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Animated Documentary and the Scene of Death:  
Experiencing *Waltz with Bashir*

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**W**hen brought together in the animated documentary, animation with its tradition of comic storytelling and gothic graphic fiction and the documentary film with its tradition of “realism” create new possibilities for understanding the relationship between spectatorship and memory. In this form memory and reality are volatile and changeable, yet believable. In the Israeli film *Waltz with Bashir* (dir. Ari Folman, 2008) the animated form of the bulk of the film is ultimately juxtaposed with television footage and still shots of the massacre within the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. The film’s final sequence of live footage, some of which would have appeared on most of our television screens across the world, makes of those passing seconds a death scene. As a “death scene” we see again but really for the first time the horror and the miracle of survival. The preceding animation with its intertwining flows of dreams and reality not only interrogates but enacts how memory can be seen.

**Death Seen**

*Waltz with Bashir* is a film entirely about its ending, which is incommensurate with the unfolding narrative of an Israeli soldier (who is also Ari

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1 Folman, the director of the film as well as his animated equivalent) trying  
 2 to remember exactly what he did and where he was as the Sabra and Shanti-  
 3 lila massacre took place.<sup>1</sup> His entire journey, all the looking at the film so  
 4 far, until that final scene, can be understood as a kind of practice in how to  
 5 remember so we can see and remember what we see at the end. The ending  
 6 transforms the film from a story about gaining knowledge about something  
 7 that happened apart from us to a set of events in which we as viewers are  
 8 implicated—where blankly “watching” has also produced the forgetting of  
 9 those deaths.

10 How to express what we see at the end? Here is one description. We  
 11 see sadness and shock and horror. What we see is actual footage of the  
 12 response of the families, the mothers, the grandmothers returning to their  
 13 homes (usually called “the camps”) of Sabra and Shantila to find their court-  
 14 yards, the streets, the small alleyways filled with the murdered, massacred  
 15 bodies of their families. And then the footage of a single old woman keen-  
 16 ing is replaced with a few single, still photos of the dead, some in strewn  
 17 piles, others alone.<sup>2</sup>

18 Here is another description. We see that memory is a process. As  
 19 individuals we do not recall “like a movie” each retrieved scene, picture  
 20 clear, each flashback accounted for as each gap is neatly edited. And yet  
 21 much of the documentary tradition has been dedicated to showing us the  
 22 “truth,” assuming we will remember. But a documentary’s promise of a  
 23 final knowing also produces in that totalizing knowing a forgetting. Here  
 24 that forgetting is undone through this juxtaposition of unsettling anima-  
 25 tion that questions what is real with the very real captured images of the  
 26 dead. When the two are brought together the dead are released from their  
 27 photos and footage to speak continuously of Palestinian presence and suf-  
 28 fering, and the driving narrative and factual basis of documentary turns  
 29 instead to showing us how memory and the truth of documentary are pro-  
 30 duced. In this ending we *see* the effort to render unforgettable this moment  
 31 in the documentary because we know in that same moment that we cannot  
 32 know entirely, ever.<sup>3</sup> In this moment instead we hear grief; we see silence  
 33 and sit still as both spectators to film and witnesses of reality, in and of  
 34 the same minutes of sensation that are this seen scene. We *will* remember  
 35 them. What we are seeing is staged as the ending of this particular film,  
 36 but the footage we are shown moves outside the established narrative and  
 37 temporal bounds. What we see floods into the audience not as a “message”  
 38 but as a particular kind of filmic memorial.

39 Given that the whole film up until this point has been animated, con-

stantly pressuring by way of its form and its *mélange* of investigations the categories of real and unreal, the rupture created by this actual footage, these indisputable deaths, is shocking. And the shock is as much aural as visual, as much cellular as surface. In the face of that footage it seems like the whole animated film was about slowly, inexorably revealing to us not the truth of Ari's experience but the limits of the cinematic documentary. Here we see not just the doubled doubt of memory but its rhythm as well. The drawn, slowly talking figures, jerking through a space only slightly surreal, only just out of time, so that in the end we can hear, because we have been slowed down to a waiting within the movement of the image, why a woman, a real woman, is screaming. And that scream is another kind of rupture, for up until this point there has been Max Richter's persistent sweeping and weeping score so that every scene is connected, wrung through with composed sound. And so now, here at the end, we know what that scream means, can hear it emerging out of the silence of death and over the seen (but not heard) panicked breaths of Ari seeing that woman and that sound come toward him.

To think of these final moments of the film that are a combination of "real" images and "animation" as a death scene is to feel the cultural force of this massacre and its renewed demand as affective witness. Not only and forever about a people caught within the politics of Lebanon and Israel, Palestine, Christian Phalangists, Jews, and Muslims or as a global event we may have glimpsed on our televisions but as a conundrum of how we can see death on film, moving death, not as a narrative climax or plot device but as a renewed space of knowing the pain of others and of remembering what cannot be represented.

### Remembering

There are many short exchanges in *Waltz with Bashir* that linger. One of them is the explanation from Ari's therapist friend that "memory is dynamic, memory is active."<sup>4</sup> That statement is the conclusion to his account of a "well-known experiment in psychology," where an individual is shown photos from his or her childhood, then photos in which his or her picture has been added into a fake scene, and how eventually most people will "recall" that day. This is the dynamism of memory, its capacity to fill in missing holes, to "recall something that never happened" (*Waltz*, 17). What flows from this exchange is the need first of all to find out what did happen, what could possibly be true for Ari, and so Ari begins his journey back

1 to the present. But for the film's global audience the question of memory,  
 2 particularly visual memory, is much more open. How alive is memory, how  
 3 retrievable through journey and narrative is it, when so much of what we  
 4 might remember we have seen as images or texts, small seconds of some-  
 5 one else's story in another part of the world? We see these global scraps as  
 6 part of a framed news session on television, but we also see them as pass-  
 7 ing (sometimes still affecting) half-hearted points of connection on screens  
 8 in elevators, on moving billboards, and as visual headlines across our com-  
 9 puters. We forget most of these images. Their very form as headlines, as the  
 10 flotsam and jetsam of news content, means we are meant to move on from  
 11 them to the next day's news and then the next. The process of making par-  
 12 ticular global incidents "stick" enough to become anchored in an order of  
 13 collective global memory requires the historicization of particular images,  
 14 their repeated interpretation, and the contagion that occurs through their  
 15 affect. For the individual therapy patient there is a warning about what  
 16 black holes we might cover with "false" memory, but for the global audi-  
 17 ence the "faked" scenes in which we insert ourselves is an ongoing reality.  
 18 Every image has a source, a point of view, a political and emotional context  
 19 that produces some order of limit to how we will "know" that image, but  
 20 these are rarely explored. Remembering images of global incidents there-  
 21 fore requires not simply the real/not real of the therapeutic encounter but  
 22 a capacity in the documentary to work the local/global nexus through deep  
 23 contextualization and a filmic order of thick description of the form itself,  
 24 within fields of affect.

25 Although the film is organized around a familiar narrative of the  
 26 protagonist Ari, trying to remember where and what he was doing in the  
 27 Lebanon war generally and particularly during the Sabra and Shatila mas-  
 28 sacre, it does not end with that. He never finds exactly when he was, where  
 29 he was, at the moment of massacre. In the final image of him, he sees the  
 30 survivors of the massacre coming down the street toward him, and yet we  
 31 know by then that he was never exactly there, exactly like that. Our final  
 32 moment as viewers is of the historical live footage, the bereft woman, the  
 33 still bodies—all things that we *all* could have seen, might have seen. What  
 34 were we watching on our television screens in 1982? What did we see in  
 35 passing on our way to the dinner table? Right here?

36 This is an ending that calls us all to connect through what we might  
 37 have forgotten. We all may have seen that original footage or not, but we  
 38 are all connected through knowing we will forget. News stories are, after  
 39 all, made in their short, throwaway form to be forgotten. So although the

film shows us quite baldly some of the dead, the affective force of the film lies in reminding us what we might have seen and dismissed and now are seeing again as if (but not really) for the first time—the first time when this story, that footage will last in our memories, having first been seen and dismissed as one tiny part of a news cycle.

The film through the figure of Ari mostly follows the traditional confessional figuration and the classic revelatory trajectory of the documentary. In this mode the single, uncertain, curious individual slowly reveals to us what he does and does not know. In the constant return to the narrator's interpretation and his memories, his process of memory making becomes a private and public confession. In that process of confession Ari becomes made and unmade. In our institutional role as listeners we become aware of our own uneasy collusion in the making of the forgetting of this massacre. Ari's memories, the real images we see, matter now not only to Ari and the idea of the documentary but to us, to all of us who look.

Not only are we global spectators that forgot but we are an audience caught up within the experience of a documentary form that through its style of animation allows us to glimpse the structure of the "reality" in progress. The drawn forms remind us that the documentary is always a re-presentation, requiring the reproduction of forms of storytelling (narrative, revelation, correction) that produce "reality," and yet in this film even the belief in what we are seeing is unsettled. Can that set of moving lines, that moving drawing, be understood as a "real" man? And if so, what is the status of those carefully framed shots of realism found in other documentary forms?

Having produced a distinct, open, confessing subject and a labile "audience" that is not so much receiving as coproducing confession, an order of radical connectivity arises. This involves not so much an individual becoming as a becoming with others. As a means of convening community the confession's temporality becomes not so much a means of producing teleological individualism as an order of radical connectivity. Confession may still be producing the single representative subject of (modern) discourse as Michel Foucault suggested, but an appreciation of the moments of "in-betweenness" within confessional temporal modes and the social becomingness complicate the story.<sup>5</sup> In this way *Waltz with Bashir* can convene audiences and so connect people, but it can also not simply reenact a particular memory but pass on the experience of memory making.

This conditional truth made up in part by a dispersed public already saturated with and produced through images makes of this documentary

1 time an affective event—something emerging out of and intervening in its  
 2 own discourse.<sup>6</sup> Memory becomes a temporal, affective reenactment—we  
 3 recall and relive as memory what we may never have known or may have  
 4 forgotten. But in doing so we may connect more radically or at least more  
 5 globally than ever before, and we have to have a form whereby we can see  
 6 ourselves remembering, making memory so as to remember what we may  
 7 have never known or forgotten. It is through the agonism of this affective  
 8 memory in its animated filmic form, which includes the history and poli-  
 9 tics of spectatorship, that we are both overcome and enabled, moved and  
 10 reminded.

### 11 12 **Leaving the Cinema (Again)** 13

14 I first saw *Waltz with Bashir* with my partner and our two nephews (twin  
 15 twenty-one-year-olds) from my side of the family.<sup>7</sup> I had already heard it  
 16 was a good movie and knew it to be doing new things with animation, and  
 17 somehow animation made it seem like a good choice for a film we might  
 18 all like. Afterward we were pretty shattered—broken up in our speech, try-  
 19 ing to say what it was, how it worked, what we felt. We bought wine and  
 20 beer on our way to a nearby restaurant, and it was a relief to drink and then  
 21 eat. And as we were talking about the film we returned again to the power  
 22 of seeing figures who move slowly, who are animated and yet who are real.  
 23 Real when they remember in more sepia tones, real when they are in the  
 24 present moment but still animated. Then my nephew Vuli said, “It’s kind  
 25 of Brechtian.” Now this was revelatory to me—not just the idea but the fact  
 26 that Vuli said it. He was speaking my language—I had forgotten somehow  
 27 that he would actually learn something at college, know ideas that I know,  
 28 use concepts that I teach. For a second we were both a part of two famil-  
 29 iarities at once, personal and public. The bliss of narcissistic identification.  
 30 The love of him, of them both, speaking naturally, critically. I hadn’t for-  
 31 gotten they had grown up, but I had forgotten they would stay grown up,  
 32 keep growing up. What time was I in?

33 Vuli made a good point. Bertolt Brecht’s task was to keep people  
 34 thinking and to keep them imagining the possible politics within any piece  
 35 of theater. This involved “stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar,  
 36 obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about  
 37 them.”<sup>8</sup> To this end, Brecht employed techniques such as the actor’s direct  
 38 address to the audience, harsh and bright stage lighting, the use of songs  
 39 to interrupt the action, explanatory placards, the transposition of text to

the third person or past tense during rehearsals, and speaking the stage directions out loud. In his epic theater, ideas or didactic lessons were key. In “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” he directs his actors in the following manner:

Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. His muscles must remain loose, for a turn of the head, e.g., with tautened neck muscles, will ‘magically’ lead the spectators’ eyes and even their heads to turn with it, and this can only detract from any speculation or reaction which the gestures may bring about. His way of speaking has to be free from ecclesiastical singsong and from all those cadences which lull the spectator so that the sense gets lost.<sup>9</sup>

Brecht is so beautifully aware here of the potential power of attraction, of corporeal seduction, and of psychoanalytic transference—all of which can occur within theater. As Jonas Barish suggests, “Brecht seeks to confront us with a simulacrum of our waking experience but also sets out to undermine the illusion he is creating. We are gazing not at life but artfully constructed fiction.”<sup>10</sup> Folman, the director of *Waltz with Bashir*, could be said to be doing exactly that as he simultaneously makes his art, calls up our history of seeing images, and challenges what a documentary can do.

All the figures are slowed down, their faces sketched, the settings drawn, and each image recalls simultaneously the “real” human and the redrawn one. But where Brecht depended on the overarching power of normative rationality to remind the viewer to think without emotions, to think and not feel, Folman allows us to see how we feel and think simultaneously. He fosters judgment *and* emotional experience through an appreciation of the dense fragmentation of memory. He does this not just through mimetic temporality, slowing movement down to the pace of memory making, but through the animated form, which asks us to recall the screen through the comic form, through the trace of the physical hand on paper, back to itself. There is no immediate “identification,” but there is reidentification through both the experience of comic reading and the remembered humor, horror, superheroes, silliness, and mystery of the comic genre. At the same time we are images within images; we know ourselves to be images in others’ minds, as these images mind us. There is a particular moment in the film when the war correspondent recalls his first sight of the last of the camp residents being led out at gunpoint, and he says, “You know the picture of the Warsaw ghetto? The one of the boy with his hands up? A long train of women, old people, and children were walking like that with their hands

1 up” (Waltz, 81). Let me ask you that same question? Can you recall that  
 2 photo? The boy is in a suit and a cap with socks, and if you have seen it,  
 3 you might recognize that you remember him because he looks toward the  
 4 camera while most of the adults in the photo are looking up at a soldier or  
 5 are blurred by looking away. Moments later the correspondent remembers  
 6 then seeing a small hand of a girl in the rubble and then her face and saying,  
 7 “My daughter was about the same age as that girl. She had curly hair too”  
 8 (81). We are called into a form of identification, but it is a highly mediated  
 9 one. Iconic image, own child, sketched image of hand and face, our chil-  
 10 dren, other images, watching these images in the dark with others. Never  
 11 forgetting that we remember and create through images. Never forgetting  
 12 that the dramatic resolution of this film was never about the main charac-  
 13 ter shooting but looking, seeing and helping the killers see. And so we are  
 14 always as the audience being addressed as viewers and people who are see-  
 15 ing something again.

16 Behind that, as the therapist in the film says, “For you the signifi-  
 17 cance of the massacre was set long before the actual event. It comes from  
 18 a different massacre. It’s about what happened in the other camps, those  
 19 camps. Your parents were in Auschwitz right? The massacre’s been with  
 20 you since you were, I don’t know, six years old” (91). This makes for this  
 21 character a particular horror, a particular significance, not so much perhaps  
 22 in becoming a Nazi as suggested but in becoming the so-called ordinary  
 23 German who looked on, who claimed he or she “didn’t know” when only  
 24 miles from places of mass murder, and so to us, looking on and listening,  
 25 remembering what we might have forgotten as we go on looking.

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### 28 **Animation**

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The first meaning of *animation* is “the action of imparting life, vitality, or  
 (as the sign of life) motion; quickening, vitalizing,” and a further meaning  
 is “the production of ‘moving pictures’; the technique by means of which  
 movement is given, on film, to a series of drawings (esp. for an animated  
 cartoon).”<sup>11</sup> What are we watching when we watch an animated animation,  
 when we see graphic fiction actually moving or in this case a film that is  
 informed by the aesthetics and some of the reading practices and sensory  
 responses of sequential art?<sup>12</sup> This is also one of the few films that has  
 led to a graphic novel version of itself rather than being a filmic adaption  
 of a graphic novel. The images that we see are a very particular form of  
 movement, sound, and image. While broadly realistic the movements of

the characters are almost mechanical and slightly slowed down. An ordinary walk appears like both the stiffened gait of someone in some pain or the tense withholding of a bodily impulse or emotional outburst. In conversation the turn of the head and the puff of a joint are slowed by the simple strokes of movement. An eye moves back and forth inside its lid, a brow raises, fingers intermittently tap on the cheek, lips and eyelids open and close. Where in any verité film, any movement by a human being would involve hundreds of small tics and pulses, nongestural action, and hints of unseen vibration, in this form each movement and the spaces between each movement are seen. As Ross Gibson suggests, “The time between blinks is closely related to the duration of a single, sustaining thought. It is the tempo of a person’s composure.”<sup>13</sup> Here a new order of composure is created—one that is “close enough” to human but with a moment, perhaps a breath, of difference. In this way we have access to the surplus that is routinely under-regarded in “natural” viewing. Insisting we see this “excess” makes ordinary viewing strange and each scene of animation a contingent truth. Gibson continues: “By concentrating on the eyes and aspirations of the actors, the audience *feels* a direct relationship with the performer.”<sup>14</sup> In this kind of animation the audience still feels that direct connection with the figure but also with the processes of both performance and drawn production. Paul Ward suggests, “Animation is the perfect way in which to communicate that there is more to our collective experience of things than meets the eye.”<sup>15</sup> If the blink is the time of the comprehended thought, then the time of these animated blinks is that of the comprehended, performed, and experienced thought. It is not the usual affect produced through identification or through breathing in the human performance but a positional affect, critically, ethically aware of how our experience, as documentary experience, is being made.

This is not the experience of modernity or even film and modernity. If by way of Walter Benjamin and particularly Jodi Brooks’s reexamination of Benjamin through gesture and film we have the jerky figure of Charlie Chaplin who “by mimetically performing shock experience . . . grasps or harnesses its [modernity’s] force,”<sup>16</sup> then the animated figures refuse the position of putting the human before the apparatus of the camera. Here animation extends rather than breaks up the movement and sense of the figure, suggesting our integration and uncanny extension through the digital of high modernity rather than the shock of earlier forms.<sup>17</sup>

In a traditional graphic novel where the drawn figures are not being moved literally (although we clearly still understand them as having an

1 order of movement) we would see one of two panels of a man tapping his  
 2 fingers on his cheek, perhaps in an elongated panel, which would impress  
 3 on us the idea that he was thinking. In *Waltz with Bashir* the action of think-  
 4 ing is more like a “natural” human movement, fingers tap regularly, the  
 5 head looks up, the eyes rest in the middle distance and yet not quite. There  
 6 is not the space of the drawn version to see several panels at once and to  
 7 transform time while projecting more of ourselves into the spaces left by  
 8 the incomplete lines and partially filled-in eyes of the characters. But there  
 9 is a new space that emerges in the gap between these gestures and what we  
 10 know actors in film and our own selves would do.

11 One effect of this is to create a different order of relationship to the  
 12 film through the drawing in of timed space, a gap. These gaps appear visu-  
 13 ally as unfilled spaces bordered by drawn lines, and they appear rhythmically  
 14 as the unnatural gait of a human or the strange speed of a vehicle.  
 15 Everything is real yet everything is strange. Set within the extraordinary  
 16 realm of war the animation brings to life the experience of making the  
 17 strange familiar and the familiar strange, an experience that includes the  
 18 watcher, who is caught up and suspended in the sensorium of the cinema  
 19 seconds at a time.

20 Another effect is a re-enchantment with the idea of the human. By  
 21 showing us caricatures of the human not as distorted but as broken down  
 22 to simple moving lines, we see the human more closely, care more deeply  
 23 for what we could become. It has the slightly jerky but dreamlike aspects  
 24 of minimalist theater and the moving, potential vocabulary of the line.  
 25 That is, we see a form of ordinary action stripped back to the gestural and  
 26 the expressive possibilities of drawn forms in a state of potentiality—we  
 27 always know they could be more realistic, made more complex and dense  
 28 to look more like the visible human. We are therefore simultaneously mov-  
 29 ing backward to a stripped-down, contained version of movement and for-  
 30 ward as we sense the potential of the lines that are making these faces and  
 31 bodies. They could be real pictures of actors or they could become some-  
 32 thing other than human, but all we can mark is their potentiality. Our his-  
 33 tory of watching cartoon films is filled with sequences where fish talk and  
 34 mice rule and trees and houses have their liveliness revealed, but this film  
 35 very carefully keeps a tight rein on what we know graphic film can do. As if  
 36 to emphasize the persistent theatricality that is possible, the human char-  
 37 acters are introduced against backgrounds of great realism. These settings,  
 38 ranging from forests to cities, are almost photographic in their detail, while  
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the human figures remain more simply drawn, so we can read the images as both them and us and what we have been and might become.

Only in the dream sequences or the reoccurring unconfirmed memory of being in the water before the massacre and then again as the lead character moves toward the massacre's aftermath does the coloring render a sameness between the setting and the people. The effect then of the final death scene of real images is to stage an imagistic breakthrough that seems to reveal what was always happening, all around—and not just in Lebanon but within our world, which we organize and exist in through images on-screen that we enter and leave. We discover that Ari, who we are set up to follow and invest ourselves in, is revealed ultimately as the figure who—in seeking to reveal his single truth—blocked our processual and contingent truths. The truth in the end is when we are able to see beyond him, to look over him, to see the scene of death as we might all have once seen it in the newspaper and on the television but this time knowing we are looking. At that final point we see why he saw it and then did not, and now we ask ourselves why we too had forgotten.

This questioning comes about through the practiced restraint of the animated form. In this film animation is held back from its fantastical possibilities to mimic and exceed reality, so that when we are confronted by the final photos and “real” footage, their form as contained images breaks open and spills into our new experience of memory as process. This is a kind of animation that brings life to death. It vitalizes images of suffering in a way that lets them move again around the world as something that needs to be accounted for. This kind of animation asks whether these images, these seen deaths, can become Susan Sontag's “miracle of survival,” that is, images that evoke the unforgettable remainder of continuing Palestinian presence.<sup>18</sup> But in this instance, this animation asks whether these images can become an image of all the past and present potentiality of what each of the dead were and could have become other than one small part of an image of death, seen and forgotten.

### Dancing with Death

In a film rich with memories and marked moments of death avoided, there is the waltz of the film's title. In this scene Frenkel, an Israeli officer, is hemmed in, as is his entire patrol, on one side of a road under constant fire from snipers sitting somewhere in the big hotels across the way. Along with

1 the snipers there are people, “women, children, old people,” on their bal-  
 2 conies watching Frenkel and his group of Israeli soldiers caught at the side  
 3 of the road, unable to get across or retreat. As Ron Ben-Yishai notes, these  
 4 people are “watching as if they were at a movie” (*Waltz*, 84). At another  
 5 point in the film, Frenkel recalls that he knew he had to do something  
 6 “dramatic” to get across the intersection, but he first needs the gun that  
 7 he knows best, and so taking one from his friend he goes into the fired-on  
 8 street. There he begins to dance like a waltz—not running straight across  
 9 the road but dancing “as if he meant to stay there forever” (85). In the film  
 10 the waltz soundtrack begins as the event takes off, and we watch this dance  
 11 knowing he has survived, so this is not a dance of death but perhaps a dance  
 12 with death—a mad effort to bring order and rhythm to fear. It also seems  
 13 like a struggle to assert Frenkel’s (and his soldiers’) reality—we are not a  
 14 movie; we live, we die. This scene is an uncanny echo of the much more  
 15 deadly observation practiced by the Israeli Defense Forces in its organiza-  
 16 tion of the massacre. The IDF set up several command posts on high build-  
 17 ings (one of which is depicted in *Waltz with Bashir*) and lit up the skies with  
 18 a barrage of flares over the camps, enabling the killings to go on into the  
 19 night. Amnon Kapeliouk speaks of an Israeli officer who said “that watch-  
 20 ing from the roofs of one of the buildings occupied by the Israelis was like  
 21 watching “from the front row of a theatre.”<sup>19</sup> Watching—whether real, or  
 22 “like” a theater, or on a screen—is always a political activity and should  
 23 always be questioned.

### 24 25 **Love Song?**

26  
27 Or is this film like a very particular kind of love song? In the film the main  
 28 character Ari watches multiple televisions in a shop when he is on leave.  
 29 On some of those televisions is the president of Israel talking on and on,  
 30 and on one of the televisions is Public Image Ltd (Johnny Rotten’s group  
 31 after the Sex Pistols) singing, over and over, “This is not a love song,” in an  
 32 angry monotone.<sup>20</sup> Like the film in which it appears, this song both claims  
 33 its form and refuses it. We recognize that love exists but not in the saccha-  
 34 rine, irritatingly unforgettable form of commercial love songs. *Waltz with*  
 35 *Bashir* promises in its documentary form a truth about death and suffering,  
 36 but we come to learn that truth not through simple revelation but through  
 37 confrontation—confrontation with the documentary form, cinema experi-  
 38 ence, and ourselves as viewers through the final death scene.

39 There are not so many deaths that none matter. There should not

be deaths that we see and deaths that we remember. Those divisions can be undermined, slowly and through reimagining what and how memory works within a reimagined ethical frame that can include the seen and the scene and thus ourselves, who watch and produce. Animation enables this documentary to be unreal enough to make the reality of death true while preserving the space of what cannot be entirely known or shown—the death of others.

### Notes

This essay could not have been written without constant conversations about it. Thank you to Nicky Solomon and the movie gals for those conversations and to Anne Rutherford for her valuable readings and comments.

- 1 The Sabra and Shatila massacre occurred on September 16, 1982. The massacre was carried out by Christian Phalangist forces with the assistance of Israeli forces, and it is estimated that more than three thousand people were murdered. See Leila Shahid, “The Sabra and Shatila Massacres: Eye-Witness Reports,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32.1 (2002): 43.
- 2 Brian de Palma’s *Redacted* (2007) was also meant to end with a montage of real bodies, faces showing, but this produced a falling out with his backer and producer Mark Cuban and says much about the status of the photograph. “The film ends with a montage of still photographs (some taken by the Guardian’s Ghaith Abdul-Ahad) of war victims—the maimed and the dead. Cuban insisted that the faces be disguised to protect families or those still living. De Palma was outraged, saying that the photographs had already been seen in the press and were available on the internet, and that it would be impossible to obtain permission for usage. He called it an act of censorship. . . . Has he fallen out with Cuban? ‘I was very unhappy that my pictures got redacted,’ he says with a stony face. Didn’t Cuban offer him the opportunity to buy the film back from him, though? ‘That’s not true. He never offered me that opportunity, he never answered my phone calls.’ He gave up on the film? ‘Absolutely—he didn’t want to be associated with those photographs.’” Simon Hattenstone, “No One Wants to Know,” *Guardian*, March 8, 2008, [www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/mar/08/features.iraqandthemedial](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/mar/08/features.iraqandthemedial).
- 3 This is to offer quite a different perspective to Dave Saunders in *Documentary*, who suggests of the “real” footage at the end of *Waltz with Bashir* that “these images seem like an afterthought designed to wrench the viewer back into an empathetic engagement with mimetic reality; the power of photography’s indexical ‘death mask’ is rammed home in a sequence underlining, by contrast, animations distancing effect.” Saunders, *Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 184. I agree that there is a sharp confrontation between the forms, but I suggest that this serves to open up the restraint of this style of animation to its affective excess and shocks the supposed indexicality and subsequent knowingness of the photograph into a memorial to what cannot be represented.
- 4 Ari Folman and David Polonsky, *Waltz with Bashir: A Lebanon War Story* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 17, hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *Waltz*.

- 1     5    Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8.4 (1982): 777–95.
- 2     6    This awareness of the multiple relations between memory and confession were greatly  
3     helped by Susannah Radstone's insights in her book *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confes-*  
4     5    sion, *Nostalgia, Memory* (London: Routledge, 2007).
- 6     7    I would also like to thank Susan, Vuli, and Bheki for the first experience and Mridula  
7     for the second. Roland Barthes in his evocative essay "Leaving the Movie Theater"  
8     writes of letting oneself "be fascinated *twice over*, by the image and its surroundings—  
9     as if I had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, lost, into the  
10    engulfing mirror, and a perverse body, ready to fetishize not the image but precisely  
11    what exceeds it: the texture of the sound, the hall, the darkness, the obscure mass of the  
12    other bodies." Barthes, "Leaving the Movie Theater," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans.  
13    Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 76–83. I have only lightly touched on  
14    his sense of watching with others but carry that experience of cinema into this piece.
- 15    8    Bertolt Brecht quoted in Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks, *The Cambridge Companion*  
16    *to Brecht* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 191.
- 17    9    Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" (1949), in *Brecht on Theatre: The*  
18    *Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 65.
- 19    10   Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press,  
20    1981), 45.
- 21    11   *Oxford English Dictionary* (online), s.v. "animation," [www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/](http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/7785)  
22    Entry/7785 (accessed September 14, 2010).
- 23    12   *Sequential art* is Will Eisner's term for cartoons and comics and graphic art. Scott  
24    McLeod discusses terms to use for cartooning and cartoons. McLeod, *Understanding*  
25    *Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 1–9. Also see Will Eisner,  
26    *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (New  
27    York: Norton, 2008).
- 28    13   Ross Gibson, "Acting and Breathing," in *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Perfor-*  
29    *mance*, ed. Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros (Sydney: Power Publications, 1999), 40.  
30    Ibid.
- 31    14   Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 85.
- 32    15   Jodi Brooks, "Crisis and the Everyday: Some Thoughts on Gesture and Crisis in Cassa-  
33    vetes and Benjamin," in *Falling for You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*, ed. Lesley  
34    Stern and George Kouvaros (Sydney: Power Publications, 1999), 52.
- 35    16   These slowed-down actions and the sense of unreality, as well as the forgetting, are  
36    classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome, and I thank Malcolm Garnet for  
37    his careful diagnosis of Ari and conversations about this. While it is interesting to think  
38    of Ari through PTSS I am even more interested in the ways in which trauma has been  
39    revealed through film in both modern and postmodern forms—not just in characters  
40    but through the very style of documentary filmmaking.
- 41    17   Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Hamilton Press, 2003), 78.
- 42    18   As quoted in Shahid, "The Sabra and Shatila Massacres," 43.
- 43    19   Public Image Ltd, "This Is Not a Love Song," single, 1983.