

**Visualising the gap between official war
narratives and lived civilian experience through
3D animation**

Brief Outline of the Research Objective

This research looks at how stylised 3D animation can show the gap between official stories about war and the real experiences of civilians.

The study explores whether 3D animation can work as a critical tool for revealing the abstraction, euphemistic language, and emotional detachment often found in representations of war. It engages with writing on media framing, distant suffering, propaganda, and animated documentary to consider how war is shown, hidden, made morally understandable, or kept at a distance in visual culture. Existing research suggests that media do more than simply report conflict; they also shape how it is understood by the public. In a similar way, animation has not only been used for entertainment, but has also served political and ideological purposes. This research will inform a practice-based project that uses visual storytelling to question the relationship between official narratives and the realities of civilian experience.

Draft Literature Review

A good place to begin is the idea that media do not only report war, but also shape how people understand it. In *Discourse, Media, and Conflict*, the authors explain that media language helps build political and cultural ideas about conflict, rather than simply giving neutral facts. The book shows that war coverage is shaped by framing, selection, and emphasis, and that this influences how audiences see conflict (Chiluwa et al., 2022).

Ahmed Sahlane's chapter, "*Covering the War on Iraq*," is particularly relevant because it looks at framing and visual rhetoric in media coverage of the Iraq War. Sahlane argues that reporting shapes how people see war through careful choices in images and language. These choices affect both how conflict is understood and how audiences respond to it emotionally (Sahlane, 2022).

This issue can be explored further through writing on distant suffering. Chouliaraki argues that media representations of suffering do more than pass on information; they also shape the moral relationship between spectators and the pain of others. In "*The Mediation of Suffering and the Vision of a Cosmopolitan Public*," she outlines a way of understanding how news narratives organise ethical attention and compassion. In "*Mediatized war and the moralizing function of news about distant suffering*," she goes on to suggest that wartime news positions audiences morally by presenting some distant deaths as more grievable than others (Chouliaraki, 2008).

A further ethical dimension comes through in Stephen J. A. Ward's discussion of "media harm." Ward argues that the power of news media can be misused, and that irresponsible reporting can lead to misinformation, harmful judgement, and wider social consequences (Ward, 2020). Although he is not writing specifically about animation, his ideas are still relevant because they treat representation as an ethical act rather than a neutral one. For this study, that opens up an important question: if public language about war can create distance or even cause harm, could animation

offer a critical way of exposing the gap between official discourse and lived experience rather than repeating it?

To link this to animation studies, Gerard C. Raiti's article "*The Disappearance of Disney Animated Propaganda: A Globalization Perspective*" is helpful because it shows that animation has never been just entertainment. Raiti looks at Disney propaganda in the 1940s and explains how it was tied to nationalism and political messaging. This shows that animation has long been used to communicate ideas and influence the way people think (Raiti, 2007).

At the same time, animation is not only a tool of ideology, but also a medium that can deal with conflict, memory, and personal experience in its own way. Joseph A. Kraemer's discussion of *Waltz with Bashir* is useful here because it shows that animated documentary can represent trauma in a different way from live-action film. He does not say that animation automatically makes suffering feel more real. Instead, he shows that animation is a constructed form that can both represent trauma and shape the way it is understood. This is important for this study because it suggests that animation can express experiences that may be difficult to show through live-action realism, while still involving ethical and political questions (Kraemer, 2015).

Taken together, these sources suggest that this research topic is both workable and critically relevant. Media and discourse studies show that war is not communicated neutrally, but shaped through rhetoric, visibility, and moral positioning (Sahlane, 2022; Chouliaraki, 2008). At the same time, animation studies show that animation can operate politically, historically, and emotionally, whether as propaganda or as a medium for representing trauma and memory (Raiti, 2007; Kraemer, 2015). The gap this project aims to address is the limited attention given to how stylised 3D animation might be used to challenge sanitised war discourse by placing official media language alongside the lived experience of civilians.

This review therefore supports the proposal by setting out a conceptual framework for the project. The practical outcome will not try to explain war as a whole, but will instead explore how visual storytelling in 3D animation can make the tension between public narratives and human consequences more visible. In this sense, the literature points towards a practice-based methodology in which visual metaphor, cinematic contrast, and environmental storytelling are not just aesthetic decisions, but critical tools. The project therefore asks how stylised 3D animation can expose the gap between sanitised public narratives of war and the embodied realities of civilian suffering.

Bibliography

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