

IN STILL TIME

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ABSTRACT

In *Still Time* is an experimental animation that investigates the catastrophic image and spectacle through direct animation of still images onto 16mm film. The film uses still images found on the internet from the current Syrian civil war; these were laser printed directly onto the film, simultaneously abstracting these images and re-animating them. These images are juxtaposed with audio from news sources, interviews and YouTube videos posted by Syrian civilians, activists and journalists on the ground of different events that have taken place during the crisis. Through clues of shape, line, colour, and sound these abstracted images of catastrophe attempt to facilitate questions about the moral imperative to look, our ability or inability to bear witness to unthinkable human suffering and our complicity in the violence documented in the image. What are the limits of the catastrophic image? How can trauma and the unthinkable ever be properly represented? How do we give meaning to an event that stops and disrupts time?

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Evolution of the Project

My thesis project began as an experimental supercut found footage film using Apocalyptic and post-Apocalyptic feature-length cinema as its source, with the intent of addressing violence and the media by creating montages out of common visual themes. However, my thesis project underwent several changes as my research into Apocalyptic Hollywood narratives needed focus and specificity. My thesis took another iteration with a satirical found footage film called *Rearing Our Future: How to Survive the Apocalypse*. This stage came to fruition after taking a break from collecting Hollywood representations of the Apocalypse and looking at historical American educational films that dealt with the Cold War and nuclear threat. I was inspired to create an Apocalyptic narrative in the form of an educational film that dealt with survivalism in our contemporary time with dry humour, that addressed real and perceived threats to our way of life. However, during the process of experimentation and reworking, this film project failed to express my deep-seated anxiety about crisis, violence, and our present catastrophic time. It was after the process of working on draft 2 of *Rearing Our Future: How to Survive the Apocalypse* that I realized I had to look at real catastrophe developing during our present

moment instead of fictional representations of catastrophe, since Apocalyptic cinema is easily mobilized, as fantasy, as mission, as diversion during times of crisis.

An explanation for the Apocalyptic narrative's come-back in popular cinema is that Apocalyptic films allow us to reflect on the harsh realities of our present moment, on conditions that are difficult to confront head-on.

Additionally Apocalyptic cinema feeds into our collective desire for a rational “end”, a cleansing that will allow us to return to a perceived peaceful utopia of the past. However, this reflection and critique is limited by spectacle and fatalism, as we distract ourselves from disaster by watching it as entertainment on a lit screen in a darkened cinema. The act of watching such cinema is in-and-of itself a privilege for those not affected by crisis.

From this point I directed my focus from the apocalyptic image to the catastrophic image, a turn from cultural fantasy to the material reality of trauma and suffering. It was the image of the lifeless body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi washed ashore on a Turkish beach that facilitated this turn. This image published on September 2, 2015 by The Guardian sparked global outcry about the Syrian refugee crisis and lack of appropriate response from the EU to

handle the surge of refugees fleeing war, and rightfully so. However, since the Syrian refugee crisis started in July 2011, what was it about this photo that specifically aroused global condemnation 4 years into the crisis? What made this image of a child refugee who lost his life at sea speak to the collective consciousness than say, images of children in Syria who fell victim to chemical attacks or gunfire or barrel bombs? Carolyn J. Dean discusses in her essay *Photographs of Catastrophe and the Representation of Vulnerable Humanity*; how Hannah Arendt famously noted that through the Jewish refugee crisis it was revealed that human dignity was not accessible to the refugee. A refugee is an invisible subject, lacking political representation as a citizen (Dean 2015, 75). The status of the refugee as stateless exposes that, contrary to our beliefs and utopic desires, human rights have always been implicated in citizen rights. Dean discusses philosopher Giorgio Agamben's writing on Auschwitz, and that the ability to bear witness happens only after dehumanization is achieved, only once it no longer makes sense to speak of dignity (Dean 2015, 76). The dead refugee is a symbol of a wasted life that our collective consciousness can bear witness to, and empathize with as it exposes the shared dream of renewal and the fantasy of an apocalyptic rebirth cut short.

In Still Time looks at real images of the current crisis in Syria, to focus the gaze from popular Apocalyptic fantasy to catastrophe in our present time. A study published by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in the United States of America¹ argues that a severe drought from 2006 to 2009 in Syria caused widespread social unrest in the farming and herding communities, who left their farms en masse to urban areas. As many as 1.5 million people migrated from rural to urban areas. Syria had to import wheat into the country for the first time in 2009, and food prices drastically rose in the cities. The authors of the study acknowledge that many factors led to Syria's uprising, including corrupt leadership, inequality, massive population growth, and the government's inability to curb human suffering. This in turn added to social stresses that eventually resulted in the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad in March 2011. The use of deadly force by Assad against peaceful protesters in 2011 led to an armed rebellion against government repression that has since grown in staggering complexity and deadly violence with the involvement of foreign armies. With nearly a dozen foreign countries now

¹ Physical Sciences - Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences - Social Sciences - Environmental Sciences: Colin P. Kelley, Shahrzad Mohtadi, Mark A. Cane, Richard Seager, and Yochanan Kushnir. *Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought*. PNAS 2015 112 (11) 3241-3246; published ahead of print March 2, 2015, doi:10.1073/pnas.1421533112

involved, the Syrian Civil war is being characterized as a proto-World war with various proxy wars being fought simultaneously. Close to 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced internally, while close to 5 million have fled as refugees.²

In Still Time uses a material, direct animation approach by reprinting news images of the Syrian civil war, refugee and drought crisis between 2009 to the present onto 16mm clear leader in an effort to re-animate these images into consciousness. The current refugee crisis is now the world's biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War. By the end of July 2015, 62% of those who had reached Europe by boat were from Syria, Eritrea and Afghanistan, fleeing war, dictatorial oppression and religious extremism, according to figures compiled by the UN.³ *In Still Time* explores the catastrophic image by use of abstraction and juxtaposition, to facilitate questions about catastrophic time, the moral imperative to look, our ability or inability to bear witness of unthinkable human suffering and complicity in the violence pictured.

²Syria's refugee crisis in numbers: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>

³ UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

Context - Apocalyptic Narratives

Apocalyptic narratives have resurged significantly in the twenty-first century, following a period when their themes of human redemption, moral unveiling and rebirth were felt to be exhausted. In her book *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, Teresa Heffernan suggests that the return of both religious and secular End Times narratives in literature, film and popular culture foregrounds our desire for a cleansing rebirth to rationalize humanity's current discord (2008, 131). Millennial hope and Apocalypticism "claims that a supernatural or exceedingly powerful force, like nuclear disaster, for example will bring world destruction, but an elect number will be granted a new, transformed earth" (Quinby 1999, 4). Apocalyptic writing itself is a remainder, a symptom, an aftermath of some disorienting catastrophe. An unthinkable disaster occurs, and yet the world persists. The world after the world, the post-apocalypse. A world, in Zizek's phrase, "between two deaths" (Berger 1999, 42), a place that is both following and preceding an apocalypse, is the realm of the living dead.

Post-apocalyptic representations are simultaneously responses to historical catastrophes and a symptom of the trauma that happen as a result. The traces, symptoms and signs left in the wake of catastrophe are used to

reconstruct trauma, reading back in time in an attempt to work through them. However, denial of trauma persists. The repetitions, and denials of socio-historic traumas — sexual, racial, economic antagonisms — and dominant discourse that tell survivors “to get over it” can be read as symptomatic responses to traumatic history. The damaged, post-apocalyptic world is sustained by powerful institutions that benefit from the world as it is, disavowing trauma and appealing to a fantasy of an ideal society without divisions, a nation of harmony, an imaginary utopia.

Apocalyptic representations in literature, film, television range from perpetuating a fatalistic apocalyptic vision based on Biblical references, to works that provide a different way of looking back at history, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Dealing with slavery archives that have been destroyed, Morrison’s narrative parses the cultural symptoms of trauma and allows “its ghosts to speak” (Berger 1999, 217). For those who have suffered catastrophe already through war, genocide, environmental disaster, and neo-colonialism, the Apocalypse has already come. *In Still Time* takes its cues from Morrison’s Apocalyptic narrative, in that it is an art-object that allows us to pause, look back in time and attempt to work through a specific catastrophe.

Thesis Film - In Still Time

By combining an experimental and process filmmaking methodology with direct animation, *In Still Time* is an experimental animation that focuses on the current Syrian crisis as a prescient catastrophic event, and its unique circumstance as a conflict sparked by climate change. By materially working with these images up close, my intention was to use abstraction as an alternative entry point to understanding catastrophic time and how we consume catastrophic images.

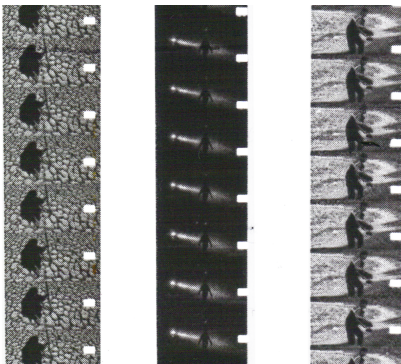
In Still Time re-animates and magnifies images of the Syrian crisis through the film's projection. Today's news stories come into the public consciousness as quickly as they are eclipsed by the next catastrophe. With this film, I am literally taking a closer look at these images before they fade into the background, and investigating how the catastrophic image is consumed. While an inevitable abstraction of the images takes place during the animation process, the material process of the image transfer allows me to take these images into my own hand, look and reflect on this crisis in a material way that Apocalyptic cinema could not through artistic catharsis. While I'm clearly in a privileged position to be making such a film, the end result is a film that is a

personal and lyrical document of how at this moment I can extract and attempt to find meaning in catastrophe and investigate the limits of representation and human empathy.

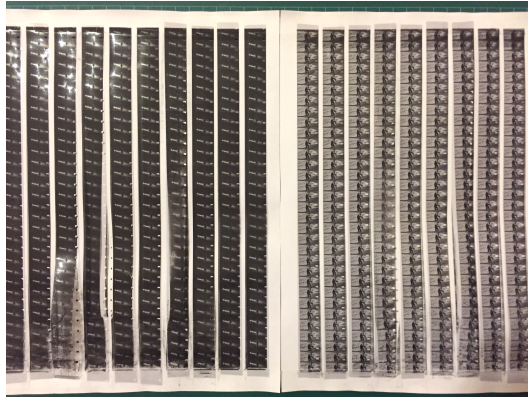
In Still Time is structured by a linear timeline of events, from the 2006 evolution of the Syrian drought, the Arab Spring uprisings in Syria, the civil war and the enduring refugee crisis. Select images from the news and stills from YouTube videos were printed, and reprinted onto clear 16mm film. Using a laser printer, strips of 16mm film affixed to a sheet of paper that were fed into a desktop printer to produce the animated image. Audio from various news broadcasts, interviews and YouTube videos uploaded by Syrian civilians, activists and journalists were paired with the printed images. The combination of abstracted catastrophic images with audio from the conflict is an attempt to create space in which a meditation on the catastrophic image can occur.

Process - Direct Animation, Collage Film and Found Footage

I used direct animation and collage / found footage filmmaking methods for this film. Using the news media and YouTube as an archive for imagery pertaining to the Syrian crisis, I chose images that spoke to me as well as those foregrounded in the public domain. I measured the area on the 16mm film strip that constitutes one frame within the 24 frames needed to create 1 second of footage. I scaled each image I chose down to 0.625" w X 0.313" h in Photoshop. I then created templates of the scaled still images in InDesign, exported the template to print directly onto the filmstrips. 10 strips of film that had approximately 24 -30 frames each were affixed to 8.5"x11" sized paper that were fed into the printer to create approximately 10 seconds of footage. Each strip was then cut and spliced together. I printed on approximately 250 feet of 16mm, and made over 800 splices to piece the film together.



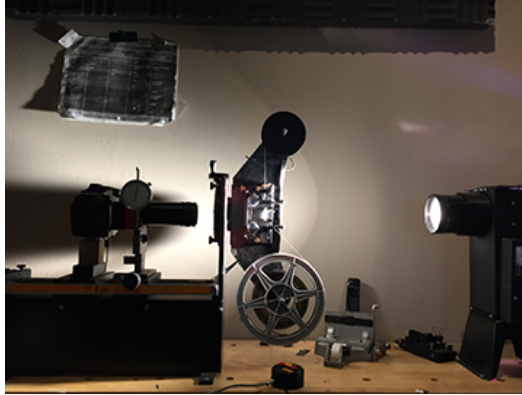
Scan of film strips



Film strips affixed to 8.5x11 paper

The pieced together strips were then frame-by-frame digitally scanned using a JK Optical Printer, with a Canon 7D in place of a traditional 16mm Bolex to capture and digitize each frame of the projected image. During this process I also captured blank coloured frames that are used as transition points in the film. I inserted coloured Kodak filters in the gate of the optical printer, and captured 24 frames for each colour to produce 1 second of footage.

Aesthetically I liked how the changes in light from the projector were captured by the Canon 7D, giving the blank coloured image a trembling effect. The full jpeg sequence of the laser-printed still images on 16mm and the blank coloured frames were then brought into After Effects to create the amalgamated video file that was edited with the sound design.



Modified JK Optical Printer with Canon 7D

Collage is an art form in which an assemblage of disparate parts (objects, images, etc.) that together form a new work. Often the power of the work lies in the juxtaposition of the various elements of the collage. Collage film is a continuation of this process. The elements used in collage film include found footage, animation, still imagery, news broadcasts, and popular culture. Like most appropriated art, collage film is often intended first to reveal and then to subvert the audience's preexisting associations with the appropriated film image.

In Peter Lang's *Dictionary of Film Terms: The Aesthetic Companion to Film Art* (2006), Collage Film is defined as:

A film whose images are created through the overlay of assorted materials (as in an artistic collage) and photographed with the intention of achieving both visual and rhythmic effect. Experimental filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek frequently produced collage films, for example *Breathdeath* (1964), a film that employed pictures of famous people,

cutouts of objects, newspaper headlines, and other material phenomena for an animated protest against war. Godfrey Reggio's *Powaqqatsi* (1988) is a feature-length collage film that brings together visual images of Third World societies and prevailing labor conditions.

In Still Time uses collage in the sense that it takes still imagery from the internet, processes them through direct animation to provide an alternative way of looking at them. The use of these images taps into the audience's preexisting associations with the appropriated imagery of the Syrian war and crisis.

In *Archive Effect: Found Footage and the Audiovisual Experience of History* (2013), Jamie Baron investigates the issues and problems of representation that are characteristic in the appropriation of archival film and video footage and examines how the "archive effect" is used to create alternative histories and readings of it. Baron is also a curator for the Festival of (In)appropriation, which is a yearly showcase of contemporary, short (20 minutes or less), audiovisual works that appropriate existing film, video, or other media and repurpose it in "inappropriate" and inventive ways. The Festival of (In)appropriation's website states:

Whether you call it collage, compilation, found footage, détournement, or recycled cinema, the incorporation of already existing media into new artworks is a practice that generates novel juxtapositions and new meanings and ideas, often in ways entirely unrelated to the intentions of the original makers. Such new works are, in other words,

“inappropriate.” This act of (in)appropriation may even produce revelations about the relationship between past and present, here and there, intention and subversion, artist and critic, not to mention the "producer" and "consumer" of visual culture itself.⁴

For my thesis film, I collected and gathered images to create my own archive to cull from. Rather than bombard the viewer with an overload of images as a super-cut film would, I wanted to do the opposite and chose a smaller selection of images and use repetition to allow the viewer to meditate on the images being presented rather than shock. The use of direct animation allowed me to approach these images with my own hands, bringing them outside of the digital realm as a material response to and critique of the voyeurism I felt looking at images of catastrophe.

Information in the digital photos was lost in the direct animation process of scaling down the images, laser printing the images onto film, and projecting them back into a digital camera. The loss of information made the images abstract versions of their former selves, while still containing traces of shapes and ghosts of recognizable figures. In a way the abstraction allows for an alternative space in which to engage with the catastrophic image that goes beyond the initial shock and horror of what is inconceivable. As catastrophic

⁴ <http://festivalofinappropriation.org/>

events rupture the sense of history and time, the trembling, wavering animated still images in the film connect to this rupture and material destruction.

The title *In Still Time* references the process in which the film gives the still image cinematic time, and references the way in which catastrophe disrupts linear time. The obliteration of normalcy and every day life that comes with catastrophic events stops time, as each second the crisis endures is a moment too long. At moments in the film, the images and movements stop to show a block of colour before the next set of images. This pause with no image stops cinematic time as a moment for reflection and rest. Due to the loss of information and abstraction of the images in the process of direct laser printed animation, the sound design is an important source of information in shaping what we see and remember.

Process – Sound Design

The sound design for *In Still Time* uses relevant sound clips from the Syrian crisis and music from *Gravitational Pull vs. the Desire for an Aquatic Life* (1996) by Stars of the Lid. The sound clips for the film were collected from various news broadcasts, and YouTube videos uploaded by Syrian civilians, activists and journalists on the ground documenting events during the crisis. The first sound clip is from a Youtube video documenting a funeral of a martyr, in the Khalidiya district just north of the center of Homs, in which a man sings to a crowd of thousands. This clip is mixed with audio from another funeral, with thousands in attendance chanting “We will bring you down Bashar!” The image of a female Syrian farmer on her arid farmland is paired with an audio clip taken from an interview with Razan Zaitouneh, a lawyer and human rights activist in Damascus, Syria and audio from a 2009 Al Jazeera broadcast about the Syrian drought. At the time of the interview, Syria had endured a 3 year long drought that would only worsen and continue up until the Arab Spring in 2011. Studies now suggest climate change played a significant role in the social unrest that led up to the Arab Spring in Syria. The end of the drought sequence

finishes with an audio clip interview with Fouad Ajami, the late professor and writer, who speaks about the uprising in Syria.

Audio for the following sequence was taken from a Democracy Now! episode from December 29, 2011 titled *Syrian Activist Speaks Out from Hiding as Arab League Mission Fails to Slow Deadly Crackdown* in which Democracy Now! journalist Juan Gonzalez's voice places us 9 months after the Syrian Arab Spring, talking with Karam Nachar, a Syrian cyber-activist, and Bassel, a Syrian activist and filmmaker in Damascus, who for security reasons could only use his first name. They discuss the current tensions between the Syrian army and the rebellion, the daily killings, and the importance of social media and video during the political crisis. I chose a clip of Bassel speaking, almost in a whisper about how a camera is akin to a weapon.

The film transitions to an image of a mural of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad that is riddled with bullets. The audio paired with this imagery is Bashar al-Assad's interview for ABC News with Barbara Walters, in which he denies the violent crackdown and killing of protesters and civilians who were actively killed by his army. Following this is audio from a 2013 interview published on YouTube by Human Rights Watch with Peter Boukaert, Emergencies Director

for Human Rights Watch in Geneva, that is paired with two stills taken from a YouTube clip published by a Syrian civilian of a child suffering the effects of a chemical attack who is being treated, and a still of children who lost their lives from the attack. Boukaert discusses how the evidence from images after the attack on Ghouta in Eastern Syria strongly suggests that Syrian government forces were responsible for chemical weapons attacks on two Damascus suburbs on August 21, 2013. These attacks, which killed hundreds of civilians, including many children, appeared to use a weapons-grade nerve agent, most likely Sarin. Bashar al-Assad denies using chemical attacks on his people, but this assertion is doubted by most credible sources in the international community.

Audio from another interview with Razan Zaitouneh is paired with images of buildings and housing destroyed during the Syrian Civil War. In the audio clip used, Razan speaks of her frustration about the risks civilians, journalists and activists have taken to document with video and photography the atrocities they are facing to show the international community what is happening in Syria, only to receive a disproportional apathetic response from this community. This audio speaks of the simultaneous power and

powerlessness images of catastrophe evoke. The image of a Syrian White Helmet⁵ carrying a child to safety is paired with an interview with Dr. Farouq Habib, the spokesperson for The White Helmets during a meeting in October 2015 in Ireland to discuss with members of Ireland's parliament the impact of the conflict in Syria. In this clip Dr. Habib discusses the futility in working with Western countries that wish to work and transition with Bashar al-Assad still in power. The sequence ends with an interview with one of the Syrian White Helmet volunteer about his experience on the ground, mixed with an interview with Dr. Majed, a doctor speaking with The Syria Campaign⁶ and an interview with a Syrian refugee named Majd at a refugee camp in Calais, France discussing his journey.

The final sequence pairs audio of the current Syrian refugee crisis with still images of refugees at sea, making the perilous journey to escape the war. The first clip in this sequence is from an interview with a Syrian refugee about the having no other option but to cross the Mediterranean sea to seek asylum in

⁵ The White Helmets are a group of approximately 3,000 Syrian volunteer rescue workers who self-formed in the early part of 2013 to respond to bomb attacks against civilian communities by the Assad regime. They operate from 110 different locations across Syria, and have saved more than 24,000 people.

⁶ The Syria Campaign is an independent advocacy group campaigning for a peaceful and democratic future for Syria.

Europe, with underlying audio from an Al Jazeera English broadcast from September 9, 2012 titled “*Inside Syria - How serious is the Syrian refugee crisis?*” The infamous still images of a Turkish paramilitary police officer carrying 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, and the still image of the boy’s solitary body washed ashore on a Turkish beach is paired with an interview with Sarab Al-Jijakli, a Syrian-American community organizer and advocate based in New York who in this clip discusses the plight of Syrian refugees, and the image of Aylan Kurdi which made global headlines and brought the crisis into popular consciousness after he drowned in the Mediterranean Sea.

The sound design for *In Still Time* plays an important role in relation to the abstracted animated images of the Syrian conflict in the film, as it provides the viewer an indexical grounding from which to focus the image and discern what they are seeing on screen. The characteristics of found footage editing are crucial devices I employ to activate the viewer’s pre-existing associations with the images and sound to promote active engagement and meaning creation.

Related Films and Artisanal Practices

In Still Time uses found footage, experimental animation and experimental filmmaking methodologies. Works that I researched for my thesis film that informed my approach are *Tribulation 99: Alien Anomalies Under America* (USA, 1991) by Craig Baldwin, *Places With Meaning* (CANADA, 2012) by Scott Fitzpatrick, and *Print Generation* (USA, 1974) by J.J. Murphy.

Tribulation 99: Alien Anomalies Under America (USA, 1991) by Craig Baldwin is a feature length 16mm found footage film that is a parody of CIA interventions in developing countries as well as a critique of paranoia and conspiracy theories, presented as a pseudo-documentary that tells the revisionist history of alien intervention in Latin America in 99 brief ramblings.

The film's synopsis states:

Upon its release in 1991, *Tribulation 99* became an instant counter-culture classic. Craig Baldwin's "pseudo-pseudo-documentary" presents a factual chronicle of US intervention in Latin America in the form of the ultimate far-right conspiracy theory, combining covert action, environmental catastrophe, space aliens, cattle mutilations, killer bees, religious prophecy, doomsday diatribes, and just about every other crackpot theory broadcast through the dentures of the modern paranoid. A delirious vortex of hard truths, deadpan irony, and archival mash-ups—industrials, graphs, cartoons, movies from Hollywood B to

Mexican Z Tribulation 99 constructs a truly perverse vision of American imperialism.⁷

By stitching together material from stock footage, B-movies, the news, educational films, commercials, and other archival material, Baldwin is able to frame the footage anew and create new meaning through the cut and collage. The film is also an interrogation of history, which Mike Zryd argues "...analyzes the historical discourses and political forces that motivate historical events. A committed leftist satire directed at American foreign policy and media culture, Tribulation 99 shows how found footage collage, through metaphor and irony, can offer highly condensed metahistorical analysis and complex political critique" (Zryd 2003, 42).

The way in which found footage films use metaphor, ambiguity and memory to investigate images informed the structure of *In Still Time*. Using still images found from the internet of the Syrian conflict from news media and stills of YouTube videos, my intent is to tap into existing associations the viewer has with the catastrophic image and create a space for the meditation on their meaning with the use of memory and abstraction. Through the edit, it articulates different elements into a new form together as one cinematic object.

⁷ <http://www.othercinemadvd.com/trib.html>

The direct animation method of laser printing onto 16mm film strips used by Winnipeg filmmaker Scott Fitzpatrick to create *Places With Meaning* (CANADA, 2012) was a technique I used to transfer the digital still photography from the internet onto film. *Places With Meaning* is a fast-paced animation in which the Truetype dingbats font, Webdings, the sequel to the font Windings, created by Microsoft in 1997 takes centre stage. Images of the font, enlarged by the process of printing onto film, quickly dance by as a colourful printed layered backdrop changes tone to the music, which was created from the printing of the font onto the optical track of the film. I used the technique of printing directly onto 16mm film with a laser desktop printer. Fitzpatrick used an industrial laser printer, at a Staples Copy Centre to create *Places With Meaning*, whose dot per inch (DPI)⁸ is substantially higher than a desktop printer. Since I wanted the images in *In Still Time* to be more abstract and deteriorated to reflect catastrophe, I chose to use a desktop printer with a lower DPI number.

Print Generation (USA, 1974) by J.J. Murphy is a feature length structuralist experimental film that is a meditation on light, chemistry, and the

⁸ Dots per inch (DPI, or dpi) is a measure of spatial printing or video dot density, in particular the number of individual dots that can be placed in a line within the span of 1 inch (2.54 cm).

properties of photographic emulsion. Beginning with points of red light, the film takes a single minute of film and reprints in over and over, moving through several levels of abstraction, then returning to representation, and back again to abstraction. *Print Generation* is an exploration of film and memory that pushes the limits of film's materiality. *Print Generation* "...harnesses image and sound deterioration to elegantly address the intricacies of perception, memory and time: how we remember, what we remember and how the fleeting nature of memory itself reveals and recedes."⁹

Conceptually, the ideas in *Print Generation* about deterioration, abstraction and representation informed how I wanted to interrogate the catastrophic image through repetition, abstraction, deterioration and perception. Through initial experimentation, I knew information in the photographic image would be lost through the process of direct animation. The digital image was saved, then scaled down and printed onto film with a desktop printer, then projected back into a digital camera on a modified JK Optical Printer. The level of abstraction generated creates a space in which to engage with the image in a different way one would engage with an unmediated

⁹ From the description of *Print Generation*'s presentation at Arts Emerson: https://artsemerson.org/Online/default.asp?BOParam::WScontent::loadArticle::permalink=film_print_generation

catastrophic image. There is a rupture in perspective. While still retaining some representational cues, paired with related sound, *In Still Time* looks at the ways in which a lossy image, or a “poor image” with all its artifacts can in some ways create “...disruptive movements of thought and affect” (Steyerl 2012, 43).

The Animated Image and Documentary

In *Persuasive Animation* (2013), scholars investigate animation in contemporary moving image culture, from classic experimental and independent shorts to digital animation and installation, and documentary. In the book, Nea Ehrlich discusses the advantages of using animation as documentary language in contemporary culture. The originality and unusual imagery that can be created with animation can increase the documentary form's popularity. There is an increased agency for the animator in its efficacy to communicate cross-culturally as a global visual language. The animated image offers seemingly limitless possibilities in representation and disarms the appealing mode of realism (Ehrlich 2013, 251).

In Still Time can be read as an experimental animated documentary, that differs from an animated documentary like *Waltz with Bashir* (Israel, 2008) by Ari Folman in form. However, both similarly investigate ways in which the animated image can generate a new process in viewer engagement, or a "truth process," which Ehrlich suggests is a space in which an ethical encounter is facilitated between the spectator and the other (Bucan 2013, 252). While *In Still Time* directly references the photographic image, the images created in *Waltz*

with Bashir were created from scratch using a combination of Adobe Flash cutouts and classic animation. However, both films use sound as a documentary grounding tool that taps into the truth value of the animated image. Both films rely on the viewer's inter-textual knowledge, or the "extended index" (Bucan 2013, 254) of the specific wars that are the main focus of each film.

In the essay, "*Documentary uncertainty*" (2007), Hito Steyerl discusses the limitations of documentary within our contemporary time. Rather than disavow contemporary documentary due to the philosophical problems around objectivity, representation and consistency documentary constantly poses, Steyerl suggests that this is precisely what makes it valuable, in that it articulates contemporary tensions and anxieties marked by our present historical moment (Steyerl 2007). She introduces the essay with an anecdote about a CNN broadcast during the early days of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, in which a journalist uses a cellphone camera to directly broadcast images taken out of the window of a moving armoured vehicle in Iraq. The images broadcast were abstracted, low resolution representations of the Iraq landscape. From here Steyerl suggests how the closer to reality we get, the less intelligible reality becomes.

And that step back, towards critical distance and objectivity, was, under these circumstances, always already ideological illusion? In once sense, this is probably true. And paradoxically, one can thus say that there is no more truth and certainly not within documentarism. But let us reverse the perspective: what if the contrary is the case and it precisely those blurred and unfocussed pictures from the cell-phone camera that express truth of the situation much better than any objectivist report could? Because these pictures do not really represent anything. They are just too unfocussed. They are as post-representational as the majority of contemporary politics. But amazingly, we can still speak of truth with regard to them (Steyerl 2007).

Through abstraction, poor images articulate uncertainties about truth, and speak to our anxieties living in catastrophic time and the limits of representation. *In Still Time* similarly articulates the “abstract documentarism” of the CNN anecdote discussed by Steyerl. The images in *In Still Time* articulate uncertainties about what we see as true or real, and the doubt created in the simulation of witnessing a catastrophic event.

Conclusion

By way of process cinema, and exploring found footage, collage, and direct animation methods, I was able to find a path to the finished work that is *In Still Time*, which began as a different project. Process cinema methodology allowed me to navigate the archive of Apocalyptic Hollywood cinema and the archive of images of real catastrophe, and develop a relationship with the images. However, popular Apocalyptic cinema did not speak to me as powerfully as images of the current crisis in Syria did, which prompted me choose the direction of working with the catastrophic image as a way in which to understand this specific and unique moment in historical time in which climate change, inequality, State unpreparedness and other factors brought upon a civil war of enormous complexity and a refugee crisis whose severity has not been seen since the Second World War.

The process of direct animation onto film provided a connective channel to the images, and a way in which I could work through the voyeurism and powerlessness evoked in looking at images of catastrophe. Since the film uses photography as its source, it carries the same problematics as documentary and documentary representation - the question of truth. The use of direct animation

as an alternative documentary form provides an alternative ethical space for engagement between the spectator and the documented 'other' (Ehrlich 2013, 252). *In Still Time* is a meditation on the Syrian civil war that facilitates questions about the catastrophic image, catastrophic time, bearing witness and the limits of representation.

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