, pointing to the complexities intrinsic to the experiences and memories of internment.

The second mechanistic emphasis placed upon the photograph is its positioning within the cinematic structure. Laura Mulvey has observed that in contrast to cinema, the



photograph does not end.<sup>42</sup> An ‘ending’ cinema stands in opposition to an ‘endless’ photograph, she notes.<sup>43</sup> Following Mulvey, Matilde Nardelli explains that the incorporation of the photograph into the filmic frame causes an ‘awareness of “duration” to emerge’.<sup>44</sup> For, unlike printed photographs, filmed photographs do not remain still but exist as sequential movements in time. *Minoru* unfolds in large part as a series of methodically paced photographs. Individual images fill the screen at various intervals, at times gradually zooming in and out of focus. In their cinematic incarnation, these photos become temporally distinct from their original form. No longer a unique moment that has been infinitely captured – or an image that was caught instantaneously – these photos have been assigned chronological fixity within the filmic narrative. Such an engagement with the photograph takes control of an image that may have forever remained inert. In the film, the images are set into motion through a cinematic fluidity akin to the processes of memory itself. They become emblematic of the testimony that seeks to bring forth the silences of the past.

Within the cinematic narrative, the atemporality of the photograph is reimagined as part of a temporal continuum. Though specified a defined duration, the image is also not seen as an isolated moment, a glowing beacon of a past singularity, the twinkling flash of an instant caught on light-sensitive paper. Instead, the photos in *Minoru* take their place within the illimitable processes of time, signifying the sum of their formative forces and the sustaining, capacious moments yet to come. To this end, the intervals between the images are not chronological gaps but instead motivated and connective fibers, which denote multidirectional momentum in an extending constitution of images past.

### *Affiliative Identification*

Shaped by what might be absent, out of frame, evanescent, or forgotten, *Minoru*’s engagement with the photograph promotes a multiplicity of readings. This introduces into the act of spectatorship a level of indeterminacy, opening the image up to its interpretive

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<sup>42</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x A Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 83.

<sup>43</sup> Matilde Nardelli, ‘End(ur)ing Photography’, *Photographies* 5.2 (2012), 159.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

potentialities for audiences across space and time. In her analysis of the authenticity of heritage representation, Kidd underscores the significant role empathy plays for viewers attempting to make sense of a past previously unknown to them. Personalized identification can be carried out not solely via characters and situations but also through the physical objects that are able to testify as ‘witnesses to history’, as they are thought to possess ‘artifactual memories’.<sup>45</sup> Presenting a relational stratagem for the viewer that emphasizes the intermeshing of virtual and actual worlds, as *Minoru* similarly espouses, Kidd’s study details how the respondents of heritage performances – enacted in the form of storytelling events, plays, and museum exhibitions – felt that such items allowed them to psychically inhabit another temporality, becoming ‘hooks upon which other, more factual, information hung’.<sup>46</sup>

Describing this kind of interactive testimony as the ‘evidence of experience’, historian Joan Scott deems this approach highly dubious.<sup>47</sup> Predominantly ahistorical in Scott’s view, the ‘evidence of experience’ implies a direct engagement with the past. This entails the suspension of inquiry into its modes of representation – in the case of *Minoru*, its social production and role of the photograph during wartime in Canada – and the explicative structures surrounding these images. Most crucially for an engagement with history, this relationship to the past would seemingly disregard time itself, so that the viewer’s experience of these images would be purportedly comparable to what the direct witnesses had seen at the moment of their production. In accordance, every glimpse of the image would be able to grant a unity of vision that is consistently confirmed across past, present, and future.

Indeed, the presumption that contemporary experience will adequately align with history without reducing the image to personal projection or sentimental indulgence is extremely flawed. How can we read the photographs of the internment decades after they were taken, long after the camps have been closed, and after the Redress Movement reached a conclusion? The historical imagery in *Minoru* accentuates these temporal schisms. The varied interpretations of these images provided by contemporary viewers will undoubtedly be

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<sup>45</sup> Kidd, ‘Performing’, 29; and John Urry, ‘How Societies Remember the Past’, *The Sociological Review* 43.1 (1995): 53.

<sup>46</sup> Kidd, ‘Performing’, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Joan Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, *Critical Inquiry*, 17.4 (1991): 775.

distinct from that of the camps' internees. But such is the condition of the photograph, a remnant of the past continuously circulating in the present. Reconciliation with this complication must be met if we wish to productively engage with the photograph, manifesting in the harmonious exchange between two oppositional processes of reading the image, what historian Julia Adeney Thomas refers to as the 'recognition' and 'excavation' of the photograph.<sup>48</sup>

In ascertaining the differences between the interpretive strategies of recognition and excavation, Thomas underscores several of their contrasting attributes. Where acts of recognition acknowledge the similarities and disconnects between the moment of the image's production and its subsequent viewings, excavation invests itself in the material embeddedness of the visual object as part of particularized social and historical interrelations. For the process of recognition, limitations may arise if it begins to devalue or deny difference. Seen as analogous to Barthes' theoretical enunciation of the characteristic unattainability of a 'true' image in *Camera Lucida* – in which he chronicled the complexities involved in discovering a photo that presented a truthful 'likeness' of his mother – recognizing affiliations based upon similarity becomes a futile exercise, as no one image is able to capture the irreducibility of individuality. Conversely, excavation may inspire overdeterminist readings of the object's invariability. Thomas instructs that the objective of historical excavation, of examining the photograph as 'a shard from the past', is 'to uncover the network of connotations, practices, and relations to power – in short, the entire discursive system – through which it emerged as an object'.<sup>49</sup> In this manner, excavation works to delineate the 'historical matrix out of which it came' but not of which it continues to be a part.<sup>50</sup>

Though there exists a tension between these two modes of visual and material engagement, acts of recognition and excavation may also exist as two sides of the same coin, as each is able to support and expound the other. For *Minoru*, the intersections between its contrasting forms of historical documentation – by way of photography, testimony, archival

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas, 'Evidence', 152.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

objects, and animation – suggest a framework of interconnected dots between and beyond its visual, material, and interpretive margins. The present is allowed to infiltrate the past; the past pervades the here and now. Its mutual interplay of the process of image recognition and excavation allows *Minoru* to re-examine a past that is always in flux. Destabilizing compartmentalized notions of time, the film encourages the reconceptualization of historical image and archive, which should always be open to varying developments and revised meanings. It is in this context that *Minoru*'s animated engagements with its archival imagery appear generative, rather than reductionist forms of preconceived, impenetrable, or monolithic accounts of history.

### ***Image and Medium***

*Minoru* begins with a photograph. It is a grainy, black-and-white image. In it stand two adult figures, mother and father, each cradling an infant. Three young boys pose patiently to the left. As if covered by a rolling fog, the clarity of the photo weaves in and out. The image's white spaces are gradually filled in with pinks, greens, and blues. The colors appear dulled in their vibrancy. Heavy black ink traces the silhouette of one of the younger boys, whose image becomes the focus of the film screen. The boy's outline is saturated with color until he is fully re-represented as a cartoon. The boy becomes animated. He glances over his shoulder and bounds out of the photo, its white border becoming a trampoline that propels him out of the picture plane. He enters an illustrated landscape, a photographed street overlaid with a muted color palette (Figures 1.11-1.15).

This introductory moment transitions the film from archival documentation to its animated aesthetic. It enmeshes the actual and virtual terrains of the past, the documented and the abstracted. But what becomes of the photographic image that is abandoned in the wake of these movements? Removing himself from the confines of the photo, the boy leaves behind a vacant space in his family portrait. Not a seamless integration of forms, the film immediately establishes a tension between its divergent imagery. From the outset, *Minoru* sets its visual

modes of animation and photography in contrast to one another, interrogating what can be known about each and how they can both be read within the filmic medium.

In *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, art historian Hans Belting offers a breakdown of the intricate connections between image and medium. The ‘what’ of the image – the visual content – is driven by the ‘how’ – the mediated form – in which it is represented. Belting reminds us that there are no images that can appear to us unmediated. Tightly interwoven, the two tend to be viewed inseparably. Though we can and do read image and medium as distinct entities, Belting insists that this action is merely detractive. He presents the example of the painted canvas:

When we distinguish a canvas from the image it represents, we pay attention to either the one or the other, as if they were distinct, which they are not; they separate only when we are willing to separate them in our looking. In this case, we dissolve their factual ‘symbiosis’ by means of our analytical perception. We even remember images from the specific mediality in which we first encountered them, and remembering means first disembodiment from their original media and then reembodying them in our brain. Visual media compete, so it seems, with the images they transmit. They tend either to dissimulate themselves or to claim the first voice. The more we pay attention to a medium, the less it can hide its strategies. The less we take note of a visual medium, the more we concentrate on the image, as if images would come by themselves. When visual media become self-referential, they turn against their images and steal our attention from them.<sup>51</sup>

Belting makes clear that the interactions between image and media must always be taken into consideration if we are to assess their motivations and capabilities. Further to this, images always ‘*happen*, or are *negotiated*, between bodies’, which then communicate with various media.<sup>52</sup> Of this reciprocal relationship between image-medium-body, he states:

Bodies censor the flux of images via projection, memory, attention, or neglect. Private or individual bodies also act as public or collective bodies in a given society. Our bodies always carry a collective identity in that they represent a given culture as a result of ethnicity, education, and a particular visual environment. *Representing bodies* are those that perform themselves, while *represented bodies* are separate or independent images that represent bodies. Bodies *perform* images (of themselves or even against themselves) as much as they *perceive* outside images. In this double sense, they are living media that transcend the

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<sup>51</sup> Belting, ‘Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology’, *Critical Inquiry* 31.2 (2005): 304.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

capacities of their prosthetic media. Despite their marginalization, so much a` la mode, I am here still pleading their cause as indispensable for any iconology.<sup>53</sup>

In the following, I explore *Minoru* as such a bodily performance, one that mediates between the image and its medium. As an enabling doubling act, *Minoru*'s animated rupture with the photographic past is potentially emancipatory. Breaking away from the material photograph, the young Minoru enters a seemingly imaginative projection of experience. But the foundation of this illusory world continues to rely upon photographic representation and vice versa, resulting in an archival landscape that adheres to visual abstraction. Within this juxtaposition, the animated forms appear vulnerable. Continuously shaking against the solidity of the photograph, the animated image seems unstable, unable to stand on its own. Image and medium are made inextricable, as history and memory become codependent. It is a negotiating premise, a liberating attempt to both physically release its imagery from the historical document while continuing to engage with it. This dynamic creates an open terrain within which Minoru's personal narrative is allowed to unfold.

### *The Body as Living Medium*

In his 2001 study *An Anthropology of Images*, Belting attempts to revise what he characterizes as an outmoded conception of media in the digital age. He notes that 'physical images are physical because of the media they use, but *physical* can no longer explain their present technologies'.<sup>54</sup> The virtual world has caused the physicality of the image to garner new meanings. The term 'image' remains the same, but 'medium' should now be perceived as a perceptual entity – 'the sense of the agent by which images are transmitted'.<sup>55</sup> The 'body' of the image, posits Belting, should signify either the performing body that created it or the perceiving body that physically registers the image in order to read it.

Belting's reformulation of the medium and body of the image – a way of bypassing

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 302.

the apparent lack of physicality within the digital terrain – retroactively sheds new light on *Minoru*'s interactions between its animated and photographic forms. Not denying the corporeal potentials of the virtual realm, Belting's reading grants it agency, performative capabilities, and tangible interrelations between the bodies of production and reception.

Belting's analysis allows us to view *Minoru*'s aesthetic mode as ahead of its time.

Throughout the film, the represented body becomes embodied through its very abstraction. Its animations work not exclusively toward the revitalization of the photographic image but also toward a reinterpretation of virtuality. Here, the animated image is interdependent. It is connected to its perceived material bounds but liberated to have a life of its own. Reinforcing this, the animator's hand forges connections with lived bodies beyond the photograph. These embodied and synergized interconnections between animation and the photographs it reawakens stresses the body as a medium in and of itself. In both production and reception of the film, multiple bodies come together to activate, illuminate, interpret, and revise this historical representation. Now able to distinguish itself from the image, the body gains representational autonomy, a loosening analogous to the young *Minoru*'s immediate and animated break from the photographic frame.

In his discussion of these issues, Belting cites Plato's well-known skepticism of the image. Highlighting the distinctive components of image production, Plato dissociates the living body from the still image with respect to the paradigm of the body that speaks versus the written word. While the body is able to remember the dead, the image can only depict them. In his view – and in the view of numerous photography scholars to come – the represented image only replicates death. The memory image, however, can enliven the dead, imbuing them with new life, bringing them into the present. Plato's argument incited the dismissal of images of the dead as illusory, in effect excluding such illustrations from Western philosophical discourse, and establishing the theory of the body as a living medium.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2001), 173-176.

*Minoru*'s visual structure challenges this dichotomy. As a medium interpolating living memory into the repose of the photograph, *Minoru*'s animated figure delves into the recesses of both, working to strip away the decay of past representation and reveal the life underneath. The narrator's animated body figuratively extends beyond the peripheries of individual physicality. It is instead a prosthesis that resides within the space of historical representation, situated at the crux of historical excavation. It envisions a physical slippage between actual and virtual worlds of imagery, presence and absence, documentary and fantasy, personal and public. Blurring the boundaries between the visual representation and its referent, these bodily slippages work to externalize an internalization.

#### *The Presence of an Absence*

While Belting's contemporary reevaluations of the 'image-medium-body' mode of viewership make way for more physical ideations of the virtual and more virtual ideations of the physical, Belting curiously presents a more regressive interpretation of the image's ability to paradoxically perform the 'presence of an absence'.<sup>57</sup> In his analysis, Belting demonstrates how the photographic image has traditionally denoted the absence of a body, a represented body that is no longer there. Though this absence is unable to summon a physical return of that body, it has been theorized that a different kind of presence can replace it, described as a 'visible' or 'iconic presence'.<sup>58</sup> For Belting, the problem with this argument is that the paradox of the 'presence of an absence' is rooted in a reductionist tendency to equate presence with visibility. And indeed, this is a constrictive comprehension of the presence of any entity. However, when Belting attempts to expand the notion of what is able to constitute presence, it is the narrowed definition of multisensory perception and prohibitive view of the capabilities of an image proffered – as opposed to an openness to their potentialities – that seems to relegate the presence of an absence to the margins of visibility:

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<sup>57</sup> Belting, 'Image, Medium, Body', 313.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



When absent bodies become visible in images, they use a vicarious visibility... Since the days of Galileo or of Röntgen, however, we are familiar with another kind of absence, namely, absence from sight and not absence as such. The worlds of the telescope or those represented by X-rays are never visible in the way human bodies are. They are present and yet remain invisible. We need visual media with their prosthetic function when we want to watch a microcosm or outer space. But even here we replace the remote targets of vision (let me call them bodies) with images, which not only use technology but are entirely dependent on it in order to make these worlds present to our sight.<sup>59</sup>

Ignored in this description is a more expansive spectrum of sensory perception in relation to presence, one that could enrich our consideration for the ‘presence/absence’ dilemma.

Without sight, presences are still perceived, felt, and heard in ways that not only fit within our five senses but also exist within a multisensory plane that challenges human capabilities. But even after we acknowledge that presence can be conceived of and experienced in a multitude of ways barring the visual, Belting’s question remains: Can the photographic image ever rise above the visual? Must it always restrict its subjects to their visibility?

For example, looking at these photographs from *Minoru*, which show the filmmaker with his father (Figures 1.16-1.17), immediately invoked is a connective physicality. The caresses between loved ones, the touches of filial affection. For many scholars, the photograph affirms not just visibility but also tangibility, rhetorically linking to its status as a trace, an imprint, a mark of the subject. According to Georges Didi-Huberman, the ‘imprint transmits physically – and not only optically – the semblance of the “imprinted” object or being’.<sup>60</sup> ‘Footprint’ has been figuratively employed by both Sontag and Rosalind Krauss to describe photography’s technique of transmission. Photographs ‘look like footprints in sand’, Krauss writes, ‘or marks that have been left in dust’.<sup>61</sup> Such designations infer an embedded physicality within the image: something or someone was present. The mark left behind has been captured. But *Minoru* attempts to release it.

*Minoru*’s engagement with its material imagery suggests an effort to free past

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *L’empreinte [Human Figure in Art]* (Paris: Éditions du Centre Georges Pompidou), 38, as quoted and translated by Geimer, ‘Image as Trace’, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 203.

representations from their temporal and physical constraints. Working to move its bodily referents beyond the photo, the film interrogates what we see, which challenges what we know – or think we can ever know – about an image, a presence, a past. Two silenced generations, the Issei and Nisei survivors of internment, make incarnate the presence of an absence. Though hidden in the camps, their suffering spread through the nation. Though enslaved, their bodies did not vanish. Though communication was hindered, their memories survived. *Minoru*'s animated interjections of the personal into historical documentation points to this very invisibility, amplifying suppressed voices. Particular to this aim are the governmentally issued certificates and identification documents displayed throughout the film, including issued and reissued certificates of birth (Figures 1.18-1.19). These official documents – whether acknowledging the citizenship that was later ignored by their granting institutional bodies or used for the justification of the denial and violation of the human rights of those oppressed persons – gain new meaning here. Incorporated alongside the personal photographs of the Fukushima family and the father's testimony, these images perform an absence, revealing the negations and erasures of the past and the repressed memories of those who lived through this period of exploitation, internment, and exile.

### *'Unstoppable Development'*

Film theorist Kaja Silverman has also recently reappraised the status of the photographic image within the digital age. Reviving what once seemed crucial for the study of photography but has now almost entirely fallen to the wayside, Silverman draws specific attention to the materiality of the photographic process.<sup>62</sup> Early inquiries into the medium placed particular emphasis on how the photographic image materializes. Much of this analysis focused on the stark contrasts perceived between the mechanization of photography and the handmade processes of other representational modes. In the introductory remarks of his 1846 volume of photographic plates, *The Pencil of Nature*, early critic of photography William Henry Fox

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<sup>62</sup> Kaja Silverman, 'Unstoppable Development' (paper given at University College London, London, UK, 14 November 2013). See also her chapter 'Unstoppable Development' in *The Miracle of Analogy: or, The History of Photography, Part I* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015): 39-66.

Talbot wrote that the photograph is ‘obtained by the mere action of Light upon sensitive paper. They have been formed or depicted by optical and chemical means alone, and without the aid of any one acquainted with the art of drawing...They are impressed by Nature’s hand’.<sup>63</sup> Such notions of technical authorship became essential for photography research. Questions of whether the photograph was produced by the human hand or if the subject appeared to have made an image ‘of itself’, as Talbot hypothesized, became baffling issues for the understanding and critique of this mode of production.<sup>64</sup> Initial investigations of the medium largely deemed the photographic process inferior to handmade image production for two reasons: first, the immediacy of its product, and second, its independence from manual labor.

Though I contend that *Minoru* is not geared toward the reassertion of any such formalist hierarchies, the film does speak to Silverman’s appeal to reconsider the progressive and continuous potentialities of photographic materiality and process, what she describes as the medium’s ‘unstoppable development’. Silverman observes that ‘we are used to considering a photograph immobile, but there [is] nothing “still” about this kind of image’.<sup>65</sup> Rather, the photograph – historically castigated for its apparent automation of production – is in fact always developing. If not through an evolution by light, or through the fluctuations in its chemical stabilization or destabilization, the photograph will continuously reconstitute itself through interpretive renewals. The life of the photograph will see its share of unintended and unconscious recordings, readings, and revivals, all of which can be revelatory or reformatory for the image. Dynamic and adaptable, photographs are ‘constantly developing into other things: paintings, novels, computational images’.<sup>66</sup> This shift in perspective complicates traditional valuations that relate photography to the death of the image and animation to the endowment of life. Alternatively, the photograph is viewed not as a representational mode in decay but as a form in the midst of its ongoing evolution.

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<sup>63</sup> William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Talbot, in a letter to the editor of the *Literary Gazette*, 2 February 1839).

<sup>65</sup> Silverman, ‘Primal siblings: George Baker in conversation with Kaja Silverman’. *Artforum International*, 1 February 2010.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Superimposing animation onto the photographic imagery within *Minoru* operates as an acknowledgment of both media's respective processes and capabilities, gesturing that they are each rooted in their processes of becoming.

Fukushima recalls that when the archival materials were introduced into his original animation conceit, the creation of visual coherence between the two forms became an issue.<sup>67</sup> After some deliberation and discussion with another colleague, he concluded that it wasn't necessary to animate the archives. Instead, the archives needed to 'feel animated'.<sup>68</sup> Viewers should be able to perceive the past's liveliness.<sup>69</sup> Through its rigorous handmade production, the film appears as an organic assemblage of its many moving parts, which are permitted to develop and dissolve into one another. Inspired by the works of NFB animator Norman McLaren, Fukushima developed a five-drawing random cycle animation technique that could create the illusion of subtle movement within the static photographic image.<sup>70</sup> A random cycle typically consists of a series of nearly identical drawings with small variations. The materials used to create the cycles seen in *Minoru* included clear acetate animation cels drawn on with greasy crayons, photocopied archival materials that had been painted on with watercolor, and delicate handmade Japanese *washi* papers. Fukushima's drawing cycles were overlaid onto the various archival documents, then filmed under four to seven second intervals with a cascading dissolve, or chain-mix, which incorporates several cross-dissolves at once.<sup>71</sup> Conventionally, this technique results in a shimmery effect. Filmed under the time and material conditions Fukushima set in place, the effect instead created extremely subtle and tactile movements on the surface of the image. These diaphanous layers appear to release the past from its framed capture, coloring in the greys, and setting stillness in motion. The animations endow the photographic imagery with ceaseless pulsations. Mimicking the syncopation of breath, these movements evoke a rhythmic pulsation, a longing for the

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<sup>67</sup> Fukushima, discussion with author, appendix i.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Fukushima, in correspondence with author, 25 May 2011, appendix i.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

formerly dormant but still embodied past, which reverses the finality – the death – of the photographic shot.

## **Part II. Living Memory**

When the animated figure of the young Minoru leaves the Fukushima family photograph, two things are accomplished. First, as I have outlined, this movement underscores a complicated relationship between how history is documented and how it is experienced. Second, the break from the photo emphasizes a ruptured past. A form of ‘cultural genocide’ and ‘political violence’, the internment caused an erosion of communal cohesion, national identity, and familial structures.<sup>72</sup> As Pamela Sugiman detailed in her essay ‘Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women’s Life Stories’, particularly significant was the destruction of the familial unit, as this had served as the ‘the primary vehicle for the acquisition of an ethnic identity and for the transmission of Japanese cultural symbols in Canada’.<sup>73</sup> The animated figure’s immediate movement away from the family photograph expresses this sense of fracturing. Moreover, through its engagement with the personal testimonial, *Minoru* strives for communal recognition. Many scholars have argued that the utterance of individual memory exists as a social act.<sup>74</sup> Situated within fluctuating timelines, testimony carries with it both its past and present cultural frames of perspective. According to film and culture theorist Annette Kuhn, memory – being ‘always already secondary revision’, and neither ‘pure experience’ nor ‘pure event’ – stands as a mirror of personal, historical, and social shifts.<sup>75</sup> In the first part of this section, I will explore how *Minoru* utilizes personal testimony to illuminate broader communal experience and attempts to reconcile social and material injuries. Minoru’s narration relays how his family’s possessions – though promised

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<sup>72</sup> Kobayashi and Miki, *Justice in Our Time*, 50; and McAllister, ‘Narrating Japanese Canadians’, <http://cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1083/989>.

<sup>73</sup> Pamela Sugiman, ‘Memories of Internment: Narrating Japanese Canadian Women’s Life Stories’, *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29.3 (2004): 361.

<sup>74</sup> See Eviatar Zerubavel, ‘Social Memories: Steps to a Sociology of the Past’, *Qualitative Sociology* 19.3 (1996): 286; Marie-Noelle Bourguet, Lucette Valensi, and Nathan Wachtel, *Between Memory and History* (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1990); and Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1941] 1992).

<sup>75</sup> Kuhn, ‘A Journey Through Memory’, in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 186 and 189.

to be ‘held in trust’ by the government – were never returned. The film highlights such tangible losses through its animated interplays with family photography, which I will discuss in the second half of this section.

Sugiman has elaborated upon the significance of the family photo album during the internment, as it became a valuable object around which memories of the past could be revisited and rethought.<sup>76</sup> Not offering false memories or any illusory totality that might threaten to replace the past, these photographs became intermediaries within a constantly transforming narrative. Along with witness testimony, the photographs acted as descriptive ciphers in the continuous reconsideration of the past. The animated forms in *Minoru* similarly reflect the dynamic transformations of family, community, heritage, and memory itself. Employing the term ‘photo-narrative’ in her reading of Japanese Canadian family photo albums, Namiko Kunimoto contemplates family photography’s involvement in the metamorphic making of memory.<sup>77</sup> As a ‘photo-narrative’, *Minoru* imagines a multifaceted terrain of memory through its intertwining of intermediality and multiple narrations. Negotiating polymorphic modes of meaning-making across a variance of personal and public relations, the family photo album participates in a cyclical development of collective experience. In the film, both historical and personal photographic narratives become entangled, and through the sharing of this filmic family album, distances are bridged between strangers. Watching *Minoru*, viewer and viewed engage with each other; narrators, listeners, direct witnesses, and the next generation are necessarily enfolded into the revelatory opening up of the past.

### ***The Testimonial***

*Minoru* opens with the filmmaker’s narration: ‘In the fall of 1987, at the age of twenty-six, I asked my father, Minoru Fukushima, for the first time about his childhood. This is

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<sup>76</sup> Sugiman, ‘Memories of Internment’, 370-371.

<sup>77</sup> Kunimoto, ‘Intimate Archives’, 131.

his story.<sup>78</sup> The film proceeds to alternate between Fukushima's expository narration and the personal testimony of his father. This hybrid narration works to make Minoru's account narratively cohesive. But it also indicates a negotiation between more experimental documentary modes and the traditional structure of many public broadcasts and NFB productions, a norm that is simultaneously countered and encouraged throughout the film. *Minoru*'s employment of animation and personal testimony promotes more inventive, performative, and abstract approaches within the genres of documentary or nonfiction cinema, but the film stops short of presenting much narrative ambiguity given its archival documents and contextual exposition. Its visual conceit supports this narrativization through specific rhetorical relations: imagery that correlates with the testimony provided; imagery that may have preceded the testimony but is retroactively explained by the narration; and imagery that appears without voiceover, which instead relies on its positioning within the larger narrative structure, leaving room for spectatorial reflection.

The film's dual narrations and their interplays with the adjacent imagery amplify one of *Minoru*'s central themes, the complex oscillation between one's immediacy to and distance from the past. The film presents back-and-forth movements between the close-up witnessing of an event and its subsequent removal from view. Correspondingly, *Minoru*'s layering of narrative voices are at once intensely personal, yet disconnected. The audial timelines of father and son are both independent and intertwined. The father's narration occurs in response to questions posed by his son, but the film is not a direct documentation of their ensuing conversation. There is no interaction between the two narrators, no fatherly advice given or sought. In fact, throughout his narration, Minoru never addresses or mentions his son. Cultural theorist Svetlana Boym, whose research has explored memory representation within exilic experience, characterizes this type of communicative relationship as a form of 'diasporic intimacy'.<sup>79</sup> Such an engagement, Boym posits, speaks to the experiences of

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<sup>78</sup> Fukushima, *Minoru*, 00:00:40.

<sup>79</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 251-258.

émigrés and refugees who may understand the transiency of diasporic living and the impermanence of home. Affiliations founded on diasporic intimacy are rooted in a longing for wholeness, for a stable homeland. But they are also deeply embedded in the knowledge that everything could be taken away. It is an intimacy with a theoretical defense mechanism from loss, a belief that one can be protected if meaningful things are kept at arm's length.

The film's co-narrations infer that these revelations are contingent upon intergenerationality. In the aftermath of WWII, the Issei and Nisei generations were freed from intimidation that was sanctioned by the nation-state. But as Boym delineates in her discussion of diasporic freedom, there exists a distinction between one who is 'free' and one who has been 'freed'.<sup>80</sup> The 'freed' individual has been physically liberated from an authoritarian regime, but to be 'free' connotes an inner liberation, an ability to act freely regardless of any externally imposed political state. Though freed from political exile after the war, the persecuted population may continue to deal with the physical and psychical inflictions of subjugation. Consequently, speaking freely may remain hindered, a facet of the posttraumatic that *Minoru* acknowledges. The Sansei, however – while not living under a tyrannical political state – might seek relief from the lingering remains of this traumatic history. The following examines how these intergenerational displacements are evidenced by the film's narrative structure.

### *Exilic Nationalism*

Stationed at the 25<sup>th</sup> Canadian Reinforcement Group, Minoru – dressed in uniform – stands at a halfway point (Figure 1.20). He is positioned underneath two arrows in opposing directions and at the nexus of several vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines within the photograph's composition. He is framed within the perimeters of the image, within a frozen moment layered between photographic documentation and animated visualization. An intricate network of delicate white lines on the fringe of the image bleeds into the picture plane, manifesting itself as an organic web of dense fibrous tissue. Heightening the intersections of

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 341-342.



the image's various directional elements, this web illustrates the complicated constellation of temporalities, geographies, and media that pervades the film. It is a web that hints at a continuous engagement with the past and visually embeds Minoru within a labyrinth of hybridity.

*Minoru* negotiates a complex set of identity politics in which one's self is not viewed simply as a unique and stabilized position but an interminable process of internal and external reevaluations. Sugiman contends that the Nisei generation – caught in a form of cultural or transcendental homelessness – was mandated to move between their 'Japaneseness' and 'Canadianness'.<sup>81</sup> Born to Japanese immigrants living in Canada, Minoru is represented in the film as an individual residing in an interstitial state. The hyphenated cultural designation of 'Japanese-Canadian' was not a perceptual constant but an identity contingent upon ever-shifting socio-political mentalities. Minoru's birthright is Canadian, but with the insurgence of anti-Japanese sentiment in Canada during WWII, his Canadianness was effectively erased in the eyes of his government. The camp where his family was interned became a halfway house within his own country, a holding place between birthplace and ancestral home. It was a geographical parenthesis; Minoru became a foreigner in the only homeland he knew.

Obligated to walk along a network of unfixed boundaries, the exile navigates the in-betweens of disparate settlements and movements. The formation of individual subjectivities within this network has been theorized as being entirely relational to society. One is both more and less than, similar to and different from, more or less determined by the dominant culture. Homi Bhabha describes these articulations of cultural difference as performative, a continuous process of defining, undefining, and redefining what is ultimately an always partial notion of identity.<sup>82</sup> As such a performance, *Minoru* restages the past to accentuate the crisscrossing of political, cultural, and personal shifts that Minoru's personal testimony addresses. He speaks from a position that is both inside and outside his homeland, his government, his family, his self. The recurring depictions of thresholds, windows, doors, and

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<sup>81</sup> Kunimoto, 'Intimate Archives', 368.

<sup>82</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

passages throughout the film become visual references to this dichotomy, all provoking a longing within the intermediate subject, a vulnerable positioning between realities and dreams, homes and homelessness (Figures 1.21-1.24).

Minoru's cultural longings and belongings are not represented as existing along a direct path but fluctuating within a fluid movement back and forth, a spiraling around circuitous loops. The location of Minoru in the photograph at the reinforcement camp signifies these movements, pulling him in various directions and envisioning a spatial continuum that exists beyond the photo's dimensions. These directional tensions imply an infinite process of becoming and unbecoming, which supersedes boundaries and binaries, origins and endings. According to Bhabha, 'the "beyond" is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past'.<sup>83</sup> It is not the literal, physical traversals that are integral to this process of becoming. When Minoru leaves Canada, it does not leave him. 'Life was hard,' narrates Minoru of his time in Japan. 'We were resented, because we weren't Japanese. So I went to school to learn Japanese. I was in Grade 8 in New Denver but only spoke English. So I was in school with the Grade 1 kids, and I was fourteen. I stayed in school about a year. Just a year. Then, back to rice fields.'<sup>84</sup> The binary of 'Us/Them' that existed for him in his homeland is only seen to reinterpret itself upon his move to Japan. Crossing one border leads to another, and these fluctuating movements between belonging and unbelonging – between an existence that is at once situated everywhere and nowhere – creates an exilic imprisonment within the body. This is made visible, for example, when he is shown sitting alongside his Grade 1 classmates, his larger physical stature pronouncing just how out of place he is (Figure 1.25). There is no escape from imposed boundaries, as they are contingent upon circumstances both external and internal. Boym suggests that the trips of exile and return are not straightforward but exist as intricate ontological labyrinths that chart space on time and time on space.<sup>85</sup> Like a geological formation that relies on the interplay of time and water to come into being, the process of such a personal configuration occurs through the overlapping

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>84</sup> Fukushima, *Minoru*, 00:09:30.

<sup>85</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 270.

shifts and displacements of external cataclysms and timelines. The rock is formed at its edges, and it is at the edges – at one's boundaries of being – where identity and individuality become visible.

In addition, the military photograph of Minoru acts as a literal pronouncement of the complexities of nationalism. As his only recourse for returning to his home country, Minoru was compelled to pledge his allegiance to it and its army, to the government that had previously denounced this very birthright. Several accounts of the Japanese Canadian survivor community reveal similarly complex reconciliations of pre-war, wartime, and postwar lives. According to Sugiman, during the war and its immediate aftermath, many Nisei survivors continued – and have continued throughout the decades – to make known their loyalty to Canada. 'In this way,' she states, 'a nationalism is woven throughout statements about *present* identities and memories of *past* identities.'<sup>86</sup> For Sugiman and McAllister, this signals an effort within the Nisei population to dissociate from any notions of 'otherness' or Japaneseness as a means to underscore their Canadianness.<sup>87</sup> And several survival testimonies, like Minoru's, draw upon periods of exile in Japan to reassert themselves as distinctly Canadian, stressing an inherent unassimilability into Japanese society.<sup>88</sup>

### *Childhood and 'Critical Nostalgia'*

One way national loyalism is made manifest within the testimonies of the Nisei is through the portrayal of childhood within the camps. Often, the time spent in internment is spoken of and represented as a period of friendship and emotional contentment.<sup>89</sup> Sugiman notes that many former internees have reflected upon the internment with idyllic language, emphasizing it as a time of hard work, education, and ingenuity, rather than a moment of adversity.<sup>90</sup> Relatively free of disruption, days in the camps were filled with children's activities: skipping, running,

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<sup>86</sup> Sugiman, 'Memories of Internment', 379, emphasis in original.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., and McAllister, 'Narrating Japanese Canadians', <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/1083/989>.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Sugiman, 'Memories of Internment', 378-380.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

singing, playing hopscotch or baseball, and doing chores. Speaking of his time in internment, Minoru remembers: ‘We were in a tent at New Denver. Wooden floor. And a tent. But then, living in – under a tent I guess – was a novelty, you know. It felt like a real camp. Middle of the Rocky Mountains. Right in front of a big lake and a ball field. I remember, that’s where I learned how to swim. It was just like growing up anywhere else.’<sup>91</sup> This frank depiction of his experience reinforces the complicated interconnections between sentimentality and nostalgia amidst a narrative of unconcealed racial oppression.

In very broad terms, the analytical frameworks regarding nostalgic remembrance yield two contrasting interpretations within social theory. On the one hand, nostalgia is viewed as an overly sentimental ‘opiate’ that eases the inability to ‘face the truth of the past’.

<sup>92</sup> Some critics warn that it is a disruptive and even immobilizing force, which may halt political and social movements. <sup>93</sup> Sociologist Herbert Gans writes that nostalgia is ‘inherently conservative, if not reactionary and escapist’, describing it as a ‘simplification’ if not a ‘falsification of the past’.<sup>94</sup> Taking a more optimistic tone, other scholars, including Boym, have identified nostalgia as a sophisticated tool for the reappraisal of the past, one that offers a liberating sense of renewal and recuperation.<sup>95</sup> Maurice Halbwachs’ pivotal 1925 work, *On Collective Memory*, initiated such a discussion of the positive potentialities of nostalgia’s escapism, which he assesses is able to disengage from perceptions of time as irreversible.<sup>96</sup>

Though Boym and Halbwachs’ readings of nostalgia are befitting of Sugiman’s analysis – that the historicist nationalism of the Nisei has been filtered through a productive nostalgic longing for wholeness – I am wary of attributing Minoru’s testimonial to any

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<sup>91</sup> Fukushima, *Minoru*, 00:03:47.

<sup>92</sup> See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Leo Spitzer, ‘Back Through the Future: Nostalgic Memory and Critical Memory in a Refuge From Nazism’, in *Acts of Memory*, eds. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crew, and Spitzer (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999), 91; Suzanne Vromen ‘The Ambiguity of Nostalgia’, *YIVO Annual* 21 (1993): 71; and David Lowenthal, ‘Nostalgia Tells It Like It Wasn’t’, in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, eds. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 20, quoting historian Christopher Lasch.

<sup>93</sup> Sinead McDermott, ‘Memory, Nostalgia, and Gender in *A Thousand Acres*’, *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.1 (2002): 390.

<sup>94</sup> See Herbert J. Gans, *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1979).

<sup>95</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xiii-xix; Lowenthal, ‘Nostalgia’, 18-32; Judy Giles, ‘Narratives of Gender, Class, and Modernity in Women’s Memories of Mid-Twentieth Century Britain’, *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28.1 (2002): 21-41; and McDermott, ‘Memory, Nostalgia’, 389-407.

<sup>96</sup> See Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 103-113.

generalizations of his experience, nor do I gauge whether the events elucidated in the film espouse the more negative or positive ideologies of nostalgia as a concept. Rather, I am interested in ascertaining how – in light of these peripheral observations – *Minoru*'s animated reminiscences of a vibrant youth spent in internment correspond to the testimonial narrative. Not quite an 'opiate' from dealing with history, not entirely a liberating rewrite of the past, *Minoru*'s nostalgic tone links its various contextual themes together, drawing out some of the complexities between history, memory, and trauma in the process.

*Minoru*'s animated aesthetic conveys nostalgia for a childhood that is both imaginative and diligent. As a space for wistful dreaming, becoming, and play, the animations of *Minoru*'s childhood express a laborious act of historical re-creation, which translate into a spirited act of recreation. The animated representation of *Minoru* as a child serves as a lively trigger who activates the film's process of historical excavation by entry into its storybook world. *Minoru*'s is a world of hide-and-seek, where memory fragments are flushed out from their hiding places to the ends of productive encounters.

Cultural memory scholar Leo Spitzer's concept of 'critical nostalgia' is useful to consider here. Contending that nostalgia infers 'selective emphasis on what was positive in the past', Spitzer makes clear that nostalgia is not excluded from critical engagement with its negative components.<sup>97</sup> More than asserting a particular vision of the past over another, Spitzer's ideation allows for the variations inherent to comprehending past experience. This definition does not condone deletions from the historical record but instead makes space for diverse – perhaps oppositional – interpretations. Throughout *Minoru*, it is the very playfulness of its animated imagery that underscores the palpable devastations that occurred during wartime. The father's nostalgic testimony, which transports the film into a wholesome world of childhood, accentuates by contrast the devastating fractures that took place within this cataclysmic moment.

Childhood is itself a state of transition. *Minoru* relates to the traumatic events of wartime and displacement as disruptions of this process of becoming. Within the film,

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<sup>97</sup> Spitzer, 'Back Through the Future', 96.

childhood symbolizes metamorphoses within metamorphoses, a moment layered in the time that was, that could have been, and the time that has become. Boym postulates that it is at these points of traumatic rupture where the creative spaces of childhood are threatened. These spaces, located within developmental experience, provide context for early bonds that are based not on shared nationalities, races, or creeds, but upon mutual affinities for play.<sup>98</sup> This act of socialization is crucial for subjective experience, and when political and historical events impinge and supplant these sites of transformation, the process of becoming is stifled. Such fractures stunt the growth of the individual, coercing an adolescent moment of pause.

The projection of the young Minoru into the animated landscape of the film becomes a visual reclamation of this point of rupture. Animation provides a spatial fluidity open to a plurality of potentialities, opportunities to imaginatively explore the parameters of development. The animated figure's displacement from the photograph into the animated frame is then not an escapist act into a far away land but a knowing leap into the abyss of the past's shattered illusions. The juxtaposition of childlike animations with photographic imagery creates incoherence amidst a coherent narrative. Disorienting for the viewer, the visual oscillation between the actual and the virtual is less a filmic simulation of an experienced past and more a mirroring of historical excavation. It is an investigation into the void of the forgotten, lost, silenced, and unrepresentable by a motivated figure, which moves between layers of space and time.

#### *Diasporic Intergenerationality*

In *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History*, Elizabeth Tonkin reminds us that temporal overlaps are essential for acts of storytelling. Tellers can only speak in retrospect, and audiences may have multitudes of varying timelines amidst them. Both speaker and listener are inextricably tied to the pasts that shaped them, and this will always

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<sup>98</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 53.

inform the reception of narrated events.<sup>99</sup> Embedded within *Minoru*'s narrative is a schematized negotiation of these temporal gaps. As co-narrators, father and son serve as mediators between the experience of the past and its subsequent retellings. As an exilic traveler, Minoru has a particularized vantage point. He narrates a past he lived through and now re-encounters from a distance. As Boym discerns, the traveler who mediates between local and universal perspectives can provide national awareness.<sup>100</sup> Viewing his period of exile from an 'insider's outsideness' enables Minoru's surrogacy between private and public worlds.<sup>101</sup> However, Minoru is not the sole intermediary operating within the film; his son's collaborative performance provides a doubling of this exploration of the past, establishing a mirrored depth of learning about one's cultural heritage. Such inside-outside positions become crucial to acts of historical archaeology, as the reaches across time and space they imply are what grant unacquainted observers entry to history.

As witnesses to exilic experience – Minoru's literal geographic and cultural displacement; the son's temporal displacement from and vicarious reconciliation with his father's expatriation – father and son interact as two diasporics bonded in 'longing without belonging'.<sup>102</sup> Minoru's narration is largely detached and indirect in the film. His word choices dwell in the acceptance of lived alienation and uprootedness. His voice is separated from his son's. But through the father's act of divulging a once concealed past and Fukushima's visual engagement with those revelations, father and son participate in a shared narrative of experience. Their collaboration is then made available to a wider audience, the rapport between father and son having offered a mode of surrogacy for broader intergenerational connections. And intrinsic to the bond of diasporic intimacy that Boym advances, this relationship is mediated through its material production, which presents the shocking recognition of an intimate connection set against the backdrop of isolation. As if experiencing the physical sensations generated by a sudden human touch against one's skin,

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<sup>99</sup> Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66.

<sup>100</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 12.

<sup>101</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 14.

<sup>102</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, 253.

the father is startled into a personal, revelatory connection with his son, and viewers are invited into this process.

In *Minoru*, both testimony and image work together to forge compassionate connections between testimonies of the past and those unfamiliar with it. Working as a memory prompt, the film's initial image of the Fukushima family lends the link between speaker and listener a particular closeness. The revelatory nature of the narration suggests that, even if not close to the surface, such instances reside in memory. Of his uprooting and dislocation from his childhood home – though not immediately retrievable – Minoru's remembrance quickly becomes lush in detail: 'I can't recollect anything when the war started,' he begins. 'I was just having fun, you know, being a kid...growing up in Vancouver, over my parent's grocery store; 477 Powell Street. They had tobaccos and vegetables and fruit, an ice cream soda fountain and candy. My mom sold candy.'<sup>103</sup> Through its cinematic production, *Minoru* revitalizes a specific history. The filmmaker's animations enliven his father's testimony, where the work of unfolding the past fortifies a bond between father and son. Additionally, as Fukushima participates from an estranged vantage point of the past, his narrative voice typifies not an authority on a history he witnessed but instead places him in the position of inexperienced or uninformed viewer. This becomes an enabling double act allowing him to mediate between cultures and temporalities, while effectively providing access to a similarly stationed audience.

In his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin described the shock of memory, which suddenly infiltrates one's consciousness years after the event.<sup>104</sup> Marcel Proust's notion of the *mémoire involontaire* referred to the everyday cues that can activate the process of recollection.<sup>105</sup> *Minoru* similarly explores such a temporal reawakening, as dormant long-ago memories are suddenly revealed later in life. However, the photographic prompts envisioned in the film and the flood of memories they unleash are facilitated not by a

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<sup>103</sup> Fukushima, *Minoru*, 00:00:51.

<sup>104</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, [1923-1940] 2007), 211.

<sup>105</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Volume I: The Way by Swann's*, ed. Christopher Prendergast, trans. Lydia Davis (London: Penguin, [1913] 2003), 16.



memento from the past but by the second generation, the manifestation of the future. According to Boym, the act of looking backwards is held in disregard for the first-wave exile, who fears the possible sentimentalization or minimization of grief and loss. Instead, the search for roots and meaning has been left to the next generation, who has been emancipated to revisit a geographic and temporal past.<sup>106</sup>

### ***The Family Album***

The past is gone forever. We cannot return to it, nor can we reclaim it now as it was. But that does not mean that it is lost to us ... if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain. From these traces, markers that point to a past present ... can be pieced together.

– Annette Kuhn<sup>107</sup>

The Second World War brought with it an intensified period of racial hostility toward the Nisei generation. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, ethnic difference immediately garnered new connotative force. Engrained in the bodily, manifested in acts of violence, this potent discrimination was fixed in its physicality. It provoked a brutal severing, a breaking of both material and communal bonds. Many of those who were interned were given a mere twenty-four hours to surrender their homes, possessions, and financial holdings. They were often compelled to forego contact with friends and family in the process. This prohibition of personal communication persisted well after the war. But while the Redress Movement worked diligently to recover repossessed property, the intimate losses would never be completely restored. These personal injuries often ‘meant the forfeiture of memory itself’.<sup>108</sup> Irwin-Zarecka notes that many of those facing internment tried desperately to save what little personal possessions they could in the founding of what she termed a ‘memory household’.<sup>109</sup> Such a space could ‘reserve objects evoking people dear to us who are no longer here’,

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<sup>106</sup> Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

<sup>107</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Family and Imagination* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), 4.

<sup>108</sup> Sugiman, ‘Memories of Internment’, 371.

<sup>109</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 89.

objects that are able to offer ‘an anchor, the comfort of continuity and identity’.<sup>110</sup> These items included gifts, toys, and books. But the single ‘most cherished possession’ was the family photo album.<sup>111</sup>

Susan Stewart offers the interpretation that the photographic souvenir is able to reduce ‘the public, the monumental and the three dimensional into the miniature, that which can be enveloped by the body, into the two dimensional representation, that which can be appropriated within the privatised view of the individual subject’.<sup>112</sup> Outlining the encounters between public and private histories, Stewart explains how control over personal subjectivities within the public sphere is performed through memory objects, souvenirs, and the collection. For those who had been interned throughout British Columbia, uprooted from their communal relationships, the photograph became a way to cope with the devastation of the past and the crushing loss of loved ones. Photo albums provided new spaces for the creation of new bonds within the camp itself.<sup>113</sup> These objects worked to re-establish social networks, temporary and unstable as they may be. Following the war, these communal connections were indeed relinquished, as former internment prisoners were often forbidden to contact their fellow members. With such restrictions put in place, the splintering of the Japanese Canadian society was to be ensured well into the future. With little recourse, the community was obliged to foster social cohesion through memory, storytelling, and photography.<sup>114</sup>

Analogously, the interaction of these elements throughout *Minoru* works toward visual and narrative unity. Providing a new space for new voices, the film and its intermedial imagery attempts to undermine historical erasures while recovering a sense of wholeness. The family photo album is employed as not only a physical prompting of remembrance but also an evocation of the future. It becomes a survival tactic, operating in the hopes of achieving continuity, one that stretches across all the shattered yesterdays and into an intact tomorrow.

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<sup>110</sup> Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 89.

<sup>111</sup> Kunimoto, ‘Intimate Archives’, 133.

<sup>112</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 138.

<sup>113</sup> Sugiman, ‘Memories of Internment’, 370-371.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

In this light, the film's engagement with the photograph functions to acknowledge disunity as an effort toward rectification, most specifically seen by its interrelation of the family album with historical records, animation, and its incorporation of intergenerationality.

### *The Familial and Historical Archives*

Situated amidst the film's more intimate photographs, including the image of Minoru as a child in the arms of his father (Figure 1.26), there are also several photos that are not from the personal archives of the Fukushima family. As these images pass along the screen – photos of young children being escorted through the city streets by an officer of the state, of a family seated at their dinner table, or of a mother and her children presumably being expelled from the country (Figures 1.27-1.29) – it becomes unclear whether those photographed are members of the Fukushima family or strangers to them and us. The insertion of anonymous, public imagery into an intimate, familial story signifies at the very least the mediation of a personal past by the social archives. The public has been injected into the private, the private has moved into public space. But rather than emphasize its potentially negative implications – the public imagery possibly decried as a violation of individual experience, a squashing of individual testimony by the dominance of an official narrative – these interplays should not be read as indicative of the film's naiveté, a falling victim to its own propagandism.

Alternatively, in the context of its intermedial production – which I have argued encourage a type of 'critical nostalgia' that is neither overly sentimental nor blind – the engagements between public and private photographic records reemphasize the narrative's complex engagement with the 'official' archives. *Minoru* makes clear that memory and history, public and private, individual and communal modes of being are never mutually exclusive. These entities are instead wholly interwoven, and though violent clashes between interpretations will continue to knot themselves throughout this web of the past, it is through such incongruities that temporal subjectivities will coalesce, threading together the family, the nation, and the collective.

Sugiman's investigation observes that in dealing with the Japanese Canadian

internment and exile, survivors, redress activists, and subsequent generations may tend to conflate historical accounts with individual recall.<sup>115</sup> Whether successful, these attempts to reconcile the traumas of wartime attempted to authenticate a cohesive biographical narrative. The family album became crucial for these efforts, promising a perceived preservation of belonging, community, and a stable family unit in the face of a crisis that worked to obliterate these relational ties. In excess of redrawing communal bonds, personal photographs also epitomized individual autonomy over externally imposed subjectivities. Before and during wartime, the Canadian Government ordained and sanctioned photographic documentation of the Japanese Canadian community. These photos were often used to promote an intolerant image of the population as an othered and powerless group. For Japanese Canadians disempowered by visual propaganda, the taking of personal, domestic, and family photographs offered a different kind of connection between viewer and viewed, one that cried out from beneath the violating sheaths of subjugation. To this end, though perhaps not produced as a more crusading endeavor to destroy the official record and replace it with a personal one, *Minoru* is also not acting as a direct obfuscation or denial of the social climate it depicts by incorporating both personal and governmental records into its conceit. Instead, the film is reminiscent of and complicit with the practices of its cultural environment. It in fact stands as a product of it, participating with the burgeoning discourse regarding the internment and its representation.

#### *Animation and the Living Connection*

Historicizing the family photo album pushes the visibility of each image beyond its edges. It provides other contexts, calling attention to what lies just outside every photo's reach. The photograph is always beguiling; it makes a seemingly empty promise to reunite us with the past. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes articulated the indexical nature of photography as an 'umbilical cord', which – through its physical and luminous radiations – links the skin of the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 383.

photographed referent to the gaze of the viewer.<sup>116</sup> This conception invokes the photograph's potential for a material, tenuous bond between viewer and viewed, a living connection between past and present. Looking once again at the photographs of Fukushima with his father (Figures 1.16-1.17), we are reminded of the corporeal transference between the Issei and Nisei generations, an embodied experience between father and son and their interwoven timelines.

By animating and saturating with color the black-and-white photos of his immediate and extended family (Figures 1.30-1.32), Fukushima emphasizes this living connection to a familial past. The movements of the animated markings placed atop the film's imagery strengthen these generative and generational connections. At times these marks appear as white slivers in the foreground of the image, or small, black smudges muddying a document. Sometimes an intricate network of tiny vein-like structures spreads from within the photograph toward its peripheries. They emerge and dissolve as if part of an organic process, a membranous connective tissue joining together the new with the old, weaving the son into the branches of his family tree. As corporeal inscriptions, handmade productions that layer themselves onto the already visceral materiality of the photograph, these markings reinforce the embodied interconnections and material emanations experienced between generations. Emphasizing the touch of the human hand, the physical marks and the handmade transparencies hint at an intergenerational connection. They bring attention to the intimate materiality and personal projections involved in our attempts to connect with the past. The visible traces that cling to the filmic materials point to the transference of traumatic scarring, the wounds of abandonment and uprootedness that adhered to the witnesses of the internment and relocation, and the indelible imprint these experiences impose on generations to come. The father's past has left its mark on the son, and the son has left his mark on the father's past.

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<sup>116</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80-81.

### *Image and Intergenerationality*

The animated and photographic bonds in *Minoru* speak to an intergenerational formation of heritage, a process of becoming that is delicately navigated and heavily embodied. The insertion of the filmmaker's hand into his father's remembrance seams together lived experiences both past and contemporary. The animated markings and overlays dispatch an emblematic appeal for the past's recognition of the future generation, underlining a desire to not only understand the past but also be understood by it. It is a familial connection, a personal intervention between the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei generations. It is a movement that surpasses temporal and spatial constraints in order to establish an intergenerational history.

*Minoru*'s aesthetic production comes to serve its symbolic artifactuality, a temporal interaction that will endure in the 'unstoppable development' of its intergenerational dialogue via its ensuing viewings and narrations. The thin corporeal traces left behind in the aftermath of the Second World War have been exposed and elucidated in the film – not as a means to bring them back – but to acknowledge that they have always been there and will continue to be built upon.

It is not until *Minoru*'s conclusion that images of the son are revealed, presenting the filmmaker as a child in the embracing presence of his parents (Figures 1.16-1.17, 1.33). These are the culminating visions the film offers after its showing and telling of a personal and cultural heritage. It is a vision intrinsically linked to the life stories of Fukushima's mother and father, which exists as a layered past filtered through the prism of time. These photos express a disconnection between timelines in both their physicality and consciousness, as the filmmaker is established as two separate subjectivities: the child who is a stranger to his older self and the adult who represents himself at an age of transformation. It is a climactic union of temporalities, a process of remembering what had long been repressed, even though it was forever there. It is a process linked to multiple sets of memory, memories that – while independent and perhaps secret – continuously serve in the formation of the ongoing present.

## Conclusion

If *Minoru* exists along the continuum of personal and collective becomings, the path it takes is – to borrow Rothberg’s term – multidirectional. It requires back-and-forth movements across consciousness, space, and time. It is a looking backwards, but as Benjamin suggested in his reflections on childhood, it is a way backwards that carries us into the future.<sup>117</sup> It is a return to a past that held hopes of what could be, a nostalgic return to a youth that was plagued by political destruction and upheaval. And though the traumatic events of wartime may be thought to have passed, their presence remains. Each day forward is imbued with its precipitous history.

The material processes of animation are extensions of these embodied temporal layers. Each frame, each moment evoked, becomes the product of overlapping transparencies. Every handcrafted overlay is connotative of specific positions along a continuum of physical space and experienced time. And these instances communicate with each other, through their multimodal partnerships and subtle blends with one another. Multiple images bleed into each other to form a single image. Each single image connects with the others to create the moving image. What emerges is the formation of horizontal and vertical constellations. Every frame contains hidden layers of possibilities. The moving image contains possibilities for narrativization. There exists the potential for limitless expansions of space within animation, opportunities to embed individual histories against the backdrop of political and social landscapes.

‘My father came home and rebuilt his life,’ Fukushima narrates at the film’s conclusion. ‘In the process, many things were left best forgotten and unspoken. Those silences are a large part of my identity, my other heritage.’<sup>118</sup> A pronunciation of silence, *Minoru* gives attention to the life that flows just beneath the surface of things, interconnecting past and present and viewer and viewed in imperceptible ways. As the spinning wheel of

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<sup>117</sup> Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, ed. Michael William Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1928] 2016), 21-96.

<sup>118</sup> Fukushima, *Minoru*, 00:16:06.

individual memory turns, the material remnants of social and cultural memories are gathered together, interwoven into the fabrication of this personal and collective history. And through its emphasis on the multiplicity of memory – remembrances both spoken and unheard – *Minoru* attempts to reach beyond the cinematic screen into a broader communal network of experience.



**MIGRATION TWO. Poland-Canada.**  
*I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*

Animator Ann Marie Fleming was unfamiliar with Bernice Eisenstein's work when she was first approached by the National Film Board of Canada in 2006. But Fukushima, now a producer with the NFB, had recently optioned Eisenstein's graphic novel, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* – which chronicles the author's upbringing in Canada as the child of Holocaust survivors – and believed Fleming was entirely suited to lead its cinematic adaptation.<sup>1</sup> Fukushima had been interested in Fleming's 2003 animated short, *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam*, in which Fleming documents the life of her great-grandfather, a world-renowned Chinese-born magician and vaudevillian. Given the parallels between the two works – the mapping out of familial histories and geographies through an assemblage of handmade visuals – Fleming seemed an apt choice for the transformation of Eisenstein's graphic memoir into the medium of animation. Fleming, however, was unconvinced.<sup>2</sup> First, Fleming was not Jewish, and this was a Jewish story. Second, she had never adapted someone else's work. And most insurmountably, how would it be possible to represent the Holocaust, a subject that is so deeply entrenched in debates concerned with its innate unrepresentability?

The challenges seemed manifold. The aesthetic adaptation of Eisenstein's narrative presented a particular set of complications. Not only are the events of the Holocaust in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* told at a generational remove – its narrative premised on the experience of this second generation – but its cinematic representation would be further distanced from its historical roots and put in the charge of an unaffiliated filmmaker. What divergent implications might this production bear for those who directly experienced the Holocaust, for the families of the survivors, and for those who cannot lay claim to any immediate historical connection to the events?

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<sup>1</sup> Fukushima, discussion with author, appendix i.

<sup>2</sup> Fleming, 'I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors', interview by Wendy Dallian, *The Vancouver Observer*, 17 September 2010, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/filmreel/2010/09/16/i-was-child-holocaust-survivors>.

Despite Fleming's hesitation to adapt the novel – having been assured that neither the film's producers nor Eisenstein had concerns about Fleming's non-Jewish background or any lack of direct connection to the Holocaust itself – Fleming became attracted to the project.<sup>3</sup> She had recently been in the throes of reinterpreting *Long Tack Sam* as a graphic memoir and resultantly became engaged with issues concerning media adaptation.<sup>4</sup> She subsequently put forward a proposal, which was accepted by the NFB. A team of three animators – Lillian Chan, Howie Shia, and Kevin Langdale – signed on to work under Fleming's direction. Together they set out on what would become a four-year collaborative project with the aim of coalescing their discrete artistic voices with that of the original work.

The initial proposal for the film was quite complex. In contrast to *Minoru's* original conceit, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* was meant to be an hour-long mixed-media documentary that included interviews with the author.<sup>5</sup> Footage of Eisenstein's mother recounting her experience – which had been made available through the University of Southern California's Shoah Visual History Foundation (a nonprofit organization established in 1994 by Steven Spielberg, which collects and records the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses) – was to be included. And in keeping faithful to the book's narrative structure, there were to be flashbacks and flash-forwards, an interwoven folding backwards in time and returning to the present. But it was ultimately decided by the NFB that the film could only be fifteen minutes in length, for the purposes of making it eligible for film festivals as an animated short entry.<sup>6</sup> In addition, screenings of early versions of the film, which had included archival images of the Holocaust, proved unsuccessful with test audiences. Preliminary viewers found the archival images too shocking to watch alongside the animation, and Fleming decided to scrap these materials from the cinematic adaptation.<sup>7</sup> The project was instead streamlined into a strictly animated film, which adhered closely to Eisenstein's visual framework. But despite this simplification in form, the representational

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; and Fleming, *The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 2003), 35mm and DCP.

<sup>5</sup> Fleming, interviewed in the *IWACHS*, 'Adaptation, Animation, and Artists', DVD extra.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 'Cruelty: 200 Pages in 15 Minutes', DVD extra.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 'Approaching History and Dreams', DVD extra.

complexities inherent to depicting the Holocaust remained and in many instances were further problematized.

Fleming's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* presents a visual unraveling similar to that of the graphic novel. The film is not homogenous in execution or style. The background imagery has been stained, smudged, and spattered upon. Brushstrokes and erasures remain visible. Human figures are frayed at the edges, and the layers of animated imagery appear to collapse and fold like paper. In the wake of these fallen remnants and loose ends, left behind is a pervasive tactility. Each visual thread maintains a distinct texture. There is a vibration to every movement, a clear emphasis on the sensation of touch. By the time the opening credits roll – after we have been introduced to the engraved ring that has passed between victims and survivors of the Holocaust, between Eisenstein's mother and father, and finally passed onto Eisenstein herself; after we have watched the gentle caresses given to her father's ties and vests; and after her mother and father have been envisioned in a warm embrace – within this first minute of the film, hands and materiality have been referenced nearly a dozen times.

This tactile imagery makes thematic the concept of multiplicity. The film stresses the manifold layers of aesthetic styles, material forms, artistic voices, and the number of hands that have touched and crafted the visual narrative. These varying gradations complement the original narrative. But while the presence of these mingled aesthetic modes highlights the plurality of temporalities, geographies, and translations that are interwoven throughout Eisenstein's account, there is also something unsettling about their disjunctions. The countless visual variations of Eisenstein's younger self (Figure 2.1), for example, impress on the audience that Eisenstein's story is not her own. Instead, this biography appears interchangeable, open, accessible. But given the immense and unknowable subject matter at the heart of this narrative, should it be? The visual mechanics of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* encourage a reading beyond a particularized, first-hand, or familial witnessing of the Holocaust and alternatively offer a vision of a universalized, perhaps overly simplified experience. However, is this an issue based on aesthetic choice or solely an inherent offshoot of animated film and its production? Does this distinction matter? Can perceived

insensitivities toward the experience of the Holocaust ever be reconciled?

This discussion contemplates how *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* relates to such questions regarding Holocaust representation, with particular attention given to the graphic memoir and the subgenre of Holocaust film. In the previous chapter, I posited that *Minoru* grew out of an emerging discourse germane to the history depicted, which made it less radical in its representational tone and more concerned with relaying the story. The film worked to break the silences of a long-suppressed history. The production of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, however, reveals an inverse of circumstances. There exists a massive and contentious field of study pertaining to the Holocaust and its representation. When engaged with, this immense amount of critical scholarship dictates severe limitations, making rife with complications any production related to the event. My investigation of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* assesses how the film navigates through the larger polemics surrounding Holocaust representation. This analysis will first provide an overview of the more dominant scholarly and critical discourses at hand before locating *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* within them. Specific contingencies and significations for animation and the graphic novel with respect to the dilemmas of Holocaust representation will emerge throughout this inquiry. Though I work to contextualize *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* within these debates, my analysis does not side with any particular critical argumentation. Rather, taking into consideration this discursive terrain, I explore how Eisenstein and Fleming's works are able to raise new questions for representational analysis. Especially useful to this end is an engagement with Marianne Hirsch's writings on the artistic practices of second-generation Holocaust survivors, what she terms 'postmemory production'. More broadly, this examination deals with foundational questions regarding artistic responses to official archives, historiographical ethos, and how we are able to represent atrocity while continuously interrogating the visual form's capacity to do so.

## **Part I. Critical Debates**

Responding to the upsurge in the production and positive reception of Holocaust melodramas

– which included *The Night Porter* (1974), *Pasqualino settebellezze* [*Seven Beauties*] (1975), the U.S. National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) television miniseries *Holocaust* (1978), *Sophie's Choice* (1982), and *War and Remembrance* (1988) – Elie Wiesel took to *The New York Times* to offer a public reminder: 'Auschwitz is something else, always something else. It is a universe outside the universe, a creation that exists parallel to creation...no one can now retell Auschwitz after Auschwitz. The truth of Auschwitz remains hidden in its ashes. Only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so.'<sup>8</sup> These words of warning concerning the inevitable failures of Holocaust representation were nothing radical. Wiesel's cautionary statement echoed a great many assertions made by theorists and historians who had been debating the topic since the end of WWII, including Raul Hilberg, Lucy Davidowicz, Martin Gilbert, Michael Marrus, Theodor Adorno, George Steiner, and Saul Friedländer. Wiesel's words were also a reiteration of the 'plea for the survivors' he offered in his 1978 book, *A Jew Today*.<sup>9</sup> But despite everything that had been written and rewritten on the topic, the perceived slippage of the Holocaust's unrepresentability from social consciousness compelled Wiesel to repeat his words of admonition.

It is an understatement to note that the scholarly and critical debates centering on Holocaust representation have been extensive within contemporary humanities. It has been the subject of almost ritualistic scrutiny, with detailed evaluations appearing nearly every time an artwork dealing with the event emerges within Western mainstream culture. These analyses are predominantly rooted in perspectives ranging from the more flexible notion that portrayals of the Holocaust – while permitted – must fall within certain representational constraints, to the strict condemnations of any such representation. The primary objections inferred by each argumentation largely fall under two major categories: first, the inability of

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<sup>8</sup> Elie Wiesel, 'Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing Memory', *The New York Times*, 11 June 1989, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html>. See also Liliana Cavani, *The Night Porter* (Wilmington: AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1974), 35mm; Lina Wertmüller, *Pasqualino settebellezze* (Rome: Medusa Distribuzione, 1975), 35mm; Marvin J. Chomsky, *Holocaust* (New York: National Broadcasting Company, 1978), 35mm; Alan J. Pakula, *Sophie's Choice* (Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1982), 35mm; and Dan Curtis, *War and Remembrance* (Burbank: Disney-ABC Domestic and Buena Vista Pictures, 1988-1989), 35mm.

<sup>9</sup> Wiesel, *A Jew Today* (New York: Random House, 1978).

any Holocaust representation to capture atrocity and experiences of it, and second, the commercialization or kitsch value of works about the Holocaust, which have been produced and marketed for mass consumption, perhaps even enjoyment or spectacle. The following attempts to break down the more specific components and assumptions present within these protestations, and will specifically keep in mind these critiques as they pertain to both the graphic and animated editions of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*.

### ***Failures of Representation***

When philosopher Jean-François Lyotard argued in his 1983 book, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, that the way we are able to talk about reality died in the Auschwitz gas chambers, he alluded to something apart from the theoretical unspeakability of the Holocaust. Lyotard's is instead a pragmatic postulation: the one who could testify to being murdered in the gas chambers is not there to testify.<sup>10</sup> Even if there were words equipped to adequately describe the act itself, the insidiousness of the destruction of Holocaust experience renders testament to it an impossibility. It is conclusively unrepresentable, or in Lyotard's terms, 'unpresentable'.<sup>11</sup> Paradoxical as it may sound, his thesis proposes that the moment an attempt is made to memorialize, remember, or depict Auschwitz, Auschwitz has already been forgotten. It is one thing if the atrocities of the Holocaust are indescribable, but it is another if the memory of those events becomes conflated with narrativization and depiction. For Lyotard, what is left of the event exists in a formless haze of forgetting and should remain so.

While this premise is highly restrictive, Lyotard acknowledges that representation is also inescapable. He distinguishes between attempts to record or 'save the memory' as a mode of documentation and other efforts that might 'preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten', which would be akin to fictionalizing the historical event.<sup>12</sup> But despite this distinction, it remains nearly impossible for artistic works to comply with Lyotard's guidelines, be it romanticized melodrama or thoroughly researched investigation.

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<sup>10</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1983] 1988), 3, 6, 14, 16, 27, and 32.

<sup>11</sup> See Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the Jews'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), which consists of nine-and-a-half hours of testimony from Holocaust survivors and witnesses, would not pass the test put forth by Lyotard, due to its reliance upon the utterance of individual remembrance.<sup>13</sup> Lyotard observes that such personal digressions can subsume memory itself, the act of remembering becoming so painful that its display takes the focus away from the remembered event (as is the case in one particularly emotional moment of *Shoah*, when survivor Jan Karski turns his back on the camera and walks away from the interview). Moreover, Lanzmann's editing choices would devalue the film as documentation. While widely regarded as the most comprehensive cinematic testament to the Holocaust, *Shoah* excluded over three hundred hours of footage.<sup>14</sup> For Lyotard, this would indicate that the goal for Lanzmann's film is not to 'save the memory' but to shape it in some way, whether that would be to make it more easily digestible, identifiable, or the most emotionally charged.<sup>15</sup>

Lyotard's argument is useful for discussing *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* as it encapsulates some of the prominent aspects tying together many of the long-standing arguments concerning artistic depictions of the Holocaust, a critical terrain the film is obliged to traverse. Specifically, there are three representational traps implicit in the writings of Lyotard, each of which can be found in the various arguments of Wiesel, Steiner, Adorno, and Friedländer, that *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* – like many of its literary and cinematic predecessors – encounters: first, the employment of narrative fragmentation as a mode of storytelling; second, the reliance upon personal memory as a historical source; and third, the issue of tenuous authenticity. What follows is an examination of how – in relation to its visual antecedents – *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* engages with these representational strategies, sometimes succumbing to and other times subverting their

<sup>13</sup> Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (New York: New Yorker Films, 1985), 16mm and 35mm.

<sup>14</sup> See Richard Brody, 'Witness: Claude Lanzmann and the Making of *Shoah*', *The New Yorker*, 19 March 2012, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/19/witness-5>; Shoshana Felman, 'The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*', in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Felman and Dori Laub, MD (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 204-283; Miriam Hansen, 'Schindler's List Is Not *Shoah*, The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory', *Critical Inquiry* 22.2 (1996): 292-312; and Gertrud Koch, 'Transformations esthétiques dans la représentation de l'inimaginable', in *Au sujet de 'Shoah': Le film de Claude Lanzmann*, ed. Bernard Cuau, trans. Catherine Weinzorn (Paris: Editions Belin, 1990), 157-166.

<sup>15</sup> Lyotard, *Heidegger*, 26.

hazardous ramifications.

### *Narrative Fragmentation*

Holocaust scholar Jacek Leociak insists that any notion that narrative could present the world as a sensible entity collapsed after Auschwitz. Correspondingly, attempts to represent the unrepresentable events of the Holocaust have increasingly taken on forms that self-reflexively model this inadequacy. ‘Micronarratives’, as Leociak calls them, have become the digestible mode of Holocaust representation, forms that are ‘fragmentary, temporary, provisional, incomplete’.<sup>16</sup> Granted, any artistic representation or historical documentation of the Holocaust will be incomplete. In *I sommersi e i salvati* [*The Drowned and the Saved*], Primo Levi stressed that even Holocaust survivors cannot testify to a whole truth, for they are not ‘true witnesses’ but only those that ‘did not touch bottom’.<sup>17</sup> Aware of the impossibility of speaking to the event’s entirety, many literary and cinematic representations instead narrowed their narrative focus onto individual remembrance. These include the seminal memoirs of Auschwitz survivors Wiesel (*Un di velt hot geshivign* [*And the World Remained Silent*] (1956) and its subsequent adaptation, *La nuit* [*Night*] (1958)) and Levi (*Se questo è un uomo* [*If This is a Man*] (1947) and *La tregua* [*The Truce*] (1963)), which provide personal testimony of the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> Also included in this narrative category are accounts of isolated events, as is the case with Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) and Bryan Singer’s *Valkyrie* (2008), both of which stand not as films about the totality of the Holocaust but cinematic representations of specific events within it.<sup>19</sup>

*I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* emerges from this lineage of micronarratives. It also bears a pedigree of visual forms that – as contemporary literature scholar Hilary Chute elucidates – uniquely emphasize a narrative as fragmentary or partial: the comic book and

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<sup>16</sup> Jacek Leociak, ‘On the Abuses in Research of the Holocaust Experience’, *Holocaust: Studies and Materials* English edition 2 (2010): 386.

<sup>17</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1988), 83-84.

<sup>18</sup> Wiesel, *Un di velt hot geshivign* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-Farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1956); and *La nuit* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1958); Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1947); and *La tregua* (Torino: Einaudi, 1963).

<sup>19</sup> Steven Spielberg, *Schindler’s List* (Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1993), 35mm; and Bryan Singer, *Valkyrie* (Beverly Hills: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 2008), 35mm and DCP.



graphic novel.<sup>20</sup> Most notably, Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize winning *Maus I, A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* and *Maus II, A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Begin* kindled interest in representations of the Holocaust through comic forms. Spiegelman's graphic novels raised provocative issues about the medium's aesthetic potential and ability to deal with the 'limits of representation' inherent to its subject matter.<sup>21</sup> Published in 1986 and 1991 respectively, *Maus I* and *II* visually translated the survival of Spiegelman's father, Vladek, from Auschwitz, and the complex relationship had between father and son in the war's aftermath. Spiegelman had long worked as an underground cartoonist and advocated the recognition of the graphic novel within the mainstream. But it wasn't until his controversial decision to represent the Holocaust through it – combined with his startling portrayal of all involved parties as animals (picturing the Jews as mice, the Nazis as cats, and the Poles as pigs) – that propelled artistic and scholarly inquiry into the medium's capabilities.

Critical analyses of *Maus* yielded both severe condemnation and effusive praise. Negative reception of the novels has been far surpassed by critical acclaim since their original release, but those who did deem *Maus* a strategic failure or underscore its conceptual flaws pointed to its reductive nature. Comic book author and critic Harvey Pekar reasoned that the work's primary error laid in its depiction of the protagonist's father, which Pekar interpreted as a biased caricature that detracted from Spiegelman's more substantive and elevated representation of the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup> Pekar also found Spiegelman's reluctance to visualize war within the narrative as unnecessarily minimalist, as he believed the graphic novel altogether capable of handling themes of such gravity and did not need to rely upon the allegoric device of anthropomorphism.<sup>23</sup> Many scholars, including literary critic Hillel Halkin, also objected to Spiegelman's use of the animal as visual metaphor, finding that it was 'doubly dehumanizing,

<sup>20</sup> See Hillary Chute, "'The Shadow of a Past Time': History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*", *Twentieth Century Literature* 52.2 (2006): 199-230.

<sup>21</sup> See Saul Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 41-42; Deborah R. Geis ed., *Considering Maus: Approaches to Art Spiegelman's 'Survivor Tale' of the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003); and Philip Smith, *Reading Art Spiegelman* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 42-101

<sup>22</sup> Harvey Pekar, 'Maus and Other Topics', *Comics Journal* 113 (1986): 55-57.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

once by virtue of symbolism and once by virtue of graphic limitations'.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, not only did this stylistic choice reduce characters to racist stereotypes, but it also reinforced a principal tenet of Nazism, namely that the atrocities were perpetrated by one species against another, rather than humans against humans. According to Spiegelman, initial attempts to present his work to Holocaust survivors or their children were met with similarly intense outrage, mostly in regard to the use of comics, as its 'low art' status was felt to have effectively trivialized tragedy.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this minimization of authentic experience was bolstered by *The New York Times* when, upon the original publication of *Maus*, the novel was labeled under the 'Fiction' category of their bestseller list.<sup>26</sup>

Conversely, many scholars applauded the choice of medium as a means of self-reflexively signifying the deficits of Holocaust representation. Paul Buhle notes that many readers considered *Maus* 'the most compelling of any [Holocaust] depiction, perhaps because only the caricatured quality of comic art is equal to the seeming unreality of an experience beyond all reason'.<sup>27</sup> Rothberg contends that Spiegelman captured the 'hypertensity' of the Holocaust 'by situating a nonfictional story in a highly mediated, unreal, "comic" space'.<sup>28</sup> And Chute pushes this further, offering a meticulous analysis of the graphic novel's visual and narrative structure to demonstrate how *Maus* innovatively plays with space and time, making an indecipherable history 'readable through form'.<sup>29</sup> For Chute, the aesthetic presentation of the fragmentary – found in the comic panels and gutters (the in-between spaces that separate those panels) – against the larger visual conceit of each page emphasizes *Maus*' interplay of various timelines and levels of perception, multiplicities that share the

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<sup>24</sup> See also Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996); Andrew Loman, 'The Canonization of *Maus*', in *The Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts*, eds. Paul Williams and James Lyons (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010); Peter Obst, 'A Commentary on *Maus* by Art Spiegelman', American Council for Polish Culture, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.polishcultureacpc.org/books/Maus.html>; Pekar, 'Maus and Other Topics', 54-57; and Hillel Halkin, 'Inhuman Comedy', *Commentary* (1992): 55.

<sup>25</sup> Art Spiegelman, quoted in Arie Kaplan *Masters of the Comic Book Universe Revealed!* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006), 119.

<sup>26</sup> Spiegelman, 'A Problem of Taxonomy', *The New York Times*, 21 December 1991, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/29/books/l-a-problem-of-taxonomy-37092.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Buhle, 'Of Mice and Menschen: Jewish Comics Come of Age', *Tikkun* 7.2 (1992): 16.

<sup>28</sup> Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: the Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), 206.

<sup>29</sup> Chute, 'Shadow', 200.

same space. The final page of *Maus II* (Figure 2.2), for example, underscores several temporal intersections. Chute points us to Spiegelman's signature on the page – positioned under the gravesite of his parents, the grass growing from beneath the tombstone – which she suggests pushes the eye up the preceding comic frames and correspondingly back in time.<sup>30</sup> Spiegelman's manipulation of the spatial flows of the page permits back-and-forth or up-and-down readings, which highlight the ceaseless interrelations between timelines as opposed to narrative closure.

These more flexible interpretations – which validate the comic book's ability to deal with tragic subjects – along with the critical success of *Maus I* and *II*, promoted new literary subgenres. Broadly, Spiegelman's *Maus* precipitated the rise of recent 'tragicomics', a genre that includes Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (published in 2000 by Pantheon Books, the original publisher of *Maus*) and Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1996) and *Safe Area Goražde* (2000), which chronicle the author's war reportage of Palestine and Bosnia.<sup>31</sup> More specifically, *Maus* ignited the increased production and cultural recognition of graphic novels engaging with the Holocaust, dubbed 'Holocomics'.<sup>32</sup> These works include Joe Kubert's *Yossel: April 19, 1943, A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (2003), which imagines an alternate reality in which his parents – who had emigrated from Poland to America in the 1920s – had not left before the rise of Nazism; and Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* (2004), which visually contrasts stories of genocide between the Holocaust and the former Yugoslavia.<sup>33</sup>

What fundamentally distinguishes Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* from its counterparts, leading also to its more ambiguous position within the subgenres of the 'tragi-' or 'holo-' comic, is its visual structure. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is not a traditional graphic novel. Aside from a seventeen page comics-esque spread of text, image, panels, and gutters, the remainder of the novel would more aptly be described as an illustrated

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 215-220.

<sup>31</sup> Joe Sacco, *Palestine* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 1996); and *Safe Area Goražde* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> 'Holocaust and the Arts: Comics About the Shoah', Holocomics.net, accessed 24 April 2016, [http://www.holocomics.net/comics\\_holocaust.html](http://www.holocomics.net/comics_holocaust.html).

<sup>33</sup> Joe Kubert, *Yossel: April 19, 1943. A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (New York: ibooks, 2003); and Pascal Croci, *Auschwitz* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004).

memoir.<sup>34</sup> When viewed in conjunction with the visual structures of its predecessors, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is a departure from the form, lying somewhere between the works of Levi and Spiegelman. Visions of the past remain, but the confining nature of the standard comic panel has disintegrated. The placements of Eisenstein's drawings vary. Sometimes they peek out from the margins of the page (Figure 2.3), other times they serve as the text's visual centerpiece (Figure 2.4). Seen in relation to *Maus*' aesthetic, the images in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* appear freed from the more traditional visual constraints of the medium. They are allowed movement, enabled to fluidly emerge and dissolve within the textual narrative whenever deemed fit.

This aesthetic emancipation is a double-edged sword. Take for example the portrait Eisenstein provides of her father (Figure 2.5), a focal point for her written remembrance of how he looked and dressed.<sup>35</sup> While liberated from a more suffocating comic frame – from being literally boxed in – the positioning of this image within the text restrains its representation in another sense. The dominating shape, size, and placement of this visual depiction reinscribes the father's image, becoming less a self-aware critique of the parameters of aestheticization and more a laying claim to fuller representation. The self-reflexive fragmentation of the traditional graphic novel has been undone, replaced by a more permeating visual presence. The lavender coloration marking the father's image saturates the text, absorbing it and clouding the reader's mind from alternative visualizations. In this image, we do not detect the crisscrossings of multiple timelines and perspectives that Chute is able to read into the last page of *Maus II*. Instead, we are met solely with the present moment, with Eisenstein's reinterpretation of the past. And in this regard, it becomes a temporal and representational enclosure, something echoed by the accompanying text itself: 'Always, my father reminded me of a caged animal.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 66-83. Hereafter, the novel will be referred to as *IWACHS* in footnotes.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Such visual inhibition is more difficult to detect in the film. The variations of animation style provided by animators Fleming, Chan, Shia, and Langdale more readily allow for multiple visions of the past, and this serves to self-consciously emphasize the fragmentary and limited capabilities of the imagery. Continuing to look at representations of the father, we perceive flexibility in the film's visions of him (Figure 2.6). Awareness of these aesthetic subjectivities is underscored from the film's outset, when Eisenstein is depicted as a child, drawing her father's face (Figure 2.7). This mirrors Eisenstein's original illustrations, which display similar discrepancies in form and detail (Figure 2.8). The difference between these sets of imagery, however, is rooted in their respective temporal natures. In Eisenstein's memoir, each illustration allows itself to be lingered upon, not necessarily in relation to other images but to the text itself. This is what facilitates a more pervasive connection between the represented events and the visual forms they take, as is the case with the portrait of the father. The pace and movement of the cinematic imagery, on the other hand, makes the stylistic incoherence more pronounced, as one aesthetic vision rapidly morphs into another.

Their structural distinctions point to the ways the original graphic novel and its animated adaptation are differently suited to reassert the narrative's complex interweaving of multiple perspectives. Though the graphic novel's imagery appears to at times overshadow the narrative through its prominence, it remains a story rooted in fragments, pieces of an immense and unsolvable puzzle. Visual remnants and textual vignettes interweave, overlap, and intersect disparate timelines throughout the novel, and these movements work against narrative cohesion. The film, however, does not exactly share the graphic novel's more anti-narrative stance. The choice to retain Eisenstein's textual excerpts, which are then reenvisioned by a unique animator, is correlative with the original's staccato narrative style. The film's varying aesthetics challenge perceptions of animation as a reductive medium. However, this is complicated by the film's heavy reliance upon both audial and visual transitional devices. The blending together of the film's heterogeneous parts through musical interludes and visual segues (like the symbolic gold ring that ushers in the film's introduction

and conclusion; the swastika patterns that sprawl out to diagram Auschwitz; or the images of bagels that float across the screen like clouds, only to be plucked from the sky and passed down to an infant Eisenstein) plays down the in-between spaces – the gaps and ‘gutters’ – of Holocaust remembrance and representation.<sup>37</sup> It yields effortlessness where the original text evoked more pervasive feelings of struggle and uncertainty. This incongruity between the film and the graphic novel, between a seemingly comprehensive narrative versus an incomprehensible experience is solidified by the film’s figurative bookends, as it opens and closes with the animated image of a young Eisenstein sitting on top of the world (Figures 2.9-2.10). Neatly enclosing a complicated past that in the novel appeared to be spilling out uncontrollably, this imagery stands as an apt visual metaphor for the film’s narrativistic turn to offer a ‘whole picture’ of this subjective experience.

Evidenced by these tensions are the challenges encountered by Holocaust micronarratives. While attempting to avoid producing overly generalized or intact representations of Holocaust experience, for many critics and scholars, fragmented narratives will never be fragmented enough. When Wiesel asks of dramatic interpretations of the Holocaust why there is ‘this determination to show “everything” in pictures?’ when ‘a word, a glance, silence itself communicates more and better’, he references the complexities not of what can or cannot be shown but how it can be shown.<sup>38</sup> A representational dilemma underlying the highly polarizing *Schindler’s List*, for example – a cinematic portrayal of Oskar Schindler, the Sudeten German Catholic entrepreneur who risked his life to save eleven hundred of the Jewish factory workers he had previously exploited – is not that this story is merely partial but that its partial nature is deemphasized. When Spielberg addressed his critics by stressing that he did not make a movie about the Holocaust but only ‘one story from the Holocaust’, he evades what lies at the heart of the critique: that the events in question

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<sup>37</sup> Fleming, *IWACHS*, 00:00:22 and 00:13:48; 00:06:28; and 00:06:03, respectively.

<sup>38</sup> Wiesel, ‘Art and the Holocaust’, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html>.

have been narrativized.<sup>39</sup> Mediated by classic tropes of Hollywood cinema, *Schindler's List* has been derided for speciously promoting a coherent understanding of an indecipherable abyss of atrocity. Miriam Hansen faults Spielberg's film for giving the illusion that its narrative stands as a microcosm of the larger whole.<sup>40</sup> She concludes that its reliance on 'historicist underpinnings', which include its use of fifty interviews conducted with the *Schindlerjuden* – those who were saved by Schindler – as source material, as well as being marketed and packaged as a film 'based on a true story', enables it to falsely declare possession of more than just an isolated event, claiming instead a 'totality of the Holocaust experience'.<sup>41</sup>

The 'based on a true story' descriptor is especially problematic for *Schindler's List*. David Bathrick notes the many complications that arise from this claim, particularly as the film's links to the 'real story' are sourced upon the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, accounts that are entirely anomalous.<sup>42</sup> Several other critics of *Schindler's List*, notably Lanzmann and Gertrud Koch, observed that the film – to its own detriment – followed a trend that emerged during the time of its production, which celebrated individual survival, rather than memorializing mass death.<sup>43</sup> It would seem that the challenge for artistic representations of the Holocaust lies in doing both, in reverentially balancing life with death in order to not, as Wiesel writes, 'betray the dead and humiliate the living'.<sup>44</sup> And since this precarious equity must also operate within certain representational constrictions, depictions would not be able to deviate from established norms. Neither additive nor subtractive, Holocaust representations cannot ignore any side of the equation.

Just as Spielberg shielded criticisms by citing *Schindler's List's* narrative specificity, Fleming described her own coming to terms with the complex representational issues inherent

<sup>39</sup> Steven Spielberg, quoted in Martin Grove, 'Hollywood Report: *Schindler* Global Hit; *Maverick* Sneaks Well', *Hollywood Reporter*, 6 April 1994: 8.

<sup>40</sup> Hansen, 'Schindler's List Is Not Shoah', 297

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. See also Ora Gelley, 'Narration and the Embodiment of Power in *Schindler's List*' (paper given at the Society for Cinema Studies annual conference, New York, New York, March 1995).

<sup>42</sup> David Bathrick, 'Rescreening "The Holocaust": The Children's Stories', *New German Critique* 80 (2000): 48.

<sup>43</sup> Lanzmann, 'Why Spielberg Has Distorted the Truth', *Guardian Weekly* 3 April 1994, 1.7; and Koch, as quoted in James Hoberman, 'Schindler's List: Myth, Movie, and Memory', *Village Voice*, 29 March 1994, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Wiesel, 'Art and the Holocaust', <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html>.

to the adaptation of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* by distancing the narrative from the broader event.<sup>45</sup> For Fleming, the filmic process relied on taking ‘the Holocaust out of the Holocaust’.<sup>46</sup> The story, she says, became ‘about a state of mind’ and about ‘interpersonal, particularly family, dynamics’.<sup>47</sup> It is tempting to try and analyze the film along those parameters. It is true that the narrative focus of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* in its textual and cinematic forms is not placed on the Holocaust itself but on its aftermath. However, the Holocaust remains at the root of Eisenstein’s account. Though it works to shift perspectival interpretation of the events by way of the second generation – an issue I will discuss more at length in the second half of this chapter – the centrality of the Holocaust cannot be displaced. There is no simple workaround. There is no way to talk about the Holocaust without talking about it, no way to deal with the Holocaust without dealing with it. The discourse can change, but in order for that to happen, both the graphic novel and animated film still need to negotiate the scholarship surrounding the ethics of Holocaust depiction. This is why I have discussed and will continue to analyze *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* in relation to these representational complexities.

### *Memory as Historical Source*

Through the self-reflexive employment of specific narratives, autobiographical or testimonial productions aim to provide points of entry into Holocaust experience. In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, we find an idiosyncratic tale that – with every pieced-together turn – acknowledges that it is not representative of the entirety of the Holocaust. Simultaneously, its composite structure and particularized narrative works to free itself and its audience from the project of working through the traces of an unknowable past. This maneuver – allowing the subject to both speak to the event while attempting to evade its perceived unspeakability – signifies a complex ethics of aesthetics. Modern Polish literature scholar Aleksandra

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<sup>45</sup> Fleming, interview by Dallian, <http://www.vancouverobserver.com/blogs/filmreel/2010/09/16/i-was-child-holocaust-survivors>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



Ubertowska asserts that when we talk about survivors' testimonies in the form of memoirs, diaries, or epistolography, there is a tendency to suspend criticism regarding the works' artistic standing.<sup>48</sup> In the case of Holocaust representations – when the very validity of the historical event having happened has been questioned – any autonomy from documented sources or 'factual' evidence becomes that much more perilous. Consequently, it is preferable that Holocaust portrayals display the properties of authenticity, constraint, and adherence to established fact.<sup>49</sup> Formal elements should refrain from any unnecessary embellishment. Instead, they should fall in line with a tradition of testimonial representation, which Ubertowska describes as a 'quasi-documentary' relayed via individual experience.<sup>50</sup>

In his cautionary essay 'On the Abuses in the Research of the Holocaust Experience', Leociak characterizes this anti-positivist, pro-narrative approach to researching, analyzing, and representing the Holocaust as severely flawed.<sup>51</sup> He takes specific issue with the postmodernist assumption that 'history' is not a standalone entity but a product of active and flexible construction. That this view has become increasingly espoused within the humanities concerns Leociak. Arguing that this perspective is abusive to 'historical sources' and 'historical facts', Leociak challenges the idea that history is reliant upon various fragments of indirect information, which must then be restructured by the historian, author, or artist. Furthermore, he criticizes the dependency upon personal testimony and remembrance as tools that can verify past events, as their use creates a slippery slope. Similarly, historian Kerwin Lee Klein more broadly warns that the growing fascination with memory studies is eroding modes of intellectual inquiry.<sup>52</sup> Klein notes the prevalence of two disabling notions of memory within the contemporary humanities: the 'therapeutic', which stems out of Freudian theory, and the postmodern 'avant-garde', which emphasizes an individual 'direct

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<sup>48</sup> Aleksandra Ubertowska, 'The Uplifting Power of Kitsch. Holocaust Literature (Esthetically) Astray', *Holocaust: Studies and Materials* English edition 2 (2010): 166-167.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ubertowska, 'The Uplifting Power of Kitsch', 166-167.

<sup>51</sup> Leociak, 'On the Abuses', 385-395.

<sup>52</sup> Kerwin Lee Klein, 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse', *Representations* 69 (2000): 127-150.

experiencing' that ultimately seeks to replace history and become its opposite.<sup>53</sup> For Klein, underscoring personal involvement and knowledge in relation to history premises itself on its capacity to encapsulate and impart to the perceiver what is inherently unrelatable and inexpressible. Precariously, this defective mode of historicization, Klein argues, seems an ideal tool for the investigation and representation of the Holocaust as it surreptitiously gains access to the ineffable and unthinkable. Moreover, it justifies a neoteric treading into previously forbidden representational territory. As James Berger points out in his research on literature and trauma, a 'discourse of the inexpressible' has become a preoccupation within memory and trauma studies, yielding a 'traumatic-sacred-lofty otherness' in the postmodernist dealings with historical catastrophe.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, the apparent untouchability of personal memory has offered it a protective barrier from interrogation. How productive a task is it for the cultural critic to challenge the integrity of another's individual experiences, remembrances, or interpretation of lived events? The hesitation to question portrayals of witnessed accounts, especially as they pertain to the horrifically traumatic and highly particularized experience of Holocaust survival, bounces around a perceptual bipolarity. On the one hand, to dispute the personal testimony of traumatic experience risks an egregious and offensive action taken toward the victim. On the other, there exists an underlying perception that memory is inherently faulty, something bound to cave in to thorough inquiry. So what then is to be gained by challenging its historical veracity?

A byproduct of leaving unchallenged the perceived unassailability of memory representation, however, is the opportunity for misleading or erroneous information to slip through the cracks. Take for example Benjamin Wilkomirski's 1995 Holocaust memoir, *Bruchstücke: Aus einer kindheit 1939–1948*, later published in English as *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*.<sup>55</sup> In this narrative, Wilkomirski recounts his experience as a child survivor of the Holocaust, who hid from the Nazis in a Polish farmhouse with his

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> James Berger, 'Trauma and Literary Theory', *Contemporary Literature* 38.3 (1997): 569–583.

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Bruchstücke: Aus einer kindheit 1939–1948* (Berlin: Juedischer Verlag, 1995).

brother and father before their eventual capture and imprisonment at the Majdanek and Auschwitz concentration camps. Initial critical reception of the memoir was quite favorable. Comparisons were drawn between Wilkomirski's writing and that of Levi, Wiesel, and Anne Frank. But in 1998, Swiss journalist Daniel Ganzfried began questioning the validity of many of Wilkomirski's descriptions of the camps. His inquest revealed that Wilkomirski was in fact not a Latvian-born Holocaust survivor but a Swiss-born man named Bruno Grosjean who had spent the majority of his childhood growing up in various orphanages in Switzerland.<sup>56</sup> Despite assertions by the author that his account was still based on autobiographical elements and the defenses of critics and scholars who sought to preserve the work's literary value, the text was largely shunned.<sup>57</sup> The book sparked considerable debate within Germany and Switzerland regarding treatment of the Holocaust in contemporary representation and the larger issues of authenticity in relation to the autobiography and witness testimony.<sup>58</sup>

I do not suggest that Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is or should be equated to such a case of memoir fabrication. But there remains a subtle complication to its positioning within the genre of the Holocaust memoir, a work that could elucidate Holocaust experience. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*' awareness of its temporal remove from the Holocaust and its place within Holocaust representation makes ambiguous its classification. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* emphasizes that it has been informed by – if not modeled after – the more prominent memoirs of Holocaust victims and survivors. This central aspect of the narrative is visually acknowledged within the novel and film when a young Eisenstein is seen perched atop a stack of autobiographies, including those written by Levi and Wiesel. Given that this story is not about surviving the Holocaust and instead gives testimony to the experience of growing up in a family and community of Holocaust survivors, the stakes for Eisenstein's narrative and representational structure are markedly different than

<sup>56</sup> See Stefan Maeckler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (Berlin: Schocken Books Inc, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> See Ibid.; Ross Chambers, 'Orphaned Memories, Foster-Writing, Phantom Pain: The Fragments Affair', in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, eds. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 92–111; and Blake Eskin, *A Life in Pieces: The Making and Unmaking of Benjamin Wilkomirski* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002).

<sup>58</sup> See Ibid. and Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); and Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

that of its predecessors. This places the novel and film in a tense engagement with Holocaust survivorship, inferring a kind of perilous usurpation of wartime experience, an appropriation of the Holocaust survivor's biography archetype. Reinforcing this, there persists in the narrative voice of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* a curious coveting of Holocaust experience. And as I will explore in the remainder of this chapter, this is a primary role of Eisenstein's narrative, to speak to the specialized experience of the second generation and push the critical conversation of Holocaust representation forward.

### *Links to Authenticity*

In 1984, Israeli playwright Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto* premiered at the Haifa Municipal Theatre in Israel. The play's narrative, based upon the nonfictional Jewish theatre group that performed within the Nazi occupied Vilna Ghetto during WWII, unfolded as a dramatic musical. It interposed historical figures and settings with elaborate costumes, live dance numbers, theatrical villainy, and grotesque debauchery. Considered highly controversial, the play's major offense was not that it lacked a factual basis but that it had selectively assembled the events depicted and the manner in which they were conveyed.<sup>59</sup> Sobol's choice to illuminate certain moments, themes, and characters through a specific perspective, combined with the positioning of these elements within the dramatic world of musical theatre, was perceived to tarnish its subject matter. Writing about *Ghetto*, Wiesel postulated that though the play may provide insight into a certain reality, the reality portrayed was simply too limited. And in this sense Sobol's 'based on a true story' production became a lie.<sup>60</sup> The events that transpired – while authenticated – were instead made inauthentic by the play's representational mode and style of production.

The issue of authenticity within Holocaust representation is a deeply complex matter to parse. Aside from being grounded in historically documented events, artistic representations of the Holocaust must also *feel* true. Presupposed by the critiques of

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<sup>59</sup> Kerstin Mueller, 'Normalizing the Abnormal: Joshua Sobol's *Ghetto* in West Germany', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 45.1 (2009): 44-63.

<sup>60</sup> Wiesel, 'Art and the Holocaust', <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html>.

Holocaust depiction, explains Ubertowska, is the belief that it must follow a strict protocol geared toward authentic reproduction.<sup>61</sup> Representations must not stray from the key components of ‘constrained tone’ and ‘faithfulness to the facts’.<sup>62</sup> Any emphasis on elaborate formal techniques or processes should be avoided, and the standard tradition of ‘giving testimony’ should be met. As Wiesel asserted in his discussion of Sobol’s *Ghetto*, any departure from these guidelines by way of aesthetic or artistic license risks an act of the Judaist precept of *chillul hashem*, an egregious act of sacrilege.<sup>63</sup>

But the moment we begin to scrutinize a work’s status of authenticity, we have already stepped away from the source in question, embarking instead upon the debates concerned with the mechanics of artistic production. ‘Authentic’ is not synonymous with ‘original’. For something to seem authentic, it implies deviation from its origin. Though authenticity has a supposed claim to certified validity, it is still fundamentally a creation, a manufactured illusion of our present connection with the past subject. And an argument can be made that it does not need to be anything more than that. It is for this reason that some Holocaust scholars including Irmre Kertesz and Melanie Wright reject the premise that a work must adhere to a traditional procedure of capturing what appears authentic. Instead, those seeking to artistically interpret the Holocaust should be encouraged to avoid any tightly restrained modes of production. This perspective promotes representations that exist at the opposite end of the spectrum – toward the completely fantastical or outrageous – in order to highlight that the actual events will never be captured. Speaking of Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, for instance, Hungarian writer and Holocaust survivor Kertesz finds the film to be drowning in a sea of falsified imagery, due not to its lack of authenticity but because of its futile attempts to create it. Stated Kertesz: ‘It is obvious that the American Spielberg, who by the way was born after the war, has absolutely no idea – nor can he – about the authentic nature of a Nazi concentration camp. So why does he torture himself trying to make

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<sup>61</sup> Ubertowska, ‘Uplifting Power’, 166-167.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Wiesel, ‘Art and the Holocaust’, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/11/movies/art-and-the-holocaust-trivializing-memory.html>.

everything appear authentic?’<sup>64</sup>

This is not to imply that Kertesz opposed any and all endeavors toward detailed, realistic representation. Rather, his objection concerned the presumption that images with the appearance of authenticity bear more entitlement to the real than other forms of portrayal. On the contrary, Kertesz observed that it is frequently the case that cinematic efforts toward authentic re-creation are sought in vain, offering a crude literalism that – instead of honoring the suffering and death of millions – merely reinforces an offensive artificiality. As scholar of religious studies Wright notes, there is something profoundly unsettling about Meryl Streep’s method-acting decision to starve herself in order to appear more like a camp inmate for *Sophie’s Choice*.<sup>65</sup> Related criticisms have been waged at Polish director and Auschwitz survivor Wanda Jakubowska’s 1947 autobiographical film *Ostatni etap* [*The Last Stage*], widely deemed one of the most ‘authentic’ Holocaust films.<sup>66</sup> Shot inside the camp at Auschwitz, many of the hired actors were Holocaust survivors who returned to the scene of their past torment and filmed reenacting its horrors. But while such great lengths were taken to ensure the film’s detailed accuracy, Jakubowska is said to have had her leading actresses styled according to postwar standards of beauty, one that avoided any sickly or emaciated appearances of the prisoners.<sup>67</sup> The presentation of a particular ‘look’ – whether of historical re-creation or cinematic aestheticization – obscures the distinctions between fictional and realistic representation, and no matter how we view it, such visual calculations are disconcerting.

Such conflations of fiction and nonfiction are not, as it were, inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’ strategies for the reinterpretation of Holocaust experience. It is rather an inescapable facet of the genre, and one that necessitates a delicate steadying between realistic and dramatic

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<sup>64</sup> Irmre Kertesz, ‘Wem gehört Auschwitz? Ober die enteignung der erinnerung’, *Die Zeit* (1998): 55, as quoted and translated by Bathrick, ‘Rescreening’, 48-49.

<sup>65</sup> Melanie J. Wright, ‘Don’t Touch My Holocaust: Responding to *Life is Beautiful*’, *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 9.1 (2000): 21.

<sup>66</sup> Wanda Jakubowska, *Ostatni etap* (Warsaw: Film Polski, 1947). See also Marek Haltof, *Polish Film and the Holocaust: Politics and Memory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 28-52; and Hanno Loewy, ‘The Mother of All Holocaust Films?’ Wanda Jakubowska’s Auschwitz Trilogy’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24.2 (2004): 179-204.

<sup>67</sup> See Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema’s Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 35-38; and William Freidberg, ‘Nazi Concentration Camp Reactivated for Film’, *The New York Times*, 29 February 1949, 2.5.

portrayal. Blurring the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction within these works is not something to be avoided, as it simply cannot be. Conversely, it is when this certainty is ignored that a depiction may offend. This is why Kertesz considered it fair to criticize the realist representational mechanics of *Schindler's List* but deemed the excessively dreamy world imagined in Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* [*Life is Beautiful*] (1997) praiseworthy: 'The gate to the camp in the film resembles the main entrance of the real camp Birkenau in roughly the same manner that the warship in Fellini's *Ship of Dreams* resembles a real flag ship of the Hungarian navy. Here there is something very different at stake: The spirit, the soul of this film is authentic.'<sup>68</sup>

### ***Holocaust as Kitsch***

Before NBC produced 1978's *Holocaust*, the broadcast company was already at work on a similarly themed made-for-television movie titled *The War Against the Jews*, based on modern Jewish historian Lucy Dawidowicz's 1975 book of the same name. American screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky, a veteran of U.S. television production, had been approached to pen the script, but he turned it down, reasoning that the content would be 'too painful'.<sup>69</sup> The project was ultimately scrapped, but its preliminary production made way for *Holocaust* to take shape. Upon airing of the miniseries, Chayefsky responded to the criticism that *Holocaust* 'trivialized' history – most notably declared in Wiesel's article for *The New York Times* – with the somewhat complacent assertion that 'trivialization is television'.<sup>70</sup> If he had agreed to take on that initial project, he too would have ended up turning it into a soap opera, 'because you have these damn ten minute intervals all the time. You can never accumulate the power; you have to capsulize a lot of emotion, and you have to overdramatize things'.<sup>71</sup> Market pressures consistently dictate the manner various topics are presented on television.

Discussing Stanley Kramer's 1961 *Judgment at Nuremberg*, Annette Insdorf describes how

<sup>68</sup> Kertesz, 'Wem gehört Auschwitz?', 55; Roberto Benigni, *La vita è bella* (Santa Monica: Miramax, 1997), 35mm; and Federico Fellini, *E la nave va* [*And the Ship Sails On*] (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Gaumont, 1983), 35mm.

<sup>69</sup> Paddy Chayefsky, quoted in Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

the American Gas Association, an advertiser for the film, did not appreciate the use of the word ‘gas’ being used to refer to the exterminations taking place at the concentration camps and threatened to pull their sponsorship from the teleplay unless the word was removed.<sup>72</sup>

But while the content produced by the major American television networks has a uniquely indistinguishable border between artistic authorship and corporate interests – given its dependence upon ratings and advertising, its subjection to programming schedules and censorship guidelines – the trivialization argument undoubtedly concerns itself at a much wider level. For example, the overlapping vested interests have particular consequences for the NFB and its productions. Despite its more altruistic mission to raise cultural education and awareness nationally and internationally, the NFB is also part of a broader culture industry. The animation department at the NFB is no small fraction of this scheme. Its revenue generates about three-quarters of the NFB’s profit even though it is one of the smallest and cheapest-to-run departments housed within the NFB production studios, with most animators working freelance.<sup>73</sup> A large part of its economic viability comes with participating in international film festivals, which suggests why it was so crucial for *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* to fit the fifteen-minute time limit required for all short film festival entries. In addition, as Fukushima notes, Eisenstein’s work had with it a kind of ‘B-movie’, ‘campy’ aesthetic that could translate well to both televised children’s programming and the film screen.<sup>74</sup> It is this emphasis on the film’s versatility and marketability that invites inquiry into the production of Holocaust kitsch.

Sociologist Abraham Moles has traced the genesis of kitsch to *kitschen*, which stems from a southern Germany dialect and denotes ‘doing something any old way, trashily’.<sup>75</sup> The subjective nature of that definition understands kitsch as a connotative category, something intuitively determined and dependent upon what the relevant cultural climate accepts as appropriate or politically correct. Moles goes on to identify two distinct dimensions inherent to the concept of kitsch: the aesthetic and the social. The aesthetic quality of kitsch

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<sup>72</sup> Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Fukushima, in discussion with the author, appendix i.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Abraham Moles, *Psychology of Kitsch* (Barcelona: Paidós Iberica, Ediciones S.A., 1998), 13.



epitomizes a conformism to low or common expectations and a resignation from creativity and artistic risk. The social dimension of kitsch, Moles details, involves the way in which we covetously engage with the world and material things, inferring an essential ‘fetishization of objects’.<sup>76</sup> Underlying both of these facets is an innate relationship to consumerist culture and its prevalence within middle class society. For precisely this concern, Holocaust scholars like Zygmunt Bauman, Frank Ankersmit, and Friedländer have sought to establish connections between kitsch and representations of the Holocaust. In their respective analyses, kitsch is found to correspond unexpectedly well with the philosophical and historical discourse surrounding the birth of fascism. Adorno looked for sources of fascism and the Holocaust in the attachment to objects that typified middle class society, both in the phenomenon of the reification of the human world and in the alienation of individuals by accounting for them in purely economic terms.<sup>77</sup> In this light, kitsch is a specific case of objectification, a kind of prefiguration of the middle class’ conformity and desire to possess. Bauman has expounded this idea by pointing to the continuity between mass production of consumer goods and the extremist practice of ‘fabricating corpses’, or the industrialized annihilation of millions of people.<sup>78</sup>

Friedländer’s *Reflections on Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* more thoroughly solidified this connection between kitsch and fascism.<sup>79</sup> Through an investigation of Holocaust art produced during the 1980s and 1990s, Friedländer argues that these works employed an artistic strategy based on an aesthetic of ‘Nazi kitsch’.<sup>80</sup> As posited by Friedländer, Nazi kitsch comes in the form of a particular set of linguistic styles and symbols that derive from certain ‘apocalyptic fantasies’, in which images depict the twilight of the world, the total annihilation of everything that lives.<sup>81</sup> In the Nazi aesthetic, violent motifs

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>77</sup> See Theodor Adorno, *Prisms: Essays in Cultural Criticism and Society*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, [1967] 1983).

<sup>78</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>79</sup> Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Friedländer, ‘Historical Writing and the Memory of the Holocaust’, *Writing and the Holocaust*, eds. Berel Lang and Aron Applefeld (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 66-77.

are accompanied by a longing for harmony and unity with nature, which could be interpreted as an attempt to revive the rustic, primeval values that were crucial for the beginnings of German fascism. According to Friedländer, it was exactly this tension between these contradictory qualities – the desire for peace and destruction – that paved the way for Nazi fanaticism. Friedländer treats artistic employment of Nazi kitsch in two ways: as a feature of Nazi discourse, which simultaneously constitutes a key to our comprehension of it, and as a creative practice that allows the artist to represent the unrepresentable. Friedländer deduced that the works he examined employed a language emblematic of Nazism in order to unmask it and strip away the dangerous illusions upon which it was based. Using this establishing platform, Friedländer outlined these determining factors of Holocaust kitsch:

1. A juxtaposition of the conflicting elements of harmony – which supposes the receiver's emotional engagement – with death, atrocity, and horror.
2. The incorporation of bucolic motifs, primeval sagas and legends, heroicization, various esoteric symbols, the aura of mysticism and/or initiation rituals.
3. Detailed realism in the describing of mass death.
4. The eroticization of power, violence, and ruling.
5. Finally, kitsch as an aesthetic category inevitably leads to the neutralization of the past, to the creation of a softened, bearable image of the Holocaust. Friedländer describes such a tactic as the 'exorcizing' of the Holocaust, which is positioned within the context of normal historical events, a 'framework of cognitive conformism and unification'.<sup>82</sup>

In the following, I will integrate elements of Friedländer's hypothesis into my analysis, while distinguishing three distinct subcategories of kitsch specific to *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*: escapist, satirical, and sentimental.

### *Escapist Kitsch*

John Boyne's 2006 novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is founded on a fanciful concept.<sup>83</sup> A story of a German boy named Bruno whose father is appointed commandment of a Polish concentration camp, it conceives a world seen through the innocent perspective of a small boy who doesn't grasp the realities of war, nor the concentration camp located next to his house.

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<sup>82</sup> Friedländer, *Probing the Limits*, 109.

<sup>83</sup> John Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2006).

Even when Bruno makes friends with Shmuel, a boy who lives behind the camp's wired fence, and visits the 'other side' only to perish in a gas chamber due to a 'tragic mistake', the profundity of the mass annihilation remains beyond the narrative's reach. The novel's insular construct manifests in a consistent avoidance of visualizing the reality of the camp. Direct explanation is replaced with a childlike stylization, in which a variety of things are given naïve names (for Bruno, 'Führer' becomes 'The Fury', while 'Auschwitz' becomes 'Out-with').<sup>84</sup> The limitations of the child's knowledge expresses itself in a language full of euphemisms, ellipses, and understatements, the titular 'striped pyjamas' acting as a cloying descriptor of prisoner uniforms. It is this conceptual excess and formal peculiarity that causes the book's gravitation toward kitsch, making it perhaps too galling or controversial for the reader to accept.

Boyne's novel is helpful in assessing the issue of kitsch in relation to *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* as both works share a strategic narrative device, an increasingly common trope within Holocaust literature and art: imagining the Holocaust through the perspective of a child. However, both *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* reverse the scheme present in numerous Holocaust autobiographies and fictional works that portray a child's experience with the event, such as Kertész's *Sorstalanság* [*Fatelessness*] (1975) and Benigni's *La vita è bella*, by envisioning the Holocaust not from a child's perspective within the camp but from the outside.<sup>85</sup> Aiming to allow an audience unconnected to the Holocaust into the event, this is a kind of 'escapist' kitsch. Its representational strategy is that of a voyeuristic fantasy in which the presence of a childlike naiveté is allowed to bypass direct confrontation with the past. Though creating the narrative vision through the eyes of a child creates a flexible means to approach the Holocaust, the lack of awareness on behalf of the respective protagonists might prove debilitating for the depth and cohesion of the narrative. This risks exposing the narrative's fundamental inadequacies, generating unease for the reader or viewer.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2 and 25.

<sup>85</sup> Kertész, *Sorstalanság* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

These contributing factors to the kitsch appeal of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* exemplify certain aspects of LaCapra's writings on Holocaust narrativization. In *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, LaCapra describes the 'redemptive' or 'fetishistic' narrative.<sup>86</sup> This narrative style presents a wishful and uplifting message that serves to relegate traumatic experience, deactivating the magnitude of the events in question. Such a hopeful conclusion is specifically what Ubertowska deems patronizing about *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, a sentiment that might also apply to *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*.<sup>87</sup> Despite the subject matter of each – despite the narrators' delving into the nadirs of loss, suffering, and death – what emerges is an essentially encouraging story of human experience that comes full circle. Both narratives offer a message of the fortifying bonds of community, something they infer is more potent than any ideological division. But this more passive and conciliatory perspective may conversely evoke cynicism and objection. If the brotherhood of a German boy and a Jewish prisoner – in combination with the persistently childlike unawareness that Boyne presents throughout his novel, reads as overly saccharine – *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* may be viewed through a similar lens. The narrative is vulnerable to critiques regarding its naïve coveting of Holocaust experience and its apparent lack of any anger toward those who persecuted the young girl's parents and extended family. With too many questions left unasked or too easily answered, both the graphic novel and the film might be seen to trivialize the experiences and memories of Holocaust victims.

But the potentially offensive kitsch value of these works does not necessarily translate into the devaluation of their artistic status. Ubertowska makes the point that Benigni's film, along with art installations by Zbigniew Libera, Mirosław Bałka and David Levinthal, and novels by Jonathan Foer and Marek Bieńczyk – all examples of the event's 'paradocumentation' – are all widely critically acclaimed and embraced, even as they are based on more superficial connections to the Holocaust.<sup>88</sup> Each is based on the receptive effect of decontextualizing the Holocaust, where the historical event is approached through

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<sup>86</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>87</sup> Ubertowska, 'Uplifting Power', 158-163.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-163.

fantastical or escapist routes. But what distinguishes *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* from these works – potentially making them more prone to accusations that their escapist narratives are a serious affront to Holocaust survivors – is their perspectival shift. These stories are not told from the viewpoint of a victim or survivor of the Holocaust. For Boyne's work, the narrator comes in the form of a naïve and unsuspecting child, an allegoric figure who simultaneously provides the unaffiliated reader access into the event while allowing the text to obfuscate any complex considerations of Holocaust bystanders and their culpabilities. In the case of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, the narrative voice guiding us through the genocide and its repercussions is similarly provided by an someone removed from the event, distanced from it by both an ocean of space and a generation of time. These works have manipulated the triad of the perpetrator-victim-bystander that Holocaust historian Hilberg established, and in so doing, they have given rise to a vague ethicality.<sup>89</sup> The perpetrator (albeit one that the narrative absolves from culpability) is accounted for on the one hand, the bystander (albeit a second-generational bystander who only observes the event's aftermath) on the other. But the voice of the victim remains silent. The telling of the prisoners' stories from the ancillary perspectives of both protagonists – despite their relative lack of understanding – gives critics ample opportunity to condemn both works as obscene representations verging on mere provocation.

### *Satirical Kitsch*

'The last time a German looked this hot was when they were pushing Jews into the ovens.'<sup>90</sup> In February 2013, immediately after American comedian Joan Rivers' made this remark – said in reference to model Heidi Klum – the Anti-Defamation League issued a forceful condemnation of Rivers' words and demanded that the comedian apologize for her 'vulgar

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<sup>89</sup> See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> Joan Rivers quoted in the article, 'Joan Rivers Not Apologizing for Holocaust Joke', *CNN*, 1 March 2013, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/02/28/showbiz/joan-rivers-holocaust-joke/>.

and hideous' comment.<sup>91</sup> Rivers refused. 'It's a joke, number one,' she reasoned. 'Number two, it is about the Holocaust. This is the way I remind people about the Holocaust. I do it through humor.'<sup>92</sup> Since the blatantly farcical image of Adolf Hitler exhibited in Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940), the utilization of dark humor and satire has pervaded Holocaust discourse and depiction.<sup>93</sup> Such instances can at once offer catharsis while undermining the event and its perpetrators. American comedy series *Hogan's Heroes* (1965-1971), Mel Brooks' *The Producers* (1968), and Monty Python's *The Flying Circus* (1969-1974) are a few notable examples that have waded into these satirical waters.<sup>94</sup> It is debatable whether these attempts to blend the Holocaust with humor have been successful with audiences, and a case can be made for whether the Anti-Defamation League is entirely reasonable in its implorations to Rivers, or whether it is a sign of faux-outrage stemming out of an overly politically correct media culture. But any offenses taken, box office or critical failures had – including one particularly infamous example of a cinematic production gone awry, Jerry Lewis' notoriously never-released *The Day the Clown Cried* (1972) – are unable to demonstrate the ineffectuality of this specific genre.<sup>95</sup>

*I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is not a satire of this type, in the sense that it does not set out to mock Nazism, its propagators, or its tenets. But its visual manifestation as both comic and cartoon is undeniably tied to strands of Holocaust parody. When reviewing the history of graphic and animated interpretations of the Holocaust and its aftermath, it becomes clear that a central aspect of their production is their coexistence with propagandistic endeavors undertaken in the name of anti-Semitism and pro-Nazism, a combative relationship that persists today. While early use of the comic medium worked to tackle anti-Semitic

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* (Los Angeles: United Artists, 1940), 35mm.

<sup>94</sup> Bernard Fein and Albert S. Ruddy, *Hogan's Heroes* (Los Angeles: CBS Films and New York: Viacom Enterprises, 1965-1971), 35mm; Mel Brooks, *The Producers* (Beverly Hills: Embassy Pictures, 1968), 35mm; and John Howard Davies and Ian MacNaughton, *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1969-1974), 16mm and video.

<sup>95</sup> Jerry Lewis, *The Day the Clown Cried* (unreleased, 1972), 35mm. A film deemed 'so drastically wrong' Lewis never released it, instead keeping it under lock and key since its production: Kory Grow, 'Jerry Lewis' Fabled *Day the Clown Cried* May Come Out – in 10 Years', *Rolling Stone*, 7 August 2015, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/jerry-lewis-fabled-day-the-clown-cried-may-come-out-in-10-years-20150807>.

cartoons like the 1941 cover of German comedy magazine *Lustige Blätter* (Figure 2.11), which shows a caricature of a Jewish man consuming the figures of a Russian, an American, and an Englishman, symbolizing Jewish responsibility for WWII, or the 1940 cartoon *Der Store fried* (*The Troublemaker*), one of the many pro-Nazi animated films made in support of the war, such comic portrayals of anti-Semitism are far from extinct. In 2015, days after the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, Iranian newspaper *Hamshahri* announced its second International Holocaust Cartoon Contest, an event aimed at promoting Holocaust negationism and condemning Western hypocrisy concerning the freedom of speech.<sup>96</sup> Though the ideations of the genre vary widely, ranging from darkly macabre to lighthearted romp, and while the political, cultural, and geographical proponents of Nazism and its ideals have shifted, the cartoon form remains a visible part of an antagonistic exchange between Holocaust defense, negation, and condemnation.

Early examples of comics mocking the Nazi political party are plentiful and indicative of an immediate satiric response to the birth of the Third Reich.<sup>97</sup> The emergence of the comic book industry in 1930s New York happened to coincide with Hitler's rise. Many comic book artists were quick to employ their visual practice – with the medium's leanings toward the grotesque, caricature, and fantastical – to ruthlessly lampoon the Germans.<sup>98</sup> This was especially the case after the United States had entered the war, when patriotic superheroes like Captain America and Captain Marvel began battling Nazi villains.<sup>99</sup> One of the most prominent contributors to this trend was influential comic book artist Will Eisner, who had produced anti-Nazi comic strips since the start of his commercial career in 1936.<sup>100</sup> In an episode of his popular comics series *The Spirit*, titled 'The Tale of the Dictator's Reform',

<sup>96</sup> Matt Schiavenza, 'The Hypocrisy of Iran's Holocaust Cartoon Contest', *The Atlantic*, 31 January 2015, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/01/the-hypocrisy-of-irans-holocaust-cartoon-contest/385058/>.

<sup>97</sup> See Harry Brod, *Superman is Jewish? How Comic Book Superheroes Came to Serve Truth, Justice, and the Jewish-American Way* (New York: Free Press, 2012); and Cord Scott, *Comics and Conflict: Patriotism and Propaganda From WWII Through Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Annapolis: Naval Free Press, 2014).

<sup>98</sup> Scott, *Comics and Conflict*, 1-57.

<sup>99</sup> For example, DC Comics supervillain Captain Nazi was introduced as a nemesis of characters Bulletman, Captain America, and Captain Marvel in William Woolfolk, 'The Coming of Captain Nazi', *Master Comics* 21 (New York: Fawcett Comics, December 1941). For further reading see 'Captain Nazi', in *The DC Comics Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Characters of the DC Universe*, ed. Phil Jimenez (New York: DK Publishing, 2004), 64-65.

<sup>100</sup> Scott, *Comics and Conflict*, 19-35.

released in June 1941, Eisner's titular protagonist is seen confronting and ultimately taming Hitler, a character Eisner envisioned as nothing but a delusional, fairly dimwitted puppet who dies at the scheming hands of Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels.<sup>101</sup> While Eisner's portrayal of Hitler might be faulted for minimizing the dictator's authoritative influence in bringing the Nazis to power and promoting a state of warfare and mass genocide – which in turn proffers a somewhat forgiving attitude toward him, a mere pawn in a larger political game – the goal to humiliate Hitler's image and render him impotent is made clear.

This strategy was similarly adopted in the production of animated propaganda films by Walt Disney Studios during WWII, a series meant to promote the U.S. war effort.<sup>102</sup> Disney cartoons *Education for Death* and *Reason and Emotion*, both released in 1943, present Hitler as a bumbling, less than gallant antihero and a squealing, erratic crybaby, respectively.<sup>103</sup> In the Academy Award winning *Der Fuehrer's Face* (1943), an array of images satirizing Hitler's likeness – largely representing him as the chinless overseer of the 'Nutziess' – races through the mind of Donald Duck, who – in what is later revealed to be a nightmare – has maniacally succumbed to proclaiming 'Heil Hitler!' upon each iteration of the Fuhrer's face.<sup>104</sup> But Donald is not the only famous cartoon character who became a Nazi adversary or even the only cartoon duck. In *Daffy: The Commando* (1943), Warner Brothers' Daffy Duck is imagined as defeating a childishly screeching Hitler with a simple mallet to the head.<sup>105</sup> And taking one final swing at the Third Reich just a few months prior to its collapse, Bugs Bunny donned a Hitler wig and mustache while stripping Nazi politician Hermann Göring of his war medals – as well as his trousers – in *Herr Meets Hare* (1945).<sup>106</sup>

Though these Disney and Warner Brothers productions saw their share of censorship

<sup>101</sup> Will Eisner, 'The Tale of the Dictator's Reform', *The Spirit* (Des Moines: Register and Tribune Syndicate, 6 June 1941).

<sup>102</sup> Timothy P.A. Cooper, 'Walt at War – Animation, Transformation, and Indoctrination: The Hypothetical Image of Disney's Animal Soldiers', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9.3 (2014): 333-351; Richard Shale, *Donald Duck Joins Up: The Walt Disney Studio During World War II* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1992); and Sven Stillich, 'Donald Versus Hitler: Walt Disney and the Art of WWII Propaganda', *Spiegel Online International*, 10 August 2009, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/donald-versus-hitler-walt-disney-and-the-art-of-wwii-propaganda-a-641547.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Clyde Geronimi, *Education for Death* (Los Angeles: RKO Radio Pictures, 1943), 35mm; and *Reason and Emotion*, Bill Roberts (Los Angeles: RKO Radio Pictures, 1943), 35mm.

<sup>104</sup> Jack Kinney, *Der Fuehrer's Face* (Los Angeles: RKO Radio Pictures, 1943), 35mm.

<sup>105</sup> Friz Freleng, *Daffy: The Commando* (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1943), 35mm.

<sup>106</sup> Freleng, *Herr Meets Hare* (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1945), 35mm.



over the years on the grounds that Nazism is no laughing matter, other enfeebling representations of Hitler and the Nazis have not stalled in their cultural prevalence. *Hipster Hitler* is one recent example.<sup>107</sup> Beginning as a web series in 2010 before branching off into the media of books and animation, this comic plays the Nazi and ‘hipster’ cultures off each other as a means to satirize both. In a disclaimer note written by its anonymous creators, *Hipster Hitler* was not created to offend but to offer ‘a new way of disliking Hitler and laughing at the “lazy dictator” he was, who is known for being indolent, maniacal at times, with violent bursts of enthusiasm’.<sup>108</sup> In the series’ first episode, ‘Ironic Invasion’ (Figure 2.12), a youthful, t-shirt-sporting, thick glasses-wearing Hitler is seen responding to an inquiry from Goebbels about the invasion of Poland with an exasperated ‘Whatever!’.<sup>109</sup> Another contemporary example of Hitler humor comes by way of German comics artist Walter Moers, whose comic book character ‘Adolf, die Nazisau’ [‘Adolf, the Nazi Pig’] proved so popular in his appearance in Moers’ animated short *Ich hock in meinem bonker* [*I’m Crouching in My Bunker*] (2005) that a feature-length film, *Adolf – Der film*, is currently in production.<sup>110</sup>

There is an obvious tonal shift between earlier comic depictions of Hitler and the Third Reich and these more modern examples. While all of the films and comics listed above have in common the facile themes and distorted visuals found in caricature, the proximity of each work’s production to WWII impacts both their historicity and their leaps into absurdity. Granted, the stakes for each of these productions are markedly different. Eisner, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants who fled to the U.S. at the beginning of the twentieth century, was creating content during a war waged against those seeking to destroy the Jewish population. Disney had been commissioned by the U.S. Government to produce anti-Nazi cartoons in order to boost American morale and support for the war. The inception and creation of these works have clearly been carried out with vested interests. But what is at

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<sup>107</sup> ‘About Us’, *Hipster Hitler*, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://hipsterhitler.com/about-us/>.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> See ‘Ironic Invasion’, *Hipster Hitler*, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://hipsterhitler.com/ironic-invasion/>.

<sup>110</sup> Walter Moers, *Ich hock in meinem bonker* (self-distributed, 2005), DCP; and *Adolf: Der film* (no distributor listed, 2017), DCP. See also ‘He’s Back’, Adolf Online, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.adolf-online.com>.

stake for projects like *Hipster Hitler* and *Adolf – Der film*? Is this form of satire still relevant? Are these examples offering new insight, or do they exist as more ambivalent plays on a very long-running cultural gag? If the aim of the propagandistic efforts of the 1940s was to objectify Nazism and its perpetrators, these new works might function as the commodified incarnate of that goal. Are these objects the real-life manifestation of the kind of intentionally tasteless productions imagined in Brooks' *The Producers*? Something akin to the fake musical 'Springtime for Hitler', a farcical example of gauche drivel that – as *The Producers* makes clear – should not be made for profit? Indeed, *Hipster Hitler* has a line of merchandise for sale, ranging from children's clothing to iPad cases. And while *Adolf – Der film* has yet to be released, the production company is currently taking suggestions for merchandising tie-ins, which has so far accepted ideas for ADOLF bathplugs, rubber ducks, alarm clocks, and hand puppets. They will also take donations for the film's production, through Internet-sourced crowdfunding.

This kitschy consumerism of Nazi-themed products is not a rarity. Hitler mustaches and dolls are widely available for purchase. Comical anti-Nazi t-shirts and bumper stickers abound. *Nazi Zombie Army* is one of the highest ranked video games to play on Xbox.<sup>111</sup> And it could be said that this is where the relevance of these objects lies, in the annihilation of substance through superficiality. These cultural forms signify that notions of Nazism are not simply outmoded. They have become devoid of value, rendered inert, made a laughingstock. In these cases, consumerism has become a symbolic celebration, a collective dancing on the grave of the persecutors of the past, in which we have not only killed the Nazis; we now get to kill their zombie reincarnations. Quentin Tarantino's 2009 *Inglourious Basterds* exemplifies this gleeful violence, with its cartoonish executions and the one-dimensionally valiant Lieutenant Aldo Raine, a comics-esque archetype played by Brad Pitt, whose sole pleasure is found in 'killing Nazis'.<sup>112</sup> It also naturally lends itself to its own merchandising, including action figures of the heroic Lt. Raine and the villainous Nazi Colonel Hans Landa.

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<sup>111</sup> *Nazi Zombie Army*, *Sniper Elite* Series (Oxford: Rebellion Developments Ltd., 2015).

<sup>112</sup> Quentin Tarantino, *Inglourious Basterds* (Universal City: Universal Pictures, 2009), 35mm and DCP.

In keeping with her analysis of Holocaust kitsch, Ubertowska might define the aesthetic of Tarantino's film as 'hyperrealistic', a term she applies to Jonathan Littell's novel *Les bienveillantes* [*The Kindly Ones*], which dwells in its indulgently explicit details, chronicling everything from the insignificant administrative matters of the Nazi organization to the systematic murdering of Jewish prisoners of war. Such sample text from Littell's novel includes:

Walking on the bodies of the Jews gave me the same feeling, I fired almost haphazardly, at anything I saw wriggling, then I pulled myself together and tried to pay attention, but in any case I could only finish off the most recent ones, underneath them already lay other wounded, not yet dead, but soon to be. I wasn't the only one to lose my composure, some of the shooters also were shaking and drinking between batches. Nearby, another group was being brought up: my gaze met that of a beautiful woman, almost naked, but very elegant, calm, her eyes full of an immense sadness. I moved away. When I came back she was still alive, half turned onto her back, a bullet had come out beneath her breast and she was gasping, petrified, her pretty lips trembled and seemed to want to form a word, she stared at me with her large surprised incredulous eyes, the eyes of a wounded bird. . . . I convulsively shot a bullet into her head, which after all came down to the same thing, for her in any case if not for me, since at the thought of this senseless human waste I was filled with immense, boundless rage, I kept shooting at her and her head exploded like a fruit . . .<sup>113</sup>

This degree of detail, Ubertowska argues, becomes so unimaginable that it desensitizes its readers.<sup>114</sup> The piling up of gratuitous information, which exceeds the capacity of human understanding, begins to parallel the unthinkable piling up of atrocities, killings, and bodies. In this manner, the novel's employment of a hyperrealistic brutality – much like Tarantino's graphic imagery – translates atrocity into an illusory surrealism, one that makes a hollow shell of its subject matter, opening it up for new or revised interpretations and historicizations of the Holocaust.

This is the terrain of satirical kitsch, hollow abstraction, and commercialization into which *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* enters. And both the graphic novel and animated film seem quite cognizant of its place within this kitschy visual field. From the light humor it employs, to the 'B-movie' quality of its visuals, Eisenstein's work exhibits a self-awareness

<sup>113</sup> Jonathan Littell, *The Kindly Ones*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 128-130.

<sup>114</sup> Ubertowska, 'Uplifting Kitsch', 163-165.

of its existence within this curious but prevalent form of Holocaust representation.<sup>115</sup> But rather than turn the comical aspects of its medium toward a scathing indictment of past atrocities, the narrative inversely employs a defensive strategy of self-deprecation. However, if this self-reflexivity works to dodge the categorization of superficial kitsch – via its personal nature, emotional tone, and emphasis on self-reflection – it ends up risking self-parody. Tova Reich’s 2007 novel *My Holocaust* satirizes such self-referential works, pointing its finger at those artists, writers, and filmmakers – even those who have survived or have been directly affected by the Holocaust – who use the Holocaust for personal gain.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, despite *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*’ penchant for poking fun at itself – exploiting its tongue-in-cheek kitschiness in order to acknowledge its potentially off-putting self-indulgence or opportunism – its very self-awareness makes it susceptible to another kind of kitsch, that of the narcissistic and overly sentimental.

### *Sentimental Kitsch*

Perhaps it is the figure’s eerie motionlessness – her unwavering, hopeful smile, or her unblinking eyes and the frozen look of surprise they express – that creates the unsettling uncanniness of Anne Frank’s waxy likeness (Figure 2.13). Unveiled in March 2012 at the Madame Tussauds in Berlin, the three-dimensional wax figure was met with palpable unease and outrage. Writing about the controversy for the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Edmon Rodman explains that in Jewish belief, it is a violation to view the deceased, a reason why open-casket funerals are discouraged in the religion’s tradition: ‘We can look at them, but they cannot gaze back.’<sup>117</sup> In regard to this verisimilar representation of Frank, Rodman laments that ‘there is no return teenage glare that says, “how could you let this happen?”’<sup>118</sup> But can the same not also be said for the countless commemorative statues made in Frank’s honor? What is it about this sculptural rendition that separates it from other depictions of the

<sup>115</sup> Fukushima, in discussion with the author, appendix i.

<sup>116</sup> Tova Reich, *My Holocaust* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007).

<sup>117</sup> Edmon Rodman, ‘Looking Into Anne Frank’s Unblinking Eyes’, *JTA*, 21 March 2012, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.jta.org/2012/03/21/arts-entertainment/looking-into-anne-franks-unblinking-eyes>.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

young girl? On the one hand, the juxtaposition of the victim's image with the wax effigies of Spielberg's E.T. and teen heartthrob Justin Bieber accentuates a tacky commercialization. Given that the *Diary of Anne Frank* is one of the best-selling books of all time, it is not surprising that publishers and manufacturers have found ways to monetize Frank's image, producing everything from posters to key chains and developing numerous projects including movies, Broadway plays, computer programs that offer virtual tours of the house where Frank took cover, and germanely, the 2010 comic book, *Anne Frank, the Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography*.<sup>119</sup>

Besides the possible 'celebrification' of this tragic figure, there also seems an over-the-top sentimentalization that has pushed these objects somewhere outside commemoration, instead resulting in a kind of taxidermic fetishization. Rather than offering any reconciliation with the past, the wax figure conveys a compulsive clinging to or coveting of it. Sid Jacobson, author of the *Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography*, asserts that while the figure on display at Madame Tussauds is certainly offensive, the comic book is not because it 'was done with dignity'.<sup>120</sup> But when considering each of these works side by side (Figures 2.13-2.14), one wonders where the line is drawn between dignity and none. Both forms highlight the well-known photograph of Frank sitting and writing at her desk. Both seek to inject this image with a feeling of new life and color, to reanimate it through their respective use of dimension, physicality, and sequenced action. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* likewise enlivens images of the departed, both those who perished during the Holocaust and the survivors that Eisenstein grew up with and who passed long after. And these illustrations are also animated with movement, reinvested with color, vitality, and an unreserved romanticism. When the novel and film imagine Eisenstein's father as a courageous cowboy who rides horseback into the concentration camp, saving all the prisoners from the fate of the crematorium, should this be characterized as a cheapening of the sanctification of his memory? A joining ranks with the kitschy action figures and Nazi-killing Tarantino heroes

<sup>119</sup> Ernie Colón and Sid Jacobson, *Anne Frank, the Anne Frank House Authorized Graphic Biography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010).

<sup>120</sup> Sid Jacobson, as quoted in Rodman, <http://www.jta.org/2012/03/21/arts-entertainment/looking-into-anne-franks-unblinking-eyes>.

that have preceded it and keep it company? Does it not equate his experiences and memories to those of the John Wayne and Montgomery Clift characters to which the author invites comparison?<sup>121</sup> Would this be such a bad thing? I ask these questions not to debate whether the Hollywoodization of Eisenstein's father should be met with outrage or nonchalance but to assess the dictates of cultural acceptability. How do we determine when it is and is not permissible for representations of the past to be romanticized or commodified?

Ubertowska observes a direct correlation between sentimental mawkishness and the genre of Holocaust autobiography. She notes that sentimentalism is often characteristic of novice authors who have 'little literary awareness' and rely on an unquestioned 'spontaneity and authenticity' that engagements with fond remembrance affords.<sup>122</sup> In one example, Ubertowska dissects Maria Szelestowka's *Lubię żyć* [*I Live*] (2000), particularly discussing the chapter 'Kwiat' ['Flower'], which spends its length fixating on a single tulip that ornamented Szelestowka's hiding place during the war.<sup>123</sup> Ubertowska sees this as singularly kitschy, as it stresses individuality over collective historical experience through personalized fetishization. Several analogous moments can be found in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, perhaps most notably in the emphasis granted to the aforementioned ring that Eisenstein's mother passed down to her after her father's death. The chronicled history of this ring – its climactic transference from an unnamed unknown to the hands of our protagonist – does not simply connect the individual to the vastness of history and collective human experience but may also become a fetishistic pronouncement of individual importance.

Terming this type of egocentric preoccupation with the Holocaust 'narcissistic kitsch', Leociak worries that in this exceedingly flexible mode of representation, history is overshadowed by a dominating 'I'.<sup>124</sup> The 'I' of the author begins to fill up the space of informative content, becoming 'present everywhere: in the structure of sentences, in their disjointed, fragmentary flow full of exclamations, in the rhetorical questions'.<sup>125</sup> The

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<sup>121</sup> Eisenstein, *IWACHS*, 49.

<sup>122</sup> Ubertowska, 'Uplifting Power', 167-168.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. See also Maria Szelestowka, *Lubię żyć* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 2000).

<sup>124</sup> Leociak, 'On the Abuses', 391.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

Holocaust in these works ends up consigned to the background, serving as scenery for the indulgent performances of whimsical rumination and personal fantasy. This presents a particular kind of perilous ‘auto-fiction’, an opportunity for the author to fictionalize history through the malleability of autobiography and the convenient compliance of individual memory and perception.<sup>126</sup> One example of such auto-fiction, Roma Ligocka’s critically panned memoir *Dziewczynka w czerwonym płaszczyku* [*The Girl in the Red Coat*], draws a few unflattering comparisons to *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*.<sup>127</sup> In it, Ligocka recounts her experience growing up during WWII while gazing out the window of a luxurious hotel in Nice, France. A toddler at the time of the war, Ligocka wrote her story decades later. Its delayed narrativization of the event garnered the memoir significant criticism, which found that Ligocka’s account was over-reliant on the idea of an infallible memory posing as historically authentic. Further, the narrative structure is fairly solipsistic, its perspective rarely expanding beyond that of the heroine. Historicity and communality is therefore narrowed, viewed only in relation to the author.

If read as such a production of excess egoism, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* may too face such complications, as its distanced view of the Holocaust and the essential positioning of the event as something upsetting to the author’s upbringing edges the narrative into egocentrism. By the end of the text, there is no reconciliatory moment reached by the protagonist that the identity of Holocaust survivor – though coveted throughout the film – is simply not hers. Instead, the work imparts that – in a very different way – it is hers. And perhaps by extension it is ours, a memory that should not be the burden of survivors alone. To this end, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* might stand as an example of narcissistic kitsch that obscures the Holocaust’s uniqueness. The role of Holocaust survivorship in Eisenstein’s narrative does not become transformative in this capacity but rather provides a thematic backdrop for a phase in the adolescence of a young girl and her imaginative attempts to replay history. The additional tidbit that Ligocka decided to write *The Girl in the Red Coat*

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<sup>126</sup> Ubertowska, ‘Uplifting Power’, 171.

<sup>127</sup> Roma Ligocka, *The Girl in the Red Coat: A Memoir*, trans. Margot Bettaur Dembo (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002).

upon seeing Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, having been inspired by the little girl in the red coat who appears in the film, does not mitigate the interpretation of these works as self-indulgent or appropriative performances but reinforces *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*' employment of Hollywood tropes as gimmick, an example of auto-fiction as a kitschy case of art-imitating-life-imitating-art.

Given the above concerns, Leociak's description of Andrzej Bart's Holocaust study *Fabryka mucholapek* [*Flypaper Factory*] befits this discussion:

It lies halfway between literature and documentary, between a novel and an account, between a testimony and a record of a dream. It is conspicuously "between" discourses, genres, truth and fiction. Thus, it perfectly fits the model of post-literature in post-modern times. Consequently, it is not surprising – its poetics is perfectly predictable, it is painfully "post-traditional". It flatters the tastes and trends. It is also perfectly empty cognitively. The author plays with conventions of speaking, quotes, narrative perspectives, ideas for the plot, but it does not lead to anything. More specifically: it does not lead to anything apart from the satisfaction of the author's ego.<sup>128</sup>

While my analysis throughout this chapter has found much of the sentiments of Leociak – and the other critical scholars engaged with – to be applicable toward the discussion of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, I also find the prevailing inclination to discard contemporary autobiographical works related to the Holocaust to be an unproductive analytical strategy. My research submits that *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*' particular narrative and visual structure signals a recent attempt to augment the possibilities for how we can relate to and represent the past. If artistic representations have sought to reconsider the way we think about the Holocaust, critiques of such representations must also progress beyond knee-jerk accusation and dismissal. If a self-reflexive historicity is the problem, then scholarship must put objects back in the hands of a wider audience, working to uncover its implications for the historical consciousness of contemporary culture. The remainder of this chapter seeks to explore one interpretive mode that *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* is in a privileged position to both operate within and advance, that of postmemory representation.

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<sup>128</sup> Leociak, 'On the Abuses', 390; and Andrzej Bart, *Fabryka mucholapek* (Warsaw: WAB Publishing, 2008).



## Part II. Postmemory Production and the Animation of the Archives

In 1992, memory studies scholar Marianne Hirsch fueled a conversation about memory representation within the medium of graphic literature.<sup>129</sup> In her essay ‘Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory’, Hirsch investigated the peculiar positioning of three photographs that had been interposed into the illustrations of Spiegelman’s *Maus I* and *II*. Each photograph presented an image of Spiegelman’s family. The first showed his father, Vladek, standing in his camp uniform. The second was taken of his mother, Anja, pictured with Spiegelman as a young boy. And the final image was of his older brother, Richieu, who had passed away before Spiegelman was born. These archival documents, Hirsch proposed, transcended the role of imagery and reanimated the past through the power of indexicality and iconography. Together, the photographs unified a family destroyed by the Holocaust. Appearing amidst this sea of broken pasts and fragmented imagery, the photographs symbolized a sense of cohesion, security, and continuity that had been previously severed. For Hirsch, this established a bond between the photograph, its subject, and the viewer through the photographic ‘umbilical cord’, as postulated by Barthes. Working from the supposition that the appearance of family photos within *Maus* worked to reunify Spiegelman’s family, Hirsch went on to coin the term ‘postmemory’, a concept denoting the yearning of the second – or ‘post’ – generation of Holocaust survivors to make a fractured past whole again.

In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997) and more recently in *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), Hirsch expanded upon her notion of postmemory, theorizing that a parent’s witnessed experience of a traumatic event can have an over-arching, permeating presence for the next generation. Broadening her theoretical framework beyond that of the Holocaust, postmemory became characterized as a process of inter- and trans-generational transmission of lived

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<sup>129</sup> See Hirsch, ‘Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory’, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 15.2 (1992-1993): 3-29.

experience, an intangible transference of a generation's remembrances of a traumatic past onto its descendants. Akin to the intergenerational mode of second-hand experience raised in my discussion of *Minoru*, Hirsch has asserted that, like the continuous echo of a past life, the parents' witnessed experience comes to reverberate in the life of the child. This transmission of experience does not result in the form of a literal memory but a psychic approximation of memory, which is composed by the second generation on the basis of the stories, images, and behaviors they were exposed to throughout their childhood. Postmemory is seen as a residue that seeps into the next generation, an innate absorption of traumatic events without the initial shock of direct experience. Artistic works of the postgeneration, including *Maus*, which have sought to explore this lingering of past experience are based upon the supposition, Hirsch contends, that the second generation is born into a confused state of familial unity and underlying disunity. The parents who were able to survive may have rebuilt a life for themselves, but its foundation bears the cracks of traumatic rupture. The child of postmemory becomes driven to repair these cracks, to make whole an inherent breach within the familial structure, even if that disjunction is latent, having yet to display any identifiable symptomology. Works of second-generation artists and writers are shaped by this need to heal and rebuild, to cathartically reconstruct the parent's traumatic past as a way to reconcile its familial aftermath.<sup>130</sup>

The remainder of this chapter discusses *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* in connection with postmemory. Though *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* shares parallels with *Maus*' narrative and aesthetic locus as a postgenerational work, I also recognize that it exhibits several crucial departures from Hirsch's theory. While the exploration of a complicated and fractured familial past is certainly a central issue within Eisenstein's narrative, it is not clear whether the reconciliation of the traumatic experiences of her parents is necessarily the focus. Rather, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* acts more as an investigation of postmemory itself as opposed to a work of postmemory production as Hirsch defines it. The tragedy of the Holocaust has instead been put into the background of the

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<sup>130</sup> Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 112.

narrative, and there seems to be an all but complete evasion of visualizing the traumatic events in question. These representational choices problematize the operational strategies employed by artistic works of the postgeneration that Hirsch describes, while also building upon the concept of postmemory.

Alongside these distinctions, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* also elicits reconsideration of Hirsch's employment of 'reconstruction' with regard to works of postmemory. The postgenerational reconstructions expounded by Hirsch are ultimately unfeasible and will never be realized. The past cannot be returned to, the dead will not be resurrected, and the photographs employed in *Maus* do not bring Spiegelman's family back 'in their full appearance'.<sup>131</sup> The acknowledgment that such endeavors by postgenerational artists are unrealistic – and possibly not even desirable – are largely absent in Hirsch's writings. However, assuming that 'reconstruction' designates only the representational *attempt* to reconstruct the experience of the first generation, the issue is deemphasized in relation to *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* as it makes no such effort. Employing Hirsch's foundational investigation into the interaction between photography and illustration, I suggest that *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* circumvents the processes of postmemory reconstruction. Both the graphic novel and the film have opted to disengage from historical photographic documentation, instead choosing to depict these images through the use of comics and animation. This decision does not signify a move to fuse past and present through its re-creation, or to link its virtual remembrance to an actual antecedent. More complexly, this is a move that further distances itself from history, while simultaneously bringing it closer. It is a move that seeks ownership, a co-optation of the past through the experience of artistic production.

As the use of photography within the works of postmemory is a primary tenet of Hirsch's conceptual model, the following discusses three examples where the photograph plays a role in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* as a means to explore postmemory via this postgenerational film. I will detail how *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*' refusal to

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 37.

incorporate the photograph into its visual narrative, choosing instead to visualize its photographic referents graphically, becomes an artistic strategy to chronicle the struggles inherent to postmemory victimhood. In an action that is reactive to the productions Hirsch assesses, both the graphic novel and film stand in protest against the suffocating longing to make sense of a past that forever remains elusive.

### ***Example One: Holocaust Imagery and The Anti-Fetishization of Atrocity***

Writing about NBC's *Holocaust* miniseries, Lawrence Langer, a scholar of Holocaust literature, contended that the handful of black-and-white photographs of the camps incorporated into the teleplay were significantly more potent, tragic, and affecting than the whole of the dramatization.<sup>132</sup> It was a departure for Langer, who had previously made clear his suspicion of any direct forms of realist or pictorial modes within Holocaust representation but now embraced the photo's aptitude to estrange or 'disfigure' the filmic narrative.<sup>133</sup> Implicit in Langer's reconsideration of photography's emotive power is an underlying bias against the manipulative mechanics of cinematic representation, specifying it as a medium unable to similarly evoke the past. It is this 'shock of the real' that moved Hirsch to advocate the photograph's essential positioning within works of postmemory and their endeavors toward reclaiming the past. When we look at a photograph, Hirsch advises in her cursory overview of photography theory, 'we look to be shocked (Benjamin), touched, wounded, and pricked (Barthes' punctum), torn apart (Didi-Huberman)'.<sup>134</sup> A critical tenet of Hirsch's initial formulation of postmemory postulates that since the three intercalated photographs in *Maus* are presented as reproductions rather than drawn in the same style as the rest of Spiegelman's account, they serve to rupture the narrative. These visual fractures create a protective screen for the viewers, who are able to witness the enormity and strength of a destructive past while also being shielded from it by the image's diminutive size and scope. Emblematic of the processes of postmemory production, the photograph offers a space of projection that

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<sup>132</sup> Langer, 'The Americanization of the Holocaust on Stage and Screen', in *From Heester Street to Hollywood*, ed. Sarah Blancher Cohen (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1983), 127.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 38.

facilitates affiliation with the past, a bridge that stabilizes the postgeneration's simultaneous connection to and separation from history.<sup>135</sup>

Conversely, many critics and artists dealing with Holocaust representation deem the use of both reenactment and documentary photography altogether inappropriate and ineffective. Lanzmann's *Shoah* stands for many, including the filmmaker himself, as the sole archetype for aesthetic representations of the Holocaust, one that is undeviating in its capture of witness testimony. Lanzmann asserts that *Shoah* 'is not a documentary, it is not at all representational'.<sup>136</sup> He maintains that the interviews conducted with Holocaust survivors, perpetrators, and secondary witnesses are not directed toward reconstructing the past, or the memory of it for that matter, but seek to explore the process of reliving that past in the present.<sup>137</sup> Lanzmann describes his presentation of the past as 'imageless images' because what appears onscreen is instead the absence of an image, an absence that speaks to an inherent unrepresentability more potently than a visual re-creation ever could. Lanzmann states: 'The Holocaust erects a ring of fire around itself, a borderline that cannot be crossed because there is a certain amount of horror that cannot be transmitted. To claim it is possible to do so is to be guilty of the most serious transgression.'<sup>138</sup> Contrary to Hirsch's argument that the photograph can bring about a 'full' presence of the past, Lanzmann offers a strident critique of the fallacies he deems inherent to the idea that an artist could ever reproduce putative presence, or that access to a direct and total rendering of the event itself could ever be provided by aesthetic production. *Shoah* exists as a cinematic disavowal of full presence, a declaration that representation – as LaCapra also argues – is but a 'marking of the past itself as an object of reconstruction on the basis of traces and traces of traces'.<sup>139</sup>

*I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* employs an aesthetic strategy that exists somewhere between the modes of operation advocated by Hirsch and Lanzmann, particularly in its dealings with filmed footage and photographic imagery. As mentioned, the original

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<sup>135</sup> See Hirsch, 'Family Pictures', 3-29.

<sup>136</sup> Lanzmann, Ruth Larsen, and Rodowick, 'Seminar with Claude Lanzmann, 11 April 1990', *Yale French Studies* 79 (1990): 96.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> See Lanzmann, 'Why Spielberg Has Distorted the Truth', 1.7

<sup>139</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 103-104.

conceit for the film was meant to be a collage of materials both photographic and animated in nature, which would also include the testimony of Eisenstein's mother. But after initial test audiences found the archival materials documenting the camps and the atrocities committed to be too jarring, these images were removed.<sup>140</sup> Only one visual allusion to the genocide remains in the film (Figure 2.15), a cartoon depiction of the young Eisenstein viewing footage of the piles of discarded bodies. This re-representation of the graphic images produced during the war does several things that both fall in line with and stand in contrast to Hirsch's leanings toward the indexical powers of photography and Lanzmann's outright refusal of such a premise.

These filmic portrayals act in accordance with Hirsch's argument that individual postmemory is formed in part by freely available imagery that has made its way into the postgenerational psyche. An early cover image of *Maus*, for instance, displayed a drawing by Spiegelman, which was based on a widely circulated 1945 photograph taken by Margaret Bourke-White (Figures 2.16-2.17). The image shows liberated male prisoners in Buchenwald, who stand behind a barbed-wire fence while facing the photographer. Huddled together, some of the prisoners grip onto the wires. In Spiegelman's representation, the men have been turned into mice. An arrow points to one particular mouse figure in the back row, identifying him as 'Poppa'. Hirsch reads this image as symbolic of the adoption of public images into the private family album. It denotes that the son can only imagine his father's experience in Auschwitz by way of a well-known image from the social archives. Likewise, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* not only chooses to animate the publicly accessible war footage – as opposed to including the photographs themselves – but also repeatedly presents the protagonist looking at this imagery. These moments appear in a sequence picturing Eisenstein watching various depictions of the Holocaust unfold on television and film as a child (Figures 2.18-2.20). In these instances, the film asserts that the broadcasting of Holocaust imagery played no small role in Eisenstein's learning about this familial history.

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<sup>140</sup> Fleming, interviewed in the *IWACHS*, 'Adaptation, Animation, and Artists', DVD extra.

The film's acknowledgment that public images mediated personal perceptions of the past underscores Lanzmann's critique of visual documentation as fundamentally inadequate. Reinterpreting documentary photography via animation within *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* pronounces that any image is only and forever a representation and nothing more. It reasserts documentation as a trace of the event and posits that any overdependence on realist imagery will not amount to a deeper understanding of the past, as it brings us only to the surface of things. It is in this capacity that *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, while rooted in the archives, works against fetishizing these images. Tacit in both Langer and Hirsch's arguments regarding the photograph's evocative prowess is that the variable 'shock' it provides is dependent upon the larger mode of representation in which it resides. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*' avoidance of photography, combined with its decision to place such images on the same visual plane as its animated production, undermines its shock value. It removes what Sontag classifies as photography's power to 'haunt' and obsess the viewer.<sup>141</sup>

This is not to surmise that Lanzmann would endorse *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* as a representation of the Holocaust. Both the graphic novel and the film are focused on stylistic visualization as much as testimony. But an argument could be made that it too provides 'imageless images', as it uses its medium of animation to articulate the emptiness of formal documentation. Like *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, *Shoah*'s structure adheres less to the generic codes of the documentary or historical reenactment and more to those of a modern work of art. As Koch describes in her review of the film, *Shoah* draws 'its force from the affirmation that art is not representation but presentation, not reproduction but expression'.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* does not stand as a reproduction or reconstruction of the past. It instead employs a visual strategy to counteract conventional modes of representation, while adding a particular experience to the discourse surrounding Holocaust representation. The caveat for Adorno's advocacy for a rethinking of aesthetics post-Holocaust was that one must fight against the fetishization of

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<sup>141</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 80.

<sup>142</sup> Koch, 'Transformations Esthetiques', 161.

representation and its ties to authenticity, not that one should never approach it. When Langer in *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* promotes disfiguration as a ‘conscious and deliberate alienation of the reader's sensibilities’, he does so with the belief that a reader is ‘compelled to recognize, to “see” imaginatively both the relationship between the empirical reality of the Holocaust and its artistic representation in the work of literature and the fundamental distinction between both of these worlds’.<sup>143</sup> It is a delusion, it would seem, to trust that by withholding or ignoring conventional imagery of the Holocaust, the mind will be free to roam wherever it pleases. This view does not take into account the extent to which the recycled fictions and documentary illustrations of prior visual representations continue to circulate as part of the collective unconscious. These must also be dealt with in the process of interrogating, disfiguring, and interpreting the past. And this is where *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* finds itself operating, navigating between worlds both public and private – between the historical archives and personal experience – in order to reconcile the gaps in-between and explore the postgeneration’s position relative to these entities.

### ***Example Two: The Adolf Eichmann Trial and the Personalization of Public Imagery***

The oscillations between public and private domains of historical memory are integral to how *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* investigates the experience of the postgeneration.

Hirsch situates postmemory alongside similar theorizations of the intergenerational transmission of lived events, such as Ellen Fine’s ‘absent memory’, Alison Landsberg and Celia Lury’s ‘prosthetic memory’, and Raczymow’s ‘memory shot through with holes’.<sup>144</sup>

While conceptually related, I submit that postmemory does not imply a process robust enough to be ‘shot through with holes’. It is not that a memory innate to the child of postmemory existed and was subsequently erased, built upon, or penetrated. Rather, what initially arises within the psyche of postmemory is a saturating, indefinable sense of an unwitnessed – but

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<sup>143</sup> Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), 3.

<sup>144</sup> See Fine, ‘Absent Memory’; Allison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory, Identity* (East Sussex: Psychology Press, 1998); and Raczymow, ‘Memory Shot Through’, respectively.



overwhelmingly significant – past, and the consuming desire to get hold of it. It is in this capacity that, though *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* does not attempt to reconstruct first-generational experience, its analysis with respect to postmemory remains relevant. While Eisenstein’s specific narrative and visual conceits do not serve to reconstruct a past not witnessed by her, they do work to deconstruct the persistent urge to do so, laying claim to her experience in the process.

A pivotal moment for the narrative and for the assertion of Eisenstein’s relationship to the Holocaust arrives at the beginning of both novel and film, when she recounts watching the Adolf Eichmann trial unfold on television. It was 1961. She was eleven years old. She imparts that this was the first time the Holocaust became real to her. Eisenstein felt that she had ‘somehow absorbed the fact’ as a young girl, but it wasn’t until seeing the trial – and the televised footage of the graphic Holocaust imagery that accompanied it – that the Holocaust became something more than elusory.<sup>145</sup>

This was a highly visible moment. The trial of the infamous Nazi conspirator and architect of ‘The Final Solution’ was the source of global controversy and interest.<sup>146</sup> It was a very well-documented event, and the images it produced remain prevalent within the collective and individual memories of those who witnessed it. But again, this decidedly public event – its archival imagery not difficult to locate – has been revised through Eisenstein’s stylistic vision (Figures 2.21-2.22). Portraying this widely available imagery through illustration and animation, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* works to strip away its public status and the significant social and cultural weight that it carries. Rather, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* emphasizes the author’s personal connection to this collective history.

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<sup>145</sup> Eisenstein, *IWACHS*, 20.

<sup>146</sup> For further information, see Lawrence Douglas, ‘Trial as Documentary: Images of Eichmann’, *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective* (2006): 369-384; Haim Gouri, *Facing the Glass Booth: The Jerusalem Trial of Adolf Eichmann*, trans. Michael Swirsky (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, [1962] 2004); and Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt’s Narrative* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1965). For a recent example of how the trial continues to pervade our visual culture, see also Kaori Shoji, ‘The Eichmann Show: The Reality is Far More Horrific Than the Fiction’, *The Japanese Times*, 13 April 2016, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2016/04/13/films/film-reviews/eichmann-show-reality-far-horrific-fiction/#.VyLkwsdb8tU>.

In his essay 'A Photograph', Umberto Eco described Eddie Adams' 1968 photograph *Rough Justice on a Saigon Street* (Figure 2.23) as a photo that 'proved epoch-making'.<sup>147</sup> The image has accumulated connotations supplanting the individual moment. It is linked instead to other associations and related imagery, the viewer's knowledge of these various references able to ascribe subsequent meanings to Adams' work. Eco found that while the image developed a myth and life of its own, the event depicted has been buried under a pile of collective viewings and interpretations. Analogously, there exists a substantial accrual of cultural, social, and political implications for the documentation of the Eichmann trial. The event is encumbered by its historical significance in regard to what it disclosed about the war and its aftermath, how we collectively reconcile and condemn atrocity, and what it offered by way of catharsis for Holocaust witnesses and survivors. That *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* overrides this documentary image suggests a desire to tell a story independent from its socio-political encumbrances, free from a realist adherence to everything that this specific event encompasses. How might Eisenstein's account be told otherwise? How might her voice be heard from underneath this immense buildup of historical debris?

Contrastingly, Wolfgang Brückle notes a moment in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) when the lead actress is seen watching the televised documentation of Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức's self-immolation during the Vietnam War. This immediately recognizable moment of reality ruptures Bergman's visual narrative. Brückle discerns that the television footage takes us out of the film, as it becomes a more visceral sight than the movie itself.<sup>148</sup> This is precisely what Eisenstein and Fleming avoid. By not incorporating the televised documentation into their aesthetic, they keep the viewer inside its scope. It is a move that underscores the pervasive insularity of the visual narrative, and it drives home a postgenerational attempt to take ownership of a haunting historical past. By depriving us an image from the past, we are not compelled to confront it, to look back and respond to its gaze.

<sup>147</sup> Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1986), 216.

<sup>148</sup> Wolfgang Brückle, 'Feature Films and the Shock of the Real: Regarding Wartime Documents in Art-House Cinema and Beyond', in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence (The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art)*, ed. Jaynie Anderson, Melbourne (2009), 661.

By positioning the representation of the past squarely in Eisenstein's vision, the film asks that we only look back at her.

### ***Example Three: Family Photographs and Interwoven Timelines***

The title credits of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* mirror the book's cover (Figures 2.24-2.25). A black-and-white image of a young girl cradles a doll in her arms. Her appearance alludes to the fragility of a thin, paper cutout. Her fearful expression radiates anxiety. The foreboding shadow that eclipses her image verifies this unease, as the block letters spelling out the film's title loom overhead, trapping her within the visual conceit of a B-movie thriller. The protagonist has been hemmed in, backed into a corner by the ominous past of the Holocaust, unable to escape the dark shadows of her parents' lived experience.

As Hirsch argues, there exists an inherent risk for the postmemory generation to become so consumed by the experiences of their parents that their own life-shaping events are ignored or displaced.<sup>149</sup> The second generation becomes defined by the first. This postgenerational pattern is well chronicled throughout *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. It is pictured as a struggle, with the protagonist acting as 'The Jewish Sisyphus', pushing a giant boulder of history and memory uphill.<sup>150</sup> It is described as an addiction, the young Eisenstein shown tumbling down the hypnotically swirling rabbit hole, an opium den of Holocaust highs.<sup>151</sup> It is an enclosure. And although she tries to move beyond it, our animated protagonist is repeatedly imagined falling down between its walls.<sup>152</sup>

Eisenstein's character is visually encaged in an in-between state of past and present, held captive in a perplexing state of indeterminate time. Within the circumstances of postmemory, Hirsch explains that the 'post' designates not only a belated moment in time but also that moment's complex relationship with a continued past.<sup>153</sup> Like the postmodern, which indicates both a critical distance from and embeddedness within the modern, or the

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<sup>149</sup> Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 107.

<sup>150</sup> Eisenstein, *IWACHS*, 53; and Fleming, *IWACHS*, 00:03:53.

<sup>151</sup> Eisenstein, *IWACHS*, 68; and Fleming, *IWACHS*, 00:02:04.

<sup>152</sup> Eisenstein, *IWACHS*, 66-69; and Fleming, *IWACHS*, 00:02:48 and 00:04:18.

<sup>153</sup> Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 106.

postcolonial, which does not purport the end of the colonial but its profound perpetuity, postmemory involves a layering of temporalities and aftermaths, an interrelation of past and present. In this light, ‘memory’ becomes a more apt term than ‘history’, as it signifies a still-living connection to previous experience, while ‘history’ specifies a finite past.<sup>154</sup>

Postmemory is not a movement. But it evokes movement, movement between places, timelines, and lineage.

These movements, however, are isolated and oblique. They offer no clear endpoint. They move back and forth between narrowed points in time. They imply a vacillating migration between past and present perspectives of an event. But they do not transport its passengers to any particular destination or epoch. In this film, postmemory is perceived a misleading trap, a workspace that provides only the illusion of progress. The timelines of Eisenstein’s parents intertwine with her own. But these interconnections paradoxically establish a boundary that separates her from the experience she longs to know but is unable to. This tension is particularly evident in Eisenstein’s remembrances of the other survivors she knew growing up in Kensington Market – a Jewish community in Toronto – individuals who formed a tight-knit extension of her parents and family as a whole. These relationships are introduced in a kind of family photo album, which frames each family member into a discrete enclosure (Figure 2.26).<sup>155</sup> Their lived connection with her parents is closed off to anyone who did not also possess the same knowledge of survivorship. Accordingly, the young Eisenstein is portrayed seated amongst this community without belonging to it (Figure 2.27).<sup>156</sup>

However, even though *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* depicts a suffocating positioning within the experience of postmemory, its heavy employment and aesthetic usurpation of family photography moves the narrative forward, placing the past directly into the hands of the postgeneration. An image of Eisenstein’s mother, grandmother, and aunt is particularly expressive of this artistic attempt to guide the past into the present, rather than

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>155</sup> Fleming, *IWACHS*, 00:05:23.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 00:10:50.

dwell in its oppressive grasp (Figures 2.28-2.29). Based on a photograph that the author happened upon, it shows the three women sitting together, lining up their arms to display their concentration camp number tattoos in a row. After she finished drawing the photograph, Eisenstein noticed something she'd 'never seen in them or never recognized – a kind of innocence, a lightness, as if their arms don't even carry the mark of the past'.<sup>157</sup> It is a liberating moment in the visual narrative, suggesting an undoing of the traumatic wounds of the Holocaust, while reasserting the embodied interconnections between that past, the generation of survivors, and their children.

## Conclusion

As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, there is a pervasive emphasis on touch and materiality that connects the disparate aesthetic styles, narrative fragments, and historical timelines throughout *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. Like the image of Eisenstein drawing her father's face (Figure 2.7), the integration of heterogeneous textures into the film's imagery makes the artist's hand inescapably apparent, underscoring the intersections of the past and its representation. There exists a delicate layering of imageries that fold over the larger visual topography (Figures 2.30-2.33). At times these understated graphics provide backdrop for the scene, or hover above the surface of the image. They may assume the marks of a fine wood grain, or seep into the frame like an ink blotch. Sometimes they appear aggressive in nature, poking through the screen with sharp edges or spilling onto the base of the image like a violent stain. In other moments, these textures wash over the picture plane like water, undulating against it with slow and subtle syncopations. But no matter the form they take, these visual interventions are always present, working to unite the film's aesthetic disconnects while guiding the narrative along.

These saturating textures reinforce the embodied interconnections and material emanations experienced by members of the postgeneration. Emphasizing the touch of the human hand, these tangible layers hint at an intergenerational connection. Like *Minoru*, they

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<sup>157</sup> Eisenstein, *IWACHS*, 112.

bring attention to the intimate materiality and personal projections entailed in this encounter with history and the traces it leaves behind. But while Eisenstein observes a release from the marks left on her family members' arms, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* works to take ownership of these inscriptions of the past.

Inserting a self-aware present into the past by way of artistic production, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* dispatches an appeal emblematic of a postgenerational plea to recognize – rather than heal, as Hirsch contends – the transferred wounds of traumatic experience. Imbuing Eisenstein's family photographs with new illustrations, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* affixes the present moment onto history, an act of the postgenerational desire to rest one's own victimhood alongside the previous generation's.<sup>158</sup> It is an acknowledgement of familial ties but also of circumstances and actions, events the postgeneration did not bear witness to or had an opportunity to evaluate but which pervade its existence. In this regard, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* illuminates the experiences of the postgeneration, which might be unable to share in or identify with the memories of past generations, even though it has been shaped by those same histories. But like the ring that was passed down to Eisenstein by her parents, these acts of transference refer to more than an inescapable and entangled web of timelines. Eisenstein's receipt of her familial past places it within her protectorate. Far from being a hostage to a crushing and intangible burden, the protagonist works to unravel herself from this web of history and envisions herself as its guardian. But this process of disentanglement requires effort. It is a struggle to undo postmemory victimization. And it is this struggle that lies at the root of *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*.

The animated projections onto Eisenstein's postgenerational remembrance speak to the narrative's endeavor to overthrow not just the dominating presence of the Holocaust – through an internal relatedness to previous generations, and in an external relation with those generations – but also the restrictions critical theory has posed for Holocaust representation. As I have detailed throughout this chapter, testimonial representations of Holocaust

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<sup>158</sup> Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 112.

experience have been forced to inhabit an impervious limbo. Presenting a moment that is so viscerally charged with emotion and socio-political significance, personal accounts of the Holocaust cannot be too holistic or fragmentary. They also cannot be too realist or abstract. Nor can they be overly personal, lest they border on self-indulgence. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* – viewed as a product of its time and characterized by its roots in the graphic novel, animation, personal memoir, kitschy aesthetics, and postmemory production – signals a more progressive contemporary approach to the Holocaust, where revised representations are presented to a new generation. Eisenstein’s narrative voice acknowledges that it cannot and will never be able to give testament to her parents’ persecution. But it can address the experience of growing up in the wake of that suffering. And it is the tension created between these generational gaps of understanding that shapes the narrative’s inquiry. *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* attempts to rethink the critiques applied to other Holocaust representations. It works to change the conversation about this historical moment altogether, embracing the ever-expanding complexities that Holocaust representations will continue to posit.

**MIGRATION THREE. Italy-Greece.**  
***My Mother's Coat***

The opening images are bare (Figures 3.1-3.2). A small girl wraps her arms around her mother's waist. Instinctively, the mother encloses her daughter within her long, fur coat. Little visual information is provided, as each hand-drawn animation is only a fragment alluding to the larger whole. Scant detail fleshes out the figures, their faces, bodies, and surroundings. Every line is purposeful yet conspicuously incomplete. But the viewer can still sense the tactility of this imagery, imagining the softness of that fur coat and recognizing the familiar sensation of resting one's head against a loved one, melting into the warmth of another body.

Marie-Margaux Tsakiri-Scanatovits' animated short *My Mother's Coat* unravels its narrative of remembrance through these subtly shifting, ephemeral images. Visualizing an audio-recorded interview with the filmmaker's mother, the film acts as a mutual love letter shared between its subjects. The mother speaks of her past, reflecting upon her decision to marry at a young age and leave her homeland of Italy for her husband's native Greece in 1974. She divulges her memories of motherhood, marriage, and her nostalgic desire to return to her small hometown. Her exposition is revealing, and the corresponding imagery echoes the intimate nature of the memories disclosed.

In its final scenes, the film abruptly morphs into a montage of clips taken from old home movies of the filmmaker's family (Figures 3.3-3.4). These video recordings document a family vacation, showing Tsakiri-Scanatovits' mother enwrapped in her voluminous fur coat and the young filmmaker nestled tightly against it. It is an image connecting us back to the film's introduction, to the animated depiction of the mother-daughter embrace. Two filmic representations of the same illuminated past – one handmade, one analog – both noticeably discordant within the contemporary digital topography. The video sequence suggests a more comprehensive physicality than its illustrative counterpart: the figures are live-action, the



scenes are filled with color, and the corporeal details that may have been lost to memory have been recaptured and revealed on tape. Undeniably, it presents a different kind of presence than animation. But is either representation more or less recognizable? Relatable? Real?

Distinctions made between actual and virtual fields of knowledge rest upon imprecise suppositions. If we assume that the actual denotes that which can be perceived by our five primary senses, then the virtual may be thought to exist within a more conceptual framework. Perhaps virtuality designates entities that we are able to imagine or psychically approximate, ideations of what was or predictions of what has yet come to pass. For example, in Aristotle's estimation, the actual might refer to a solid block of marble while the virtual imagines the potential sculpture that may be carved from it.<sup>1</sup> But is that potentiality any more complicated to perceive than its 'actual' counterpart? Does imagination not rely upon the actual? Isn't the simulation or idea of an actuality still an actuality in and of itself? And by the same token, wouldn't 'actual' materiality rely upon its own set of virtual underpinnings with regard to the various visual, mental, and sensory perceptions necessary for its realization? In the lexicon of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, what is 'real' must be acknowledged to encompass both virtual and actual spheres.<sup>2</sup> The promised sculpture would not exist without the recalcitrant materiality of the marble; it in fact resides within it and within our perception of it.

In her recent article, 'Information, Secrets, and Enigmas', Laura Marks builds upon Deleuze's notion of the 'fold' to rethink this interplay of actual and virtual images within contemporary digital culture.<sup>3</sup> As a means to ascertain the processes of their production and reception, Marks expands upon the intricate, invisible, but constantly in flux folding environment that Deleuze envisioned. She proposes a folding-unfolding cinema aesthetic based on a three-tiered system: image, information, and the infinite. Borrowing from Henri Bergson, Marks argues that all images exist within a universal sea of images, constituted as the virtual, or the 'infinite set of all images'.<sup>4</sup> Information is the mechanism that pulls a

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. John Warrington (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, [350 BCE] 1956), Aii-Aiii.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* [*Différence et Répétition*], trans. Paul R. Patton (London: Continuum, [1968] 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Marks, 'Information, Secrets, Enigmas', *Screen* 50.1 (2009): 86-98.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

particular image into significance, giving form to the formless, actualizing the virtual. It is, in her view, an organizational tool used to make sense of the axiomatic white noise that pervades contemporary media culture, turning the mess of incoherent frequencies into a streamlined audio signal. Images are able to unfold from this information, which itself unfolds from the infinite.

Receiving and processing vast amounts of visual information is not necessarily specific to contemporary culture. But Marks asserts ‘information’ as a particularly apt descriptor for theorizing modern sensory experience. She reminds us that what we see and hear is often the end calculation of informative code: databases, algorithms, and lines of encryption. What and how we perceive has been codified. This quality of digitization is an aspect of visual culture more broadly, whether computer-generated or not. Merleau-Ponty elucidated throughout his inquiry into phenomenological perception that art is the sensual presentation of the idea; art can make the invisible visible. What is different now, Marks observes, is a deeper layer of invisibility but not immateriality. There are many perceptible things that are materialized and processed by information, composed by the inherent physics, mathematics, and chemistry of materials. Similarly, contemporary visual culture is fundamentally an information culture. It is an environment where perception has been broken down into codes, where a magnifying glass can be held to the exterior of things in order to reveal their interior composition. And under this lens, the invisible is made visible. If it can be said that contemporary media culture and digital saturation have fomented a collective sensory deprivation – an environment that is overly sign, information, and image conscious, where we choose to look up the weather online rather than go outside to feel the temperature on our skin – Marks posits that her folding-unfolding cinema aesthetic might offer a remedy for this modern affliction: as the image unfolds, she explains, information and infinity connect us ‘back to the world’.<sup>5</sup> In the case of *My Mother’s Coat*, we can use Marks’ theory to contemplate how Tsakiri-Scanatovits’ visual narrative has emerged out of the fog of the past, given shape by the memories of her mother’s testimony and the filmmaker’s aesthetic

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 87.

production. From this information unfolds her imagery, which connects the infinite abyss back to the world and to the eye of the perceiver.

But while a productive strategy for assessing the visual mechanics of cinema in general, or Tsakiri-Scanatovits' film in particular, Marks' postulation stops short of fully fleshing out these enfolding-unfolding movements and their potentialities. For Deleuze, the fold speaks to more than technical process but to an ontology of becomings and unbecomings, multiplicities, and the possibility for differentiations to simultaneously exist within continuities. It is a delicately interwoven fabric that allows for a dynamic, multidimensional vision of the infinite. Within the Deleuzian fold, the possible connections made between its elements do not exist on unwavering chronological pathways but occur instantaneously and infinitely, their presences relying more upon movements in the in-between than on demarcated spatio-temporalities. In Deleuze's words, 'the outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside'.<sup>6</sup> The fold obliges a liquidity of motion, in which everything is everywhere at once, where everything touches everything else concurrently, where the inside and outside are one and the same, and no distinctions between space and time are made. Disregarding these facets of Deleuze's sophisticated conceptualization seems a disservice to the folding-unfolding process that Marks establishes, which has by comparison been streamlined into its all too rigid image-information-infinite circuitry. Viewing these schematics aside each other, Marks' formulation (Figure 3.5) appears narrower in scope, as it is both overly schematized and simplified.

This chapter explores the ways *My Mother's Coat* visually analogizes the fluid and intricate constellation of connections wrapped within the Deleuzian fold. In addition, I offer an interpretation of the fold that departs from Marks' supposition of it as a procedural and stratified mode of experience. In her usage, 'information' appears discordant with the advancement of Deleuze's theorization. Though certain that contemporary digital culture

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<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, [1986] 1988), 96-97.

emphasizes a technological evolution that will always necessitate further reflection, Deleuze's original proposition had allowed for these dynamic pathways of knowledge. And though Marks' theorization acknowledges that modes of invisible coding have always been present, I would caution that the newness or contemporary prevalence of the digital landscape should not demand the overthrow of the Deleuzian model or avow its dominance within this system. This would stand in direct contrast to Deleuze's circumspection – if not outright condemnation – of any structure that establishes hierarchies, transcendent entities, or knowledge that is based upon binaries and pre-established fact.

Moreover, rooting 'information' in the 'factual' rather than the 'perspectival' plays down the flexibility of perception, deemphasizing 'information' as only one of many ways of seeing. In this context, human perception is considered a biased knowledge source and connotes negative characteristics. This view invalidates its capabilities, instead of evaluating sensory cognition as part of a larger network of ceaselessly flowing and interchanging mediations. In her article, Marks notes that animation, for instance, is the least 'indexical' image of all time-based imagery, as opposed to those founded on 'factual' information.<sup>7</sup> But how have these visual characteristics of the medium been defined? Within any representation exist buried secrets and mediating forces, some of which reveal themselves and others that do not. Images are inherently inscrutable in this manner, as we will never know all that has been disclosed versus enclosed within their borders. Searching for answers within the image depends not only on the hand of the artist or the materiality of its form but also on the eye of the perceiver. These are the points of contact – the perspectival 'inflection' points of transformation described by Deleuze – which infer that, even though perceptual experience varies, it will always be involved in image production. It will always play a valid role in the shaping of an object. It is undeniably an 'actual', 'factual' thing simply because it exists.

In what follows, I will explore five layers of filmic production that have been incorporated into *My Mother's Coat*, which – rather than delineating any clear-cut systems of knowledge – signify the perceptual processes of understanding, of knowledge always

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<sup>7</sup> Marks, 'Information', 93.

becoming: fragmentation, morphology, corporeality, audio, and video. In this film, abstraction and virtuality intersect. Materialities and tangibilities are firmly rooted within the animated image, evoking a physical presence that exceeds its status of minimalist abstraction. In a sea of digital imagery, the handmade production of *My Mother's Coat* gestures a return to a corporeal mode of visualization. It reasserts the hidden layers of the everyday, the invisible realities that manifest themselves not solely through data and evolving technologies but also within the body, the family, the immediate environment, and the air that circulates in-between. These are not just pre-coded layers of information but dynamic and perspectival mediations. *My Mother's Coat* underscores these interchanges, uncovering what is always happening beneath the surface of things.

### **Mediation I. Fragmentation**

According to Tsakiri-Scanatovits, the initial idea for *My Mother's Coat* occurred to her on a summer afternoon in 2009.<sup>8</sup> The filmmaker – then a Royal College of Art student working toward the completion of her master's degree – was watching some old home movies with her sister at their parents' house in Greece. She noticed a theme running throughout the VHS footage: her mother – a parent and a wife, responsible for dropping the kids off at school, doing the laundry, and packing school lunches – seemed interminably torn in different directions. It is a visual allegory that stresses physicality, her mother's body appearing pulled, exhausted, and separated from itself. The image of a body-in-pieces served as the aesthetic foundation for Tsakiri-Scanatovits' *My Mother's Coat*, the filmmaker's final student project. In the film, there appears a compulsive avoidance to depict the fullness of the body throughout, something true for each of its figurative forms.

Representations of a fragmented body carry with them an extensive history stemming out of classical antiquity and the early modern period, when philosophical and scientific inquiry into the body's anatomy developed and intensified. The figurative dissection of bodily forms was essential to the second-century writings of Greek medical philosopher

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<sup>8</sup> Tsakiri-Scanatovits, in discussion with the author, 22 August 2012, appendix ii.

Claudius Galen, who viewed each part of the body as relational to its overall harmony.<sup>9</sup> The harmonious individual – reflective of the person’s health and wellbeing – mirrored that of the divine. In the Galenic view, the brain performed the psychic function, the heart was the vital faculty, and the liver supported the body’s natural component. Centuries later, Deleuze and Félix Guattari reworked these anatomical classifications. Envisaging a ‘body without organ(ization)s’, Deleuze and Guattari posited that the body is a plane of consistencies in which there is no hierarchical structure; instead, any one of its parts can serve as the surface.<sup>10</sup> In her essay ‘Getting Under the Skin, or, How Faces Have Become Obsolete’, Bernadette Wegenstein argues that by the turn of the millennium, all previous ideas of the fragmented body had been superseded, as contemporary media came to embrace the body as what she calls – in an inversion of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘body without organs’ – ‘an organ without a body’ or an ‘organ instead of a body’.<sup>11</sup> Citing examples from film and advertising that feature individual body parts as their own ‘independent biotopes’, Wegenstein observes that body parts have become fetishized to the point of being seen as whole bodies in and of themselves.<sup>12</sup> She discerns that these representations of specific body parts are not necessarily working to override a body’s totality but instead signal that contemporary interpretations have done away with classical antiquity-era or early modernist visions of the unified or harmonious body.

Viewing the fragmented bodies presented in *My Mother’s Coat* within the contemporary visual culture Wegenstein describes, we are able to see ways in which Tsakiri-Scanatovits’ animations are not only a manifestation of the ‘organ instead of body’ but also a response to this proposition. I suggest that the film’s figural fragments elaborate on some of Wegenstein’s hypotheses. As I will detail in this discussion, this is particularly significant for her assertion that the facial codification of the body critiqued by Deleuze and Guattari in *A*

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<sup>9</sup> Claudius Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, trans. and ed. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [165-175 AD] 1968), 49.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [*Mille plateaux*], trans. and ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1980] 1987), 149-166.

<sup>11</sup> Bernadette Wegenstein, ‘Getting Under the Skin, or, How Faces Have Become Obsolete’, *Configurations* 10.10 (2002): 222.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

*Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* has since been surpassed, allowing for any part of the body to act as both a 'Face' and a whole body.<sup>13</sup> However, the film also heralds a retroactive return to Deleuze and Guattari's 'BwO' system, in which contextual distinctions and connections between parts and whole are not only acknowledged but also continue to be operational.

Of its animated imagery, the mother-daughter embrace depicted in the film's title scene provides the fullest representation of either figure (Figure 3.1). The image is transparent yet durable. Individual strands of hair are delineated. There is physicality to the mother's hand, and her cheekbones are defined. That we can identify them at all is startling, as we are not able to clearly view either face of mother and daughter throughout the rest of the film. From there, each character devolves into a scattering of pieces. Simple moving lines present themselves just long enough to trace the contours of their bodies before fleeing the frame. Any notion of cohesion or constancy made evident in the film's opening moments is swiftly stripped away, leaving behind hazy boundaries, a permeability of bodily integrity. Entities are continuously concealed, revealed, emerging, merging, and dissolving into nothing. Everything and everyone seems just out of the viewer's reach, impossible to access, impossible to know.

Philosophy scholar Drew Leder has drawn a parallel between such vague impressions of formal embodiment and the perceptions of children still becoming familiar with their bodies as discrete units. There is both a sense of corporeal stability to the bodily structure, even as it is transforming in physicality and consciousness. It is a developmental stage in cognitive awareness 'that first allows the body to open out onto a world'.<sup>14</sup> But as a result of this unfolding outward, the body inevitably 'folds back upon itself' when it becomes socialized and seen through an externality.<sup>15</sup> It is at this point, Leder speculates, that the former 'presence of an absence' – described as the realization that one does not know their

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<sup>13</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 149-166.

<sup>14</sup> Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 90.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

own bodily form – becomes instead ‘the absence of an absence’.<sup>16</sup> But this presence will be reaffirmed in the physical performances of bodily knowledge, like when a parent teaches their child a new motor skill. As a film about the relationship between mother and daughter – and more accurately, about a child looking to discover what she did not know about her mother’s past, the things that may have been obscured and are now exposed – *My Mother’s Coat* visually espouses a process of formative learning and unlearning, a re-education of what a child understands about a parent, about family, about one’s self. Old definitions are questioned, prior knowledge erased.

This cinematic interrogation is visualized in two modes: first, the disintegration of bodily fixity, as discussed above and as I will continue to address throughout this section; and second, through the particular attention granted to the segmented body, precluding the face. An aspect of Wegenstein’s argument hypothesizes that as the early modern fragmented body – which sees wholeness as a sum of its parts – has been overwritten, it has also been replaced, at least in part, by the “defaced” body’.<sup>17</sup> Wegenstein finds that faciality is no longer the primary human feature that is able to represent the whole. As a philosophical subject, the face has long been contended the communicative ‘screen’ of the body. For philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, the human face appears as the ‘window’ that bares the ‘naked truth’ of another, and such a revelatory encounter between persons would produce affiliation: ‘It is my responsibility before a face looking at me as absolutely foreign (and the epiphany of the face coincides with these two moments) that constitutes the original fact of fraternity.’<sup>18</sup> Twentieth-century film theorist Jean Epstein valued the facial close-up as the most powerful cinematic tool to connect the medium with its spectators, as the face had the ability to establish an emotional affiliation between the actor, machine, viewer, and the world, a power he termed ‘photogénie’.<sup>19</sup> Deleuze and Guattari characterized this extension of faciality as representative of the ‘decoded body’, in which the face has supplanted all other parts: ‘The

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>17</sup> Wegenstein, ‘Getting Under the Skin’, 222.

<sup>18</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, [1961] 1969), 214.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Epstein, ‘On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie’, trans. Tom Milne, *Afterimage* 10 (1981): 114.



face is produced only when the head ceases to be a part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body, when it ceases to have a multidimensional, polyvocal corporeal code – when the body, head included, has been decoded and has to be overcoded by something we shall call Face.<sup>20</sup> But shifting beyond Deleuze and Guattari, Wegenstein concludes that the principality of faciality has been outmoded. Coded faciality has been granted to other components of the body, to the organs, to DNA, to the point where ‘any body part has the potential to become this special “window to the soul”’.<sup>21</sup>

*My Mother’s Coat* exemplifies this reorganization of the body as a system of knowledge by visually challenging its structural hierarchy. Faciality is rare in the film. The faces of mother and daughter are almost never seen. Instead, the figures are presented as fragments of themselves: traces of hands folding a sweater, intertwining arms and legs that the viewer cannot quite distinguish from one another (Figures 3.6-3.7). And then there is the salient repetition of feet (Figures 3.8-3.11). About as far removed from the face along the bodily terrain as we can get, the foot seems the most isolated from any ‘window to the soul’. Yet there remains something acutely intimate about feet. Not often exposed. For some, a source of shame. For others, a fetish. And though their utility may evidence as routinely human, their functionality emphasizes the corporeality of being, the very root of ‘down-to-earth’ living. The foot is both sensitive and callous. It provides the physical point for being grounded and ungrounded, the locus of lifting us up and keeping us down. In this capacity, it is a feature that vacillates within a process of learning-knowing, of being mindful of one’s self and surroundings. In Sobchack’s poetic analysis of ‘phantom limb’ phenomena, she describes the fresh awareness she had of the physicality of her foot and the significant sensory role it had after her above-the-knee leg amputation:

Just as with my so-called “phantom” and later with my prosthetic left leg, the most prominent sense I had of my right leg’s specific shape and solid presence was my “foot” – that “part” of my leg that most regularly met and was spatially defined by the resistance of the ground. In sum, without either some corporeal problem or worldly contact to define its presence, and for all

<sup>20</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 170.

<sup>21</sup> Wegenstein, ‘Getting Under the Skin’, 233.

its fleshy solidity, I sensed my right leg as little more than a generally vague and hardly weighty verticality.<sup>22</sup>

Classifying the revision of her liminal definition as a mode of recognition and reconciliation with the 'mirrored form of structural homology', a natural inclination for the experience of having two legs, Sobchack describes this process – like Leder – as the phenomenological cognizance of a 'presence/absence'.<sup>23</sup> 'Looking at the place from which the "thing" that was my objective leg was absent,' Sobchack states, "no-thing" was there. And, yet, the "dys-appearance" of my leg, however vague its boundaries, was subjectively experienced as a sense of self-presence now and here. Together...in their conjunction, doubling and reversals, they constituted a strange positivity: the presence of an absence.'<sup>24</sup> It is again a body opening out onto the world, before folding back within.

A heightened awareness of presence and absence runs palpably throughout *My Mother's Coat*. As a dissection of form, the mother's visual image is intimate, intricate, and exposed, but also indecipherable and hollow. But this paradoxical presentation does not seem accordant with Wegenstein's 'OiB' framework, in which the part has become a whole in and of itself. Instead, Tsakiri-Scanatovits' fragmented animations act as a return to Deleuzian form, the BwO, in which hierarchy is continuously resisted, and the bodily segments retain their individual properties even as they are concurrently interwoven into a larger whole. This model is akin to what modern dancer Homer Avila characterizes as a 'new morphology' of body and motion: 'It's not about looking at an aspect of partial function. What you are seeing is the wholeness of this organism. And what impresses me most about this organism – this corpus – is that you may alter it in so many ways, and still it has this incredible desire to have an expression of life.'<sup>25</sup> As the physical configurations emerge and dissolve into one another in *My Mother's Coat*, they infer a continuous attaching and detaching of child and parent, individual and world, individual and knowledge. They produce a constant redefining of the

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<sup>22</sup> Sobchack, 'Living a "Phantom Limb": On the Phenomenology of Bodily Integrity', *Body & Society* 16 (2010): 59.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 51 and 59.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 51 and 58.

<sup>25</sup> Homer Avila as quoted in Sobchack, "Choreography for One, Two, and Three Legs" (A Phenomenological Meditation in Movements)', *Topoi* 24.1 (2005): 56.

self, presenting a challenge to what constitutes knowing. It is as though the bond between mother and daughter is analogous to the phantom limb, the relationship becoming a lyrical metaphor for the endless and symbiotic merging and dissolving that constitutes its unceasing formation.

Discussing the fold, Deleuze advises:

Folding-unfolding no longer simply means tension-release, contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution... a simple metric change would not account for the difference between the organic and the inorganic, the machine and its motive force. It would fail to show that movement does not simply go from one greater or smaller part to another, but from fold to fold.<sup>26</sup>

Folding-unfolding defies traditional conceptualizations of perimeters, natural or unnatural. Spatiality, for example, can be redefined without conventional restrictions, allowing for a renewed dynamic between architecture and nature, structure and ground. This designates an abolishment of the separation between a figure and its environment, alternatively promoting the entanglement of the two. Essentially, what is advocated within the Deleuzian process of folding-unfolding is a ceaseless potentiality of movement. It is not about stable points of reference. It is not about beginnings, endings, or secondary transformations. Rather, folding-unfolding is about process, the interaction between forms, the dialogue between entities. Folding-unfolding denotes becoming. When the figures in *My Mother's Coat* rhythmically melt into one another, reappearing only to fade away once more, they do not do so to motion a beginning or an ending. Instead, these movements speak to an infinite loop of becomings and unbecomings. There are no static identities, no impermeable borders. *My Mother's Coat's* filmic space offers a fertile ground for folding-unfolding: a zone of indeterminacy and possibility, an environment where the fold can thrive.

The creation of this malleable visual environment is primarily due to its foundational medium. As a cinematic form, animation is differentially equipped to work hand in hand with the Deleuzian fold. It provides a boundless platform for unlimited movement, what Sergei

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<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* [*Le pli: Leibniz et le baroque*], trans. Tom Conley (London: The Athlone Press, [1988] 1993), 19.

Eisenstein called the ‘plasmatic-ness’ of the animated image.<sup>27</sup> For animator Raimund Krumme, even the most minimal of forms can offer an expansive fluidity of motion, as the very ‘simplicity of the drawing lets you concentrate on movement’.<sup>28</sup> Animation allows for effortless recursions, allowing visual forms to self-reflexively flow back into their former manifestations by bending, retreating, or folding into themselves. This aesthetic quality promotes the in-betweenness of becoming-unbecoming, folding-unfolding. It can instantaneously preserve its presences and absences, acting as a challenge to hierarchies of form or organizational systems of knowledge.

Such are the capabilities of the medium that *My Mother’s Coat* takes advantage of and which come to serve its narrative of indefinable bodily and phenomenological connections: relations to familial pasts, to another’s memories, to distant homelands, to parents, and to children. These bonds are material, multiple, and ceaselessly morphing. This too is an expression of the Deleuzian fold:

Thus a continuous labyrinth is not a line dissolving into independent points, as flowing sand might dissolve into grains, but resembles a sheet of paper divided into infinite folds or separated into bending movements, each one determined by the consistent or conspiring surrounding... A fold is always folded within a fold, like a cavern in a cavern. The unit of matter, the smallest element of the labyrinth, is the fold, not the point which is never a part, but a simple extremity of the line.<sup>29</sup>

The following discusses this mutability of the line in connection with the animated form, drawing a further correlation between the fold and the visual morph.

## **Mediation II. Morphology**

A dispersion of curved lines come together to form what appears to be a car (Figure 3.12). Faint, honking sounds of the audio cement that impression. But just when the viewer thinks they have solved this visual puzzle, the form has already disintegrated and reconvened to

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<sup>27</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leda (Kolkata: Seagull Books, [1941] 1986), 64. To distinguish between Sergei Eisenstein and Bernice Eisenstein, I refer to Sergei Eisenstein by both first and last names throughout the text.

<sup>28</sup> Raimund Krumme, ‘The View From Hollywood’, *Animation World Network*, 1 October 1996, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.awn.com/animationworld/view-hollywood>.

<sup>29</sup> Deleuze, *Fold*, 6.

become something else. Two walking figures fluidly change between human and object, their splintered lines intermittently appearing and disappearing (Figure 3.13). Another figure transforms into several people simultaneously, before each bodily remnant falls out of the frame and into nothing (Figure 3.14). By establishing itself on a field of minimalist fragmentations, *My Mother's Coat* does not center on what is shown and not shown, or what has been privileged versus overlooked. Instead, the focus is granted to the selective process itself. It is a shift from representation to performativity, as the film places attention on the movements of folding-unfolding.

Such shifting, transformative movements are characteristic of the visual morph. As noted by several contributors to Sobchack's edited volume *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of the Quick Change*, there is nothing within contemporary representation that is as at once clichéd and distinctively fascinating as the cinematic morph.<sup>30</sup> 'Within the last decade,' Kevin Fisher writes, "the morph" has arisen as a unique phenomenological object within visual culture and, just as quickly, induced a sort of sensory fatigue through its overuse.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, the morph has become 'utterly familiar'.<sup>32</sup> Seen frequently in television advertising, music videos, and film, shape-shifting figurations have a long history, showing up in science-fiction vehicles like *The Wolf Man* (1941), *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *The Abyss* (1989), *The Thing* (1982), *Starman* (1984), *Willow* (1988), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *The Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003), the *Transformers* film series (2007-2014), and *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2012).<sup>33</sup> However, as Sobchack explains, the visual metamorphosis remains interminably intriguing:

<sup>30</sup> Sobchack ed., *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation in the Culture of Quick Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Kevin Fisher, 'Tracing the Tesseract: A Conceptual Prehistory of the Morph', in *Meta-Morphing*, 103.

<sup>32</sup> Sobchack, "'At the Still Point of the Turning World" and Meta-Stasis', in *Meta-Morphing*, 131.

<sup>33</sup> George Waggner, *The Wolf Man* (Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1941), 35mm; John Carpenter, *The Thing* (Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1982), 35mm and 70mm; John Landis, *An American Werewolf in London* (Universal City: Universal Pictures, 1981), 35mm; Carpenter, *Starman* (Culver City: Columbia Pictures, 1984), 35mm and 70mm; James Cameron, *The Abyss* (Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 1989), 35mm and 65mm; Cameron, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Culver City: TriStar Pictures, 1991), 35mm and 70mm; *The Matrix* trilogy, The Wachowski Brothers (Burbank: Warner Brothers Pictures, 1999-2003), 35mm and 70mm; Michael Bay, *Transformers* (Universal City: DreamWorks Pictures and Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2007-2014), 35mm, 70mm, and DCP; and Catherine Hardwicke, David Slade, Chris Weitz, and Bill Condon, *The Twilight Saga* (Santa Monica: Summit Entertainment, 2008-2012), 35mm and DCP.

Watching a morph, at the same time I know its human ‘impossibility’ and strangeness, I also feel myself identifying with it – not with its narrative figure, but with its figuration of corporeal process. My own body quickens to its effortless transformations at some deep molecular level and I recognize the morph as strangely familiar; that is, I feel “myself” in constant flux and become aware...there is nothing quite so paradoxical as the sense the morph conveys that the ephemerality of flux and the temporality of transformation are themselves undone. Flux and transformation suddenly lose their quotidian human (if not philosophical) logic and value--not only because the morph's radical ‘quick change’ is fixed in a concrete and particular figure, but also because its transformations are temporally reversible.<sup>34</sup>

Found in a cinematic conceit that is less sensational and more minimalist, what might these strange impossibilities of physical form mean for *My Mother's Coat*? What might they summon for an embodied relationship with the viewer? And what do these transgressions of bodily delineations and ‘quotidian logic’ imply within a narrative context not rooted in the genres of sci-fi or the supernatural but within a quotidian narrative itself? Taking a look at the film’s emphasis on its earthly narrative and the tangibility of its production, we discern that its employment of the handmade morph – in contrast to its digital counterpart – becomes a reassertion of the corporeal, the actual, the everyday within a genre of inventive abstraction. Despite its simplified aesthetic, the latitude of its physicality and the potential extensions of its peripheries are not posited as a scientific fiction or future but as a physical world that we perceive and experience presently.

In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze makes it clear that the line is an enabling space for – and not the driving force behind – the converting processes of becoming-unbecoming, folding-unfolding: ‘It is not the line that is between two points, but the point that is at the intersection of several lines.’<sup>35</sup> According to Deleuze, the atomic element of an ‘active’ line that results in its transmutations – its curvatures and folds – is such a point, labeled the ‘inflection’.<sup>36</sup> Inflections compose the genetic underpinning of the plane of immanence. They reside at the apex of elasticity, where spatiality can be inverted and the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze, *Fold*, 219.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 15.

inside and outside can be interchanged. To put it another way, the line is a pathway and the inflection point is responsible for the variability of its direction.

Deleuze builds his analysis of the line through an engagement with Paul Klee's definition of the inflection. Klee considered the inflection point the impetus of movement from within, a recursive act that expressed an 'eternal return'.<sup>37</sup> Klee described the inflection in similar terms, identifying it as the locus of 'cosmogensis' or 'chaosmosis', an inter-dimensional point that awaits events – or folds – to occur.<sup>38</sup> In his *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Klee diagrammed an active line, which Deleuze elucidated as the inflection point seen at three junctures (Figure 3.15). The first image charts the formation of a line dictated by a pathway that alternates direction at the inflection or folding point. The second reveals the interaction between lines along this folding-unfolding system. And in the third image, the dimensionality of the line is shown, indicated by the shadow represented on its external surface. Klee's visualized inflection point stipulates a contingent cause and effect relationship between positions, lines, and curves. These maneuvers are not random but intentional. Klee imagines a point put into motion as 'an active line on a walk moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk's sake'.<sup>39</sup> British animator Lesley Keen explored this liberative aptitude in her 1983 short, *Taking a Line for a Walk: A Homage to the Work of Paul Klee*, which, in an aesthetic form similar to that of *My Mother's Coat*, highlights the limitless and interconnected potentials of multiple moving points.<sup>40</sup>

These interpretations suggest that the function of the linear is not to manifest in a figurative form. The line is not necessarily oriented toward the confinement of a discrete entity or the provision of distinct margins. Instead, the space of the line becomes an arena for Klee's concept of the 'chaosmic'. Or, as Merleau-Ponty deduces, the line culminates in 'something only by being a "spectacle of nothing," by breaking the "skin of things" to show

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<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Klee, quoted in Deleuze, *Fold*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, ed. and trans. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (London: Frederick A. Praeger, [1925] 1953), 16.

<sup>40</sup> Lesley Keen, *Taking a Line for a Walk: A Homage to the Work of Paul Klee* (London: Channel Four, 1983), 35mm.

how the things become things, how the world becomes world'.<sup>41</sup> The line embodies a fertile, generative environment. But with its propagative prowess comes its equally obliterative force. And it is this tension that exemplifies its transformative potential.

Throughout *My Mother's Coat*, figures and objects emerge from nowhere and dissolve back into nothing. It is a series of visual becomings and unbecomings. If these forms were tangible – if you could reach out and touch them – they would simply slide through your fingertips. The trace memories would wash over you before quickly draining away. It is a frustrating encounter, as we diligently attempt to decipher the image only to come up empty-handed. The images are tantalizing in their promises of something more, but they are consistently elusive. As media historian Norman Klein describes, within the animated cycle there exists a moment when, 'for a few frames, the object...does not look like what it was or what it will be'.<sup>42</sup> He names this mid-movement the 'animorph'. Both 'solid and absent at the same time', the animorph is found interacting with itself at its points of indiscernibility – its points of inflection – which obscures its delineations and eludes cohesive configuration.<sup>43</sup> Similar to Deleuze's contention that Klee's work stands in contrast to Kandinsky's, the animorph diverges from a conventional 'cause-and-effect relationship between poses and movement', instead signifying that 'poses and movement arise *at the same time*'.<sup>44</sup>

The animorph is a paradoxical vision of movement. It stresses the organic fluidity of motion by emphasizing the connective shifts and flows of the transmutational process, while also presenting its asymmetrical, particularized, and aleatory instances as one pose morphs into another. This shifting of its parts into the whole is reminiscent of the reorganized body as previously discussed, a simile allowing us to view *My Mother's Coat*'s use of the morph as acknowledging the fragment as representative of totality. It is a challenge to what semblances of form can ever constitute knowledge. For, in the processes of becoming, is 'wholeness' ever realized?

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<sup>41</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Primacy of Perception*, 181.

<sup>42</sup> Norman Klein, 'Animation and Animorphs: A Brief Disappearing Act', in *Meta-Morphing*, 22. To distinguish between scholars Norman Klein and Kerwin Lee Klein, Norman Klein will be referred to by both first and last name.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Keith Broadfoot and Rex Butler, 'The Illusion of Illusion', in *Illusion of Life*, 266, emphasis in original.



Characteristic of this visual assemblage, cinematic morphing grew out of the production of time-lapse photography. Late nineteenth-century experiments with serial exposures, including Eadweard Muybridge's studies of human and animal locomotion and Étienne-Jules Marey's 'chronophotographs', worked to capture the processes of movement that are imperceptible to human visual acuity. These projects offered a revelatory glimpse into the natural progressions and degradations that happen before our eyes, whether or not we are cognizant of these fluid modifications. Within cinematic practice, the time-lapse image was put forth and mobilized. Filmmakers like Epstein, Dziga Vertov, and René Clair became preoccupied with film's distinctive capacity to capture the interactions between physical and temporal shifts. Stated Epstein: 'until the invention of accelerated and slow cinematic motion, it seemed impossible to see – and it was not dreamed of – a year in the life of a plant condensed in ten minutes, or thirty seconds of an athlete's activity inflated and extended to ten minutes.'<sup>45</sup>

Fisher relates these 'graphic-synchronic representations of diachronic movement' to the visual embodiment of the geometric entity called the 'tesseract'.<sup>46</sup> Within the language of geometry, the tesseract is defined as a hypercube, a four-dimensional extension of the conventional three-dimensional cube that is characterized as having height, width, and breadth. The fourth dimension designates an additional direction other than the x, y, and z axes that gives volume to three-dimensionality beyond the spatial dimensions that we have traditionally been thought to perceive. As it moves through time and space, the tesseract becomes a four-dimensional 'hypersphere'.<sup>47</sup> The shape of its movement gives the illusion of 'sphericality', as the fourth dimension interacts with the third via an initial point in space that moves to a final point in space.<sup>48</sup> However, it has been contended that what is perceived as a growing and diminishing sphere or appearance of wholeness is actually the progressive iteration of three-dimensional moments on a four-dimensional continuum. In this capacity, as a semi-stable pattern 'of energy determining the boundaries of a characteristic "sensible"

<sup>45</sup> Epstein, 'Magnifications and Other Writings', *October* 3 (1977): 19.

<sup>46</sup> Fisher, 'Tracing the Tesseract', 116.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

shape in space and time', the tesseract seems interchangeable with Norman Klein's notion of the animorph.<sup>49</sup> It too presents a figurative movement in mid-phase, a zone of indeterminacy where physicality is in the process of becoming. This transient space of the metamorphosis reveals for Norman Klein the residue of past and impending temporalities, memories of former and future movements. The animorph, he notes, is like 'the shadow where a picture frame once hung...a twinkling monad, shape-shifting across dimension...a scar that narrates'.<sup>50</sup> If, as Fisher illustrates, the hypercube denotes the oscillating motions of the three-dimensional cube into an outer dimension as a graphic or digital form, then the animorph may be viewed as the representation of the tesseract within two-dimensional animation.<sup>51</sup> It becomes a visual metaphor for the intrinsic processes of animation, the tesseract connoting the movements of becoming that occur in the in-between.

As Fisher observes, the advancement of the tesseract and the fourth dimension within the fields of geometry and physics prompted the unification of two previously autonomous categories: space and time.<sup>52</sup> The revolutionary classification of space-time and its postulation that the tesseract is able to reveal itself in the visible world only through temporal changes had a massive influence on ensuing research into multi- and parallel dimensionality. These transformations called the fundamental mechanics of the physical into question. Notions of gravity, space, and time – their parameters and their aptitudes – were reconsidered. This reassessment of the constitutive fringes of worldly reality became both threatening to and advantageous for religious and spiritual leaders, who became preoccupied with it as a scientific explanation for extrasensory perception, spirits, and the existence of the afterlife.<sup>53</sup> It is perhaps this expansion of quantum mechanics – as pushed along by the development of the tesseract – that yielded the visual morph's unique relationship with science fiction. As Norman Klein explains, with the development of this multidimensional extension of movement, 'gravity itself seems to disappear. Laws of nature collapse. But very soon, an

<sup>49</sup> Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video: Texts, 1968-1980* (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), 62.

<sup>50</sup> Norman Klein, 'Animation and Animorphs', 24.

<sup>51</sup> Fisher, 'Tracing the Tesseract', 120.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-108.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

alternative law takes over, an uncanny logic where events go out of scale: the sculpture of morphing. It is mercurial. Flesh, or metal, flows like water'.<sup>54</sup> In this time-space schematic of morphology, both figure and ground are distorted, changing their characteristic forms or transposing themselves into different dimensions. These innovative understandings of dimensionality call to mind a pivotal scene in Alfonso Cuarón's 2013 space thriller *Gravity* (Figure 3.16), in which the floating protagonist is encapsulated in an ethereal, transitional space, appearing at once embryonic and futuristic. Such visions of morphology promote an image of synchronous stasis and progress, a process of becoming. These manifestations of the tesseract are, as is echoed Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* (which included one of the earliest literary references to the entity), a wrinkling in the fabric of time and space, where experiential folds can collapse upon one another.<sup>55</sup>

But while future, fantastical, and imagined technologies might be rooted in these interpretations, *My Mother's Coat* reclaims these physical principles as earthly forms. The next section details how the film articulates their present realities through the film's handmade and embodied mode of production.

### **Mediation III. Corporeality**

In 1967, American artist Charles Csuri began working on one of the defining projects of his career, a series of animated object transformations that were to include the morphing of forms. The first artist to receive funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), Csuri was commissioned to research the transition from traditional media to computer-generated imagery. He produced his drawings by hand for the purpose of transforming them via analog and digital technologies, investigating the mathematic principles that allowed him to view his sketches in ways he had not before, in regard to their multidimensionality. Both still and moving imagery comprised Csuri's early works and included the computerized transmutation

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<sup>54</sup> Norman Klein, 'Animation and Animorphs', 21.

<sup>55</sup> Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1963).

and interactivity of art objects.<sup>56</sup> For Csuri's eleven-minute animated film, *Hummingbird*, over 14,000 frames were produced and output to 16mm film.<sup>57</sup> It reveals an image of a bird rhythmically floating in and out of view and then dissolving into pieces before gradually reassembling (Figure 3.17). Hugely innovative at the time, the film was purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in 1968 as representative of early computer animation and the nascency of the digital morph.

The resemblance between Csuri's animation and Tsakiri-Scanatovits' is striking (Figures 3.12-3.14). Given my discussion about the tesseract, morph, and animorph, and how they frequently work to visualize the futuristic and fantastical, it is interesting to see how closely *My Mother's Coat* visually recalls this moment in animation history, when the hand-drawn image was first crossing paths with digital production. The imagery in *My Mother's Coat* offers not a return to but a retrieval of Csuri's *Hummingbird*, a reclamation of the moment when the morph became tethered to new technologies. Handmade animation had long employed morphing techniques to not only push and explore potentialities but also acknowledge the fluid and elastic transformations we find in the everyday, in the natural world. Émile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie*, filmed in 1908, utilized organic elements like sand and clay to investigate their morphological capabilities.<sup>58</sup> *My Mother's Coat* – with its emphasis placed not on the surreal but on the quotidian and familial – offers a kind of homecoming to these aesthetic experiments. The film affirms the sciences as real-world, lived experience, rather than the sciences as fictional or fantastical. Tsakiri-Scanatovits' work initiates a dialogue between organic and technological sciences, one that reembodies their intangible impossibilities. Within *My Mother's Coat*, a communicative exchange is created and encouraged between forms of past and future, biological and digital, asserting that they are not mutually exclusive but in fact interrelating in the here and now.

This is not to say that the initial stages of digital animation posed an immediate threat to hand-drawn production. In 1967, when Matthew Baigell, a professor of art history at The

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<sup>56</sup> See Edward Shanken, *Art and Electronic Media* (London: Phaidon, 2009), 80; and Janice M. Glowski ed., *Charles A. Csuri: Beyond Boundaries, 1963-present* (Boston: Siggraph, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> Charles Csuri, *Hummingbird (fragmentation animation)* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 16mm.

<sup>58</sup> Émile Cohl, *Fantasmagorie* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Société des Etablissements L. Gaumont, 1908), 16mm.

Ohio State University, sent an article discussing Csuri's work to the journal *Artforum*, he received a two-sentence answer from editor Philip Leider: 'Thanks for the enclosed manuscript on Chuck Csuri. I can't imagine *Artforum* ever doing a special issue on electronics or computers in art, but one never knows.'<sup>59</sup> At the time, the technological form's emphasis on rationality, a programmatic creative process that can be measured objectively, was deemed an affront to the very heart of artistic practice. Hiroshi Kawano, a pioneer of Japanese digital art working around the same time as Csuri, stated that his computer work was performed in the pursuit of discovering 'the algorithm of art in order to simulate human art', the implication being that digital art is not the outcome of artistic creation, but artistic imitation.<sup>60</sup> Kawano's proposal underscored particular aspects of the digital aesthetic that complicated Csuri's preliminary vision of a harmonious relationship between the natural sciences and artistic representation, namely automation, homogeneity, and the uncanny.

The work produced by Csuri and his team, along with research undertaken by early digital artists including Kawano, Peter Foldès, and MIT researcher Tom Brigham, became the foundation for the emergence of modern digitized morphing technologies.<sup>61</sup> The seamless refinement intrinsic to the digital morph that is familiar to contemporary visual culture speaks to something other than the highly specialized capabilities of advanced technologies, suggesting instead a perceptual shift in the production of these virtual objects. Envisioned initially as a means to attune art with nature, Csuri saw the digital morph as a way to merge the image with basic scientific principles, linking mimetic representations of the world to natural laws of geometry and physics.<sup>62</sup> The simulations he designed were both models of the visible and 'sensualization[s] of a set of algorithms and data'.<sup>63</sup> But the conceptual vastness new technologies allowed also encouraged exploration of their progressive capacities, and Csuri began to push simulational boundaries throughout his career. He contemplated new

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<sup>59</sup> Philip Leider, in a written letter to Matthew Baigell, 30 October 1967, held in the personal collection of Charles Csuri.

<sup>60</sup> See Hiroshi Kawano, Manuscript held at the Muzej Suvremene Umjetnosti [Museum for Contemporary Art], Zagreb, Croatia, 1971.

<sup>61</sup> Margit Rosen, 'A Record of Decisions: Envisioning Computer Art', in *Beyond Boundaries*, 39-43.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Rosen, 'Record of Decisions', 35.

spatialities – referred to as ‘n-dimensional’ in his writings – as well as theoretical constructs like special relativity. Csuri hypothesized how he could represent objects that move faster than the speed of light or change the limitations of the physical universe to ‘create his own personal fiction’ of reality.<sup>64</sup>

Foldès, whose films *Visages des femmes* [*Faces of Women*], *Metadata*, and *La faim* [*Hunger*] all explore themes of metamorphosis through the digital image, said of his creative process:

The art of the twentieth century is cinema. The language of the twentieth century is technology. In my films, I made metamorphosis. *Visages des femmes* was a perpetual metamorphosis, created by handmade drawings. With a computer, I can still make metamorphoses, but with greater control over each line of the drawing, which I can move as I please. And I work faster, because the machine frees the artist from the fatigue of labor. A miniaturist can work for seven years on a single work: nobody says that Rembrandt’s paintings are less beautiful only because he spent less time on them.<sup>65</sup>

While Foldès’ contention speaks to the efficiency of an automated digital medium, it also brings to issue the possible losses of expedience. Fisher notes that all digital morphing programs – including the most popular, Elastic Reality – emphasize a coordinated transformation from the defined ‘source’ position to the end ‘target’ position.<sup>66</sup> These data points are connected not through a program that has taken into account the processes of organic physical movement, or with regard to bodily mass and proportion, but by way of their corresponding shapes; a mouth to a mouth for example, or a head to a head. For Norman Klein, it becomes evident that the digital morph has a fundamental problem not with discontinuity but with its seamlessness of execution: ‘We are struck by the direct representation of two apparently discontinuous beings or things sharing in a continuous material substratum. The measure of this continuity is witnessed in the unbroken-ness of the

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<sup>64</sup> Csuri and James Shaffer, ‘Arts, Computers and Mathematics’, in *AFIPS Conference Proceedings Volume 33*, ed. American Federation of Information Processing Societies (Washington D.C: Thompson Book Company, 1968), 1294. See also Csuri, *Proposal to the National Science Foundation* (The Ohio State University Research Foundation, November 1968, Proposal Reference No. 68-466), 4.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Foldès in conversation with Giannalberto Bendazzi, as quoted by Mark J.P. Wolf, ‘A Brief History of Morphing’, in *Meta-Morphing*, 90. See also Foldès, *Visages des femmes* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 1968), video; *Metadata* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 1972), video; and *La faim* (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 1973), video.

<sup>66</sup> Fisher, ‘Tracing the Tesseract’, 117.

tesseract.<sup>67</sup> What results is a forfeiture of dimensionality, as the object in transition is compelled to stretch itself across its borders in order to meet the corresponding target points. Consequently, at the very apex of its metamorphosis, the object is found to be flat and inorganic.

Sobchack describes this paradox of the digital morph as the ‘sameness *of* difference’, a ‘chronotopic cohesion of narrative time and space’ that transforms the represented into overly flexible and homogeneous structures.<sup>68</sup> Citing Michael Jackson’s 1991 music video for ‘Black or White’, Sobchack stresses the compression of individualism and difference through the video’s digital morphing of a multiplicity of faces.<sup>69</sup> Reduced to a set of aligning features, many people are forced to become one in a ‘mutable permutation of a single self-similarity’.<sup>70</sup> The contradiction here is that in order for these seamless transitions to occur, each individual must be altered from the outset, as the measurements of every person needs to match the fixed target points; a mouth to a mouth, a head to a head. Accordingly, it appears that in order for the digital morph to occur – a moment meant to highlight the physical scope, scale, and spatial density of the figure – all stable figuration must be discarded.

But as mentioned with respect to the tesseract, the occurrence of the morph need not rely on the dissolution of its subject. Instead, this is the role of the animorph, to reveal the underlying physicality in each moment of transformation, perhaps unveiling a dimension that – though conventionally imperceptible – lays the groundwork for organic movement. Take for instance these two animated sequences from the introduction of *The Simpsons* (Figures 3.18-3.19), one created by hand for the series’ first season in 1989 and the other produced using the animation software Flash for its twentieth season in 2009. Each depicts the same moment from the show’s opening: the character Marge swivels her head around while standing in a grocery store checkout line. However, the earlier version uses twenty-four frames to express the same movement that the later sequence conveys in five. The change is expedient and cost effective, yes, but the loss of dimensionality is significant. And while it is

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Sobchack, ‘Still Point’ 132, emphasis in original.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. and Landis, *Black or White* (New York: Sony Music Distribution, 1991), 35mm and DCP.

<sup>70</sup> Sobchack, ‘Still Point’, 142.

understood that neither image is aiming for realist portrayals of the human form, there exists a perception of idiosyncratic life and vitality in the earlier image that is absent in its revised form, which appears hollow and robotic. This stilted movement can be thought of as an abbreviation of the tesseract, and without a foundation of fuller volume and depth, the sequence renders an uncanny representation.

Avoiding the uncanniness of form while retaining a corporeal link between its imagery and the perceived world is exactly the dilemma *My Mother's Coat*'s aesthetics attempt to outmaneuver. The film's material partnerships are essential to this end, both in connection with the physicality of its figurations and its craftsmanship. In the planning stages of *My Mother's Coat*, Tsakiri-Scanatovits produced extensive figure studies and preparatory drawings for the film (Figures 3.20-3.23). Using life-drawing exercises to establish the physicality of each of the figures, the filmmaker then translated the images according to the appropriate age and body type. As Fisher advises, in order for animation to bring the illusion of life to a drawing, the integrity or stability of a line must be adjusted so that it mimics natural bodily movements.<sup>71</sup> It is not enough to draw bodies proportionally. Instead, life-drawing classes instruct animators to study 'implied mass', emphasizing shifts of weight, responses to gravity, bodies in distortion or distress, or the simple act of breathing.<sup>72</sup> Tsakiri-Scanatovits' delicate yet rigid forms drawn against the film's textured underpinning do not imply physicality; they are inescapably tethered to it. The structural configurations of some of the human figures give them geometrical – almost architectural – support.

For many, like Foldès, the process of digital figuration provides a sense of authoritative agency and control for the artist that is preferable to the handmade. Contrary to denoting artistic choice, however, 'control' in this case seems contingent upon the automated predictability of technical mediation. But there exists a spectrum of creative agency that becomes difficult to ignore. As art and media scholar Margit Rosen observes, the computer 'which intervenes between artist and viewer precludes a great deal of normal communication.

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<sup>71</sup> Fisher, 'Tracing the Tesseract', 104.

<sup>72</sup> Norman Klein, 'Animation and Animorphs', 23.



Even at the first stage – the punched card – one cannot tell whether the card was punched tenderly or in fury'.<sup>73</sup> What might be missing within the digital's regulation of forms is a visceral or emotive aspect of their creation, an instinctual rather than mechanical expression of becoming. Krumme describes his self-reflexive agency of production as such:

A figure emerges and we can still feel the presence of the hand that drew it – the aggressive gesture, the mellow, soft movement, or the uncertain scribble... My figures often come to life like this. Their existence . . . comes randomly, rather than through analysis. The particular movement of the hand communicates emotions in a very direct way. The problem is to get this spontaneous drawing, which includes traces of its creation, into fluent, acceptable animation... I ask myself how to keep this human factor, this soul, in a more or less rationalized environment.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, the handcrafted animations of *My Mother's Coat* reveal a different kind of autonomy than what is most often offered by digital imagery, one that is viscerally and sensually driven as opposed to programmatic. There is an immediacy embedded into traditional animation that seems not easily acquired through the digital process, a link to the form's inherent materiality. Handmade animation allows the film to be handled and treated like an object. As such, it can be felt, moved, and manipulated. The texture of the paper and the fluidity of the drawn line against it enable its intuitive navigation as well as an organic interactivity between artist, material, and image. But this should not infer that this mode of production is effortless. Rather, in contrast to digitality's provision of automated ease, the performative quality of the handmade emphasizes struggle. In *My Mother's Coat*, there appears a shaky fragility to the figures and their movements, a physical form – waking, breathing, walking, living – that conveys strength and vulnerability. Much of this instability can be attributed to the hand, resonating with Sergei Eisenstein's words: 'A tremor of contour – is a tremor of the author, like the tremor of the visible in a pure aspect'; or those of Benjamin, as this acts as a story that 'bears the marks of the storyteller much as the earthen vessel bears the marks of the potter's hand'.<sup>75</sup> Within its narrative context, the physical exertion required by thousands of hand-drawn frames to create this cinematic image implies

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<sup>73</sup> Rosen, 'A Record of Decisions', 39.

<sup>74</sup> Krumme, 'View From Hollywood', <http://www.awn.com/mag/issue1.7/articles/Krumme1.7.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, 47; and Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 159.

something near compulsion, an emotionally charged labor of love that intricately preserves a familial history. And the film seems to continuously reassert its intimately involved, hands-on mode of production. In Figures 3.24 and 3.25, for instance, the mother is seen tying the daughter's shoes, only to be briefly interrupted by the daughter's helpful hand. Somewhat ghostly, it suddenly disappears and reappears. It is a presence outside the film's margins, a reminder of the animator's relational omnipresence and one of the film's many evocations of the connective sense of touch.

Such tactile moments flood *My Mother's Coat*, saturating the film with pervasive sets of hands. Hands which embrace, hold, pour, and pack. Hands that are always moving, doing, touching something. These moments point to a particular unfolding of the past: a selection not of narrative acts but specific moments. *My Mother's Coat* tethers together a constellation of lived experience by its direct handling of material residues and sense memories. Fragments of the mother's remembered past are interwoven, creating a textured visuality that physically links the present with history, memory with the actual event. As witnesses to the past, these objects and perceptual experiences – coaxed from remembrance – refer to the capacity of the senses to mediate between the planes of actuality and virtuality, between past and present.

Some of the objects included in the film – like the titular fur coat – are presented as emblems of a past that has shaped them, showing the wear and tear of lived experience and storing within them specific memories and personal histories. Other objects – like a coffee cup or clothes on a clothesline – seem more innocuous. And still others remain completely enigmatic – like an inexplicably placed key or the formation of unrecognizable structures appearing alongside the mother's narration: 'I had to find work,' she narrates.<sup>76</sup> This is possibly a narrative byproduct, the nostalgic relevance of these materials simply not noted verbally. Not everything is explained, not everything flows together in linearity. The film treats the items it conjures as simultaneously momentous and random. Perhaps they are manifestations of Benjamin's auratic objects, the material remnants that signify melancholic longings for a connection to the past. These objects take on lives of their own as they strive

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<sup>76</sup> Tsakiri-Scanatovits, *My Mother's Coat*, 00:01:01.

for significance beyond their time. The film characterizes these tangible elements as prominent players in the narrative. The fur coat, for example, is imbued with comfort and warmth, auratic qualities that make a relationship with it feel like a relationship with another human being. For Benjamin, the materiality of a medium or object can teach its recipients about it, how to comprehend it – not through magic – but through engagement.<sup>77</sup> When people take the time to speak with an object and hear it speak back, experiences can be extracted from and carved into its materiality. It is within these objects that pasts can be both enfolded and unfolded.

*My Mother's Coat* behaves like this kind of object and asks to be treated as such. The moving bodies brushing against the grain of the paper, the rigidity or fluidity of the drawn line – these are invitations; invitations to caress the slopes and turns of the image, to have a hand in the steady assemblage and dispersing of its forms. The film requests to be held by the viewer, who may enter into the empty, incomplete spaces and permeate them by way of sensory investigation and identification. In early drafts of 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', which advanced Benjamin's notion of aura, he articulated a form of communication between nature and perception, a mimetic understanding of material reality termed 'sensuous similarity'.<sup>78</sup> This type of sensual mimesis was also described in his 1933 essay 'On the Mimetic Faculty' and his unfinished *Passagenwerk* [*The Arcades Project*] (1927-1940).<sup>79</sup> Of particular interest to Benjamin in this regard was the observation of the child's tendency to relate to people and things mimetically, a developmental stage Benjamin saw as unfortunately undone by maturation, as adults typically go on to approach things as entities separate from themselves. Marks categorizes these bodily similes as features of 'yielding-knowing', also explained by anthropologist Michael Taussig as 'a yielding and

<sup>77</sup> Benjamin, 'Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Collecting', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 2, Part 2 1931-1934*, eds. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1931-1934] 1999), 486-493.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, Second Version', in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Brigid Doherty, Thomas Y. Levin, and Michael William Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1936] 2008), 19-55. See also Hansen, 'Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: "The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology"', *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 179-224.

<sup>79</sup> Benjamin, 'On the Mimetic Faculty', in *Selected Writings*, 721-722; and *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1927-1940] 1999), see especially 'First Sketches', 827-870.

mirroring of the knower in the unknown'.<sup>80</sup> The concept of this childlike 'mirror-touch' as a strategy for empathizing and knowing the cinematic subject calls to mind the process of knowledge detailed earlier in this chapter, in which the permeable boundaries between the mother and daughter's fragmented forms connote a simultaneous learning-unlearning. Relating to the film's tangibility becomes in this context a proclamation of its very intangibility, a doubling down on the elusiveness of what constitutes knowing someone or something. It is again an indeterminate zone in which viewer and viewed are not merged onto the surface of things but underneath it, the viewer having been positioned as the child who attempts to hold onto what is slipping through his or her fingers.

In both *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* and *Touch Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Marks puts forward her argument that the cinematic screen acts as a porous membrane through which the audience can make contact with the material forms of memory. This material engagement stems out of a connection with sensory knowledge, defying the audiovisual limitations of the filmic medium. Memories can be encoded into the objects of everyday experience, which can then be examined through cinema's engagement with them and translated to the viewer through material connections shared across the screen. Throughout her analysis, Marks draws upon Benjamin's writings on aura, which she reads as part of a productive tactile relationship between viewer and viewed. Within this conceptualization, the artist's hand connects to the brushstrokes of the painting, which are then enjoined to the viewer through an active, sensory spectatorship. This affiliative process is based upon empathetic recognition – or tacit knowledge – as the viewer's own body of memory is able to relate to another. Marks elucidates this as a kind of laborious visual process, known as 'haptic visuality', which beckons the viewer closer to the image in order to discern its partial or obscured status. In this mode of viewership, the audience must activate their sensual memories and propensities, aligning them with that of the image.

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<sup>80</sup> Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 45-46.

Extrapolating from Marks' contention of the cinematic screen as a porous membrane, I posit that *My Mother's Coat* embodies a 'skin of the film' that is not only permeable but also wearable. This is a skin we are invited to 'slip' into, a fur coat we are encouraged to warm up within. This corresponds to Wegenstein's ideation of the current cultural imaginary, which is accustomed to thinking of skin as a detached article, a 'bodysuit' that can be separated from its traditional form.<sup>81</sup> In line with her 'OiB' theorization, in which Wegenstein premises this particular shift in contemporary representation as an inversion of Deleuze and Guattari's BwO, she suggests that in the process of dismantling the hierarchical structure of the body as Deleuze and Guattari conceived, skin has liberated itself from its primary function of surfacing the body. No longer serving to exclusively protect what lies beneath, skin has instead become a surface, a flat screen atop of which events can be produced. It too has been re-encoded as a 'face', separating itself from the organized body and offering itself to the external world as an independent entity.

However, while *My Mother's Coat* expresses such a re-facialization or restructuring of bodily hierarchy, it accounts for something that Wegenstein's theoretical position does not. Wegenstein seems to take Deleuze and Guattari's BwO framework to a hypothetical extreme, determining that the facial overcoding put forth by the BwO model is a definitive result rather than part of an ongoing process, a permanency and not a moment along a continuum in flux. *My Mother's Coat*, however, envisions a continuous reorganization, an open-ended becoming-unbecoming. It emphasizes the unremitting nature of the transmutability of interiority and exteriority, the liquid peripheries that flow back and forth throughout these possible renewals. The viewer is not only invited to slip into the film – into the eponymous fur coat – but he or she is also allowed to outgrow it, reuse it, wear it, and leave it behind. *My Mother's Coat* establishes layers of tangible and intangible 'skins', all of which can enwrap us in the cinematic space until they need to be discarded, continuing to fold and unfold the viewer within this filmic embrace.

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<sup>81</sup> Wegenstein, 'Getting Under the Skin', 242-243.

#### Mediation IV. Audio

The film's opening moment is an enveloping one. Standing outside, the daughter is nestled within her mother's coat. The presence of a cold wind is conveyed by the gentle movements of blowing hair and shaking tree limbs. There is warmth and texture in the narrator's voice: 'I used to put you inside my fur coat in the morning when I took you to the bus stop. You were very little. And I used to keep you in, like this.'<sup>82</sup> From the beginning, the viewer is lured into the screen, talked to and not at. The 'you' is ambiguous and inviting, allowing the spectator to immediately identify with and share in this act of personal remembrance.

Like the coat that shelters the young girl from winter storms, the mother's voice becomes a warm embrace; it is another cinematic skin intending to wrap the film's internal and external contents into its folds. The voice is textured, physical, embodied. For Merleau-Ponty, language exemplifies the bodily: 'Words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon being.'<sup>83</sup> The voice – generated and deciphered in the flesh – makes corporeal the space between the speaker and the listener. It becomes a tangible link between bodies, which must open up to one another in the production of meaning.

Marks proposes that when various acoustics are perceived as indistinct – when 'the rustle of the trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest cavity and move my body from the inside' – it manifests as haptic sound.<sup>84</sup> Like haptic vision, the textural qualities of music, spoken word, ambient noise, and even silence can be experienced kinesthetically, creating a physical union between interacting forms. An emphasis on the tactility of sound, or the inextricable connection between materiality and the auditory, is emphasized by the focus *My Mother's Coat* grants to its many quotidian details. A sweater is folded; its fabric rustles. Butcher paper crinkles. A shower is taken, and the water droplets smack against the skin's surface. In these instances, the little things are magnified. Not a reduction or simplification of their literality, these

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<sup>82</sup> Tsakiri-Scanatovits, *My Mother's Coat*, 00:00:08.

<sup>83</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, [1964] 1968), 102.

<sup>84</sup> Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 183.

moments are amplified into something larger than they seem. Their sound gives voice to the invisible, the silent, the non-dimensionality of the everyday. For Marks, such haptic audio becomes a way in which the tactility of memory is encoded, expressed, and processed through the tacit knowledge of the viewer.

In his analysis of filmic sound, Gregg Redner presents a similar reading of haptic sound, drawing a link between Deleuze and Guattari's writings on sensation and cinematic audio. Redner reads Deleuze and Guattari's assertion that a 'work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else, it exists in itself' as a 'liberating' premise that allows us to view the cinematic soundtrack 'both in its diegetic and non-diegetic incarnations, as just one of a number of sensations within the filmic universe'.<sup>85</sup> This enables us to consider the audio as distinct from – and equal to – the narrative structure, visual aesthetic, and material production of the film. But apart from seeing each filmic element as its own entity that plays a role in cinematic production and reception, the Deleuzian system – with no insinuations of hierarchy – would also emphasize the interrelationships shared between each component. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari explain the significance of the phenomenological aspects of both 'affect' and 'percept', the triggers that 'make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become'.<sup>86</sup> By embracing Deleuze's notion of sensation, we are able to avoid mechanical readings of the score's functionality rather than addressing it on its own terms and as a 'rhizome in the greater whole'.<sup>87</sup> In this view, the film's audio is not purely technical or didactic but is instead in constant dialogue with each of the other filmic parts, all of which must work together toward the film's becoming.

The audio in *My Mother's Coat* is an enveloping cinematic mode not solely for the velvety and entrancing qualities of the voice over but also because of the ways it works with the film's corresponding features. As the narrative reveals itself through a series of fragments, as the images tantalize us with only bits of vision and suggestions of form, the viewer may

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<sup>85</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* [*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*], trans by Hugh Tomlinson (London and New York: Verso, 1991] 1994), 164; and Gregg Redner, 'Deleuzian Sensation and Maurice Jaubert's Score for *L'Atalante* (Vigo, 1934)', *Studies in French Cinema* 9.2 (2009): 98.

<sup>86</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 182.

<sup>87</sup> Redner, 'Deleuzian Sensation', 71.

experience a type of sensory deprivation. There is the promise of fullness, but one that lies just beyond our grasp. The audio, however, in its warm welcome and direct establishment of intimacy, eases our sensorial cravings or withdrawals. As a metonymic signifier of the larger whole, the audio fills a sensory void by initiating a bond of immanence with its listener. It creates a heightened awareness of experiential phenomena, contributing to a cinematic viewership that is visible and audible, as well as touchable and haptic.

Working with these interpretations of haptic perception reaffirms a Deleuzian folding-unfolding cinema aesthetics. And this is not exclusively due to the capabilities of haptic sound – found in this case within the vocal narration and the aural sensations – to create a relationship with the viewer that is based upon envelopment. Haptic sound also stresses development. To reiterate, ‘folding-unfolding no longer simply means tension-release, contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution’.<sup>88</sup> Throughout *My Mother’s Coat*, the mimetic exchange between viewer and viewed stresses its productive nature. As Redner notes, through the application of the Deleuzian concept of sensation, our investigation of the cinematic soundtrack can be understood as sonic vibration – a perceived sensation – but also an emotional or affective sensation: ‘The inject of sensation can be related not only to our aural and visual faculties, but also to our areas of affect manifested in human interaction and emotional response.’<sup>89</sup> As mother and daughter kinetically entangle and disentangle throughout the film, the viewer is welcomed into their physical embrace. It is a coming together that elicits an experience of not only sensation but also creation. It is a dynamic interchange engendering something new, something rhythmic, organic, alive.

While the significance of this creative act cannot be overstated, the focus once again is not on a defined endpoint – a creation in and of itself – but on process. Growth, development, evolution; these progressions are rooted at the crux of folding-unfolding: ‘The simplest way of stating the point is by saying that to unfold is to increase, to grow; whereas to

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<sup>88</sup> Deleuze, *Fold*, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Redner, ‘Deleuzian Sensation’, 99.



fold is to diminish, to reduce, to withdraw into the recesses of a world.’<sup>90</sup> Within the cinematic fold, viewers are simultaneously enfolded and unfolded into and out of the screen. We are encouraged to delve into the minutiae of the everyday in order to access their layers of multidimensionality. These oscillations of movement speak to a larger whole, one that is constantly expanding and rippling outward into a yet unknown. In this way, we are pushed to reconsider our bodily boundaries. A folding-unfolding across borders begins to produce uncertainties about them, as opposed to maintaining them as distinct separations. No longer complying with binaries of ‘here/there’, ‘us/them’, ‘me/you’, ‘past/present’, or ‘figure/ground’, this folding-unfolding aesthetic disregards the establishment of a partition between screen and viewer, or even time and space. These uncertainties produce multiplicities in the potential of becoming. ‘The fold is the general topology of thought,’ states Deleuze. “‘Inside” space is topologically in contact with the “outside” space... and brings the two into confrontation at the limit of the living present.’<sup>91</sup> Implying a back-and-forth flow from outside to inside, irrespective of distance or time, the fold exists as an unfixed and constant exchange between spatial and temporal dimensions. It is in this capacity that we are enfolded into the filmic world, enclosed – from the outside-in and the inside-out – within *My Mother’s Coat*.

Through this porous interchange, established conceptualizations of perception are challenged. The act of ‘feeling’ is multisensory and performed with indifference for time and space. As Sobchack states, ‘both our sense of bodily transcendence and the sensuality of our bodily existence are often *amplified* at the movies – rather than *reduced* by the cinema’s supposed lack of a full sensorium. That is, we not only feel but often also *feel ourselves feeling* – and this even as we are transcendently “elsewhere”’.<sup>92</sup> However, this does not solely point to an inter-spatial viewership of phenomenological embodiment but also insinuates one that is inter-temporal. It spans across timelines, creating a diachronous temporality of our

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<sup>90</sup> Deleuze, *Fold*, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, 118-119.

<sup>92</sup> Sobchack, ‘Embodying Transcendence: On the Literal, the Material, and the Cinematic Sublime’, *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 4.2 (2008): 198, emphasis in original.

perceptual processes, where we both feel and ‘feel ourselves feeling’.<sup>93</sup> Reiterated in these interactions is the zone of indeterminacy, in which the film’s various narrative structures have resisted traditional ideas of a spatio-temporal continuum. In regard to the narration, the film creates an intricate puzzle out of its verbal and the visual elements, alluding to what semiotician Gunther Kress addresses as a contemporary tendency to confound the ‘genre of *narrative*’ with the ‘genre of *display*’, two modes that he deems constitutionally distinct.<sup>94</sup> In *Literacy in the New Media Age*, Kress contends that the ““world narrated” is a different world to “the world depicted or displayed””.<sup>95</sup> The image – happening in a spatial confine – can contain a coexistence of multiple timelines, a single pregnant moment that assumes past, present, and future within its frame. The verbal, however, progresses in consecutive time. But in fact both forms of representation are capacious enough to infer a myriad of temporalities simultaneously. Both present unique patterns of folds and reveals, flashbacks, perspectives, and potentials within their narrative modes. Layering each of them together through film does not necessarily diminish or aggrandize one or the other’s worlds of possibilities. Instead, it reemphasizes a saturating stitching of both together. It is a dynamic multimodality of coaxing out experiences of past, present, and future through image and sound.

*My Mother’s Coat* offers a combination of multisensory fragments. The filmic space becomes a cluttering of spatio-temporal remnants. This mode of storytelling envisages a timeline lengthy and varied enough that deeply buried strata are indecipherable to those clearing the debris. As the film progresses toward its conclusion, image and narration become increasingly inscrutable for the viewer. The hatted head of an unidentified man stares blankly out of the screen, encircled by what sounds like the clinking and chattering noises of a café. There are visual references made to a packed bag and – if it were not for the recognizable sounds of its shuffling timetable – an almost impossible to detect train station.<sup>96</sup> But who is going where? And when? Perhaps the film has flashed back to a point in time before the mother’s narrative began. Before she was living in Greece, when she was in Italy packing to

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>94</sup> Gunther Kress, *Literacy in the New Media Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>96</sup> Tsakiri-Scanatovits, *My Mother’s Coat*, 00:03:54-00:04:13.

move. Or perhaps she is packing to leave in present time, to leave her husband – owing to the discontents she mentions throughout the film – and reclaim the independence she craves. But maybe the suitcase is fated for her daughter, who the mother says she is ‘waiting for... to come back’.<sup>97</sup>

More likely, the suitcase is all of these things and not narrative at all, at least not chronologically. It is symptomatic of the convolution of timelines and geographies that are embedded within this filmic object. It evokes the significance of material and sensory perceptions for those who find themselves living between cultures, remaining in one place while aching for another. *My Mother's Coat* seems aware that the cultural displacement of its protagonist has left her moving amidst such sensuous geographies, both in her life in Greece and her life in Italy. But these yearnings are not conveyed solely by the person who knows what they signify, the person who tells the story. Instead, these visual longings are drawn by the hand of another. A film both intercultural and intergenerational, this is a personal remembrance of dislocation told through the perceptual lens of another generation. The film is pushed forward by the mother's passing along of a familial history to her daughter. She speaks of her difficulty to acclimate to life in Greece. She relays how much she misses the smells and sounds of her hometown. She confides that things would have been better for her had she remained in Italy. These personal revelations and visual translations are both disorienting and connective, remote and organic. It is an intensely intimate conversation shared between mother and daughter, which has extended itself outward into an illimitable circuitry of time, space, and perception.

Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari employ the contrasts between the Hellenistic deities Chronos – who portioned time into a consecutive series of past, present, future – and Aion – the god of eternity – to consider a conflation of the two that is both oppositional and concurrent. The time they envision is simultaneously disengaged from and built upon each form, one designating the interminable process of becoming (Aion) and the other measuring out history (Chronos). Together they become a past-present-future at

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 00:04:32.

once and forever, in a singularity of diachronous temporalities. It is a free-floating time that is constantly becoming, where everything that has happened, could happen, and is happening coexist. Sleeping, dreaming, waking – all at once. Atmospheric changes, seasonal transformations, day into night – in synchronicity. It is in this way that becoming is both micro and macro in form, within the smallest units of measure to the most infinite expanses of the universe. Entities have their discreteness of being but are always connected, never apart. They are interminably in the process of something, an in-between state to somewhere or some time.

At the butcher shop, the filmmaker's mother is shown purchasing a rabbit.<sup>98</sup> It is wrapped in paper, and a stain of blood seeps through (Figure 3.26). 'Everything together,' the narrator states.<sup>99</sup> More than narratively passed on, the material traces resurfacing throughout the mother's testimony have coalesced with the experiences of its recipients. These details – no matter how idiosyncratic, inscrutable, or small – are treated with care, made significant. They merge into an expansive wholeness. To borrow a concept from the last chapter, this movement produces a postgenerational melancholy for those past sensory occurrences. There is reciprocity of those nostalgic sensual experiences and objects. It is a nostalgia based on unification, as if one could feel that kind of longing for a time and place in which they never themselves lived. In these moments, everything is offered. Each fragment in time is viewed as a kernel that contains what was, what is, and everything that has yet to arise. All at once; everything together.

### **Mediation V. Video**

The transition to video footage in the film's conclusion is a blunt one. It is a climactic reveal of a more fleshed out representation of Tsakiri-Scanatovits' family. Yet it remains equivocal. What does this sudden departure from animation mean for a visual reading of this film? Echoing the final scenes of *Waltz With Bashir*, which startlingly transitions from animation to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 00:02:43.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 00:02:50.

photographic and filmic documentation of the Lebanon War – these images could serve as a provocative shock for the viewer, a confrontational removal of animation’s visual buffer. But the narrative themes of *My Mother’s Coat* do not appear to necessitate the severe ‘shock of the real’ that *Waltz with Bashir* adopts. Alternatively, the ending might indicate a cathartic release from the past, which is viewed at a distance and through the prism of time. Perhaps it is an image of remembrance produced in hindsight, after the fragments have been sorted through and reconciled. But given what I have theorized throughout the chapter – that the film’s employment of animation pursues a material adhesion between past, present, and future – and given the knowledge that these old home movies served as the initial impetus for the film, it is possible this ending is not an ending at all but a reinforcement of the continuous learning-knowing process the film conveys. Rather than leaving us with any concrete or cohesive resolutions, the inclusion of home movie footage loops us back and forth in time, becoming an effort to rematerialize a familial past and mold it into a tangible, relatable form in the here and now.

The portable video format became available to consumers in 1965. To many in the filmic arts, its availability promised an aesthetic medium with minimal historical baggage. Its visual capabilities seemed to emerge outside the boundaries of cinema, with no discernible material lineage. As art critic David A. Ross suggests, this mode of representation ‘had no tradition. It was the precise opposite of painting. It had no formal burdens at all’.<sup>100</sup> This lack of any apparent ‘burdens’ on the form granted it a kind of temporal detachment, a freedom from any weighty historical contextualization or artistic practice. In *Expanded Cinema* – which, written in 1970, was the first book to explore video as an artistic medium – media theorist Gene Youngblood prognosticated that as a new technology, video had the capacity to reveal ‘new dimensions of awareness’.<sup>101</sup> Many video artists at the time found themselves working with the medium as it appeared to offer a liberating and more flexible space for spontaneous creative flow. This was due to both its perceived freedom from the past and its

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<sup>100</sup> David A. Ross, quoted in Sturken, ‘Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form’, in *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*, eds. Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture, 1990), 107.

<sup>101</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970), 134.

ignition of a new terrain of technological futures. As early video artist Scott Bartlett stated, 'there's a whole new story to be told thanks to the new techniques: we must find out what we have to say because of our new technologies'.<sup>102</sup>

But in fact, video's unprompted genesis was a mere misconception. Film historian John Belton reminds us that 'no technology develops autonomously. It is always a direct or indirect product (or by-product) of other technologies, which leave their imprint upon it. Video is no exception'.<sup>103</sup> Confusion regarding the form's mechanical underpinnings rested upon the belief that – though a visual medium – video was not rooted in visual technologies. Invented during WWII, video stemmed out of German engineering experiments with magnetic tape as a mode to record audio communication. After the war, the technology eventually made its way to the United States, and subsequently, the entertainment industry. Until then, television broadcasts had relied upon unreliable live-feeds.<sup>104</sup> But by 1948, with the arrival of the first pre-recorded program – *The Bing Crosby Show*, aired on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) – video technology was beginning to revolutionize the television industry.<sup>105</sup>

Evolving out of electromagnetic sound recordings, video is quite different from its filmic peers.<sup>106</sup> In many ways, the video camera is more closely related to the microphone than the cinematograph. Where filmic development depends upon mechanical and chemical processes, the video image is a manifestation of the immediate electronic capture and translation of kinetic energy. As such, the nature of each medium's capacity for visual illusion is wholly distinct. Created through a continuous scan of flowing electrons, the video does not denote the mechanical or chemical formation of a material image – as does the filmed image – but the instantaneous harnessing of energy and light. The rapidity of video's electromagnetic capture creates a liquidity of motion that sharply contrasts with the stop-

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<sup>102</sup> Scott Bartlett, quoted in *ibid.*, 264.

<sup>103</sup> John Belton, 'Looking Through Video: The Psychology of Video and Film', in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, eds. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 61.

<sup>104</sup> Christopher Sterling and John Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1990), 269-403.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Belton, 'Looking Through Video', 61-72.

motion assemblage of traditional cinematography. This flowing visualization of video imagery is enhanced by its inherent synchronicity with sound. In contrast to film, both the visual and audio components of video can be recorded simultaneously, as one unified signal. The perceived seamlessness of form comparatively heightened the gaps of cinema, in both its truncated manner of visual production and its necessarily separate modes of image and sound.

In light of these characteristics of video production, what might we make of the audio-visual mechanics with respect to the structural aesthetics of *My Mother's Coat*? In Tsakiri-Scanatovits' film, we have on one side a mode of representation – animation – that necessitates a stop-and-go, frame-by-frame technical motion. However, as I have argued, the animated images within this film utilize a fragmented aesthetic, morphing techniques, and embodied performativity in order to underscore its ethereal flows of movement and connection. On the other side, the film ends with a medium that exemplifies immediacy and seamlessness, carrying with it a sensory fluidity that unifies the audible with the visible. But here too exists an anomaly of form; the liquidity of its movements have been edited into brief sequences, while the audio track has been altered. The original video score is manipulated in a way that no longer aligns with the image. The film's vocal narration runs atop the video image as the sounds of ocean breezes and crashing waves drown everything else out. The result at once confounds and unifies the disparate cinematic pieces.

In each instance, the modes of representation employed in *My Mother's Coat* emphasize a simultaneous incongruity within their respective forms. The capabilities of both media have been pushed. Perimeters have been renegotiated. When we start to relate these procedural revisions to an aesthetic of folding-unfolding, ideations about the film's interplays between its material and visual structures and what these connote for the fuller filmic representation begin to emerge. The Deleuzian fold encompasses a ceaselessly shifting, differentiating infinity. As an entity, its wholeness is equal to its uniquely constituted parts. Its edges are indistinguishable, always nebulous. Its topological surface is inherently pliable, open to unanticipated possibilities rather than dependable predictabilities. There are endless

and surprising undulations of folds, unfolds, and refolds where objects, beings, and the spaces and relationships between them are continuously redefined.

More precisely, the film's visual modes provide perspectival differences that are presented to the viewer as both distinct and converged in their functionalities. Each offers an exclusive way of expressing and perceiving motion. But neither declares its dominance over the other. For the viewer, both animated film and video image may offer an illusion of smooth and organic movement. However, the manner in which this flowing motion is processed through human visual cognition is characteristically different. As with cinematic film, animation depends upon the capacity of the brain's visual cortex to fill the gaps within sequential imaging processes. This is the neuro-optical function that allows stagnated motion to appear continuous.<sup>107</sup> An optical illusion known as the phi phenomenon or stroboscopic movement, it is a process that does not occur in the way we visually perceive the natural world, as there is no frame rate.<sup>108</sup> In this light, the video image is more akin to innate human perceptions of the physical world than to the cognitive functions required to view animated film. What arises in conjunction with the perceptual processes necessary for viewing *My Mother's Coat* are questions pertaining to the contrasting mediations between the image and the viewer's eye.

While animation requires the brain's active involvement in order for its staccato movements to cohere, video does not demand this type of perceptual intervention. With its continuous scanning of electrical pulsations – done without hesitation – video offers a streamlined, effortless stimuli of audio-visual experience. But while possibly considered a more organic mode of visual operation, processed internally and instantaneously within the brain, there also seems a physical loss innate to its mechanics. Requiring minimal bodily participation in the production of its moving forms, the video image appears disconnected from its perceivers, even as it simultaneously complies with natural perception. This is also in spite of the image's reliance upon the physicality of its subjects. Digital animation often

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<sup>107</sup> See Richard D. Zakia, *Perception and Imaging: Photography—A Way of Seeing* (New York and London: Focal Press, 2013).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.



transgresses into this complication in a more overt way, where the attempts to capture bodies in motion and then reproduce those movements through seamless computer programming may smooth out its qualities and forms to such an extent that they appear inorganic. As computer animation researcher Susan Sloan notes, digital gaming companies and virtual reality software programs often end up decreasing individuality through the leveling of natural movement or even misidentifying bodily form and function (if, for example, the motion sensors are not placed on the subject correctly).<sup>109</sup> The capture of such false movements can lead to uncanny figurations; hallucinatory, floating movements that appear lacking in physical internality. The figures may appear like empty vessels, where there is form but no content, where something intrinsic to the body has been lost in translation. This, Sloan assesses, has partially contributed to a current trend of ‘anti-craft animation’, which values the amateur handmade look, with its shaky vulnerabilities, segmentation of forms, and more halting transitions between the frames. It is an aesthetic that stresses embodied action, not only via the image’s connection to the animator’s hand but also through the bodily labor it requires of the viewer. Instead, to perceive the image, one must engage in a more diligent form of sensory spectatorship, the kind of effort that Marks’ notion of haptic viscosity entails.

This is not to posit that the video image equates itself to the uncanny qualities of CGI but to highlight that each of the representations employed in this film exist on a spectrum of interrelated characteristics and the potential receptions of those characteristics. Every visual form has its particular attributes that offer various – different but still valid – perspectives of the subject presented. Appearances can deceive. Actualities and virtualities may intersect in the perceptual formation of concurrent incompatibilities. People who, for example, have a deactivation within their visual cortex’s ability to decipher phi movement – a condition known as cerebral akinetopsia – would instead only be able to perceive stillness. Human perception in this case might be better equated with the succession of still photographic imagery or a less rapid pace of the animated frame, as opposed to the instant fluidity of video.

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<sup>109</sup> Susan Sloan, ‘Studies in Stillness’ (paper presented at the SAS Conference, ‘The Animated Body’, London, UK, 18 May 2013).

By intersplicing both video and animated versions within the representation of its subjects, *My Mother's Coat* does not appear to necessarily negate or undermine either of their respective processes of perception. Rather, the film recognizes the possibility for multiple visualizations and reinterpretations of both events as they continue endlessly folding and unfolding from and upon each other.

For the viewer, while perhaps not the emotionally charged shock offered at the end of *Waltz with Bashir*, there is still a surprise to the senses in *My Mother's Coat*'s last moments: a heightened awareness of the perceptual mechanisms triggered by its contrasting visual forms. Sobchack describes such a moment of cinematic spectatorship as the entrance of an 'oblique space', where the viewer becomes mindful of his or her own 'hereness'.<sup>110</sup> This experience, Sobchack asserts, signifies a state that is cognizant of the simultaneous perception of connectivity and detachment from the actual and virtual realities within the filmic image and one's own body. It is again here – in these sudden sensory and cognitive ruptures – that we may begin to 'feel ourselves feeling'.

Implicit in this synchronicity of potentialities and differentiations is an encapsulation of coexisting perceptions of time. Chronos and Aion, it seems, have once more been crisscrossed within the film's intermedial assemblage of actual and virtual imagery. For Marks, such images exemplify Deleuze's concepts of the 'present that passes' – the moment in time that moves consecutively forward – which aligns itself with the actual image, and the 'past that is preserved' – the time that has been captured and represented through remembrance – which correlates to the virtual.<sup>111</sup> She goes on to use the home movie as an example of this divergence in temporal representation. The video encompasses the present that passes – which will never be re-experienced – while the personal memories, experiences, or perceptions of the same recorded day – though not captured materially – become a preserved past within the virtual and are subsequently retrievable only through memory. It is in this manner, she continues, that a hegemonic dominance over memory is cemented, as the

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<sup>110</sup> Sobchack, 'Vivian Sobchack in conversation with Scott Bukatman' *e-Media Studies* 2.1 (2009): <http://journals.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Journals.woa/1/xmlpage/4/article/338>, accessed 24 April 2016, DOI:10.1349/PS1.1938-6060.A.338.

<sup>111</sup> Marks, *Skin of the Film*, 40-41.

material documentation of the actual, video image will take precedence over the virtuality of remembrance.

It seems, however, quite difficult to uphold these distinctions. Looking at *My Mother's Coat*, how is the video image less a 'past that is preserved' than the narrated testimonial of the mother's remembrance? How is the intercut video able to consecutively move forward in the 'present that passes', while the animated abstractions do not? Do not both encapsulate actual and virtual modes of becoming? Instead, we can view these actual and virtual forms not as discrete 'individuals' that stand above or in contrast to one another but as participants in their own processes of 'individuation' – of becoming – which are subjective and relational. This position further aligns with Deleuze's theorizations as presented in *Difference and Repetition*, as well as in his earlier writings that expressly advocated against Platonic, or unchanging, forms.

Both video and animation espouse diachronous and anachronistic capabilities. Video records a simultaneity of sensual and electrical information. It can be played backwards or forwards, paused, or set on an infinite loop instantaneously. Animation can move quickly or slowly in time, manipulating sensory perception at will. Its gaps and intervals can test perception with flickers, color confluences, elusions of fullness, and the revelations of hidden dimensionalities via the animorph. Each of the film's representational modes offers differentiations of measured time and fluidities of temporal infinities in synchronicity. Memory is preserved in the present. It can pass itself onto the future. The past is now. The present has already passed. The present is 'pure becoming'.<sup>112</sup> As video artist Bill Viola describes the analog medium, 'the divisions into lines and frames are solely divisions in time, the opening and closing of temporal windows that demarcate periods of activity within the flowing stream of electrons. Thus, the video image is a living dynamic energy field, a vibration appearing solid only because it exceeds our ability to discern such fine slices of

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<sup>112</sup> Deleuze, *Foucault*, 55.

time'.<sup>113</sup> Measured time exists. But so does the timeless, instantaneous flow of life. In each and every moment.

What the intermedial combinations in *My Mother's Coat* promote is a partnership of contingent exchange, a fluctuating collision between aesthetic structures, histories, spatial potentialities, and perceptual encounters. And within these interdependent relations, the particularities of each visual form are revealed. This challenges ideas of media specificity as isolationist, alternatively highlighting the mutual interactions of disparate modes of representation. For example, video – initially perceived by many critics and artists as an invention without a past, without preconceptions about its usage – is instead thoroughly embedded within the evolutions of both audible and visible formats.<sup>114</sup> Its apparently untethered and unfettered space for creative performativity was – like the movements perceived in video and animation – purely illusory. In this light, Bartlett's hopeful vision of this liberating medium, his anticipation that a 'whole new story was about to be told thanks to the new techniques', becomes instead a reminder that 'newness' is not necessarily the same as 'exclusivity' or 'autonomy'.

Moreover, as underscored by both animation and video, these visual processes confirm not only their place within specific histories but also their revitalization within the present. Video, superseded three decades after its inception as a home viewing media by the DVD, Blu-Ray, and online streaming, is likewise an outmoded medium. It is no longer the primary focus of commercial cinema and its attendant forms. But 'video art' continues to be called 'video art', despite its contemporary transition into the digital. And traditional hand-drawn animation is now experiencing a resurgence. These media still have things to communicate, not merely amidst emergent visual technologies but also with regard to them. In their very mechanics, they espouse the convolutions of time, allowing for re-readings of the past within the here and now.

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<sup>113</sup> Bill Viola, *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House: Writings, 1973-1994* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 158.

<sup>114</sup> See Chris Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 6-19; Sturken, 'Paradox in the Evolution', 101-121; Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 130-140.

## Conclusion

Prior to making *My Mother's Coat*, Tsakiri-Scanatovits worked on a different film about her parents (Figures 3.27-3.30). Executed in a similar visual style – as it comparably includes minimalist line drawings that outline the figures and their surroundings, vulnerably shake from frame to frame, and are highlighted by sporadic additions of color – *Eric, do you exist?* (2009) chronicles a recorded conversation between her father and mother. Sitting at the breakfast table, her mother talks while her father sifts through the newspaper, paying his wife little notice. Tsakiri-Scanatovits animates where her father's mind might be wandering off to – his financial concerns, his vacations, his friends, his love affairs – while her mother's narration plays over the imagery. The recorded audio is real-time, the authentic voices of Tsakiri-Scanatovits' parents heard in their original Italian, while English subtitles run along the bottom of the screen.

*My Mother's Coat* is a noticeable refinement of this aesthetic. *Eric, do you exist?* recalls the initial storyboards for *My Mother's Coat* (Figures 3.31-3.32). It is characteristic of Tsakiri-Scanatovits' visual style, without the benefit of her rigorous figure studies. Its pace lacks the slowly rhythmic shifts of its successor, creating a frenetic atmosphere rather than an ebb and flow of organic movement. Comparing the two films, it seems that the filmmaker's technique had been modified in-between their respective cycles of production. But also apparent is that while *Eric, do you exist?* provides a more immediate, less mediated link to its subjects and creator, it is a link less convincing in its physicality. Its visuals are not as sturdy as those of *My Mother's Coat*. Though there is less linguistic translation or edited content, though the artistic style is more innate to the artist's hand and less a studied and acquired technique, *Eric, do you exist?* somehow appears more distant materially, visually, and narratively from its viewer.

I have maintained in this chapter that there exists a sense of physicality and tactility – a bodily connection and presence – embedded within *My Mother's Coat*'s minimalist aesthetics. I view this as particularly significant in the context of a new media world flooded by the digitally mediated and computer coded. But while the handmade object is integral to

the provision of this materiality, it is not solely on this basis that the bounds between material and immaterial start to unravel, forming new connections and pathways. Instead, there are several layers between viewer and viewed that create a fibrous conduit for mutual affinities and unfoldings to be shared between and beyond the screen. These mediating modes are not distancing mechanisms but enable closer, more in-depth affiliations. Various strata of physical, perspectival, and experiential referents have been integrated into the filmic object, creating passages between the actual and virtual worlds while grounding the film in a way that offers openings for interactive connections.

This type of visual processing and perception complicates Marks' reading of the Deleuzian fold and her Image-Information-Infinite system. The film implores us not to conflate 'information' with empirical data or technological processing, measured structures that demand particular attention within an experiential folding-unfolding. To do otherwise would stand in direct contrast to Deleuze's contention that we avoid theory that promotes established hierarchies, unchanging structures, or the supremacy of technical measures. These new modes of information are only one part of an expanding constellation of being and becoming. And Marks' writings imply these perceptual possibilities. Her appeals for the exploration and endorsement of more ways of seeing – not just through the visual but also through the tactile and haptic – lends itself to such interpretations. But there appears a tendency within these argumentations to accept hierarchical organizations within physical reality as a given, rather than negotiate with them. Analysis of such filmic objects can instead work to uncover how these works function – not according to any assumed institutional models – but as forms that are always and concurrently detached from and connected to broader networks of knowledge.

*My Mother's Coat* offers such a visual opportunity to reveal the invisible, secret, permeable webs of interchange that we perceive are already there, coursing beneath an empirical physics, but which are unavailable or invisible to us. As Klee notes, reflecting on the intersections of art and mathematics, 'you learn to look behind the façade, to catch a thing at its roots. One learns to perceive, what streams beneath, learns the prehistory of the

visible'.<sup>115</sup> Tsakiri-Scanatovits' familial history reveals itself through its underlying antecedents, its fragmentary pieces of information. But which elements have been selected to unfold or remain folded should not suggest an evaluation of the image-object in terms of its authenticity or accurate representation of the 'whole story'. *My Mother's Coat* does not aim for realism. The film instead operates within a more complex and less direct system of gradations and referential layers. It is aware of its inherent inability to altogether capture an infinite past.

However, while seemingly fragile fractures and broken pieces of figuration, there is also sturdiness to the remnants shown. Though it is not a digital production, *My Mother's Coat* too offers a set of codes, as it relies upon simplified visual cues to depict a world of sensory and physical experience and perception. But where the visual signs in *Eric, do you exist?* might feel detached and unsubstantiated, the imagery in *My Mother's Coat* are complex and richly sourced. Though the figurative studies Tsakiri-Scanatovits based her imagery upon were not of her parents, the material links remain, not tenuously but durably. There is a substance to these filmic forms, something to hold onto. There is more to the image than meets the eye. Like shards of a shattered glass, there is a weight to its parts. These images are where the folds lie, where the actual and virtual planes intersect.

The primary activities in *My Mother's Coat* have taken place at a level prior to the perceived image. The final image viewed by the audience is inextricably tethered to its underlying causes – to its calculated series of physical movements, aesthetic choices, and narrative selections. The filmic process employed by Tsakiri-Scanatovits comprises visual and physical fields of coded imagery. Her simplified visual cues reach out from the physicality of real-world sources to the hand of the film's creator, providing an actual undercurrent to the virtual remnants that the audience sees and hears. This is how the film becomes an object, how it acts as material and immaterial, and how it manages to move through space and time, carrying with it the fingerprints of those who handle it.

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<sup>115</sup> Klee, quoted and translated by Rosen, 'Record of Decisions', 35.

These perceptual connections in turn form an interface between two jurisdictions: the tangible and intangible. *My Mother's Coat* makes us reconsider Marks' assertion of the contemporary norms of quantifiable information, acting in contrast to a seemingly non-sensory information age. Its minimalist visual cues are indeed informationally coded, but they are coded to represent images that we must employ multiple perceptual realities to interpret. A slightly wavy line, a pool of transparent aqua, an abundance of drifting numerical and alphabetical characters; the viewer must be able to decipher the denotations of the film's cryptic imagery through a relatable framework of physical and sensory awareness. These are links back to actual indices, ones that we must invest in to perceive.

*My Mother's Coat* operates within a porous structure. It invokes intergenerational and intercultural histories, braiding them into a permeable materiality. And where tactile objects mingle with memory, where sense perceptions are called upon to reconnect to the past, the viewer is pulled in closer to the layers of time and space that the film moves within and between. It is during these moments that a kinship is created between the viewer and the filmic object, evoking knowledges of other experiences and temporal and cultural migrations. Following Benjamin, Hansen describes this blurring of geographies and temporalities as the product of 'mimetic innervation', a process of spectatorship that demands connection and completion by the perceiver. Mimetic innervation involves the breadth of experience and is not bound up in sequential time or the present moment. It necessitates the undoing of the alienation of the senses. It is a sensory awakening, in which mimetic affinity is generated between viewer and viewed, acting as a mode of sensual synchronicity and redefining traditional subject-object relationships.<sup>116</sup>

Granted, we cannot reconstruct what people may have felt, thought, or experienced in the past, whether or not in the presence of memory objects and artifacts. Phenomenologically we can summon our own perceptual experiences, but we should do so with the acute cognizance that the conscious embodiments of those from another time and place will not be roused. While some objects of significance and passed-down narratives remain, the past is

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<sup>116</sup> Hansen, 'Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street', *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (1999): 309-329.



seemingly lost to us. But within *My Mother's Coat*, there exists an appeal to do more than gaze upon these ciphers of long ago, identifying them as disconnected entities that should be viewed only in isolation from our individual experience. Instead, we are encouraged to move amongst them, collecting any experiential acumen we can, enjoying a material bond with their respective times and places of belonging. *My Mother's Coat* is not an attempt to fill in its blanks with 'correct' information. Rather, it is about participating in the processes of folding-unfolding, about making a material, sensuous connection to its animated referents and hands of production. And through these interactions, *My Mother's Coat* emphasizes our envelopment into the back-and-forth movements between the actuality of present time and the virtuality of an infinite past.

**MIGRATION FOUR. Kosovo-Finland.**  
*A Kosovo Fairytale*

At a refugee center in Oravais, Finland, the Neziri family sits around the living room coffee table. Parents Sami and Elvira, along with their sons Lavdim and Enis and their daughter Aida, are hard at work and deep in thought. Stacks of paper and piles of colored markers are scattered across the table. Sami holds a pencil to his lips as the camera cuts away to a faint sketch of a young, thin man (Figure 4.1). The figure sports a highly coiffed wave of hair atop his head and a sly smile across his face. ‘Albin, your mother loves you,’ Elvira says as she draws the contented countenance of a young girl (Figure 4.2).<sup>1</sup> ‘You know that I never got to say goodbye,’ Lavdim – the eldest son – laments.<sup>2</sup> The family’s narration addresses the only member of the family who is absent from this picture: Albin, the Neziris’ youngest son, who remained in Kosovo. These are the opening scenes of *A Kosovo Fairytale*, a short film chronicling the Neziris’ experience with the Kosovo conflict, their exile to Finland, and how – in the face of brutal geopolitical extremism – they were forced to flee the country without their newborn son.

In the summer of 1998, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević launched an offensive against Kosovo’s ethnic Albanian majority. Civilian populations were attacked, villages were destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of Kosovar Albanians were expelled from their homes. Having met and married amidst this turmoil, the union between the Neziri parents – Sami, a Kosovar Albanian, and Elvira, a Serbian woman – was plagued with acts of violent discrimination, an oppressive circumstance that continued long after the war. Fearing for their family’s safety, the Neziris decided to escape. But uncertain whether their infant son Albin would survive the treacherous clandestine journey across Europe, they reluctantly resolved to leave him in Kosovo with his grandparents, hoping they would one day be reunited. At the time of the film’s production and release in 2009, the Neziris were still awaiting the residence

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<sup>1</sup> Middlewick, Nell, and Nylund, *A Kosovo Fairytale*, 00:01:27.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 00:01:24.

permits necessary to return to their homeland and to their son.<sup>3</sup> *A Kosovo Fairytale* acts as a message to the young Albin, who is seen exclusively in the film via an online video chat he has with the rest of his family in Finland.

While the film opens and closes with these live-action sequences, the Neziris' account of wartime experience unfolds as an animated vignette that provides Albin with a fairy-tale vision of his familial past. As audience to this storybook world, the viewers soon discover that the film's introduction is also a behind-the-scenes documentation of its production. The sketches the Neziris are shown drawing are self-portraits, and these images provide the inspiration for each family member's animated representation. In this discussion of the film, I suggest that the self-reflexive attention granted to its material production is integral to *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s visual and narrative structure. Its collaborative aesthetics underscore a collective processing of war and its aftermath. The film becomes a cinematic collage of its materialities, narrative voices, and technological modes of production. In so doing, *A Kosovo Fairytale* emphasizes the various permutations of personal and public histories, transnational relations, and social networks of communication that have been interwoven through the recounting of this wartime narrative. Moreover, its aesthetic assemblage makes way for a more globalized rather than localized notion of traumatic victimization and refugee experience.

The first half of this discussion will work to unravel how the film's employment of visual and narrative collage operates with respect to its socio-historical circumstances of production. In the second half, I will investigate how the film's aesthetic strategies signify various complications for representations that might approach wartime trauma as widely accessible or palatable. Particular attention in the latter section will be given to an analysis of the film in light of another mixed-media production that also addresses the Kosovo conflict, *Gzim Rewind* (2011), which helps to highlight some of these representational difficulties.<sup>4</sup>

Like *Minoru* and *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* – which both had to steer

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 00:13:50.

<sup>4</sup> *Gzim Rewind*, Knutte Wester, (Copenhagen: Danish Broadcasting Corporation, 2011), DCP

through their respective representational terrains, in effect becoming symptomatic of some of the broader contexts in which they are situated – *A Kosovo Fairytale* also exemplifies a particularized visual topography. One way this film seeks to embed this narrative within contemporary visual culture is through its utilization of digital and social media. The formal and narrative emphasis placed on both online communication and aesthetic collaboration creates for the film an embrative digital and material assemblage. This is significant for its attempt to establish new spaces and modes for sharing the Neziris' testimonies, as well as its efforts to connect people and their disparate experiences across geopolitical, cultural, and territorial boundaries. Enmeshed in this method of representation is a clear emphasis on the film's collaborative process, as each of the family members had a hand in its material execution. Filmmakers Mark Middlewick, Samantha Nell, and Anna-Sofia Nylund all participated in animating this story, transforming the Neziris' illustrations into the moving image. Nylund notes that including the family from the screenwriting stage to the editing process became essential for the film's production, since it could potentially facilitate a view of Finland's refugee population not from the outside but from 'the inside out', which might offer opportunities for others to 'understand and be maybe a little more open' to refugee experience.<sup>5</sup> This collaborative strategy is visually underscored throughout the film and creates a type of heterogeneous tactility that enfolds everything it touches, including the audience.

### **Part I. Collage–Collaboration–Collective**

Introducing *A Kosovo Fairytale* through a documentation of its making underscores the film's structural and thematic underpinnings. Primarily, it stresses the film's material and visual aesthetic, which I characterize as a type of cinematic collage. Interpreting the concept of 'collage' as the cutting, removing, and inserting of disparate elements into a new form, this film highlights the aggregation of its material pieces. Throughout the film, the Neziris' hand-

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<sup>5</sup> Nylund, as interviewed in Middlewick, Nell, and Nylund, *A Kosovo Fairytale, Making of* (self-distributed, 2009), DCP

drawn self-portraits and pictures of home interact with layers of paint, newspaper clippings, cardboard, sculpted wire, popsicle sticks, and the animated image. The intersection of the film's live-action scenes with animated production expresses a symbiotic exchange between its more virtual and abstract fields and its more realist or documentary forms. Several technological modes of production – including digital, analog, and handmade cinematic processes – are at play here. The photography-based animation of its discrete material elements interplays with the film's audio and visual recordings, all of which become the subject of an online chat shared between the Neziri family in Finland and Albin in Kosovo. We see Albin, sitting on his grandmother's lap, through a small browser window on a computer screen (Figures 4.3-4.4). These material and technological mediations come to reinforce the communicative voices that work together to narrativize the Neziris' story, from each individual family member to the team of filmmakers who collaborated with them throughout the filmmaking process. In this section, I will sort through the film's material means, while also addressing some of the resultant byproducts – whether intended or not – of their aesthetic functions.

My analysis in this section finds itself filtering into two main lines of inquiry regarding the filmic image, specifically concerning its temporal and spatial components. While the collage technique of material insertion and layering throughout the history of fine arts has allowed for disruption within the structural surface of the picture plane – as a method to convey modernist views of fragmentation and cohesion – I deduce that this cinematic collage operates in a comparable fashion but within a spatial-temporal continuum. New media and film scholar Yvonne Spielmann has premised that the filmic collage can function as a challenge to both narrative linearity and physical parameters. Such an assertion indicates *A Kosovo Fairytale's* visual mode is entirely suited for the exploration of its geopolitical and socio-historical contexts.<sup>6</sup> The film employs an aesthetic of visual and technical assemblage to not only reject particular historicizations of the Kosovo war that have emerged out of

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<sup>6</sup> See Yvonne Spielmann, 'Aesthetic Features in Digital Imaging: Collage and Morph', *Wide Angle* 21.1 (1999): 131-148.

vested political or scholarly interests but also blur the strident geographical and ethnic divisions that have surrounded this conflict. The multimodality of the film emphasizes a more transnational and intercultural network of experience and empathetic identification.

Beyond this, *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s strategic employment of old and new forms of technological innovation works to underscore an appeal for transformation, particularly in terms of a social and political movement. New media theorists John Hess and Patricia Zimmermann might characterize such a work as a 'radical' form of cinematic process, in which 'historical modalities and future imaginaries morph together to repair [a] dislocation of space and time but refuse full restoration of its previous linear analog configurations'.<sup>7</sup> This kind of hybrid entity, they argue – 'part history, part future' – is reminiscent of Raymond Bellour's law of the 'double helix', which refers to the evolution of new media and its offspring of imagery, the 'new species' of our time.<sup>8</sup> Tracing a lineage of philosophical fascination with the dialectic of the word and image, a pattern he locates in the works of Deleuze, Barthes, and Foucault, Bellour observes a semiotic parallel between technological innovation and artistic production. A fundamentally biological metaphor, the 'double helix' suggests the existence of organic life processes behind technical and artistic production. This view may make us reconsider how a physical form is birthed from an idea or how fantasy manifests itself in reality. In his explanation of the concept, Bellour presents a film still from *Jurassic Park* to demonstrate this visual metaphor.<sup>9</sup> The image shows a Velociraptor caught in the projector beam of the park's orientation film, its skin becoming a screen for the display of the DNA codes that were used in the creature's cloning process. In this explicatory example, the organism's genetic script is seen in conjunction with the physical body it has produced.

Such is the case with *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s focus on its technical becoming. We see the Neziris generating their own film, we watch as their drawings come to life in the moving image. The 'double helix' in this scenario comes to define the assemblage of material

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<sup>7</sup> John Hess and Patricia Zimmerman, 'Transnational Digital Imaginaries', *Wide Angle* 21.1 (1999): 149-167.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; and Raymond Bellour, 'The Double Helix', in *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation*, ed. Timothy Druckrey (New York: Aperture, 1996), 173-99.

<sup>9</sup> Bellour, 'Double Helix', 173-99.

production and its culminating creation. It is a technological mode of process and processing, a combination of physical elements to produce something new. This is – in the broadest interpretation – what DNA is. But it is also what a collage is: a heterogeneous combination that materializes as a revised material object. All that is needed for this new form to grow is time and space.

### ***Time: Modernized Mythos***

When reviewing the journalistic and scholarly narratives chronicling the Kosovo war, what emerges as key to understanding the conflict is a very specific notion of ‘history’ and its crucial positioning within the politics of South Eastern Europe. A dominant theme running through Western analyses of the war has been to view the former Yugoslavia in an almost mythological light, connecting the bloodshed of the war to an ancient lineage of ethnic hatred and a proclivity for carnage deemed innate to the Balkan people. The presumption of this genetically savage civilization underlies much European and American discourse centering on the Kosovo conflict, creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality that resulted in some very real implications for political action and inaction throughout the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> American war correspondent Robert Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* – which insisted that the ancient animosities in the region would make any attempt toward peace impossible – was said to have convinced President Bill Clinton to oppose intervention.<sup>11</sup> The Bosnian crisis was, to quote then U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, ‘a problem from hell’ in which any intermediation would be an exercise in futility.<sup>12</sup> Consensus within Western Europe and North America held that these centuries-old feuds would only continue to fester in an insidious and ceaseless cycle of barbarism.<sup>13</sup> The grip this perspective had on

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<sup>10</sup> Pierre Melandri, “‘Un problème surgi de l’Enfer’: Les Etats-Unis et les Premières Guerres de l’ex-Yougoslavie (1991–1995)”, *Relations Internationales* 103 (2000): 495.

<sup>11</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, ‘The Dangers of Letting a President Read’, *The New York Times*, 22 May 1999, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/22/books/the-dangers-of-letting-a-president-read.html>; and Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York: Picador, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Warren Christopher, testimony provided to the United States Congress regarding the Bosnian conflict, as quoted in Barry Schweid, ‘Associated Press Report of Bosnian Conflict’, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 May 1993, A3.

<sup>13</sup> See Spoma Jovanovic, ‘Difficult Conversations as Moral Imperative: Negotiating Ethnic Identities During War’, *Communication Quarterly* 51.1(2003): 57-72.

international relations temporarily loosened when – under the threat of NATO air strikes in October of 1998 – Milošević signed a cease-fire agreement. This enabled hopeful diplomats to try and negotiate a settlement between the Serbs and the Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës (UÇK ), or the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). However, all such diplomatic attempts for a resolution failed, and in March of 1999, NATO began a two-month aerial assault on Serbia until the Serbian government agreed to withdraw its troops from Kosovo. By the end of June, Serbian forces had withdrawn completely, and with UN Security approval, a contingent of peacekeepers moved into Kosovo. These international peace officers remain in Kosovo today, reminders of a xenophobic view of the Balkan people as a primitive and barbaric culture that must be looked after, a mentality that has yet to be altogether assuaged within contemporary journalism and political discourses regarding the region.<sup>14</sup>

A second prominent body of analysis concerning the precipitation of the Yugoslav wars also entails a mythologizing perspective, one that stems from within the former Yugoslavia itself. In this scenario, it was Milošević and his administration that utilized ancient mythos to dignify their aggressive ambitions. This argumentation, the repercussions of which are still in play as a tool to evaluate socio-economic processes of the area, has been crucial for much of the historical scholarship emerging both within and outside the contemporary Balkans. It is also a significant feature of efforts aimed at counteracting any accepted or seemingly viable notions of the Balkans as an essentially savage culture.<sup>15</sup> Several scholars and journalists have argued that culpability for the Kosovo conflict lies squarely in the power hungry and manipulative tactics of the social and political elite, who had called for a highly sophisticated and systematic method of state-sanctioned violence, as opposed to operating out of a culturally embedded sense of primeval ferocity.<sup>16</sup> To this end, the Milošević regime exploited a nostalgic cultural historicism as a means to promote a united front of ethnic pride and validate their political and militaristic aims. Cherry picking Serbian

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<sup>14</sup> See for example, Christopher Hope, 'This is the Balkans. No One is Nice', *The Guardian* (2001): 2-5.

<sup>15</sup> For further reading see Misha Glenny, *The Balkans, 1804–1999* (London: Granta, 1999); and Stephen Pavlowitch, *A History of the Balkans, 1804–1945* (London: Longman, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> See Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); and Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1995).



traditions and moments in history, nationalist leaders played up revenge fantasies and fabled destinies as a way to demarcate communal and territorial borders and garner support for war.

Particularly instrumental in shaping these objectives was a propagandistic resuscitation of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo within public memory. The mythological status of this battle, largely regarded within the Serb community as its defining foundational moment, had been on a cultural upswing during the nationalist revival of the 1980s, reaching a highpoint during the sexcentenary celebrations of 1989. Historian Florian Bieber has traced how the legendary connotations bestowed upon the Battle of 1389 were deployed during the subsequent decade in order to fit the shifting political priorities of the Milošević regime.<sup>17</sup> Bieber also comprehensively outlines a more general proliferation of the claims of genocide inflicted upon the Serbian population of Kosovo, which he asserts exemplifies the potential that narrative fabrications have to engender aggressive nationalisms through motifs of oppression and commiseration. The complicity of numerous political and professional groups within the region fed this climate of ethnic discrimination, as Serbian political and cultural life was nationalized within Kosovo in the 1980s. This, Bieber explains, was the strategic logic of the most extreme demagogues in Kosovo who worked to make a case that ethnic coexistence was unfeasible.

Such a mindset has gone unabated within Kosovo's socio-political climate, as the country remains on disputed ground, most prominently in its northern regions. Sociologist Gëzim Krasniqi, for example, has found that this overlapping of Serb and Kosovar jurisdictions and sovereignties makes 'both Serbia and Kosovo unfinished and unconsolidated states with no clear territorial boundaries', and no clear resolutions in sight.<sup>18</sup> And it appears that any progressive political dialogue addressing these issues is profoundly stalled, as it remains entrenched in folklore and legends of yore. As recently as 2011, Serbian Interior Minister Ivica Dačić reasserted the mythological underpinning of the region's ethnic tensions through a paradoxical inversion of the strategy's political worth. For Dačić, what lies at the

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<sup>17</sup> Florian Bieber, 'Nationalist Mobilization and Stories of Serb Suffering. The Kosovo Myth from 600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to the Present', *Rethinking History* 6.1 (2002): 95-110.

<sup>18</sup> Gëzim Krasniqi, 'Overlapping Jurisdictions, Disputed Territory, Unsettled State: The Perplexing Case of Citizenship in Kosovo', *Citizenship Studies* 16.3-4 (2012): 365.

heart of these cultural rifts is not a fiction of reality or hyperbolic rhetoric. Rather, it is the idea that these societal fractions could ever be healed that is the fantasy. In an interview given to Serbian newspaper *Nin*, Dačić made his position clear: Kosovo should remain partitioned between its Serbian and Albanian sides, as the people ‘do not need fairy tales of multi-ethnic life anymore’.<sup>19</sup>

Amidst these disparate yet equally wrought strains of Balkan mythology enters *A Kosovo Fairytale*, and – as its title connotes – the film seems well aware of its residence alongside the mythos that has been perpetuated within the international and nationalist portrayals of the region. ‘Fairy tale’ becomes a symbolic confrontation of the argument that multi-ethnic unities are too utopian of an ideal, the Neziris’ story having been based on the lasting marriage between an Albanian man and a Serbian woman. From its opening credits, when the newspaper headlines chronicling the timeline of the conflict are marred by a large, dark stain (Figure 4.5) – which then animates into an airborne blackbird before dissolving into the film’s title – *A Kosovo Fairytale* appears to actively and immediately reject mediated reportage and socio-historical narrativization. Embedded in this action is a particular protest against essentialist representations that frame the Kosovo conflict as the inevitable outcome of inherent ethnic disjunctures. It serves to combat any national or international complicity in allowing the belief that multi-ethnic coexistence is impossible. *A Kosovo Fairytale* instead promotes its own narrative of a union that remains hopeful, that of the Neziri family. More broadly, its tacit acknowledgement of the aforementioned distinct mythologies hints at the interrogation of their respective origins, suggesting that these narratives should not be taken at face value. To this end, the issue of agency becomes crucial for the film, as the attention given to its visual and narrative production raises questions about the authors behind the myths.

The Neziris’ origin story begins with the opening pages of a handmade storybook (Figure 4.6). The book is small and black with big bold lettering sprawling across its front

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<sup>19</sup> Ivica Dačić, quoted in ‘Partition of Kosovo Only Solution, Minister Says’, *B92*, 15 May 2011, accessed 24 April 2016, [http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2011&mm=05&dd=15&nav\\_id=74342](http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2011&mm=05&dd=15&nav_id=74342).

cover. 'Nje Prall Kosovar' – 'A Kosovo Fairytale' – the letters spell out, the words hovering above a fairly bleak city skyline that has been assembled from black paint, cardboard, and newspaper clippings. Lavdim holds the book in his hands. Upon opening it, he reveals the colorful landscapes that fill the pages (Figure 4.7). Hand-painted by the Neziri family members, each page depicts their long ago home in the far away place of Kosovo. The storybook visuals are then translated into animated imagery, becoming the focus of the cinematic screen. But as the camera's eye pans from right to left – scrolling past painted mountainscapes and newspaper stories that have been cut up, reassembled, and colored in by the filmmakers – it appears that we are not just moving forward in the narrative but also backwards in time. 'Time' becomes a key feature in the film, garnering a convoluted nature that underscores much of its narrative arc. After meeting his future wife, for instance, Sami – his initial advances unrequited – chooses to wait for her. His beard grows long while the flowers he buys for her wilt. Once married, the family quickly begins to expand, but each child's birth is marked by an increasingly destabilized homeland. And though the war eventually ends, the fighting does not.

These confluences of progress and disintegration are often accompanied by the animated paper cutout of a blackbird (Figures 4.8-4.10), which is seen flying into the picture plane at times most hopeful or dire. The blackbird holds a peculiar role within the narrative, one that symbolically encompasses the precarious uncertainty of the future while also moving things forward in narrative time. But by the film's end, when Lavdim indicates that this emblematic creature was part of a dream he had – in which a blackbird delivered his baby brother to Finland and back to the Neziri family – this figurative entity is revealed to be a manifestation of the non-temporal. The blackbird becomes more a representation for a detachment from the everyday – from waking life and measured time – that is innate to acts of remembering, imagining, and dreaming. In turn, these fairy tale aesthetics and motifs of reverie solidify the film's counter-historicism. This story is not part of the historical or political record. Rather, this story is personal. It is – as Lavdim's beginning narration clearly

states – ‘their story’.<sup>20</sup>

Lavdim’s words are assertive. It is their story, an attempted reclamation of the Neziris’ past, their experience, their familial origins. And while the family is visualized in the film as being covered up by a pervasion of newspaper clippings (Figures 4.11-4.13) – signifying the overpowering subjugation of their experience by dominant media narrativization and political propagandism – the personalized sharing of the Neziris’ story in *A Kosovo Fairytale* signals a refusal to let their experience remain concealed under any other representation of the Kosovo conflict. Instead, this act of storytelling seeks to place itself on equal footing with the prevailing cultural mythologization. As Stephanie Schwander-Sievers describes, this is a representational strategy common within Kosovo’s current commemorative discursive and visual practices, as militant advocates for both the Serbian and Albanian sides of the conflict celebrate the sacrifices of those who were imprisoned, exiled, or gave their lives for the cause.<sup>21</sup> In these representational instances, individual heroics are emphasized in the creation of a transcendental legacy that outlives the individual, putting personal and biographical accounts on par with the nation’s legendary leaders and forefathers. Frantz Fanon related these kinds of engagements with oral tradition – typified as ‘stories, epics, and songs’ – as acts of rebellious liberation, a process that attempts to acquire new and relevant cultural currency through a return to form. A traditional form of historical reconciliation, this revitalized type of storytelling works to ‘bring conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons’ via present-day allusions to the archaic and allegorical.<sup>22</sup>

The film’s use of the blackbird as a narrative trope becomes a perfect example of this strategy. *Kosovo* is the Serbian possessive adjective form of *kos*, meaning blackbird. The etymological roots of the name go back to the Kosovo Polje, or the ‘field of the blackbirds’, which was the site of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, the very battle that was drawn upon extensively by the Milošević regime. While a crucial site for the Serb nation, the Kosovo

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<sup>20</sup> Middlewick, Nell, and Nylund, *Kosovo Fairytale*, 00:02:15.

<sup>21</sup> See Stephanie Schwander-Sievers, ‘The Bequest of Illegalja: Contested Memories and Moralities in Contemporary Kosovo’, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* (2013): 1-12.

<sup>22</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 174.

Polje is also considered a *lieux de mémoire* within Kosovar history. *A Kosovo Fairytale* attempts to shift this image of the blackbird, acknowledging its tainted and conflicted symbolism but imbuing it with something new, reimagining it as the bearer of ethnic and familial unity. This action disrupts commonly accepted or politically propagated narratives on behalf of the film, as it endeavors to insert its own story into the historical canon.

As I have suggested, rooted within *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s narrative conceit is an inherent distrust of the available and mediated historicizations and representations of the Kosovo war, as well as an implicit rejection of any claims for the wholeness these narratives might present. And it is because of this trepidation of any 'official' history that the collage aesthetic becomes so crucial for the film, since, in the words of short story author Donald Barthelme, 'fragments are the only forms [to] trust'.<sup>23</sup> The collaborative piecing together of the family's history serves in its combative struggle against representational totality, or in a more activist sense, totalitarianism. In his article 'On Memory, Identity and War', Patrick Finney has detailed how the socialist propaganda disseminated under Milošević sought to control representations of the past as a means to reinforce the regime's validity.<sup>24</sup> It became an ideological objective of the Yugoslavian government to underline the interconnections between the region's public histories and private memories in order to bolster renewed notions of national identity. Beyond the emphasis placed upon a nationalized public remembrance and commemoration under Milošević's rule, nationalists also began to co-opt private memories as part of such initiatives. To this end, the regime became preoccupied with reinvigorating the narrativization of personal experience with wartime trauma and brutality – whether inflicted by or upon the individual – as a way to promote the idea that there was honor to the bloodshed of the 1990s.

In the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict, the disintegration of the Milošević government gave individuals dominion over the interpretation and representation of their own experiences, making self-exploration and employment of formerly suppressed private

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<sup>23</sup> See David Barthelme, *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 157.

<sup>24</sup> See Patrick Finney, 'On Memory, Identity and War', *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 6.1 (2002): 1-13.

memories and histories possible. In addition, political impediments to the access of archival materials and oral histories were removed at this time.<sup>25</sup> Personal testimony began to garner cultural viability. Scholarly examinations into how wartime experience is processed on the individual, familial, local, and national levels through acts of remembrance also started to emerge. These studies aimed to comprehend ‘the ways in which people construct a sense of the past’ and how intersections of private memories and public identifications work to fortify each other, as ‘the core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering’.<sup>26</sup>

Actively participating with this contemporary cultural trend to employ personal remembrance as historical legitimization, *A Kosovo Fairytale* highlights these junctures of past and present, individual and communal experience, through a strategic combination of private and public, old and new manners of communication. Two mechanistic devices engage with the past throughout the film: the storybook and the screen. Sitting at the computer, Lavdim looks into the external camera. ‘This story is for you Albin,’ he tells his brother. ‘So when you grow up you’ll understand why we left you.’<sup>27</sup> A digital retelling of the past proceeds, with online communication serving as the technological impetus for the animation of the handmade. In this moment, the digital becomes a mode of temporal alteration, a simulation of time travel that overtly brings the past into the present, merging them together rather than setting them side by side.

Film scholar Margaret Morse discerns that in this electronic age, former cinematic processes of sequential, linear narrativization have been replaced by digitized modes of representation that are shaped by ‘principles of envelopment and temporal simultaneity’.<sup>28</sup> The television, video, and computer screens of today have ‘gone live’, in her words, bringing disparate elements – visual modes and representations from around the world and across

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<sup>25</sup> See Robert William Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution* (London: MacMillan, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> See Alon Confino, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method’, *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1386–1403.

<sup>27</sup> Middlewick, Nell, and Nylund, *Kosovo Fairytale*, 00:02:01.

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Morse, ‘Body and Screen’, *Wide Angle* 21.1 (1999): 64.

spans of time – into the ‘here and now’.<sup>29</sup> In *A Kosovo Fairytale*, such temporal synchronization is pervasive, as multiple timelines of the past/present/future are poured upon each other. Temporality is dealt with fluidly throughout the film’s live-action sequences, mimicking the aforementioned conflation of time that is integral to its animated storyline. The Neziri children are involved in the retelling of their parent’s past, which is also their own. The parents and children take turns speaking to the younger brother, who will one day understand this familial history, the explanation of his current reality. ‘I’m waiting for the day to come, maybe it won’t come soon,’ Aida laments. ‘But I’ll be waiting. I won’t forget you. You won’t forget me.’<sup>30</sup> Each message delivered in the film’s conclusive moments wraps together past regrets with present longing and hopes for the future. And held tightly within the dimensions of the computer screen is the central recipient of this oral history, a boy who has been growing up apart from his family and who is too young to know why. But Albin is now endowed with a time capsule intended for the future recognition of his past. The phrase ‘making up for lost time’ becomes more than a figurative expression here, serving instead as an apt description for the film’s technical process, which appears an earnest attempt to manufacture additional time.

### ***Space: ‘Spatial Effects’ and Immersive Screens***

If we can characterize the purposeful layering of heterogeneous media and representational forms throughout *A Kosovo Fairytale* as a mode of cinematic collage, the transformative capabilities of such an assemblage may be said to surpass its temporal structure. Spielmann postulates that the introduction of various media and new technologies into the cinematic form creates a dynamic tension between linear continuity and spatial density.<sup>31</sup> Just as the collage aesthetic within painting has historically worked to break apart visual coherence, Spielmann notes, cinematic collage can produce a spatial depth that is disruptive to linear continuity, making it a counterpart to the cinematic montage. By creating an interface that

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Middlewick, Nell, and Nylund, *Kosovo Fairytale*, 00:13:00.

<sup>31</sup> Spielmann, ‘Aesthetic Features’, 137.

connects not only different materials – its assemblage of paint, drawings, newspapers, and various found materials (wire, cardboard, popsicle sticks) – but also contrasting modes of production – including animation, photography, and digital recordings – *A Kosovo Fairytale* is able to place particular emphasis on its spatial and structural organization. Through its physicality – its combination of disparate elements that touch and engage with one another – *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s use of the cinematic collage shifts ideas about the moving image from illustrating sequences of time to enabling sensory experiences of space. The film employs this material strategy in three ways: first, to call attention to and attempt to stifle tensions bore out of the ethnic and territorial conflicts that ultimately resulted in the Neziris' narrative of familial rupture; second, to underscore the transnational distance between Albin and the rest of his family, who – as political refugees – find themselves acclimating to their new home in Finland; and third, to extend these transnational/transcultural movements and perspectives to a broader audience, connecting the film to the viewers and inviting them to relate to and participate with the Neziris' story.

Regarding the first of these aesthetic functions, *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s diversified materiality operates as an investigation into conceptualizations of territorialization. Particularly important is the film's emphasis on its actual and virtual worlds – with respect to both their distinctions and interconnections – that it creates through its various modes of production. Firmly established throughout the film is its intermingling of physical materiality – the handmade drawings produced by the family, the real-world objects that are part of the film's animated aesthetic, and the opening and concluding live-action sequences that serve to ground the animation in images of its referents – with its electronic and digital elements – its photography-based animation and the centralized role online communication is given in the sharing of this story. In her writings about the function of the collage aesthetic within cinema, Sobchack outlines the particular differences between discrete cinematic forms, noting that 'where traditional cinematic representation presents three-dimensional space, the analog variations of light and atmosphere that constitute the sensual experience of texture and contour, and digital space computes and simulates represented space – analyzing,



schematizing, and digitally coordinating it so that three dimensions, texture, and contour are diagrammed rather than pictured'.<sup>32</sup> The interpolation of each of these filmic strategies within *A Kosovo Fairytale* forces the film to negotiate between modes of representational abstraction, realism, and hyperrealism, blurring together fantasy and reality as a way to visually thematize its bridging of familial, communal, and national gaps. As Sobchack goes on to point out, such a cinematic collage 'emphasizes a particular kind of density and texture' that, as opposed to serving as a mere depiction of space, serves to physically map it out.<sup>33</sup> As Cubitt describes, this type of cinematic collage, particularly within contemporary digital film, produces what he terms 'spatial effects', as opposed to the 'special effects' of traditional cinema.<sup>34</sup>

While *A Kosovo Fairytale* may not appear as a purely digital artwork or digital collage, the principality of the computer and online interaction throughout the film – in conjunction with the prominence granted to its collage of materials – exemplifies a visual strategy invested in challenging the separation of people, places, and things in preference of bringing them together to establish networks across real and imagined disconnections. For Cubitt, artistic transgressions of the coherence or fixity of defined borders within digital productions are due to the 'endless dataspace' inherent to digitization, which allows the artist to move in all directions.<sup>35</sup> And according to Hess and Zimmerman, it is this very flexibility of online space that creates opportunities for the potential interrogation of any claimed boundaries and territories, be they cultural, social, or geopolitical. We have seen such potentialities harnessed within recent uprisings in the Middle East, for instance, including Iran's Green Revolution in 2009 and the spread of the 2012 Tahir Revolution throughout Egypt, both heavily attributed to Twitter and other social media platforms.<sup>36</sup>

To these transnational ends, the central role digital communication takes throughout

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<sup>32</sup> Sobchack, *Screening Space. The American Science Fiction Film* (New York: Ungar, 1987), 261.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See Sean Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics* (London: Sage Press, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>36</sup> See Ahadi's *The Green Wave* (2010); 'Online Activists in the Middle East: Seeds of the Future', *The Economist*, 22 May 2012, accessed 24 April 2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2012/05/online-activists-middle-east>; and Bennett Resnik, 'How Egypt's Tahir Revolution Spread on Twitter', *Middle East Voices* 3 April 2012, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://middleeastvoices.voanews.com/2012/04/how-egypts-tahrir-revolution-spread-on-twitter-86221/>.

*A Kosovo Fairytale* draws comparisons to contemporary artists like Daniel Reeves – whose single-channel, multimedia works have attempted to negate narrativization and rework traumatic processes across personal, public, national, and transnational lines – as well as various interactive websites that have provided platforms for online activism. Such sites include online ‘hacktivist’ group Anonymous; the Serbian radio station B92, which employed its online platform to protest its governmentally imposed shutdown during the war; and the Third World Network, which has utilized electronic disturbance of the MAI trade agreement talks. These endeavors have capitalized on the flexible dimensionality offered by digitization as a strategy to bypass geographical, social, and political parameters. Irrespective of borders, they promote the ability to organize, unite, and undermine global authorities.

Sociologist Saskia Sassen has advocated a growing digitalization and globalization that contributes to a massive concentration of resources, making online space a crucial site for the emergence of new power structures.<sup>37</sup> Internet space is a terrain of open access. Instantaneous data streams of image, text, and sound have made it possible for social interactions to trespass perimeters and restricted zones. The Internet has become an enabling infrastructure for emergent political and artistic radicalism, one that recognizes how online space can be utilized to create more expansive and transformative social grids. Fundamentally, this engine of transnational networking comes down to one key aspect: access. The digital, when accessible, skirts regulations that impose on image production and consumption by way of inadequate media infrastructures, government censorship, and political obstructions.

Showing the Neziri family in conversation with Albin through an online video chat stands as such a technological confrontation of any imposed limitations. It allows the family to see and speak with him, a member of their family that they are otherwise denied access. For *A Kosovo Fairytale*, digital communication becomes an imperative act of circumventing a political structure that has suppressed and separated the familial unit. Being able to share their story of exile beyond the geopolitical lines that they were compelled to cross signals a protestation against their mandated geographical, cultural, and familial alienation. According

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<sup>37</sup> See Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: The Free Press, 1998).

to Hess and Zimmerman, this type of digital activism can create new ‘forms of collision’ – spaces for social transformation.<sup>38</sup> Mirrored by its material aims – its use of the cinematic collage, which works to disrupt temporal linearity through its emphasis on spatial configuration – *A Kosovo Fairytale* – with its distribution of national, transnational, individual, and social narrative modes – disrupts demarcated territories and linear directionality. But this interference does not necessarily seek the dissolution of spatial boundaries or linearity. Rather, this film is more preoccupied with transformation. Not simply working to ‘negate the linear in favor of the non-linear’, these platforms work to create something new.<sup>39</sup>

Digital artist Philip Mallory Jones proposes that digital artworks – in the form of interactive web pages, social media projects, or virtual gaming systems – should not be envisioned as non-linear forms but as spherical objects, different radical shapes that correlate to a three-dimensional strata of varied subjectivities.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, activist works utilizing the digital seek to interpolate multiple dimensions of social thinking, which causes new domains for nascent political action. And Jones’ notion of the ‘spherical’ is not alone in metaphorically assessing the multidimensionality of the revolutionary digitized terrain. Curator Timothy Murray imagines the engagement between the analog and the digital as a fold – not necessarily in the Deleuzian sense, although connections can be drawn – where continual enfolding becomes a key component of radical digital art.<sup>41</sup> For Murray, this fold is characterized by movement, as it acts as a passageway between inner to outer and between the material and the virtual.<sup>42</sup> Analogously, Spielmann contends that the digital collage takes the form of an image ‘cluster’, which she notes is often seen in both experimental films that work with layering techniques and narrative films that are extensively labored over in their material assemblage.<sup>43</sup> Spielmann explicitly defines a ‘high density collage’ as the insertion

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<sup>38</sup> Hess and Zimmerman, ‘Transnational Digital’, 159.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>40</sup> Phillip Mallory Jones, ‘Digital Multiculturalism’, presentation at the Athens International Film and Video Festival, 5 May 1998.

<sup>41</sup> Timothy Murray, ‘Digital Lights’ (lecture given at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 25 October 1998).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Spielmann, ‘Aesthetic Features’, 139.

of several material layers into the cinematic image, which also comprises the components of montage in such ways that the two directional functions of the moving image – that of time and space – are transformed into another form that stresses spatial organization.<sup>44</sup> Whether we accept any of these symbolic descriptors – the ‘sphere’, the ‘fold’, the ‘cluster’ – what becomes clear is an emphasis on the apparent materiality and dimensionality of the cinematic digital collage. A picture of an amorphous and dynamic shape begins to emerge in regard to the digital aesthetic, underscoring it as a mode of representation that is not clearly circumscribed but mutable, negotiable, and absorbent. These porous and immersive qualities are then doubly activated by the permeability of the filmic screen.

As Morse suggests, the perception of the cinematic screen as an interface between the world and a world of fantasy – between the ordinary and the extraordinary – is a culturally produced paradigm that has seen its fair share of perceptual fluctuations.<sup>45</sup> In the contemporary digital age, Morse determines, the screen as we knew it is an all but extinct species. Images are no longer reliant upon physical surfaces to be made visible. Traditional canvas movie screens have been torn down, leaving LCD displays in their wake, while virtual projections and volumes of light allow images to float freely in space. Morse hypothesizes that these technological evolutions have allowed the image to integrate more fully into our daily lives, creating an increasingly permeable relationship between viewer and viewed.<sup>46</sup> While it is debatable whether the new screens Morse describes have indeed undergone a ‘loss’ of their physicality – as my analysis posits that these new representational platforms offer not an immateriality but a different kind of materiality – it remains certain that contemporary digitization has changed the way we approach the screen and the moving image. Virtual reality systems, haptic gaming consoles, and an upsurge in three-dimensional filmmaking and television production have allowed the image plane to sustain the impression of a world that can envelop its audience. These technologies promote the idea that the viewer or player could step through the screen, giving the illusion that the screen is not really there at all. Further,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See Morse, ‘Body and Screen’, 63-75.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

digital technologies and computer-generated environments can simulate the personal experience of space by manipulating physical delineations and one's perception of directionality. Subsequently, the spectator has become a performer, able to physically interact with the cinematic realm.<sup>47</sup>

*A Kosovo Fairytale* counts on the status of the screen as an increasingly blurred line within contemporary media consumption. Taking into account its heterogeneous aesthetic, which I have premised promotes the obfuscation of boundaries, the film's direct engagement with the screen acts as both an acceptance of the challenge it presents and a summons to the spectator to enter the filmic space. The online dialogue shared between Albin in Kosovo and his family in Finland mirrors the relationship between viewer and viewed. Through this engagement, the computer screen analogizes the film screen, as each connects people across time, space, and circumstance. When Lavdim speaks to his brother, he also speaks to us (Figure 4.14). The computer's camera is made interchangeable with the cinematic lens. The audience, having been placed in Albin's position, becomes not only a recipient of this mode of storytelling but also a crucial player in it. When Lavdim asserts that, 'this is their story', it is quickly followed up by a more encompassing declaration: 'It is my story. And yours too.'<sup>48</sup> Reaching through the cinematic frame, the viewer is invited to engage with the Neziri family, with their experience, with this filmic narrative. This is accomplished not through a passive spectatorship but through active participation and collaboration.

In 1993, artist Luc Courchesne presented a similarly themed interactive video installation, titled *Family Portrait*. In the piece, a viewer walking into the gallery space would immediately encounter virtual images of four people floating in space. Their figural dimensions mimicked their actual physical presence, and while the images were just spectral reflections – illusions beaming off monitors onto half-mirrored glass – they appeared to be standing in the same space as the viewer. A computer screen placed in front of each figure allowed the gallery visitor to hold a conversation with one of nine different personas that was

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>48</sup> Middlewick, Nell, and Nylund, *Kosovo Fairytale*, 00:02:17.

electronically coded into the image. The viewer was met with a set of conversational options, norms of social interaction not traditionally anticipated when engaging with imagery. These included choices to address the phantom reflections with formal greetings and goodbyes. The figures also communicated amongst themselves, looking at and speaking to one another, sometimes acknowledging or disregarding the visitor who was standing in front of them. As the viewer continued to interact with these artificial beings, it became clear that they formed a community. They had common memories and experiences between each other, a past that stretched well beyond the spectator's arrival. A later piece by Courchesne, *Hall of Shadows* (1995), likewise played with this social tension between viewer and viewed. Set up in a multi-user interactive video theatre, the work followed a narrative that was conveyed within the interactions of four virtual actors. Upon entering the gallery space, the visitor would trigger the story to unfold. The viewer could then engage the forms by selecting an available comment or question provided on an accompanying computer screen. But while the figures might initially have responded to the spectator's presence, they could just as quickly become focused on their own discussions, making it nearly impossible for the viewer to grab their attention and break into the conversation. Conversely, forming a bond with a character might lead to more in-depth introductions and invites to join their discussions. Conversational topics ranged from where to get the best ice cream to philosophical debates about what it means to be human. The virtual community might even begin to investigate its own status as a set of images, as each figure is 'trapped', according to Courchesne, "in a strange timespace warp" that does not evolve, but repeats ad infinitum'.<sup>49</sup>

Besides their thematic parallels and the interplay of virtual and actual modes of representation, these works by Courchesne are interesting to ponder in connection with *A Kosovo Fairytale*, as they explore what happens when an outsider enters defined social spaces and orders. They moreover contemplate how technological innovations, mediations, and interactivities might work to open up these spaces on the level of the individual. A central effect that both of Courchesne's pieces potentially have for the viewer is the infliction of a

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<sup>49</sup> Morse, 'Body and Screen', 74.

kind of self-conscious mentality one might have when trying to navigate through such an intimidating social interaction. How does one negotiate and preserve inclusion into a community or kinship that is not their own, particularly one so profoundly rooted in an extensive network of shared experience and familial ties? What is the role of the outsider once invited ‘inside’? What are the responsibilities that need to be upheld? And can such access ever be fully granted and/or trusted?

The issues touched upon in Courchesne’s virtual societies continue to resonate, raising questions about technology, communication, and embodiment. What are the implications for a highly technological society where people live together and apart simultaneously, who can feel at once connected and disconnected, and who might engage with physical presences that are perhaps illusory? Considering our deepening social immersion into a progressively digitized world – into an endless stream of virtual-actual interrelations – how do we come to know ourselves individually or culturally within the ever more convoluted confluences of our bodies, our sense of selves, and our interactions with the world and each other? *A Kosovo Fairytale* speaks to this tension between user and interface, employing the immersive threshold between the screen and the viewer’s physical and psychic peripheries. Engaging with an interactive form of spectatorship analogously found within Courchesne’s ‘timespace warp’, the viewer in this scenario is compelled to ask comparable questions: Who am I in relation to these figures? What is my responsibility to them? How might my ties to them be established, maintained, or disconnected? By the end of the film, when the last of the family members has spoken directly to the camera – to Albin but also to us – a fragile connection has been formed with the viewer. Along with each member of the family and the filmmakers themselves, the audience has been absorbed into the filmic production, into its collaborative process. The viewer has been charged with the role of involved participant, a confidant who is encouraged not to turn away from the screen but to follow through, actively engaging with what is happening on the other side.

## Part II. Authors and Audiences

It is night. A single house sits atop a small hill. From the inside, the house seems quiet and abandoned. We see an empty chair in an empty kitchen. It is dark, and it is still. But from the outside, things are different. Here in the woods, there is much movement. A shaky camera angle provides the viewpoint of someone running through the trees, someone who is able to hear the repetitive succession of nearby shouts, then gunfire, then screams. The action in these moments is interspersed with the stillness of that isolated house. This stillness extends in an ensuing onslaught of images showing several lifeless bodies, bodies of those who have been hanged, shot, and left for dead. These alternating visuals of combat and death establish more than a contrast between movement and stasis, emphasizing instead their interrelations. As dawn breaks, a woman raises her voice and hands to the sky; a man lies face down on the ground while a stream of water rushes over him; and – in the only color-filled instance of the sequence – a raging fire burns a wooded area down to ash. It is a vision of wartime with a purposeful and pointed message: there is life in destruction, destruction in death, and a natural and unending progression of time, decay, and renewal that underscores it all (Figures 4.15-4.18).

This imagery composes one of two animated depictions of war produced for the *Gzim Project*, a multimedia endeavor undertaken by filmmaker Knutte Wester.<sup>50</sup> The project documents the experience of its protagonist, Gzim, who fled the Kosovo war with his family as a young boy. The animated sequences are examples of a filmic practice known as ‘machinima’, in which the cinematic narrative has been represented through a series of repurposed scenes from a video game, in this instance the first-person tactical shooter game *ARMA II*, or *Armed Assault 2*. An aesthetic strategy developed in the 1980s, machinima involves the employment of digital production engines and the reconfiguration of previously produced computer graphic imagery – most commonly taken from video games – as a mode

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<sup>50</sup> Sgt. Padrino and Wester, *Gzim Project: Nightmare* (self-distributed, 2011), DCP; and ‘*Gzim Rewind: A Documentary Project*’, Wester, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://knuttewester.se/default.aspx?part=film&namn=gzim>.



of filmmaking. An assemblage of machine, cinema, and anime, machinima has since become a genre all its own, allowing for low-budget or do-it-yourself filmmakers – ‘machinimators’ – to animate their narratives. The creation and dissemination of machinima has raised several legal concerns, and as the production company Bohemia Interactive – the producers and copyright holders of *ARMA II* – had refused to allow these machinima sequences to be used in the documentary about Gzim, these scenes do not appear in the final film. However, permission was granted for them to be made available online, where they are accessible on YouTube and as part of the *Gzim Project*, a website offering information and resources that supplement the finished, hour-long documentary, *Gzim Rewind*.

*Gzim Rewind* aptly progresses its narrative of recollection through a series of interweaving flashbacks, spanning the years between 2010 and 2003 when Gzim and his family were forced to leave their homeland. During his transitory stay at a refugee center in Sweden, Gzim met video artist Wester, who proceeded to chronicle the boy’s story. Over the course of the next seven years, Wester intermittently interviewed and filmed Gzim as he continued to process the war in its aftermath, the memories of his native country, and his subsequent return to Kosovo as a teenager. Throughout the film, Gzim recounts his recurrent nightmares of the Kosovo conflict, including a particularly violent massacre he witnessed at the age of four. During Gzim’s discussions of these traumatic recollections with his family and with Wester, the filmmaker began to draw connections between Gzim’s wartime experiences and the graphic video games that Gzim occupied his time with during his adolescence. This is what precipitated the creation of the *Gzim Project*’s machinimic vignettes, which serve to represent Gzim’s memories of war. These sequences are respectively titled ‘Nightmare’, the name of the scene detailed above, and ‘New Beginnings’, which appears to pick up where ‘Nightmare’ left off, at the break of dawn.

I find the *Gzim Project*’s machinima aesthetic a useful analytical tool for this discussion, as it enriches inquiry into two critical components of *A Kosovo Fairytale*’s visual and narrative stratagem. First, it allows for a more probative interrogation of authorial practice in relation to war and nationalism. While *A Kosovo Fairytale* begins to question who

is at the helm of historical narrativization through its mode of personalized storytelling and its engagement with prominent cultural tropes and mythos, the *Gzim Project*'s use of machinima is similarly tactical but pushes the often limiting public-private, government-individual binaries by complicating and broadening its social framework. Machinima as a filmmaking process necessarily interrogates narrative authorship and mediation, as it entails the reappropriation of digital software, creative content, and intellectual property. As an emerging cinematic genre, it indicates a contemporary shift in storytelling practices. Machinima comprises an ever-expanding and diversifying media ecology. It is multimodal and intermedial in form and available across various interactive media distribution channels, including but not constrained to cinematic, online, and gaming platforms. This emphasis on the accessibility of creative content leads to the *Gzim Project*'s second valuable diagnostic inference for this investigation, as it problematizes *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s reliance on the empathetic identification of its audience, calling into question the capabilities and parameters of individual and collective engagement. What follows is an analysis of these respective areas of authorial practice and spectatorship. I begin with an establishment of each work's use of aesthetic reappropriation and conclude with a discussion regarding how this issue manifests itself within *A Kosovo Fairytale*. Throughout this section, I aim to understand what the material and narrative structure of *A Kosovo Fairytale* might signify for the translation of the Neziris' lived experience to a wider audience, who may be unfamiliar with the conflict.

### ***Intermedial and Cultural Reappropriation***

*A Kosovo Fairytale* and the *Gzim Project* share several features. Both set out to chronicle Kosovar families – with specific attention paid to the experience of the children – in the aftershock of the Kosovo conflict. Both incorporate mixed-media aesthetics into the representation of the central characters' memories of war, where animation serves with live-action sequences to illustrate these wartime flashbacks. And both projects were undertaken by Western European filmmakers, who sought to represent the experience of the Kosovar refugee. The works also have similar conditions of production, as they are each low-budget

projects executed by a collaboration of young artists and an assemblage of social resources. While *A Kosovo Fairytale* was dependent upon the participation of its student filmmakers, academic instructors, members of the Neziri family, and the financial support of various arts funding programs, the *Gzim Project* relies upon a network of volunteers, freelancers, and the hospitality and receptive cooperation of Gzim's family, as well as financial assistance from several Scandinavian grants for artists and new media projects.<sup>51</sup> Both have an online presence that publicizes the projects and their respective activities, and both have worked their way through the relevant distribution channels, including documentary and art film festivals and independent television networks.<sup>52</sup>

However, these parallels are precisely what invite inquiry into their differences, as they accentuate how each work's respective visuals might contrastingly operate. Granted, it is not exceptional that the modes and conditions of production for both works rest in the hands of a collaborative social network. But as each of these projects communicate critical insinuations about authorial freedom with respect to globalized and mediated discourses on war and representation, the ways in which they engage with notions of collaboration are made pertinent. As cross-media works, both *A Kosovo Fairytale* and the *Gzim Project* promote the reappropriation and re-contextualization of various media sources. As a result, they raise questions about authorial practice, which in this case concerns not only the use of creative content and intellectual property but also the rewriting of cultural and social histories, most notably in the form of war representation and narrativization.

For the *Gzim Project*, the employment of machinima uniquely enables an interrogation of authorship in two critical ways. The first regards its reappropriation of existing media, which weaves an expansive social network into the film's visual and narrative structure. As media law scholar Yochai Benkler argued in 2006, the particular emphasis placed upon intermedial modes of making in contemporary visual ecology offers

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<sup>51</sup> See 'Gzim Rewind: A Documentary Project', <http://knuttewester.se/default.aspx?part=film&namn=gzim>, which notes support from the Svenska Filminstitutet, Sveriges Television, Nordnorsk Filmcenter, and the Västerbotten Konstnärsnämnden.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. and 'A Kosovo Fairytale: Samantha Nell', Nell, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.samanthanell.com/portfolio/a-kosovo-fairytale-2009/>.

indispensable opportunities for transparency and communal contribution within the production and consumption of art and media. According to Benkler, ‘the practical capacity individuals and non-commercial actors have to use and manipulate cultural artifacts today, playfully or critically, far outstrips anything possible in television, film, or recorded music as these were organized throughout the twentieth century’.<sup>53</sup> Machinima acts as such an intermedial practice, and beyond instigating a dialogue with its modes of aesthetic assemblage, it automatically envelops a subculture of gamers and artists who utilize this platform to share individualized interpretations of the medium within an expansive social collective. For Benkler, it is specifically this social aspect of machinima that highlights the increase of availability and viability for each individual to make space for his or her own voice within an expansive cultural network. This shift in the perception of consumer or user into a more active role of interloper, creator, or storyteller challenges previous formulations of the artist-audience relationship and directly signals a more progressive form of authorship.

The particular attention given to the complex matter of reappropriation and authorship within the *Gzim Project* brings focus to the issues of historical narrativization and representation of war that *A Kosovo Fairytale* problematizes. However, distinctions should be made between each work in this capacity. For the *Gzim Project*, ‘reappropriation’ is fundamentally linked to its materiality. The practice of machinima premises itself upon the capturing, remixing, and reusing of digital media contents, making it a technique that directly impinges upon authorial production and ownership. Consequently, machinima is of significant legal concern, as it is a matter of intellectual property and copyright infringement. Instances of reappropriation within *A Kosovo Fairytale* do not bear any overt legal ramifications – as they do not manifest themselves as a reuse of other material productions – but are instead strategically pulled from the broader cultural ether and employed as a narrative device. These moments include the film’s adoption and adaptation of tropes like the blackbird and the fairy tale, which – as I have suggested – serve to reinforce cultural

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<sup>53</sup> Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Nations: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 276.

mythologies within the region and are used by *A Kosovo Fairytale* to revise their meanings. This type of reappropriation falls in line with its more traditional definition, in which a cultural term, style, practice, or artifact that might have been used pejoratively against a particular population is reclaimed by the offended populous in order to change, undo, or neutralize any derogatory insinuations. Such occurrences of cultural reappropriation are in effect inherently activist. The type of material reappropriation utilized within machinima, however, is not. But the use of machinima within the *Gzim Project*'s narrative context does imbue its employment with certain social and political ramifications, which by contrast can serve to highlight how *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s use of cultural reappropriation operates as a thematic tactic.

The second key factor in the *Gzim Project*'s interrogation of authorial practice is its pointed utilization of video games focusing on war, a move that raises many questions about how we relate to war and our experiences of it. The machinima sequences directly contrast interactive simulations of military combat with lived accounts of wartime. Wester recounts that the impetus for incorporating these moments into his film came from this kind of jarring juxtaposition between art and life:

I was in Kosovo, meeting Gzim, whom I have known since he was a boy in Sweden. He was now a teenager. I saw him playing this computer war game, which I thought was so strange because war is still obvious in Kosovo. I mean, just outside his house lie the ruins of their old house . . . But of course he was a teenager, playing war video games like everyone else. And that gave me this idea of his nightmare – as if happening inside or looking like a war video game – to show Gzim's actual nightmares. So I rewrote the film script for *Gzim Rewind* with machinima sequences . . . based on stories by Gzim and his mother (about witnessing a massacre). I found an American machinima filmmaker on machinima.com, Sgt Padrino, who gave me these fantastic moving images and I edited the machinima into my film.<sup>54</sup>

Wester's incorporation of the video games he saw Gzim play complicates an already complicated discourse surrounding war-related imagery that might mythologize or glorify war. But rather than placing the simulated gameplay and lived experiences of wartime in contrast to one another, the machinima sequences work to obscure these distinctions, while

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<sup>54</sup> Wester, *Gzim Project*, <http://www.gzimrewind.com>.

also ensnaring a pervasive societal dilemma of detachment or desensitization into the film. While film and television theorists Theo van Leeuwen and David Machin do not specifically analyze machinima in their survey of global media communications in contemporary culture, they do investigate the fluctuations of power, ownership, and consumerism of war within our expanding visual ecology through an analysis of video games centering on Middle Eastern conflicts. They note that most first person ‘shooter games’ rarely show the personal impact of war, and aside from precursory scenes or trailers that provide background on the characters and events chronicled in the game, the civilian casualties and collateral damages involved in military combat are largely ignored.<sup>55</sup> However, as many of these games are based on verifiable conflicts, attempts to distance them from lived reality or create any discernible distinctions between what is real, human, and personal from what is purely fictional or fantastical verges on the implausible.

Which is what makes it relevant that Bohemia Interactive denied Wester’s request to incorporate the machinima scenes into his film, as they did not ‘want their game to be associated with real war’.<sup>56</sup> Such a clear-cut division does not seem achievable. The synopses of games like *ARMA II* have made themselves dependent upon documentations of war, while users, like Gzim, may have experienced war firsthand. The interconnections between virtuality and the actuality it is based upon are too densely interwoven to evade. The visual conceit of *ARMA II*, for instance, developed from actual satellite imagery of České Středohoří, in northern Bohemia, Czech Republic – the homeland of the game’s designer – speaks to this heavily concentrated referentiality. The imagery was thought to be so realistic that the UK television network ITV made the error of broadcasting some of the games’ scenes within their documentary *Exposure: Gaddafi and the IRA*, aired on 26 September 2011, as they had mistaken it for actual footage of a 1988 IRA attack.<sup>57</sup>

The *Gzim Project*’s deployment of machinima – with its emphasis on participatory

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<sup>55</sup> See Theo Van Leeuwen and David Machin, *Global Media Discourse: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> Wester, *Gzim Project*, <http://www.gzimrewind.com>.

<sup>57</sup> See ‘ITV Documentary in IRA Computer Game Blunder’, *BBC News*, 27 September 2011, accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-15082177>.

practices of engagement, reclamation, and authorship – precisely illustrates this complex relationship between reality and fiction, evidencing that what is at the crux of these gaming platforms also lies at the heart of the tension between war representation and war experience: the individual. It doesn't seem attainable for gaming companies, like Bohemia Interactive, to have it both ways. It appears an untenable position to develop first-person shooter games around user identification and roleplaying scenarios, while at the same time remaining distant from a user's experience or interpretation. This is how machinima's standing as an individuated process within a collective network is able to emphasize the intricate ways that shared perspectival frames take root within society and culture, interrogating how we can all be enfolded into an interactive process that distorts the lines between reality and representation.

This is the kind of complex interactivity allowed for by the digital terrain and within which *A Kosovo Fairytale* operates. While my assessment does not draw comparative criticisms between *A Kosovo Fairytale* and the *Gzim Project*, it does try to ascertain how the utilization of animation and interactive technologies by both works reveals the ways they contrastingly attempt to deal with the Kosovo conflict. In consideration of the *Gzim Project*, we may begin to think about *A Kosovo Fairytale* in a new light, seeing it as a comparatively gentle engagement with its audience. It contrastingly tends to be less haunting and more dreamlike, less a direct confrontation with the brutalities of war and more a metaphorical or lyrical contemplation of them. In an age of hyperrealistic graphics, video games, and sensationalistic depictions of war and violence in film and television, *A Kosovo Fairytale* appears a relatively mild encounter with its historical subject, perhaps hinting at a shedding of the preconceptions regarding the primeval savagery of the Balkan people that have long persisted within critical and media discourse. But if seen as a mode of representational activism, its mechanics appear much more covert, allowing for its viewers a slow immersion into its storybook world, rather than the kind of unflinching graphic engagement that *Gzim Rewind*'s machinimic techniques offer.

Though each work speaks to and within a socially expansive network, they offer

contrasting modes of accessibility. As a central tenet of *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s narrative of spatial and temporal transmission – be it from Kosovo to Finland, parent to child, or exile to wider audience – the theme of access becomes a critical component for its efforts toward cultural translation. And this is both in connection to its literal narrative of civil war, intercultural union, and geographical exile as well as its collaborative form of production and appeals for the empathetic participation of its audience. To more fully expound the film's particular mode of viewer participation, I have found it useful to explore how it engages with two mechanisms of cultural translation, distinctly classified as the 'Third Space' and 'the void'.

### ***The Third Space vs. the Void***

With so much emphasis placed upon the notion of space – whether public, private, virtual, geographical, or geopolitical – and how these various planes interact and merge with one another, a single dimension seems conspicuously evaded within *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s visual and narrative framework, what cultural theorist and new media scholar Nikos Papastergiadis has termed 'the void'.<sup>58</sup> In his research, Papastergiadis sets out to rethink interactionist models of cultural exchange and globalization, advising that contemporary cultural cosmopolitanism needs to more explicitly integrate encounters with difference in lieu of prioritizing attempts to find common ground.<sup>59</sup> This space of difference – the void – becomes a reservoir for the displaced fragments and untranslatable elements that arise during the fusion of disparate social structures. Accepting the traditional definition of 'translation' as the 'process by which the meaning in one language is conveyed in another', Papastergiadis draws attention to the moments when linguistic transferences stops short.<sup>60</sup> In these instances, the correspondence between languages may inadequately capture the breadth of a word or concept. While analogies might be found within the new language, the bond created might be

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<sup>58</sup> See Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Cultural Translation, Cosmopolitanism and the Void', *Translation Studies* 4.1 (2011): 1-20.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 5.



the product of a vague or ‘uneven fit’.<sup>61</sup> Connotative depth might be shaved off and discarded to force things together, and the void can be viewed as a place where these excess trimmings fall.

The postulation of this space implies a system of cultural translation that is multidirectional and complexly structured, rather than a more simplistic back-and-forth process of mutual exchange. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur previously theorized a similar paradigm for representing translation, arguing that it should be recast beyond the stifling polarity of ‘fidelity’ and ‘betrayal’.<sup>62</sup> Instead, it should be viewed as a productive confrontation with the infinity of difference, which – and not in spite of but because of the deficiencies of this process – provides stimulus for the innovation and reconceptualization of cultural meaning-making. For Papastergiadis, the emphasis placed upon difference within the void is crucial for social renewal and transformation, as it offers greater potential for a less sullied environment where alternative communities can be created and built upon. The void is a place where the fragments – and not whole cultures, with their lengthy and weighty histories – can collide. It is a space where the differences, having been stripped from their origins, can bounce off one another and form something new.

Papastergiadis theorizes that the void’s direct corollary is what Bhabha calls the ‘Third Space’.<sup>63</sup> For Bhabha, the Third Space acts as a hybrid state that encourages limitless potentialities for those with differences to come together, becoming a site for postcolonial activism and liberation from hegemonic oppression. In the Third Space, difference is minimized, and what can be mutually understood and shared through human experience is emphasized. Admittedly, Bhabha’s Third Space did acknowledge elements of Papastergiadis’ proposed void in its supposition of the ‘contingent tension’ and ‘temporal break’ that encircles hybridity, enabling it to stand as both nothing and an endless potential.<sup>64</sup> However, Papastergiadis urges that in the context of contemporary globalization, we now need a revised,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>62</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

<sup>63</sup> See Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, capitalization in original.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 191.

non-mechanistic paradigm that addresses the highly creative and transformative function of the void in cultural translation, which can then serve as a helpful tool for cultivating cross-cultural processes of adoption and adaptation. It is his contention that the innovative potential emerging out of modernized cultural translation is not the consequence of an antiquated idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’ but is in part a reaction to the Third Space and its supposition of universality.<sup>65</sup> The current sociological discourses concerning globalized culture, in Papastergiadis’ view, have been too holistic and not nearly radical or dynamic enough.

*A Kosovo Fairytale* points to this representational trend and the complexities of working through it. Via its intersections between heterogeneous materialities and its more socially inclusive pleas for empathetic identification, there appears an emphasis on the intricate ways in which the depictions of war and exile are faced with balancing both the shedding and maintaining of cultural differences. To this end, the tension within *A Kosovo Fairytale*’s visual and narrative mechanics – its simultaneous playful imagery and grave subject matters – indicate the negotiations between the void and the ‘Third Space’ that contemporary representations of war and exile may encounter. The film raises questions about how we are able to express painful histories to general audiences, while also disputing perceptions that such attempts are too naïve, saccharine, or altruistic. How are representations able to seek out a direct confrontation of severely incompatible experiences and perspectives? How do we use the tools available to us to tell these difficult stories, tools that have become increasingly globalized and interactive? The film’s modes of production expose an operational struggle within this visual terrain, a pivotal positioning between the Third Space and an engagement with the transformative merits of the void.

I have stressed that *A Kosovo Fairytale*’s emphasis on heterogeneity and assemblage by way of intercultural and intermedial collaboration, collage, and communication not only underscores the Neziris’ Albanian-Serbian union but also hints at a traumatic narrative that is at once particularized and open to empathetic engagements. But the constrained tone of its visual and narrative modes also speaks to its delicate navigation between the utopian

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<sup>65</sup> Papastergiadis, ‘Cultural Translation’, 17.

principalities of the globalized Third Space and a less relatable but more productive void. The film stands as an emergent and progressive encounter with difference – what Papastergiadis argues is necessary for genuine revolutions to occur – but this meeting is carried out with a palpable sense of trepidation. *A Kosovo Fairytale* is careful not to polish over the gaps of experience between the cultures, audiences, and individuals involved while it works to broaden the spectrum of human understanding. In this capacity, the film has a difficult time merging its fairy-tale cohesion with its messy materiality.

This incongruity signifies the complexities of a representation that is not necessarily attempting to present neutrality but is instead always negotiating. While the various intermedial and intercultural elements brought together in *A Kosovo Fairytale* might accentuate their coexistence, the conflicts, disconnects, ruptures, and rifts that may stem from their exchanges have also been made visible. In the following, I attempt to dissect these representational tensions within the film, noting various opportunities where these tensions and frictions are particularly evident. These disjunctures are predominantly sourced within the restrictions its fairy-tale premise imposes on its visual and narrative structure, but they can also be seen within the film's entanglements between its contrasting aesthetic and material forms. There are two specific examples cited here that will work to explicate these issues: the film's representation of an othered enemy and the presence of an electronic 'flicker' that is brought upon by its cross-media mode of production.

### *The Othered Enemy*

If, as I have postulated, we view *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s engagement with relevant cultural mythos as a method of repurposing hegemonic narratives while providing a counter-historicization for the conflict, the film will be met with several thorny complications.

Anthropologist Stef Jansen's study 'The Violence of Memories: Local Narratives of the Past After Ethnic Cleansing in Croatia', which examines local narratives in an area of Croatia devastated by both WWII and several clashes of ethnic cleansing during the first Yugoslav wars, yields an interpretation of Croat and Serb memories of those histories as highly partisan,

selective, and plagued by ‘black holes’.<sup>66</sup> This is not an unexpected conclusion regarding the processes of remembrance, nor one unique to the experiences of the region or its cultural and political conflicts. What is significant, however, is Jansen’s discovery that locals from both communities borrowed heavily from historical references to the ancient past, the Second World War, communist life, and the violent tensions of the 1990s, in order to create their personal accounts. In Jansen’s view, these stories also appeared to conveniently support nationalist or apologist tendencies. They mirrored the dominant competing narratives of the region and – beyond merely conforming to them – actively reinforced them by using those narratives to lend credibility to personal experience. Jansen’s analysis resultantly becomes quite suspicious of individual memory as a way to disrupt nationalist narratives, as it too can be found thoroughly embedded within the political terrain.

Jansen’s conclusions suggest a productive skepticism of the supposed ‘liberation’ of private memories after the collapse of a suppressive regime. While fertile ground for formerly repressed voices to be promoted and heard, the post-communist environment and new nationalist regimes could just as easily cynically exploit these personalized narratives. These assertions remind us of the fine line between political history and interested memory. Historical scholars Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan, and Kevin Passmore observe that the role of the historian in contemporary culture is and will continue to exist both consciously and unconsciously under the authority of nationalist perspectives.<sup>67</sup> These contentions lead us to acknowledge that any version of the past – personal or political, whether ‘accurate, professional’, or disinterested – cannot be relied upon as a whole truth.<sup>68</sup> Others take this further, wondering whether any and all attempts to mitigate historical and cultural animosities between countries through narrative revisionism are nothing other than delusions of grandeur.<sup>69</sup> From this view, *A Kosovo Fairytale* reflects the complications inherent to

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<sup>66</sup> See Stef Jansen, ‘The Violence of Memories: Local Narratives of the Past After Ethnic Cleansing in Croatia’, *Rethinking History* 6.1 (2002), 85.

<sup>67</sup> Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan, and Kevin Passmore eds., *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 35 and 271.

representational efforts toward the reclamation of cultural tropes within an individualized narrative. Does continuing to address dominant or manipulative modes of historicization serve as sheer propagation of them? Should entirely new discourses be developed out of the remnants of Papastergiadis' void? Is it possible – or even preferable – to engage with the past as a mode to detach from it? And – as a means to negate the prejudices of 'official' socio-political discourses by establishing alternative ones – how can the institution of a new biased agenda be avoided?

Especially revealing is how the film treats the cultural turmoil of the Kosovo conflict itself. There are three occasions in *A Kosovo Fairytale* when the aggressive clashes of the civil war are made visible in the film: once in a depiction of war breaking out between Albanian and Serbian forces, once when the Neziri parents are threatened by those who object to their intercultural union, and once when the Neziri children are harassed while playing a ballgame outside. In each of these instances, the perpetrators are made to appear unmistakably unlike the Neziris (Figures 4.19-4.20). Clearly the villains of this fairy tale, these characters are composed of heavy, intertwined wire. Their presence is unfailingly accompanied by an eerie soundtrack, a screeching reverb that reminds one of the opening and closing of a rusty gate. The bodies are faceless and macabre. Towering well above the fragile paper cutouts of the film's main protagonists, the figures are menacing. Their movements are stilted and inorganic, and though they do bleed, their blood is thick and ink black. These beings, the film has visually articulated, are simply not human.

The film's reluctance to engage with these figures as fellow humans as opposed to othered and unknowable assailants poses a complicated question for the reappropriation of its fairy tale tropes. Instead of negating the mythical binaries that sought to divide the region's inhabitants, the storybook world envisioned in *A Kosovo Fairytale* seems to encourage its own black vs. white, good vs. evil, and us vs. them ideation of history. Furthermore, it doesn't just create two separate camps of 'good' and 'bad' – the people who have suffered at the hands of war and the seemingly invisible perpetrators of it – but assumes that everyone associated with the making of the film or that has been enveloped into it as a spectator is

positioned squarely in the 'good' category. There appear no grey areas. We are all in this together, us against an arcane evil blur that has impacted us but does not impeach us. For Papastergiadis, it is essential that cultural translation works to imagine an alternative community, but the 'imaginary' should not nullify reality. Rather, it should adhere to it, making room for the 'near infinity of worldly differences' to exist within its boundaries.<sup>70</sup> To not incorporate the differences along with the interconnections shared between the Neziris and their persecutors, visualizing instead a hypothetical, or aggregate bogeyman to deride and fear, appears a risky venture for its underlying narrative of unity. I stress this point not to dismiss the Neziris' story or the magnitude of their losses and persecutions but to acknowledge the limits of the film's fairy tale conceit to relay them.

There is a moment in *Gzim Rewind* when a teen-aged Gzim is showing Wester around his hometown in Kosovo. Walking down the street, they encounter something sticking out of a mound of dirt on the side of the road. 'What's that, a leg?' he asks, matter-of-factly. 'No, its an arm.' 'Just look at that,' Gzim says, as he taps at something protruding out of the dirt. 'Knutte, that's a skull. A human cranium.' This is the bare-bones reality that *Gzim Rewind* finds impossible to ignore, and it exists apart from an ethical dilemma for the film. When one questions whether it is acceptable for a video game to depict the carnage of war, if it is appropriate for individuals to engage in a fantasy world of role play and for machinimators to put their own spin on it, or when the game distributors and designers want to distance themselves from the real thing, it is in regard to this reality that the condemnations and distinctions become clouded. Because these things simply are, as *Gzim Rewind* tells us, and the films and video games wouldn't subsist without them. War exists; it is a human creation that implicates us all. But where the *Gzim Project* directly acknowledges this as a lived reality, *A Kosovo Fairytale* shies away, working instead toward a sense of communal cohesion that simultaneously minimizes any broader societal incrimination.

Consequently, the film evades this disjuncture, alleviating viewers from any calls for transformation on either the individual or collective level of reception. And this is not for a

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<sup>70</sup> Papastergiadis, 'Cultural Translation', 11.

lack of narrative devices. As Katherine Verdery explained in her investigation of the mass exhumation of war victims across Eastern Europe, part of the propagandistic strategy to incorporate the myths of the past across the former Yugoslavia appeared as a ‘grisly literalism: the mass exhumation and reburial amidst savage recrimination of victims of Second World War massacres in the early 1990s means that “the skeletal inhabitants of limestone caves were the first troops mobilized in the Yugoslav wars”’.<sup>71</sup> But within *A Kosovo Fairytale*, the use of its unified fairy-tale narrative alongside its heterogeneous structure signals the film’s ambiguous position within its visual and socio-historical context. It appears to lie somewhere between palatability and a more skull-and-bones depiction of reality, pointing to the difficulties inherent to traversing this complex representational terrain.

#### *The Flicker*

*A Kosovo Fairytale* was released as a video to digital transfer and consists of mixed-media animation and live-action sequences. Throughout this analysis, I have dealt with the film as a filmic collage. For Spielmann, the cinematic collage that also incorporates the digital is inimitably positioned to provide both openness and chaos. When employed within film, these qualities work to achieve a seamless continuity through their very ruptures and rifts. As a cinematic ‘painting’, the digital collage can appear to smooth out the edges and melt its disparate parts into a homogenous whole. Essentially, though its various intermedial features might denote incoherence, each digital unit will in fact be underwritten with the same electronic code and correspondingly form a coherent structure. This, Spielmann distinguishes, is the fundamental paradox of intermedial cinema: it stresses difference but mediates them to fuse such discrepancies together. Spielmann locates this paradox between the potential for representational simulation versus transformation. Where the digital simulates the visible – as the physical components that form the visual, including light rays or chemical or mechanical properties, become copies of their original forms within the completed image – the analog is

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<sup>71</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 99.

always grounded in figuration and the physical transformation of its material parts. The analog image is rooted in the factual while the digital image manifests itself in the factual's very dissolution. The digital upholds distinctions between its disparate media because the factual differences and their transformations are negated through their dissipation. And this is what creates the digital's illogicality: differences are sustained, but only underneath an overlay of surfaced cohesion. Potential development or transformation of the discrete elements coming together is bypassed through the process of digitization, as each element is artificially blended together.

A prime example of this visual paradox in *A Kosovo Fairytale* – and emblematic of what it signifies for the film's complex network of the intercultural, intertemporal, and intermedial – is the presence of an electronic 'flicker' that can be seen in its live-action scenes. During each moment of the Neziris' video chat with Albin, the image that is recorded on the computer monitor is interrupted by a continuous flashing or dimming of light that slowly scrolls down the computer screen. This flicker is caused for two reasons: a difference in the scanning frequency between the computer monitor and the video camera and a difference in the way the phosphor dots that compose the computer's image display is perceived by the human eye versus the camera's image sensor. The picture on a standard cathode ray tube computer monitor – like the one in the Neziris' home – is generated by an electron beam that scans horizontal lines of pixels across the screen, lighting up each pixel when the beam interacts with it. The pixels are made of individual phosphor dots that emit a glow when they are hit by the beam. Though the pixels are not actually lit up or glowing continuously, human perception pieces the intervals together to give the illusion of a steady image. A video camera, however, does not visually translate the lighting up of these dots seamlessly, and this is what results in the appearance of a flicker.

As Spielmann describes, such a 'flicker' is similar to the phenomena of a visual paradox. Edgar Rubin's examination of visual perception in the 1920s similarly found Josef



Albers' work to be representative of this visual discrepancy.<sup>72</sup> Albers laid bare the perceptual dilemma between seeing the 'actual fact' and the 'factual fact' in his painted picture planes consisting of two differently colored monochromatic fields that have been inserted into each other, creating spatial tension through their proximity.<sup>73</sup> The effect is highlighted in the apparent fusion of the two fields so that there is a compression between what is 'actually' seen and what is 'factually' present in the image. The spatial ordering of the imagery makes it appear as if the two fields of color will continuously swap positions between the foreground and background. This perceived effect of distortion, Spielmann advises, is similar to the perceived effect of fusion in intermedial cinema. Within cinema, paradoxical figurations or illusions can arise from the merging of elements that have contrasting ways of being visually processed and are subsequently able to emphasize various types of dynamic or static movements or indicate diverging temporal or spatial directions.<sup>74</sup>

At the risk of getting overly literal about this visual disjuncture, the flickering present in *A Kosovo Fairytale* reinforces the film's aesthetic of intermedial collage, highlighting both the friction caused by the bringing together of its heterogeneous elements and the hindrance created between the filmic world and the viewer's natural ability to perceive and understand it. What is visibly revealed by the fusion of its intermedial forms – in the case of *A Kosovo Fairytale*, the analog video, the computerized digital, and the animated handmade – is not their ability to blend into a unified whole. On the contrary, it is their unique qualities and differential capabilities that are exposed. As this visual tension emphasizes the digital in its final image, however, the transformative or progressive potential may be seen as having been impeded. For Spielmann, if the digital image – which can only simulate the visual – captures a moment of intermedial transformation, it will only validate an intermediality that is not grounded in actuality, as the technical requirements for this kind of exchange have been negated in the dissolution of their distinctive capabilities. This is a defining characteristic of the digital, which distinctively negates the factual and affirms what is nonfactual. Asserted

<sup>72</sup> For a broader discussion of Edgar Rubin and other phenomena see Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception- A Psychology of The Creative Eye* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, [1954] 1974).

<sup>73</sup> See Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975).

<sup>74</sup> Spielmann, 'Aesthetic Features', 141-142.

Friedrich Kittler: ‘The affirmative means that we affirm what is and negate what is not, whereas simulation means to affirm what is not and negate what is.’<sup>75</sup> This is what allows for the superficial, nonfactual connections to be made between all the parts of the image and what causes the simulation of intermediality to affirm what is not actually there: transformation, a crucial facet of *A Kosovo Fairytale*’s narrative of cultural translation. To this extent, the presence of the flicker acts as a representative of the potentiality of intermedial friction and its possible demands for interpretive engagement and, perhaps, dynamic revolt. Accordingly, rather than promoting the merging together of differences, the flicker exists as a reminder of the film’s cautious relationship with its transformative aspects.

## Conclusion

In their behind the scenes video, *A Kosovo Fairytale Making of*, the filmmakers provide some insight into their motivations of production.<sup>76</sup> Of their decision to use animation, Middlewick proffers that it might draw attention to the Neziris’ experience: ‘You hear about all these stories and you watch the news, and you, you just change the channel, “oh, another refugee story”’.<sup>77</sup> Echoes Ludvig Allen, the film’s sound designer, ‘I think its important to give minorities – the small people, if you will – a voice’. Without assigning too much analytical regard to the tonality of these statements, an ingenuous effort to ‘give the small people a voice’ appears to have embedded itself within *A Kosovo Fairytale*. And it is tempting to view the film on those terms. But as with all the films that have been looked at throughout this research, the investigation here is less concerned with assessing whether certain representational objectives were met – or whether a film was or was not successful in relating its narrative to its audience or toward any socio-political ends – and is instead more interested in ascertaining how its aesthetic and material structure functions within its specific context of production. I have argued that *A Kosovo Fairytale*’s mode of intermediality works toward the creation of an open-ended environment for boundless transformation, while also treading a

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<sup>75</sup> Friedrich Kittler, quoted and translated in *ibid.*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> Middlewick, Nell, and Nylund, *Kosovo Fairytale, Making of*.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

fine line within the representation of a horrific past. How should we tell these stories? How can we simultaneously express the brutal realities of war and the lyricism of lived experience? Moreover, what are the stakes of making these narratives accessible in a globalized world that potentially devalues difference within a united ‘melting pot’ of culture and society?

For the sociological debates concerning cultural translation, Papastergiadis cautions that the discourse tends to gravitate toward an unproductive and simplistic affiliation between homogeneity and heterogeneity. *A Kosovo Fairytale* complicates this deceptive duality. While its intermedial engagement with digital and interactive technologies does attempt to discharge its particularized narrative of trauma – releasing it into an expansive media network – its structural wiring seems encoded to self-destruct, a product of its delicate representational predicaments. If this metaphor seems all too rudimentary and convenient for a discussion concerning the intricacies of intercultural exchange and revolution, it is. Hess and Zimmerman have expounded on the inadequacy of the various metaphors we employ to describe digitization within contemporary visual culture. The Internet as the ‘information super highway’ suggests a systemized linearity, as does the conception of it as the new ‘frontier’ – as in the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) – which connotes one-directional forward expansion. In addition, ideas of immersion and interactivity, which may promise an escape from oppressive or isolating environments, correspond to notions of digitized and democratized information. These might include the various initiatives currently being undertaken by countries around the globe, which seek to digitize cultural, historical, and literary canons in order to reinvigorate unilateral senses of nationalism and cultural heritage.<sup>78</sup> These heuristic devices can be helpful for determining certain components of digital trends. But as Hess and Zimmerman caution, none of these metaphors will fully capture its global or transnational repercussions. The relationship between privilege and access with respect to racial, cultural, and class divides, for example, needs to be revisited when it comes to

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<sup>78</sup> See Mats Dahlström, Joacim Hansson, and Ulrika Kjellman, “‘As We May Digitize’: Institutions and Documents Reconfigured”, *LIBER Quarterly* 21.3-4 (2012): <https://www.liberquarterly.eu/articles/10.18352/lq.8036/>, accessed 24 April 2016, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.18352/lq.8036>.

technological advancement and application.<sup>79</sup>

Congruently, for the established schemes of cultural translation, Papastergiadis contends that globalization itself is not organized into the established confines of domination and emancipation or into the exclusive formation of a new world order. 'If cultural translation is to enable a rethinking of cosmopolitanism beyond the boosterist and apocalyptic perspectives on the cultural logic of globalization,' he writes, 'it will also need to develop a conceptual framework that is not solely dependent upon mechanical processes of cultural production.'<sup>80</sup> Essentially, this is what the representational frictions inherent to *A Kosovo Fairytale* convey, that we need to find new ways of incorporating the past into the present, of participating in a rapidly expanding globalized world while also maintaining distinctions. For representations to create a safe and alternative space for the cultivation of interculturalism, productions need to rely on more than the metaphorical potentialities of structural, narrative, and visual assemblages. Instead, we should encourage deeper consideration, deconstruction, and utilization of a representation's individual parts. As Hess and Zimmerman urge, we need to approach such issues with a more multifaceted stratagem in order to better understand the oblique ways in which cultural translation 'can touch but not follow the path of the original, nor demonstrate how meanings are formed out of the shards of a broken system'.<sup>81</sup> We need the metaphors. But more than that, we need to tear them apart, scrutinize their pieces, and put them back together in a way that says something different.

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<sup>79</sup> Hess and Zimmerman, 'Transnational Digital', 155.

<sup>80</sup> Papastergiadis, 'Cultural Translation', 17.

<sup>81</sup> Hess and Zimmerman, 'Transnational Digital', 155.

## CONCLUSION: Films That Touch and Move

‘Line,’ stated Barthes, ‘always implies a force, a direction. It is energy at work, and it displays the traces of its pulsation and self-consumption.’<sup>1</sup> The potency and potentiality of the animated line lies at the heart of this study. I have investigated this potential within four animated shorts: *Minoru: Memory of Exile*, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, *My Mother’s Coat*, and *A Kosovo Fairytale*. Personal, familial narratives told through intergenerational perspectives, these films explore to varying degrees issues of trauma, war, dislocation, and conflicting intercultural encounters. The animated lines running through each film echo such oscillations between disparate points. They traverse and reverse, overlap and collapse, engage with and disengage from one another. Throughout this project, I have worked to understand these movements and their intersections with the personal stories shared, paying close attention to their respective historical contexts. I have found that each film approaches animated lines as figurative entities emphasizing process, rather than endpoint, form, or product. The films interconnect divergent media, histories, and memories in an effort to reconfigure the conditions for individual and collective subjectivities.

The heterogeneous range of issues raised by these films – in relation to not only their specific narratives and circumstances of production but also animation as a cinematic category – has yielded a complex topic of study. The interdisciplinary crosspollinations between film theory, artistic production, memory studies, and the films examined, between their aesthetics and their subject matters, emphasize the ceaselessly shifting interconnections between memory, history, and representation that continue to mirror and transform each other. My central aim throughout this research has been to discern what these films can tell us about the engagements between memory and medium, the past and its representation. Why has animated cinema recently become a preferred vehicle for personal narratives of

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<sup>1</sup> Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 209.

remembrance? What might the animated aesthetic signify for the individual stories told? About the broader collective histories addressed? I contend that animation has been employed as a mobilizing force to rethink the fabrication of history and to make the archives more inclusive. These films do not reassert established representational boundaries or classifications. They do not propagate any inherited frameworks that promote fallacious narratives built on promises of closure or homogeneity. Instead, these works attempt to forge new alliances equipped to comprehend the ever-expanding intra-communal networks of memory and history. In this final summary, I will discuss some of the elemental aesthetic and narrative modes that unite these films in their calls for collaboration and transformation. To this end, I propose that the use of traditional animation practice 1. Rethinks indexical representation; 2. Visualizes metamorphosis; 3. Stresses interactive forms of viewership and media practice; and 4. Suggests reciprocity with the past. Following these points, I will conclude with a discussion about the current and future state of this cinematic genre.

### **Rethinking the Index**

In my introduction to this study, I pointed to the many analyses within animation scholarship that link the rise of animated nonfiction to a postmodernist shift in documentary filmmaking. Animation researchers including Ehrlich, Roe, Ward, and Wells have argued that the medium's overt fabrication makes it especially able to interrogate the veracity of the documentary image, while exploring the relationship between fictional and factual representation. This view has intensified with the increase of digital cinematic practices. Though early truth claims of cinematic objectivity were founded on the technical limitations of image manipulation, it has been hypothesized that the same threshold can no longer be met in contemporary digital culture.<sup>2</sup> Animation researchers have utilized this argumentation to

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<sup>2</sup> Manovich, 'What is Digital Cinema?', in *Visual Culture: Experiences in Visual Culture*, eds. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 221-238.

promote a more expansive vision of documentation and indexicality, one that includes the diverse realities that animated film can illustrate, independent of their physicality.<sup>3</sup>

This rethinking of the filmic index runs parallel to animation's self-reassessment in the face of digitization. Fearing the obsolescence of more traditional techniques, there have been efforts within animation theory and practice to identify the medium's strictures, distinguishing what makes it a distinctive cinematic form, one that cannot be usurped by new media. Rewrites of animation's teleological histories have sought to include the independent, experimental, and avant-garde modes of production while also highlighting the technical and material development of pre-digital animated film.

Reviewing the literature, I have found certain undercurrents running beneath these recent attempts to reevaluate animation. Specifically, there appears a palpable and long-held contention with cinema studies and industry. The digital age has offered animated film a moment for self-reflection and transformation. But it has also presented for many within the field an occasion to challenge established cinematic hierarchies. As I have outlined, recent years have seen prevalent appeals in the field to destabilize traditional cinema theory by revising its history through the lens of animation. To be clear, these apprehensions are not singularly attached to the emergence of new technologies. They have instead been conflated with animation's oft-cited 'identity crisis', which I posit extends well beyond the introduction of the digital. The contemporary threat of digitization appears to have coalesced with the field's less pronounced anxieties, which include concerns over its perceived position within visual culture and in comparison with other modes of representation. This is particularly – and especially relevant for this research – in regard to photography and live-action film.

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<sup>3</sup> See Ehrlich, 'Animated Documentaries as Masking', <http://journal.animationstudies.org/nea-ehrllich-animated-documentaries-as-masking/>; and 'Animated Documentaries: Aesthetics, Politics and Viewer Engagement', in *Pervasive Animation*, 248-271; Roe, *Animated Documentary*, 17-40, 139-169; 'Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion', 215-223; and 'Uncanny Indexes: Rotoshopped Interviews as Documentary', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 7.1 (2011): 26-38; Ward, *Documentary*, 82-99; 'Some Thoughts on Practice', 232-234; 'Animating with Facts: The Performative Process of Documentary Animation in the ten mark (2010)', *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6.3 (2010): 293-305; 'Animated Realities: The Animated Film, Documentary, Realism', *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 8.2 (2008): <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/082/ward.shtml>, accessed 24 April 2016; and 'Animated Interactions: Animation Aesthetics and the World of the "Interactive" Documentary', in *Animated Worlds*, ed. Suzanne Buchan, 113-129; and Wells, *Art and Animation*, 40-45.

Throughout this study, I have detailed the ways each film examined makes a compelling case about animation's potential to challenge conceptualizations of cinematic verisimilitude. Through animation, *Minoru* revivifies the historical archives; *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* employs the medium to convey an internal struggle rooted in the psychic processes of fantasy and escapism; the animated visual morphs in *My Mother's Coat* intimate the hidden movements of bodies in transition; and in *A Kosovo Fairytale*, animation reveals the inner turmoil of a family compelled to escape their homeland in the dark of night. Animated cinema is undeniably capable of communicating a range of elusive realities. In so doing, it can make us reconsider a broadening indexical spectrum, as well as the practical and aesthetic merits of animation within cinema more widely. But I caution that the tendency within the field to assert animated nonfiction as a threat to live action's stature as an indexical form does not do the medium or its proponents any favors. Though digital media has complicated perceptions of photographic indexicality, a concept particularly tethered to the complex debates concerning history, representation, and authenticity, the issues raised in this research make clear that the stakes for any historicist depiction – whether literary, testimonial, archival, cinematic, or within the visual arts – are extremely high. Any historical representation is unavoidably constrained in scope and proximity from the portrayed event. With regard to the impediments inherent to realist representation, advocating one medium's perceived indexical character over another misses the complexity of these issues. Interrogations of the exclusive link between photography and indexicality should – rather than premise that there exists another medium to take its position of supremacy – evidence this fundamental aspect of representation.

Yet much of the discussion pertaining to animation and indexicality, as well as the establishment of animated documentary as a genre, has fallen into a discursive pattern of pitting animated film in direct conflict with photography, live action, and traditional documentary practice. Inquiries into the genre have frequently been rooted in the idea that 'animated documentaries are necessarily passing comment on live action's ability, or lack thereof, to represent reality', establishing as a central research question, 'what is animation



doing better than the viable live-action alternative?’<sup>4</sup> It is often taken for granted that – though other visual media can also illuminate visible and indiscernible realities, physicalities and immaterialities, as well as abstract and realist concepts – animated film has a privileged, more expressive, or more imaginative means of bringing things ‘to life’ through the moving image. I suggest that the discipline’s current streak of imperious rhetoric – which speculates that the animated medium ‘goes beyond the mere indexical capacity of photographic images’, due to its ‘greater liberty to conflate the “then” and the “now”’ than live action, and is the ‘most apposite way to remember the past’ – needs to be tempered.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to imply that all media can or should be equated or that animated cinema does not operate in idiosyncratic ways relative to context. Animation functions distinctively and with specific outcomes. However, it would be a disservice to these films to root their analyses within a disciplinary fight for representational authority, as it risks negating their productive collaborative engagements, as well as how rigorous and self-aware these interactions may be. A recurrent theme shared by these films is the convergence of animation with photography and live action. They engage with photographic, archival, and other aesthetic modes in light of distinctive memory narratives. By closely examining these films, I have shown how the incongruities inherent to intermediality have been embraced, becoming sites for creative trajectories and alternatives. Correspondingly, my objective has not been to establish what animation always does – to ascertain generalizing regiments and delineations – but to acknowledge the possibilities of what it can do, in a multitude of differing circumstances.

If animation has found itself in a moment of self-reflection, it has the luxury of being able to experiment with and extend its potentialities without trapping itself into preconceived categorizations. Now appears an opportunity for the medium to avoid pinning itself into a corner. As alternate histories of the various facets of animated practice continue to multiply,

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<sup>4</sup> Roe, *Animated Documentary*, 17-18. See also DelGuadio, ‘If Truth Be Told’, 192.

<sup>5</sup> Roe, *Animated Documentary*, 155, 35, and 168.

future scholarship should encourage their development – not so they may be set in stone – but so the discipline of animation studies can preserve its inclusive identity.

### **Metamorphosis**

There is a hypnotic undercurrent to the visuals in *My Mother's Coat*. The spectator may find him or herself drifting with its imagery, as it folds and unfolds, or as persons turn into objects with minimal alteration. The images are illusory, ceaselessly falling away before recrystallizing. As I referenced in relation to the film, Sergei Eisenstein credited such regenerative autonomy to the animated image's plasmaticness.<sup>6</sup> In animation, the drawn contours of bodies and limbs can expand, contract, and assume pliable shapes at will. They can metamorphose with ease. Though it has been interpreted by some that animation's playful visuals necessitate an oversimplification of human experience, manifesting in ultimately broad and caricatured pantomime, Sergei Eisenstein promoted just the opposite.<sup>7</sup> These movements are organic and fluid, exhibiting an 'omnipotence of plasma which contains in "liquid" form all possibilities of future species and forms'.<sup>8</sup>

The unexplored terrains of animation are not only found in the reveals of veiled realities; they are also located within movement itself. Animation meditates on movement. Its frames underscore that the vitality of a work of art is sourced in the motion of its creation and not the residue of form. Forms arise only amidst a series of maneuvers. This contingency designates that the animated image never rests. Rather, it is forever in flux. In chapter three, I suggested that *My Mother's Coat*'s morphological motif resonates with Klee's famous description of a freely moving line that goes out for a walk 'for a walk's sake', for the sake of being its innately generative self.<sup>9</sup>

Particularly transformative are the animated line's engagements with the range of materials used in these films, especially when it intertwines with photography. The various

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<sup>6</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, 64.

<sup>7</sup> Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 309.

<sup>8</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 16.

entanglements between these two differing media invite comparison, highlighting the complex inferences they share. Animation and photography have long spoken a common language. Their respective imagery has connoted traces, erasures, shadows, and flashes of light, movement, or color. The animated or photographic still is often imagined standing somewhere between temporal realities, absences, and presences. Set in motion, they may be characterized as expressions of life and vitality. Each mode presents its viewers with a haunted image, a piece of visible evidence of material and immaterial worlds wrapped together, as a tangible yet mysterious entity. Developed in the dark room, drawn on a light box; animation and photography are entrenched in a philosophical oratory of life and death, in terms of ideology, process, form, and content. Their interrelations within these filmic contexts bears specific formal resonance for the temporal themes at play.

First, their aesthetic interactions self-reflexively hint at live action's illusion of still photography as time-based, spatial movement. Both animation and photography are engrossed in issues of motion and stasis. Each medium is preoccupied with accessing the instant: animation through its depictions of the hidden fluctuations that compose movement, photography with its capture of discrete instances. These modes complement one another in their production of temporal and material forms. Their interplay reaffirms film – any film – as an 'automated reconstitution of movement', epitomizing the analogous relationship between chronophotography and the animorph.<sup>10</sup> It points to what Sobchack calls 'the inanimated stillness at the heart of cinematic animation'.<sup>11</sup> There exists animate stillness and deanimated action. Through their formal engagements, we are meant to consider the machinations behind how time is experienced versus how it is represented. We are moved to dissect the elusive connections between lived time and remembered time – between past, present, and future – in order to locate our position in relation to these time-based passages.

Second, the contact between animation and photography prompts a rethinking of photographic immobility. It has been extensively theorized that a photograph presents for its

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<sup>10</sup> Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 53

<sup>11</sup> Sobchack, 'Animation and Automation', 379.

viewer an inherent binary: ‘arrested transience’, an ephemeral moment sustained.<sup>12</sup> If photography is able to provide evidence of these fleeting realities – connecting the photographed instant to the moment of its subsequent viewing – animation complicates this temporal limbo. Watching *Minoru*, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the animated figures that dance upon the film’s photographic imagery. Animating these photos and archival materials breaks their chain of signification. It defamiliarizes the image, extricating it from its anticipated context or sequence and altering its associations. Animation creates an additional lens through which to view the photographic image: the past is not only ever-present; it is ever changing.

The films work with visual and temporal morphs, transitions, and formations. These transmutations stress each lived moment as one with continued potential, as witnesses to alternative visions. We discover a reciprocity between stillness and movement, the significance of which is not placed upon the before and after, beginnings and endings, but on unremitting uncertainties. With a focus on becoming, accentuated are possibilities both virtual and actual. And it is perhaps for this reason that themes of childhood hold such weight for these films. Strongly tethered to an age of wonder – to the budding unknowns inherent to ingenuousness – animation’s employ elicits a space where imaginative vicissitudes are endless. These films envision a conflation of childhood and adulthood that acutely heightens the terrors, tragedies, and losses of history. But here, the storybook remains open-ended to its valorous rewrites while uncertainty, suspense, and hope are made beholden to the image. Metamorphosis never ends. It is instead an ever-expanding moment, forever unfolding.

### **Interactivity**

I have paid particular attention to themes of embodiment and embodied spectatorship throughout this project, arguing that each film plays on sensory perceptions to establish a bodily bond between viewer and viewed. This engagement is both identificatory and interactive. The films include a range of abstract and tangible images that move, merge, and

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<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 11-13.

dissolve into one another. Material remnants, photographs, and archival documents reconstitute themselves into cinematic collages, brought together through the artist's performative production. It is a physical form of filmmaking that emphasizes its material methods of making and reciprocally invites multisensory reception. My reading of these films has brought attention to the many ways these vicarious connections operate. These processes may be subtle, but they are no doubt significant for the stakes of their respective narratives. The relationship established between materiality and embodiment thematizes a tangible connection to history, working to bridge the gaps between past and present, as well as individual and collective memories. These films approach lived experience as something that continues to be felt in the here and now, while the bodily implications work hand in hand with the intimate stories told.

The ideation of animation as a sensual medium alludes to the permeability of its filmic frame. The theory of the plasmatic, for example, offers such a reading. Though described as a sensation that cannot be seen, touched, or completely articulated, the plasmatic roots itself in its corporeal connections. This process is multisensorial, phenomenological, and phantasmatic, as audiences become inundated with vast amounts of sensory information. The mental 'acrobatics' required to negotiate the animated form's morphs and contortions bring us back to our own perceptual processes. As I discussed in chapter three, traditional cel animation – along with analog filmmaking – depends on certain neuro-optical cognitions in order for our eyes and minds to string the frames together. To perceive the visual form's movements, we must move with it; we must assist in its animation. If animation presents us with an escapist world, it is one where subject, object, and artist commingle with one another. Crafting each frame with a mixture of materials, the animator builds the very structure of the cinematic object. Viewers enter that space, welcomed by the hand at work. Their eyes are met with a continuous flicker of light and image. This communicates not only sequential experience but also the film's very fabrication. It is a visceral engagement. There is close observation and mental processing. There are physical responses. Following this, an active sensory engagement with the filmic image promotes a tactile mode of viewership. In my

analysis of *My Mother's Coat*, I espoused a haptic reading of animated film in line with Marks' interpretation, where an embodied viewer is drawn closer to the textural surface of the picture plane, relating to it as one body does another. Attention is forced onto the film's details – the hand-drawn fragments, the line of the pen, the grain of the paper – mingling the viewer with the matters at the heart of narrative production. Denied a view of the whole, audiences are motivated to put the pieces together. The film invites touch; it wants to be held, to be searched. Animation engrosses its viewer, becoming a phenomenological experience that unites the performative aspects of the works on both sides of the screen.

My focus on the haptic is due to the significance these films place on tactility as a form of vision and, in turn, remembrance. I reiterate that the use of traditional, handmade animation is as crucial a component for assessing how these films engage with the past as it is a complex and far-reaching tool used to contemplate the interactions between memory, history, and representation. I pursued this line of material analysis in tandem with attentive visual interpretation. These films revel in touch, they fully embed their narratives in it. No matter how intimate, inaccessible, fantastical, or traumatic, their stories are anchored in the tangibility of the handmade. This enables each viewer's own tactile experiences to inform the visuals onscreen. What this establishes is an empathetic mode of viewership, where audiences identify with the cinematic world by way of consonant sensory reference points. Through the pervasive engagements with touch as a sensual medium, these films directly involve the viewer in their acts of remembrance.

The prevalence of photography within the films extends this perceptual mode. In chapter one, I made the point that the family photographs in *Minoru* reinforce Barthes' notion of the photographic umbilical cord, forming a physical connection between subject and object. The film emphasizes such familial bonds, like when the camera lingers on a photograph of the father placing his hand on his son's shoulder. This focus on tactility speaks to a generative intergenerationality, a tangible and transformative intimacy between parent and child. The qualitative mobility of the photograph further accentuates these kinds of sensory interconnections. Highly reproducible and accessible, the photograph has been easily

circulated since its invention. It is passed around and passed down. From their use in *memento mori* to family photo albums, photographs become physical links to our loved ones and lost relations, moving from one generation to the next.

It has been tempting to make the case that this emphasis on the tactility of older media forms – including analog photography and traditional animation practices – comes as a direct response to our globalized information culture and its seemingly incorporeal communicative exchanges. It is possible that these hand-drawn films are symptomatic of a contemporary visual culture that increasingly craves physicality, and I maintain that this is part and parcel of our shifting technological landscape. But I also recognize that this issue is vastly more complex. Such a proposition presumes the inherent disembodiment of digitization. To be a ‘medium’ necessitates a physical apparatus. New media are not immune to this parameter. Their mechanics are not immaterial, nor is the artist, operator, or user’s engagement extracorporeal. Far from disembodied, the new media infrastructure is laden with manmade structures and human actors alike. Though it may open itself up to more abstract interpretations of what ‘connection’ means, global digital networks are not intangible. The adaptive ways in which we continue to share stories, inform, and interact with one another – while not without their implicit differences and repercussions – do not signify a reduction in circulation, nor are these communications no longer handheld or without embodied responses. Instead, the constellation of direct constituencies and participants created by digitization bears the potential to continuously widen alongside a correlative, in flux understanding of communal space.

My investigation of *A Kosovo Fairytale* particularly brought this realization home. In the film, online interactivity yields not passivity but a network of empowered players, an expanding community of those who might be touched by this story, who might engage with it, who might share it. The disseminating prowess of the Internet makes possible the immediate viewing of each work explored here, and this merging of the handmade with digitization does not escape my analysis. Rather, this aspect of access speaks to the issues of democratized content these films champion: that the archives should be exposed for the

stories they exclude; that representations should be seen and voices be heard; that information should be digital in the sincerest sense of the word, available at our fingertips. The embrace of networked communication points to the transnational and transcultural attributes of each film, with their focus on the social and cultural impacts of migration. Images today are characteristically travel-bound, digitally circling the globe instantaneously. This wider dispersion encourages a simulacral proliferation of personal stories and social histories. It rethinks archival distinctions in light of the fluctuating ways we store and examine the past, on individual and collective scales.

Deploying both new and old technologies, aesthetics, and techniques, these films seek to transfigure image formations and ecologies. They speak to the very instrumentation of human interaction, to how the evolution of communication media shapes interpersonal exchange. In analogizing a partnership between new and old media with past and present modes of communication, each film makes way for multivalent computations beyond anachronism. In recent years, connotations of ‘new’ and ‘old’ media have too been shifting in subtle but significant ways. While ‘new’ media has previously denoted a comparison to older and different media forms, a product’s newness now relates almost exclusively to computer-based technologies.<sup>13</sup> The lifespan of computer hardware is staggeringly short, while non-computer technologies barely enter the equation. Through the use of more traditional media practices within a digitized field, these films dispute the increasingly accepted premise that past media forms – by virtue of being of the past – are innately obsolete.

Regardless of sentiment, the return to traditional animation practices within these films stands as a firm declaration that older media forms are not only alive and well but also foundational participants in contemporary visual culture, due to their reliability and familiarity. Though digital technologies have conceived a new horizon of sophisticated software, the seemingly limitless possibilities they offer are predictably challenged with corresponding complications. Many filmmakers have detected various risks of producing images solely through digital modes, which include failing computer applications, the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 18.



constant need for updates and up-to-date operating systems, and the difficulties inherent to data storage and cross-platform exchange.<sup>14</sup> Others lament the removal of the physical experience of animating hand to paper, the immediacy of traditional production, and the aesthetic of the handmade. To remedy this, some animators have returned to profilmic techniques, while others have been developing hybridized digital applications that might mimic the look and feel of handmade processes.<sup>15</sup>

These responses to digital animation are not necessarily condemning of new technologies. Rather, they are made in consideration of how the pros and cons of each mode might be able to inform each other. Not combative, the use of handmade animation styles within the digital age may emphasize their interconnections, working to expand the capabilities of animation while generating a symbiotic exchange between new and old visual techniques. In this view, digitization is not a crisis but simply one advance in the lengthy evolution of visual technologies. The complexities and fluctuations it raises are entirely natural and do not automatically signal the death of a medium. By attentively fostering the kinds of layered, intermedial formations embedded in the films I have discussed, we may begin to develop a more elastic and embrative process of defining and evaluating media technologies. Encouraging such flexible teleological and ontological models should promote the resilient resurgences of overlooked or forgotten modes of representation. To this end, *Minoru* might be viewed a new kind of memento mori or family album: an intimately adorned collection of family photos and histories to be instantly passed down and around and stored in the cloud.

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<sup>14</sup> See Sara Álvarez Sarrat and Lorenzo Hernández, 'How Computers Re-Animated Handmade Processes', *Animation Studies* 7 (2013): <https://journal.animationstudies.org/sara-alvarez-sarrat-and-maria-lorenzo-hernandez-how-computers-re-animated-hand-made-processes-and-aesthetics-for-artistic-animation-2/>, accessed 24 April 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See also 'A Conversation with Steven Heath', Video Out Distribution (Vancouver: Vivo Media Arts Centre), accessed 24 April 2016, <http://www.vivomediaarts.com/a-conversation-w-steven-heath/>, an interview with animator Steven Heath, who explains why he returned to traditional animation for his film *Star and Cyprus* (2014).

## Reciprocity and Reclamation

Visually and narratively, these films sew together frames of past and present. I have stressed that these interwoven timelines are not meant to convey chronological sequence but temporal intersectionality. Animated cels are overlaid atop each other as archival materials mesh with contemporary aesthetic forms. The attention granted to outdated technologies counters the misremembering, disremembering, or discounting of the old in light of the new. The narrations are intergenerational; voices both connected and disparate are intermingled in the telling and retelling of history. These films work as a lamentation of any historical narrative or archive that sublimates the complexities of individual and collective memory formation. Against the separation of the unredeemed past from a present that has already forgotten it – or finds it untouchable under any circumstance – these more antiquated modes of drawing and filmmaking performatively reinscribe the continued interdependence of past and present.

Working to create alternative and diversified visions of pasts made present, each film shuttles between history, memory, and contemporary subjectivities. Left in the wake of these passages and resettlements are the traces of movement, visualized by the smudges, erasures, and residues of the animated form. *Minoru* renders a buildup of aesthetic deposits into an animated palimpsest, where drawings undulate across the film's photographic and archival imagery; *I Was A Child of Holocaust Survivors* concatenates different artistic hands and voices as it attempts to negotiate a multivalent, postgenerational authorship of the past; *My Mother's Coat* explores spatial and temporal relations with an animated aesthetic that endlessly prefigures the simultaneous disappearance and conservation of form; and *A Kosovo Fairytale* utilizes a multiplatform mode of traditional and modern storytelling practices, where an intergenerational and intercultural collaboration of speakers emphasize the narrative's multidirectionality. Each film accentuates its temporal affinities, interweaving the dusty layers of long ago with the transitional present.

In revealing their heterogeneous fabrication – their mixed-media assemblages, multimodal and metonymic storytelling, and remediations – these films point to their narrative arcs, where the past is shown to have continued interactions with its present

retellings. Not to be understated, however, these films recognize that the contemporary moment may too influence the past. This experiential reciprocity is literalized through the making and viewing of these films, as they attempt to replay historical events in the present. The filmmakers connect with their narratives through their performative productions, while viewers are integrated into the work through interactive process. By its very nature, for instance, haptic or tactile viewing requires the represented object to reach out toward its subject and vice versa. Both touch and are touched; both move and are moved. We become participants in the shaping of these stories. And through these conjoined movements – through a ‘kinetic kind of osmosis’ between forms and materials, bodies and objects – we are asked to learn and empathize, becoming new witnesses, who may then be inclined to believe, share, and testify.<sup>16</sup>

These films do not, however, work to deny the past its innate characteristics, the axiomatic aspects that will always evade restoration. But they also avoid its monumentalization. In these cinematic contexts, history is not relegated to the untouchable confines of museum display, or fetishized as an intact and impermeable narrative. Instead, each film handles the past and its artifacts with the aim to engage, reconsider, and potentially transform. Neither stagnant nor embalmed, the past evoked is moving and malleable. It is emphasized as an entity always becoming, belonging to the future as much as to history. As such, these films manifest the renewal of the *milieux de mémoire* that Nora sought – as opposed to the more impenetrable *lieux de mémoire* – where the social transmission of experience is made possible between peoples across space and time.<sup>17</sup>

This view of history is particularly evidenced in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*. In chapter two, I made the case that Eisenstein’s narrative is a direct acknowledgment of the postgenerational struggle to process a traumatic familial history. The film wrestles with postmemory, elucidating the efforts to lift the tremendous weight of history off the shoulders of the next generation. Not dwelling in the traces of an unknowable past, *I*

<sup>16</sup> Len Lye, *Figures of Motion: Len Lye, Selected Writings*, eds. Wystan Curnow and Roger Horrocks (Auckland: Auckland University Press, [1930-1980] 1984), 82.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past (Volume 1) [Le Lieux de mémoire]*, eds. Pierre Nora and Lawrence Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1.

*Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* attempts to reclaim its past. It filters through the lapses in both the historical and remembered records through the material and emotive remnants left in the wake of the Holocaust. It points to the aspects of historical trauma that the postgeneration continuously confronts, the elements to which it does possess. Though most pronounced in Eisenstein's novel and Fleming's film, I deem this postgenerational laying claim to the past a prominent facet of each of the films examined in this study. Through their modes of making – the intimacies of storytelling and the labors of the handmade – the experiences of the parents manifest as those of the children, the filmmakers, artists, and writers themselves.

Through their attempts to repossess the historical archives, these films work to process painful pasts. Their belated production provides insight into traumatic experience. Many researchers working on trauma have established that it – by its very nature – is only accessible in its aftermath.<sup>18</sup> Its severity raises a particular paradox, 'that the most intense occurrences may be those we are unable to represent or even experience'.<sup>19</sup> As we have seen in films *Minoru* and *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, periods of silence often follow cataclysmic shifts or fractures. Transgenerational memories may concretize via secretcies and repressions imposed or internalized. The familial legacies of violence might only become verbalized through second-generation narrativization and representation. Pressurized by this psychic compartmentalization, reactions to trauma may come about in unique spaces and forms. The symptom – a tick, a slip, a joke – reveals the source coming out in spurts.<sup>20</sup> The wound cries out through coping mechanisms like narrative, humor, or subversion. It is exactly these qualities of traumatic response that can be found in works like Spiegelman's *Maus*, Satrapi's *Persepolis*, and Eisenstein's *I Was A Child of Holocaust Survivors*. Paradigmatic of the intergenerational attempt to reconcile familial traumas, such works exemplify

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<sup>18</sup> See Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 181-192; and ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 1-12; Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher, trans. John Fletcher and Luke Thurston (London and New York: Routledge, [1992] 1999), 264-269; Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 266-97.

<sup>19</sup> Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, 99; see also Caruth, 'Traumatic Awakenings', 208 in *Violence, Identity and Self-Determination*, eds. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 208-222.

<sup>20</sup> Kate Lawless, 'Memory, Trauma, and the Matter of Historical Violence: The Controversial Case of Four Photographs from Auschwitz', *American Imago* 71.4 (2014): 399. See also Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

postmemory production while offering new cathartic forms. Both the graphic novel and animated film – through their particularized plays with humor, subversion, and personalization – have tendered these kinds of unorthodox modes.

### **Moving Forward**

These representational endeavors to reclaim the past are not made exclusively in relation to suppressive archives and the dominance of hegemonic histories. Rather, they also directly challenge the vast and varied critiques of historical representation. In this study, I have examined such criticisms as they pertain to these films. *Minoru*, for instance, has been considered too conformist in its endeavor to break away from nationalized historicisms, while *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* must traverse a significant scholarly field dedicated to the Holocaust and its unrepresentability. In reviewing their tactical modes of representation, I have assessed how these films strategically employ individual testimony to subvert certain critiques of historical narrativization. I have detailed how their visual forms self-reflexively confront the aestheticization of history and documentary practice. Their methods of production work to destabilize the larger polemics concerning historical representation, and they are particularly provocative in light of arguments that might deem testimony and trauma fundamentally ahistorical.

In this dissertation's introduction, I discussed some of the cultural criticisms that take issue with the precarious positioning of personal narratives within historical representation. Finding its oversaturation within contemporary media to have prompted a 'wound culture' or 'culture of narcissism', certain scholars have alerted us to the numerous issues that arise when personal experience is enabled to 'usurp all other realisms'.<sup>21</sup> Such arguments warn of the counterproductive dangers that memory presents by way of its tendency to trivialize or sensationalize historical events.<sup>22</sup> This stance may be used to criticize the idiosyncratic nature

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<sup>21</sup> Michaels, *Shape of the Signifier*, 408-409; Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company 1979), xiii-7; and Hartman, *Scars of the Spirit*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> For further reading see Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, xiii-xxxv, 77-103, and 189-204; Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 1-21, 175-198, and 267-308; also Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 16-25.

of *My Mother's Coat*, for example, which could read too alienating for some, while *A Kosovo Fairytale* may be taken to task for its more guileless implications. There is also the danger of misappropriating historical pasts toward self-affirming ends.<sup>23</sup> Rather than minimize the individual for the sake of the collective, testimonial works have been rebuked for putting the self before others, in exercises of indulgence.<sup>24</sup> More specifically, these concerns question the critical value of testimonial representations of traumatic experience. If trauma is an unknowable experience, a brutal infliction never to be truly known or understood, how would we know it through stories or photographs? Roth describes this dilemma as a fundamental tenet of the field of memory studies, which appears to have determined 'that traditional empirical representation necessarily breaks down in the face of the traumatic'.<sup>25</sup>

These evaluations point to the catch-22 of testimonial representation. Attempting to challenge monolithic representations of history, testimonial films are contested for being overly subjective or inaccessible. As I have particularized throughout the chapters, the films at the center of this research are not immune from these concerns. Attempts by each film to establish a diversified vision of a collective 'we' is a complicated proposition. There is a delicate line between conceptualizing a collectivity that contains all voices and one that equalizes them. Advocating the erasure of previous ideations of history may be mistaken for condoning historical erasures outright.

In my view, the films' emphasis on heterogeneity stands in direct contrast to a message of homogenized universality. But I have noted the places where these works appear most vulnerable to critique in order to highlight that such lines of inquiry are precisely what these films encourage. These works do not evade dissension. But I contend that evasion is not the point. They are aware of the ongoing and complex debates regarding the past's portrayal.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, Hirsch and Spitzer have documented how some disagree with the premise that the Holocaust can or should be used as a template to assess other histories or traumas is for some entirely untenable, contending that such 'transferring' of the Holocaust mirrors the 'mass transfers' and annihilations of its victims: Hirsch and Spitzer, 'Small Acts of Repair: The Unclaimed Legacy of the Romanian Holocaust' (panel discussion held at the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH), University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, 30 October 2014). See also Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 1-29; and Roth, 'Why Photography Matters to the Theory of History', *History and Theory* 49.1 (2010): 96.

<sup>24</sup> See Joe Bonomo, 'Review: Pursuing the Self', *The Georgia Review* 53.3 (1999): 580; and Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, 95.

<sup>25</sup> Roth, 'Why Photography Matters', 93.

That they use their aesthetic and narrative modes of production to self-reflexively negotiate these issues tacitly acknowledges the innate inadequacies of such a proposition. I have assessed how animation itself is used to complicate the mechanization of factual and fictional interpretation. However, more than drawing attention to these tensions, these films inspect their suppositions. They reflect on how we might promote a thorough rewrite of the past without overwriting it. They interrogate how representational authenticity is constituted. Accordingly, they question whether an image is ever truly autonomous, liberated to be imperfect. These issues are not raised disingenuously. That each film might skirmish with its adjacent criticisms does not infer the wish to undermine or obfuscate them through sheer awareness. Beyond being symptomatic of the primary dialectics, these films seek to collaboratively wade through each crashing wave of dissent, scrutinizing how we can approach history in the face of the multivalent repercussions of its representation. It is in this vein that they engage with the broader polemics to push the discourse along. For, if we want to work through the past, we will have to work through the challenges it presents.

In a cultural climate entrenched in a cycle of historical depiction and subsequent reproach, these films proclaim the necessity of past representation, in spite of or because of its shortcomings. This estimation aligns with a growing contingent of memory and history scholars who hope to reconcile an essential paradox of historical trauma. As Roth states, ‘the traumatic cannot be contained in representation, but it is “too big to fail” – too important to be left out’.<sup>26</sup> Schwab confirms, ‘to counter silence, the victims of history have produced an abundance of literature of witnessing, testimonials, and memoirs. At the same time, we have a whole body of theories that claim trauma's unrepresentability’.<sup>27</sup> Too impactful to be remembered, too impactful to be forgotten. No matter the angle, the impossible nature of trauma is indisputable. To move beyond this philosophical stalemate, some cultural critics have called for the development of a new language for working through traumatic memory. As Didi-Huberman advocated in *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs From Auschwitz*

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<sup>26</sup> Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, xviii

<sup>27</sup> Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 48.

and as LaCapra, Roth, and Schwab have more recently echoed, we need to advance a theory of trauma writing and representation that will remain attentive to these inherent incompatibilities.<sup>28</sup>

Following the arguments of Didi-Huberman and LaCapra, I posit that these films offer a rethinking of memory representations. They acknowledge the pitfalls of portrayal while promoting empowered and informed engagements with the past. They make it clear that individual and collective traumas will not go unheard; we can be assured that they will manifest themselves in some form and in due time. This is not to say the conversations about painful pasts will be easy, that meaning should be self-satisfying, or that empathetic identification should be unearned. There are many rationales that may convince us that it is preferable to say or do nothing. But these films counter such assessments, emphasizing that there exists no suitable reason not to look, touch, or identify with traumatic histories. We must make space for testimony, each film implores. We must ask questions, always cognizant of the parameters of the inquest. Representation can push the limits or defend them, but it cannot be compelled to cease. Moreover, these films challenge the alternative. Will standing mute yield more fruitful results? Is a symbolic void any less reductionist of the inestimable lives lost? Is it more desirable to keep the past in the past, to be either fetishized or forgotten? It has been theorized that such courses of action merely feed into the silences that often follow traumatic experience, leading to devastating repetitions of subjugation.<sup>29</sup> Rejecting disengaged detachment, these films indicate that we only make progress through continued dialogue and interaction. It is a matter of communication, the conscious production of a shared memory that ‘integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs From Auschwitz* [*Images malgré tout*], trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, [2003] 2008); LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, 205-223; and *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 59-89 and 118; Roth, *Memory, Trauma, History*, xiii-xxx, 77-103; and ‘Why Photography Matters’, 102; and Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 1-66.

<sup>29</sup> Schwab, *Haunting Legacies*, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 15.



If such objectives seem naïve, or if the mechanics of these films appear overly saccharine or sentimental, these films also dispute that these modes are inherently unproductive. For example, though the simplicity of *A Kosovo Fairytale*'s storybook animations could at first glance appear to trivialize a painful past, my investigation revealed its fairy-tale motif to instead offer an indictment of the self-serving, falsified narratives that the Milošević regime employed to promote and defend its genocidal actions. Likewise, in accordance with scholars Boym and Spitzer – who have both disputed the historical maligning of nostalgia – I proposed that *Minoru*'s engagement with nostalgia serves as a critical tool for the reinterpretation of a differentiated past, one that can help reconcile a 'cultural uprootedness and sense of alienation'.<sup>31</sup> For *Minoru*, the animated manipulations and reconfigurations of family photos and archival imagery reinforce the complexity of nostalgia and sentimentalism, as its disruption of a melancholic aesthetic contrasts with any urge to leave a perfect past untouched. Less idealistic, these films offer a pragmatic embrace of the past's pains and losses. An uncorrupted representation of the past does not exist. Telling another's story of survivorship or heartbreak is no more inherently exploitative than forgetting about them is reverential. And listening to individual voices does not necessarily imply vanity or indulgence. Acknowledging this, these films wonder whether it is more naïve to rigorously attempt to rectify the gaps in historicization or to abjure them altogether in a belief held in vain that an ideal image could ever be realized.

These works promote arduous reconsideration of the images and narratives that define significant cultural moments and their aftermaths. But they also highlight the imperative of artistic productions to confront authoritarian power structures by imagining alternative modes of resistance. They petition us to be both mindful and supportive of formal innovations working toward this end, including inventive documentary strategies and hybrid artistic practice. Without such engagements, these films warn, we may endlessly fall within tired representational patterns that marginalize the already marginalized. For example, we have seen how the Holocaust has become particularly exemplary of the philosophical

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

polemics involving trauma and its proprietorship. Who is able to address or narrativize the Holocaust? Will postgenerational associations result in the event's relativization? But perhaps the more pressing menace endangering the Holocaust's exceptionality is found in its very ubiquity, in the unscrupulous habits of a mainstream media that glorifies and desensitizes it. In contrast to fearing 'other' histories and their perceived attempts to co-opt Holocaust memory, *I Was the Child of a Holocaust Survivor* directly challenges the presumed threat of memory competition, in which primacy has been granted to one cultural history while others remain unheard. This is key to understanding how it is at once imperative for Eisenstein to relay the experience of trying to untether one's self from the powerful grip of the Holocaust, while the Neziri family at the center of *A Kosovo Fairytale* must work to get their story of suffering at the hands of an oppressive, genocidal civil war out into the world. All stories need to be told, declare these films, and nothing should remain hidden behind an overriding narrative.

In their newly coauthored paper, 'Small Acts of Repair', Hirsch and Spitzer further these sentiments.<sup>32</sup> Viewing Rothberg's model of multidirectionality as a starting point, they investigate how we can recalibrate memorialization according to a more proactive method that is attentive to current geopolitical shifts. They wonder how we are able to mend the profound rifts between national and transnational historicizations without homogenizing experience. They inquire about the recourse a person caught in exile or displacement has for redress if no transnational institution or state exists, if the socio-political boundaries are no longer clear. Amidst pressures to assimilate, how can immigrants set about integrating their social histories into the history of the nation where they now reside? How might an increasingly multicultural nation reconcile a past corrupted by xenophobic policies? The intersectional aspects of these films raise these kinds of complex questions. Rather than disintegrate any ascendant narrative only to establish new claims of totalizing supremacy in its place, these works interrogate hegemonic systems. They challenge the public record with the aim to reformulate our comprehension of the implications of war, trauma, and exile.

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<sup>32</sup> Hirsch and Spitzer, 'Small Acts of Repair', 30 October 2014.

Constituting what Rothberg describes as an ‘art of transition’, they formally and thematically explore a specific transitional period, that of the contemporary acceleration of transnational migration.<sup>33</sup> The unwavering movements of people across borders implores our attention, and these works promote the reconceptualization of a more inclusive vocabulary that might address the contingent issues regarding politics, aesthetics, and emancipatory forms of documentation. Moreover, they encourage modes that are antithetical to an apathetic media environment, one that leaves uncontested the utopian vistas of globalization – that a truly egalitarian mode of social participation, a wholly democratized digital network, and an unencumbered travel across regions – exists or is even possible. Whatever progress we make in bridging the archipelagos that divide us, newly surfacing issues will always demand our attention. We should be neither crestfallen nor credulous in the efforts toward our continued advancement.

These films place the onus for such reorientations on aesthetic and discursive redefinitions of space, time, culture, homeland, and belonging via intercultural and intergenerational perspectival shifts. Through experimentation with novel cinematic forms, they work to reveal the deeply buried layers of social consciousness, debunk standardized representational norms and national imaginaries, and reject rigid identity categorizations. Resisting any reductive geographical peripheries, each film moves from fragmented materials, objects, and performances as they stretch across a variety of modalities, distributing mechanisms, and borders. Itself an often marginalized medium, animation may effectively mobilize the energies needed to discover new possibilities and perspectives. Its projective and morphological properties illuminate such communal expansions. Through its graphic renditions, it makes visible intimate knowledge. Animation can redraw and reshape the rules of what, where, and how things can be seen. Its mutations and departures from visual points of origin and orientation poetically explore acts of migration through an art of transition.

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<sup>33</sup> Rothberg, ‘Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject: On Sebald and Kentridge’. In *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, eds. Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 41.

Participating in this galvanizing process, the genre of animated nonfiction has opened itself up to expansive social constellations. The trend I have identified in this dissertation continues to grow. Each year sees the release of short films centering on interrelated themes of war, memory, and nostalgia, like Bexie Bush's *Mend and Make Do* (2014) and Falk Schuster's *Wider Horizons* (2015).<sup>34</sup> Mark Lomond and Johanne Ste-Marie's *Migrations* (2014) uses animation and remediated practices to offer a moving portrait of migratory patterns and displacement, topics also thematized in Diane Obomsawin's *Here and There* (2013) and Joel Kefali's *Baba* (2014).<sup>35</sup> Recent feature-length films like Brett Morgan's *Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck* (2015) and Marielle Heller's *Diary of a Teenage Girl* (2015) have explored intimate subjective narratives through animation and mixed aesthetics.<sup>36</sup> This flourishing filmic archive is also increasingly self-referential, even inspiring its imitators. At the London International Animation Festival in 2014, filmgoers might have noticed a striking resemblance in both form and conceit to Tsakiri-Scanatovits' *My Mother's Coat* in Jiamin Liu's *Voice of Anne Parker*. But the genre is branching off in unfamiliar directions as well, broadening its range of autobiographical perspectives.<sup>37</sup> Films like Tommy Pallota and Femke Wolting's *Last Hijack* (2014) and the currently in development screen adaptation of Derf Backderf's *My Friend Dahmer* (2012) follow live-action documentaries *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014), which focus on individuals complicit in atrocity or conflict, what Rothberg terms the 'archive of implication'.<sup>38</sup>

These expanses within the genre speak to a larger thematic underlying the films examined here: a rejection of binary propositions. They present an ideation of history and memory that is never black and white, and their heterogeneous blends of media, modes, and

<sup>34</sup> Bexie Bush, *Mend and Make Do* (Stockholm: Story, 2014.), DCP; and Falk Schuster, *Wider Horizons* (Balance Film GmbH, 2015), DCP.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Lomond and Johanne Ste-Marie, *Migrations* (Montréal: Fluorescent Hill, 2014), Super 8mm; Diane Obomsawin, *Here and There*, (Montréal: National Film Board of Canada, 2006), 35mm and DCP; and Joel Kefali, *Baba: A Conversation with My Grandfather*, (Auckland: Loading Docs, 2014), DCP.

<sup>36</sup> Brett Morgan, *Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck* (New York: Home Box Office, 2015), Super 8mm, 35mm, and DCP; Marielle Heller, *Diary of a Teenage Girl* (New York: Sony Pictures Classics, 2015), DCP.

<sup>37</sup> Jiamin Liu, *Voice of Anne Parker* (London: London Transport Museum, 2014), DCP.

<sup>38</sup> Rothberg, 'Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject', 40; Tommy Pallota and Femke Wolting, *Last Hijack* (Cologne: The Match Factory, 2014), DCP; Derf Backderf, *My Friend Dahmer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2012); and Joshua Oppenheimer, *Act of Killing* (København: Det Danske Filminstitut and London: Dogwoof Pictures, 2012), DCP; and *The Look of Silence* (Alamo: Drafthouse Films, Planegg: Koch Media, and Pascal Caucheteux: Why Not Productions, 2014), DCP.

voices come to mirror these shifting multiplicities. Their aesthetic and narrative underpinnings emphasize networks and continua of moving parts and their interactions. Narratively, they postulate that the individual does not necessarily negate the collective, that insight can be gleaned from the fantastical, and vice versa. Within this cinematic genre, nostalgia works with cynicism, and history and memory are not mutually exclusive. These films instead promote a system of interarticulations. Visually, they rethink discrete classifications and aesthetic oppositions. They avow that the introduction of the new does not mean the erasure of the old. Operating along multidirectional lines, each film views the intersections and disconnections of their various pathways as transformative sites. They become shared spaces where disparate parts can come together in the creation of unconventional modes to access the past, document lived experience, and circulate those memories.

I have interpreted these maneuvers as adverse to cognate universalism. Speaking to a collective entails a consideration of all sides, accepting that there might be multiple perspectives, multiple ‘truths’. Having such an open dialogue dictates discrepancies and overlaps, matters inescapably incongruous. Its embrace should not be viewed as the legitimization of homogeneity – that everything should be viewed as substantively equal, or that war, genocide, and persecution could ever be relativized. These incompatibilities and complications need to be addressed mindful of context. What is untenable, however, is repudiating entire modes of production or characterizing any one aesthetic, historical, or experiential process as superior in sweeping ways. Memory is and will continue to be individually and collectively layered, mediated, articulated, and rearticulated. It is within these multidirectional overlays and reverberations where diversified connections to the past will work together and thrive, without necessarily becoming one and the same. In this capacity, the connections these films establish with the viewer appear less concerned with forcing analogical recognitions of oneself in the experience of the victim, survivor, or refugee on a level that is entirely detached from the traumatic event – a level misguidedly rooted in an intrinsic, universalizing notion of the human condition. Instead, these works are interested in

presenting the more radical premise that the experience of the exile, survivor, or victim is not aberrational but circumscriptive of the human condition, in all its heterogeneous forms.

To this end, the layered cinematic topographies of these works convey not a recurrence of lived experience as a way to homogenize difference but an actively forming web of past, present, and future. Approaching memory and history as palimpsestic, the films do not view individual and collective experience as distinct linear trajectories that are necessarily oppositional, or competitive as per Rothberg's valuation. Rather, they act as one more deposit in the sedimentary production of time, an unending process of back-and-forth communication that continuously modifies our understanding of history. The new layers added to the historical text do not disappear the past. History remains in the pervasive traces left behind. And the continued conversation these films encourage point to those remnants, to the deletions, voids, or omissions that will continue to develop. Each film deploys the materials of its respective media in order to evoke the raveling together of multidirectional memories, where hidden pasts – elusive as they may be – are entwined around sites of personal memory.

And these loci are too subject to change. Viewed as such a palimpsest, each film creates a temporally ambiguous space; a space that stands amidst a repetition of histories continuously relived, broken down, and reshaped; a space that posits the future as an amorphous network of interconnections, fusions, substitutions, and losses. Contemplated within these hybridized cinematic images are the renewals of time as we experience it, which present themselves as syncretistic memories that are diverse, multivalent, and unstable. These temporal formations denote an organic morphology, a continuous production of intricate, crystalline patterns of multiplying timelines. History and memory are not moments of arrest but are alive, interactional, and always in the making.

Focusing on process, the films discussed in this research do not present a final analysis. As 'small acts of repair', each film indicates only a step toward reparation, even if healing will never be reached. What is broken will remain fissured, and the chasm between those who are and are not witnesses to trauma will not be bridged. But this should not signal a

lack of progress. Working to mediate what has been forgotten with what remains in consideration of future fluctuations is to welcome life in all its forms. Change does not solely signify hopeful transformations; it also suggests decay and deterioration. Animation – through its absorptive materiality, one that digests and reformulates its mode of making – captures such afterimages of lived experience.

In perpetual motion, the animated lines wandering through these films make connections across geographical, cultural, and temporal boundaries. I have worked to extricate these lines, examining at their roots the several disparate strands of this study. By methodically gathering them back together, I have seen how they make manifest their heterogeneous contexts of production. The animated imagery, with its intersecting interruptions and integrations, draws attention to the underlying narrative themes. I have argued that the aesthetic structures of each film bring us closer to these interrelations, inviting us to mingle within the spaces in-between: the flights of migration, the intercultural and intergenerational paths of connection, and the moments between the frames.

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