Handmade Aesthetics in Animation for Adults and Children
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Animation is a medium of contradiction, a theme evident across numerous cultural histories of the form. Often characterised by a certain "innocence" or child-like simplicity, animation nevertheless employs sophisticated imaging technologies which contribute to its promotion and reception. As Mark Langer (1992) observes, technological innovation was heavily implicated in the early competition between animation studios, as evident in trade reviews, publicity and awards ceremonies. Animation often suggests an unthreatening cosy nostalgia, commonly associated with fairy tale adaptations and childhood trips to the cinema. At the same time, as screen media freed from the "realism" of photographic representation and associated classical forms of storytelling, it frequently expresses a chaotic or transgressive edge. Within American animation, Paul Wells suggests the batting eyes of Disney's cute cartoon characters exist alongside the knowing wink of Warner Bros' more anarchic antagonists (2002, 49). Animation incorporates an expansive range of moving image cultures, from commercial studio products to outsider work with explicitly artistic ambitions. While early animation expressed modernist, avant-garde artistic ambitions, Esther Leslie points out the form was soon integrated into the production of advertising and propaganda (2004, 9). Animation is dismissively aligned with child viewers, as detailed in Jason Mittell's (2003) account of cartoons in the post-theatrical era. Yet film and television animation continues to be popular with audiences of all ages. A *Sight and Sound* article published in January 2017, retrospectively assessing the previous year's cinema successes, identifies animation as the most lucrative feature film format. *Zootropolis* (Byron Howard, Rich Moore, 2016), *The Secret Life of Pets* (Chris Renaud, 2016), *Finding Dory* (Andrew Stanton, 2016), *Kung Fu Panda 3* (Alessandro Carloni, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2016), *Storks* (Nicholas Stoller, Doug Sweetland, 2016), *Trolls* (Mike Mitchell, 2016) and *The Angry Birds Movie* (Clay Kaytis, Fergal Reilly, 2016), while entertaining child filmgoers, are seen as addressing adult anxieties, presenting allegories on contemporary politics, and, in the case of *Sausage Party* (Greg Tiernan, Conrad Vernon, 2016), offering comedy for a distinctly mature market (Singer 2007, 46-7). On the small screen adult animation flourishes, with *Rick and Morty* (TV Series, 2013-), *Bojack Horseman* (TV Series, 2014-) and *Big Mouth* (TV Series, 2017-) bidding for cult status, while animation for children like *Adventure Time* (TV Series, 2010-18), *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (TV Series, 2010-) and *Steven Universe* (TV Series, 2013-) enjoys cross-generational appeal. By many accounts the most successful television show in history is an animated sitcom, popular with a wide audience demographic, about the yellow-skinned inhabitants of Springfield, USA. Indicative of the contradictions inflecting the form, Jonathan Gray considers *The Simpsons* (TV Series, 1989-) a product that is both cult and mainstream, both critical of media institutions and part of a powerful media empire. The series expresses cynicism towards practices of branded merchandise, evident in the morally bankrupt figure of Krusty the Clown, yet is itself a highly successful commercial source of licenced products, betraying an "economic complicity" in the same cultural processes it parodies (2006, 8-9).

Many contradictions surrounding "animation" result from the broad range of formats covered by the term. Animation exists as film, television and digital cultures, with every medium asserting its own demands and affordances. The word refers to cel, stop-frame, claymation, pixilation and computer generated imagery, each accompanied by

their own aesthetics, studios, media, practices, cultures and audiences. This chapter explores three diverse examples of animation: the children's television series *Charlie and Lola* (TV Series, 2005-8), the adult cartoon franchise *South Park* (TV Series, 1997-), and the family action-adventure film *The Lego Movie* (Phil Lord, Christopher Miller, 2014). A central concern will be the different ways in which each example negotiates various tensions surrounding the nature of animation, its commercial and industrial contexts of production, its status as both mainstream and outsider culture, and its relationship with audiences of different ages. The means of reconciling this contradiction is through the implication of an imaginary child figure in the process of the text's construction. In the context of this anthology, each of these very different examples employs animation which conspicuously emulates a hand-crafted, cut-out, home-made style. Variously evoking a sense of naivety, unprofessionalism, amateurism, playfulness and subversion, such "childish" dimensions partly serve to obscure the computer-augmented animation involved in their production. There is an evident disjuncture between the texts' naïve aesthetics and the knowing, professional, serious, commercial contexts in which they are manufactured. That three very different screen cultures – a children's television programme, an adult animation, and a family film – all employ associations of the child-like as part of their operation suggests the considerable mobility of this mythical figure, able to fulfil a range of functions and ideological requirements. This contradiction simultaneously underlines complex relationships between children, animation culture, screen media, modernity and technology. Notwithstanding the demonstrable popularity of animation with adults, the form has persistent associations with child audiences. Wells forcefully argues that the dominance of Disney in the field of popular animation means all American animators, and by extension animation scholars, must in some way respond to practices and traditions established by the studio (2002, 45). The same can be said of animation's alignment with young people. The introduction to Jayne Pilling's (1997) edited collection makes repeated references to the emergence of adult animation as both explicit explanation, and implicit justification, for the growing critical interest in its study. As I have previously argued (Kirkland, 2017), the figure of the child has historically functioned to articulate adult ambivalence towards the modern condition. The symbolic child defined by this process is caught in a position of liminal temporality, between past and future, between adult nostalgia for a childhood lost and collective hope for a brighter tomorrow. Children, and the media with which they are associated, simultaneously articulate and seek to reconcile the same tensions between regression and progress Wells (2002) sees as a recurring theme throughout animation culture.

Several recent authors discuss how animation that is deliberately "rough around the edges" engages with the experiences of modernity. Exploring the Disney/Pixar features *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008) and *Wreck-It Ralph* (Rich Moore, 2012), Keith B Wagner and In-gyoo Jang (2016) argue that both films adopt an "imperfect aesthetic" regarding their protagonists. The robot, the videogame character and his companion Venellope are presented in a manner which effectively counteracts the precision of digital cinema. Through an emphasis on defects, errors and flaws the characters are defined as disadvantaged, sympathetic underdogs. Wagner and Jang argue such aesthetics construct these protagonists as endearing, relatable and human, contributing to the films' engagement with labour politics, disenfranchisement and worker alienation. In an essay also exploring *WALL-E*, Vivian Sobchack discusses the term "animation" as evoking a contemporary sense of machines becoming increasingly lifelike, while humans experience a deteriorating sense of agency and

control (2009, 375). Sobchack suggests that *WALL-E* gestures towards a superseded era of photochemical cinema and analogue recording technologies, symbolised by the robot's ironic fetishisation of a VHS recording of a Broadway musical set in the last decade of the nineteenth century. At temporal odds with its digital composition, futuristic setting and 2008 release, the first act of Pixar's film is as dialogue-free as cinema of the pre-synchronised sound era (ibid., 379-80). Within these films, criticism of the dehumanising impact of mechanical class-based labour, over-consumption, and environmental destruction are expressed in a manner that obscures the texts' own situation in technologized production practices, consumer capitalism, and multinational corporate cultures. Both articles, however briefly, also gesture towards the ways "flawed" animation relates to issues of age and audience. For Wagner and Jang, imperfect aesthetics contribute to animation's engagement with "more mature or overtly adult themes" (2016, 134), while Sobchack regards WALL-E as a child-like character, constituting "a rusty, beat-up, 'yellow blankey'", a "transitional object" mediating between mechanical and electronic, humanity and post-humanity, infancy and adulthood (2009, 385-6).

Connections between childhood, modernity and handcrafted animation of a distinctly tactile nature, are more extensively articulated in Rachel Moseley's monograph on British children's television of the 1960s and 1970s. Drawing on work surrounding the Victorian craft movement, with its associations of rurality, nature, domesticity, cosiness and comfort, Moseley argues such iconography inflects television of this era with a nostalgic sense of national identity, providing a form of "solace" for producers and viewers. The desire to escape contemporary forces is considered to have had particular appeal during the tremulous 1960s, a period of particular social, cultural and political unrest. While focussed within a specific national and historical context, Moseley's observations also have contemporary significance. The author sees continuity in the craft aesthetic of the new *Clangers* (TV Series, 2015-) television series which employed the same knitted characters and stop-frame animation of its predecessor. The show reflects adult nostalgia surrounding its original broadcast, but also more recent articulations of cultural disillusion and disconnectedness paralleling those of previous decades, evident in fashions for vintage home decorations and "hipster" DIY. Here is the context in which "contemporary decisions to use (*or simulate*) processes which so explicitly bear the trace of the maker's hand" can be understood (2016, 71-3, my emphasis). This chapter will explore such handcraft simulation in *Charlie and Lola*, *South Park* and *The Lego Movie*. Like the films considered by Wagner, Jang and Sobchack, all three are highly computer augmented, although this is obscured by their flat, cut-out, jerky rendering. Only the first case study is specifically for children, but all employ an imaginary child as part of their visual strategy. The later example is the only one to emulate stop-frame and the animation of toys, a consistent theme of Moseley's study. Nevertheless all affect a child-like aesthetic, evoking both the appearance of children's culture and culture made by children. This contributes to a distancing from processes of modernity and massification which they are variously critiquing or retreating from. Creating the impression that these artefacts of the culture industry are the work of children playing with felt pens, construction paper, or building blocks obscures the adult professionalism and technological virtuosity entailed in their production. In appropriating such an aesthetic, the simulated handmade strategies employed by these media illuminate the extent to which children and the child-like have historically functioned as a means whereby adults negotiate discomforting aspects of modern life, culture and art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

***Charlie and Lola*: The Animated Picture Book**

Of the three examples discussed in this chapter, *Charlie and Lola* is most unambiguously associated with child audiences, animation for children, and the kinds of programmes discussed by Moseley. Originally commissioned by the BBC, *Charlie and Lola* was the adaptation of a book series created by current Children's Laureate, Lauren Child. As detailed by many commentators, amongst them Jeanette Steemers, the BBC has an esteemed history of catering for pre-schoolers dating back to the 1950s puppet show *Andy Pandy* (TV Series, 1950, 1952) screened as part of the *For the Children* and *Watch With Mother* slot aimed at the under-fives. Preschool provision continued on both the BBC's terrestrial channels, culminating in the launch of the dedicated digital channel CBeebies in February 2002. The channel was a partial response to the success of cable and satellite competitors such as Nick Junior and Playhouse Disney, whilst also digitally expanding the corporation's role as a public service broadcaster (2010, 42-3). The channel achieved approval from parents and policy makers, but Steemers observes audiences started to decline in 2006-7, leading to a shift in targeting to include six year-old schoolchildren, and the prioritising of four to six-year olds. Broadcasting *Charlie and Lola*, alongside such titles as *Lunar Jim* (TV Series, 2006), *Underground Ernie* (TV Series, 2006) and *Lazytown* (TV Series, 2004-7) represented efforts to raise the channel's age demographic (ibid., 46-8). As such the series negotiates a number of tensions, between CBeebies as a channel for pre-school and school children, between the BBC as a terrestrial and digital broadcaster, and between the corporation as traditional public service provider and entrepreneurial broadcaster within a competitive international marketplace.

In Steemers' account the show was cited by a BBC executive as an example of a local and international success, which maintains the corporation's creativity and commitment to the channel's core audience. No mention is made of the series' animation style. Nevertheless the executive emphasises the show's "'well-crafted stories'" and "'well-crafted characters'" who are seen as expressing "'true personality and integrity'" (ibid., 54). This emphasis on narrative craft, character and authenticity resonates with the series' visual style, distinct from both cell animation and the three dimensional computer generated techniques often employed in recent children's television. The show has a distinctly "flat" visual style. The title characters and their friends Lotta and Marv are composed of slightly crooked lines, as if hastily sketched without concern for their ragged edges and overlapping corners. The simple strokes with which they are drawn have an uneven texture suggesting the inexpert marks of a felt tip pen. Sections of colour are similarly imperfect and rough, as though scribbled in with crayon. The butterflies which flutter across the screen in the opening sequence appear to be made of wallpaper scraps, while both Charlie and Lola are seen literally drawing on their environment (see figure 1).
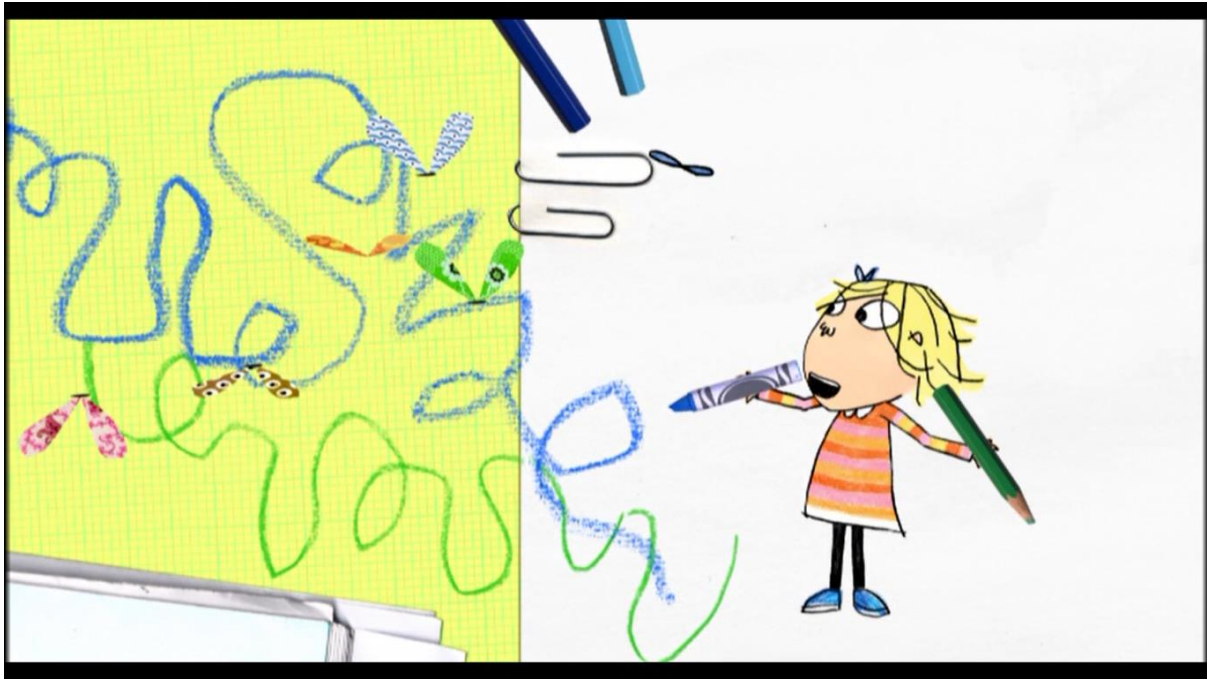
Many objects in the world of Charlie and Lola have a photographic quality, suggesting a collage stuck together from magazine pictures, while the patterns of clothing suggest actual fabric cut out and glued into place. The style faithfully reproduces the design of the book series on which the franchise is based, while more broadly exploiting animation's proximities to sequential art, picture books and other visual culture aimed at children. This contributes to a perception of the series as safe, appropriate viewing for young people. As if to underscore its literary origins, *Charlie and Lola* DVDs have a distinct design, reminiscent of small hardback children's books, complete with a space for the owner to write their name.

As Moseley's brief mention of the series suggests (2016, 86), *Charlie and Lola* follows many qualities of earlier British children's television. The show has the multimedia collage aesthetics of handmade animation, combining "cut-outs, line drawings, areas of pattern and texture […] which evoke the graphic and illustrative design trends of the 1950s and 1960s". While largely focussed on stop-frame, Moseley's study makes some mention of paper cut-out animation (ibid., 80-1). The method has clear presence in the British children's television of Moseley's era, with shows like *Mr Benn* (TV Series, 1971-2), *Crystal Tipps and Alistair* (TV Series, 1971) and *Captain Pugwash* (TV Series, 1957-66, 1974-5) employing a combination of still drawings, paper puppets, and limited animation techniques. Like the Lauren Child adaptation, they evoke a sense of picture or popup books brought to life. As with the stop-frame techniques of *The Pogles* (TV Series, 1965) and *Chigley* (TV Series, 1969), *Charlie and Lola*'s aesthetic "speaks of the hand and the touch of the craftperson" evoking cosiness and simplicity (ibid., 70-1). Its flatness, texture and design suggest work with scissors, wallpaper and pages torn from magazines, implying the hand of the animation artist, just like the knitted, sewn or stitched-together characters Moseley examines. Part of the appeal of children's animated television, Moseley argues, is the "'aesthetics of child's play'" being evoked. This is understood as revealed through "the slight hesitancy and unevenness of the movement created as commensurate and 'realistic' with the movement of the small object in the hand of the child at play". The result is a brand of television associated with craft, the child and the domestic, rather than art,

the adult and the public sphere (ibid., 14-5). Just as the BBC shows Moseley explores produce the impression of gazing down upon a miniature world resembling the wooden brick towns and toy figures of children's playsets (ibid., 38-9), *Charlie and Lola* presents viewers with a tabletop of two dimensional craft materials: patterned paper, scraps of fabric, cut-out pictures of bananas and tomatoes. The implements with which characters and their world are drawn might be the same as found in a pencil case or schoolroom desk. This is underlined in the opening sequence where Charlie draws a flight of stairs allowing his sister to pursue the swarm of collage butterflies. The show's handmade aesthetic secures alignment with Child's book series, but also suggests the pages and frames might themselves be drawn by an actual child. In this respect, an attempt is made to obscure the adult authorship of both book and television series which resonates with Jacqueline Rose's discussion of the impossibility of children's literature. The production notes for J M Barrie's play *Peter Pan*, the focus of Rose's provocative study, suggested that technicians and set designers as well as the author of the production be somehow "in league" with the child in the audience or on the stage. Rose considers this a characteristic manoeuvre to obscure the absence of children's participation in the adult-authored theatrical experience (1984, 32). The dotted line on the inside cover of each *Charlie and Lola* DVD, intended to mark ownership in a practice otherwise exclusive to books for children, seems designed to interpellate the child viewer into a more intimate relationship than the adult-authored, mass produced consumer product might warrant.

As Moseley argues, there is an absence of critical engagement with stop-frame filmmaking outside explicitly modernist or avant-garde art projects, and cut-out animation appears almost entirely overlooked. In historical terms, *Charlie and Lola* might be compared to the work of Lotte Reiniger, a figure whose films have received relatively little scholarly attention (see Boeckenhoff & Ruddell in this collection). Notably paralleling Moseley's observations, Leslie's history of animation and the avant-garde spends little time discussing the filmmaker. For the contemporary commentators Leslie cites, Reiniger's "filigree shadows, trapped in a flat world of genies and demons" reflect little upon contemporary modernity. Leslie only notes a preoccupation with exploring two-dimensionality, evident in "façades, layout, display, surface, dabbing, plaques, plate, panels, effacing, flattening and film" which characterises much early twentieth century modernist work (2004, 50). William Moritz implies the neglected art of silhouette is an issue of gender, the technique being aligned with women's folk art and skills developed performing household activities (2009, 15). There are connotations of cultural femininity aligned to this delicate, intricate, intimate animation, suggestive of paper doilies, crochet and lace making. As Reiniger's work expresses aesthetic qualities of Wedgewood jewellery, crockery and ornaments (ibid., 13), the style of *Charlie and Lola* has a similar feminine domesticity, associated with floral wallpaper, textiles and scrapbooks. There is significant overlap between the femininity of the style and its perceived alignment with child audiences. Moritz cites one commentator who opined that all films for children ought to adopt this technique, allowing the imagination of the child to expand upon the simplified appearance, something not considered possible with puppetry or traditional animation (ibid., 15). Notably, the majority of Reiniger's films were fantasy, fairy stories, or television commercials for domestic products. In echoing Reiniger's style *Charlie and Lola* further secures its status as domestic children's entertainment, while suggesting intersections between the child-like and the feminine.

Máire Messenger Davies observes that within the British television establishment there is suspicion of animation, a format associated with a culturally imperialistic Americanisation of the airwaves and the prioritisation of commercialisation over quality. As Messenger Davies observes: "the more animation in the schedule (especially the more imported American animation) the more the guardians of public service values are likely to be worried" (2001, 232-3). This was certainly evident in Steemers' account of CBeebies' establishment. In justifying the corporation's role in providing digital children's television the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport spoke of the BBC's commitment not to rely on cartoons, in contrast to more commercial television rivals (2010, 44). *Charlie and Lola*'s visual design manages such concerns, its soft lines, uneven colouring and scribbled aesthetic standing in stylistic contrast to American and Japanese cartoons. It may also be deliberately designed to evoke an older, seemingly more naïve, national, terrestrial form of children's television, more familiar to adults than to children. Nostalgia is a recurring theme of children's television, evident in the range of recently revived shows, from *Andy Pandy* (TV Series, 2002) to *Postman Pat* (TV Series, 2016-7), from *Bill and Ben* (TV Series, 2001-2) to *Thunderbirds* (TV Series, 2015-), from *Danger Mouse* (TV Series, 2015-) to *Teletubbies* (TV Series, 2015-7). Successful children's brands require the approval of parents and guardians. Reproducing adult-favoured franchises, like basing screen media on classic works of children' literature, secures their status as appropriate for children. Consequently *Charlie and Lola* evokes the same "craft aesthetic" as "classic" BBC children's television such as *The Clangers* (TV Series, 1969-72), *Trumpton* (TV Series, 1967) and *Paddington* (1976). The series appears designed to evoke a sense of "enchantment", tentatively described as "whimsical? funny? simple?" (2016, 11-12) in Moseley's interrogation of the nostalgic register expressed in popular writings on British children's television. The emulation of Child's "picture book" aesthetic distances the series from its status as television and animation, and from its origins within an institution increasingly adopting commercial strategies in an international marketplace far removed from the gentle domestic concerns of the programme's storylines. In this respect the Britishness of Moseley's quaint handmade animation, implying a retreat from the "professional" and "adult" world of commercial capitalism, becomes a unique selling point. There are parallels here with another internationally recognised British animation brand, the work of Aardman studios, who have adopted a similar handmade look. Marian Quigley aligns Aardman's work with an assertion of national identity, the imperfect animation linked to the studio's Britishness, in contrast to the smoother, more "'showy'" visuals of American studios such as Dreamworks and Disney (2009, 58). An irony is that *Charlie and Lola* has proven a successful brand for subsequent BBC-licensed commercial products. Susan Edwards in a nuanced engagement with the "corporatisation of childhood and childhood artefacts" (2010, 263), includes the series alongside *Waybuloo* (TV Series, 2009-13), *In the Night Garden* (TV Series, 2007-9) and *Numberjacks* (TV Series, 2006-9), as representing media convergence between CBeebies television, digital games and products. Affiliated *Charlie and Lola* merchandise currently includes wood and card playsets, colouring-in dolls, umbrellas, balloons and stickers, all of which carry the same scrappy child-made design as the series. These products would appear as much at home in Charlie and Lola's illustrated world as in the domestic space occupied by the child in front of the screen. The consequence is a cosy fit between the environment of the child and that of the show's fictional children, in a manner which suits the corporation, the carer and possibly the child consumer.

***South Park*: Cartoon Crudity**

Despite many obvious differences, there are some striking parallels between *Charlie and Lola* and Comedy Central's *South Park*. Both employ the same flat, cut-out, handmade visual style which implies a certain naivety to their production. While the CBeebies show's main medium appears to be felt tips and crayons, *South Park*'s textured colours suggest cut-out construction paper, along with the same photo montage insertions featured in background posters, images, and occasional characters.
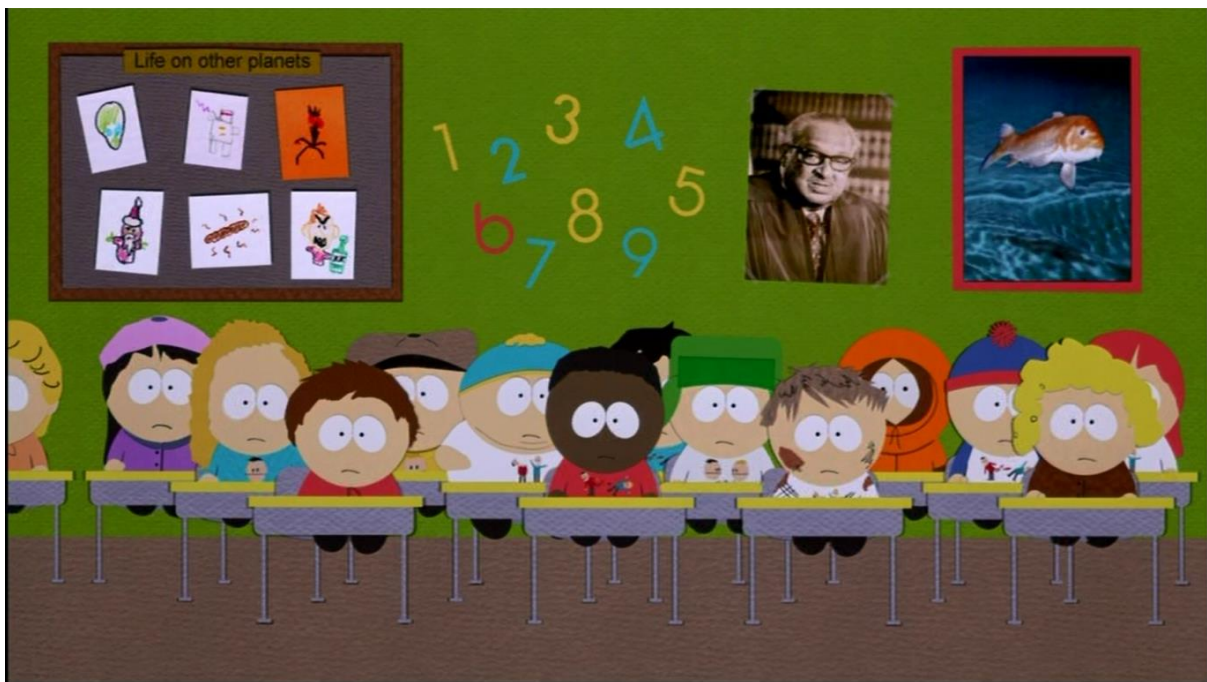
Both draw upon traditions of children's culture, evident in *South Park*'s focus on the activities of school children and the ironic pedagogic lessons which conclude early episodes. And both shows align themselves with children, childhood and children's media, by giving the impression their animation might have been produced by a child's hand. This aesthetic of childhood appears fundamental to *South Park*'s comic impact, incongruously juxtaposed with the series' often grotesque or sexually explicit imagery. The show capitalises upon associations between child audiences and television animation, together with traditions of children's culture as non-violent and non-sexual, to produce comedic frisson between form and content. *South Park* also mobilises alternative understandings of childhood and conventions within children's media. While *Charlie and Lola* appears characterised by its innocent, unthreatening, whimsical qualities, *South Park* is dependent on conceptions of the child as playful trickster, as a figure whose apparent unknowingness allows them to express the inexpressible. Consequently media and culture produced for children is permitted certain liberties not afforded to mainstream adult media. While the child-like aesthetic facilitates the series' shocking impact, the impression that what is being aired might itself be produced by a gang of naughty children also enhances the show's satirical function. Marcus Schulzke observes that many *South Park* episodes hinge upon the

differing perspectives between adults and children (2012, 24). Humour is frequently produced through the young characters misunderstanding aspects of adult life, biology and sexuality, but similarly frequent are moments when adult society is shown up as particularly ludicrous "through the eyes of a child".

Origin mythologies of the series are widely known. According to various accounts *South Park* started life as a student project, *Jesus vs Frosty*, co-created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, which later became *The Spirit of Christmas*. Produced in Parker's parent's basement for just two thousand dollars, this was intended as a video Christmas card for a Fox executive, featuring now-familiar child characters in a narrative pitting Jesus against Santa Claus in a battle for ownership over the season. The cartoon short became one of the first internet memes. Following its early success, Comedy Central was chosen as *South Park*'s home, and soon became its flagship show, reviving the network's fortunes and leading to a merchandising sensation (Gournelos 2009, 145-6). This narrative, which has been repeated across numerous sites, constructs the series origins as amateur, makeshift and low budget; its producers as outsider chancers; its success resulting from the authentic support of an emerging network of fans facilitated by new distribution technologies outside the control of media conglomerates. There are even connections between the basement location of the show's conception and the workshop environments in which the handmade animation that Moseley discusses was brought to life (2017, 20-1), suggesting a transatlantic parallel of small scale, domestic crafted production. The subterranean homegrown genesis of *South Park*'s virtual pilot, as well as the juvenility of the student filmmakers, defines the showrunners as themselves adolescent or child-like in a manner which suits the show's aesthetic and characters. Parker and Stone perform the same role of adults playing at making television, entailing signs of amateurism, cultivated spontaneity and managed chaos that David Buckingham, in a piece inspired by Rose's work on children's literature, identifies in Saturday morning British television (1993, 51). Even in a show merely masquerading as children's culture, the construction of the adult author as child-like remains an important component, obscuring the more calculated features of this story, including the deliberate courting of studio executives, the lucrative licensed products which followed the show's success, and its creators' subsequent financial fortunes.

If *Charlie and Lola* echoes traditions of British children's television, *South Park* draws upon aspects of American animation, often aligned with more adult-orientated interrogations of modernity. Like the cartoon style of Hanna-Barbera, *South Park* employs a "'flat', two-dimensional theatricality" with less emphasis on quality animation than the comic script (Wells 2002, 88). Wells' sees a similar "limited" style in shows such as *Rocky and his Friends* (TV Series, 1959-61), *The Flintstones* (TV Series, 1960-6) and *Mighty Mouse – The New Adventures* (TV Series, 1987-8), observing the presence of satire, irony and parody within these series in relation to American values, suburban lifestyles and previous cartoons. The 1980s *Mighty Mouse* revival reflects an appreciation of how "subversive representations and agendas could be 'invisibly' placed within the seemingly innocent and 'unregulated' space of the cartoon form" (ibid., 83). While the aesthetic of *Charlie and Lola* might be compared to the work of European auteur filmmaker Reiniger, *South Park* recalls practices of the United Productions of America animation studio. This approach was characterised by two-dimensionality, minimalism and boldness of design, but also, Dan Bashara argues, a visual style exploring conditions of modernity (2015, 83-4). Detailing critical attention

paid to the studio's trademark look, the author identifies an illuminating contradiction. UPA characters are said to exist in a "'never-never land'" of flat backgrounds and simplified figures, while simultaneously rejecting the more familiar "'never-never land'" of cartoon fantasy for a more authentic expression of contemporary human realities. Reconciling this contradiction, Bashara argues UPA artists produced a vision which, in the context of modern art, rejected photo-realistic representations in favour of modes more effectively able to communicate sensations of modern life (ibid., 89-90). Regarding intersections between childhood, animation and modernity, the choice of metaphor is telling. Cartman and friends, like Gerald McBoing Boing, inhabit the realm of Peter Pan. As fictional boys voiced and animated by grown men, they have not aged since their first appearance in 1998. Like the inhabitants of J. M. Barrie's fantasy realm they embody a childhood made by and for adults, designed to address a particular adult experience of modern disillusionment. But while the Darling's flight represents a retreat from modernity into an endless childhood of children's fiction, the South Park boys, trapped in their quiet two-dimensional mountain town, serve to illuminate the tensions, anxieties and horrors of contemporary modern culture.

Many commentators on *South Park* do not consider the show's status as animation, or its distinct style, however Ted Gournelos notes how the series' crude aesthetics facilitate its political dimensions. Uncomplicated animation, Gournelos argues, allows for the abstraction and simplification of the show's cultural, generic and textual points of reference, which are subsequently layered to make them, and the ideologies they represent, satirically absurd (2009, 146-7). The animation's "aesthetic crudity" (155) contributes to its humour, both heightening and managing its impact. *South Park*'s style is "innocent", like *Charlie and Lola*, presented as something which might be made by a child playing with sugar paper and scissors. It is also "crude" in terms of its lack of technical sophistication, rendering objects and actions two-dimensional, awkward in movement, and lacking in detail. The series' comedy relies upon the frisson between idealised conceptions of children, and a suspicion that these mythologies mask a cruelty and vulgarity more reflective of lived childhood experiences, a tension embedded in its visual appearance. The show has elements in common with the early avant-garde animation discussed by Leslie, the visual language of which "hoped to shock and surprise and make the viewer ask: What will they try to pull on us next? How repulsive can they make my environment seem? This ugliness and flatness and motility that they portray – does it lay bare how all this civilization is merely a façade?" (2004, 19). Consistent with this chapter's opening themes, Gournelos relates flat aesthetics to the reconciliation of the show's industrial and ideological contradictions. *South Park* inhabits a dominant status within popular culture while affecting a critical disposition associated with alternative media. Despite its frequent engagement with contemporary politics, it manages to maintain a large audience by refusing to occupy any clearly defined or consistent ideological position (2009, 162). The management of such contradictions partly resides in the show's handmade aesthetic. Audiences might dismiss any unpalatable politics as meaninglessly playful. If the animation requires so little effort, it can be assumed the content is not taken seriously by its producers. The style also aligns the series with the cut-out techniques of filmmakers whose animation belongs to absurdist, surrealist or Dadaist traditions. It is interesting to note the work of Monty Python member Terry Gilliam is frequently cited as an influence. The sometimes grotesque, unsettling, confrontational nature of Gilliam's work employs the same crude cut-out style and jerky movement as Parker and Stone in a manner aligning their work with satire, caricature and anti-establishment counterculture.

Through its playful use of collage, frequently entailing the mutilation of classic works of art, there is also something ambiguously child-like about these animated inserts. It is significant to note that before branching out into adult sketch comedy, many members of the Monty Python team, Gilliam included, worked on the British children's show *Do Not Adjust Your Set* (TV Show, 1967-9) (Home 1993, 48-9).

Also discussing the series' child-like design, David Larsen describes the show as "infantile cut-out cathode ray theatre" in a consideration of *South Park* and the carnivalesque (2001, 65). A recurring feature of children's culture, the carnivalesque is observed in both American (Jenkins 1993) and British (Messenger Davies 2005) examples of media, toys and games. Young people's various connections with the transgressive, vulgar, disruptive activities of the carnival reflect the multiple associations between children and pre-modern, undeveloped, abject and underground culture. Historical overlaps between children and the carnival emerge from the exclusion or expulsion of children, along with women, the old and the insane, from the Enlightenment model of rational, regulated, closed adulthood (Jervis 1999). This perception is reflected in the many ways contemporary children's culture derives from medieval folk tales, however Bowdlerised, Disneyfied or mass produced. In Larsen's analysis, which draws on Foucault, Bakhtin, Baudrillard and Freudian psychoanalysis, the *South Park* children stand in for the non-productive, anally-fixated "infantile masses" of postmodernity. Episodes featuring characters such as Big Gay Al and Mr Hankey the Christmas Poo – bearing telling traces of both Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse – are characterised by autoeroticism, omnipotence of thoughts, and a grotesque irrational body which refuses to abide by the sacred distinction between the internal and external (2001, 68-9). A similar infantile fascination with waste products is observed by Judith Kegan Gardiner, who argues a particularly "masculine anal" obsession runs throughout *South Park*, exemplified by episodes revolving around talking faeces, explosive diarrhoea or record breaking stools. In this, Gardiner identifies a particularly infantilising form of regressive masculinity. Animation, reduction, anality, and arrested development are all considered qualities of a superficial adult male rebellion based on cursing, frequently referred to as "potty mouth", and farting in the absence of any effective collective resistance or alternatives to dominant political structures. Also drawing on Freud and Bakhtin, Gardiner pessimistically relates such popular culture developments to an adult malehood that employs infantile behaviour, only as a gesture which ultimately serves the interests of patriarchal capitalism (2000, 257-9).

Critiquing the cinema-released musical *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* (Trey Parker, 1999), Gardiner explores the function of childhood and its evocation of "innocence" in the movie's happy resolution, which sees the bloody consequences of a war between America and Canada magically reversed. Drawing on film musical theory Gardiner argues the animation aesthetic enhances populist, folksy, communal generic traditions, allowing audiences to feel that they can both hum the songs and draw to the same degree of professionalism as the movie's animators (2005, 54). There are evident overlaps between animation, child audiences and this Hollywood genre, as many contemporary examples of the musicals – notably Disney feature films – are animated. In considering the masculine agenda of *South Park* the show and *South Park* the movie, Gardiner draws on Fred Pfeil's discussion of American alibis of "innocence" (2005, 56) and "childishness" (2000, 259). This is regarded as a mode of masculinity which rejects political activism and responsibility in favour of a playful

boyhood that ultimately shores up white middle class privilege. While emphasising the film and series' ambiguity and self-awareness, the author concludes: "The very crudity of its animated images is… part of its underlying ideology, of a masculinism that wants to retain the world just as it is, unjust as it is, as the playground of powerful, male-bonded, American white boys who never need grow up and who can continue to enjoy the world's pleasures and treasures without taking responsibility for them" (61-2). If *Charlie and Lola* mobilises a distinctly feminine animation style, evoking the cut-out tradition of Reiniger, the crudity of *South Park* produces a more masculine register. A similarly unsophisticated child-like aesthetic masquerading as children's culture is employed to obscure the show's commercial and critical success, excuse its provocative politics, and justify the plethora of poo, wee and fart jokes which continue to run throughout the twenty year old series.

The Lego Movie: Dimensional Animation

Despite belonging to another very different franchise, there are many parallels between *The Lego Movie* and the "imperfect" animation discussed above. Although digitally produced in an era when smooth-moving animation technologies are well within the means of a studio such as Warner Bros, this is a film affecting stop-frame animation. This appears in the jerky movement of its characters, the photorealism of its imagery, and the simulated cracks and fingerprints dirtying its digital models. Unlike the slightly uneven, clumsy, imperfect "'lurch'" of British children's animation (Moseley 2016, 85), this is no unavoidable consequence of the filmmaking process, but a deliberate visual strategy designed to evoke an older, more artisan, tradition of animated culture. It distinguishes the feature from other Lego screen products, such as non-theatrical DVD releases and Lego videogames which boast significantly smoother movement and considerably slicker surfaces. Consequently *The Lego Movie* works to make visible what Sobchack refers to as the "'shamanic' power" of the animator's hand, usually hidden, or made evident only in conspicuous moments of self-reflexivity (2009, 384). In this respect, the film gestures to the earliest of animation media which performed a certain demystification of its own processes. Leslie describes the self-reflexivity of early hybrid cartoons combining live action and animation, where the artist would be included as part of the scenario, drawing an often uncooperative and antagonistic figure into existence (2004, 13-4). *The Lego Movie* implies the presence of a human craftsman through its stuttering movements, flawed models and soiled photorealism, in a manner which effaces the considerable processing power necessary for its generation. In this case the "ghost of the animator" (Moseley 2016, 85) is just that, a spectre, and the intimate, intricate, hand-craft production processes it pretends to unmask are similarly mythical. A certain child-like quality is suggested in this amateur appearance. But while *Charlie and Lola* and *South Park* only hint at the presence of the child in the filmmaking process, *The Lego Movie* goes further by incorporating a fictional boy into its diegesis as the source of the film's world. In this respect, to paraphrase Rose (1984, 32), the child is scripted into the scene with the implication that they, and not the adult computer coder employed by a multinational film studio and toy franchise, are responsible for the animation on the screen.

It is undoubtedly the case, even more so than the examples cited by Moseley, that *The Lego Movie* takes place within a world of toys, an extravagant metropolitan version of Trumpton's parochial doll's house (2016, 36-7). The film's settings give clear impression of being built from bricks, while every object and machine it contains resembles accessories and vehicles assembled from construction packs. This is strikingly evident in the film's opening sequence, where cars, trucks, buildings, paving stones, signs, trees and people look like components from the franchise's long-running Lego City range.
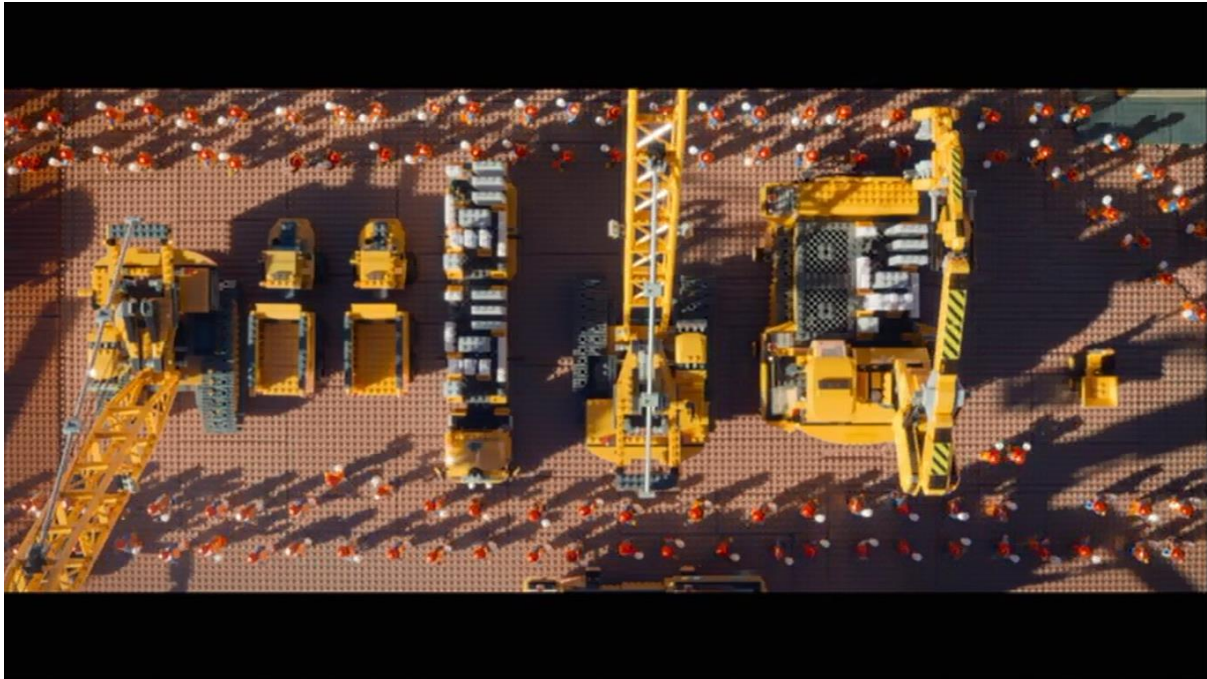
Characters make no disguise of their status as iconic minifigures. Close-ups reveal their plastic surfaces, swivel joints and necks, while their simple expressions and mouth movements appear drawn from the stock range of heads in the toy box. If Clangers and Soup Dragons only became available for purchase following their television success, Lego was an established and recognised brand decades before the film's production; the company began manufacturing licensed film tie-ins fifteen years prior to the feature's theatrical release. While the inhabitants of the Trumptonshire trilogy were reportedly burned to ensure they were not turned into commercial products (ibid., 69), *The Lego Movie* contains characters from across the various Lego brands of media merchandise, including superheroes, *Harry Potter*, *The Simpsons* and *Lord of the Rings*. Original characters such as Wildstyle and Unikitty were also ready to buy in Lego stores. In this respect the film series constituted an unabashed, even celebratory, partnership between the film industry and children's merchandise. The movie embraces a certain toyetic turn which characterises the post-*Star Wars* era, notably the first franchise enshrined in Lego kits, with a cameo from Han Solo, Chewbacca and the Millennium Falcon. Explicitly mass produced, corporate, commercial aspects potentially compromise qualities of homegrown animation, as does the Lego aesthetic itself. In considering the hand-made miniatures of British television, Moseley draws on the comments of Roland Barthes to emphasise the virtue of natural materials, such as wood and fabric (ibid., 61). Bright plastic bricks represent the antithesis of the style of plaything positively appraised by the famous semiotician. Unlike the original puppets and models which traditionally populate stop-frame animation, Lego bricks and minifigures can only result from factory processes and their very function is reliant upon mechanically-produced uniformity. *The Lego Movie*'s jerky gesticulations towards stop-frame techniques might be designed to counteract this potential lack of charm, implying handmade processes in their animation if not their production.

The contradictions at the centre of the Lego film series have been observed by many commentators. Discussing the Batman spin-off (Chris McKay, 2017), Andrew Osmond describes a "charming collision" between the "jerky, faux low-tech aesthetic" of the

film, and the "overblown spectacle, full of giant tanks, planes and monsters" (2017, 84). Kate Stables notes a central theme of the original movie being "the duality of Lego", as either a regimented experience designed around prescriptive construction kits, or a more creative imaginative activity (2014, 77). Matthias Zick Varul explores this duality, interpreting the film as expressing contradictory developments within contemporary capitalism, exemplified by the building block toy manufacturer. As a franchise, Lego is considered the perfect product of the "prosumer". Within Lego culture enthusiastic fans upload stop-frame clips onto YouTube, proposing and rating new designs on the brand's official website in a manner which effectively provides the company with free advertising and labour. Mythologising such practices, the film's climax sees everyday minifigures rallied to think outside the box in frenetically devising idiosyncratically imaginative designs in order to defeat the villainous Lord Business. Reproducing the kind of stop-frame animation used by amateur video-makers locates the film in the kinds of consumer-creator practices this narrative champions. In apparent opposition to an increased emphasis on pre-scripted play in the form of movie-based kits, the movie appears to enact a reclamation and appropriation of what Varul considers the original "childlike playful spirit of Lego" (2014, 8-10). Just as the film hinges on tensions between following building instructions and embracing a more individual freeform play, so too did *The Lego Movie* merchandise. As concession to the film's ludic disposition, many affiliated kits allowed two different objects to be built from the same bricks instead of just one.

In this respect the film maps onto Lego play various tensions within capitalist modernity, a system that requires both individualism and conformity, freedom and control, creativity and regulation. Its opening moments parody many aspects of contemporary urbanity and mass culture, including regimented fitness routines, expensive coffee and vacuously-optimistic pop music. Indicative of the contradictions the franchise exploits, "Everything is Awesome", the film's semi-theme song was a download chart success and received an Academy Award nomination. In a moment reminiscent of Robin Williams' rendition of *South Park: The Movie*'s "Blame Canada", the number was performed at the ceremony against a cartoonish backdrop resembling *Charlie and Lola*'s child-like scribbled crayon. Varul's emphasis is on the tensions the film expresses between an older, rigid, traditionally structured form of capitalism, and more contemporary, flexible strategies for organising economic production and consumption. The uncompromising, hierarchical rule of the presciently characterised Lord Business, who erects walls between different world brands and aspires to glue the Lego universe into place, represents this negative kind of capitalism. It exists in opposition to the communal, crowdsourcing, collective intelligent activities of the minifigure citizens, who foil the villain's evil scheme in the film's frenetic climax. Rather than expressing an anti-capitalist message, the film champions new flexible over old organised capitalism in which the prosumer revolution's radical potential will be ultimately absorbed and harnessed by the corporate machine (ibid., 12-13). This endorses a more seemingly democratic form of consumerism, foregrounding the kind of popular creativity, fandom and user-generated content which the company has increasingly capitalised upon through its online community. In paying tribute to these spontaneous, subversive expressions of artistry *The Lego Movie* draws on the countercultural aspects of animation and stop-frame toy play. These include Adult Swim's *Robot Chicken* (TV Series, 2001-) and Channel 4's *The Adam and Joe Show* (TV Series, 1996-2001), together with amateur animations known as "brickfilms" facilitated by Lego animation packages. Incorporating the film's gesture to stop-frame

fan culture, selected brickfilms feature incidentally in the film's background as winners of a competition to promote the movie. Also paying tribute to YouTube practices, whereby famous film scenes are incongruously remade in brick and minifigure form, the movie was accompanied in UK cinemas by Lego-rendered promotions for high-speed internet provision, car insurance and a hotel chain. The reproduction of familiar adverts in the medium of Lego, broadcast on British commercial television in a crossover promoting both the products and the movie, exemplifies the obscuring of capitalist processes under an alibi of childish play and whimsy in a manner enhanced by the animation's affected jerkiness.

While television has been historically successful in specifically catering for child audiences, the theatrically released family feature film's traditional demographic incorporates young people, teenagers and parents. Despite being based on a toy franchise and promoted as a half-term film, the adverts for adult products which accompanied screenings implies *The Lego Movie* was partly aimed at more mature audiences. Despite lacking the cosy textures of Moseley's children's animation, the persistence of the Lego brand means the range has likely nostalgic resonance for adult filmgoers to complement its contemporary significance for children. Such a point is made in Lincoln Geraghty's discussion of Lego fandom, in which they argue the brand's longevity is integral to its transgenerational success (2014, 165). In fostering this multi-age popularity the film parallels the Lego videogame series, a franchise based on the brand's film-themed kits. Jessica Aldred observes how, in contrast to the usual dismal performance of film-based videogames, this franchise has enjoyed consistent critical and commercial success (2014, 105). Like the Lego movie kits, this range started with *Star Wars* in 2005, subsequently expanding to incorporate many franchises featured in *The Lego Movie*. The movement of film characters frantically building vehicles from fragments of their world mirrors the actions of videogame avatars performing similar acts of frenetic construction. The combination of characters from different films, television shows and intellectual properties, represent a unique selling point for the subsequent Lego Dimensions range, with its fan-style mash-up of *Portal*, *Dr Who*, *Back to the Future* and *Ghostbusters*. The feature film clearly anticipates this "playful" assembling of multi-generational brands from different media, studios, genres, and eras. A form of handmade animation, remediated into the digital console, is also evident in the small scale of the games. Drawing on animation scholar Donald Crafton, sequential art theorist Scott McCloud and videogame academic Mark J. P. Wolf, Aldred argues the aesthetics of simplification entailed in characters' translation into iconic toys facilitates the role of the avatar as player substitute (ibid, 108). Furthermore, playable Lego versions of famous characters and actors, in their cartoonish, minimalist, pantomime performance, parody the aspirations of more seamless videogame-movie adaptations, while Warner Brothers continues to profit from the series (ibid., 114-5). Considering the Lego *Star Wars* series' transgenerational appeal, Robert Buerkle suggests these videogames functioned symbolically to counteract a sense of disillusionment experienced by adult fans at the second franchise's perceived childishness. Sincerely echoing the song which plays out the *South Park* movie, like the films' producer, the games encouraged jaded adults to re-experience the new trilogy through the "'eyes of a child'". This permitted a recuperation of the franchise for older fans through engaging in a digital experience marketed at young players (2014, 120-1). Crucially, as two-player games they allow children and adult to play together in a cooperative and mutually enjoyable experience of family fandom (ibid., 143). This is precisely the implied audience experience of *The*

Lego Movie, ultimately emblemised in a narrative of father and son bonding over the shared pleasures of playing with bricks.

The desire "to awaken life in petrified things", Leslie argues, is that of a child (2004, 8). This is a mythology of childhood *The Lego Movie* evokes in its final act, which reveals the world of the film as existing in yet another basement, that of an adult kit assembler played by Will Ferrell, who also provides the voice for Lord Business. This father's frustration at his son's frequent interference with his carefully constructed sets has led him to start gluing bricks together, effectively prohibiting both their reconstruction and animation. Following miraculous conversion to his offspring's more creative perspective, the conclusion sees both playing freely together in a manner endorsing the child's preferred disposition towards Lego bricks. Such closure, reflected in the parallel recuperation of Lord Business, appears consistent with the company's promotional strategies which have frequently encouraged cross-generational play at the expense of cross-gender activities (Johnson 2014, 86). In this the film reveals the centrality of an adult male-appropriated childhood to its animation and ideology which, as argued by Varul, constitutes "an anti-Fordist, anti-bureaucratic liberation myth in which the joys, frustrations and rebellions of Lego-playing children coincide with those of the grown-up employees and consumers" (2017, 12). The rigid authority of the father merely appears compromised through indulgence in juvenile activities which, reflecting Gardiner's (2000, 2005) infantile innocence of masculinity, do little to undermine patriarchal structures even as they are pulled apart and reassembled. The adult man is the star and voice actor, while the child whose hand represents the animating ghost in the machine has no equivalent avatar in the Lego universe. The movie's in-world climax involves a confrontation between Lord Business and Emmet, the film's every*man* character. Like *South Park*, the world of *The Lego Movie* is inherently male centred, despite the presence of girl power action figure Wyldstyle, and a brief cameo from a 1970s Wonder Woman preceding her 2017 live action counterpart by several years. This world is constructed by a child, but one of a certain age and gender, positioned in opposition to a grotesque younger femininity. The film's final punchline is provided by the father who warns that now his son is allowed into the sacred basement, so must his sister. This leads to a terrifying, briefly glimpsed, alien invasion of the more infantile Duplo brand into the Lego universe.

Conclusion

This chapter has interrogated intersections between childhood, animation and the handmade. Parallels have been drawn across a disparate trio of screen franchises – a children's television programme, an adult comedy series, and a family film – all of which deliberately reproduce the imperfections of handmade animation. This style is evident in the crayoned lines, scribbled colouring and wallpaper patterned surfaces of the BBC's *Charlie and Lola*. Its aesthetic includes the flat cutout world of *South Park* with its construction paper mountains, photomontage posters and wobbly walk cycles. And it also runs through *The Lego Movie* with its jerky stop-frame movements, plastic tactility and scratched figures. Rather than being the result of technology limitations, deficiencies in skill, or a consequences of the animation techniques being mobilised, this style constitutes an affected performance of simplicity, crudity and amateurism, at odds with these series' status as professional products of the fully integrated culture industries. These are all successful screen media with high viewing figures, significant

cultural impact within their field, and substantial merchandise tied into their respective franchises. While numbering just three seasons, the last of which aired in 2008, *Charlie and Lola* remains on the Cbeebies channel and website, while its toys continue to have a presence in stores and children's bedrooms. *South Park* is still being produced and is recognised as one of the most popular series on Comedy Central, currently in its twenty-first season, and set to continue into 2019. A range of four-season box sets were released this year (2018), together with the next instalment of a popular videogames series. The franchise is accompanied by an extremely diverting website. In an act of digital interpellation, *South Park* enthusiasts are afforded the opportunity to design themselves as an avatar employing the series' instantly recognisable reduced style of graphic representation. Testimony to its success, *The Lego Movie* has been followed by two sequels, *The Lego Batman Movie* and *The Lego Ninjago Movie* (Charlie Bean, Paul Fisher, Bob Logan, 2017). The latter example, based on an original Lego franchise, places the first film's parallel narrative centre stage in the story of a boy in an Oedipal battle with his villainous father. Meanwhile, on the small screen, Unikitty has been given her own cel-style television show on the Cartoon Network.

Despite not being crafty animation, in the sense of being handmade, bespoke, constructed in someone's shed or basement, the choice to adopt this visual style is nevertheless crafty in the sense of being shrewd, knowing, and somewhat deceitful. The affectation of scrapbook montage, paper cutouts and stop-frame movement functions to disguise the texts' digital construction and entrenchment in capital-driven corporate cultures of production. Such instances where the handmade is a deliberate creative or corporate choice highlight the meaning attached to the style, with its positive associations of artistry, artisanship, subversion, playfulness and authenticity. Just as digitally animated characters who express analogue imperfection appear more endearing and relatable, the same can be said of the media themselves and the affection generated towards their respective franchises, a fundamental requirement for their continued function as branded products. The style of *Charlie and Lola* evokes a sense of the domestic, the homely, the safe and comfortable, which avoids the uncanny resonance of the digitally generated, and the perceived mercenary intentions of children's media of international origins with a with more cynical commercial agenda. In *South Park* the handmade aesthetic constructs the series as outsider, anarchic, countercultural, and confrontational. Investment in this simulated mode of animation is evident across various versions of the show's opening sequence. In some the hands of the animator appear constructing the show's iconic central characters; others suggest a comic juxtaposition between the series low-fi style and the overblown pyrotechnics of the commercial box office blockbuster; more recently the two-dimensionality of the show's characters are emphasised in a sequence which moves through a three dimensional landscape populated by explicitly flat figures. The easy translation of Lego into a digital aesthetic, as evidenced by the plethora of affiliated videogames which pre-date the movie cycle, means an even greater emphasis on physicality is required of *The Lego Movie*. Appropriating a style associated with amateur video making aligns the Warner Bros series with cultures of creativity, fandom and parodic irreverence. The emulation of brickfilm also suggests the movie is rooted in the endless creative, versatile and potentially chaotic ludic possibilities of the product itself, positive brand associations which persist long after the film has run its course.

This chapter has also explored the significance of childhood within this process. In many respects there are overlaps between animation which is inexpert, scrappy, naïve, simple, reduced, crude, primitive, diminutive and playful, and children to whom the same adjectives are also applied. In contrast to the hand-drawn or hand-animated, digital animation can appear cold, hard and off-puttingly technological in origin. Its three dimensional figures and photorealistic graphics appear to lack heart, humanity and the touch of the artist. In the history of digital animation the child-like has an evident role in counteracting such perceptions. It is telling, for example, that out of all the potential stories which might have been chosen, the first computer animated feature film tells the tale of a group of talking toys in a young boy's bedroom. It is also significant that the child in this film is largely displaced in favour of a bickering confrontation between two icons of masculine adulthood, the cowboy and the spaceman, both voiced by adult stars. Despite their diversity, all three examples considered in this chapter rely upon childhood, either as media for children, as adult media masquerading as children's television, or as a family film involving the animation of a brand heavily associated with children. Like the handmade, the child-like evokes a range of meanings. In the case of *Charlie and Lola* it suggests quaint whimsy, but also Britishness and a terrestriallity countering not only digital animation but also digital television. For *South Park* it constitutes carnivalesque grotesqueness, the pleasure of laughing at bodily functions, and a certain Emperor's-new-clothes authenticity in debunking the pomposity of adult authority. Where *The Lego Movie* is concerned childhood means the eclectic combination of differently-themed toys, a challenge to older models of capitalism in the form of a youthful crowdsourcing kickstarting gifting gig economy, and the bonding experience of playing with plastic bricks. Childhood can signal nostalgia experienced by older people who are no longer children. It can mean rebellion and disregard for the sacred cows of adult society. Childhood might also function as a leveller, an identity everyone has experienced, the perfect means of appealing to a universal audience. In every case this childhood is an adult-authored construction, compiled by the adult corporation with the adult gatekeeper, viewer or ticket-buyer in mind. The exclusion of the child from the production process, an absence central to the claimed impossibility of children's media, requires the simulation of the child's hand alongside the manufacture of handmade techniques. This affectation represents a further dimension to these texts craftiness.

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