



Melissa Ferrari

Strategies for Authentication: An Inquiry into Credibility and Transparency in Nonfiction Animation

Animation and written text both lack photographic indexicality, are not intrinsically evidence-based, and are vulnerable to the subjectivity of their author. Despite these qualities, text is recognized as a valid format for conveying factual information. In his essay “The Animated Documentary,” Gunnar Strøm compares animation and writing in arguing that animation should also be accepted as a legitimate nonfiction medium. However, nonfiction writers use established conventions, such as bibliographies and citations, to maintain a foundation of credibility. It follows that nonfiction animation artists should hold themselves to comparable standards, providing viewers access to evidence of truth claims in their films. Factual accuracy, subjectivity, and the relationship between fact and truth are points of contention in all nonfiction filmmaking, particularly with the extensive postmodern discourse on the constructedness of documentary film. These concerns are magnified in animated documentary, making veracity a particularly relevant topic. The scope of this paper focuses on independent animated nonfiction or animation commissioned by independent creators that make verifiable truth claims. The implications of this inquiry suggest that unconventional methods for demonstrating factual accountability can alleviate the burden of conveying truth in the film itself. This conclusion may provide animation artists with greater agency in employing increasingly experimental modes of nonfiction animation while maintaining factual integrity. The foundation for this investigation begins with Winsor McCay’s *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918) which is widely recognized as the first commercially distributed animated documentary. The opening scenes of the film place the viewer as a witness to the vital act of the filmmaker, McCay, acquiring knowledge from an expert on the subject of his film. This scene illuminates the importance of evidence in early animated documentary history. In considering the ongoing epistemological implications of authentication in current nonfiction animation, this paper reflects on Penny Lane’s animated documentary feature *Nuts!* (2016) and accompanying appendix of annotated footnotes, *Notes on Nuts!* (2016). Lane’s use of footnotes reveals how the role of transparent authentication in animated documentary has yet to be resolved, and how this tension manifests in the zeitgeist of media credibility today.

Bio; Melissa Ferrari is an experimental animation artist, nonfiction filmmaker, and scholar. Her research and practice critically engage the distinctions between animated nonfiction filmmaking, educational film, and experimental animation documentary. Currently, she is pursuing her Masters of Fine Arts in Experimental Animation at the California Institute of the Arts ('19). Her films have been shown internationally in venues such as the Ottawa International Animation Festival, Black Maria Film Festival, Slamdance Film Festival, and Animasivo. Melissa is the Founding Associate Editor of *The Research Unit in Experimental Animation Society*, a publication for undergraduate and masters level scholarship in the art of experimental animation. Previously, she worked as an animation artist at Dusty Studio in New York City, where her nonfiction animation was featured in *The New York Times Op-Docs*, *The Museum of Modern Art* in New York, *Nautilus*, TED Talks and PBS.

