Image Semantics in Non-Fiction Animation from a Semiotic Perspective: Waltz with Bashir and Trauma Literature

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Abstract: When it comes to non-fiction animation, its most typical form of representation is the animated documentary. Waltz with Bashir is the first animated documentary that recreates the 1982 massacre in a Palestinian refugee camp. This paper will use semiotic theory as the basis of research to study the meaning conveyed by the 'special language' of video to explore the meaning and profound connotation of animation in the field of documentary film. From this, it will deduce the impact of the semantics of video in animated documentary film on the audience and on the related field as well as look into the future trends and exploration of animated documentary film. It also explores the future development trends and blue ocean of animated documentaries.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Subject

In the era of new media, there are various forms of video recording, through which anyone can record and transmit image anytime and anywhere. As a result, the threshold of documentaries becomes lower, professional and amateur interests are mixed together, and the photographic level turns out to be uneven. In the meantime, the shooting content of documentary is single, in order to save the image-making time, a series of problems like focusing on forms over content and invariable style of creation are gradually emerging. [1]However, the audience's aesthetic demand is gradually improving as well, thus, how to break through the dilemma of documentaries? Perhaps Animated Documentary is one of the answers.

The so-called 'non-fiction', that is, objective truth. When the concept of 'non-fiction' is applied to creative writing, it becomes a kind of constraint on the author, requiring him not to use his imagination at will. [2]As mentioned in the article *Non-fiction*, 'non-fiction' and 'fiction' contradict each other, but are not necessarily opposed to each other. 'Non-fiction' relies on objective reality, but does not exclude the subjective initiative of the creator. 'Non-fiction' is a method of creation that requires a minimum of verification as something other than pure imagination.

However, when it comes to non-fiction animation, its most typical representative form is the animated documentary. In fact, animated documentary is a formal innovation evolved from traditional documentary, which does not conflict with the concept and scope of documentary itself. A group of scholars, represented by Chi Wang , believe that the function of animation can be used to express both fiction and reality, [3]and can often achieve a presentation effect that cannot be achieved by actual filming. The images presented in animation are not constrained by traditional filming conditions . They can be more symbolic in their imagery , rich in color and elements to create different moods and atmospheres. When animation adheres to the principle of 'authenticity', its artistry as a form of artistic expression also makes it suitable for transformation into a documentary.

1.2 Subject Value

semantics, as the name implies, is the meaning transmitted by language. The animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir* creatively adopts the form of animation instead of actual filming to recreate the war, weakening the bloody and brutal images and supplementing some of the scrappy

visual elements, which well blends the artistry of animation and the reality of documentary, [3]but the author finds that the most of the existing studies on the documentary are based on the aesthetic features it exhibits and the discussion behind it about the authenticity of non-fiction animation. This paper, however, focuses on the meaning conveyed by the 'special language' of video, exploring the meaning and profound connotations of animation in the documentary field, and thus deducing the impact of the semantics of video in animated documentaries on the audience and on the documentary field. This will provide a basis for guiding the way in which animated documentaries are drawn and produced in order to facilitate their future innovation and development.

1.3 Research Ideas and Methods

1.3.1 Research Ideas

This paper will be based on the theory of semiotics. Saussure's Structuralist Language Semiotics Theory points out that symbols are composed of two elements: signifiant and signifié, which are inseparable. From his perspective, symbols make meaning through association. Later, Roland Barthes put forward Secondary Semiotic System, which is developed on the basis of Saussure's theory. Signifiant and signifié in the first system constitute symbols, while the symbols become new signifiant in the second system, which constitute myth with new signifié.[4]

The paper will take the theory as the framework to study the surface meaning and deep meaning of the video language in the animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir*.

2. Significant

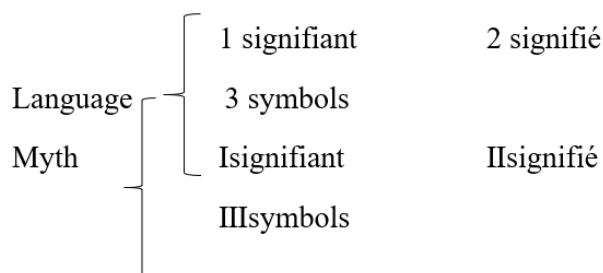Figure 1 shows a model of the language myth.

Fig.1 Language Myth

2.1 Research Methods

The paper uses individual-case-study method to carry on the detailed symbolic interpretation to the selected film, from the color, lens, scene, sound, light, characterization and other aspects.

At the same time, literature-research method is used to collect, sort out and interpret relevant literature, making a more comprehensive interpretation of the field through logical analysis, comparative analysis and systematic analysis.

2.2 Reasons for Film Selection

Waltz with Bashir is the first animated documentary to recreate the massacre that took place in a Palestinian refugee camp in 1982. The film premiered in May 2008 at the Cannes Film Festival, France, and won many nominations such as the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, the Golden Palm Main Competition Award, etc. Besides, it also won lots of awards including the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film, the American Film Critics Society Award for Best Film, etc, leaving an indelible mark in film history.

Xiaotang Xu once mentioned in her article, in *Waltz with Bashir* and such similar texts, the 'shortcut' of its narrative code in expressing the traumatic memory of 'unspeakable' and the closeness of its non-linear process from 'unspeakable' to 'speakable' are the reasons that make it become an important field of writing individual trauma. [5]*Waltz with Bashir* presents real characters with virtual animated image, intersperses the deductive way which is beyond the reality

and different from the conventional ideas in the animation constructed with memories, and converts oral stories as well as written testimony into visual symbols, making the new method of narrating history events through animation transcend the traditional documentary.

3. Image Semantics from a Semiotic Perspective

3.1 'Zoosemy' Sets the Tone

In terms of character symbolism, the film opens with a running scene of a pack of dogs(Figure 2), vicious-looking, with glazed eyes and sharp teeth, stopping cars, knocking over tables and chairs and scaring off passers-by as they run, where the dogs symbolize a malevolent force.

The shot symbols show that the opening shot recedes as the subject, the dog, enters, and the camera follows the dog's movement. This section makes use of the elevated close up shot, which zooms in on the dog's face and shows the dog's fierceness. The elevated shot also visually magnifies the sky, with the orange sky dominating most of the frame.

In terms of color symbolism, this section fills the whole scene with only two large blocks of color: the orange sky, the grey-blue ground and buildings. In nature the sun is orange, which can symbolize temperature and give people a sense of enthusiasm. Here the orange color is accompanied by the running of the dog, stirring up the viewer's agitated and hot emotions; the grey-blue color is darker overall, symbolizing the cold hardness of reinforced concrete, and the grey-blue color does not give the viewer a shock, but rather highlights the presence of orange in the overall picture.

In terms of sound signatures, the rapid drumbeat matches the rhythm of the dog running, heavy and intense, overlaid with the dog's angry panting, making the whole atmosphere of the film aggressive.

Table 1 Sound contrast

Signifiant	Signifié
Dog Pack	Evil forces
Close up	Facial grimace
Elevation shot	Deterrence
Orange	Restlessness, dryness
The rapid drumbeat, the angry panting of the dog	Aggressiveness

Taken together, these symbols in Table 1 serve as the signifiant of the direct meaning system, whose signifié refers to an environment that is fraught with danger and where violence is about to break out. The direct meaning system in Table 2, as the signifiant of the secondary meaning system, expresses the arrival of the enemy, the intrusion of the invaders into the territory and the imminent outbreak of war(Figure 2). The opening scene sets the overall tone of the film, with violence as the main theme.

Table 2 Direct meaning system

| Secondary meaning system	Direct meaning system				
	Signifiant				Signifié
Signifiant	Character symbols	Lens symbols	Color symbols	Sound symbols	The environment is fraught with danger and violence can erupt at any time
	Dog packs symbolize the forces of evil	The close up shows the grimace of the face and the elevated shot gives an intimidating effect	Orange provokes restlessness and dryness	Heavy drumming, angry panting of dogs with aggression	
Signifié	The enemy arrives, invaders break into the territory and the war is on the horizon				
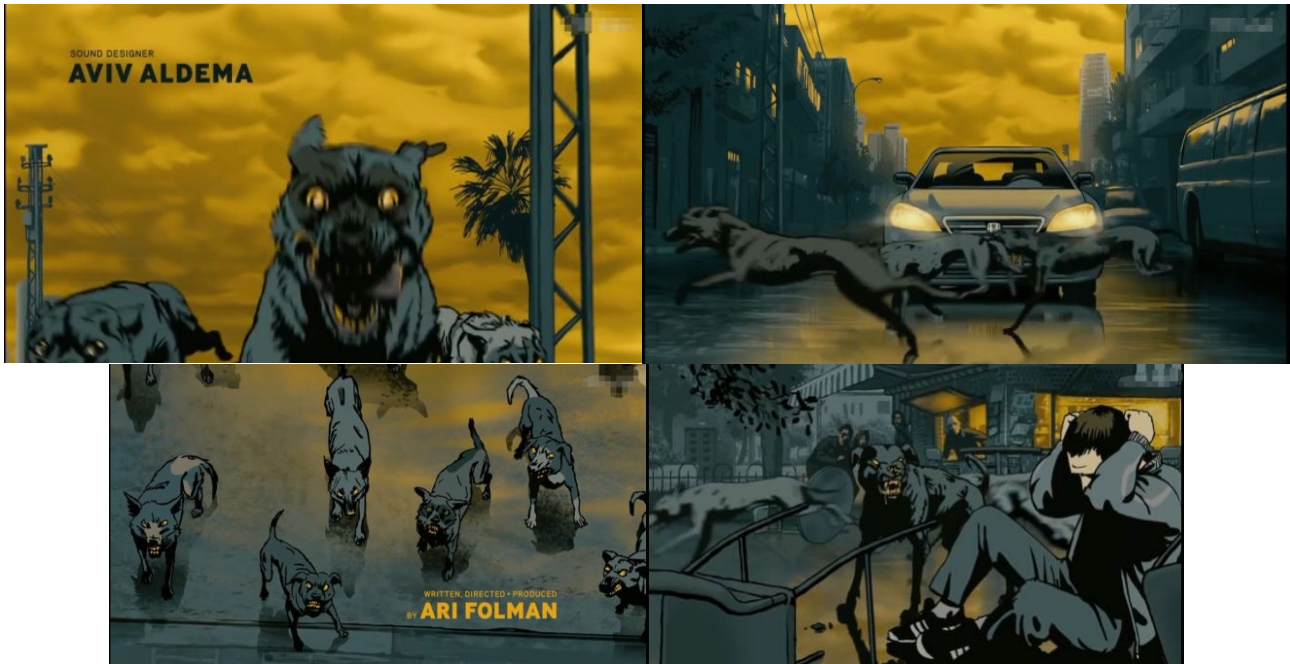
Figure 2 AVIV ALDEMA

3.2 Creating a Virtual Image

In the director's interview with his comrade Cammy, he recalls boarding an assault boat after joining the army, becoming seasick and vomiting incessantly as he struggled with the rough seas. While in his drowsy state of consciousness, he saw a naked goddess as he lay on her body watching his comrades die.

The woman here is portrayed completely naked, exposing her breasts and vagina, showing the female physiology in all its glory. The woman is as large as the assault boat, and she picks up the frail Cammy as if she were carrying a small baby. When the battle comes, the woman is swimming on her back in the water, and Cammy is lying between the woman's legs, where the child was born. Through the analysis of the woman's imagery and the interaction between the two, it can be inferred that the woman here symbolizes motherhood, rather than sex.

Here the whole scene looks like a blue-green filter has been superimposed, not only is the sky dark blue, but the figures' bodies are also covered in a light blue. Blue is one of the three primary colors, and it is the most primitive color in the universe. Night is a time of slumber, where the intention is to give a sense of stillness and tranquility. Only when the cannon fire explodes does the image take on a red tinge.

Two panoramic shots are used in this sequence, one showing the woman swimming on her back in the water, with Cammy lying between her legs, in order to reveal the relationship between them. Secondly, the camera is shot from behind with Cammy's point of view. He watches from a safe area as the assault boat is attacked. This shot reveals the relationship between Cammy and the assault boat, with Cammy in the foreground of the frame and the assault boat in the rear of the frame. The frame acts as Cammy's eyes at this point. The scene is documented in a way that also allows the viewer to become involved with the character of Cammy and to better understand the inner workings of the character.

Table 3 Scene comparison

Signifiant	Signifié
Huge Woman	Mother
Blue	Pristine, tranquil and serene
Panorama	Character Relationships
Back shot	Documentary, Participation

The combination of these symbols in Table 3 constitutes the signifiant of the direct meaning

system, whose signifié refers to Cammy's desire to return to her mother's embrace and to seek refuge and security(Figure 3). While the direct meaning system, as the signifiant of the secondary meaning system, deeply expresses Cammy's fear and avoidance of the war or the related memory, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Direct meaning system

| Secondary meaning system	Direct meaning system			
	Signifiant			Signifié
Signifiant	Character symbols	Lens symbols	Color symbols	Cammy wants to return to her mother's arms, wants shelter and safety
	Woman symbolising motherhood	Panoramic views reveal character relationships; back shots serve to document and engage	Blue means stillness and tranquillity and raw power	
Signifié	Cammy's fear and avoidance of war or the related memory			
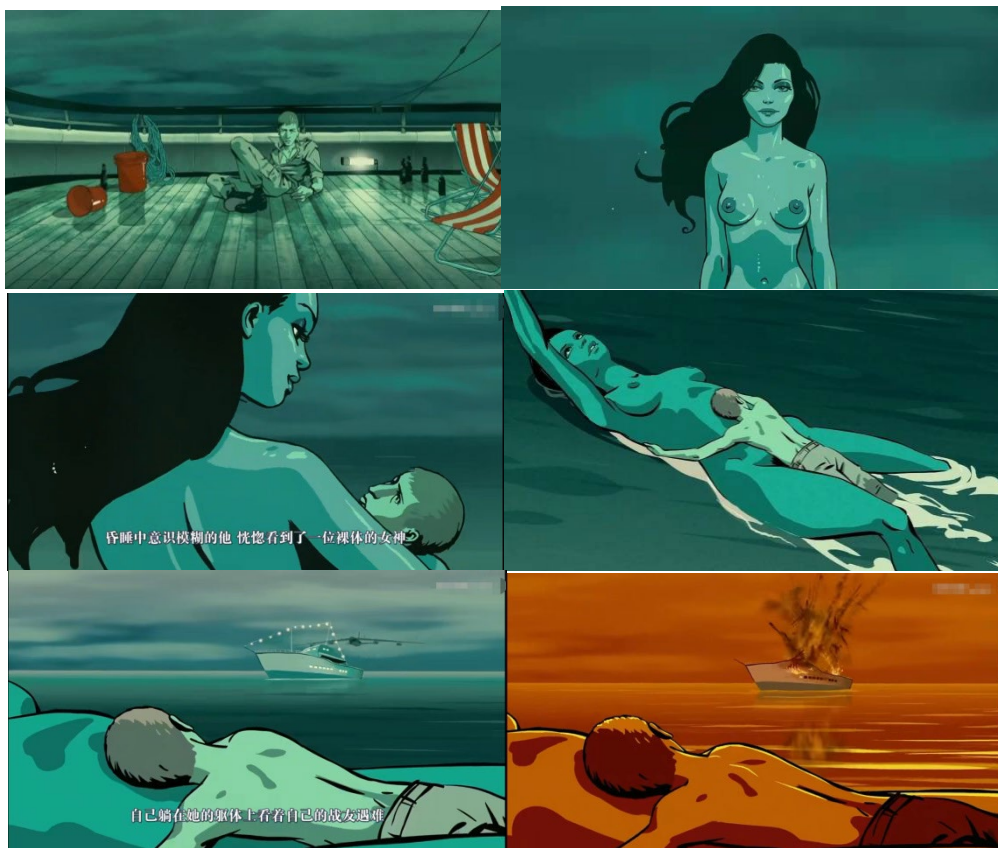
Figure 3 symbol

3.3 Magical Realism

When the film is about Israeli soldiers occupying the beach, a soldier walks into the picture, holding a rifle as a guitar and then playing. After that, upbeat music plays. The rock music played by the guitar and drums together makes people feel relaxed and happy. This section expresses the joy after the victory of the war. But the lyrics are'I'm bombing Sidon every day, between the mushroom clouds and the smoke at dawn, and I'm guaranteed to come home in a coffin', which is highly ironic.

In terms of light symbols, it was originally night before the guitar was played, and it dawned immediately after the soldiers walked up the beach. The overall picture becomes brighter, foreshadowing a optimistic situation and rendering the cheerful atmosphere at this time.

This section mostly uses large panoramic views, showing the soldiers surfing, playing football, drinking and other scenes of their happy lives,But at the same time, the bombardment is all around, the gunfire is weaving in and out, and the artillery fire is as orderly as a salute, which means that the bombardment had become a daily occurrence. The large panorama here serves to reveal social relationships. Here the panorama is often used, with the camera on the same level as the subject, to record the scene objectively and fairly.

Table 5 Panoramic

Signifiant	Signifié
Upbeat music	The joy of victory in war
Bright and cheerful environment	The situation becomes optimistic
Large Panorama	Social relationships
Ping shot	Objective and impartial

In summary, these symbols in Table 5 serve as the signifiant of the direct meaning system, whose signifié refers to the relaxed and positive state of life and joy of the winning side(Figure 4). The direct system of meaning, as the signifiant of the secondary system of meaning, artfully expresses the frenzy of the Israeli military's aggression against Palestine and the intensification of the war, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Direct meaning system

Secondary meaning system	Direct meaning system			
	Signifiant			Signifié
Signifiant	Sound symbols	Lens symbols	Light symbols	The winner's relaxed and joyful state of mind
	Upbeat music expressing the joy of victory in war	A large panorama reveals social relations; a flat shot reflects objectivity and impartiality	A brighter environment means the situation becomes optimistic	
Signifié	Israeli military attacks on Palestinians go into frenzy as war heats up			

Figure 4 War comparison

3.4 The Brutal Aesthetics of 'irony'

A small group of Israeli soldiers encountered the young boy in the woods who was attacking with a rocket-propelled grenade. The trained soldiers unanimously fired at the boy and the child's body fell to the ground like a swaying leaf, sifted by the bullets.

Ironically, the use of Bach's piano music in this section, with its gentle sound and soothing,

lilting rhythm, gives a sense of elegance and beauty, which contrasts with the bloody and brutal plot.

The bright sunlight cascading through the dense foliage casts a golden veil of warmth over the scene; the light shines down from above the heads of the soldiers as if to herald some divine decree.

The battle between the child and the soldier is filmed in slow motion, extending the reality of time and the process of character movement. Slow motion is considered a 'close-up in time'. It zooms in on time, showing the full details of the characters' movements and giving them a sense of beauty. When the camera matches the lyrical slow rhythm created by the soothing piano music, the flow of emotion is amplified, thus making the film convey a stronger emotion.

Table 7 Lyrical slow tempo

Signifiant	Signifié
Gentle and soothing piano music	Elegance and beauty
Bright sunshine	Warmth and sanctity
Slow motion	Gives beauty and strong lyricism

Taken together, these symbols in Table 7 serve as the energy of the direct meaning system, whose signifié refers to the cruelty of the fact that a group of soldiers are rounding up children in contrast to the beauty(Figure 5). Table 8 shows that the direct system of meaning, as the signifiant of the secondary system of meaning, illustrates that the massacre of ordinary Palestinians by the Israeli military has begun long ago and is inhumane, because the film has not told the plot of the massacre up to this point.

Table 8 Direct meaning system

Secondary meaning system	Direct meaning system			
	Signifiant			Signifié
Signifiant	Sound symbols	Lens symbols	Light symbols	Contrast cruelty of the fact that the boy is massacred with beauty
	Gentle and soothing piano music speaks of elegance and beauty	Slow motion gives beauty and strong lyricism to the image	The bright sunshine is warm and divine	
Signifié	The Israeli military's massacre of ordinary Palestinians began long ago and is inhumane			

Figure 5 The brutality of the fact that a group of soldiers rounded up children

3.5 Creating Dark Humor

The massacre began, in the fierce firefight between the two sides, Frenk's own gun was not good, so he grabbed his teammate's machine gun and rushed up the big road without cover,spinning and firing as he held it. Next to him is a huge portrait of Bashir, who waltzed through the battle.

The sound symbols here are music and gunfire. The waltz, also known as a round dance, is a piece of music characterized by fast, rhythmic 3/4 time light music. It can express a relaxed and happy mood. When it is paired with intense gunfire, the light music sets off agitation in the gunfire.

The use of dark colors, mainly black and grey, creates a dark and depressing atmosphere. Earthy yellow is used extensively to present the broken walls under fire and the grey face of the city. The soil is earthy, meaning nature, meaning a pristine state.

There are many close-ups of Frenk's waltzing feet in this passage. It also uses distant shots to show the surroundings. However, the interviewees said that the residents were watching a play upstairs, which is highly absurd.

As shown in Table 9, the characteristic of waltz is that the dance steps will form a circle, and the 'round dance' is also produced as the name implies. The film is titled 'Waltz' and the word 'circle' has an important meaning here: a circle has no beginning and no end, and in this case it can be interpreted as the characters spinning in a circle, always in a loop, unable to find an exit.

Table 9 Titled

Signifiant	Signifié
Round Dance and Gunfire	Anxiety
Dark, earthy tones	Dark and depressing, back to basics
Distant view	Exhibit environment
Waltz	Round

In conclusion, as shown in the Table10, the symbols serve as the signifiant of the direct meaning system,whose signifié refer to the repressed madness within Frenk, who cannot find a solution to his problem or a way out of his predicament(Figure 6). The direct meaning system, as the signifiant of the secondary meaning system, is a metaphor for the fact that the war has entered a deadly cycle, which has led to irreversible and serious consequences, and that the massacre will be remembered for years to come.

Table 10 Direct meaning system

	Direct meaning system				
Secondary meaning system	Signifiant				Signifié
Signifiant	Character symbols	Lens symbols	Color symbols	Sound symbols	Frenk is depressed and frantic inside, unable to find a solution to his problem or a way out of his predicament
	The waltz represents the character spinning on a circle, unable to find an exit	A distant view showing the surroundings, with residents watching a play	The dark tones create a dark and depressing atmosphere, and the earthy colors suggest a return to the primitive	A lilting round dance set against the anxious sound of gunfire	
Signifié	The war has entered into a deadly cycle which has led to irreversible and serious consequences. It will live in infamy for years to come				

Figure 6 War

4. Impact of the Image Semantics in Animated Documentaries

4.1 Impact and Outlook on the Audience

Films are created according to certain rules, it is a process of coding to combine characters, color, sound, lens, light and other symbols, while it is a process of decoding for audiences to interpret the meaning of films according to certain rules when they are watching films.

Through the analysis of the image semantics of this animated documentary, the author found that animation can express the cruel and painful events in a more artistic way, making the overall tone relaxed and cheerful, which is also more conducive to the ordinary audience to watch the film. [6]Some events that are too bloody and violent will bring about visual impact and have a certain chance to cause mental damage or psychological shadow to the audience, [7]while animation, with its softer and more polished form of expression, can soften the blow of cruelty.

Vivid colors, beautiful and moving music, exaggerated narrative can attract people's attention more and raise people's awareness of documentary. Animation uses zoosemy, irony and other techniques to create virtual character, combining magic realism, black humor, etc. Its form of expression is more interesting than traditional documentary, which can arouse the audience's emotion and give the audience more space to image.

4.2 Impact and Outlook on the Documentary Field

The reason why *Waltz with Bashir* uses animation as a form of searching for lost personal histories and memories is that the search for this past memory necessarily involves various modes of subjective human consciousness. In this respect, animation, with its rich creative freedom, is the best form for visualizing such events. [8]It has already been argued that animation can be a vehicle for constructing traumatic memories, and the director of this film suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, which manifests itself as a self-protective mechanism for losing his memories of his involvement in the war and the Holocaust. He retrieved his memories by interviewing his comrades, who either embellished what they said or did not want to face the brutal traumatic memories, so the best way to show the dreams and hallucinations they had told him is through animation.

Based on the film's depiction of war and the Holocaust, it can be inferred that animation can be used to portray the darkness of human nature and some of the hidden events, that it can represent the most serious and heavy themes, and that the artistic technique of exaggeration can add to the emotional tension of the film, as a complement to the untouchable aspects of the documentary.

After entering the 21st century, the continuous development of computer technology has brought

new exploration to animated documentary. The new 2D and 3D shooting technology, supplemented by motion capture, 3D modeling and other animation production techniques, greatly enhances the realism of the picture and can bring the scenes that only exist in ancient books and legends back to the audience. In the shooting process of historical documentary *Palace of Desire*, in order to make the audience feel the grand momentum of Daming Palace more intuitive and complete, the production staff use the 3D technology, according to historical records, to maximize the restoration of the grand ancient architectural style, making the dull, obscure written records into a vivid and detailed 3D graphics. [9]It not only helps the audience feel the ancient style and appearance of the ancient buildings more intuitive, but also increases the memory of the changes in the past. From it, we can find that modern animation technology has been widely used in documentary shooting.

Obviously, with the help of the existing new technology, non-fiction animation is already able to present the image that traditional documentaries cannot capture, the ability to make an impossible picture tangible and realistic gives non-fiction animation more possibilities. Non-fiction animation is not a history or direct selection, but the guide to the pursuit of the direct stage and the way for us to infinitely access close to reality. Advanced electronic technology provides more opportunities for the creation of non-fiction animation. Through improved rendering of animation, it has reached the requirements of documentary rather than fiction in terms of reproducing reality, reproducing history and ensuring image authenticity. At the same time, the intermittency of the animated images can always remind the audience that the documentary may not be completely true, so it may be more meaningful for them to seek the truth with suspicion and curiosity[10].

5. Conclusion

To sum up, based on the theory of semiotics, the paper interprets the image language in the animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir*. The image codes can effectively reproduce the vague meaning of traumatic dreams and truly express the unspoken psychological activities of the subject. The improvement and development of animation technology is also gradually providing documentary texts with more expressive and appealing visual symbol resources than the real vision.

Animation is of great value in presenting cruel and hidden events as well as presenting unspeakable events in a more artistic way to the general audience and making them more acceptable. Some scholars have argued that documentaries are 'creative manipulations of facts', and the birth of animated documentaries has undoubtedly deepened this view. Animation has broken through the shackles of traditional documentaries on a technical level, and grasping the truth and documentary required by documentaries will be a difficult point on the road to the future development of animated documentaries. Creators should use the thinking of animation to create documentaries. However, animation should not only be a means of expression and reproduction, but also be committed to revealing the truth at all time and serving to restore the truth, so that the spirit of record can achieve the perfect combination of animation form and event content through this way.

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