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AN IMAGINARY REALITY.
ON THE REALISM OF ANIMATION FILMS.

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fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Media Studies, Film and Photographic Studies.

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ABSTRACT

Though the term realism is more closely linked to live action film than it is to animation, animation has capabilities that even live action cinema cannot achieve. Whilst live action merely portrays what real live actors produce in front of the camera, animation is able to go beyond and create a sense of realism without the realistic look, feel, and use of actors on screen. Despite the fact that animation usually has a non realistic style of drawing and movement, elements of realism are very much present within. Within this thesis I will argue that realism within animation can be found in the visuals, narratives, character portrayals, and overall representation of social constructs. The engagement and identification the audience has with the characters, regardless of them being animated, is what ultimately creates a sense of realism for the audience. This thesis offers to show that in the case of hyper realistic animation, animated documentaries, and rotoscoped animations, animation films create a reality effect for the viewer.

Keywords: *Animation, film, animated documentary, realism, reality effect.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the many years of film theory, cinema has been focused on trying to capture the real world. From this, questions regarding whether cinema is even capable of capturing the real world came into play. According to André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer and Stanley Cavell, realism is the essence of cinema. However within this argument animation is not regarded as having such capabilities. To them animation is rather seen as a minor genre and should thus be regarded as something separate. Bazin, Kracauer, and Cavell argue that cinema is able to replicate reality because the basis of the medium is photography, which is known for capturing that which is real. According to this statement, animation is not able to create a sense of realism as it does not stem from photography and is thus not of the real world¹. However, having said this, Bazin does mention the possibilities that rotoscope animation offers in relation to the debate of how realism is the essence of cinema. This is primarily because rotoscope animation stems from live action footage. According to Kracauer however, animation and film should be divided, as animation can only express fantasy whilst live action can represent reality². Cavell agrees, in this sense, with Kracauer and argues that animations cannot project or portray the real world. Though acknowledging the existence of the genre of animation, Cavell disregards it within the cinematic debate³. Having said this however, animation has nowadays made such an impact on the cinematic world that the arguments posed by Bazin, Kracauer, and Cavell could be regarded outdated. The genre animation has become a wide phenomenon within the cinematic world and even led to the hybrid genre of animated documentary. One could thus argue that animation is indeed capable of portraying reality through various means. Within this thesis I will further explore this and argue in what ways animation films can create a sense of realism for the audience. It is however important to note that realism can be achieved in different techniques, which is why this thesis will focus on three case studies. Each discussing a different way in which realism can be achieved in animation films. The first chapter will use the 2019 remake of

¹ David N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 12.

² Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 89.

³ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film, Enlarged Edition* (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 580.

‘The Lion King’ in order to look at how realism is achieved. In order to analyse the realism of this film I will look at the landscape and background, the removal of the magical Disney moments and the grooming and movement of this animated film in comparison to the 1994 version. The second chapter, focussing on the animated film ‘25 April’, will discuss how realism is achieved through narrative and voice, the structures of sympathy with the characters, and the social constructs that can be found. It will also look at the ways in which detailed character design can move the audience and affect the sense of realism they experience. The final chapter will look at rotoscoping, animation techniques, and use of primary sources in order to analyse how realism is established within the film ‘Loving Vincent’. Within this chapter I will also focus on the use of light, colour palette, and fluid and precise animation in order to argue the sense in which realism can be achieved. Within all of these three chapters this thesis will look at the extent of realism within animated films and explore that elements of realism can indeed be found within animated films. All in all the engagement and identification the audience has whilst looking at these animated films impacts the extent in which a sense of realism is created for the audience. Within the concluding chapter, this thesis will argue how various elements of realism, be it visual, narrative or social, give the viewer a sense of reality even if films are animated. As a final concluding remark, for readers to think about, I will question whether animation films can ever truly capture a sense of realism when placed within a historical context. This will also be supported by briefly questioning whether animation should even want or try to achieve a sense of realism.

CHAPTER 1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this thesis mainly consists of the various ways in which realism or reality is approached within a cinematic context. It will also explore the film technique known as animation and some of the forms in which it can be used; like computer generated imagery, animated documentaries, and rotoscoping. Finishing off my theoretical framework will be an explanation of the terms I will focus on in order to answer my research question.

1.1 Realism

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term reality is usually used for “the state of things as they actually exist”⁴. However, the concept of reality has raised a lot of philosophical and scientific questions that lead to various definitions and theories on what it actually is. This makes the defining of reality difficult especially within the field of media studies where theoretical debates surrounding reality and realism is a recurring phenomenon. The works of Steven Prince, Susan Hayward, Stephen Rowley, and Murray Smith will therefore be used in order to explain some of the ways in which realism is approached within film.

1.1.1 Perceptual Reality

Before going into depth about the various types of realism, it is important to establish that when we are referring to realism, we are merely referring to the portrayal of it. Within Steven Prince’s article ‘True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory’⁵, he discusses the term perceptual reality in relation to unreal or referentially fictional images seen within films. What is meant by perceptual reality is whether the image “structurally corresponds to the viewer's audiovisual experience”⁶ of it within our contemporary reality. Perceptual reality is thus focused on how perceptually realistic the image we see is. Aspects such as lighting, movement, texture, colour, and sound are things to focus on when determining whether what we see on the screen matches our own understanding of these events or objects in daily life. An important aspect to

⁴ “Meaning of reality in English,” accessed June 7, 2019, <https://www.lexico.com/definition/reality>

⁵ Stephen Prince, "True lies: Perceptual realism, digital images, and film theory," *Film Quarterly* 49 (1996).

⁶ Stephen Prince, "True lies: Perceptual realism, digital images, and film theory," *Film Quarterly* 49 (1996): 32.

consider according to Prince is that even though an image is un-real, meaning it does not exist in our reality, it can still be considered perceptually realistic. This can be the case because if this un-real image were to exist within our reality it would look like what we see on screen. An example of this can be seen within the film ‘The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug’⁷, where the audience is introduced to a dragon. This dragon is referentially fictional, as it does not exist in our reality, whilst at the same time being perceptually realistic, as it corresponds to our expectation of how this creature would look, move, and sound if existent in daily life.

1.1.2 Realism and Naturalism

Within Susan Hayward’s ‘Cinematic Studies: The Key Concepts’, a lot of different terms surrounding the realism of film are explored. Not only does she discuss different types of realism that can be found within film, but she also brings to light what role naturalism plays within this debate. According to Hayward realism functions on a narrative level as well as on a figurative level with regards to film. The ways in which she expresses these two functions of realism are known as seamless realism and aesthetically motivated realism. Seamless realism has the function of disguising the illusion of realism, which means that the film technique or narrative structure creates a reality effect for the viewer by erasing the idea of an illusion⁸. Within seamless realism a reality is constructed and allows for authenticity to be maintained. What is often also the case for seamless realism is that the editing style follows a logical and predominantly chronological narrative. Within seamless realism, editing does not call attention to itself and maintains continuity, meaning the audience does not see or notice the cuts made between various long shots and close-ups⁹. The second form of realism coined by Hayward is similar to Prince’s discussion of perceptual reality. Like perceptual reality, aesthetically motivated realism focuses on its pictorial ability to convey reality. However, Hayward differentiates from Prince by emphasising on the role of the camera. Aesthetically motivated realism seeks to offer a form of realism as objectively as possible and attempts to use the camera

⁷ *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, directed by Peter Jackson, USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2013.

⁸ Susan Hayward, *Cinema studies: The key concepts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 311.

⁹ Susan Hayward, *Cinema studies: The key concepts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 66-67.

in a non-manipulative fashion¹⁰. Aesthetically motivated realism often makes use of long shots, long takes, and 90 degree angled eye level shots. The use of these camera techniques and the construction of an authentic pictorial reality are what produce realism for the audience. Another aspect, discussed by Hayward, which is closely related to realism is naturalism or naturalisation. Naturalism was originally coined within the theatre world where it related to the creation of the fourth wall. This fourth wall allows audiences to feel as if they are watching reality or real life unfold in front of them due to the way in which the spectators were no longer addressed by the actors on stage¹¹. This fourth wall is also common within film where the actors disregard the camera and the audience throughout the narrative. Within film, this fourth wall is what for example separates the fictional or animated world from the real world. Naturalisation on the other hand has a more cultural and social construction as it looks at whether the world being portrayed is shown to be evidently natural. Examples of this can be seen in a lot of classic Hollywood narratives, where the portrayal of Western society is what the audience accepts as the truth or real. This type of realism thus has a more ideological function where certain theme's, like the American dream or the male gaze, are portrayed as natural.

1.1.3 The 5 forms of Realism

According to Stephen Rowley there are five types of realism that can be applied to animation films; visual realism, aural realism, realism of motion, narrative and character realism, and social realism¹². It is important to note however that Rowley does not claim that these types are the only definitions that can be identified as realism, rather he believes that they can be described in multiple ways. Visual realism is the extent to which the environments and characters resemble the real world in terms of appearance. Animation however usually uses multiple drawings in each shot meaning that the degree of visual realism might be different when comparing the moving animations to those that stay static. An example of this difference in visual realism within animation can often be seen between the background and the characters. The second type of realism Rowley mentions is aural realism, which refers to the extent to which the sounds of

¹⁰ Susan Hayward, *Cinema studies: The key concepts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 312.

¹¹ Susan Hayward, *Cinema studies: The key concepts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 259.

¹² Stephen Rowley, "Life Reproduced in Drawings: Realism in Animation," *Animation Journal* 13 (2005).

the animated characters and environments resemble the sounds from the actual physical world. The separation of image and sounds found within animation allows for the audio to be approached in a more conventional manner. What Rowley is trying to explain here is that due to the audio being recorded separately from the image, as with animation there can be no sound because the image is constructed purely through drawing, the recording can consist of the real sound or a reproduction of it¹³. When animating an elephant for example, the recorded sounds of a real elephant can be synced to the drawn animation, resulting in a realistic portrayal of the animal. Another way in which realism can be achieved within animation is through the movement of the characters, which is described as the realism of motion. The realism of motion does however not only consist of the smooth and fluid movement of the characters, but also looks at their body's structure. The way the animated characters' hair bounces when walking or the way their ribcage expands when breathing are examples of this. A common way in which animators can ensure realistic movement is through a technique known as rotoscoping whereby live action film is traced over as the basis for the animation. The fourth type of animation Rowley suggests is narrative and character realism. Narrative and character realism is the way in which events and characters are constructed in relation to our own three dimensional world. Unlike live-action, for animation, reality, meaning the use of real people, objects, and settings, is unavailable, making it difficult to create a believable and interesting narrative. According to Rowley, the sense of belief in the existence of the characters on screen allows the narrative to truly occur¹⁴. Lastly, Rowley discusses the term social realism, which refers to the audience's believability in the world they see on screen in relation to their own reality. "A cinema that strives toward a depiction of the complicated, messy, downbeat nature of everyday life"¹⁵ can be termed as social realism. In other words, this type of realism looks at whether representations of reality are believable for the viewer.

¹³ Stephen Rowley, "Life Reproduced in Drawings: Realism in Animation," *Animation Journal* 13 (2005).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

1.1.4 The Structure of Sympathy

Murray Smith's structure of sympathy analyses why and how audiences sympathise with the characters on screen¹⁶. It looks at the relationship between the on screen characters and the audience. This relationship or engagement is explored through three main levels; recognition, alignment, and allegiance. Recognition is where the viewer recognises and names a character's traits. The viewer looks at the character's appearance and constructs an image of who that character is as a whole¹⁷. Despite being aware of the fact that the character is only existent within that narrative, by having the character possess personality traits similar to those of a person in the real world, the audience can feel connected within them. The second level, alignment, gives viewers access to the characters emotions, actions, feelings, and thoughts¹⁸. This knowledge about the character gives the viewer a greater understanding of the character allowing them to develop feelings of sympathy. Alignment consists of two sub-categories, spatial temporal attachment, and subjective access. Spatial temporal attachment refers to the extent to which the narrative focuses on the actions of one character or moves across multiple storylines. By following a character's storyline, the viewer can become attached to that character as they become more invested in what they see. According to Smith, spatial attachment can be done through various filming techniques such as cross-cutting, split screen, and voice-over¹⁹. Subjective access however gives viewers access to a character's inner thoughts and feelings. By having the viewer dive into the subjectivity of a character, a relationship is created, often resulting in the viewer being able to anticipate and guess what the character is thinking based on their facial expression. Subjective access can be done by having the character narrate over the narrative, telling the viewer about their thoughts. Another way in which this can be done is through the appearance of a character. This technique is however very much reliant on dialogue, the performance of the actors, and background music²⁰. The subjective access is of importance to

¹⁶ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 40-41.

¹⁸ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 41.

¹⁹ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 146-147.

²⁰ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 151-152.

allegiance, the last level, as it depends on how much access a viewer has to a character's thoughts and understands the context of the character's actions. Allegiance is where the viewer makes a moral evaluation based on their emotional response to a character. The viewer's feelings and emotions thus place a significant role in this last level of Smith's structure of sympathy²¹. The allegiance of a viewer is based on and influenced by the characters personality, actions, and emotions within the narrative of the film. A viewer can have an allegiance with multiple characters, however these allegiances are usually structured, meaning that some characters are favoured over the others²². Thus, Smith's structure of sympathy serves to investigate how and why viewers sympathise with the characters on screen, resulting in them experiencing the film as realistic.

1.2 Animation

The word animation comes from the Latin word 'animare', which means "to give life to"²³. This seems like an appropriate definition for the medium, as animation is able to make real that which exists within our imagination. It is able to make unrealistic events, places, objects, or personas seem real, making the impossible possible. This is however not the only definition of animation, as according to The Webster Dictionary animation is only able to bring to life events, objects, and places through photographing successive positions of inanimate objects and/or drawing a series of slight progressive changes which result in the simulation of a motion picture. In other words, animation thus involves the artificial creation of images that are put into a sequence, making them appear as if it were moving. According to Honess Roe²⁴, there are a lot of things animation can do that make it the superior genre within film. Animation is for example not restricted by the technological bounds of real life. Animation can also construct its own reality and illustrate something that would or could have been impossible to film, but animation can also be used in order to describe and show things we cannot grasp within reality because there is none

²¹ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 42.

²² Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 151-152.

²³ Andrew Selby, *Animation* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2013), 9.

²⁴ Anabelle H. Roe, "Absence, Excess and Epistemological Expansion: Towards a Framework for the Study of Animated Documentary," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 6 (2011): 226-227.

²⁵. In the case of representing a certain mental illness, psychological experience, or emotions, animation can be used on a surrealistic level in order to communicate these experiences on an understandable level to the audience. The definition of animation can however vary depending on historical development, aesthetic preference, production requirements, etc. This wide variety of definitions also has to do with the extensive array of the different forms of animation that exist. The forms of animation that this thesis will focus on are computer generated animations, animated documentaries, and rotoscoped animations.

1.2.1 Computer Generated Imagery

Computer generated imagery, more commonly known as CGI, is the creation of visually animated content with the use of various computer softwares. It is often used in the creation of characters, scenes, and special effects within films. With CGI however the computer can also perform tasks which enables it to give a sense of movement to the slightly altered images presented to them²⁶. With the use of CGI, editors thus gain more control over animations, allowing them to create extremely complex shapes, control the way light reacts to a surface, build vast landscapes and worlds, and even fix and remove unwanted errors. The first film which made use of CGI was Alfred Hitchcock's 'Vertigo' in 1958. Nowadays CGI is “an integral part of all feature films”²⁷, as it allows filmmakers to create various images or things that can not be captured or filmed in the real world. CGI has for example given life to dinosaurs in Jurassic Park and has created the realistic and incredibly humanlike creature named Gollum in the Lord of the Rings.

1.2.2 Animated Documentaries

When discussing documentary films, animation is generally not the first thing that comes to mind. These two genres, though both widely used within the film industry, do not seem to fit together. When considering a documentary is focused on portraying the real world as it is,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kristin M. Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film history: An introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010).

²⁷ “What is CGI (Computer-Generated Imagery) & how does it work?” accessed April 12, 2019, <https://discover.therookies.co/2020/04/05/what-is-cgi-computer-generated-imagery-how-does-it-work/>.

animation can seem like the complete opposite, focusing instead on the fictionalised world. A lot of issues could arise when combining animation and documentary, like how animation is not capable of producing an objective photographic image. Such issues could challenge whether animated documentaries could even be regarded as documentaries at all. Another question that could arise is whether it is morally possible to animate certain events. What is meant by this is that some events might be too traumatic or serious to animate. Take the Holocaust as an example, animated versions of this event might take away from the horrors of what happened and turn it into something that feels less real. Even though the combination of animation and documentary challenges the truth claim that documentary has, these two juxtaposing genres have come together blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality²⁸. The use of animation in documentaries has been able to expand the documentary genre in ways that were before never imaginable, enabling filmmakers to explore themes that were previously not possible. Rapid advancements in the technology of computer generated image techniques in the 21st century has led to an increase of the usage of animation in documentaries²⁹. The animated scenes within documentaries for example allow for feelings to be conveyed which often can only be accomplished through animated fictional images. Animated documentaries enable filmmakers to portray events of which there are no recordings or which cannot be recorded due to privacy reasons. The use of animation has opened up new doors for the genre as it is no longer bound and limited by the conventional rules of documentary film.

1.2.3 Rotoscoping

Rotoscoping is a technique first coined by Max Fleiser in 1917³⁰. This technique allows animators to trace over live action film one frame at a time, resulting in the animation having the motion characters of live actors. This gives the animation a flawless movement, creating a sense of realism to any character or object. What the technique of rotoscoping is thus able to do is create authentic facial expressions that bring a whole new dynamic to the film that typical

²⁸ Nea Ehrlich, *Animating Truth: Documentary and Visual Culture in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 7-8.

²⁹ Anabelle H. Roe, "Against Animated Documentary?" *International Journal of Film and Media Arts* 1 (2016): 24.

³⁰ Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1981).

animation features cannot capture. Unlike other animations, the facial expressions of the characters within rotoscoped animations are not contrived or exaggerated. The same goes for how the voices are captured in combination with the movement of the characters mouth. What is meant by this is that the mouth moves exactly as it would when looking at someone speaking in real life. The detail put into the tracing of the various stages of movement allow such films to attain a realistic sense of motion. Once a scene is filmed, animators trace over each frame, transforming the live action into animation. Rotoscoping is able to mimic the reality of the structure, the proportion, and the movement of people and objects. One could argue this technique can be seen as photorealism due to the realistic movement that comes with it. “A rotoscoped image is inherently a hybrid product that combines technology and the human body to create something that fuses and exceeds both the machine and the body to create a simultaneous presence of the drawn and the photo indexical”³¹. Rotoscoping is used to bring a greater illusion of realism to animated scenes and erases the viewer's understanding of the animation as animation. Through rotoscoping we are taking a look at real life and creating it on screen in the animated world.

1.3 Methodology

For this thesis I have decided to mainly focus on the five forms of realism expressed by Stephen Rowley in order to answer my research question. Not only does Rowley go more in depth when discussing the ways in which realism can be found within film, but he also directly links it to animation films. Another reason as to why I have chosen to mainly focus on Rowley is because glimpses of the works of Prince and Hayward can be found within Rowley's five forms of realism. Prince's perceptual realism can for example be found within Rowley's visual realism and Hayward's seamless realism can be linked to Rowley's narrative and character realism, just as her definition of naturalization is similar to what Rowley coins as social realism. Though I have mentioned some similarities, it is important to know that I am not using Rowley's definitions as a replacement, but merely as one of the many ways of looking at answering my research question. I have also decided to focus on the work of Murrey Smith, as I believe his

³¹ Mark Langer, “From the guest editor: The Rotoscope and Its Discontents,” *Animation Journal* 12 (2004): 5-6.

work on how films are experienced as realistic by the audience is not mentioned in any of Rowley's five forms of realism. The structure of sympathy coined by Smith allows me to explore the ways in which the audience's sympathy with the animated characters, from my chosen case studies, causes them to experience the animation as realistic. Within this thesis other academics, which have not been mentioned within the theoretical framework, will also be used in order to answer the research question. These academics will include Torven Grodal, Suzanne Keen, Vivian Sobchack, Sheila Sofian, Toney Fucil, and Eric Lichtenfeld. The reason as to why these have not been specifically mentioned is because their arguments and theories will only be briefly used in order to strengthen certain statements. Throughout this thesis I will assess how the various chosen case studies coincide with these theories allowing me to be able to draw meaningful conclusions as to how animation films achieve realism.

This second chapter will use the 2019 remake of ‘The Lion King’ as a case study in order to analyse the ways in which Rowley’s visual realism, social realism, and realism of movement are found within animation films. The reason as to why this animation film was chosen as a case study is because the animated visuals and movement of this film have set new standards for what animation can accomplish. Within this completely computer generated animation film, I will be looking at how realism is achieved within this animated film by looking at the visual realism of the landscape, the social realism of the ‘magical Disney moments’, and the realism of movement and the grooming of the characters.

2.1 Introducing the case study

The remake of the animated 1994 musical film ‘The Lion King’ is a photorealistic computer animated film that came out in 2019³². This remake, which goes by the same name as the original film, is produced by Walt Disney Pictures³³. The plot of the 2019 film ‘The Lion King’ has hardly changed in relation to the original, with only minor adjustments made. The most striking difference between the two films is the way in which it is animated. Compared to the hand drawn animations of 1994, the 2019 remake looks much more visually realistic. The visual realism in the 2019 version resembles the real world so authentically that the computer generated images were often mistaken for live action shots by the audience. Another example of one of the changes that were made can be seen in the behaviour of the hyenas. Within the original film the hyenas were portrayed as dimwitted and unintelligent fools, however within the remake, they are made much scarier. This change in their behaviour makes them resemble the characteristics of real life hyenas more closely, resulting in them feeling more realistic for the audience. Other minor changes, like the soundtrack, narration, jokes, animals, and visuals were also made within the 2019 film in order to have it fit the realistic aesthetic of the entire film. These realistic

³² *The Lion King*, directed by Jon Favreau, USA: Walt Disney Pictures, 2019.

³³ “The Lion King,” accessed September 10, 2019, [www.https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6105098/?ref_=nv_sr_1?ref_=nv_sr_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6105098/?ref_=nv_sr_1?ref_=nv_sr_1).

aesthetics will be explored further throughout the rest of this chapter, giving a more detailed sense of how this animated film creates a sense of realism for the audience.

2.2 Realism through landscape and background

When watching the new Lion King, one of the first striking features is how realistic the landscape looks. Through visually realistic animation incredibly realistic results are achieved on the screen, transporting viewers to the planes of Africa. Though a lot of inspiration was taken from the original movie, a vast photographic library was created in Kenya, Africa, and used as a reference point in the film³⁴. With the film footage and photographs taken in Africa, information was gathered on what shots could be built without straying too far from the real life landscape. These photographs were used as models in order to create a high level of detail for the settings of the film. All this information was then pulled together to build the world in which the Lion King takes place from scratch. This animated world consisted of dozens of square kilometers of detailed African landscapes, allowing for realistic close-up shots, wide angle shots, and even aerial shots to be made. According to Rowley the degree of visual realism in animation usually varies³⁵, however, this is not the case for this movie where each shot and each layer resembles the real world incredibly realistically. In order to analyse the sense of realism with regards to the background landscape this first section of the chapter will look at the detail and geographic accuracy of the animated landscape within this film. Detail will focus on the extent to which the background is able to depict the complex structure of the African planes, whilst the geographic accuracy will look at what changes were made in this film in order to realistically portray the African landscape. These two aspects will be explored through various examples in order to analyse how a sense of realism is created for the viewers within this animated film.

When we take the overall landscape seen in the home of Timon and Pumba as an example, one can see the amount of detail Rowley is referring to with regards to the background animation of films. When looking at the landscape found here one can see that it accurately reflects how the African landscape changes as time goes by. In other words, by looking at the

³⁴ “Virtual Reality and Visual Effects - The Lion King,” accessed September 8, 2019, <https://discover.therookies.co/2019/09/24/virtual-reality-and-visual-effects-the-lion-king/>.

³⁵ Stephen Rowley, “Life Reproduced in Drawings: Realism in Animation,” *Animation Journal* 13 (2005).

detail of the landscape the viewers are able to see that a long period of time has passed through the growing of trees, discoloration of the planes, and overall change in environment. These subtle changes in landscape as time goes by adds to the realistic effect of the film and can paint a more believable picture for the audience. These changes within the landscape were coordinated with biologists in order to make sure that it accurately reflects the African landscape. The detail Rowley is referring to can thus not just be found within the changes of scenery as the characters travel through a specific area but also in how various plants move in the wind or how certain rocks crumble under the hooves of large herds of buffalo's. Apart from the ways in which extra detail has been added to the animations of this movie, a sense of depth is also created through the geographic accuracy of the animated landscape. Compared to the original 1998 movie, one will also be able to notice how geographic accuracy has been added in order to create a landscape which audiences believe they themselves can step into. The use of virtual mapping enabled animators to see what movements would realistically be possible within the film. Take the scene when the buffalo's storm the canyon for example. By walking through the space itself, through VR mapping, animators could easily determine whether the slope of the canyon would be too steep to descend for a herd of buffalo's. This precision in geographic accuracy of the world we see within the film adds such a big element of realism. By limiting the film to what is possible in real life director Jon Favreau is able to add an extra dimension to how the audience could experience the film as realistic. This can also be seen within the movement of the animals. Apart from the fact that they can talk and sing, they move in the same way they would do in reality. By limiting their boundaries of animation, but adding dimension they are thus able to create a more realistic effect in the final film. Another example in which we can see geographic accuracy is the scene where Rafiki climbs up to Pride Rock. In the original movie we see the character named Rafiki ascend to the top of Pride Rock by coming up via the front. This, when looking at the shape of Pride Rock, is however extremely difficult and highly unlikely for a mandril to climb. Especially considering there is a much easier route for Rafiki to take. In the remake version this has been changed by having Rafiki climb up to the top of Pride Rock via a much more accessible and less sloping route. This change shows how the movement of animals as well as the geographic accuracy of the landscape were carefully considered in order to develop the most

realistically possible feel for viewers. Lastly, an example which truly captures the sense of how realistic the landscape and background were animated can be seen in the first opening shot of the film. This first opening shot is the only non animated shot in the entire film, which according to various social media sources, audiences were unable to notice³⁶. The realness of this opening shot compared to all the other animated shots is incredibly similar, thus showing how the animated visuals of this film are indistinguishable from live action shots.

2.3 Realism through social constructions

Another significant difference between the two versions of ‘The Lion King’ is how the ‘magical’ Disney moments have been taken out or modified with the 2019 version in order to have it resemble the real world more closely. These magical Disney moments are scenes where unrealistic or fairytale-like events occur or happen, like magic. An example of this can be seen when the protagonist of the film, a young lion named Simba, sees the shape of his dead father, Mufasa, appear to him in the clouds. Whilst looking at the stills taken from both films, we are able to notice how the flair has been removed within the newer version in order to create a sense of realism. Though Mufasa’s spirit still speaks to Simba in the remake, no distinct figure can be seen like the one presented in the older version, but rather a vague face that appears only when lighting is cast. Though the viewer can still vaguely see the shape of a lion’s face within clouds, in the remake version, it looks more like a hallucination rather than Mufasa coming back to life to talk to Simba. The way in which this scene is presented within the remake version is thus much more believable and more likely to occur in the real world. Another example of how magical and typical Disney moments have been removed in the remake can be seen in the scene where Simba sings about how he cannot wait to become king. In the original film this scene is lit up with bright colours as we see Simba, and his best friend Nala, ride on the backs of various animals trying to run away from Simba’s guardian, Zazu. Having lion cubs ride on the backs of austriches is however very unrealistic. The same goes for the end of this scene where audiences see giraffes standing on top of hippo’s standing on top of elephants. Though adding a magical

³⁶ “The Lion King: Is it animated or live-action? It’s complicated,” accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2019-07-19/the-lion-king-remake-animation-live-action-photo-real>.

effect to the film, this is something that does not take place in the real world, which is why within the remake version these elements have been taken out. Instead, the remake version has Simba and Nala maneuver through various herds of animals trying to hide from Zazu. In other words, the remake focuses a lot more on what Rowley refers to as social realism in which the believability of the animated world relates to the audience's own reality, a reality without magic.

2.4 Realism through grooming and movement

One major change in the making of the 2019 version of ‘the Lion King’ was advancements in the animation techniques and software used to groom the animals, enabling the animators to create incredibly realistic looking animals. Not only does grooming focus on how the hairs of certain animals look, but also at how these hairs move and respond to external or surrounding factors like the sun or wind. In order to groom an animal different layers of animation are used, starting off with guide curves, which show the basic shape and movements of the animal. These basic curves allow one to observe the general flow and direction in which the animals move and thus also give insight into the direction in which the hairs should move. Once placement and movement of the fur is determined, shadowing takes place. This makes it possible for each hair strand to have slight colour variation in order to make the colouring of the hair look more realistic. For example, with the grooming of the warthog Pumba, they had to make sure each strand of hair was coloured differently to reflect the dense, scraggly texture of his fur. The colouration of each individual hair strand also allows them to stand out from its neighbouring strands, making the fur look more detailed³⁷. This discolouration of the hair strands can also be used in order to differentiate between the tip and the root of the hair, which is what we see when inspecting the hairs of animals. All these layers and details then come together and create a realistic looking animal on screen. These animation developments specifically gave the “artist a higher level of control over the dynamics of the hairs”³⁸. Allowing them to change the way the hairs move according to each animal and the needed shot. What this means is that they had

³⁷ “The very unique characteristics of a warthog’s hair: grooming Pumbaa,” accessed August 2, 2020, <https://beforesandafters.com/2019/07/31/the-very-unique-characteristics-of-a-warthogs-hair-grooming-pumbaa/>.

³⁸ “Advancing Technologies for The Lion King,” accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.mpc-rnd.com/the-king-has-returned-advancing-technologies-for-the-lion-king/>.

control over how the fur of each animal moved in relation to the wind, how it falls when wet, and how it slightly discolours when in contact with the sun, adding subtle details that help create a sense of realism. It also gave the animators control over the light produced within the film, allowing them to replicate natural sun- and moonlight. With a high level of control over the light and grooming, animators were able to dye the fur of the characters in the light's source and cast shadows from them. What this means is that they were able to change the colour of the fur depending on the time and season in which the scene takes place. This allows for an extreme level of detail, which furthers the sense of realism produced in the film. Another example in which the detail of layering can be seen with regards to grooming and movement is by paying close attention to the movement of the lions. Whilst observing the lions one can see how their veins come through certain parts of their skin in order to give these animals a realistic look. The ways in which the rib cages of the various animals expand whilst they are talking also adds an extra sense of realness. Rather than using the same animation technique for all of the various animals, differences were made in based on the type and sex of the animal. When looking at the female lions versus the male lions for example one will be able to notice slight differences in movement, hair type and structure of the skin. As male lions have manes a lot of the natural movement of the neck can be hidden behind the hairs of the mane. For female lions however, animators had to create extra movements to the neck and esophagus as their necks are fully exposed. Another example where one is able to see how close to reality animators wanted to stay throughout the film is with the earlier mentioned character Rafiki. Within the original film Rafiki stands on two legs while holding the newborn lion cub named Simba up to the sky for all of the animals to see. This type of movement and position of the body is however biologically impossible for a Mandrill to make. Animators therefore decided to have Rafiki sit on pride rock whilst holding Simba up to the sky. All of these minor but biologically drastic changes add an additional layer of realism to the film, allowing it to be incredibly close to reality.

In this chapter I will be using the animated documentary '25 April' to analyse in which ways a sense of realism is achieved through means of various techniques seen within the content of the animated documentary. This chapter is divided into three main sub-sections, each focusing on how a different sense of realism is achieved. The first section of this chapter focuses on the narrative, character, and voice within this animated documentary. The second part of the chapter will look at how a sense of realism is accomplished through the social construct of a documentary film. Lastly, the third section will look at the portrayal of emotions, focusing specifically on Murray Smith's structure of sympathy.

3.1 Introducing the case study

The animated documentary '25 April', directed by Leanne Pooley³⁹, is about the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps's (ANZAC) experience during the invasion of the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey during the First World War. The animated documentary focuses on the stories of five New Zealand soldiers; Thomas 'Hami' Grace, Edmund Bowler, George Tuck, John Perrson, and Ormond Burton, and one Australian nurse, Muriel Wakeford, who were present during the Gallipoli invasion. In order to bring the experiences of this horrific and brutal campaign to life for a modern audience, the animated documentary makes use of the diaries, letters, and memoirs of these six individuals. The story and script of the entire animated documentary are directly taken from the recorded and written words of those who were present during the Gallipoli invasion. The use of these diaries, memoirs, and letters are incredibly important as these primary sources are what makes this animation an animated documentary. Throughout the narrative this film switches between the stories of the six selected main characters. Not only does the audience see their account of Gallipoli unfold through means of a recreated animation, but the film also switches to animated interviews in which the audience comes face to face with those whose story they are following. The film begins at the moment the soldiers land on the peninsula and chronologically follows their story until the moment they evacuate and return home, covering a

³⁹ *25 April*, directed by Leanne Pooley, Australia: Transmission Films, 2015.

period of eight months. Throughout the film the audience follows the events that occurred during the Gallipoli campaign from the ANZAC perspective which enables the audience to fully engross themselves with the characters the film follows.

3.2 Realism through narrative and voice

Since '25 April' is an animated documentary, the narrative and characters play an important role in creating a sense of realism. The narrative structure within this film begins with an animated scene of one of the retold battles fought at Gallipoli during the First World War, along with a voice-over of one of the six characters who shares his experience of the battle. After this animated scene, a brief introduction is given in which the context of the Gallipoli war is explained. The screen then goes black and fades into a close-up of one of the six main characters who speaks directly to the camera. This interview shot then fades into an animated sequence of the retold events at Gallipoli in which the film continuously switches between the animated sequences of the war and the various interview shots of one of the six main characters. By having the narrative of the film depend heavily on its set of extensive interviews with the six main characters, the viewer gains a sense of realism. This sense of realism is gained, according to Bill Nichols, due to these interviews being testimonies that provide a strong sense of authenticity to the film⁴⁰. These interviews add a personal resonance to the animated historical events at Gallipoli and creates a directness which engages the audience. By using interviews, but no commentator, the past is remembered while the audience sees the reconstructed animations of the events. Through the interviews, memories about the events the main characters are trying to tell are strengthened. This also allows for the audience to be reminded that the animation they see are re-enactments of real memories and experiences. At the end of the film, when the survivors from the ANZAC troops evacuate Gallipoli, the audience gets to see the real faces after which the characters were animated through means of archival photographs. Brief information is also provided on what happened to those that survived after Gallipoli. By having the narrative end with the real photographs of the six animated characters along with what they achieved and did after the Gallipoli campaign, the audience is reminded that this animation film is real. One could

⁴⁰ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Second Edition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

argue that through this, the viewer is transported to a reality where they learn more about the characters whose story they have been following throughout the film. Another way in which the narrative of this film creates a sense of realism for the audience is through narrative empathy. Narrative empathy, according to Suzanne Keen, can be achieved “by witnessing another’s emotional state, by hearing about another’s condition, or even by reading”⁴¹. In other words, narrative empathy is thus about the sharing of emotions and perspectives through the narrative of others. Through empathy, the audience thus feels what they believe to be the emotions of others, namely those on the screen, allowing barriers to be broken as audiences place themselves in the position of the characters within the film. The use of close-up and point of view shots is, according to Keen, one of the main techniques in which empathy can be communicated to the audience⁴². These techniques are recurring throughout the film, not only during the interview shots, but also within the animated sequences of the battles fought during the Gallipoli campaign. Especially since the information provided throughout the film is taken from the diaries and memoirs of those that were present during the Gallipoli campaign a strong sense of authenticity is achieved. By having the animated characters address the audience directly, a personal resonance to the animated footage is added, giving life to the characters and situations seen on the screen. This along with interview shots is what allows ‘25 April’ to create a sense of realism for the audience. The narrative within this film is also a way in which a broader audience can be reached, and could provoke a wider interest to those who would normally not be interested by historical narratives. By animating this brutal Gallipoli campaign, it holds the power to bring the audience to a place and make them feel certain emotions which reading diaries, letters, or memoirs of those who were there might not achieve. By following the narrative of six ANZAC’s through means of an animated documentary, audiences are able to visualize an event they could never have experienced from up close. This film is thus a way in which some of the experiences of the ANZAC can be communicated and understood by outsiders. This narrative, along with its sense of empathy and engagement with that which is happening on the screen is however also linked to the presence of voice in the documentary.

⁴¹ Suzanne Keen, “A Theory of Narrative Empathy,” *Narrative* 14 (2006): 208.

⁴² *Ibid.*

The voice of this animated documentary is another way in which a sense of realism is portrayed and plays a vital role in most documentaries. According to Bill Nichols “having a voice involves more than using the spoken word”⁴³. Even in the case of speech-oriented documentaries, they often hint at features and express values on a multitude of levels apart from what is literally said. The voice of a documentary is thus not restricted to any one feature such as dialogue or spoken commentary, but rather seeks to persuade or convince the audience by the strength of their argument or point of view and the power of their voice. The voice of a documentary can make claims, propose perspectives, and evoke feelings. In other words, the voice of a film or documentary speaks with all the means available to the filmmaker. This can include when to cut or edit, how to frame or compose a shot, whether to follow a specific chronology or rearrange events to support a certain mood or point of view, etc. The voice of documentary, then, is the means by which this particular point of view or perspective becomes known to the viewer. For this film it is thus relevant to not only look at who is telling the story, but in what ways the story is conveyed to the audience. Within this animated documentary, for example, it becomes quite clear that the priority of this film is to focus primarily on paying respect to the ANZAC troops who fought during the Gallipoli campaign and sharing their stories of bravery with the others. By only focusing on the ANZAC’s experience of the Gallipoli fight, the audience gets pulled in and is able to engage more with the narrative. The voice of this film reminds the audience of what New Zealand and Australia experienced during the First World War and brings these experiences and stories “out of the usual black and white archive pictures and into vibrant and dynamic colour”⁴⁴. Furthermore, when it comes to categories of voice there are two forms of documentary voice; direct address and indirect address. Direct address is where the subject communicates directly with the audience, with direct address the audience feels involved with that which is taking place on the screen. Indirect address is where there is no direct contact with the audience, meaning that the characters on screen do not engage with the audience. Within this animated documentary the audience is not only hearing the stories and memories of a few of those that were present at Gallipoli, but these animated characters are also directly talking to them. This directness gives shape to the animated scenes at Gallipoli, as the

⁴³ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Second Edition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 48.

⁴⁴ “25 April,” accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.nzfilm.co.nz/films/25-april>.

voices organise the presentation of these events. Each of the characters narrate their own story and provide all the information to the viewer. This direct address of the characters thus serves as the driving force of the animated documentary with the visual scenes there primarily to illustrate what is already being said. Through the direct address of the characters, the audience is motivated to look past the animation aspect of this film and experience it as if these were their own relatives sharing their stories during a family gathering. Thus, through the structure of the narrative and the extensive reliance on the direct address of the interviews, the audience comes to realise that the whole film, regardless of being animated, is a documentary and a construct of reality giving the audience a sense of realism.

3.3 Structures of Sympathy with characters

There are many ways for audiences to engage and identify with characters on screen. Similarity between the audience and the characters as well as human performance are ways in which viewers can identify to a certain extent with the characters at hand. Characters, whether they be animated or not, that are based on real-life people automatically already possess a sense of realism as it is a direct construct of reality. According to Murray Smith, identification with a character happens when the audience becomes attached to a particular character on the basic values roughly in agreement with their own⁴⁵. Bettelheim agrees with this and states that identification does not require actively taking on the identification of the character. It is rather focused on the sharing of perspectives and ideals. In other words, when an audience member identifies with a character on screen they are experiencing the world through the point of view of the character on screen. This relationship and engagement between the audience and the characters on screen is further explored by Murray Smith in his structures of sympathy. This structure of sympathy is primarily focused on how audiences sympathise with the characters on screen through means of three main levels; recognitions, alignment, and allegiance. Within these three levels one can come to see how audiences' engagement with the characters creates a sense of realism within this animated documentary. Recognition with the characters within this film can be primarily seen due to the personality traits they possess. By having the six main

⁴⁵ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 41.

characters based on and representing actual people in the real world, their traits can be considered as authentic. By using their diaries, letters, and memoirs, a glimpse of who these people were and what they were like in the real world is shared with the audience. Regardless of only being able to see a glimpse into the lives of these characters, audiences are still able to paint a picture of who these men and women were. When viewing the film, audiences know that these characters are not only existent in this narrative but also lived in the real world, which allows audiences to feel more connected with these characters. These personality traits that Murray Smith is referring to can include, but are not limited to, how the characters behave, what their moral beliefs are, and what their thinking process is. Especially when looking at the behaviour of the characters during the animated sequences of the retold events at Gallipoli, the audience sees how characters respond to certain issues they are faced with. The sharing of these behaviours can result in audiences being able to relate and identify with the characters, especially if these responses are similar to their own. One example which audiences might be able to relate to with regards to the characters behaviour is when the ANZAC troops would bathe in the sea. Regardless of being defenseless against open fire and with the great possibility of being sniped in the water, bathing was something that was still done almost everyday. This reckless yet humorous act, as one of the ANZAC soldiers put it, is something audiences might be able to relate with as they most likely know what it is like to do something careless but fun. By being able to relate such behaviours and acts to their own life, audiences are more likely to identify with the characters on screen. Through means of interviews, the audience is also able to dive into the thinking process of each character. This also helps them engage with the characters and builds a connection between them according to Murray Smith. The more engaged and the more audiences identify with the characters on screen, the greater the sense of realism as the situations happening on screen become applicable to the audience's own life. Another way in which audiences can identify and relate with the characters on screen is through alignment, which focuses on the characters emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Through alignment the audience is given a greater understanding of the characters which in turn allows them to develop feelings of sympathy. Within alignment there are two subcategories, namely, spatial temporal attachment and subject access. Spatial temporal attachment looks at whether the narrative is focused on one

or multiple characters. This focus can cause viewers to become more invested in the various storylines they are following, which in turn has an impact to what extent they feel engaged with the characters they are following. As mentioned previously, within '25 April', the audience follows six characters throughout the film, providing the audience with more information about these characters and allowing them to gain a greater understanding and thus sympathy for them. Subjective access gives viewers access to a character's inner thoughts and feelings, which is very much the case in the film '25 April'. Through the use of the interviews and by having the narration of these interviews narrated over the animated sequences of the war, the audience is able to dive into the subjectivity of the main characters. By using primary sources, the audience is also able to gain an insight into the personal mind of the characters, especially since these primary sources consist of personal diaries, letters, and memoirs. Through alignment the audience is thus able to enter the mind of the characters on screen which in turn allows them to become more invested in the narrative, giving the entire film a greater sense of realism. The subjective access is very similar to Murray Smith's last level with the structures of sympathy, allegiance, as it looks at the access a viewer has to a character's thoughts and whether they understand their actions in context with these thoughts. Through the ways in which the characters personality, actions, and emotions are shared with the audience within this film the audience is able to sympathise more with the characters which results in them experiencing the film as more realistic.

Similar to Murray Smith's structures of sympathy and Keen's narrative empathy is Torben Grodal's argument that realism is often linked to representations operating on negative emotions. This is because Grodal believes that "pain and deprivation feel more real than pleasure"⁴⁶. The horrifying events the audience sees within this animated documentary are thus another way in which a sense of realism can be produced. From beginning to end the audience is surrounded by violence, experiencing bloodshed and death throughout. The letters and diary entries of the main characters tell how the Gallipoli campaign felt like a slaughterhouse where thousands of young men and women lost their lives. This sense of loss becomes more acute for the audience when following the account of one of the characters, Thomas 'Hami' Grace, a New

⁴⁶ Torben Grodal, "The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation," in *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media*, edited by Anne Jerslev. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2002), 87.

Zealand soldier who dies on the battlefield at Gallipoli. Thomas is the first character the audience is introduced to as he explains where he and the other ANZAC soldiers were sent to during the First World War. The more the audience sees or hears a character, the better this character is understood and therefore the greater the chance of sympathy felt by the audience. Especially through means of the various structures of sympathy present within this film, meaning the understanding of where the feelings and thoughts of the various characters come from, ensures that the viewer understands the characters. This understanding causes audiences to feel in line with the characters and allows them to become invested in their onscreen lives. The attachment the audience experiences with the characters is also what makes it so heart wrenching when one of these characters, like Thomas, never makes it back home from the war. This investment and engagement with the characters as well as the emotions of the loss felt with the character Thomas creates a sense of realism for the audience. Especially when the audience gets shown a shot of an empty interview chair where Thomas used to sit, right after the shot of where we see him die. It could thus be argued that this shot of the empty chair is not necessary as the audience already knows Thomas died, however, by adding this shot an extra emphasis has been added to the negative emotions felt by the audience as his death is intensified. This scene in combination with the harsh and violent opening scene in which we see the ANZAC troops storm enemy lines adds to the negative emotions felt by the audience, resulting in a greater sense of realism. During the opening scene we hear the chaos of the frontline and see men fall to the ground and scream in agony as they get shot by the machine guns of the enemy troops. The whole opening scene is filmed through the eyes of one of the six main characters, Thomas 'Hamu' Grace, whose voice we hear explaining how "the sky was raining shells ... [and his] hands were aching from working the bolt [of his gun]"⁴⁷. By filming through Thomas's eyes the animated shots become even more chaotic as he jolts his head back and forth, falls to the ground and crawls amongst his dead fellow soldiers. The fact that this whole opening scene is animated in black and white apart from the colour of blood of the dead and wounded soldiers adds an extra dimension to the harshness the audience sees, causing a greater sense of pain and distress felt. This suffering directly matches the audience's concept of the reality of war as harsh or severe in nature, and

⁴⁷ *25 April*, directed by Leanne Pooley, Australia: Transmission Films, 2015.

helps convey the reality of the story being told. These various elements of realism convey a sense of reality to the viewer, all while using the medium of animation and shows that the engagement and identification the audience has with the characters along with the portrayal of negative emotions, produced by the compelling stories of the main characters and the graphics of the animated battlefield, create a realistic feel for the audience.

3.4 Realism through social constructs

Apart from the previously mentioned ways in which a sense of realism is achieved within '25 April', the fact that it is a documentary and thus based on real events is another significant reason as to why this animated documentary is able to create a sense of realism. From the start of the movie, the audience is confronted with knowledge of, though animated, what they are about to see actually took place. Since it is a documentary, there is also no concern for the creation of a happy ending. Not only would a happy ending contradict with the actual event, but it is irrelevant for the course of this animated documentary. In other words, a happy ending, like those we see in fictional films, would take away from the essence and impact of the animated documentary on the viewer. The lack of a victorious ending for the ANZAC troops is not only a fact, but also strengthens the audience's emotional connection with the animated documentary to the real world as they are reminded how in war there are no such things as happy endings. Innocent lives are always lost. Within this war account, the viewer also experiences the death of various characters they have built a connection with throughout the documentary. The death of Thomas 'Hami' Grace for example hits the viewer hard as he is the first voice they hear. Whilst watching the documentary you also come to realise that the opening scene is of the battle where Thomas lost his life, creating an even larger impact on the viewer. The audience knows that what they are seeing is real, regardless of it being animation, all the information shared is taken directly from primary sources of those who witnessed the events at Gallipoli first hand. The uncertain future of these characters also adds to the viewers' understanding of reality as lack of answers is something that they themselves come across in the real world. Thus, the documentary aspect of this animation makes the viewer feel connected to the storyline and results in achieving realism through means of various truth effects.

Within animation especially, the film is constructed to make the audience believe that the fictitious world in which the event takes place is as complex and as varied as the real world. One way in which this can easily be shown within animation films is through the use of primary sources. Since primary sources are a direct evidence of the past and provide firsthand knowledge of historical events by those who lived it, a reflection of social environments and issues of that person's life are certainly portrayed. According to Vivian Sobchack, when an animated documentary portrays memories, historical events or life stories about its characters, audiences cannot dissociate it from reality⁴⁸. This is because according to Sobachack, the representation of these animations are graphical in form and manipulated by animators. Sheila Sofian also argues something similar, stating that if anything, animation is able to impact the viewer in a way that live action cannot, as animated images to her are more personal⁴⁹. Because of this, audiences receive these animated images seen on screen without putting up any barriers. They are opening themselves up to a powerful experience which can potentially be extremely emotional, increasing the sense of realism felt⁵⁰. With the combination of first hand sources, which enhance the documentary feel and intensifies the sense of realism along with the emotional and narrative connection created, this animated documentary successfully portrays a sense of social realism towards the audience. Rather than just seeing the film, audiences are experiencing it which in turn allows this animated film to achieve a sense of realism.

Another aspect in which a sense of realism is created through social constructs has to do with memory. According to Astrid Erll, media is a way in which memory can be shared with others⁵¹. Through this shared experience, memories and fictional stories are able to travel and in turn become an experience and interpretation of reality⁵². Erll also argues that memory and media can be experienced in a similar manner. Whilst watching a movie, for example, one is experiencing it on a multi sensory level in which "the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history"⁵³. If we compare this to '25 April', one can see this as a way in which such events

⁴⁸ Nea Ehrlich, *Animating Truth: Documentary and Visual Culture in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 179.

⁴⁹ Sheila Sofian, "The Truth in Pictures," *FPS* 7 (2005): 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17 (2011): 12.

⁵² Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17 (2011): 13.

⁵³ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 133.

are made experienceable. Through the memory of that which is seen on screen, the audience, though not having experienced the events themselves, are able to refer to what is happening on screen on a more personal level⁵⁴. The movie is in a sense transmitting past memories which allow them to be kept alive in the audience's mind. By making the images on the screen feel like personal memories a believable representation of a past reality is achieved, creating a sense of realism.

⁵⁴ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 133.

CHAPTER FOUR LOVING VINCENT

In this final chapter I will focus on how the animated film ‘Loving Vincent’, directed by Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman, can create a sense of realism for the viewer. This chapter is divided into three sections, each of which focuses on a different way in which realism is achieved. The first considers how rotoscoping is able to capture the essence of the human form within animation film and how it is able to produce realistic details adding to the depth of the film. The second section looks at the painting technique of the film and discusses how Vincent van Gogh’s painting style is brought to life. Lastly, in this chapter I will look at the ways in which the letters of Vincent van Gogh develop a sense of truth for the viewer and in turn allows the audience to connect with him on a much more personal level through his words. By focusing on these various ways in which a truth effect is achieved, the viewer can see how a sense of realism is created within this animated documentary.

4.1 Introducing the case study

‘Loving Vincent’ is a film directed by Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman about the life and death of famous Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh⁵⁵. The film’s events take place one year after the death of van Gogh in 1890. The film follows the son of van Gogh’s postman, Armands Roulin, who is given a letter by his father that van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo van Gogh before he died. Armands’ father asks him to deliver the artist’s last letter to his brother personally. On his way to deliver the letter to Theo van Gogh, Armands encounters a variety of people who claim to have known Vincent van Gogh. During one of those conversations Armands discovers that Theo van Gogh has also passed away and decides to take the letter to Vincent’s good friend and doctor Gachet. Whilst searching and waiting for an audience with the doctor, Armands talks to the people that saw Vincent last and tries to piece together what happened in his final days before he committed suicide. During these conversations the audience is transported back to van Gogh’s final moments and is given an insight to his life through the stories of his acquaintances. Eventually he has an audience with the doctor and they discuss

⁵⁵ *Loving Vincent*, directed by Dorota Kobiela & Hugh Welchman, England: Altitude Film Distribution, 2017.

Vincent's life and what may have brought him to take his own life. Satisfied by what the doctor had to say and having personally confirmed that he was indeed a good friend of Vincent, Armands leaves the letter with him and returns back home to his father. Once Armand reunites with his father, his father reads him a letter that was recently sent by the doctor in which van Gogh's last written letter to his brother Theo van Gogh is shared.

The movie runs across two timelines; one that takes place in 1891, one year after the death of Vincent van Gogh, and one that takes place when Vincent was still alive. In order to bring these stories to life, the directors have set them in Vincent van Gogh's most well known paintings. Having the entire film take place in van Gogh's paintings allows the audience to see the world through van Gogh's eyes and gives them an understanding of how his painting technique was inspired by his various life experiences. Through the exploration of van Gogh's paintings and through the reading of his letter the audience is able to dive into the mind of van Gogh. Having the audience invest in the storyline that is presented to them also gives them a realistic perspective of what van Gogh's life might have looked like according to those that knew him best.

4.2 Realism through rotoscoping

Rotoscoping allows animators to trace over live action film one frame at a time, giving the animation the motion and feel of live actors, with the movement adding a sense of realism to any character or object. The technique is particularly powerful when used to create facial expressions, bringing a whole new dynamic to an animated film. Unlike other animations, the facial expressions of the characters of 'Loving Vincent' are not contrived or exaggerated. This is echoed in how the voices are captured in combination with the movement of the characters mouth. The detail put into the tracing of the various stages of movement allow this film to attain a realistic sense of motion. Each character, regardless of looking like a painting, is given a more lifelike quality through rotoscoping. In other words, though the animation style of the film and its characters is abstract, the audience can experience it as real due to the humanistic elements incorporated through rotoscoping.

The use of rotoscoping within this film has enabled the directors to capture the human form in a way that is closest to live action. Whether a character is walking, running, or jumping it is difficult to recreate a realistic sense of movement. Certain styles of animation lack the motion blur that occurs naturally when a figure moves in real time before a live action camera for example. Within 'Loving Vincent' however, rotoscoping is used to control the various motions seen, creating a realistic sense of movement. An example of this can be seen in the animated black and white scenes that are focused on Vincent's life. Within these scenes especially, the audience is able to notice the motion blur that is created through rotoscoping and results in a natural look. The movement of the characters within these scenes is very similar to the movement we see in the real world every day. Through rotoscoping the animated shots blend together and connect with the following shots. The motion blur that can be seen enhances the motion of the characters causing the scene to feel more alive, organic, and natural. Through the use of rotoscoping, flawless movement and realism is thus brought to all characters and objects within the film. This allows the audience to become more emotionally involved as the animation looks, feels, and moves realistically.

Within 'Loving Vincent' minor human characteristics are also incorporated in the animation, giving it a sense of reality. The film does not merely capture the basic movements of the characters, but also the unessential nuances and details in the gestures and movements of the people, such as small eye movements when a character is recalling an emotional story or the way in which the corners of a character's mouth moves while talking. An example of this can be seen when Armands is visiting doctor Gachet. During this interaction the audience is able to see how the doctor is fidgeting with his teacup as he converses with Armands. Though this is not an essential detail one must incorporate into the animation, it is a very realistic detail that adds to the depth of the character. By adding the detail of the fidgeting, Gachet is able to express a certain emotion without having to use words. These minor movements and personal traits are what make the animation feel genuine as each movement feels natural, fluid, and detailed. These micro-expressions and movements, as one could call them, of the characters are what help create a sense of realism in 'Loving Vincent'.

4.3 Realism through animation technique

'Loving Vincent' has become especially well known for the unique style in which it is animated. It is so characteristic to Vincent van Gogh himself and how contemporary audiences perceive him, adding an incredibly personal element of his life to the film. What makes it even more powerful is the fact that this film is the world's first fully oil painted feature film. In order to be able to create such an incredible masterpiece, 125 animators painted over 65,000 frames inspired by van Gogh's most famous paintings by hand. The frames were shot in live action and were then painted over, photographed, and digitalised into a sequence for the film⁵⁶. The frames one sees in the film are a combination of existing paintings made by Van Gogh, new painted works, and black and white paintings representing Vincent's past. For each shot the painters had animated guidelines which allowed them to know which parts of the image moved and which stayed static⁵⁷. By using this technique to animate the whole film, Vincent van Gogh's paintings have been brought alive to illustrate his life, establishing a sense of connection with an artist who died over 100 years ago. Though the film itself is well written, it is the medium of the film that propels it forward and makes it so authentic and moving.

All the scenes in the movie are based upon or inspired by van Gogh's paintings and were recreated seamlessly into the story. In order to have a strong impact on the viewer and use the instantly recognisable painting style of van Gogh's to tell his life's story, the painting technique had to closely resemble van Gogh's. Since the paintings play such an important role in telling the story, it was crucial to get the painting technique and animated movements within the paintings right. One way in which a sense of realism was achieved was by having the actors closely resemble van Gogh's portraits. In other words, the directors casted actors who had a physical resemblance to the paintings and who could bring the character of that person to life within the film. This close resemblance can be seen during the end credits of the movie where various of Vincent's portraits are placed next to the painted characters of the movie. Taking the postman as an example, we can see that several paintings were used as a reference point to make the resemblance as authentic as possible. By having the actors closely resemble van Gogh's

⁵⁶ "Loving Vincent - The Movie," accessed May 25, 2019, <https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/art-and-stories/loving-vincent>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

paintings the audience is also able to gain a sense of recognition as they immediately think of one of van Gogh's paintings as various characters are introduced in the film. For example, one of van Gogh's more well known works is a painting of Doctor Gachet where he is sitting behind a table leaning his head on his hand. Because of the possibility that the audience might have seen this painting before, once Doctor Gachet enters a scene audiences automatically reference back to that painting. They recognise who they are seeing on screen due to their prior knowledge of the painting, which in turn adds a sense of familiarity and reality to the film. Van Gogh's paintings however not only allowed the directors of *Loving Vincent* to cast actors that most closely resembled these individuals, but they were also used as a reference point when it came to set and costume design. For Van Gogh it was important to try to paint modern portraits that would convey the soul of the sitter. His hopes were that when people would look at his portraits they would be able to sense who that person was. In order to portray this the directors wanted the audience to be able to see the real people underneath the paintings within the film. It was important to them that the audience would be able to see the emotion of the characters face, just as one can see within van Gogh's paintings. In order to achieve this the technique of rotoscoping was used, which allowed minor facial expressions to be animated in precise detail. The realness of having real people, meaning actors, rather than animations helped breathe life into his paintings. When looking at the characters within the film we can see a close resemblance between van Gogh's original paintings and the modified version used for the film. One main difference that could be argued between the two is that the modified versions look more realistic. The reason as to why the modified versions are more realistic is due to the use of rotoscoping which enables animators to create more realised emotions. By having the emotions of the characters be expressed more clearly, the audience is able to invest more in the story as it becomes much more familiar and thus more relatable. The more emotion the characters are able to portray to the audience, namely allows emotional manipulation to take place, effecting the audience's consciousness in making what they see and feel more realistic⁵⁸. The use of painting within this film tells the story, thus the more realistic the paintings are in relation to Van Gogh's own work, the more real the story becomes to the audience.

⁵⁸ Anne M. Barry, *Visual Intelligence: Perception, Image, and Manipulation in Visual Communication* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 66.

Another way in which realism is achieved through the use of van Gogh's painting technique is because his painting style has a way of connecting with the viewer. The use of colours within his paintings allowed van Gogh to express his ideas and feelings. He wanted to convey the intensity of his experiences through the exaggeration of colour and heavy brush strokes. His unique painting style was his way of communicating what he felt with the viewer, inviting them to feel certain emotions. For example when we look at 'The Night Cafe', a painting depicting the inside of a cafe in France, the mood and style portrays a sense of anxiety, sombreness and negative feelings. Van Gogh's colour palette in the painting is dark and eerie, conveying the uneasiness of a dingy bar after midnight. According to a letter Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo van Gogh, Vincent "tried to express the terrible human passion with the red and the green"⁵⁹ within this painting. In other words, the greens and red we see within 'The Night Cafe' clash in some sort of opposing battle of colour. These two colours create a feeling of uneasiness due to them being coarse and having contrasting tones that are difficult for the viewer to handle in such a dark and commanding way. Green and red can often be regarded as complementary colours, however the way in which Vincent uses these colours in this painting creates an intentional imbalance. This imbalance is further expressed through the disoriented scene that is depicted; glasses and bottles are uncleared, people are sitting hunched over in the dark corners of the cafe, and chairs are pushed away from the tables. The painting itself is chaotic and can create a sense of claustrophobia. The painting technique thus allows Vincent to communicate through his art and can cause the audience to feel certain real emotions. This somber atmosphere that Vincent is able to create through the use of colour and composition is strengthened within the film by adding animated elements into the painting. For example, in the beginning of the film we see Armands get into a fight right outside a cafe before entering the painting of what viewers will recognise as 'The Night Cafe' and getting himself drunk and passing out on the table. These additions confirm, even stronger than the painting already does by itself, that this cafe is a place you can go to ruin yourself. The use of dialogue is not necessary within this scene as the colour already speaks for itself. Within this scene a certain mood is created merely through the use of contrasting and juxtaposing colours, resulting in giving the

⁵⁹ "To Theo van Gogh. Arles, Saturday, 8 September 1888," accessed June 3, 2019, <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let676/letter.html>.

audience a certain emotional impact. By evoking an eerie emotional response from the audience through the colours represented, the audience is directed towards entering this new scene with certain emotions resulting in the scene being more impactful. This emotional response and the impact it creates can put the audience in a more realistic setting and in turn achieves realism within the film. By using van Gogh's paintings as a starting point for the film frames, including colour palette, mood and set design, the animators are thus able to use the emotions conveyed in van Gogh's paintings and bring those to life to help tell his story.

One could however also argue that the closer one tries to get to the looks and motions of a real human being, the more strange it seems. In other words, by combining live action and animation, through the use of rotoscoping, the more unnatural the image becomes. This argument is supported by Eric Lichtenfeld⁶⁰, who believes that this combination makes it hard for a viewer to invest in the reality that is presented to them as though it might look like live action, the audience knows it is animation. Rotoscoping fits in neither the category of live action nor animation which could cause the audience to question the reality presented within the film. However, having said this, this is not the case for 'Loving Vincent' as though the movements might look realistic, the physicality of the characters and objects are not. The film does not attempt to animate in a life-like or hyper realistic manner and will therefore never achieve a real human look or feel. The whole film is rather animated as one large painting in which the characters are made up out of brush strikes like those we see in van Gogh's paintings. By purposely avoiding the realistic features of the animated characters, the more realistic they have become. In other words, the non-human look of the characters is deemed acceptable for the audience because it is not trying to imitate real life, but rather paint it as a dream.

4.4 Realism through primary sources

The everyday experiences of Vincent van Gogh's life is told through his letters and the memories of people Armands speaks to. These different perspectives are often contradictory to one another and allow the viewer to consider different points of view around Vincent's life and death. In

⁶⁰ Anthony Breznican, "Old Beowulf new tricks: Cutting-edge film could herald new digital era or end up history," *Calgary Herald*, November 12, 2007, <https://www.pressreader.com/canada/calgary-herald/20071112/282226596371636>.

other words, the viewer is offered a variety of perspectives and encouraged to create their own interpretation of events. These conflicting narratives around the life and death of Vincent create an uncertainty with the audience which in turn establishes a sense of truth as reality is often uncertain and lacks clear cut answers. By having all these different perspectives merged into one movie, the audience is given control over their own thoughts on whose point of view they believe. Throughout the film the audience is given the chance to add up all of the viewpoints of the different characters and determine their own truth.

Another large part of what makes *Loving Vincent* such a realistic portrayal of his life, apart from giving viewers full control over whose point of view they wish to follow, is the incorporation of his letters to his brother Theo van Gogh. In scenes throughout the film, characters refer to Vincent's letters and excerpts are read from them in a voice over like manner. The voice that we hear whenever a letter is being read is the 'dead' voice of Vincent van Gogh. By bringing Vincent back to life through the use of a voice actor, allows viewers to hear past memories of someone who is now a ghost. The audience is confronted with Vincent's own written words from when he was alive, creating a sense of Vincent's lived experiences and emotions. Not only are we, like '25 April', hearing the voice of the dead, but through these letters the audience can gain a glimpse into personal and private aspects of van Gogh's life. By diving into the personal thoughts of Vincent through these letters, the audience becomes not only more invested in the story but also more invested in him. Through this new investment audiences can become more attached to the story, promoting a sense of realism as a truth effect is achieved. By having a voice read parts of his letters the audience is taken more along the journey of how his artworks came to life. Rather than just witnessing the end result of his paintings they are now able to hear how the painting came to be and what his inspirations were. These letters allow Vincent van Gogh to become alive once more. Through these letters, Vincent is able to directly talk to the audience, achieving not only authenticity but also a sense of realism within the film. When thinking of making a movie focused on the life and death of Vincent van Gogh, fiction or animation (painting) are the main ways to do so. There is namely no footage from when Vincent van Gogh was alive and those who knew him are no longer alive today. The way to go about presenting his life and death to others is thus by using primary sources, namely his paintings and

letters. The use of these two sources creates a sense of realism to anyone watching, as these sources are what allow the film to most accurately represent his life.

CONCLUSION

The result of this thesis shows a multitude of elements of realism in ‘The Lion King’, ‘25 April’, and ‘Loving Vincent’. Despite these all being animation films, elements of realism are very much present. Reality effects are found in the visuals, and include detailed character design, settings of meticulous detail, the use of light, colour palette, and fluid and precise animation. Realism in these films rests in the narratives, and consist of the depiction of realistic world portrayals, realistic character portrayals, and representations of suffering and pain. All in all the engagement and identification the audience has with the characters within these animated films in which the narrative is constructed impacts the extent in which a sense of realism is created for the audience.

The way in which a reality effect is constructed in ‘The Lion King’ through the use of computer generated imagery are camera movement, landscape, grooming, and an overall sense of social realism. In the film, we notice how a lot of focus is put towards the creation of a world in which the characters can move and act as realistic as possible. The movement and aesthetics of the characters within the film as well as the terrain and how the characters interact with their surrounding environment creates a sense of realism. Alongside the animated character building and landscaping, through the use of CGI and VR mapping, the animated camera movements are what bring the whole movie together, making it incredibly realistic. With the use of traditional techniques in combination with new computer animation techniques, they were able to take the tools of traditional filmmaking and transition them into the animated world, resulting in a realistic feel. Overall, when watching the 2019 remake of ‘The Lion King’, one can feel as if they are transported to the plains of Africa. Through the use of animating traditional camera techniques, the social realism of the ‘magical Disney moments’, and hyper realistic grooming techniques, the environment, plot, and characters give the viewer a sense of realism, even though you know every aspect of the film is animated.

The way in which realism is achieved in ‘25 April’ is through the use of narrative and character, social construct, and the fact that it is a documentary film. Though what the viewer sees might not look realistic, what the viewer hears and feels does. Whilst the narrative provides

the viewer with a real and documented event, the voice is able to capture the audience and presents a story that feels more real and personal. The animated documentary brings out emotions that the audience feels and experiences in their daily lives, which creates a sense of realism felt whilst watching this animated documentary. The ways in which a social construct is followed also affects the ways in which realism is achieved as it is similar to what audiences might experience in the real world. Through this the audience is thus also able to relate to what they see on the screen as believable narratives and characters help convince the audience that what is unfolding on the screen is real. Lastly, the fact that this is a documentary and based on actual events that happened in the real world significantly contributes to the fact that this animation is able to achieve a sense of realism. Overall, the presence of these various mentioned aspects within the animated documentary is how '25 April' is able to achieve a sense of realism whilst being an animation.

The way in which realism is achieved in 'Loving Vincent' is through the use of rotoscoping and the ways in which van Gogh's paintings and words are brought to life. By focussing on the little details, such as the animated emotional quirks of the characters and the authenticity with which van Gogh's paintings are recreated and brought to life, the viewer is able to step into what the lived experiences of Vincent van Gogh's life might have been like. The use of his letters add an additional personal touch to the whole movie and produces a sense of truth, as what the viewer is confronted with is what van Gogh regarded as true during the time he wrote his letters. However, we will never know van Gogh, just like we will never know how he felt during his time as an artist. One can read his letters and study his paintings, however these do not contain all the answers. Through combining his letters with paintings and the accounts of those that knew him, we are however able to create a realistic portrayal of what Vincent van Gogh's life and death might have been like. Though there is no way of recreating what happened, 'Loving Vincent' brings together many different strands to build a portrayal of his life that is as close to reality as possible. Through these various reality and truth effects, the film 'Loving Vincent' thus succeeds in conveying a sense of reality to the viewer.

As a final concluding argument challenging whether realism can be achieved within animation films will be briefly discussed. Though having argued that realism is seen within

animation films, due to the rapid evolving technology, images or animations that were and are believed to be realistic at a certain period of time can in the future become outdated and thus un-realistic. Therefore one could argue that we are never able to recreate reality with regards to computer animation as it will never be regarded as a reality within a historical context. This is supported by Vivian Sobchack who argues that animation films are entertaining and accepted because of the fact that the audience knows it is an animation. Animation films are not trying to represent reality which causes the viewer to disregard any imperfections it might contain. However, when animations try to cross the boundary of looking less like an animation and more like reality, we as viewers “change our scale of values, and we judge the film by comparing it with non-animation film[s]”⁶¹. If one were to further expand this thesis, this could be an argument to develop further on in questioning whether realism can be achieved within animation film and be regarded as realistic for the audience and whether this is something we want animation to achieve.

⁶¹ Vivian Sobchack, “Final Fantasies: Computer Graphic Animation and the [Dis]Illusion of Life,” in *Animated Worlds*, edited by Suzanne Buchan. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 172.

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