

**Racial Stereotyping and Selective  
Positioning in Contemporary British  
Animation**

**Charles C. H. daCosta**

**A thesis submitted in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements of the  
University of Brighton for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy**

**March 2007**

**The University of Brighton in  
collaboration with University College  
for the Creative Arts at Canterbury,  
Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the characterization of blacks in contemporary British-made animated films exploring racial stereotyping and locating significant absences. Recent work produced within Britain has largely been destined for television. This thesis argues that Britain's multiculturalism has not been adequately represented in popular modes of television animation. This is particularly evident in the work of Aardman, Britain's premier animation studio.

The research involves two components: theory and practice. The first seeks to investigate issues relating to representation, stereotyping, 'race' and British multiculturalism. Through selected case studies I show how these concepts operate. I begin by sampling televised popular children's animation, whose characterization and storylines are subjected to scrutiny. Next I focus on a selection of work from the Aardman studio - whose productions are not specifically aimed at children - to extend my analysis. The second component involves the production of a Claymation film designed specifically to demonstrate how it is possible to counter some of the gaps and problems embedded in black representation.

In Britain there have been several studies within the fields of film and television - and other media forms like photography - that examine representation, stereotyping, 'race' and multiculturalism. Again similar work has been done in the US. However there has not been a concerted effort, and a systematic study, that addresses those issues within the framework of televised animation in Britain. Furthermore there are no animation-inspired studies involving practical dimensions that [currently] exist to facilitate the examination of the issues at the centre of my discussion. I show that contextually informed textual analysis and animated filmmaking can be combined to produce an accessible and powerful model for countering negative stereotyping. The results of this study - with an integrated practice element - suggest that a fresh research approach can be offered through Animation Studies.

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Arriving at this junction has neither been easy nor straight-forward. I have had to stop several times to re-fuel, ask directions or simply take a break. I would like to say a big thank you to Dr. Andrew Darley, my principal supervisor, and Mr. Roger Noake my technical supervisor for all their wisdom, guidance and patience. I would also like to express my gratitude to my wife Miriam and friends Joe Dougan and Chris Owens. There have been countless others whose insight and input made this journey a bit more pleasant; and less muddy and rough. So as I turn round and look back I would like to say, '**YOU** are the best', to each and everyone who has been so instrumental in this project. God bless you.

## **Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

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**Signed** Charles Christian Henry daCosta

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**Dated**



## Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the racial stereotyping of blacks that is endemic in British animation. By *blacks* I am primarily referring to those genotypes whose ancestry can be traced directly to the African continent. In Britain they are commonly allocated the descriptor *African-Caribbean*. However this term does not fully encapsulate the racial mix of those linked to Africa and its diasporas; but this is not the remit of this study.

While racial stereotyping is not always obvious, close examination reveals that several forces are at work to ensure that a certain state of affairs is maintained. Worse still this 'condition' ensures that blacks simply do not appear in the right contexts – remaining outside normality. It would appear therefore that the absence of black ordinariness signals a subconscious desire for black non-existence. In Britain, animation is a multimillion industry; the quality and popularity of whose productions cannot be disputed. Therefore it is not surprising that this field has followed 'normal' representational practice and has largely excluded ordinary blacks from its storylines. Countering such traditions with the creative practice of Plasticine animation [Claymation] is an integral part of this study. The practical element of my inquiry is demonstrated through the production of a short film titled *School Dinners*. A copy of this production can be found on the included DVD. Other production material such as the script, storyboards and budget are included as appendices.

I devote my first chapter to a review of the current writing from the corpus of Animation Studies, on representational issues. I undertake a decade by decade review of writing, on animation, that examine social issues. Beginning with texts from the 1960s, and working through to the current, I discuss the absences and gaps that exist in some of these important texts. I reveal that there has been increased race-related scholarship in recent decades.

The second chapter involves an examination of key concepts - pertinent to my research work. Here I discuss methodology and approaches adopted by leading scholars dealing with issues raised in this study. Gleaned from the work of Hall

Althusser and others, I begin to develop ideas that form the bedrock for conducting analyses in subsequent chapters. As an example I develop from the work of Cerniglia a taxonomy which is subsequently employed to facilitate discourse on character types. This becomes particularly useful when I visit work from the Aardman studio.

In chapter three I employ the concepts explored earlier; utilizing them as filters through which a selection of popular productions are analyzed. I then suggest that black characterization is becoming more sophisticated.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to a close study of work from Britain's most prominent animation studio, Aardman. I argue that the studio's portrayals of Britishness are not only incomplete, but also deeply problematic. I point out that the work of its most prominent director, Park, has indeed promoted an aesthetic that comfortably accommodates black exclusion, through its promotion of nostalgia.

Chapter five is a reflective report on *School Dinners*. I begin the section by posing some rhetorical questions which help to put the film into perspective. I then go on to describe the methods employed for its production. This demonstrates the link between the theoretical and practical components of my thesis; reiterating the fact that these two elements are clearly designed to work together.

In the sixth chapter I discuss my findings broadly, suggesting that incidences of black representation have increased somewhat. I point out that all these developments highlight the need for further innovative research involving multi-ethnic teams. Their varied contributions may produce more rounded analyses.

## Chapter 1

### **Black Representation and Racial Stereotyping in Animation**

#### Introduction

'Animation studies' is still in its infancy – though it is maturing rapidly [Pilling 1997:ix]. Theorists such as Brasch, Cohen, Kotlarz, Sampson, Smoodin and Wells, have emerged in the field, making important contributions to the development of this area of study. Indeed Pilling's collection of essays [*A Reader in Animation Studies* - 1997] provides a brilliant introduction to animation scholarship. Leslie Felperin's *The Thief of Buena Vista* [Felperin in Pilling 1997:137-142], which examines Disney's *Aladdin* [1992] within orientalist discourse is an example of some of the excellent scholarship that constitutes the publication. In his seminal text - *Understanding Animation* - Wells draws attention to the importance of giving animation studies as much academic attention as cinema [film] studies because:

'[A] cartoon' [read 'animated film'] has the capacity to carry important meanings and engage in social issues. In short, the animated film has the capacity to redefine the orthodoxies of live-action narratives and images, and address the human condition with as much authority and insight as any live-action film [Wells 1998:4].

This chapter focuses on the current writing on stereotyping and representation of blacks - and other non-white ethnicities - within the animation form. In the past similar work may have been undertaken, but under the umbrella of cinema or film studies. Therefore this chapter is designed specifically to facilitate my contribution to new knowledge in the field of animation studies. Beginning with texts from the late 1960s, and proceeding through key writing from subsequent decades I aim to represent what these writings articulate on the subject of representation and racial stereotyping as well as other closely related concepts and theories. I proceed to assess the strengths, weaknesses, achievements and gaps in current analyses, and argue that it is very easy to employ negative black stereotypes because they have been standard practice within animation.

With a few exceptions, most of the literature on animation studies has been produced in the United States. This is due to its extensive history, and more established tradition of theatrical, and network cartoons - but crucially the sheer size of its animation industry; the commercial success it has enjoyed over the last century, and its cultural dominance. Against such a backdrop we may reasonably assume that American productions have exhibited the most racial stereotypes. This provides useful background information for my critical studies on animation within the British context. As I mentioned earlier momentum for animation studies is gathering - largely during the last two decades. The trend owes its development to work emanating from the late 1960s and early 1970s. Such scholarship is typified by two trailblazing studies; *How to Read Donald Duck* by Chilean scholars Dorfman and Mattelart in 1975, and *The Disney Version* published in 1968 by American scholar Richard Schickel.

#### Writing from the 1960s

Schickel's treatise -*The Disney Version* – offers no substantial racial analysis, although he comments briefly on racial stereotyping, through a solitary comment on Disney's *Dumbo* [1941]. He points out that “[T]here was one distasteful moment in the film. The crows who teach Dumbo to fly are too obviously Negro caricatures” [Schickel 1968:225]. This cursory remark indeed sums up the examination of the animated form for instances of black stereotyping from the 1960s.

#### Writing from the 1970s

The general absence of scholarly writing on blacks and the animated form from this period is not too surprising, as theatrical [feature-length] animation was largely in decline. Therefore I visit writing on cinematic blacks to aid my understanding of the era. Two key texts that examine these subjects are *Slow Fade to Black* [Cripps 1977] and *Blacks in Films* [Pines 1975]. Though writing about a similar subject Pines and Cripps take different approaches to black presence/representation in cinema. Pines analyzes the construction of black-related themes and imagery in film narrative. Cripps on the other hand takes a historical approach<sup>1</sup>. The distinct approaches are typically demonstrated in their discussion of the classic all black musical *Cabin in the Sky* [1943]. Cripps is

brief, describing it as one of the “appealing Hollywood integrationist movies”, in his account of the agreement between the NAACP and the major US studios towards the end of WW2 [Cripps 1977:381]. On the other hand Pines discusses the movie within the context of racial depictions motivated by “simplistic pseudo-religious myth and typically quaint black images”. He proceeds to examine the idea of characterization within the film - a notion which is also important to my thesis.<sup>2</sup> Pines concludes that *Cabin in the Sky* was instrumental in the development of a “cinematic black vernacular...before the post-war period” [Pines 1975:60]. Indeed Pines’ idea of a cinematic language resonates with Manthia Diawara’s notion of a filmic grammar<sup>3</sup> [Diawara 2000:236] which I employ for my critique later in this work. Both Cripps and Pine’s methods have their benefits; nevertheless Pines’ modus operandi better facilitates the textual analysis adopted in this study.

Another study of major importance is Donald Bogle’s seminal *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks*, a brilliant historical exposé on cinematic black ‘types’. Originally written in 1973, several updates make it a worthwhile study even today. Although the locus of his [Bogle] investigation is America its in-depth treatment of the black experience makes it an invaluable tome from which I employ some arguments to facilitate the work in this thesis.<sup>4</sup> Bogle’s classification of black [cinematic] ‘types’ also motivates the notion of a taxonomy of characters which I construct in Chapter 3 – and use in subsequent chapters.

### Writing from the 1980s

The 80s is significant for the re-birth of theatrical [feature-length] animation, epitomised in Spielberg, Williams and Zemeckis’ *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* [1988]. Britain witnessed the so-called golden age of British Animation<sup>5</sup> [Kotlarz 1999]. It is therefore not surprising that writing on the animated form began to take more critical forms. Although the trend in critical appraisal of animation gained momentum<sup>6</sup>, significant academic writing on blacks, their representation and characterization in Britain continued to be scarce. One remarkable study from the era is Kotlarz’s influential essay - *Birth of a Notion* [1983] – exploring the issue of black representation in the animated form, which I shall be

revisiting in more detail during the course of this review. Another useful study is Maltin's *Of Mice and Magic* published in 1980.<sup>7</sup> Again, as in the discussion of Cripps and Pines' work, the two writers [Kotlarz and Maltin] adopt different approaches.

Kotlarz takes a more critical approach, scrutinizing animation through the filter of race and representation. For instance in her relation of the US Government's wartime overtures to the major animation studios she focuses on the ideological objectives of such liaisons [Kotlarz 1983:22]. She argues that animation was utilized for strategic purposes, "because of its tradition of satire and caricature, and the concealment of aggression within humour" [ibid]. It is therefore not surprising when she asserts, "that Disney's cute little characters both encapsulate and conceal some of the nastier aspects of US imperialism" [ibid]. Maltin is less critical, demonstrating his skills as an archivist and commentator through a historical approach. For instance in his account of Disney's wartime effort[s] the discussion centres on either the principal characters of the cartoons, the directors, or incidents that took place during the making of such productions [Maltin 1987:70]. Maltin is not at all concerned with [race] issues in the manner of Kotlarz. His work can be described as critically benign – though it may well demonstrate just how 'taken for granted' or acceptable certain representations were at the time. This is reflected as much by what he does not feel it necessary to say as what he articulates. But it could be reasoned that although race and representation are not the key subjects of his study, he was aware nevertheless - as an established film historian – that some of the productions he discussed were equally renowned for their racist predisposition. Indeed Maltin would also have known that the notoriety of such productions contributed, 'positively', to their continued existence long after the projectors ceased rolling. Invariably he only makes perfunctory references to racist representation [1987:167], thus creating the impression that the 'collective sensitivities' of blacks may not be so significant. Maltin's general attitude towards black representation is summed up in this appraisal of Walter Lantz's *Swing Symphonies* series [1940s]<sup>8</sup> that, "these cartoons had no running characters, although the boogie-woogie episodes tended to give tacit approval to the tiresome depiction of blacks" [1987:171]. His cursory approach effectively

squanders an opportunity to make informed contributions to the discourse on racism and the animated form. Kotlarz's critical approach on the other hand offers a useful map for the [textual] analytical route taken during the course of this study.

### Writing from the 1990s

The work of scholars Cohen [1997], Lindvall and Fraser [1998], Sampson [1998] and Wainer in the 90s home in on representation and stereotyping of blacks in animation. Other writers, such as Felperin [1997], Griffin [1994], Sandler [1998] and Smoodin [1993] either discuss closely related subjects – such as otherness – or make brief references to blackness. Taking a direct approach towards race discourse are Cohen and Sampson. Cohen takes a historical approach; using studio-by-studio accounts of racially-demeaning productions. Cohen's work is propelled by two key factors; *when* and *why* animators stopped producing the blatantly racist cartoons that had been the staple 'diet' of the industry in the US [up to the end of WW2], and the overarching absence of documentation on racial stereotyping in animation, at the time of his writing in 1997. Cohen's treatise on blackness consists of a single chapter in his work, *Forbidden Animation: Censored Cartoons and Blacklisted Animators in America*<sup>9</sup>. He is particularly concerned that the limited writing on racial stereotyping seemed to praise those offensive productions now universally recognised as grotesque in their depictions of blacks. Cohen cites an essayist - Dewey McGuire - who argues that such cartoons need to be viewed "as relics of a culture that accepted caricatures with better humour [sic] than we are accustomed to in the 1990s" [Cohen 1997:49]. He also is critical of the work of another essayist, John Allyn, who glorifies Walter Lantz's notorious *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* [1943] because Lantz received an Oscar nomination for similar work [produced two years earlier].<sup>10</sup> Cohen counters that position by arguing that some of these [racist] cartoons "are embarrassingly bad films" [ibid]. Sampson takes the discourse on black representation and the absence of blacks in animation a step further from Cohen's by dedicating a whole book to the subject. His study covers six decades [1900-1960] of negative black depictions in cartoons. Sampson commences his thesis with the assertion that the derogatory portrayal of blacks was not merely a bi-product of

the pervading ideology of the era, but an active ingredient in the effort to ensure black subservience. Sampson assembles an impressive collection of original reviews and comments from newspapers and trade publications, which validate his claim. In other words Sampson provides the reader with evidence, and then allows them to arrive at a similar conclusion to his. For instance he suggests that:

[R]esults from studies by qualified scholars have shown that in general, stereotyping of another race serves as an effective vehicle for others to enhance their own self-esteem and to acquire a sense of personal power and perhaps to reinforce their own feeling of inherent superiority. Within a multicultural society, cartoons can offer a convenient opportunity for the dominant majority to legitimately express many of their prejudices towards a less powerful minority [Sampson 1998:vii].

Smoodin offers some insight into the shifting ideological positions evidenced in the press's attitude to racism and the animated form in his work *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era* [1993]. In a section of his study titled "Disney cartoons and the response to racism", he points out an emerging trend of race consciousness in the post-war period. He notes *Time* magazine's switch to harsh criticism of some of the popular cartoons when only a few years earlier theirs had been one of explicit approval and commendation; with hardly any mention of the overt racism that had been a staple of the major studios. As he puts it, "[F]or the first time in *Time* cartoon reviews, race had become an issue and Black stereotypes were acknowledged and labeled [sic] as offensive" [Smoodin 1993:107]. However we are reminded that though ideological positions were shifting [as reflected by the magazine], individuals were still not ready to be directly linked to such opinions. In his relation of a review of *Make Mine Music* [1946] in which "white subculture – hillbillies – was likened to the kind of Blackface routine that one finds in *Dumbo* [1941]," Smoodin reminds us that "[T]he reviewer avoided expressing a definitive personal opinion about the cartoon" [ibid], nonetheless "racism was not only an issue to be discussed, but to be discussed immediately" [1993:108]. He explains:

[W]hile Disney had once been written about as a reconciler, as one who brought sides together, he was now viewed as a force that worked to polarize...In just a few years Disney had gone from global goodwill ambassador to a symbol of global divisiveness [ibid].



He also draws attention to the fact that such attitudinal transformation [regarding racism in animation] was not universal, in the light of the apparent wholesale criticism of Disney et al. Referring to *The Saturday Review* - an intellectual journal – Smoodin points out a reviewer’s refusal to acknowledge the existence of racism even while criticising Disney productions that were notable for their exhibition of such effrontery<sup>11</sup> [Smoodin 1993:109]. Other writers continue to be direct in their approach to blackness and the animated form. In their joint essay, ‘Darker Shades of Animation: African-American Images in the Warner Bros. Cartoon’, Lindvall and Fraser claim racist cartoons actually contributed to the propagation of xenophobia. They point out that, “the problem was that these [stereo]types were allowed to represent the entire black community, ignoring black professionals and other role models” [Lindvall and Fraser 1998:123]. Sampson has reason to subscribe to this position, adding that:

[S]tereotyping of another race serves as an effective vehicle for others to enhance their own esteem and to acquire a sense of personal power and perhaps to reinforce their own feeling of inherent superiority [Sampson 1998: vii].

He insists that:

[W]ithin a multicultural society, cartoons can offer a convenient opportunity for the dominant majority to legitimately express many of their prejudices towards a less powerful minority...I soon discovered that the inclusion of black stereotypes in cartoon was not considered to be a detriment by newspaper film reviewers [ibid].

Continuing in Sampson’s tradition Lindvall and Fraser advance the argument that such films were an integral part of a custom of exploitation; one where producers benefited from the misfortune [of Blacks] they had engineered. They maintain that “endemic within the studio system was a silent institutional racism of which the management generally remained ignorant or neglectful” [Lindvall and Fraser 1998:125]. They also highlight some of the difficulties encountered when attempting representations of blacks. In reference to the work of an editorial cartoonist, John Lawing, Lindvall and Fraser, seem to suggest that the attribution of any general characteristics to ethnic minorities can be deemed racist, in the light of the [current] penchant for political correctness [1998:122]. I

do not subscribe to their position in this particular instance, and will revisit the issue later in my work.

Essayists Felperin and Griffin scrutinize Disney's *Aladdin* [1992]; with the former exploring the concept of orientalism, while the latter places the notions of gender and racial representation under his critical gaze. Ultimately Felperin arrives at the position that *Aladdin* is merely another platform for the exhibition of orientalism – the west's idealised image of what the Middle East is, at least in its [western] fictional narratives [Felperin 1997:141]. Griffin's paper exposes the difficulties encountered by major animation studios when examining issues linked to the notion of representation of non-white characters. As he relates, for example, the idea of "a big black Genie with an earring" was discarded by Disney executives, "nervous because [the] version was much more Arabian" than they preferred; settling instead for a non-ethnic specific blue [Griffin 1994:69]. In a paper titled 'Disney's Dolls' another essayist, Kathy Maio, analyses the film *Aladdin* in a discussion on race. Like Felperin and Griffin she unearths "the obvious racism and ethnic stereotyping in the story". Maio implies that the negative depiction of non-whites is reflexive. She illustrates her position with the observation that "the dastardly characters [like Jafar, the Vizier] are decidedly Arabic looking while the hero, looks and sounds ['Call me Al'] like a fresh-faced American" [Maio 1998:12]. She maintains:

[O]bviously Disney never means to offend anyone... [B]ut even animators and songwriters internalise racism. And the 'imagineers' at Disney obviously look to reinforce cultural assumptions and push a few buttons in their audience members, if for no reason than it's the most efficient way to tell a story. Boyish Tom Cruise look = Good guy. Swarthy, hook-nosed Basil Rathbone look = Villain. Most audience members don't even notice when this happens. It is simply the undertow of the 'Disney Magic' [ibid].

Maio insists that such "obvious racism and ethnic stereotyping" is a common feature that manifests itself in different forms in other Disney productions. Making an association with *The Lion King* [1993] she clarifies her position by pointing to the fact that:

[D]espite the African locale, the young hero is voiced by All-American white actors [Jonathan Taylor Thomas, Matthew Broderick], while

disloyal, vicious hyena baddies are given street-jive dialogue and voiced by actors like Whoopi Goldberg and Cheech Marin [ibid].

Felperin again alludes to an instance of racism's new mantle in a review of Disney's *Tarzan* [1999] for the magazine *Sight and Sound* [November 1999].

She writes:

[T]ellingly, there are no Africans in Disney's latest version of this story, *Tarzan*, perhaps because issues of imperialism would be considered a distraction to this Discovery-channel, eco-friendly take on the classic story. Instead, the gorillas themselves, here literally given a voice for the first time, represent that which is native and threatened by European encroachers [sic]. Meanwhile, with his dreadlocks and deep tan, despite his white parents this version's Tarzan is 'Blacker' than any previous incarnation [Felperin 1999/11].

Clearly 'cosmetic ethnicity'<sup>12</sup> is preferred to that which begins to resemble a representation of actual people[s]. The notion of racism is again taken up by Dan Patanella, who reiterates that several popular cartoons may not necessarily be suitable for children; describing incidents of racial stereotyping in such productions as "shocking by virtually every standard" [Patanella 1999]. He revisits *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* [1941], and is scathing in his appraisal of its producer Walter Lantz. Referring to comments made in a 1957 article for the *Hollywood Reporter* [see Maltin 1987:182] in which he [Lantz] expressed displeasure at the censorship of some of his body of work that included the notorious cartoon, Patanella retorts:

[I]'m glad Lantz didn't purposely try to "offend or degrade" anyone; he did enough damage without thinking about it. Virtually every stereotype one could apply to African-Americans is used in *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* [1941]. According to the imagery of the film, Blacks are lazy, shiftless creatures a step or two removed from monkeys until they hear music or see an attractive woman. Then they suddenly possess endless energy, albeit directed towards dancing and singing than working [ibid].

Patanella adds:

[S]o that no one could miss the implication, Lantz set *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* in a town called Lazy Town on the banks of the Mississippi. The woman who animates the entire town's populace is a mulatto, while the rest of the town are far darker, with exaggerated thick lips. If you live in Lazy Town, you're too lazy to scrub your clothes, fight, or work but you have enough stored energy to bop away to jazz and ogle the ladies [ibid].

He agrees Lantz was only one of several producers of racially-offensive cartoons, but is adamant that such characterization was a deliberately “misguided portrayal of minorities”. He is also of the opinion that several scholars of animation history - including Maltin - have either avoided discussing racism or merely skimmed the subject over.

Essayist Alex Wainer makes an excellent contribution in a study in which he examines racial stereotypes in two Disney productions, *Dumbo* [1941] and *The Jungle Book* [1967] [Wainer 1994]. Two elements of [black] characterization arrest my interest. The first instance [in which ‘black’ characters are marginalized] applies to both films, while the second is exhibited in *The Jungle Book*. In *Dumbo* the ‘negro’ crows live on the margins of society, and can thus relate well with Dumbo [marginalized from the main society]; eventually helping him to attain previously unimagined dignity. The crows are ‘ghettoized’ but seem to revel in their present state. They are content with the status quo. [1994:3] Wainer argues they [crows] subvert their position, by appearing to be in control of their condition [1994:5]. In the case of King Louie and his monkey pack [*The Jungle Book*], the second factor which I shall term ‘the glass ceiling experience’ is articulated by King Louie, who though ‘well-qualified’ still cannot move beyond his simian disposition. King Louie then serves as a metaphor for the many well-qualified blacks who seem to be shut outside the doors of their chosen professions. The monkey king aspires to be a “man cub and stroll right into town”.<sup>13</sup> Wainer explains that “the monkeys could be read as discontented blacks seeking entrance into the white world where they obviously do not belong” [Wainer 1994:5]. Wainer describes this situation as “reaffirming the stereotypical “uppity” blacks who will not stay in their place” [ibid]. Caricaturing, which is the bedrock of cartooning, does not automatically sanction ridicule, nonetheless what both films do is inadvertently act as platforms for the exhibition of mischievous and demeaning stereotypes of blacks. The fact that *The Jungle Book* was produced during the peak of the civil rights movement, in 1967, hints at a disregard of black sensitivities.

Writing in the 2000s

The recognition of 'race' discourse as elemental to animation theory is reflected in a plethora of publications in both print and electronic formats<sup>14</sup>. For instance scholars Moody [2003], Neupert [2001] and Nyback [2000] approach the subject of racism from diverse perspectives. Employing the media of comics and cartoons Moody argues that an ideology of white superiority has been somewhat [stealthily] endorsed and advanced. He posits that:

[B]ecause they are particularly geared toward kids, cartoons have more popular appeal; they appear relatively benign. However, because they seem harmless, they can be, in fact, more dangerous. And because they are ubiquitous [thanks to television], they are insidious [Moody 2003].

He also insists that the act of regularly repeating negative stereotypes of blacks while projecting positive images of whites upholds "the ideology of biological determinism" [ibid]. Therefore the notion is perpetuated that white is the 'yardstick' against which others must be measured. This position resonates with a suggestion by Sampson that:

[S]tereotyping of another race serves as an effective vehicle for others to enhance their own esteem and to acquire a sense of personal power and perhaps to reinforce their own feeling of inherent superiority [Sampson 1998: vii].

Cautioning against passiveness, Moody further warns that animation "is hardly immune to racial ideology", because "in its perceived harmlessness lies its greatest power" [ibid]; a sentiment echoed by Kotlarz when she reasons that "the ideological force of its meanings can function precisely as an iron fist in the velvet glove of gags and sentimentality" [Kotlarz 1981:22].

Having extolled the artistic and technical prowess of the Dutch puppet animator, George Pal, Neupert shifts focus to the racism that is apparent in his Puppetoons. However he manages to remain objective in his analysis [2001:6]. Although he believes that the racism exhibited by Pal is not by any means accidental, he also maintains that Pal's films also worked "as a lively locus for examining the slow and painful transition from negative stereotypes over to a playful and vital tribute to 1940s Black cultural patterns" [Neupert 2001:9]. Emphasizing the paradox that was George Pal he concurs with Sampson who comments:

[P]al may have succeeded in bringing black folklore to the public, but he also helped perpetuate all the negative stereotypes that he found when he came to the United States. These stereotypes include chicken stealing, shooting craps, fear of ghosts, black cannibalism, the minstrel show, and shoeshine boy [Sampson 1998:30].

According to Neupert Pal deserves favourable critique because he employed black talent during his productions. Therefore it would be erroneous to critique him solely on the basis of racial prejudice [Neupert 2001:10]. Like Neupert Nyback acknowledges the racist element in productions such as Pal's, but suggests they be viewed more analytically. He claims that, "they are too good to remain buried but [could] perhaps benefit from an introduction which contextualises them" [Nyback 2000]. He argues that such productions [considered racist] have been "suppressed and wilfully ignored by the anthropologists of cinema who have little desire to re-release the toxic fumes of social hatred and inequity from another time", but wonders whether their marginalization should persist [ibid].

Brasch's *Cartoon Monickers* [2000], in spite of its innocuous title, offers an interesting dimension on the US animation industry. Chapter 10 in particular is an excellent exposé on the issue of black representation [or the lack of it] [Brasch 2000:143-155]. Through his investigation into the prevalence of middle-of-the-road names in cartoon characters [such as Daisy, Tom, Mickey, Jerry, Donald, etc] Brasch argues that the ideological position – on black inferiority - that persisted in earlier decades had not been entirely submerged by more positive thinking of recent times, and that executives continued to be nervous about 'minority' [ethnic] characters. Brasch claims:

[I]n late 1982, it was revealed that all three major television networks used outside consultants to evaluate the "appropriateness" of project ideas for the networks. One of the major criteria was the race and religion of main characters – a minority lead character would cost the writer "points" [Brasch 2000: 151].

Thus contrary to popular American belief that the races were finally at peace; a period which Bogle describes as the era of black superstars<sup>15</sup> [Bogle 2001:267-8], network television was unwilling to take 'such risks' when it came to the animated form. It would seem that the ideological mindset that promoted black

absence had barely improved. This was perhaps due to the dominance of white middle-class investors – who invariably sanctioned the televised content. As Brasch reveals:

[G]reen; that's the colour that sets standards...It's money. And money comes from advertisers. And advertisers are the businessmen with three piece suits and Ivy League education. Maybe they're someone from the Bible Belt who developed a large business...the WASPs are the advertisers...Let's face it...the medium itself is largely WASPish [Brasch 2000:149].

As articulated in my methodology this thesis does not have a political economic objective – which is integral to the work of Bryman [2004]<sup>16</sup> and Dorfman and Mattelart [1975]<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless I shall occasionally employ such thinking to reinforce some arguments.

The discourse on black representation is taken up by Wells during the second half of a section – *Race in Context* [Wells 2002:215-220] of *Issues in Representation*, the fifth chapter [2002:185-221] - of his wide-ranging study *Understanding Animation*. Exhibiting traces of militancy reminiscent of 1960s black literature he cautions – along lines similar to Kotlarz [1983-22] - against any wrongful assumption that animation is “an innocent medium” [Wells 2002:187]. He is equally blunt concerning the notion of stereotyping, stressing that “black stereotypes are essentially the symbolic embodiment of white hypocrisy” [2002:217]. Wells demonstrates ‘black’<sup>18</sup> militancy by claiming that the representation of blacks is a canvas for the exhibition of white taboos. Therefore popular caricatures and representations of blacks are merely manifestations of the ‘imagined black’, in white minds. Wells insists that:

[W]hen absorbed into white mainstream culture, however, the black idiom works as a mechanism by which white animators and audiences can rehearse their fears and play out scenarios which are supposedly outside WASP society. These include the temptation of excessive physicality, over-determined sexuality and sexual practice, gambling, drinking, etc. Black caricature is ultimately the reflection of the apparent prohibitions placed upon white desire [ibid].<sup>19</sup>

Wells’ examination of blackness occurs within a broader discourse on representation. Therefore it is not as extensive as it could have been. There are also occasions when he appears contradictory. For instance he insists that:

[W]hile such stereotyping is inexcusable, it may be understood as a product of an insensitive climate so naturalised in its political inequalities that these kind [sic] of representations were perceived as aesthetic orthodoxy...[Wells 1998:216].<sup>20</sup>

Then he suggests that the films were “operating as a playful rather than malicious presentation of black tropes” [ibid]; which I cannot accept in the light of his [earlier] articulation that:

[T]he black idiom works as a mechanism by which white animators and audiences can rehearse their fears and play out scenarios which are supposedly outside WASP society [2002:217].

Following which he posits that white artists did “*not revise their view and depiction of black characters, but [did] ignore or marginalize them, or find new victims for their jokes*”<sup>21</sup> [1998:218]. Despite the seeming ambiguity Wells’ work is beneficial to this study. This is because while there is a need to continue questioning the objectives and motives of artists whose works have been facilitated by racist imagery, it is also imperative to scrutinize animation-related writings that casually gloss over issues of representation. This assumes greater importance when examining work from more recent times, as there appears to be a significant ideological shift from how ‘race’ discourse was conducted in preceding decades.

### Conclusion

This review is by no means exhaustive - due to the difficulty of acquiring and assembling more material at this stage. Nevertheless I have made some interesting discoveries which will become an integral part of my study. In general there have been improvements in the portrayal of blackness in the animated form. This is essentially because filmmakers, like other artists, are ‘captives’ of their time [Lindvall and Fraser 1998:122]. Nonetheless the collective work of the intellectuals whose various studies are examined in this chapter, demonstrate the relevance of undertaking similar research within the British context. After all Britain does not only have a filmmaking tradition that is as old as America’s; it also possesses a history of interaction with blacks that predates its heritage of slavery, colonization and the present day



commonwealth. There could not be a better opportunity for a study of this kind as this nation strives to address its current multicultural state.

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1 This is not entirely surprising as Cripps was a Professor of History at Morgan State University in Baltimore at the time of writing, while Pines' teaching background is in the area of Film Studies.

2 Pines also examines the use of music within the same discussion.

3 Here Diawara is discussing D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* [1915].

4 However the very fact that Bogle's formidable scholarship does not touch the animated form again draws attention to the notion that Animation Studies has been a Cinderella - in relation to cinema studies - which is rapidly gaining attention as it emerges from the academic backwaters.

5 This can be attributed to the proliferation of shorts by independents; a development largely credited to state funding and private finance - witnessed in the BBC and Channel 4's massive input into the animated form. All this resulted in numerous film festivals and courses in animation.

6 Crystallizing in the formation of organisations such as the Society for Animation Studies by Harvey Deneroff in 1984.

7 It was re-issued seven years later in 1987.

8 The series has been castigated for exhibiting some of the worst racist stereotyping in the history of animation. It includes the notorious *Scrub Me Mama With A Boogie Beat* [1941].

9 First published under the title 'Racism and Resistance: Black Stereotypes in Animation' in *Animation Journal*. See [1996] *Animation Journal*, Vol.4, No.2 pp.43-68.

10 See Altyn, J. [1993] 'African Americans in Cartoons: A Misunderstood Legacy', in *The Toon!*, Spring, pp.10-11.

11 In the same essay Smoodin argues that as an intellectual publication *The Saturday Review* should have adopted a more objective position.

12 I am proposing this term to describe the use of black features / characteristics in place of blacks. 'Blackface' represents an extreme form of this phenomenon.

13 I extracted this from King Louie's lyrics in the film.

14 I am referring to web-based material such as online journals, blogs and forums.

15 The 1980s: an era when stars such as Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Prince - in music; and Earvin 'Magic' Johnson and Carl Lewis - in sports - were synonymous with entertainment; a period of syndicated programmes such as *Different Strokes* and the eponymous *Cosby Show* commandeered the sofas in nearly every American home.

16 *The Disneyization of Society*

17 *How to Read Donald Duck*

18 In this instance the reasoning of Wells - who is white - is reminiscent of black militant thought. Such thinking most commonly associated with groups like the Nation of Islam and Black Panthers [of the 1960s] who were/are perpetually apprehensive of white motives.

19 This position is similar to Fanon's - as espoused in his treatise *The Negro and Language* [see Chapter 1 of *Black Skin, White Masks*] [Fanon 1999:17-40]. In it he describes the 'imagined black' [as depicted in cinema], declaring that, "willy-nilly, the Negro has to wear the livery that the white man has sewed for him" [1999:34]. He then explains that, "to make him talk pidgin is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an *appearance* for which he is not responsible" [1999:35].

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20 This position is supported by Lindvall and Fraser who have argued that the filmmakers were “captives of the larger culture” that they operated in [Lindvall and Fraser 1998:122].

21 Later in the same paper Wells reinforces this argument by claiming that the same “aesthetic was deployed, enjoyed and exploited in Bob Clampett’s *Coal Black And De Sebben Dwarfs* [1943]” [ibid].

## Chapter 2

### Methodological Issues and Key Concepts

#### Introduction

The essence of this study is to demonstrate through key examples and discussion that negative portrayals of blacks in British animation is not a thing of the past. It is ongoing. But of course the racism that has underpinned more recent depictions is not immediately obvious. In Britain the representation of blacks and their cultures has been explored to an extent in some of the dominant literature on the animated form [see Kotlarz 1983; Wells 2000]. However these writings have somewhat failed to recognize that improvements in representation are not necessarily in sync with a pervading ideology that operates in the shadows to ensure blacks do not appear on top of the social pile. Therefore we see more blacks but cannot necessarily walk away from screens with feelings of gratitude or satisfaction. Clearly the majority of scholarship on blacks in animation has occurred in the United States; as such, the debate on stereotyping and racism has largely centred on cases involving African-American references. The majority of non-American scholarship on black characterization in animation has followed a similar trend – by employing African-American case-studies to facilitate their deliberations. These contributions are useful to animation studies on the whole. Indeed such critiques suggest, quite powerfully, that animation is neither trivial nor impotent, and should not be taken for granted. However what is obviously missing from this scholarly corpus is a concerted British-focused, British-centred study on the representation of blacks and their cultures within the realm of British animation; and especially undertaken by a black British person. A study covering these issues – such as I have undertaken – is of utmost importance because contemporary Britain is a multicultural society<sup>1</sup>. It has a tradition of excellent animated filmmaking that dates back at least to the inter-world war years<sup>2</sup>, but while there has been much discussion on the representation of British blacks in film and television, the medium of animation has not been privy to such

discourse. For this reason I conduct a textual analysis at whose fulcrum is a selection of popular British-made productions. Outlined below are the key research questions being examined in this study:

1. In an increasingly multicultural and ethnic Britain does negative stereotyping of blacks persist in its animation?
2. Has this been accidental or are these works the result of implicit racist ideologies that operate as commonsense?
3. How are these depictions executed?
4. Are there practical ways in which British animation can begin to address its problematic representations of blacks?

I began this study with a review of dominant animation literature. This involved scrutiny of text drawn from an assortment of publications including books, journals, magazines, scholarly articles, and other material sourced from the Internet. My reading covered the current body of work on 'race' and representation within animation; but I occasionally visited text from related areas such as television and film. While generally avoiding technical writing on animation during the literature review I consulted such text during the preparations for the production of *School Dinners*.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter sets out to achieve a number of objectives. Initially I describe the methodological approaches that have been employed during the course of this research into instances of racial stereotyping, levels of presence and degrees of absence in popular British animation. These have been gleaned from an examination of approaches employed by some of the leading scholars who have used these theories while working in other areas of popular culture studies. The concepts – including *ideology*, 'race', *stereotyping*, *multiculturalism* and *counter-strategies* – are then scrutinized to demonstrate how they been instrumental to this study. This is because the notions do not stand alone, but rather intertwine and fuse at various stages under the umbrella of *representation*. So for instance someone exhibiting racist behaviour may not have had cause to examine their deeds, because they have been nurtured in an environment that nurtured racism. In other words they are only acting out their ideological orientation. People pick up and apply whatever symbols or icons in order to help them quickly formulate an understanding [Fiske 2003:2]. It is this very process of trying to make sense quickly that invokes the notion of

stereotyping. This clarifies the fact that stereotyping is not an inherently racist notion, but only takes on such form when fertilized by prejudicial rhetoric. I would like to point out that in such instances rhetoric is not limited to aural forms, but can indeed be visual. Stereotypes are not genetically transmitted. They are passed on from the institutions that govern us, by the traditions to which we subscribe, and by the very people from who we seek affirmation [Althusser 1971]. Therefore they can be given different meanings – depending on their operational or contextual circumstances [Hall 1997:1]. Similarly, and as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, ideology can assume a positive form. The Althusserian concept of interpellation – famously illustrated with a ‘hailing’ policeman - suggests negativity [Althusser 1978:176-182]. I want to suggest that it is actually the example that reinforces the notion’s negativity. The employment of the concept of interpellation, in some instances, can suggest positivity. This is because ideology relies on power, and the centres of power can shift – depending on the prevailing circumstances.

In order to embark on a critical analysis of selected productions I conducted an assessment of television listings. This involved the scrutiny of screenings recorded in special Christmas editions of *Radio and TV Times* [see table, Appendix 1]. The Christmas period was selected because of the predominance of family-oriented programming – this is a good indicator of what Britain considers its ‘favourite’ productions. British-produced children’s animation fit well into this category of programming. Commencing with 2004 I work backwards through to 1993. Adopting the same *present-to-past* approach I continue the study by scrutinizing productions televised during non-festive periods. The choice of productions to facilitate my analysis is not exhaustive but only representative of televised animation. The selected films are employed to consolidate the claim that while British animation has made progress in its allowance for the appearance of blacks, their characterization and cultures, there is still more work required to improve representation. Instances of filmic marginalization or misrepresentations may not be intentional. However the very fact they occur unconsciously – functioning as common-sense and normality – demonstrates the operation of an ideology fundamentally indifferent to black sensitivities.

### Constructivism, commonsense and absence

Out of the reading on key thinkers, Hall's work on representation and Althusser's notion of ideology provide conceptual models for the approaches adopted during the course of this study; which is situated around representation and ideology critique<sup>4</sup> [Hall 1980a:117]. Hall's constructivist methods inspire my approach to analyses. This is reflected in my deconstruction of animation films to enable critical investigation of their subtext. Hall outlines or explains a concept, and then uses examples drawn from the media and other popular culture artefacts for both illustrative and analytical purposes. Likewise I first discuss key concepts and how I anticipate using them in this chapter, and then investigate how these are likely to operate. These analyses are fuelled by case studies drawn from popular animation [see chapters 3 and 4]. Symbols can facilitate and do communicate powerful messages. In other words, in the absence of the verbalization, or vocalization of ideas, beliefs can still be transmitted. This is largely because meaning is constantly being constructed and restructured [Hall 1997:26; Turner 1992:27]. The evidence of such thinking can be evidenced in *School Diners*. In this production artefacts such as dreadlocks and a Pan-African colour scheme reinforce the main character's blackness – in spite of the fact she speaks with a very English accent. Viewers are therefore compelled to question whether or not she should sound the way she does. In other words, should she not be sounding 'more black'? But within that last question rests the assumption – the ideological position that blacks can only sound a particular way, or need to talk in some prescribed manner. This leads to Althusser's suggestion that ideology is not explicit. Rather it is inherent in the very systems and practices we accept as elemental to our continued existence. Therefore we allow ourselves to submit to thought patterns automatically, as long as we function within such systems [Althusser 1994]. This understanding, which I shall be developing and taking forward, emerges from my reading of his work discussed later in this chapter. In order to provide further insight into the functioning of the ideology of race – with a view to the discourse on degrees of absence, and the constituent levels of presence – I construct a typology of characters which is adapted into a filter through which to evaluate the positioning of blacks in animation productions.

My typology takes its cue from the work of film historian Bogle, and theatrical studies of Cerniglia on ethnic casting. Both scholars are American; therefore their references are US-centred. Indeed this is another reason for the relevance of work such as this British-centred study. Thus informed I move on to locate and critique the arrangement and composition of images within a selection of British animation productions for levels of black presence. I emerge from this discussion with evidence of the persistence of black absence, then proceed to examine case studies from the Aardman studios, which as Britain's most dominant animation studio has also depicted blacks and their cultures at various times. I argue that the majority of the studio's portrayals of blacks have been akin to negative stereotyping. I maintain that the subtleties of these depictions suggest the functioning of an ideology which needs to be probed and discussed. Using the character typology – developed in this chapter – I suggest that there has not been much of a concerted effort within the British animation industry to improve the representation of blacks and their cultures.

Because of my training as an animator I am able to offer a practical alternative to the discourse on these forms of representation. This takes the form of a practical piece, *School Dinners*, which employs Plasticine and vox-pop in a manner not dissimilar to the Aardman aesthetic. Through this production I have begun to demonstrate the possibility of countering dominant perceptions of blackness – with a symbolic representation of 'hidden' Britishness. I have not been able to scrutinize all the numerous animation films produced in Britain throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and focus on popular children's animation productions screened on mainstream<sup>5</sup> television since 1993. After a discussion on British animation centred on blackness [see chapter 3] I focus on the Aardman studios, whose work has been deemed to aptly capture the essence of Britishness [Quigley 2002], and therefore constitutes the benchmark for measuring levels of black presence and absence in British animation. At this juncture I would like to outline and discuss the key ideas operating in this study.

### Representation

The concept of representation is central to any discourse on racism. This is because it seamlessly draws upon other notions – which I shall discuss shortly – to facilitate debate. The complexity surrounding the notion can be first glimpsed when one begins to scrutinize its etymology<sup>6</sup>. The cultural theorist Stuart Hall has argued that representation employs signs to produce meanings – that are then interpreted or understood by people [Hall 1997:1]. I agree with Hall, and point out that people or certain situations, for instance, can be reduced to the symbolic or iconic. For example young black males have been severally presented in tandem with menace; Nigeria equated with fraud; and while beauty is commonly associated with blondes they are also linked to stupidity<sup>7</sup>. The examples I have just utilized also demonstrate that this reductivity – to symbolic value – can be achieved through the fusion of stereotypes<sup>8</sup> and ideologies at a given time. I would like to emphasize that such symbols are especially problematic when placed at the disposal of the dominant in a multicultural society such as Britain. The inevitable result is racial discrimination which can function in different forms, and at several levels – ranging from cursory remarks to institutionalized harassment and state-sponsored persecution. Unlike stereotyping, racism – which I revisit shortly – can never be benign. This position is acknowledged by historian Fryer who argues that “race labels are in fact political weapons by means of which a dominant group can retain a subject group in subjection” [Fryer 1993:62]. The view is shared by Gidley who maintains that representations almost inevitably reflect the assumptions, or presumptions, of the dominant group [Gidley 1991:2]. Alluding to the work of American sociologist Howard S. Becker<sup>9</sup>, Gidley agrees that “representation leaves out much, in fact most of reality” [1991:4] since “all representations involve selection, translation, arrangement and interpretation” [ibid].

Again these outlooks resonate with Hall’s constructivist perspective on the notion of representation, conducted through his analyses of popular culture platforms, such as newspapers, billboards, photographs and paintings<sup>10</sup>. As he puts it: “[T]he concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture” [1997:15]<sup>11</sup>. This informs my position that the limited portrayals of blacks in British animation are problematic largely



because these depictions are habitually constructed out of perceptions – of blackness – gleaned from a distance. Like mirages, some animation productions have appeared to reflect black culture. However such portrayals frequently dissolve on close contact, leaving those meant to be represented with feelings of emptiness and distaste. This is due to the persistence of negative stereotyping of ethnic minorities, of which blacks have borne the brunt. In fact the black characterizations in the Aardman films I discuss later in this study reflect this condition – of problematic representations [see Chapter 4]. But then again I would argue that the absence of blackness and these stereotypes persist in British-produced popular animation. In the light of the nation's multiculturalism such practices must be seen as manifestations of some latent but persistent exclusionist ideology. Intellectual Ron Tamplin relates to this position in an essay on western depictions of non-westerners titled 'Noblemen Noble and Savages', in which he acknowledges the ideological constitution of representation. Tamplin admits that "what emerges most strongly [for me] is the way our recognitions, and our representations, are typed by our interests and our backgrounds" [Tamplin 1992:60]. That which we see, therefore, is either what we want to perceive or are allowed to witness. In other words we are more likely to choose to make sense of things only if they resonate with our upbringing. This indeed derives from the Althusserian take on ideology which is discussed later in this chapter [Althusser 1971] and reiterated in Chapter 3.

Richard Dyer rejects common representational studies, suggesting that they are too firmly focused on the 'disadvantaged-ness' of subjects [Dyer 2002:126]. Previous analyses, he reasons, have largely focused on "groups defined as oppressed, marginal or subordinate" [ibid]. He adds that "the impulse for such work lies in the sense that how such groups are represented is part of the process of their oppression, marginalization or subordination" [ibid]. Dyer contends that examining 'non-dominant' groups from such positions [of disadvantage] only magnifies, and reproduces, 'the sense' of 'alien-ness' [ibid]. He argues that the way minority groups are presented is always a valid reflection of how they are treated by dominant groups in their societies [ibid]. He clarifies his position thus:

[R]e-presentation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. How we are seen determines in part how we are treated; how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation [ibid].

Dyer's deliberations provide a pretty good image of the complexity of discourse relating to the notion of representation. What Dyer leaves out of his analysis is whether stereotyping is crucial during the construction of representations. At this juncture I would suggest that depictions which deliberately contravene 'normal' perceptions of the 'other', or minorities, may be useful in forcing dominant groups to re-dress, or at least confront, their prejudices. The oppositional work of such representational practices is the objective of counter-strategies, a notion that I discuss later in this chapter, and a concept I employ in my practical work. Nonetheless it is clear that representation is about constructing meaning – making sense to create order. However the process of creating some sort of order – or making sense of things – can be problematic, because it requires generalizations, 'typifications' and 'templating'<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless such 'shortcuts' or generalizations paradoxically possess the conceptual tools that can be employed for their own rectification. Because they are the only means through which dominant groups can understand others, I would argue that such generalizations can be positively subverted – to disturb the status quo.

Work undertaken in the US on black representation has also provided my study some valuable insight. There is an obvious directness in the US approach that I find useful in developing my arguments on black representation in British animation. For instance while British intellectuals Hall and Dyer – and indeed Tamplin – refer to 'dominant groups' without making explicit references to racism [see Hall 1997; Dyer 1997 and Tamplin 1992], bell hooks does not hesitate to make such a connection. For instance she argues that:

[T]here is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in [this] society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation and overall domination of black people [hooks 1992:2].

I would concur with hooks that such negative representations are detrimental to the black intellect, and need to be combated in the same media arena; because it is on these [media] platforms that the focus of the dominant groups rest<sup>13</sup>.

The critique of another American scholar Ron Merelman also highlights the need to produce work that tackles persistently negative portrayals of blacks. Like Hall and Dyer Merelman's work involves media platforms – especially television, film and popular music<sup>14</sup>. He is interested in how both “white and African-Americans have represented and projected black culture into the mainstream”, and contributed to the construction of the American identity. However he cautions apropos Fiske that “the projection of black culture can succeed only if it penetrates the mass media” [1995:199]. Likewise a British identity that is not automatically measured by the standards of white Englishness will only begin to register and succeed when blacks and other ethnicities become integral to mainstream animation. By this I am arguing that blacks and their cultures are only partially integrated into ‘mainstream’ media. This is because of an absence of ordinariness that prevails during the limited portrayals of blacks. Blacks therefore remain an unknown quantity whose tiers of sophistication are hardly revealed to whites, thus ruling out the opportunity to develop sophisticated social relationships. Merelman attributes this to the fact that “as a dominant racial group, whites will close the media gates in order to protect the cultural underpinnings of their power” [Merelman 1995:199]. It is the duty of counter-strategic practice[s] to prise open these ‘media gates’.

#### Ideology, racism and stereotyping

The notion of ideology which I take forward in this study derives from the work of French philosopher Louis Althusser. Discounting the notion of ‘false consciousness’<sup>15</sup> analogous with Engels and Marx, Althusser suggests that ideology is not explicit, but rather implicit [see Althusser 1971; Turner 1992]. Ideology, he argues, is all around us, and one has no way of breaking out of its hold. In a seminal essay<sup>16</sup> he posits that ideology does not ‘echo’ the actual world, but instead represents the “imaginary relationship of individuals” to the real world [Althusser 1971:109]. This ‘imaginary relation’ operates as common sense, so that everyone unwittingly acts out the concept in some form or shape.

For this reason representation is a conduit for ideology. There cannot be any form of representation without the projection of some manifestation of the notion of ideology. Hall subscribes to this understanding of ideology, arguing that it provides a channel:

...[T]hrough which men, interpret, make sense of, experience and 'live' the material conditions in which they find they find themselves [Hall 1980a:33].

Hall is suggesting that the platforms that enable the projection of the concept are in fact mirrors that reflect the views of the dominant group. At the same time, however, the same platform compels the others to unconsciously aspire to become like the reflection. In other words people will behave reflexively in correspondence with the latent or inherent cultural codes of the particular society in which they exist [Hall 1980a:33 and Turner 1992:26]. These perspectives that Hall takes forward stem from Althusser's seminal essay on *ideological state apparatuses*<sup>17</sup>. Althusser insists that these institutions are important in the crystallization of any ideological position<sup>18</sup> [Althusser 1971 and Fiske 2003]. Hall's approach is highly relevant because "we internalise *ideology* and are therefore not easily made conscious of its presence or effects; it is unconscious" [ibid]. Hall's work enables us to assess the role of the media in stealthily fashioning perceptions within our [present-day] societies. Our consciousness, or awareness – what we perceive or accept as a matter of course – is the result of ideology. In other words we view the world through what I would term *ideological glasses*. Put another way ideology is the window through which one sees the world [Turner 1992:28]. Media instruments – television, cinema, newspapers, magazines, books, posters, music, stamps, etc – as well as political, legal and educational systems are merely catalysts in this process. Indeed modern societies may not function in any recognisable form[s] without these ideological facilitators. As a medium that matter-of-factly transcends worlds, animation therefore needs to be seen as a conduit for the channelling of ideology. Children, who are the biggest 'consumers' of this art – but more especially those from Britain's minority ethnicities – run the risk of looking in the proverbial mirror of animation and seeing images that neither reflect them nor the cultures of their parents. This can inevitably lead to the lack of a sense of belonging – identity crises. As I point out in Chapter 3 and

reiterate during my discussion of work from the Aardman studio, blacks are frequently situated within problem, performance and entertainment contexts. This ideological positioning has damning results. Blacks are almost always expected to excel in athletics and entertainment, or demonstrate expertise when crime-related issues or other troubling concerns are highlighted. Thus for black viewers the 'role-models' who appear on media platforms to share their expertise on crime are unconsciously suggesting that 'crime pays', because it provides some of the only opportunities to see familiar faces. The pervading ideology in these instances is that blacks are not ordinary, and that as 'others' they must only surface when there is an issue. My arrival at this position has been aided by the work of media theorist Fiske who identifies two schools of thought – *process* and *semiotic*.

According to the former mode [*process*] a message is only successful if the effect precisely matches what was initially intended [Fiske 2003:2]. This can be problematic if the intended meaning is not what is received by the audience. I adopt the *semiotic* approach because it offers more scope in the understanding of how *ideologies* may operate through media [or communication] platforms, and is similar to Hall's *modus operandi*. Fiske argues that this is the case because the focus of the semiotic school's attention is "how messages... interact with people in order to produce meaning" [ibid]. The semiotic approach is able to function this way because it first identifies the cultural environment in which an individual exists. Next the approach employs this setting as a launchpad to facilitate the perception, comprehension and then eventual interpretation and production of meanings [2003:2-3]. The flexibility of this semiotic approach - analogous to Hall's methodology becomes most evident during the analysis of my practical piece – *School Dinners* which takes place in chapter five.

Like Hall [1997], Raymond Williams advocates a position that suggests *ideology* is not solidly fixed, and not the sole prerogative of any particular group. Thus a 'science' or 'philosophy of ideas can be appropriated and exercised by anyone or group of persons [Williams 1985:155]. Hence I produce a new concept by pairing the Althusserian interpretation of ideology – his idea of commonsense – with thinker Pierre Macherey's notion of absence - that the silences that occur

in any given text are not accidental [Macherey 1978]<sup>19</sup>. Macherey also calls on observers to recognize absences as reflections of the dominant ideology [Macherey 1990:215-222]. The product of the concatenation of the two notions is the idea of the *conscious-unconscious* – which I utilize to show how racism and stereotyping function within popular animation. As is the case, stereotyping can be both benign and malignant. So while it can be beneficial in terms of practical production, it also has the potential to produce representational minefields. The operation of this complex paradigm is often seamless, making it seem as if there is an unavoidable flaw in the practice of animation. This is the functioning of the *conscious-unconscious* phenomenon. This occurs because while animators have to *consciously* make production decisions – such as camera settings, lighting, etc – in order to realize their scripts, they on the other hand *unconsciously* gravitate towards the selection of images that will quickly convey their message[s]. In other words I agree with Kotlarz [1983] that animation is naturally labour-intensive; however I move on to assert that the same exacting characteristics of the craft propels animators towards the deployment of stereotypes<sup>20</sup>. It is worthwhile noting that any form of cultural production can encounter such difficulties.

Hence the animated form is unwittingly caught in a conceptual trap from which it cannot easily extricate itself at the best of times. This is in fact an ideological position from which practitioners can be wrenched – but only when *the* problem has been pointed out<sup>21</sup>. The responsibility of ensuring that the [ideological] position of the *conscious-unconscious* does not result in negativity rests with the notion and practice of counter-strategic animation production. In other words it is important to ensure that the future representations of blackness be seen to educate more than entertain. Therefore the performance tag with which blacks are [routinely] associated needs to be rejected.

### 'Race'

Central to this work on representation are the notions of racism and 'race', a concept that continues to generate interest despite the fact that it remains discredited<sup>22</sup>. The notion is not easy to situate, and this difficulty is not a new development. According to sociologists Jary and Jary this is probably because:

[I]ts meaning has altered several times over the last 400 years in line with changing concepts about the nature of physical and cultural differences and, more importantly, the ideological uses of the concept to justify relationships of superiority and exploitation [Jary and Jary 2000:503].

But theorist David Goldberg seems to think 'race' is more a product of modernity [Goldberg 2002:3]<sup>23</sup>. It is not uncommon to encounter vague descriptions of the term in some of the most popular dictionaries. For example the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines it as:

[O]ne of the main groups that humans can be divided into according to their physical differences, for example the colour of their skin...A group of people who share the same language, history, culture, etc [OALD 2000:1041].

However this definition is somewhat flawed because elements such as skin colour, historic and linguistic similarities cannot determine 'race'. For instance where would Chinese and Ethiopian Jews [Falashas] fit into the concept of a so-called Jewish 'race'? The idea of trying to force people into unworkable categories is a good indicator of why the practice of racism, which manifests in various forms and at different levels, is so deplorable. Indeed the struggle with the concept surfaces again in the dictionary definition of racism, where it is described as:

[T]he unfair treatment of people who belong to a different race; violent ugly behaviour towards: the belief that some races of people are better than others: irrational racism [2000:1042].

Taking a historical approach two theorists, Fryer and Fredrickson, attack the notion of race. Fryer's primary interest is in the area of British rule over Africans, Asians and their descendants [Fryer, 1993:xi]. In his book *Black People in Britain: an Introduction*, he argues that racism is a tool. Suggesting that the term *race* is a political instrument, particularly useful for controlling non-white peoples, he argues that the combination of the terms *black[s]* and *race* reduces the value of discourse on racism [ibid]. This process seems to place whites above the notion, in effect maintaining a hierarchy of human types according to which blacks and 'their perceived ill [of race]' must occupy the lower rungs of intellectual analyses. A good example of the reductive-ness [of racism] at work can be observed in British television's consistent engagement of black experts

for discussions relating to race. That is an indirect way of saying: ‘that is their [black] problem so they can deal with it best’. Contrast this with the routine exclusion of blacks from televised discussions on subjects such as space-travel, nuclear physics or cardiology, and a clear exclusionist message – that is the fruit of some racist ideology – is being transmitted. Of course such manifestations of racism are seamless, and so rampant, that they are hardly questioned [Dyer 1997:2]. Therefore it is still not common to see ordinary blacks being featured on popular lifestyle [television] programmes<sup>24</sup>. Such seamlessness ties in with Althusser’s notion of common-sense, discussed earlier; so that a black nuclear physicist appearing on national television is quite easily deemed an oddity. Indeed it is likely they would be discussed – even by black viewers, and on black media platforms. Yet a black social worker talking about witchcraft and child abuse<sup>25</sup> or an African doctor discussing the AIDS epidemic, is acceptable.

Race ideology is rooted in the Slave Trade. Fryer agrees, linking the ignominious trade to the successes of the Industrial Revolution. Tracing the origins of this ideology to the seventeenth century, Fryer claims that it fuelled British imperialism, and identifies the Slave Trade as the primary reason for the successful spread of racist ideologies. Arguments and theories were developed as a ‘psychological imperative’<sup>26</sup> in order to justify atrocities [1993:63]<sup>27</sup>. Racism has no scientific grounding, but the fact that it has survived at all, and triumphed on numerous occasions, is testimony to its tenacity as an ideology. This is simply because it:

[H]ad a precise *social function* – as an *ideology*: A system of false ideas justifying the exploitation and domination of people with a visible degree of melanin in their skin, by those whose melanocytes are not so active [1993:62].

The absence of blacks from ‘mainstream’ British [and to a larger extent European] history is in fact a powerful strategy that has been employed for the ‘normalisation’ of discrimination against them. The tactic has cemented an ideology that projects blacks as inferior [1993:63]. Its record of the past – the history it writes, or fails to document – inevitably defines the character of a society. National history undoubtedly promotes national ideology [Carr



1961:21]. This somewhat corresponds with Williams and Fiske's definition of *ideology* as "a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group" [Fiske 2003:165].

In more recent times the expression of racist thinking has been more subtle – almost subliminal in its operation. But then it is possible that reasoning of this kind has become more sophisticated. The combination of absences of blacks and stereotyping of blackness that characterize British animation can be a part of this progression. Therefore the limited degrees of presence and absences invariably reinforce the ideas that in spite of everything blacks are still 'other'. Hence blacks, when they 'arrive' within a frame must do so precisely to fill 'their' problem, performance or entertainment quotas. In an insightful study on the British, scholar Richard Dyer draws attention to the fact that *whiteness* has managed to remain 'invisible' despite its obviousness. Dyer argues that the *ordinariness* of *whiteness* has been possible because the 'examination of the representation of whites' has occurred mostly in a western media framework that includes forms such as painting and photography [Dyer 1997:i]. He calls for debate on this aspect of racial discourse because of the 'assumption that white people are just people', the default of humankind, 'whereas other colours are something else' [1997:2]. Like Fryer, Dyer stresses the importance of recognising the fact all have been 'constructed' politically as 'racialized subjects'.

Fredrickson offers a more global perspective during his exposé on the history of racism, examining its religious origins in fifteenth-century Spain, through its complex association with the Enlightenment to its brutalising influence on twentieth-century America, Germany, and South Africa. One of the study's achievements is its systematic examination, and comparison, of the two most dominant forms of western racism – *anti-Semitism* and white supremacy. A good illustration of *ideology* at work can be observed in the parallels between *Jim Crow Laws* of the southern United States and *The Nuremberg Laws* of 1935<sup>28</sup>. In both instances those perceived as 'foreign' males were depicted as ravenous beasts<sup>29</sup> 'lusting after white women' – in propaganda conducted for the prevention of sexual 'contamination' [2002:1]. As

film scholar Manthia Diawara has pointed out in a study on D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* [1915], representations of this kind provided the cinematic template for such negativity<sup>30</sup> [Diawara 2000:236].

The work of theorists such as Philip Cohen and Harwant S. Bains [1990], bell hooks [1992 and 1994] and Kenan Malik [1996] provide further insight. Cohen and Bains<sup>31</sup> peel the covers off a cosmopolitan Britain – supposedly multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural – to expose a society that is saturated with ‘multi-racisms’. Their study focuses on ‘the problematics, policies and the practices’ that have contributed to the weaving of such ‘racial tapestry’ ‘within education<sup>32</sup> and the youth service, amongst socialists, trade unionists’ [1990:1].

Racism is not always propelled by external forces. In several instances it resides within its victims, and it is they who somehow activate it through their belief systems. This is the work of ‘internalized racism’. So for example black youth who call their compatriots ‘white’ because they are being more studious, are in fact manifesting the traits of ‘internalized racism’. They are suggesting that learning is the prerogative of whites. Thus they are subscribing to a self-fulfilling prophecy that suggests blacks are uneducable. In her essay ‘Back to black’ hooks draws attention to this problem. She emphasizes the importance of institutions such as the Black Power movement, whose counter-strategic work<sup>33</sup> *empowered* blacks to challenge *racist* preconceptions – of them [hooks 1994:173-182]. hooks claims that such work impacted black leaders, who responded by “exposing the myriad ways white supremacy had assaulted our self-concept and self-esteem” [ibid], demanding, “that black folks see ourselves differently [not as other] – see self-love as a radical political agenda” [ibid]<sup>34</sup>.

By drawing attention to the work of the Black Power movement hooks is also introducing us to the importance of contesting racialized depictions of blackness<sup>35</sup>. Also noteworthy is Kenan Malik’s wide-ranging study on race in which he recognises the difficulties that arise with the notion. A classic illustration of the problematic, he points out, is demonstrated when “[W]e continually categorise people according to their ‘race’”, and cannot seem to

conduct [such] discussions of “culture, history or art” outside a racial framework [Malik 1996:1].

I would argue that ‘race’ is in effect the process by which dominant groups place an invisible fence around other blacks and ethnic minorities. This invisible fence is held together by an ideology that works to ensure that the cultures of those who are being contained are only seen and heard in part. In accordance with this ideology even the selective experiences of the cultures [such as blackness] must be packaged within prejudiced contexts. ‘Race’ is therefore the action of exclusion, while racism is the ideology that inspires such activity. The pair are conceptually conjoined.

### Stereotyping

Like the notion of ideology stereotyping has a ‘pejorative ring’ to it. Yet its history interestingly alludes to positivity<sup>36</sup>. It therefore needs to be approached with a degree of open-mindedness. The term is etymologically [and historically] synonymous with stability. Stereotypes can either be positive or negative. An example of a positive stereotype is ‘black men are good at sports’, while a negative would be ‘black men are *only* good at sports’. With one word, ‘only’ separating the two statements it is easy to see how effortlessly its connotation can change. At the beginning of the modern industrial age in 1798, French painter Firmin Didot coined the word to describe the new printing process involving the casts of material to reproduce images that would fix permanently. The image-setting process was called ‘stereotyping’. In time the word ‘stereotype’ has come to apply to the fixing of intellectual, or mental, as opposed to printed, images [Lippmann 1922:95-156]. At the turn of the last century psychiatrists started using the word ‘stereotypy’ to represent a persistent condition identified by displays of [any] repetitive behaviour<sup>37</sup>. Indeed psychoanalyst Michael Vannoy Adams points this out when he argues:

[S]tereotypes and archetypes, as well as stereotypical images and archetypal images, may have either a negative or positive value in psychical reality [Adams 1997:46].

But then the fact that stereotypes are tools – mere implements for reproduction – needs to be reinforced. Again Adams is quick to point this out, suggesting that:

[W]e may stereotype or 'archetype' persons and peoples not only consciously or unconsciously but also positively or negatively – as 'good' or 'bad' [types and images may be either honorific or defamatory] [ibid].

bell hooks maintains that “stereotypes, however inaccurate, are one form of representation” [hooks 1992:170]. Stereotypes have been described as standardized mental pictures held in common by members of a group. Indeed such fixed mental images are the building blocks of an ideology. I am arguing that these 'building blocks' are the pieces that can be used to trigger or construct understandings of others. So for instance the types of [stock] images of Inuits 'handcuff' our minds so that we have great difficulty imagining the existence of excellent footballers or cricketers in their communities. Stereotypes can provide the fuel for ideology, which does in turn underpin 'race'.

In cinematic discourse the term often pre-empts a *negative* situation [or condition]. This is largely due to the fact the term is seldom subjected to close scrutiny, because film like most audio-visual forums seeks the quickest ways to convey ideas to audiences<sup>38</sup>. For example the stereotypes of black males as violent, sex-crazed fiends in *The Birth of a Nation* [1915] or idle, idiotic, monkey-like and lustful in *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* [1941] perpetuated a falsehood<sup>39</sup>. Between the two films mentioned earlier audiences are exposed to a broad 'range' of troubling black 'types'. British scholar Steve Neale points out that:

[A]gainst what is conceived of as 'real', stereotypical characters are evaluated negatively to the extent that they are not like 'real people', so that they [characters] do not appear as complex individuals living complex lives in a complex society [Neale 1979:35].

Again Neale has called this problematic quality of stereotyping its 'reductiveness'. This destructive quality of stereotyping is observed in the habitual deprivation of Griffith's 1915 cinematic classic – of its accolade as an editing masterpiece, and instead dubiously 'honouring' the production as a showpiece of racist ideology. Neale argues that:

[W]hen the concept of the stereotype and the methodology it implies are used for purposes of ideological analysis, their reductiveness can easily obscure or even erase altogether those [positive] features of a text and its systems [1979:33].

Stereotyping is a basic strategy used to reduce the amount of diversity to manageable proportions. Every human being produces stereotyped ideas in order to create a shorthand form of communication. If allowed to reduce individuals or groups to oversimplified generalized signs, stereotyping can be immensely problematic, by nurturing discrimination and giving rise to racist behaviour. In order for stereotypes to be effective they need to maintain a distance from what they are supposed to represent [ibid]. Indeed stereotypes are:

[L]ike fictions, they are created to serve as substitutions, standing in for what is real. They are there not to tell it like it is but to invite and encourage pretense [sic]. They are a fantasy, a projection onto the Other [hooks 1992:170].

Stereotypes usually function best within the framework of their proponents' imagination. They work most efficiently at subconscious levels. They are best fed with visual representation[s] and what is not being said. Absences, in such instances, do not make hearts fonder but make minds wonder. Stereotyping invariably influences attitudes.<sup>40</sup> As I pointed out a little earlier stereotypes enable ideologies to be transmitted. This is exceptionally true of the animated form – which frequently cannot progress without the use of stereotypes of some sort during the course of production. But these can also be located in the attributes assigned to characters, or allocated to situation to facilitate the development of script and narrative [see Hayward 1977]. But when such stereotypes contribute to erroneous or incomplete representations of blackness then they must be identified for their role as instruments of a racist ideology. Jaundiced perceptions, especially of blacks, that have been perpetuated by such racist work can be eradicated. However this will not happen without concerted efforts on the part of filmmakers – especially black ones. The efficacy of such work will be best noticed through the same platforms on which otherwise offensive imagery have previously been deployed. In other words stereotypes can function as vaccines for combating – and eventually destroying

the negative ideologies they could otherwise propagate. This is the objective of counter-strategic filmmaking – an approach I adopt in my practical work. I outline the notion of counter-strategies later in this chapter.

### Outline of characters types

Taxonomies of characters have been important in facilitating our understanding and appreciation of blacks in the theatre and moving images. One such influential classification is film historian Bogle's extensive study *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks* in which he outlines 'types', revealing the way in which the image of blacks appearing in American films since the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has changed – but how it has paradoxically remained the same. He maintains that while there are many more blacks featured in prominent cinematic positions, their roles have hardly extended beyond the basic 'types' spelled out in his thesis [Bogle 2002]. Therefore while whites seldom justify their roles because of the pervasiveness of whiteness [Dyer 2002:127], blacks are frequently evaluated, both by the gravity of the character[s] portrayed, and the relevance of their ethnicity to the position[s] for which they are cast. In other words blacks are more likely to gain more universal respectability if skin colour is not the casting prerequisite. This is best witnessed when they are cast alongside other ethnicities. Cerniglia provides some useful insight into the discourse on the casting of national/cultural ethnic identities employing examples from the US. He argues that:

[C]haracter types have been around since the theatre began; they are one of the fundamental tools of playwriting that establishes character relationships without resorting to tedious exposition for every character who walks on stage [Cerniglia 2004:6].

He is resolute in his assertion that "when ethnic stereotypes are created, perpetuated or studied in the contemporary era of explosive identity politics, the 'play' is no longer just fun and games" [ibid]. To facilitate our understanding of his position Cerniglia offers a model of casting that is a key contribution to my study on the depiction of blackness. It is set out as follows:

Traditional Casting [e.g., Olivier blacking up to play Othello];  
Ethnically Specific Casting [actors represent characters of the same ethnicity; e.g., African-Americans play Walter Lee and Beneatha in *A*

*Raisin in the Sun*, with a Nigerian immigrant in the role of Joseph Asagai];

Colour-Blind Casting [best actors for the part regardless of ethnic background; e.g., in a production of *Three Sisters* with a “multiracial” cast, the spectators still view the characters as Russian];

Conceptual Casting [through casting, the ethnicity of the characters is overtly shifted; e.g., Patrick Stewart plays *Othello* with an African-American cast];

Colourful Casting [without changing the ethnicity of a character, the actor’s ethnicity comes into relief during specific moments in the play; e.g., a Chicana playing Lorraine Hansberry in *To Be Young, Gifted and Black* states to the audience, “It is clear that I am Black” [2004:4-6].

Both Bogle and Cerniglia’s approaches are useful in the sense that they afford me the opportunity to develop a character typology more directly suitable to my lines of inquiry; which I set out as follows; *chief* or *principal*, *central*, *marginal*, *peripheral* or *apparitional* and *ethereal*. The two scholars provide templates for assessing characters which draw on historical references. Bogle and Cerniglia also employ historical references to illustrate their classifications. Both are interested in the presence of ethnic characterization. Their concise outlines, which avoid convoluted lines of enquiry and debate, make it easy to appreciate the intricacies of character types. Encouraged by such work I develop a taxonomy that utilizes animation as a filter for evaluating degrees of black presence on British television.

Before visiting the character types I would like to mention that such characterization occurs within what I shall define as *series-specific* and *episode-specific* frameworks. In the case of *series-specific* circumstances certain characters appear in every showing of such programmes – in all stories. *Series-specific* characterization refers to situations in which certain players feature only for one season or the length of a series. *Episode-specific* roles on the other hand relate to those characters that are prominent in a few episodes but may only make brief appearances in the rest of a series, as in the case of *marginal* or *peripheral* roles. This is an issue I outline more extensively shortly through the typology, that endeavours to demonstrate how stereotyping functions, especially within popular children’s animation.

*Chief* or *Principal* characters are those around whom storylines revolve, making eponymy, or self-titling, a common trait of such episodes. Familiar examples include *Pingu*, *Noddy*, *Fireman Sam*, and *Postman Pat*. Removal or exclusion of chief characters can affect the success of such programmes [see fig.1].

*Central* characters are key to the development of storylines. They are often closely linked with the *chief* or *principal* character. Episodes can progress with or without them. However their absence would be noticeable. The strength of such characters means they could be made to feature in separate [spin-off] shows. A good example is Jess, Postman Pat's cat, which is expected to spearhead a separate series<sup>41</sup>. Yet another prime example is Daisy, a girl in the model animation series *Dig and Dug with Daisy* [1993]<sup>42</sup> which features two bumbling handymen. No storyline is complete without an intervention by the girl [see fig. 2].

*Marginal* characters may make the odd contribution to ongoing dialogue, or action; however they add 'spice' to storylines. In other words they do not have any choice [or control] but to be present, in the capacity of 'adding spice' to characters and storylines. An example of such characterization can be located in the role of the black centurion in the puppet animation production *The Miracle Maker*<sup>43</sup> [2000]. Though the centurion is allocated one sentence of speech it is obvious his ethnic presence is more the result of a poetic licence than factual evidence. The issue of *marginal* characterization will receive more attention during my discussion of work from the Aardman Studio [see fig. 3].

*Peripheral* or *Apparitional* [now you see them now you don't] characters are 'atmosphere' or extras – those whose sighting requires a bit more attention. Blacks are often subjects of *peripheral* or *apparitional* characterization. Therefore in productions in which they are only allocated such characterization it is most likely black viewers who will either notice, or be excited by sighting[s] of their kind. In other words when black people catch the sight of their kind in these cinematic situations they arrest the gaze, mentally recording nearly every aspect or detail within that brief encounter, no matter how transitory. It is not uncommon for disparate black spectators to register, and discuss, the



occurrence of such *apparitions*. Ethnic 'minorities' will notice each other within the pervasiveness of whiteness. This phenomenon translates into real life where for example most black men frequently acknowledge each other with a nod – when they meet in Britain – whether or not they know themselves. If they happen to be close enough such acknowledgements may take the form of short verbal greetings. The difference between *peripheral* or *apparitional* and *marginal* characters lies in the fact the former may be heard and seen, while the latter is just about seen [see figs. 25-29].

*Ethereal* characters are those that are referenced, alluded to – somehow have their presence or existence referenced – but never made to appear. This can suggest that a creator is aware of these persons and the cultures within which they operate but is either:

- [1] unsure of how to present them;
- [2] cannot portray them for special reasons;
- [2] think their absence adds intrigue to storylines and are therefore best – literally – kept out of the frame;
- [3] just want them kept out of the picture.

My notion of ethereality takes off from the idea that absence is as important as presence when decoding or trying to make sense of any text [Macherey 1990]. But I take it further, outlining four ways in which the concept functions. This has to do with degrees of inference – to characterization. I shall commence my discussion by working backwards, from fourth to first manifestation of the concept, to demonstrate the shades between limited screen portrayals and absence.

The fourth form of etherealization relates to instances where a character has vocal representation but no physical manifestation. This can include a narrator or commentator if their voice is crucial to storylines. An example of this form of *etherealization* can be found in *Mohammed: The Last Prophet* [2004]<sup>44</sup>, a puppet animation production. Though the protagonist, Mohammed, is not seen his presence in the plot is communicated to viewers<sup>45</sup> – through the voice of a

narrator – as Islam deems any physical manifestations of Mohammed blasphemous, but does not contest his manifestation in spirit form. Another example is the character of Charlie from the series *Charlie's Angels* [1976-1981], who is not seen, though his voice is heard.

The third type of etherealization occurs in regard to situations in which characters are alluded to or referenced. This is how I would describe the wife of the television detective, in the popular series *Columbo*. Frequently referenced, inferring the protagonist has more depth to his person, she has yet to make a screen appearance. Similarly the banker in the Channel 4 game show *Deal or No Deal* is in constant contact with the host by phone but is neither heard nor seen. Again this type of etherealization applies in instances where a photograph, drawing or some sort of still drawing briefly invokes the notion of a life that is not depicted in any other form within a production. For instance in the Aardman production *A Close Shave* [1995] Gwendolene's father is mentioned on a number of occasions and briefly depicted in a framed portrait with the film's antagonist, Preston the cyberdog [see fig. 4]. This third manifestation of etherealization can also be related to what I would like to term *conceptual existence*. I shall demonstrate how this works with an example from the Akan linguistic cluster of Ghana, West-Africa, in whose lexicon the words or names 'tiger' and 'kangaroo' do not exist. This is due to the fact such animals are not native to the sub-region, or the rest of the continent for that matter. Therefore one has to implement descriptions that derive from an amalgamation of references from their existing vocabulary and knowledge base<sup>46</sup>. Without some form of physical 'interaction' – such as a visit to a zoo – these animals will remain only within the realms of the Akan's imagination.

The second level refers to occasions when brief symbolic or iconic references – often in a passing glimpse – are employed to suggest remote [or distant] existence. Aardman's *Babylon* [1986], which I discuss in the chapter four, employs this form of etherealization as a short-cut for relating to 'Third World' people.

The first level addresses characters who are mentioned in relation to a series or production, but who are not included in the final production. An example of this type of etherealization is the Jamaican postlady in *Postman Pat*, who I discuss later in this chapter. There is no obligation to include such characters if screen versions are already successful.

In general blacks frequently appear in *marginal, peripheral* or *apparitional* roles, and therefore are the most likely to be *selectively positioned*, in order to afford extra tiers of gravitas to those cast in *chief [principal]* or *central* roles. In the occasional instances of black *centralisation* their depictions tend to be either *series-specific* or *episode-specific*. This is a problematic into which film scholar Manthia Diawara offers further insight when he suggests that D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* [1915] provided the first template for Hollywood's "obsession with miscegenation" [Diawara 2000:236] in its representation of blacks. He maintains that it created the 'grammar' that fixed "black people within certain spaces, such as kitchens, and into certain supporting roles, such as criminals, on the screen" [ibid]; moving to assert that according to such 'grammar' "[W]hite people must occupy the center [sic], leaving black people with only one choice – to exist in relation to whiteness [ibid]. As I revealed during my review of writing from the 1970s, Diawara's position concurs with Jim Pines's point on the development of a "cinematic black vernacular... before the post-war period" [Pines 1975:60]<sup>47</sup> [see discussion in Chapter 1].

Cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg reminds us that Hall advocates a similar position when he argues that "identities are relational and incomplete", emphasizing that "[a]ny identity depends upon its difference from, its negation of, some other term...", a process which is reversible. Thus "identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself" [Grossberg 1996:89]. Thus, maintains Diawara:

[T]here are no simple stories about black people loving each other, hating each other, or enjoying their private possessions without reference to the white world, because the spaces of these stories are occupied by newer forms of race relations stories which have been overdetermined by Griffith's master text [Diawara 2000:236].

Therefore such degrees of absence in representation crystallize audiences' false perception of blackness and invariably promote unhealthy stereotyping. The selective positioning of blacks – on the margins of frames, in unflattering roles and the situation of their characterizations outside of the mainstream – trumpets a message of inferiority and irrelevance. This in turn fuels the situation that suggests blacks do not really fit into the dominant society. As a result of such thinking certain blacks begin to internalize the negative perceptions, and eventually perpetuate the negative stereotyping allocated to their kind. Absence becomes a proactive ideology that suggests to the blacks that they are a non-person. Like domesticated animals that have learned to depend on their owners for food, those under the spell of the ideology of absence wait, often in vain, for white affirmation. Writer Zora Neale Hurston is equally radical on the issue of black selective positioning claiming that:

[W]hen everything is discounted, it still remains true that white people north and south have promoted Negroes – usually in the capacity of 'representing the Negro' – with little thought of the ability of the person promoted but in line with the 'pet system' [Hurston cited by Minh-ha in Pines and Willemsen [ed] 1994:136].

Hence the stencil for cinematic black identity would appear to have been constructed from a mould governed by racist mindsets. Nonetheless such 'identities' can be destabilised because "identities are relational and incomplete" [Grossberg 1996:89]. Contesting such 'identities' requires the appropriation of these very media platforms of film and television – but especially through the form of counter-strategic animation. This is because animation has the unique ability to cut across social boundaries.

#### Counter-Strategies: confrontation, subversion and inversion

As I have just pointed out the importance of counter-strategies emerges because of the need for a strong response to persistent negative stereotyping – of blacks and their cultures. *School Dinners* is a counter-strategic animation production. As our understanding broadens, becoming flexible, we begin to see culture differently. We encounter new social artefacts – in the form of traditions,

customs, rituals and behaviour. Therefore the way in which we decode the messages that are encoded or embedded in these elements change – constantly. How we respond to, or correspond with, these artefacts of culture can never be finally fixed [Hall 1997:270]. The manner in which the slipping and sliding of meaning occurs fuels and propels the notion of counter-strategies which I adopt – as a guiding principle – for the purpose of challenging unhelpful modes of black representation in British animation. The idea of counter-strategies manifests itself in three key ways that I shall describe as direct, indirect and camouflage.

The direct approach combats negativity by way of positive confrontation; the indirect approach involves a strategy that can be viewed as positive subversion; while the camouflage method uses a subtle plot. Like a palace coup its effects are felt, or noticed only after its objectives have materialized. In the final analyses the prime objective of counter-strategies is to invert persistent mis-representational expressions by transforming them in “a more ‘positive’ direction” [Hall 1997:226-227] – hence the air of militancy that accompanies its moniker. Counter-strategies are oppositional precisely because they are by nature engaged in the rejection of ‘established’ or entrenched viewpoints. As Hall has pointed out such ingrained attitudes are deeply embedded in the core of the dominant culture<sup>48</sup>. Scholars Bogle and Diawara also remind us that throughout the twentieth century, cinema and television have been instrumental in the congealment of negative black imagery [see Diawara 2000; Bogle 2001]. It is against the backdrop of endemic negativity<sup>49</sup> that counter-strategies are necessary for the purpose of re-ordering the status quo. I shall proceed to discuss the manner in which these counter-strategies operate.

#### Direct resistance: the work of positive confrontation

Overt responses to negative stereotyping generally confront the vexing issue of ‘race’ by thrusting black images and characters into previously inaccessible areas of public space. This is openly subversive and confrontational. The tactic was first adopted within the practices of black cultural politics in response to failed ‘integrationist’ approaches to negative typecasting and ‘incomplete’ representation, by white liberals who sympathised with blackness. Such

'integrationist' productions were problematic on the whole because of their tendency to compromise difficult issues. Therefore they advocated safe 'middle-of-the-road' strategies, designed to appease audiences on both sides of the proverbial demographic fence. 'Integrationist' productions are typified by Stanley Kramer's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* [1967] which featured Sidney Poitier and Katherine Hepburn. In the film the black character gains 'entrance' into 'white respectability' because he is suitably qualified. Though [probably] unintended the film ultimately [mis]informed blacks that the right credentials would earn them passage into white society.

Rising to prominence during the 1970s, direct resistance films reflect the tide of black militancy emanating from the preceding decade. Such works try to expedite the process of what Hall calls 'trans-coding' [Hall 1997:271]. This involves the process of co-opting an existing meaning, then re-appropriating it to result in a new understanding. Direct resistance engages in the evangelization of black human-ness – warts and all – while at the same time marketing its principals as stars in the public space of cinema. Indeed these platforms have enabled the wider world to appreciate the fact blacks are not a foreign species. Characteristic of this form is the Blaxploitation genre – often condemned for overt racism, blatant sexism and indiscriminate violence. Trailblazing examples include *Shaft* [1971], *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song* [1971]<sup>50</sup>, *Superfly* [1972] and *Cleopatra Jones* [1973], for whom a nascent black hero was synonymous. By making such characterization acceptable and marketable – albeit to black audiences initially – I would argue that these films sowed the seed for the future of actors like Samuel L. Jackson<sup>51</sup>, Will Smith<sup>52</sup> and Laurence Fishburne<sup>53</sup>. The appeal of these cinematic 'powerhouses' not only guarantees box-office success but renders racial boundaries insignificant. But crucially such work informs spectators that it is possible to stake claims in space that has largely been the prerogative of the dominant group.

#### Indirect resistance: the work of positive subversion

African-American scholar Ralph Waldo Ellison has suggested that by "changing the joke" one can begin "slipping the yoke" [Ellison 1958] of mis-representation that minority ethnicities have often been saddled with. Evidence of how

“changing the joke” can work is observed, again, in the success of trans-coding. The potency of expressions such as “black is beautiful” – credited to work by the [militant US] Black Panther movement – validate the success of the indirect method of positively subverting prevailing negativity. Another example is located in the more recent use of *wicked* to denote [outstanding] excellence<sup>54</sup>; and similarly the processing of *bad* to communicate a street-credible form of its reassuring opposite. I have observed that Rastafarians frequently ‘reverse-engineer’ words and names<sup>55</sup>. This is part of their attempt to resist Babylon<sup>56</sup> – the oppressive social system epitomised by the police. This concurs with the position that “stereotypes are inherently protean rather than rigid” [Hall 1997:284] and therefore the meanings they produce can never be finally fixed [1997:270]. This approach is not perfect. However, it begins the process of providing a viable approach for the ongoing discourse on ‘race’ and ethnicity.

#### Camouflage: the work of the subtle plot

This is a ‘stealth’ strategy that avoids any form of confrontation but seeks to address stereotyping from within the theatre of the perceived problematic. Operating behind ‘oppositional’ lines with current ways of representation, such works appear to be in agreement with the status quo and seem self-deprecating. Nonetheless the ‘camouflage’ method by its very unassuming nature informs its viewers that the presence of blacks is an integral element of the nation’s make-up. In other words such depictions cement blackness into the consciousness of the dominant culture.

The recurrent lampooning of the mannerisms of Nigerians and other black immigrant groups, by Black British comedians Felix Dexter<sup>57</sup> and Leo Chester<sup>58</sup>, exemplifies this manifestation of the concept. Hall similarly recounts Lenny Henry’s “witty exaggerations of [his] Afro-Caribbean caricatures” [1997:274-5]. Nonetheless I witness a problematic within ‘camouflaging’. This is due to the manifestation of what I called the *problem, performance* and *entertainment* context at the beginning of the discussion on ideology. This instance limits depictions of blacks to associations with troubling circumstances, athletics and music. Examples of this problematic have included stereotypical black athletes and rappers; and archetypal black muggers and single mothers. The notion is

examined within the framework of animation during the discussion of character types in the next chapter. Another problem with this approach is that it frequently splits opinion among the very people it aims to portray<sup>59</sup>. Nevertheless, and despite its complexities, this is still a valuable counter-strategic approach to the representation of variety and difference. Popular children's animation series such as *Dig and Dug* and *Little Red Tractor*<sup>60</sup> demonstrate positive aspects of the camouflage concept in action. In these animation films the black characters do not possess any super-human skills. On the contrary they are ordinary 'citizens' within their communities. Interestingly both programmes are located within rural English settings. It is as if the producers are 'quietly' employing rusticity to counter the perception that dwellers of the countryside are intolerant to ethnic minorities. But at the same time the programmes allegorize the presence of Britain's 'hidden' blacks – those who have been a part of this nation for centuries. Of course such representations can also be problematic. This is because some of these 'integral' blacks are sometimes referred to by their [fellow blacks] as *coconuts*. This implies that although black their worldview and outlook is totally white.

Counter-strategies are confrontational and yet they are not merely about the reproduction of the opposite view. Rather they set out to modify thought patterns and mindsets. This is done through the re-ordering of culturally-embedded ideas, making them extremely useful for addressing, and re-dressing, imbalances in the representation of blackness by dominant groups. The employment of counter-strategies can be beneficial to many art forms – and therefore animation, the creative platform on which my practice takes place.

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1With a plethora of nationalities resulting from its colonial adventures, and the reversal of its imperial fortunes, Britain is now what I will describe as a commonwealth of cultural identities.

2 For instance Joy Batchelor's successful film, *The Music Man*, was produced in 1938; before the prolific production outfit – Halas and Batchelor Cartoons - was launched in 1940.

3 This is the film which constitutes the practical element of this thesis.

4 Hall's strategy involves the media's "definitions of social relations and political problems, and their implication in the production and transformation of popular ideologies".

5 By mainstream I am referring to the terrestrial programming currently available without the need for cable and satellite service subscription or a digital set-top box.

6 For instance the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary provides the following explanations;



1. The act of presenting somebody or something in a particular way; something that shows or describes something; the negative representation of single mothers in the media.
2. The fact of having representatives who will speak or vote for you or on your behalf.
3. Formal statements made to somebody in authority, especially to make your opinions known or to protest. [OALD 2002:1082]

7 The archetypal dumb blonde.

8 I discuss this notion again, in a separate section in this chapter.

9 Becker also has a web page which brings together [on one platform] most of his papers - <http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/>

10 Guided by Althusserian Marxism he sees the media as primary in the promotion and reproduction of dominant thinking - an ideological state apparatus [see discussion on ideology]. To this end Hall posits that 'preferred meaning[s]' are the underlying agenda behind any media 'text'. [Hall 1997:225-279]

11 In the same essay Hall stresses that:

Representation connects meaning and language to culture...Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things. [ibid]

12 My own term for describing negative portrayal or representation; for example the police 'template' of young black [termed in their lexicon as IC3] men as potentially criminal or violent.

13 In the same essay she points out that:

Socialized within white supremacist educational systems and by a racist mass media, many black people are convinced that our lives are not complex, and are therefore unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection. [ibid]

14 Through these forums he draws attention to issues such as educational practices like admission policies in some [American] universities. [1995:153-199]

15 This refers to the idea that the working classes are compelled to accept the views of the bourgeoisie because they are not media owners. This process changes the outlook of the working classes to synchronizes with that of the media owners.

16 'Lenin and Philosophy'

17 The notion was first discussed in Althusser's 1971 paper titled 'On Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', which was published in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York, Monthly Review

18 In the essay he argues that the law, family and educational institutions, among others indeed act as catalysts for the promotion of ideology. As institutions their functions must be governed by some form of ideology, which are unwittingly imbued by those transiting through these machineries of state.

19 In the same treatise Macherey makes clear that, "knowledge...must include a consideration of...absence" [Macherey 1978:85], and insists:

This is why it seems useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say...for in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said. [ibid]

20 This a view shared by Hayward [1977] and Shaw [2004], who advocate its use, though as benign production tools.

21 I would argue that developments such as the rise of civil rights and black liberation movements influenced several American animators to revise their modus operandi – especially with relation to the portrayal of black characters.

22 Race is described as, "a scientifically discredited term previously used to describe biologically distinct groups or persons who were alleged to have characteristics of an unalterable nature" [Jary and Jary 2000:503].

23 Indeed Goldberg insists that:

Race is one of the central conceptual inventions of modernity...the concept assumes specificity as modernity defines itself, refining modernity's landscape of social relations as its own conceptual contours are mapped out. The significance transforms theoretically and materially as modernity is renewed, refined and redefined. [Goldberg 2002:3]

24 Indeed this belief extends to programmes requiring audience votes. It is a commonly held belief among several blacks that they would not win when they participate in such shows. Popular BBC programmes such as *Strictly Come*

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*Dancing and Just The Two Of Us* seem to give credence to that conviction. In the former the athlete Colin Jackson was relegated to the second spot, while the latter saw popular soul singer Beverley Knight consigned to the position of runner-up.

25 As in the notorious Victoria Climbié case in which social workers allegedly failed to prevent the sadistic treatment which resulted in her murder – by superstitious relatives [see ‘Timeline: Victoria Climbié’, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/2062590.stm> , Thursday, June 9, 2005 and ‘Climbie Social worker found guilty’, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2219317.stm> Tuesday, August 27, 2002].

26 In the same treatise Fryer insists the pervasiveness of racist ideology was such that it inconceivable for whites to attribute any form of civility to blacks. Therefore it was only natural to perpetuate the falsehood that:

African society was non-society because it was not their society; Africans had no artistic culture because they had no cathedral spires in the Kalahari; they were primitive because they were naked and Britons had been naked when they were primitive; they had always been ‘backward’ because they were ‘backward’ now; if they advanced it would take them centuries because it had taken Europe centuries...Africans were not fit to rule themselves [Porter cited in Fryer 1993:69].

27 Again Fryer insists in the same work that violent racism was necessary not just as an ideological rationale, but as a psychological imperative to eliminate any forms of guilt that could be remotely felt at any time during the slavery era, and afterwards [ibid].

28 See the complete Nuremberg Laws of September 15, 1935 which can be found at the following location: <http://www.skolman.nu/third-reich/nurnberg-lagarna.htm>

29 Such flawed thinking provided a diabolical incentive for several extralegal executions. The Nazis labelled ‘predatory Jewish males’ as the biggest threat to ‘German womanhood and the purity of Germany. [2002:2] Hence union between the two peoples was prohibited. Likewise Jim Crow forbade the union - marriage or otherwise - of whites and ‘those with any known or discernible African ancestry’. [ibid] Murder would characterise both campaigns. The only difference, in principle, between the two state-of-affairs is the fact Jim Crow transgressions were extralegal while the Nazi catalogue of wrongdoing was institutionalised, and passionately championed by the governing body of the day – the Third Reich. The obsession with ‘racial purity’ is clearly the common denominator in both instances.

30 A common thread running through Fredrickson’s comparative analysis [historical study] of racism is what one can confidently call the misapplication of the powers of legislature. He observes this in Afrikaner racism – exhibited in Apartheid – and argues that only the ‘climate of world opinion in the wake of the Holocaust’ prevented full-blown ‘biological racism’, opting instead for the no-less repulsive condition of ‘separate development’. Nevertheless one is reminded that the propagators of Apartheid endeavoured to use the concept of ‘cultural rather than physical differences’ as the basis for their flawed logic. Afrikaner racism is perhaps the best demonstrator of how ‘cultural essentialism’ hiding behind the mask of nationalism [in this instance the need to define the Afrikaner national identity] can carry out ‘the work of a racism based squarely on skin colour or other physical characteristics’ [2002:3-4]. This is a particularly interesting argument as it highlights, and details the emergence of post-Holocaust racism [a form that rides the bandwagon of cultural preservation, as opposed to eugenics [racist genetics].

31 They can barely disguise their angst, and thus point out that:

[A]t first, cursory glance many people may be inclined to misread the title of this book. We are after all, supposed to be living in a multi-racial society, to send our children to multi-ethnic schools, where they do multi-cultural studies and learn to respect, appreciate or at least tolerate each other’s diversity. That is the official storyline, and it is one in which we would all like to believe. Current realities are very different, however, and so is our title.

The realities include: a black community struggling to achieve social justice and a better deal for its children at a time when Britain is increasingly divided into two nations; a police force actively eroding civil liberties which the law is supposed to uphold; a popular press which daily relays racist images and chauvinistic sentiments while orchestrating moral panics against ‘ideological bias’ in schools; mass youth unemployment, in which ethnic minorities are over-represented, disguised by government training schemes in which they are discriminated against. We could go on, but the point of this book is not to rehearse, yet again, the terms of the

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present conjecture but to take a step back and look at what has helped to shape these several 'front lines' [Cohen and Bains 1990:1].

32 Richard M. Merelman's work on representation - which I visit shortly - follows a similar trajectory when he examines admission policies within some American universities.

33 Central to my thesis, the notion of counter-strategies is discussed in more detail a little later in this chapter. Scholar Stuart Hall also visits the concept in his work on representation.

34 In the same essay hooks makes the claim that, "the slogan "black is beautiful" worked to intervene and alter those racist stereotypes that always insisted black was ugly, monstrous, undesirable». [1994:174]

35 The issues she raises are important because they remind us that the 'fruits' of plantocracy still persist, and need to be eradicated. The term originates from the practice, during The Slave Trade, whereby lighter skinned slaves were 'privileged' to work as house servants. Those of a darker shade were confined to hard labour in the fields. As such slaves often 'aspired' to be lighter skinned. In my native Ghana [all over Africa and the West Indies] it is not uncommon to encounter bleached skin. Skin lighteners are still commercially viable – trade in such products is still profitable. As recently as October 2002 the issue of 'house slave' made headline news. See [www.cnn.com/2002/US/10/15/belafonte.powell](http://www.cnn.com/2002/US/10/15/belafonte.powell) and [www.drudgereport.com/hb.htm](http://www.drudgereport.com/hb.htm) for copies of the news report.

36 Pointing to Walter Lippmann, the man credited with its introduction - to social scientists in 1922 in his publication titled *Public Opinion* - Dyer elucidates:

A pattern of stereotypes is not neutral. It is not merely a way of substituting order for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a short cut. It is all these things and something more. It is the guarantee of our self-respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes, *of others such as blacks* [my emphasis], are therefore, highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses [sic] we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy [Lippmann 1956:96 cited in Dyer 2002:11].

The Project Gutenberg website makes available a free electronic copy of Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*. Visit the link that follows for a copy of the text [www.gutenberg.net/etext04/pbpnn10.txt](http://www.gutenberg.net/etext04/pbpnn10.txt)

Some of Lippmann's initial ideas have remained central to current definitions of the term. In his seminal essay, 'The role of stereotypes', Dyer agrees [with Lippmann] on the way stereotypes function and suggests one adapts the following ways to facilitate one's understanding of the term:

(i) an ordering process, (ii) a 'short cut', (iii) referring to 'the world', and (iv) expressing 'our' values and beliefs [Dyer, 2002:11]

37 [http://faculty.weber.edu/eszalay/Humanities\\_Sept\\_20.htm](http://faculty.weber.edu/eszalay/Humanities_Sept_20.htm) - source [Nov. 12/02]

38 Cinema scholar Donald Bogle identifies five categories of cinematic black stereotypes in his seminal study on film and television. His character types are outlined as follows:

Toms: weak-minded subservient black male characters – usually cast in the role of house servants  
Coons: weak-minded clownish black male characters  
Mulattoes: seductive, mixed-race female characters - often cast in tragic roles  
Mammies: very dark, fat and controlling black female characters – often cast in housekeeping roles  
Bucks: Aggressive, sexually charged black males – usually cast in typical roles

Likewise I introduce and implement a typology of characterization for the course of my analyses in Chapter 3.

39 Suggesting black men were dangerous or moronic - while their female counterparts remained docile and unintelligent - these images nourished ideas like cultural essentialism that catalysed the emergence of post-Holocaust racism [Fredrickson 2002:3].

40 For example as a child I was supplied with images [and text] of Inuit as vertically challenged people who lived in igloos, ate raw fish and seal meat. As an adolescent I 'encountered' them once again, via National Geographic [and similar publications]. This time around however they were portrayed as hopeless drunks, unemployable and plagued with high mortality rates. The subject in these portrayals suggested Inuits were not interested in improving their lot – and that their resistance to progress lay at the root of their malaise. Initial perceptions frequently come into play although one is now better informed.

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41 'Just Jess' – <http://www.toonhound.com/sept2002.htm#jess> Date: January 11/04

42 Produced and directed by George Layton, and distributed by Dorling Kindersley Vision Ltd

43 Directed by Derek Hayes and Stanislav Sokolov for S4C and BBC

44 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4013213.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4013213.stm) [July 22/2005]

45 See the following: [http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v\\_id=33045](http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v_id=33045) [July 22/2005]  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4699847.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4699847.stm) [July 21/2005]

46 As such results could include 'striped lion without a mane'. The marsupial would be described as a big rabbit-like animal with a face like a deer that carries its young in a pocket in front of it. Photographs, drawings or moving images may facilitate understanding; however 'tiger' or 'kangaroo' exist conceptually.

47 Pines makes this assertion while analysing the film *Cabin in the Sky* [1943].

48 This is because of the "three [fateful] major moments when the 'West' encountered black people" [1997:239]; periods that heralded the birth of "an avalanche of popular representations based on the marking of racial difference" [ibid].

49 Negative representations of blacks reached their apogee towards the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless they have persisted, but with slightly less shades of malignance.

50 The groundbreaking film by African-American director Melvin Van Peebles.

51 *Shaft* [2000] – USA . Dir. John Singleton; *Pulp Fiction* [1994] – USA . Dir. Tarantino; *51st. State* [2001] – USA . Dir. Ronny Yu; *Snakes on a Plane* [2006] – USA . Dir. David R. Ellis; etc.

52 *Men in Black* [1997] – USA . Dir. Barry Sonnenfeld; *Independence Day* [1996], USA . Dir. Roland Emmerich; *Bad Boys* [1995 ] USA . Dir. Michael Bay; *Enemy of the State* [1998] USA . Dir. Tony Scott; etc.

53 *The Matrix Trilogy* - 1999-2003 – USA . Dir. The Wachowski Brothers

54 This is what I term 'reverse-engineering' – the process of generating new meanings from a word by continuously using it to convey opposite meanings.

55 In Rasta patois *understand* is replaced by *overstand*, while *Mango* becomes *I-come fruit*. Similarly *oppression* is referred to as *downpression*, and along with the trend *oppressor* takes on the form of *downpressor*. This last [and curious] inflection occurs because in Jamaican dialect the word sounds more like *up-pressor* or *up-pressure*.

56 I return to this idea during my analysis of work from the Aardman studio.

57 Born in St. Kitts in the West Indies.

58 Now known as Leo X, he was born in Sierra Leone in West Africa.

59 For instance while subsequent generations may recognise and appreciate jokes about behavioural patterns – within their ethnicities, they tend to generate offence among first generation immigrants. Having endured hardship on initial arrival in this country, they do not now expect to be ridiculed by their own kind. This problem worsens across ethnic lines. For instance the West Indian comedian Felix Dexter is despised by Nigerians – who he habitually lampoons.

60 They are discussed within the context of character types in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### **Black Spotting: Character Mapping and Tracking in Popular Animation on British Terrestrial Television since 1993**

#### Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to identify types of black representation and how they have occurred within popular British-made children's animation since the early 1990s. However I have also given consideration to some of the work produced during the second half of the 1980s – a period that falls within the so-called 'golden age' of British animation. This period has been recognized as such because of a surge in state and private sector funding for productions in that category of filmmaking. Alongside the development came broadcasting opportunities for both independent animators and studios. BBC2 and the newly established Channel 4 network would play pivotal roles in the support and promotion of such work. In fact the latter's culture of commissioning independent productions is one of the high points in the history and development of British animation [Kotlarz 1999]. The fruit of all this was a creative energy among animators, that yielded a multiplicity of styles drawn, from myriad subjects and topics. Films such as Marjut Rimminen's documentary *Some Protection* [1987]; Mario Cavalli's *Soho Square* [1992], a painterly observation of the London spot's everyday eccentricities; and Phil Mulloy's *Cowboys* [1991], a collection of shorts that give a new twist to the Western genre, would typify the eclecticism of British animation. The harvest of ingenuity would be reflected in the form of numerous festivals and training programmes across the country<sup>1</sup>. The eclectic nature of these independent productions would in fact become a hallmark of British animation. However there also existed a trend of popular televised animation - predating the 'golden age' - that often drew inspiration from the British tradition of excellent authorship.

Employing four case studies, *Postman Pat*, *Thomas the Tank Engine*, *Dig and Dug with Daisy* and *The Little Red Tractor*, I shall use the typology outlined in the previous chapter to demonstrate the function of stereotyping. I shall continue to argue that the *centralization* of black characters is a recent development that needs to be further developed, in order to reflect Britain's

multiculturality. In the next chapter I will continue to examine these issues in more detail, but focus the discussion on how they have operated within the context of the Aardman corpus.

However Britain's viewing public is ethnically diverse – reflecting a nation that is in all respects a commonwealth of cultural identities. Consequently ethnic minorities increasingly expect to be considered in these portrayals – but not as extraordinary or 'other'<sup>2</sup>. Therefore I discuss British multiculturalism with a view to creating an awareness of the fact that this study on black representation does not take place in a vacuum, but alongside other potent forces of social cohesion. I follow the discussion with an overview of British animation, and then proceed to construct a typology of characters. This classification of character types is a conceptual tool that becomes especially useful in my discussion of the positioning of blacks in the films selected for textual analyses in the latter part of this and the proceeding chapters.

### British Multiculturalism

This concept is explained as the inclusion of “people of several different “races”, religions, languages and traditions” [OALD 2002:835]. Its myriad definitions move from the simplistic “combination of several distinct cultures”, to sociologists Jary and Jary's more descriptive “acknowledgement and promotion of cultural pluralism” [see Penguin Concise English Dictionary 2002:574; Jary and Jary 2000:399]<sup>3</sup>. What these seemingly incomplete definitions do is serve the useful purpose of providing clues to what is in actual fact a very complex debate, one that is constantly evolving, especially in Britain. This is largely because despite the frequent pairing of the notion with the nation, British multiculturalism is not operational at the same high level[s] of decision-making as in Canada<sup>4</sup>. The practice of multiculturalism in Britain is best observed in the plethora of languages exhibited by local government literature and religious education within schools. The primary objective of the exercise is to create an awareness of other peoples within the British nation, and foster better perceptions of the wider world eventually. Whether such noble objectives are achievable and practical in the long run will continue to generate debate, largely because multi-ethnicity is all too often confused with multiculturalism<sup>5</sup>. In other

words people frequently talk about one when they really mean the other. Parallel notions, the two differ in practical terms.

### The assimilationist argument in favour of multiculturalism

Assimilation does not have to equate Anglicization, or represent a unitary process. The Sikh community in Southall feel completely Asian and British at the same time. While they often support England during a world soccer cup tournament, they will also back India during a cricket competition. This is because they recognize that although British, they still have a cultural heritage and ancestry that is rooted in India. This is no paradox but rather a reflection of the dynamism of multiculturalism. Sociologist Michael Banton points out that while an ethnic group may be in the minority – on a national scale – they could represent an overwhelming majority on a social level, their neighbourhood. Therefore the maintenance of the cultures of such communities is useful, as it offers a balance in their relationship with the dominant society. In other words the self-pride generated by such traditions stems the development of any inferiority complex. He deduces that this apparent dichotomy embodies the notion of multiculturalism [Banton 1990:37-39]. Hence being a commonwealth of ethnic identities implies that integration occurs seamlessly when people co-exist without sacrificing their identities. Harmony takes place when ethnic groups have a strong sense of self-awareness, and they perceive and appreciate their potential value to the wider populace. Theorists such as Jonathon Green disagree with a *uni-cultural* approach, arguing that the ‘melting pot’ generates dissatisfaction, because of the absence of individuality. He is adamant that “problems crop up when [ethnic] minorities are asked to drop all customs and traditions and adopt the majority culture” [Green 1990:404]. The cross-fertilization of distinct cultures results in hybrid traditions which invariably become a significant facet of national identity<sup>6</sup>. Thinkers who have made significant contributions in this sphere include theorists Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy [See Hall 1980; Gilroy 1993 and 2004], as well as political philosopher Bhikhu Parekh<sup>7</sup>, who maintains that:

[S]trange as it may seem, the greater and deeper the diversity in a society, the greater the unity and cohesion it requires to hold itself together and nurture its diversity. A weakly held society feels nervous in the presence of differences, sees them as potential threats to its unity

and survival, and lacks the confidence to welcome and live with them [Parekh 1998].

The notion of a commonwealth of ethnic and cultural identities in Britain – somewhat reflective of the Commonwealth Club<sup>8</sup>, does not necessarily sit comfortably with everyone. Indeed quite a few agencies and individuals have vocalized their displeasure at the “tossed salad” [Honeyford 1998:vii] concept. Instead they advocate a “melting pot” nationality – with a unitary culture in operation [ibid]. Though such sentiments have been attributed to right-wing philosophy this is not necessarily true. Indeed the first prominent articulation of displeasure at the idea of multiculturalism occurred in a letter from seven parliamentary members of the then ruling Labour Party<sup>9</sup>. Again it was not too long ago when opponents of the notion gained an unlikely ally in the person of Trevor Phillips, who is chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality. He proclaimed that multiculturalism “suggested ‘separateness’ and was no longer useful in present-day Britain”<sup>10</sup>, and he argued that:

[W]hat we should be talking about is how we reach an integrated society, one in which people are equal under the law, where there are some common values<sup>11</sup> [ibid].

Then there are those, like the intellectual Ray Honeyford, who see the notion as a malignant cancer in the imperialist fabric. Honeyford claims multiculturalists will:

[T]each all our pupils to denigrate the British Empire....The multiculturalists are a curious mixture: well-meaning liberals and clergymen suffering from a rapidly post-imperial guilt; teachers building a career by jumping onto the latest educational bandwagon; a small but increasing group of professional Asian and West Indian intellectuals; and a hard core of leftwing political extremists often with the background of polytechnic sociology [Honeyford 1983:13].

The extent of Honeyford’s antipathy is notably demonstrated in a wide-ranging thesis which specifically attacks the Commission for Racial Equality. Honeyford attributes Britain’s “antiracist obsession” to the commission.<sup>12</sup> [Honeyford 1998:292]. As far as he is concerned the organization is merely the spearhead of a more insidious plot to reverse civility in Britain. So he insists that:

...[T]here is a paradoxical sense in which the CRE actually needs racism, if it is to survive; and it is more or less obliged to stress its incidence, if it is to justify its regular demands for increased powers [ibid].



Likewise Roger Scruton insists that the Commission for Racial Equality, with its multicultural creed, is dedicated to the disruption of racial harmony. Multiculturalism is a flawed concept, he insists, that merely encourages disintegration [Anushka and Hinsliff 2004]. Multiculturalism in Britain is a complex ongoing debate, one that this study cannot pretend to have covered exhaustively. However I have made one key observation during the course of this study. It appears that ethnic minorities have championed the notion, with white support coming mainly from the political left-wing. On the other hand the most vocal opponents of the initiative have been white individuals or groups who reside towards the right of political opinion. This nation's multi-culturality and plural ethnicity cannot be reversed. This is largely because imperial Britain's dominance over a multitude of cultures and ethnicities was its greatest asset. Therefore in the absence of the imperial project Britain needs to celebrate its heritage of diversity which makes it unique among much bigger nation states. For that reason approaches to homogeneity can be developed at all levels, and methods for integration promoted and implemented at all costs to reflect the changing nation and its place in the global village<sup>13</sup>. As a rainbow nation, Britain's palette of ethnicities and culturalities can be the template of harmony from which some of its European counterparts can learn to address their difficulties – of adapting to a rapidly-changing world.

#### British animation: a brief outline

Home-made<sup>14</sup>, these animation films are produced initially for UK television 'consumption'. For this reason the films regularly exhibit mannerisms and character traits that are commonly identified with Britishness. These behaviour traits include the frequent characterizations of 'ordinariness' within soaps<sup>15</sup>; the aloofness and detachment, often observed in the plethora of dramatizations involving the English gentry; as well as excellent storytelling traditions associated with this nation<sup>16</sup>. Innovative and eclectic, British animation has generally been characterized by shorts reflecting independence and inventiveness. This is not necessarily new because the culture of independent film-making that prevails in Britain can be traced back to the 1930s. In fact John Grierson, who spearheaded the documentary movement after which it is named, was a strong advocate of films made outside of the Hollywood studio

system. Rejecting what he perceived to be an American commercial formula, he favoured any opposing alternatives, seeing animation as an important element in his creative arsenal. Through his vision and drive, a generation of important animators would come to be associated with the eclecticism of British animation. They included Len Lye<sup>17</sup>, Lotte Reiniger<sup>18</sup> and Norman McLaren<sup>19</sup> – known for his inspirational work, and the nurturing of generations of eclectic practitioners [Kotlarz 1999]. The Producers Alliance for Cinema and Television [PACT] corroborate my claim by pointing out that “the [British animation] industry is characterized by a large number of small independent studios” [PACT Report 2002:17]<sup>20</sup>. The animation industry in Britain can be credited with very excellent and innovative programming that constantly generates international attention<sup>21</sup>. Its global presence over the last decade has been remarkable. This is evidenced in work such as *Bob the Builder*, *Wallace and Gromit*, *Noddy*, *The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends* and *Eddie and the Bear*. Indeed the production of animated television series aimed at family and children’s viewing guarantees the livelihood of the British Animation industry [PACT 2002:5].<sup>22</sup>

#### Postman Pat: series-specific centralization and etherealization

*Postman Pat* the popular children’s series is set in the fictional village of Greendale – based on the Cumbrian town of Kendal<sup>23</sup>. It depicts a rural English community that is described as “a delightful concoction of drystone walls, patchwork fields and leafy hedgerows”<sup>24</sup>. Greendale is an idyllic place where residents know each other, frequently addressing each other by their first names. As village postman, Pat’s services extend beyond the normal remit of mail delivery, and involve tasks that inform audiences of a close-knit community. This representative of rural English lifestyle is evidenced in real life postman David Baines – operating from the Beast Banks post office that inspired the setting for the central character – who comments: “[T]here are some places round here where you could be the only person people see in a week”<sup>25</sup>. Since its BBC1 television debut, on Wednesday September 16, 1981, it has mainly featured an all-white ‘cast’, made up of Pat the *principal* character and several others who have been assigned varying degrees of importance in different episodes. They include Reverend Timms, Peter Fogg, Granny Dryden,

Ted Glen, George Lancaster, Sam Waldren, Alf and Dorothy Thompson the village post-mistress, Mrs Goggins who operates the essential – postal – service from the village’s sole convenience store, Miss Hubbard, Mrs Pottage, twins Tom and Katie, as well as occasional extras.

The BBC, for whom the series has been a massive success, is aware of the absence of black and other ethnic characters in *Postman Pat*, and agrees “no black characters have ever appeared on screen in *Postman Pat*’s television run” of sixty episodes. However creator John Cunliffe maintains that “in the books Pat once worked with a Jamaican postlady”<sup>26</sup>, but concedes “that when he conceived the character there seemed to be no-one of Asian or West Indian origin living in Lake District area” [ibid]. Indeed a similar report on this issue titled ‘Postman Pat could get multiracial friends’, commences with aplomb but concludes on a dour note. It opens with the statement:

[C]hildren’s television favourite Postman Pat could get more black and Asian friends in order to make the show more multicultural [TCM News 2001].

However the report concludes on a pessimistic note – from the show’s producers – that appears to suggest that multiculturalism will dilute their ‘very English’ brand:

[W]e are *just* looking at how we can extend the global popularity of the Postman Pat brand... Broadening the multi-ethnic range is something we are looking at, but it is not something we *definitely* want to introduce [ibid].

The ‘Jamaican postlady’ is an *ethereal* character who is alluded to in print, but is yet to be aired. Blacks clearly don’t matter. The fact that generations of black youth have been fans of *Postman Pat* has had no impact on the series. In a way black youth have been looking at a mirror that does not even begin to hint at their reflection. The longevity and popularity of *Postman Pat* is indisputable yet all the shows making up the first three commissions make no mention of non-English ethnicities<sup>27</sup>. The lives of Greendale residents, their day-to-day dialogue – in these episodes – offer no hints, clues or suggestions to the existence of other types of Britons. The storylines unconsciously subscribe to a *selectivist* ideology with regard to blackness.

Characters in *Postman Pat* are well developed to reflect their rusticness, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. However the multicultural nature of their national audience has prompted its producers to attempt a redress of the issue of ethnic representation. Evidence of the show's nascent multiculturalism can be witnessed in some of the more recent episodes. Ethnic difference is exhibited through the *series-specific centralization* of Asian [cast] members [see fig. 5]. Yet programme makers Entertainment Rights<sup>28</sup> and the BBC are adamant their actions do not result from cultural pressure – as evidenced in the following news report:

[E]ntertainment Rights, which makes the animated puppet show for the BBC, has dismissed reports that it had been asked to include Black and Asian characters in the series. 'There has been no specific request to make the programme more multi-cultural,' an Entertainment Rights spokeswoman told BBC News Online. The BBC has also denied making any such request. But the company said the series did have to be 'redeveloped and refreshed' to keep up with the changing lives of children'. 'A brand needs to continually reinvent itself to keep its appeal', said the spokeswoman [ibid].

While the producers claim "Postman Pat lives in a small Cumbrian village and it's not the same racial mix as a big city", they make a proviso for Britain's looming multiculturalism. They insist that "it's not something we're ruling out either" [ibid], soon after which ethnographic transformation is evidenced in the form of ethnically-specific casting, during the introduction and *centralization* of the Bains family. Literally arriving by train in *The Greendale Rocket*<sup>29</sup>, Ajay and Nisha Bains, and their children Meera and Nikhil become permanent residents of the village. Interestingly the roles of Granny Dryden, Miss Hubbard, Sam Waldren, Major Forbes, Peter Fogg and George Lancaster are scaled down from this episode [31] onwards. At the same time icons of modernity, such as dishwashers, phones, and televisions are introduced to the programme<sup>30</sup>. Ajay Bains is presented, not as a clichéd Asian *corner* shop owner but as a facilitator of the local rail service. Both Ajay and Pat's wives, Nisha and Sarah are waitresses in the station café, and what was once Granny Dryden's old house becomes the Asian family's home. The newcomers' Britishness is confirmed: the grandparents of Mr. and Mrs. Bains emigrated to Yorkshire years ago [Martinson 2004]. Greendale's acceptance of the Asians, and in a broader sense a validation of the nation's multi-ethnicity, is clearly demonstrated in

*Postman Pat the Magician*<sup>31</sup>. During a birthday party for Meera Pat is invited by Nisha to perform magic tricks, with his feline sidekick Jess. That the BBC is promoting its multi-ethnic drive is evident with the commissioning in 2003 of fifty-two episodes, each with a running time of fifteen minutes, and four more episodes with durations of thirty minutes per show.

The *series-specific centralization* of the Bains in what was essentially an exclusivist programme is a positive sign for the representation of ethnicity. Nonetheless it is important to bear in mind that within Britain there are still many who would see the Bainses as symbolizing the take-over of traditional industries by foreign elements. Drawing on the mode of television theorist Herman Gray, I can also suggest that they [Bainses] “have been selectively assembled, and subsequently become a part of” a multicultural agenda<sup>32</sup> [Gray 1994:177]. In spite of such arguments the triumph of the Bainses as *central* characters is significant because the social and political struggles that resulted in their materialization in the programmes have not subsided. This is captured in the producers’ need to merely contemporize the series by re-inventing the brand that is Postman Pat. Despite the claim of not being subjected to external pressure – to depict more ethnic diversity – the producers’ practice demonstrates otherwise. They seem to have responded somewhat reflexively to murmurings of ethnic absence, by introducing non-white characters in an effort to silence critics. According to the chief executive of parent company Entertainment Rights<sup>33</sup>, “Postman Pat has been well established and nurtured by its owner for more than 20 years. We will develop the character and take him to a new level of success”<sup>34</sup>. The producers have therefore been interpellated – inadvertently succumbing to a new ideological tide. In other words they do not want to be perceived as racially-misaligned. Therefore they move to dispel a potential charge or accusation by introducing ethnic minority *centralization*. This sort of ‘involuntary’ response is examined by Marxist thinker Louis Althusser, who employs the example of a ‘hailing’ policeman to explain the notion of *interpellation* – espoused in his discourse on Ideological State Apparatuses [ISAs] [Althusser 1978:145-146]. In his illustration the policeman shouts “hey” and a person responds. By reacting, the person being hailed takes upon themselves an identity that meets the policeman’s requirement. This enables

the policeman to exercise his authority, influence or power, over the person [1978:176-182]. *Postman Pat* presents an interesting paradox in that its producers, who would normally be the influencing party, have been interpellated. This of course does not discount the fact that Entertainment Rights has not projected its own agenda at any point in time. ISAs according to Althusser work more through ideology than force, relying not only on the supposed authority, but working in conjunction with perceived power to ensure a person, or persons, are interpellated [1978:145-146]. Though this study does not embrace a critique based on a political economy position, it is possible to subscribe to the notion that *Postman Pat's* 'development' for "a new level of success" could also be propelled more by a need to extend the global reach<sup>35</sup> of its parent company, Entertainment Rights, rather than through any sense of social consciousness. Within the context of such an argument the introduction of non-English ethnicities could therefore be part of a commercial common-sense drive, as opposed to a conviction to depict cultural variety fuelled by political correctness. After all "the brand needs to *continually* reinvent itself to keep its appeal". Nevertheless Greendale's *centralization* of the Bains family is altogether an encouraging development. It is a positive rendition of the notion of interpellation, as intimated early in the previous chapter.

#### Thomas the Tank Engine: indications of inter-World War nostalgia

The form of multi-ethnic development underway in *Postman Pat* does not seem to have occurred in the case of the series *Thomas the Tank Engine* based on personified locomotives. It typifies the nostalgic depictions of an immigrant-free Britain, which is rooted in stereotypical portrayals of inter-World War England. This series is the literal manifestation of the dreams of an early twentieth Century Wiltshire boy. Inspired by trains on the Great Western line – Wilbert later to become the Rev. W. Awdry would imagine the engines talking to each other as they puffed past his home, in the town of Box, at night<sup>36</sup>. To the purist *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends* is not 'true' animation, as the main characters – Hornby-type model trains – are remote-controlled and only employ interchangeable faces. Their minimal expressions are compensated for by an enthusiastic and often exuberant male northern English narrator<sup>37</sup> who works hard to convey the personalities and temperaments of the different locomotives.

Apart from the engines the most prominent character is a human – The Fat Controller<sup>38</sup>. On close observation he comes across as a Winston Churchill caricature, which helps to appreciate the location of scenarios within a time frame close to WW2, a period when the notion of multiculturalism and talk of integration of non Anglo-Saxon ethnicities was neither topical nor paramount. In *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends* all character types are white; with virtually no representation of blacks or other ethnicities one can only point to this series as a grand example of exclusionist work. As one of the most successful children’s animated series on British television<sup>39</sup> its noticeable absence of non-white characterization is problematic, but not merely for that fact. Rather the difficulty arises because the series promotes a void that can fuel misunderstandings of blacks, especially when combined with nostalgic romanticized notions of nationhood. Such absences provide fertile ground for misconceptions that find gratification in negative stereotyping. It is worthwhile pointing out that blacks, as well as several other non-English ethnicities, were integral to the British social fabric long before the romanticized inter-war period and immediately thereafter. This is scientifically established<sup>40</sup> [King 2007], and has been the subject of extensive discourse by Peter Fryer<sup>41</sup>, mentioned during my discussion on race in the previous chapter. In the light of documents such as the aforementioned report, which challenge dominant perceptions of Englishness, the continued success of *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends* in its current form, without a single reference to Britain’s ethnic minorities, is deeply problematic. Its exclusivity can be read as indicating that non-ethnic characters do not need to be in series showcasing ‘historical’ Britain<sup>42</sup>. I am suggesting that the cultural diversity of its viewing audience has to be somehow reflected in future episodes. The series does not present a true picture of the inter-world war period, but merely reflects the nationalistic nostalgia representations frequently attributed to that era of British history.

#### Dig and Dug with Daisy<sup>43</sup>: Series-specific black centralization

*Series-specific black centralization* is a primary feature of *Dig and Dug with Daisy*. This puppet animation series<sup>44</sup> is designed to teach pre-school children about machines, and has as its *chief* or *principal* characters Dig, a young black man and his colleague Dug, who is white and middle-aged. By their accents the

former is identified as a Londoner and the latter northern English. Dug's niece Daisy has the role of *central* character in the series. For example in *The New Tractor* [1995]<sup>45</sup> Dig and Dug get into problems when their truck rolls into a ditch soon after delivering a brand new tractor to a farmer. Daisy turns up and suggests they use the tractor to recover their vehicle, which they do. On completion of the task the two *principals* somehow congratulate themselves for a job well done, when it is actually Daisy the *central* character, who got them out of their quagmire. The redemption of the two *principals* by the *central* character is a recurring theme throughout the programme. Dig and Dug are afforded equal placement and positioning within the storylines; do not make any cultural references; and there are no emphases placed on their obvious physiological differences. They are united not only because they are work mates but by genuine friendship. This is remarkable because we are given the opportunity to observe a portrayal of black and white Britons co-existing in ordinary, run-of-the-mill situations. Drawing from Diawara [2000] and Gray [1994]<sup>46</sup> I would argue that the characterization of Dig as a *co-principal* is extraordinary. His characterization defies the more prevalent location of blacks within *problem* and *entertainment* contexts in television. *Dig and Dug with Daisy* demonstrates that pervasive trends that position whites as ordinary, and blacks as extraordinary can be dislodged through radical but subtle production methodologies [see chapter 2]. The practical component of this thesis aims to employ similar counter-strategic approaches.

#### The Little Red Tractor: Episode-specific black centralization

The other series that I examine in this section is *The Little Red Tractor* [2005]. Guided by the motto "you don't have to be the biggest to be the best", storylines involve residents of the fictional village of Babblebrook<sup>47</sup>. *Principal* characters in the series are a little red tractor and Stan Guard who discovered the eponymous machine – buried beneath a tarpaulin – when he inherited a dilapidated Gosling Farm. Like *Dig and Dug with Daisy* this programme is also constructed around the English countryside. This depiction of rural life is notable for its *centrally* positioned black man called Walter and a young [black] woman Nicola<sup>48</sup> who are presented, albeit in an *episode-specific* manner [see fig. 6]. As mechanics they provide vital services and are important members of



their community. They neither speak with foreign accents nor dress to reflect a particular ethnicity, and they are not depicted as stereotypes of blackness. Again it is important to observe that these black characters are not generally being marketed within a *performance* or *problem* context as is common in portrayals of black characters. Nonetheless as blacks they are obliged to *entertain* at some point in their existence. This subtle positioning of these characters within the framework of *performance* and *entertainment* is made so as to coincide with the services they already provide to their wider farming community. Two particular episodes, *The Little Red Rocker*<sup>49</sup> and *The New Addition*<sup>50</sup>, which I discuss shortly, exhibit a multifaceted-ness – humaneness and ordinariness – of blacks that is seldom witnessed in popular British animation<sup>51</sup>.

I do not pretend the presentation of blacks in the series is perfect. Indeed it could be argued that Nicola is only allowed to wear her hair ‘natural’ because she is being portrayed within a working-class context; a farming community in which rusticness and bucolicness is more tolerable, as opposed to an executive environment in which manual labour may not be the sole determinant of one’s abilities. Nonetheless the positioning of the characters tilts towards the positive end of the dominant representational scale of blackness as demonstrated in the two episodes discussed next.

### Little Red Rocker<sup>52</sup>

In the first instance a local rock band – *Heavy Chicken* – is unable to grace a charity event. Therefore the black couple are recommended by the *principal* character, Stan Guard, as capable reserves. Mr. Jones the promoter is somewhat sceptical – which is understandable – especially as he has arranged for a press photographer to record the occasion. Compelled to proceed with the event the promoter reluctantly agrees to the substitute musicians. With a guitar, a clearly delighted Walter summons his latent skills to front the newly constituted house band – made up of Babblebrook residents. Nicola his more composed partner accompanies him on drums. But the story assumes an interesting dimension when the clumsiness of another character – Stumpy – results in a power-cut that nearly jeopardizes the event. However the looming

fiasco is averted when Walter and Nicola intervene by providing a generator. Thus they underscore their indispensability to the community. Useful as such positive representations of blacks are, it is worthwhile noting a subtle operation of ideology - in that the producers are unable to avoid the temptation of pairing blacks with entertainment and performance. Hence in an incidence of episode-specific centralization there is a 'natural' slip into a stereotypical mode of representation. Drawing from film historian Thomas Cripps, I recognize the situation as evidence of the fact that stereotypes do not fade but instead get embedded into thought [Cripps 1977:265]. As Cripps has articulated, stereotypes war upon each other [1977:265]<sup>53</sup>. Ultimately this episode, *The Little Red Rocker*, is an indirect acknowledgement of the beginning of successful integration.

#### The New Addition<sup>54</sup>

This episode of *The Little Red Tractor* offers audiences an atypically humane representation of blacks as animal lovers. A cow wanders out of its enclosure because the gate is left open by accident. The stray animal is soon sighted in Walter and Nicola's garage. They inform other members of the community of the cow's location, and the fact that it is in the final stages of labour. Walter and Nicola suspend their work, as Nicola conducts an impromptu fête for neighbours who have assembled in their compound in anticipation of the new arrival. Nicola encourages everyone to relax and eat the sandwiches "because you can't hurry Mother Nature" after all. This is positive but it draws attention to Gray's assertion that representations of blacks largely range from "the trivial and celebratory to menacing" [Gray 1994:178]. Blacks in this episode, while not providing a performance, act as anchors of entertainment, by leading a celebration. Indeed this celebratory attribute [of blackness] is somewhat replicated in the previously discussed episode, *The Little Red Rocker*.

Drawing from Cerniglia I would describe Walter and Nicola's *central* positioning as the result of colour-blind casting [Cerniglia 2004:4-6]. This is due to the fact they do not specifically have to be black to function in their allocated roles. In other words, as operators of a garage they could have been white, or members of any ethnic group. This may be a result of contemporary thinking on multi-ethnicity within the nation. The significance of this development is evidenced in

the design of the characters. Close examination of Nicola reveals natural black kinky hair. It is not chemically straightened to 'whiten' it. The tresses of several prominent female personalities such as US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, British supermodel Naomi Campbell and politician Diane Abbott provide evidence of such 'whitening' of black hair. This is a significant move in the reflection of black womanhood to children in particular. Drawing from feminist theorist bell hooks I point to the fact that Nicola does not come across as "a black Briget [sic] Bardot"... an... "imported beauty" [hooks 1992:72]. Indeed she does not abandon her "natural" hair for blonde wigs or ever lengthening weaves" [ibid]. Nicola's is not a "sanitized ethnic image"; and is certainly not constructed to subscribe to the idea "that suggests black women, while appealingly "different," must resemble white women to be considered really beautiful" [ibid]. But neither does she codify the erotic or signify the exotic. Her orange overalls guarantee the suppression of the stereotype of the sexualized black female. By being *ordinary* she stays out of the female cinematic types that Bogle has identified as *tragic mulattoes* and *mammies*.

To an extent the series forces audiences to confront embedded stereotypes of blackness [Hall 1997:228]. The programme appears to be suggesting that "you don't have to be white to be a part of the broader society"<sup>55</sup>, thus making a valuable contribution towards the effort to overthrow dominant representational paradigms [Hamilton 1997:146]. The significance of such a 'coup d'état' – an overthrow of preconceptions – is best viewed in the light of Hall's argument that "the media are... part of the dominant means of ideological production" [Hall 1981 in Alvarado, Gutch and Wollen 1987:200], a context within which blacks have been consistently, but paradoxically, presented as exotic and dangerous [Alvarado, Gutch and Wollen 1987:209].

### Observations

Portrayals of non-blacks and their culture have increased since the 'golden age of British animation'. Programmes developed during and after the 'golden age' such as *Dig and Dug with Daisy* [1993], and more recently *The Little Red Tractor* [2004] seamlessly centralize black characters. Those animated characters created before the so-called golden age of British animation do not exercise racial integration so easily. This is evident in both *Postman Man* and

*Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends*. Launched on television three years after the first transmission of *Postman Pat*, *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends* has remained entrenched in inter-World War nostalgia, avoiding representations of non-whites. On the other hand it took over two decades, thirty-one episodes and a new production team for non-white characters to be introduced [in September 2004] into *Postman Pat* which was first broadcast in 1981.

The emergence of blacks in home-made animation is important but the measure of their success is still best appreciated when arrayed against the backdrop of the more widespread negative representations of their characterization. Work such as this is important because the pervasiveness of whiteness is such that it virtually requires no representation [Dyer 2000:126-148]. Therefore blacks are aware of all aspects of the human-ness of whites, because they [whites] constantly are associated with ordinariness. Whites love animals, have families, go on vacation, buy cars, do grocery shopping, etc. However these very mundane attributes of humanity are rarely associated with blacks on the screen [see fig. 7]. By and large the work of the series, *The Little Red Tractor*, reflects a move towards the redressing of stereotypes. This corresponds with sociologist Richard M. Merelman's assertion that "subordinates who appear positively in television...deprive dominants of reasons for continuing the process of subordination" [Merelman 1995:202]. He goes on to explain that "...subordinates who appear negatively...encourage dominants to practice subordination" [ibid]. The nascent *centralization* and *principalization* of non-white characters in *Postman Pat*, *Dig and Dug with Daisy* and *The Little Red Tractor* is a positive development. This progressive move may have been inspired by the belated recognition of Britain's increasing multiculturalism. But it could as well as be influenced by events from the so-called golden age, when British animation flourished, because the numerous eclectic productions frequently gained access to state or institutional funding. However such advancements in black representation have not necessarily been evidenced in some of the other popular animation. As indicated earlier<sup>56</sup> gaps and what such absences communicate about black representation and racial

stereotyping are examined more closely in the next chapter of this study. This involves scrutiny and analysis of a selection of work from the Aardman studio.

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1 I would argue that the genesis of animation studies in Britain can be traced to that era. Indeed Irene Kotlarz's 'The Birth of a Notion' [1983], though not centred entirely on trends in Britain, is only one of a handful of academic writing on animation from that period by a British scholar [see chapter 1].

2 Such as how blacks are seen by other groups. For instance certain offences – mugging [during the 1980s] and gun crime [in more recent times] - seem to have been 'allocated' to blacks by the dominant sector. Therefore black 'experts' are called to share their [insight] knowledge on national television and radio in the event of such misfortune. Otherwise blacks seldom appear on these platforms to engage in debates around technology, finance, industry, foreign policy or even pets, etc. In the proverbial British village blacks are still, routinely, viewed as visitors at best or intruders in the worst cases. This may be a reason why it is still easy to associate blacks with certain 'perceived' social ills.

3 In their Dictionary of Sociology they surmise that:

In opposition to the tendency in modern societies to cultural unification and universalization, multiculturalism both celebrates and seeks to protect cultural variety [e.g. minority languages], while at the same time focusing on the often unequal relationship of minority to mainstream cultures [ibid].

4 A country deemed to epitomize the idea. Effective policies have, according to sociologist Roy Todd, helped formulate a Canadian "mosaic" – a model frequently employed to contrast the "melting pot" notion preferred by the United States to reflect its attempts at assimilating the diverse ethnicities within its boundaries [Todd in Cashmore 1994:216].

5 For instance while Asian residents of Southall and Ilford can largely be paired with Sikh culture – and populations in Slough and Bradford almost automatically linked to Islamic traditions – areas with large Black presence such as Handsworth and Moseley in Birmingham, Brixton and Tottenham in London or St Pauls in Bristol cannot be tied to any distinct culture. This may be because black populations tend to be generally more heterogeneous. Residential areas frequently consist of indigenes, and descendants or émigrés from former British colonies in the Caribbean and Africa, as well as [black] nations outside the British Commonwealth bracket.

6 For instance it is not uncommon to encounter descendants of Asian and European indigenes dressing up 'black', listening or performing 'black music' and talking 'black' – using language that is rooted in traditions emanating from black communities. Such emergent 'blackness' may in the long run demonstrate the presence of the African diasporas as an integral part of the modern British social fabric. According to this interpretation of the assimilationist argument ethnic minority [cultural] phenomena, such as black Britishness, can extend beyond skin colour.

7 He was appointed a life peer in 2000 and is now known as Baron Parekh of Kingston upon Hull.

8 Britain retains leadership of this curious organization of its British colonies and their affiliates.

9 Traditionally left-wing they sought to persuade their Prime Minister Clement Attlee that:

An influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness among all concerned [Skellington 1992:51].

This sentiment was repeated not too long afterwards, albeit on a more populist platform, by academic and Conservative parliamentarian Enoch Powell; in his well-known 1960s 'Rivers of Blood' speech [Phillips and Phillips 1998:242-254 & Gilroy 2002:41-83]. Since then thinking along these lines has grown more sophisticated, materializing in the form of the hypotheses by various think-tanks and individuals. They include the think-tank Migration Watch UK - founded at the end of 2001 - by former diplomat Sir Andrew Green 9; US-based British thinker Roger Scruton; Ray Honeyford, whose body of anti-multiculturalist work includes an extensive critique of the Commission for Racial Equality.

10 Article on BBC News website on April 4, 2004.

11 Cited in Lentin 2004.

12 In the same publication he describes the body as, "...a bureaucratic elite with considerable legal and propaganda powers whose...power is the detection and extirpation of racism for the British social order..." [ibid]

13 Canada, a member of the Commonwealth Club, is after all the doyen of multiculturalism; having reached a stage in its evolution where the subject does not have to be topical.

14 I am referring to British films produced by animation teams that consist mostly of indigenous talent, skills and technical expertise.

15 British soaps are usually structured around the lives of working class people in their everyday situations. American soaps, on the other hand tend to be melodramatic – as in *Days of Our Lives*, *Dallas* and *Bold and Beautiful*. – focusing on the lives of the

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rich. Australian productions such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* are largely structured around middle class sub-urban lives. The world-view of white British working class image is projected as the default, therefore audiences are able to relate to their characterization.

16 Stretching back many years, Britain's literary tradition has yielded many works of importance involving authors such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marlow, Dickens among several others.

17 Len Lye, born Leonard Charles Huia Lye [5 July 1901, Christchurch, New Zealand] he worked for the GPO Film Unit in London, and its successor the Crown Film Unit. He relocated to New York in 1943, becoming a naturalized American.

18 Born in Berlin, she relocated to Britain in 1948 and worked initially for the BBC before setting up Primrose Productions.

19 He who would later become famous for developing Canadian animation.

20 Research by Skillset in 1997/820 suggested there were around 300 studios, including those involved in the games sector, employing about 3,500 people. The majority of companies employed less than 10 people and the average annual turnover was approximately £670,000. Skillset estimated about 200 of these companies worked on mainstream production for film and television. PACT estimates that of these about 30 regularly work on feature film and television programmes, as opposed to just producing commercials and promotional films.

The Animation Industry: Employment Patterns and Training Needs 1997/8, Skillset

21 A PACT report insists that:

Our animation studios therefore have a welter of experience and talent, and they continue to have a strong reputation for originating and producing work of the highest quality [PACT 2002:5].

22 In the same report PACT claims that:

Success in pre-school television results from the UK's tradition of producing strong and appealing children's literature, which has often provided source material for successful animated series such as *Paddington Bear*, *Watership Down* and *Thomas the Tank Engine* [2002:17].

23 Recent Period - 2003 / 52 x 15mins; 2003 / 4 x 30mins and 2004; Middle Period - 1990 / 26 x 5mins and 1991 / 4 x 22mins; Early Period - 1981 / 26 x 15mins

24 <http://www.toonhound.com/thehound.htm#wood> - November 11/04

25 <http://www.toonhound.com/thehound.htm#plaque> - October 21/04

26 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv\\_and\\_radio/1723530.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/1723530.stm) October 21/04

27 1981 – 26 episodes x 15mins; 1990 - 26 episodes x 5mins and 1991 – 4 episodes x 22mins

28 This is the company that owns the rights to the character, having acquired the catalogue when they purchased Woodlands Animation [developers of the series] for £5.1m in November 2001.

29 31st episode, it was first released on DVD [in Nov 2003] but televised on BBC1 on September 6 2004. [<http://www.toonhound.com/postman-2.htm> and <http://www.toonhound.com/february2003.htm> November 11, 2004] and [<http://www.tv.com/postman-pat/show/24841/summary.html> Aug 2005].

30 The many new technological developments introduced to the series include lip-synching, steam and wind.

31 Episode 39, televised by BBC on September 15/2004.

32 But it is also worth noting that India is the biggest former [British] colony and a very important market for British television. Therefore the casting of 'Indian' characters in a very English series can be a very useful marketing tool.

33 Mike Heap, chief executive of Entertainment Rights, the company that acquired the rights, and the catalogue of the series' developer Woodlands Animations.

34 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/1644976.stm> October 21/04.

35 The series is currently televised in some 55 countries around the world.

36 Based on childhood experiences of the creator of the series, Rev. Awdry, in the Wiltshire town of Box, in 1917.

See [http://www.kinderstart.com/frame\\_for\\_links.php?redirect=http://www.thomasthetankengine.com](http://www.kinderstart.com/frame_for_links.php?redirect=http://www.thomasthetankengine.com)

37 Another Liverpoolian, Michael Angelis replaced narrator Ringo Starr after the first three series.

38 Known in the US as Sir Topham Hatt because of negative connotations associated with the adjective 'Fat' in his British moniker, this happens to be the original name of the character; who was also referred to in some of the earlier stories as 'The Fat Director' [see Book 6, *Henry The Green Engine* published by Edmund Ward, 1951].

39 Producers Britt Allcroft have realised 146 [X 5 minute] episodes between 1983 and 2000; as well as the US-backed feature-length film, *Thomas and the Magic Railroad* [2001].

40 The results of a recent scientific study conducted at the University of Leicester, in conjunction with the Wellcome Trust suggests that Generations of Caucasians from Yorkshire were discovered to possess a rare DNA code traceable only to the West African sub-region. Intriguingly geneticists employed to verify the data were able to confirm that the 'entry' of the African

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chromosomes predated the era of the Slave Trade. As a senior research partner in the project, Mark Joblin points out in a BBC bulletin, "this study shows that what it means to be British is complicated and always has been" [BBC News 2007]. He adds:

Human migration history is clearly very complex, particularly for an island nation such as ours, and this study further debunks the idea that there are simple and distinct populations or 'races' [ibid].

41 See Fryer, P. [1991] *Staying Power - The History of Black People in Britain*, London: Pluto

Also see [1988] *Black People in the British Empire – An Introduction*, London: Pluto

Walvin, J. [1993] *Black Ivory – A History of British Slavery*, London: Fontana.

42 Perhaps the representational status quo is maintained for fear of destabilizing its audience's perception of an immigrant-free, inter-world war Britain.

43 The 16 episodes were issued on four VHS tapes by Pickwick, but have since been deleted from most catalogues. As of January 2005 references of the productions appeared on the following websites:

<http://www.bookpage.com/9708bp/childrens/truckroundup.html>

[http://www.literacyconnections.com/0\\_0789411075.html](http://www.literacyconnections.com/0_0789411075.html)

<http://www.magiclantern.ca/Search/ProductSeries.asp?SeriesID=623266188>

<http://www.magiclantern.ca/Search/ProductDetails.asp?TitleID=-1798392419>

<http://www.thebookplace.co.uk/bookplace/display.asp?cid=gen144&isbn=0751351083>

[http://www.looking4dvds.com/catalog/product\\_info.php?cPath=31&products\\_id=520](http://www.looking4dvds.com/catalog/product_info.php?cPath=31&products_id=520)

44 [16 x 10 minutes] broadcast on Channel Five

45 Central Independent Television 03/05/95

46 Diawara suggests the problematic depictions of blacks have been necessary for the "comfort and understanding" of dominant "white spectators" [Diawara 2000:238]. The idea that a white worldview, and outlook, is all pervasive is again echoed by television theorist Herman Gray. He claims that popular culture frequently acts as platform for promoting ideologies which are only beneficial to dominant groups. [Gray 1994:178] Gray maintains that representations of blacks are boxed into the context of entertainment, at all levels, ranging from the trivial and celebratory to menacing – the subjects of social disorder [Gray 1994:178].

47 As a direct result of the success of its June 2004 inauguration further episodes were commissioned for the autumn of that year.

48 "Walter - Runs the Babblebrook garage and likes to play rock and roll. Walter is easily lead [sic] astray. Walter is lead singer and plays the guitar for his band called Walter and the Wolverines."

"Nicola - Walter's daughter who also runs the garage. She tends to be far more sensible than her father. Nicola also plays an instrument in her fathers band. [see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little\\_Red\\_Tractor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Red_Tractor)"]

49 Broadcast on BBC2 on December 13/2004 at 08:48hrs.

50 Broadcast on BBC2 on December 14/2004 at 08:49hrs.

51 Such ordinariness is often seen by producers as problematic because it challenges entrenched – and embedded – stereotypes of blacks. Black British cinema scholar Stephen Bourne cites an incident during which publishers refused a body of work done on a black singer [the subject of a Channel 4 documentary – *The Sophisticated Lady*] because she neither "took drugs like Billie Holiday" nor "had any 'scandal' in her life that might make the book 'commercial'" [Bourne 1998:ix-x].

52 Broadcast on BBC2 on December 13/2004 at 08:48hrs.

53 In the same discussion Cripps calls this "the sociologists' term for the waning of a no-longer-meaningful symbol". [ibid]

54 Broadcast on BBC2 on December 14/2004 at 08:49hrs.

55 An appropriation of the show's slogan - "you don't have to be the biggest to be the best".

56 During the discussion on *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends*.

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- 1 Sproxtton explains; "with our previous work, people were merely polite. But when we started working with Plasticine they got really enthusiastic" [Lane 2003:48].
  - 2 In a BBC documentary, *Inside the world of Wallace and Gromit*, Nick Park describes this aesthetic as 'touchy feely' – one in which fingerprints can remain part of the work at large. The gorilla in *Creature Comforts* [1989] typifies the style.
  - 3 The reputation of British instruction in animation has also benefited from this development. There are numerous animation courses in Britain; and these continue to attract foreign students on a massive scale annually.
  - 4 This consists of the following five films: *Early Bird* [1983], *Late Edition* [1983], *Palmy Days* [1983], *Sales Pitch* [1983] and *On Probation* [1981].
  - 5 This consists of the following five films; *Creature Comforts* [1989], *Ident* [1989], *Next* [1989], *War Story* [1989] and *Going Equipped* [1987].
  - 6 The film is a parody of *The Prince and the Pauper*, Mark Twain's 1882 attempt at historical fiction.
  - 7 Also known as *In Your Wildest Dreams*, because of the duet on which it was based.
  - 8 This is discussed during my review of animation literature – in the first chapter.
  - 9 It is well known that mercenaries and numerous warlords are able to carry out their atrocities because of business interests that involve arms dealers – often located in 'developed countries'. It is also a well established fact that no ammunition manufacturing facilities exist as a matter of course in any of the so-called 'third world' nation.
  - 10 Sus law was the informal name for a stop-and-search law that permitted a police officer to act on suspicion, or 'sus', alone. The law was widely believed to have been abused by the Metropolitan Police - to harass young black men. The law caused much discontent and was abolished following riots in St Pauls, Bristol, in 1979, and in Brixton, London, and Toxteth, Liverpool, in 1981, when it was [officially] recognised as the trigger for these unfortunate events. The law was based upon Sections 4 and 6 of the Vagrancy Act 1824 which made it "illegal for a suspected person or reputed thief to frequent or loiter in a public place with intent to commit an arrestable offence" and effectively permitted the police to stop and search and even arrest anyone they chose, purely on the basis of suspicion that they might commit a crime. [See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sus\\_law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sus_law)]
  - 11 Album *Showcase*, [1981], Island CD#IMCD 571981
  - 12 Album *Babylon The Bandit*, [1985], Elektra CD#075596043724
  - 13 Rastafarians often address each other as Dread, Dreadlocks, or Lion.
  - 14 See *The Book of Nehemiah* ch.1-7 and 12:27-ch.13
  - 15 In January 1981, before massive inner city riots erupted in April and July, there was the firebombing of young Black partygoers in Deptford, south London. On Wednesday, May 13 an open verdict was returned by the coroner at the London County Hall. This as well as countless major incidents convinced many Blacks that racism was deeply entrenched within the dominant white British society, whose 'Babylon' system needed to be resisted. [see *The Guardian*, May 14 1981].
  - 16 April 1981 saw major riots in Brixton in south London, with a similar situation occurring a few months later [July] in Toxteth, Liverpool. Within four years there was huge unrest in Handsworth, Birmingham.
  - 17 Hard as they might try, the chances of making it to the banquet table remain remote; although they may be called to provide some form of service during the occasion.
  - 18 The difficulty of such work is evidenced in the programming of networks like the US-based Black Entertainment Television [BET] whose very name undermines the potential to serve a broader informational purpose, robbing them somewhat of gravitas. Firstly the descriptor 'black' in the channel's name has the potential to alienate potential subscribers from other ethnic backgrounds, because of the persistent pairing of black and negativity in the media. Secondly those subscribing to the broadcaster will not expect any serious programme-making from a station that has 'entertainment' in its moniker. The network would appear to have, ironically, internalized the concept of marginalization and yielded to a narrowcasting of incomplete blackness. The black network has merely become of repository of the performance-entertainment notion. Drawing from Diawara I would posit that BET materializes the exoticization of blacks, who merely dance and sing on the screen. [Diawara 2000:236]
  - 19 A permit issued to students in boarding schools, enabling them to leave campuses for short periods. These are usually issued during weekends.
  - 20 A cartoon renown for its flagrant sexism.



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21 The only blacks permitted in this 1930s Harlem venue were contracted musicians. No ordinary black patrons were allowed entry.

22 This is a characteristic displayed in some invertebrates, such as aphids and lower plants like fungi.

23 See Baudrillard, J. [1988] *Essays*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p.171

24 But this trend of misrepresenting Britain is neither new nor confined to productions or artwork by British artists. Skewed perceptions of Britons and Britishness can be found in work from other countries; such as French cartoonists Goscinny and Uderzo. For instance in their bande-dessinée *Asterix in Britain* they depict Britain as an island with a penchant for conservatism – a place where aloofness and quirkiness abounds.

25 Quigley's observation draws inspiration from a BBC television programme featuring Park and his parents reminiscing *Wallace and Gromit Go Chicken* [BBC documentary 2000]

26 A collective of producers, artists and educators.

27 See online reference given in bibliography

28 In the same article Corliss makes further claims that:

Aard-people rarely raise their voices or their hopes. The most they expect from life is an anguished standoff. They often don't try to overcome their predicaments. But they refuse to sink into despondency; they have too much restraint to whine. Instead they talk in bluff monotone, drawing word-pictures of the unforgiving world as seen from inside the cage of class. [ibid]

29 In the same paper, in which he examines the 'whiteness' of British television, Creeber argues that, "... despite gaining praise from around the world for its particular form of "public service broadcasting", the British Broadcasting Corporation has proved to be surprisingly poor at reflecting the local, linguistic, racial, cultural, and religious differences throughout the United Kingdom" [ibid]. Creeber is adamant that: "[I]n the past century the British Broadcasting Corporation was responsible for simply producing a form of cultural hegemony that attempted to conceive "Britishness" within an extremely narrow set of conventions, excluding all manner of people and communities in its attempt at "making the nation as one man" [ibid]

30 Park's style has been characterized as having "a gentle, old-fashioned and quintessentially English tone", which has even managed to "increase the sales of [his character] Wallace's favourite Wensleydale cheese." [Good 2001:262-3]

31 Wright claims that:

Park has a fondness for an aesthetic that is rooted somewhere in a dream-time of Britain in the 1950s, when people took their pleasures sadly, took in lodgers, ate cheese and cream crackers, and all machinery was solid, welded and riveted. [ibid]

32 Immediately after WW2 the nation's multicultural topography altered in concert with its rapidly declining empire and a nascent commonwealth of independent nation states.

33 The animations corroborate film historian Thomas Cripps's assessment that stereotypes 'war upon older types' with each one surviving "the "fading effect", the sociologists' term for the waning of a no-longer-meaningful symbol"

34 Scriptwriter for Bob Godfrey's *The Goon Show*, *Henry's Cat* and consultant to the BBC's *Do it Yourself Animation Show*.

35 Camera assistant on Aardman's *A Close Shave*.

36 Hall has suggested that:

Stereotypes get hold of a few 'simple', vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely-recognized' characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity [ibid].

37 *Creature Comforts Series1 Part 2*

38 Based on a duet with Barry White Tina Turner loved the Plasticine animation film, but White objected to his characterization as a walrus, saying it made him look silly. Subsequently the film which was made at a huge cost could not be broadcast. In the UK [the late] Barry White was often called 'The Walrus of Love'; he did not see the funny side of the visual pun. See 'Barry throws a wobbly over video fatty' – *Sunday Mirror*, November 17, 1996 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\_qn4161/is\_19961117/ai\_n14459747].

## Chapter 4

### **Framing Invisibility: Selective Positioning of Blacks in the Aardman Studio's Work**

#### Introduction

The title of this chapter reiterates the paradigm of the *conscious-unconscious*, gleaned from a knitting together of the Althusserian notion of ideology as commonsense and Macherey's ideas of absence discussed in chapter 2. As the preceding chapter has shown instances of non-ethnic English cultural representation in British animation are now on the increase. This trend can be traced back to the beginning of the 1990s; though allusions to black presence were made in the preceding decade. This is a development that confirms Britain's status as a commonwealth of cultural identities. The variability of the nation's communities is recognized by legislation such as the Race Relations Act [Amendment] 2000. Furthermore this is appositely demonstrated in the multiplicity of its hyphenated ethnicities; like African-Caribbean, Asian-British and Black-British [see fig. 8].

As I point out in the previous chapter animation blossomed in Britain during the 1980s. The fruits of this development can be seen today in numerous animation programmes televised by Britain's myriad broadcasters. Indeed the plethora of animation courses bears testimony to this development [Kotlarz 1999]. However the extent, and the contexts, within which multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, continue to be communicated by major British animation studios demand close examination. As mentioned earlier British animation is typified by the output of small companies and independent producers who usually develop work for the advertising and special effects industries [see discussion in the previous chapter]. Several of these [programme] content purveyors frequently produce for children's television – an area in which Britain maintains a strong presence. Aardman has emerged from this hub of productivity into the leading British animation studio - with creations that are synonymous with the notion of Englishness [Quigley 2002]. It is worthwhile mentioning that while Aardman's work is not specifically targeted at children, it remains popular with younger

audiences. As the premier animation studio it featured blacks in some of its work produced during the so-called golden age of British animation. However these depictions of blacks progressed from *marginal* and *peripheral* to a state I refer to as *apparitional* characterization. This discussion of characters is of course taken from the taxonomy outlined in the previous chapter. Furthermore the contexts of such representations, in view of Britain's thriving multiculturalism, are problematic - demanding investigation. Indeed the pervasiveness of whiteness in Britain is such that it assumes a transparency that in turn accentuates blackness [Dyer 2002:126]. Blacks are visible only because of their otherness. They are like dots of ink on a sheet of paper - *problem context*; or embroidery on a piece of cloth - decorative - the *performance / entertainment context*. In Aardman's films whites can be ordinary enough to rub their noses. Blacks on the contrary can appear, but in such a manner as to render them exotic when cast in *chief* or *principal* positions. Otherwise they are insignificant or absent if located outside prominent roles. This section sets out to identify and examine crucial gaps in the representations of blacks within Aardman's oeuvre. I would like to stress nonetheless that arguments raised during the course of this study could be applied, in several instances, to other non-white British ethnicities.

### Background

Bristol-based Aardman was formed by two Surrey school friends, Peter Lord and David Sproxton in 1976. Although they continued to experiment with different forms and genres of animation, the grafting of lip-sync on to clay characters would become their *modus operandi*<sup>1</sup>. This technique was key to the success of their early 'documentary' animations, such as *Down and Out* [1977], during which human ordinariness and audio from real-life situations was given the characteristically tactile<sup>2</sup> treatment evidenced in later work such as *On Probation* [1981] and *Creature Comforts* [1989]. During the course of the last three decades Aardman's status as a producer of excellent animation has grown. The success of characters such as Wallace and Gromit coupled with the popularity of US-financed *Chicken Run* [2000] and *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* [2005] have etched the studio's reputation as an animation powerhouse in minds across the globe. This is positive in the sense that it has not only

elevated British animation, earning the industry much respectability through the demonstration of its skills and craftsmanship. It has also drawn a lot of attention to the enormous potential that lies within the art of stop-motion animation.<sup>3</sup>

Initially Aardman seemed pre-occupied with *ordinariness* – and this was witnessed in several of their ‘documentary’ pieces like *Down and Out* [1978], and series such as *Conversation Pieces* [1983]<sup>4</sup> and *Lip Sync* [1989]<sup>5</sup>. However the advent of the studio’s best known animator, Nick Park, appears to have cued a shift of emphasis to depictions of *yesteryear*, and nostalgia for an idealised past – a subject I visit later in this section. Productions such as *Stage Fright* [1997] and *Wat’s Pig* [1996]<sup>6</sup> a ‘featurette’ scripted around medieval life, testify to this trend. Nonetheless, the studio’s penchant for depicting ordinariness, and their ability to capture and project the detail within mundane human behaviour that would otherwise go unnoticed, is what catapulted it on to the global stage – with the Oscar-winning *Creature Comforts*. Again the combination of a ‘documentary’ approach with Nick Park’s more cartoonish technique has resulted in a motif that makes Aardman’s style distinguishable. So for instance although the studio’s production *Flushed Away* [2006] was conceived and implemented with digital tools, instead of their traditional Plasticine - and in sunny Glendale, California instead of rainy Bristol - the characters are undeniably Park-esque [see figs. 9-16]. Commenting on this development Park remarks:

[T]here are more animators and directors within the company becoming recognised for their own thing; the problem is that since *Creature Comforts* my style has dominated: the wide mouth and the eyes close together, all that. There’s no resentment or anything, but I think we have become a bit typecast [Macdonald 1996:72].

Aardman’s hallmark stop-motion animation is as recognisably British as Disney’s output is American. Both studios are therefore indelibly linked to transmissions of their national culture. In other words these types of work are metaphorical postage stamps – somewhat reminding viewers of the nations in which they have been manufactured.

### Black spotting

As I alluded to earlier Aardman has cast blacks in their productions. [See discussion at the beginning of chapter two] As *principal* characters they have only appeared in two instances - *My Baby Just Cares for Me* [1987] and *Limoland* [1996]<sup>7</sup>. In both cases, the characters are positioned selectively to synchronise with existing stereotypes. Such characterizations are witnessed during the narrow location of blacks - within *problem* and *entertainment* contexts. I shall proceed to look closely at four films from the Aardman collective. Three of these - *Babylon* [1986], *My Baby Just Cares for Me* [1987] and *On Probation* [1981] are notable because of the manner in which blacks are characterized. *Going Equipped* [1987] is visited mainly because of its style and content. However I compare it with another film, *On Probation*, with which it shares a common theme of incarceration. I suggest that both 'Aardmentaries' afford white offenders the 'privilege' of sharing their human side – thus reinforcing their ordinariness. The practical element of this research, which is a direct appropriation of the Aardman approach, is designed to counter the representational deficits that are apparent in these productions. A number of recent films from the studio are visited but not granted the same depth of analysis. This is done with a view to demonstrating the extent of the studio's showcase of absence and marginalization of blacks.

### Key texts

The films examined in this section are typically selected from those of the studio's corpus that coincided with the halcyon days of British animation I also visit some of the productions directed by Nick Park, and argue that his arrival heralded a new era of popularity - during which humour and more cartoon-like approaches came to characterize the studio's practice, somewhat re-define their craft and accentuate the studio's Englishness.<sup>8</sup> In terms of style the four productions that are most closely examined in this study exhibit varying degrees of the film-noir form. Two of these films are studies in human behaviour, offering viewers a chance to engage with the very human-ness of their principals. The other two are remarkable for highlighting the exploitation of blacks without offering any solutions to that problem. Therefore the productions inadvertently capitalize on black angst.

*On Probation*, *Going Equipped* and *Babylon* unequivocally communicate feelings of hopelessness and fatalism - characteristics often associated with the film-noir genre. For instance desaturated colour cinematography is a characteristic of the *Going Equipped* footage. Narrative relating to the film's protagonist is told from his [criminal] perspective; while the hopeless argument pursued by the leading character in *On Probation* virtually bequeaths a legacy of sadness to the viewer. *My Baby Just Cares for Me* is less direct in this respect, but nevertheless manages to imply, through metaphor, that a black entertainer is a pet – a trophy to be acquired in the long run. *Babylon* is yet another metaphor for the 'who is who' of the dominant society and their lop-sided relation with the so-called Third World. Both *Going Equipped* and *On Probation* employ the fly-on-the-wall 'documentary' approach in their filmmaking and have no happy endings. As is consistent with several productions from the studio, ordinariness is constantly thematized throughout their work. The voices of 'real' people - as opposed to actors – enable a powerful transmission of emotions. Once again elements of noir such as the sense of fatalism – both visual and spoken - are employed to facilitate storytelling. Indeed stylistic tools such as flash-backs, coupled with austere surroundings provide the backdrop for the 'story' of a young white convict, who is the sole personality in *Going Equipped*. Although the film features no black characters I have chosen to discuss it because of its social 'commentary' approach and style. When compared with *On Probation*, the other Aardman 'ex-offender' production, it throws up some interesting issues that reflect the dominant society's response to incarceration, which will be discussed later in this chapter. *Babylon*, a characteristically brooding film that climaxes on the macabre, is yet another production scrutinized in this section. *My Baby Just Cares for Me* on the other hand seems light-headed relief, although its noir style exposes another facet of 'racial' positioning that is less than pleasurable. However, this curious dimension may not be immediately obvious. What is clear is that blacks appearing in the studio's work do so either in *problem* or *performance* contexts. As *My Baby Just Cares for Me* and *Limoland*, and other more recent productions demonstrate, "they [blacks] thematize exotic images dancing and singing on the screen" [Diawara 2000:236] [see figs. 17-19]. I shall visit these in more detail shortly.

Babylon [1986]

Vultures circle under the canopy of a brooding sky. The hovering scavengers are perhaps an appropriate metaphor for the arms dealers – merchants of death - assembled in the hall below. A reticent waiter takes a cigarette break, before returning to work. Gracing the occasion, which has a gory denouement, are caricatures of Adolf Hitler, Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando and Groucho Marx - in 'cameo' roles [see figs. 20-23]. In the background a barrel-chested tuxedoed black man makes a fleeting appearance; but he is not the only one of his kind. A security guard, whose presence is registered only when he is violently brushed aside, materializes for a few paltry seconds. As the dinner progresses barely any attention is given to a grunting white tyrant who literally turns the event into bloodbath. This action can be read as symbolising the gun-runners' tacit approval of those whose activities of perpetuating acts of brutality, guarantees business for purveyors of carnage in the wider 'third' world.<sup>9</sup>

*Babylon* epitomizes hopelessness. The film's title may pre-empt the eventual massacre depicted in this work but the expression - as I explain shortly - encapsulates the notion of sinister social forces at work in the real world. To a large extent the production symbolises the inequalities that underline the relationship between the so-called 'first' and 'third worlds'. From its apocalyptic opening sequences, that include vultures and a missile-dotted map, to its bloodletting denouement, it is truly foreboding. As a term 'Babylon' is loaded with varying but altogether unpleasant meanings for two important groups of black people domiciled in Britain – West Africans and their diasporic counterparts of Caribbean extraction [West Indians]. *Babylon* signifies turmoil, discord and discontent. Among West Indians, especially Jamaicans - but more specifically those subscribing to the Rastafarian faith - the term is employed to encapsulate the injustice rooted in the triple heritage of slavery, colonialism and relocation to the land of the white oppressor. Hence they feel the need to fight the 'system', because they, the descendants of slaves, do not have to be in servitude to 'them', the descendants of slave driver: *Babylon* therefore is:

[T]he white political power structure that has been holding the black race down for centuries. In the past, Rastas claim that blacks were held down

physically by the shackles of slavery. In the present, Rastas feel that blacks are still held down through poverty, illiteracy, inequality, and trickery by the white man. The effort of Rastafarianism is to attempt to remind blacks of their heritage and have them stand up against this Babylon [sic] [Littman 2000].

The expression is more commonly applied to ‘the corrupt establishment, the "system," Church and State; the police, a policeman’ [Pawka 1997]. This broad usage of the term, with particular regard to ‘the police’, was its preferred reading by a great number of Black British youth during the period of the infamous ‘Sus’ law<sup>10</sup> - during the 1970s and early 1980s. Evidence of this can be found in the litany of protest songs found on albums by home-grown groups such as London band Aswad’s *Three Babylon*<sup>11</sup> and Birmingham-based Steel Pulse’s Grammy Award-winning *Babylon the Bandit*<sup>12</sup>. In the chorus to a song *One Step Forward* composed during his period of residence in Britain, Jamaican reggae musician Max Romeo maintained that for the black person – but more especially the Rastafarian<sup>13</sup> - it was “one step forward two step backwards, dread in a Babylon”. He then charged them to move “onward forward, [and] don’t step backward, down in a Babylon” [Romeo 1978]. Among West Africans, especially Ghanaians, the term relates to Britain – a place of great toil - where it is possible to raise capital for projects back in their mother nations through sheer hard labour. Britain is in other words, a place where one experiences intense hardship for the greater benefit of long-term happiness in their home country. This second interpretation of the term draws its inspiration from the experiences of Old Testament Biblical prophet Nehemiah, who returned from Babylon to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem<sup>14</sup>. Both understandings clearly invoke degrees of unrest and discomfort, even memories of oppression, among diverse groups of blacks.

Aardman’s use of the term is also not celebratory, but rather apocalyptic. Evidence lies in the title of the series to which the film belongs; the appropriately titled *Sweet Disaster*. However it is useful to note the historical context within which these films were made – a Thatcherite 1980s Britain. Several violent incidents involving inner city blacks were recorded during the period.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore possible that media coverage of these events may have



influenced and shaped the producers' perception of blackness. Civil disturbance in black communities climaxed with the Broadwater Farm Estate riots<sup>16</sup> in Tottenham north London, in October 1985. Setting a precedent for these appalling events were the equally damaging riots of April 1980 in St Pauls, Bristol. All these events are believed to have been triggered by incidents of Babylon – that is, police – brutality. Coming from this era, when most news reports on blacks were synonymous with rebellion and chaos, it is not surprising that unflattering and stereotypical representations have somehow been reflected in the studio's depictions of Britain's most visible – but most misunderstood – collective of ethnic minority groups. I make this point because until the Race Relations Act [Amendment 2000] the multiplicity of blacks was not generally acknowledged. Indeed it was commonly assumed they were the same – much to the chagrin of some - because they somehow possessed similar hair colour.

#### Progressive invisibility of blacks

The alarming and remarkable satire - on the arms trade - *Babylon* is the only non advertisement or pop [promotional] video production made by Aardman between 1983 and 1987. Described as 'chilling' by film commentator Brian Sibley [Sibley 1998:58] this is the one Aardman production that is brazen in its stereotyping. In this banquet of arms dealers that is *Babylon*, the absence of non-whites seems obvious. In fact a major strength of the production is its use of myriad *marginal* and *peripheral* cast members as opposed to the employment of *chief* or *central* characters. This is a commendable feat in technical and artistic terms. *Babylon* is a multi-layered allegory about unequal partnerships and relationships, as I mentioned at the beginning of this discussion. For example it hints at the tenuous nature of the relationship between two worlds – 'first' and 'third'. The positioning of representatives from the military-industrial business fraternity and service industries next to each other presents a grand metaphor – an inference that the troubles of the so-called 'developing world' are somewhat 'engineered' or stoked by profiteers, operating remotely - from the loci of conflict.

As the film progresses we also catch a glimpse of the smug Hitler puffing on a sizeable cigar. Beaming diabolically, he nods almost in anticipation of the carnage that will conclude the film. The presence of the Führer is symptomatic of *Babylon's* deeply problematic portrayals of blackness. The production severely limits the visibility of blacks. They are featured only in *apparitional* roles during which they are photographically underexposed. This is as if to infer blacks deserve to be on the margins of society. There are the passing iconic golliwogs that appear on a world map; an ephemeral barrel-chested man who could be an 'unseen' guest but is never established, since he is allocated no more than sixty frames. During his brief, yet 'ghostly', manifestation a concatenation of camera and subject movements - in the form of a combined tracking [out] and panning shot plus crowd activity - expedite his translation back into oblivion [see fig. 24]. The perceptive viewer is therefore left wondering if they really did sight a black man other than the slightly more obvious security guard - who happens to be part of the ongoing event's protection team. However the guard is one for whom contempt is expressed; for almost as soon as his existence is being registered by the audience - in a fleeting but nevertheless significant event - he gets hastily brushed aside by a wheelchair-bound man who he tries to assist [see figs. 25-28]. The insolence encased in that momentary act is only too obvious. Irony belies the fact that a black man who in all probability possesses African origins guards and protects those whose wealth is generated by revenue directly sourced from the proliferation of conflict in the land of his ancestry. The security guard is characteristically stereotypical – as the [security] industry is one of the few areas that consistently offers employment to black males in Britain. Hence the very act of his humiliation, and the paradox of [his] powerlessness, is reflective of the persistent contempt directed towards blacks and the lands from which they originate.

In a twist the disabled assailant is later established as the keynote speaker as the banquet swings into operation. The incident conjures another interesting reading. The decaying 'developed' world, symbolized by the disabled character continues its domination of a vibrant 'Third World', the source of most mineral wealth and low-cost labour; which is symbolised by the security guard, and on

the other hand, the fleeting barrel-chested man, both of whose virility is obvious. As the banquet progresses the golliwog map provides a backdrop for the main speaker. It is a powerful reminder of the subjugation of blacks and the commodification of their angst. Meanwhile the sad, solitary, routed black security guard lingers on the periphery of the feast – definitely not an invited guest [see fig. 29]. By this time, as established earlier, the other black character has long faded into absence. In general photography involving both white and black characters [in the same setting] demands careful technical considerations in the form of *F*- or *T*-stop settings; otherwise one of the subjects risks over- or under-exposure at the expense of the other. In this instance the aperture settings seem not to have favoured the black characters in *Babylon*. As such their presence is registered only because of the availability of frame-freezing and time-coding technology which I have utilised for purposes of close analysis. Without such know-how these ‘privileged’ Aardman black characters would remain *ethereal*; with blackness represented only by golliwogs, who are briefly glimpsed during a cursory panning camera motion [see fig. 30]. This parallels the real world, in the sense that without special initiatives blacks cannot smoothly advance beyond their ‘designated’ pigeon-holes of the *entertainment*, *performance* and *problem* aesthetic. *Babylon* also somewhat validates the claim, among a lot of blacks, that the proverbial glass ceiling remains high in *real-life* Britain.<sup>17</sup>

The transitory golliwogs at the arms merchants’ congress allude to remote black existence. The use of these symbols could have been accidental; however the substitution of black Africans with golliwogs is demeaning [see fig. 30]. They are “racist hieroglyphics [that] signal the identity” of a whole continent [Lindvall and Fraser 1998:123]. Ultimately, the action of electing golliwogs as representational tools confirms what could be described as a complex dialectic between the *conscious* and the *unconscious* [see discussion on ideology in the second chapter]. Hence seemingly insignificant behaviour and characters are factored into an animation, invariably conveying a supposedly unintended message. While such actions may seamlessly blend into a broader narrative structure, nothing can be taken for granted because every single frame of activity has been carefully fabricated [Kotlarz 1983; Lindvall and Fraser 1998].

Though they understand the dialectic Lindvall and Fraser also suggest that artists are victims of their cultural environment and should not always be blamed for what they produce. They claim that:

[S]ince artists are captives of the larger culture in which they work, they are not always culpable on the individual level for those invisible prevailing assumptions and sins of omission [Lindvall and Fraser 1998:122].

While I agree in the main with Lindvall and Fraser, I reject the last part of their claim that artists “are not always culpable”, because in situations in which active opposition to dominant ideological regimes is well-established, artists can counter those systems through creative subversion. Artists who on the other hand allow negative ideas to materialize in their work are culpable when these concepts are eventually exposed for what they are. It is worthwhile remembering that while blacks have always experienced discrimination they did not, like whites possess the means to represent themselves extensively on media platforms. Instead they were always at the receiving end of someone else’s interpretative analyses. Therefore demeaning stereotypes of blacks have already been well established, with concomitant attitudes entrenched. This is in spite of developments and trends to facilitate better representation. Hence very little effort is required for such stereotypes to ignite prejudice. Therefore it is urgent to first counter, the pervasive negativity associated with blackness; then generate long-lasting positive imagery.<sup>18</sup>

In *Babylon* the actions of characters are crafted to depict seemingly trivial activities. *Babylon* calculatingly suggests blacks are only valuable when presented in iconic form - golliwogs. They represent a marketplace for weapons of self-destruction. In the ‘flesh’ however – like the security guard - they are only good for menial tasks, and can be therefore discarded when they are perceived to have outlived their usefulness. Again *Babylon*’s banquet is vaguely symbolic of occasions such as the meetings of the UN Security Council during which so-called Third World nations play peripheral roles. Hence both instances communicate a unified objective that blacks are disposable. Selective positioning, whether ethereal or apparitional, facilitates the presumption that inter-racial intimacy and cordiality does not exist in Britain; and that blacks are

condemned to insignificance during all levels of interaction with whiteness. This is not necessarily the case. However stereotypes appeal to the 'imagined', [Hall 1997:257-9]. Operating at a subconscious level, they are best fed in two ways; firstly by visual representation, and secondly by what is not being said or portrayed in the course of such depictions. African-American writer Toni Morrison makes an argument which can be appropriated to augment this position – on how stereotypes work. She points out that:

[T]he habit of ignoring 'race' is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognise an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body [Morrison 1992:5].

*Babylon* pretends not to address 'race', and yet it ends up doing precisely that. In the end the film provides ample ammunition for a hackneyed evaluation of blackness. The production is an appropriate metaphor for the relationship between the so-called 'First' and 'Third' worlds; in which the military-industrial machinery of the former plunders the latter. As the perpetrators of injustice celebrate, the impotence of the service industries – epitomized here by the waiter and security guard – is revealed. They are helpless to intervene; only relegated to positions of peripheral and relative spectatorship, and indifference. Here one makes another interesting observation; the powerlessness of the equal opportunities initiative to proceed beyond service provision into the upper echelons of industry. So while the waiter and security guard are 'gainfully' employed they do not possess the means to improve their condition[s]. Ironically, celebrities look on; willingly endorsing, or unwittingly giving credence to purveyors of carnage. The main speaker' declares, "nothing will move us from the pride of our work...Man is evil. You know it. Yes, I know it". Ironically the speech is a platform from which Aardman seem to be proclaiming the doom of any 'Babylon' system [characterized by the abuse of power]; and the disaster that befalls such a structure may indeed be well-merited. While the film appears to be criticizing the West it ultimately fails in such a missive. This is because it does not at any time offer any non-Westerners an opportunity to air any grievances, or highlight their condition, choosing instead to keep blacks at arms length, and literally in the shadows.

### *On Probation* [1981] and *Going Equipped* [1987]

Directed and animated by Aardman co-founders David Sproxton and Peter Lord. *On Probation* and *Going Equipped* are mini dramas that revolve around the notion of detention or incarceration. The principal character in *On Probation* attempts to claim his 'obligatory' right to temporary liberty only to discover such freedom is in fact discretionary. The chief character in *Going Equipped* engages in an elaborate confessional as he is positioned to win viewers' sympathy. Both productions endeavour to involve audiences in the 'lives' of their main players. Making brilliant use of multiplicity of dialogue – overlapping and interjecting speech – and incidental action *On Probation* unfolds in a hostel for young male offenders. Here a resident wants to visit members of his family but has to settle for a less than satisfactory offer only after failing to negotiate a deal with the supervisory team. Produced in the same year as the infamous inner city disturbances of Brixton and Toxteth the film encapsulates the broodiness and despair of the half-way house. *Going Equipped* is another short constructed around the reflections of a young white inmate; whose internment has seemingly led to [his] reformation. Aided by flashbacks the film capitalises on a combination of 'live footage', dramatic lighting, facial expressions, hand gestures and other mannerisms to aid the narrative's progress.

### Passive participation and impotence

*On Probation* is a celebration of the mundane [see figs. 31-39]. The film uses a variety of cinematic techniques such as fly-on-the-wall, cinema-verité, multiplicity of dialogue and incomplete speech to draw attention to unconscious behaviour; especially in marginal and peripheral characters. The film's principal role is taken up by an opinionated young white man named Steve who requires an exeat<sup>19</sup>. The viewer's interest and attention is diverted to mannerisms – such as fiddling with pencils and finger-tapping - that would otherwise go unnoticed. Idiosyncrasies and human foibles such as ear-picking and nose-rubbing are elevated into art form. Sibley has described this production as “drama...filled with brilliant observation” that is “ultimately funnier, sadder and far more memorable than if the same...had been presented in live-action” [Sibley 1998:52]. Intrigue is generated as one endeavours to make sense out of the

ensuing dialogue. However this 'documentary' neither offers any real insight into the characters' lives, nor provides moral or life lessons. Restraint is the underlying theme of the production – made up of a 'cast' of nearly as many correctional workers as those under supervision. Thus the ensuing drama occurs outside the bounds of normal society in which one half of the participants are neither free nor inmates in a penitentiary. However the institutionalisation of the 'supervised half' – residents of a half-way house, a probation hostel - implies they do not represent mainstream society.

*On Probation* is set in a troubling context, within which an equally problematic representation of blackness - a despondent young male - is made. Unlike other marginal characters in the drama who exhibit vitality, through noticeable unconscious behaviour such as ear-scratching, tooth-picking, pen-tapping or snippets of dialogue, the black character remains expressionless and voiceless; his movements limited to a few head turns. Although he is part of an already marginalized group the black character's obligatory mutism and dearth of expression positions him on the fringes of that unit. His emasculation is complete. One resident is 'introduced' to viewers as Steve, with a probation officer as George. While it is obvious ethnicity is not being addressed the impression of a 'social documentary' is generated. However it is one in which failure is thematized – firstly by the placement of its protagonist, Steve, in a no-win situation [even though both he and his contemporaries already exist at the margins of society], and secondly by silencing the ethnic-minority representative. It is almost as if it was being suggested that though there are ethnic minority groups in the broader society, their opinions are not too important; and that the mere acknowledgment of their existence is sufficient. Studio co-founder Lord has insisted that despite possessing "all the hallmarks of fly-on-the-wall TV reportage" the films are not documentaries but "complete fiction" [Lord and Sibley 1998:52]. In the course of this fictionalized documentary – what I term Aardmentary, black positioning in the case of this film, as in others discussed in this study, cannot be accepted as unintentional. Hence the very fact this solitary cast member is allocated no activities – not even as mundane as nose-rubbing or thumb-twiddling – is an indicator of marginalization by the studio. This is again a function of the conscious-

unconscious notion [see discussion on ideology in chapter two]. It is possible the studio was not aware that by locating their very first black character within a 'prison' situation they were reinforcing negative stereotypes of blackness. But film definitely signifies that its producers, Aardman, are operating under an ideological regime that sees the denigration of blacks as normal; and therefore feel absolutely fine positioning the character in a *problem* setting [Althusser 1994:100-138; also see Hall 1980a:33 and Turner 1992:26]. Aardman may not have had the opportunity to interact [intimately] with black people and this may explain their approach to blackness. However they are very much aware of white sensitivities, and so are able to transport viewers on an emotional trip through the life of another offender in the next film visited in this discussion. Indeed that suggests that white lives are somewhat superior to that of blacks.

#### Soliciting sympathy

The convict's sombre reflections in *Going Equipped*, transform viewers from observers into therapists. The sole character's candidness constitutes a solicitation for sympathy [see figs. 40-45]. Although socially-excluded the convict is granted 'star' status - in that he has a film of his own. In both *On Probation* and *Going Equipped* principal characters have personality, 'history', voices and 'podiums' from which to make their cases. From such positions they successfully project themselves as victims; Steve, from the first film is in dire need of a family, and the fellow in the second wishes things had been better during his childhood. While these are *problem* contexts both plots are constructed so as to position the [leading] white characters in a favourable light – as ordinary persons, thus enabling the film to act as a therapeutic forum for their rehabilitation. As a result the viewer is compelled to accept both protagonists and be willing to forgive their trespasses. In contrast, Steve's black counterpart in *On Probation* is a non-person at worst, and an odd face in the crowd at best. He is merely another brick in the proverbial wall without a hint of expressivity. Considering the fact these are not dramas involving 'stars' but ordinary people the works are deeply problematic. Declining an offer of speech to the black character, except the barest of human movements [head turns], while simultaneously providing a platform involving intricate dialogue and complex motion to whites who have similar prison experiences is covertly



discriminatory. Indeed, unlike a lot of the other marginal role players in *On Probation* the sole black cast member does not even have a full upper-body armature. He is instead limited to a less advanced skeleton that guarantees nothing more than head-turns. What the sum of both films implies is that white lives are more worthy of exposure and discourse; and it does not matter whether they are free citizens or not.

#### *My Baby Just Cares for Me* [1987]

A white tom cat kisses a framed portrait of a black tabby, then dresses up to visit an exclusive jazz club where she is billed to perform. His emotions run out of control during her performance, prompting expulsion for improper conduct. He perseveres and not only lands in the diva's arms but succeeds in realizing his fantasy - planting a well-deserved kiss. His smile and posture bear testimony to his fortitude; even after he is literally dumped - on the floor.

#### Entertainment and performance-based centralization

The work is constructed around a [comic] feline dramatization of Nina Simone's timeless tune - of the same title. It is unique among Aardman productions for casting nearly as many non-white characters, with a central role allocated to a black female. This is especially commendable and in fact the film is very enjoyable. Despite the initial elation at the central characterization it is not difficult to observe that her positioning occurs within an *entertainment* or *performance* context; during which she is established as an object of desire – a prize to be won. Unlike the other Plasticine productions being examined in this section, *My Baby Just Cares for Me* makes use of techniques such as *anticipation*, *stretch* and *squash*. These practices facilitate exaggerated action, accentuate the comic tendencies inherent in cartoons and augment the entertainment quality of this production. Animation is the art of impossible worlds therefore the freedom offered by the medium is well reflected in this film's intertextuality. With a nod to Tex Avery's *Red Hot Riding Hood* [1943]<sup>20</sup> *My Baby Just Cares for Me* employs noir methods to construct a musical rendition of an amorous cat's misadventures. The diva who is the subject of the *principal* tom cat's fancy, performs in a jazz club similar to the notorious 'Cotton

*Club*<sup>21</sup> [see figs. 55-56]. Integral to the film's narrative is the archetypal sultry black jazz singer, in the form of a female cat which is established as the production's solitary female and *central* character. The sighting of a prominent black female in an Aardman production should inspire celebration, but on the contrary her role brings into play memories of unsavoury black stereotyping, more commonplace in times gone by.

At this juncture it is important to point out that blacks need to produce animated series that showcase their cultures. Otherwise blacks will be located within the narrow contexts of either entertainment at all levels, or be seen as subjects of social disorder, ranging from the trivial and celebratory to the menacing [Gray 1994:178]. No one else can rectify [such] representational errors but themselves. Blacks currently appear in ways which conform to the perceptions of dominant "white spectators" [see Diawara 2000:238]. It would suffice to mention that these audiences' knowledge of blacks may already have been constructed from existing negative stereotypes. The resulting images are usually employed for the benefit of mass markets [audiences], most of whom would have neither had cause nor opportunity to interact closely with blacks. The fact that such negative stereotypes of blackness continue to emerge is a reminder that stereotypes do not fade. They are therefore paradoxically cannibalistic and parthenogenic<sup>22</sup>. Stereotypes always use others as springboards for reinventing themselves [Cripps 1977:265].

In typical noir fashion, principal cast member - the amorous white tom cat is portrayed as a hopeless loser – except in a humorous twist he wins his 'battle' [see figs. 50-54]. Even though the victory is short-lived viewers cannot help but applaud his efforts. The film then is really about the love-struck tom's triumphs and not the jazz-singing black tabby's vocal dexterity. *My Baby Just Cares for Me* can be read as a metaphor for the inequalities associated with the history of interracial relations. An immediate connection can be made to the [previously mentioned] 1930s Cotton Club - New York Jazz club scene. However, the imbalances of such relationships also hark back to the dark ages of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its corresponding plantocracy in the West Indies. Then it was the practice of slaves with light complexions to be selected for indoor

activities – which brought them into direct contact with plantation owners and overseers. Selectionism, as an operational ideology, favoured the plantation principals for whose gratification the slaves merely existed. The consequence of such lopsided liaisons is somewhat reflected in the jazz-singing tabby's pout as she stands legs akimbo.

### Incomplete Britishness

Aardman's problematic approach to black representation is not limited to the limited portrayals and selective positioning discussed above. Shades of absence - fades from barely noticeable presence to total absence - are another means of ensuring that blacks remain insignificant; and this is communicated to the general public through the construction, and presentation, of fictional time. As thinker Jean Baudrillard has articulated in another context, "when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning" [Baudrillard<sup>23</sup> in Gibson 2000:115]. This can be said of several of Aardman's other works; including productions such as *War Story* [1989], *Palmy Days* [1983] and their first feature-length production *Chicken Run* [2000] which focus on wartime Britain. These films subliminally transport audiences to times and places where the absence of non-white indigenes is assumed to have been the norm. While other Plasticine animation pieces such as the phenomenally successful Wallace and Gromit [1989 – 2006] corpus are constructed within an idealised rusticness devoid of visible ethnic representation. *Down and Out* [1977] and *Sales Pitch* [1983] endear audiences with their banality but excise non-whites all the same.

A scan of other work from the studio's catalogue affirms the verisimilitude of Gray's analysis regarding the preferred ideologies of the dominant [Gray 1994:178]. Engaging animation such as *Late Edition*, *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* and the *Creature Comforts* series are brilliant exposés on ordinariness – the very phenomenon that defines and confirms humanness. The Plasticine 'people' reveal their frustrations and equally share their joys. Marginal characters can be observed adding 'flavour', in these showcases of human behaviour, through the infusion of peculiarities and humour. Such characterization contributes to the portrayal of diversity in action. Yet these films and the majority of Aardman's work have not offered platforms on which Black

Britain can be seen engaging in acts of ordinariness in similar ways as white Britain. Characteristically these productions de-emphasize the location of blacks within the broader British society. Indeed the studio frequently devotes much time and energy to representing unconscious, mundane behaviour, such as nose-rubbing and ear-picking, making these human foibles noticeable and even attractive. However, there is a pervasive absence of blacks. The situation is noticed by blacks. On the other hand it is barely registered by their white counterparts, unless that anomaly is pointed out to them. Aardman's adeptness at the portrayal of, seemingly unimportant human behaviour endears the studio to several people. The wit and dedication of the studio's animators ensure that their representations of human quirks remain charming [Corliss 2000:58].

Often such incomplete representations become cultural ambassadors in their own right; actively propagating an artificial impression of present-day Britishness. They virtually leave no room for alternative perceptions of contemporary national make-up.<sup>24</sup> Aardman's use of images and stories which largely exclude blacks validates negative stereotypes. This does not aid the portrayal of multiculturalism. This narrow image of contemporary Britain is reiterated in Australian media theorist Marian Quigley's reflection on the studio's 'distinctive' Englishness. Aardman's work is seen as encapsulating a time when Britain was better off without multiculturalism. [Quigley 2002:87] She claims that:

[T]he quintessentially 'English' characters and rituals of...the films draw on director Nick Park's [English] childhood experiences and evoke a more innocent age populated with simple people and problems [Quigley 2002:88-9].

However the so-called "innocent age populated with simple people and problems" is akin to a fictional landscape in an imaginary place.<sup>25</sup> The nation was recovering from an expensive world war; its empire was in terminal decline and the mushrooming of new nation states from the ashes of colonialism was being mirrored internally, in the form of burgeoning new ethnic communities. This development would accelerate in the 1960s, peaking by the mid 1970s. Therefore the multiculturalism of Britain – which I discuss in the previous chapter - was not an alien concept in Nick Park's childhood. In any case Quigley is not alone in the adoption of a position that links the studio with notions of British

national identity. Aardman's successes were cited by the Animation Network<sup>26</sup> as a reason for the British government to support British animation. The group claimed that "Nick Park's runaway success with Wallace and Gromit illustrated how the depiction of British culture could have universal appeal" [Animation Network 2003]. Aardman's clay characters talk with regional accents, take afternoon tea and live in a world that has been construed, though incorrectly, as quintessentially British. The notion of tying nationality to the audibility of "the scrape of a knife spreading jam on a piece of toast" [Quigley 2002:88] is idiosyncratic at best; but problematic at worst for those trying to comprehend the multicultural kaleidoscope that is 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain. If such narrow assertions of nationality by the nation's premier animation studio were confined to one or two films it would be troubling but not seen as endemic; because everyone has the right to self-representation. However the problematic has emerged because of the motif of nostalgia, and the dearth of black or non-white representation. This feature is commonly associated with the studio's extensive catalogue, and is habitually misread as representing British identity. In other words the studio's films have become cultural emissaries in their own right. Animator Nick Park is fully aware of the studio's 'ambassadorial' position and so reasons: "it's funny, because in Britain, we [Aardman] are very much a kind of national treasure, and a kind of sacred thing...and a lot of people here [in the US] say that as well. So we were naturally very cautious" [Wachs 2000].<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately several black British people do not relate to that exclusivist mode of representation – which they see as white. Instead they frequently gravitate towards views that synchronize with their hyphenated cultural identities [see discussion on multiculturalism in chapter three].

Aardman promotes stereotypes of Britishness at home, and capitalizes on it abroad. This prevents the likes of Corliss and Quigley, from seeing the multicultural kaleidoscope that is today's Britain. It is therefore not surprising to hear that, "Aardman Animations specialise in short comedies about little folks who live lives of British restraint" [Corliss 2000:58]. This flawed view of Britishness is again evident in the claim that "these are films by and about the English middle class – a class that, from birth has been schooled in resignation" [ibid].<sup>28</sup> While Corliss's assessment is not entirely right - especially as a majority

of the studio's films involve the depiction of ordinary working-class people and mundane situations - there may yet be an iota of truth in his observation. Perhaps it is the 'cage of class' that foreigners see when they look in the direction of Britain. The Aardman studio's cautiousness, that Park mentions, prompts it to speak a language of commonsense [Althusser 1994:100-138]; a vernacular that the studio assumes the British will automatically understand – because they supposedly share a viewpoint and have a common heritage. In the course of exercising such 'cautiousness' at home, the studio also projects to foreigners a falsehood; that Britain is a nation transfixed by its own bucolic preoccupations.

### Nostalgia and exclusivity in the films of Nick Park

There is nothing wrong with attempts to depict nationhood, but there is a problematic lodged in the construction of a culture that is based on the glories of a gone-by era. This demands attention and redress especially if it "distorts any objective and impartial appreciation" of contemporary Britain [Creeber 2004:27].<sup>29</sup> I have hinted that ordinariness and the depiction of the past has been a hallmark of Aardman's productions. Indeed I have also suggested that such portrayals largely focused on the lives of Britain's whites, leaving others mostly on the margins, or completely out of the picture. Now I would like to focus my discussion on the studio's most influential director, Nick Park, and the impact of his work on the studio. With his award-winning contribution to the *Lip Synch* [1990] series Park's directorial debut for Aardman - *Creature Comforts* - seemed to dispel the notion of exclusivity that hang over the studio like the sword of Damocles. In *Creature Comforts* he conveyed a semblance of cultural pluralism by presenting views of Britishness that took advantage of regional inflections. The highlight of this multicultural experiment is a panther with a foreign accent that heaps scorn on the British culture in which it finds itself trapped. The metaphor of a zoo is a poignant signifier of the feelings of many immigrants in this country, who though unhappy feel they cannot 'escape' to their native countries. But Park's initial enthusiastic offering on multiculturalism seems to have faded, so that his work now is instantly recognized as English. Despite Englishness reflecting only one dimension of Britishness he seems to

unequivocally endorse that mode of representation<sup>30</sup> [Good 2001; Quigley 2002].

The sense of an ideal Englishness that permeates Park's work has come to signify the studio's output. For instance the thematic brass band music of the Wallace and Gromit series sets the scene for an age of countryside innocence. Viewers are prompted to a period that is not cluttered by the excesses of modernity or the influx of alien values. Indeed Park seems to suggest that modernity and foreignness can be problematic if left unmanaged. This is symbolized by Preston, the cyber dog in *A Close Shave*; and Feathers McGraw, the villainous penguin who is the antagonist in *The Wrong Trousers*. Following the demise of 'his' inventor Preston decides to take control of both 'his' and Gwendolene's destinies; with a view to processing her into dog meat. This could be read as a metaphor; symbolizing a warning of the consequence[s] of overdependence on technology. The disingenuousness of Feathers McGraw seems to hint at a mistrust of foreigners, who might just abuse the hospitality accorded them by their English hosts. Again the rounded edges and sombre-looking grilles of Wallace and Gromit's vehicles, and the other modes of transportation appearing in the films *A Close Shave* and *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, correspond to inter- and post-war British marques such as the Morris Oxford and the Norton motor-cycle [see figs. 46-47]. In fact Gromit goes further, transporting viewers further into an idealized past, when he briefly assumes the role of a fighter pilot; which occurs when his side-car transforms into a WW2 plane, during the climactic chase sequence in *A Close Shave*. Indeed Aardman's model-maker John Wright has attested to Park's fondness for artefacts reminiscent of Britain's mid 20<sup>th</sup> century past<sup>31</sup> [Bryne 1997:14]. *New York Times* columnist Rebecca Flint tries to sum up Park's influence on the studio by commenting that:

[W]orking in concert with Aardman Animations, Park has created a bizarre, inextricably British universe where mute dogs solve riddles that elude their dim owners, penguins plot dastardly deeds, chickens act out their own version of *The Great Escape*, and cheese is granted a standing of disquieting importance [Flint 2006].

But seeping through the quintessence of delight is an awareness of affection for quirkiness; and the coupling of such eccentricity with nationhood. Once again we are reminded of Elsaesser's contention that, "during the 1980s, British films and television have successfully marketed and packaged...the war years, the countryside...and elite education" [Elsaesser 2005:267]. This successful marketing of Britain's war years is ironically stereotypical; and precisely because it schematizes a people and their nation by reducing them to narrow framework of time during which they are allocated a paltry set of behavioural traits [Frierson 1998:98-100]. Such attenuation is often executed seamlessly and matter-of-factly; as recorded in this appraisal of the studio's Hollywood debut *Chicken Run* as "a minor triumph of English eccentricity that mostly boils down to knowing visual nods to great World War Two prison-camp movies" [Dalton 2000]. In other words the films are coded to appeal specifically to an *anglophiliacs*. This could signify an unconscious tilt towards some form of black exclusion. History however is witness to the fact Britain has always been privy to other ethnicities.<sup>32</sup> By frequently transmitting the essence of a country that is fixed in the inter-war period; and projecting an idyllic post-war 1940s and 1950s, Aardman perpetuates the falsehood of a black-less, and monocultural society. In this sense the studio is actively denying the longevity of modern Britain's multiculturalism. Indeed this practice can be likened to what I would call creative revisionism.

#### Stereotyping and Stereotype-spotting in Aardman

Aardman's work attests to the position that stereotypes do not fade or vanish. Instead they become embedded into what may be [mis]construed as normality; thus paradoxically rendering them 'invisible' and [yet] ubiquitous<sup>33</sup> [see Cripps 1977:265]. A clue to the persistence of ideological activity that is reflected in these films can be found in key technical publications. In advocating the notion of stereotyping caution always has to be taken. Here the authors neither find it necessary to provide definitions of the terminology, nor explain its pejorative associations, in order to facilitate more rounded understandings of the concept. They seem oblivious to the fact there may be a problematic linked with typecasting. For instance scriptwriter Stan Hayward's<sup>34</sup> *Scriptwriting for Animation* [1977], and the more recent *Stop Motion: Craft and Skills for Model*



*Animation* [2004] by former Aardman camera assistant Susannah Shaw<sup>35</sup>, advocate the implementation of stereotypes. Shaw states: “[T]he good thing about a stereotype is that everyone recognizes it. And as you are in the business of getting ideas across to an audience, using stereotyped characteristics is not a bad thing” [Shaw 2004:130]. Shaw’s position is corroborated by Hayward who maintains that, “... it is not the name but the attributes that define a character. As most animation films are short, you need to define your characters quickly and clearly. For this you need basic stereotypes for reference” [Hayward 1977:28].

Both essential training manuals are therefore endorsing the implementation of stereotypes as standard tools for the realization of animation. Hayward clarifies his position by claiming that “attributes can be separated into positive and negative” [ibid]; explaining “the attributes can be juxtaposed to create an imbalance that may be later resolved” [ibid]. This supports the claim I made during the discussion on stereotypes in the second chapter. Shaw does not appear to be wary of its implications. If her assertion is reflective of the Aardman position then it requires attention. Hall articulates this problematic exceptionally well in his declaration that stereotypes are merely short-cuts. They can be helpful but equally troubling [Hall 1997:258].<sup>36</sup> Indeed as I intimated a little earlier in this chapter stereotypes merely schematize situations or conditions [Frierson 1998]. These circumstances are often the crudest reflections of the actuality. That is not necessarily a bad thing; but given the frequently pejorative nature of this notion, and the fact that they can distort reality, stereotypes need to be utilized cautiously. For example in a more recent incarnation of *Creature Comforts* [2003]<sup>37</sup> there is a clear allusion to blackness in one instance. Babs, a ‘West Indian’ pigeon – identifiable by ‘her’ accent - complains about ‘her’ “windy stomach” during an interview. Light-hearted as it is meant to be, the ‘black’ bird is still not presented in a positive light, as ‘she’ is unwell. Once again black characterization is typically partnered with a *problem* context - “a windy stomach” [see fig. 48]. The endings of episodes 9 and 10 of the series present audiences with further examples of stereotyping reflecting the *entertainment / performance* context. Involving ‘black’ birds, the first instance comprises of a jazz-scattering flock [see fig. 17]; while the second

features a rap-scatting duo whose dress-style, mannerisms and articulation typifies rap culture [see figs. 18-19]. Indeed the jazz-singing and rapping birds unearth yet another problematic. Within the corpus of Aardman these characterizations reinforce the perception that blacks are most eloquent when granted a platform for performance [Diawara 2000:236]. These last two scenarios seem to suggest that black British music can only be appreciated through the filter of American popular culture. Indeed this is not a new phenomenon in Aardman's work. The *central* character in *My Baby Cares for Me* [1987] is fashioned on African-American jazz diva Nina Simone; while the caricature of another American, Tina Turner, is the *principal* character the *Limoland* [1996] based on the song *In Your Wildest Dreams* another African-American<sup>38</sup> [see figs. 49-54]. So in Aardman's corpus black British characters get connected with problems, while African-Americans are associated with entertainment and performance. Britain's blacks are the ultimate losers in Aardman's mode of representation.

#### Problematic representations

These anomalies in black [and non-white] representations have all happened in spite of the multi- cultural / ethnic / racial debates which have raged for some time in Britain [see discussions on multiculturalism and the discussion in the previous chapter]. In other words blacks appeared briefly, often on the margins, and then vanished into oblivion. Outside of these frameworks of *problem* and *performance*, or *entertainment* blacks have simply vanished from Aardman's work. Whether or not the studio has decided to excise them is open to debate. This situation could however be attributed to a functioning of the *conscious-unconscious* – whereby choices made for artistic or production reasons have indeed affected the way representation is eventually read. The decisions that enable such thoughts to be given material form are conscious, though they do not appear as such [see discussion on ideology in the second chapter]. The obvious absence of Aardman's blacks cannot therefore be deemed accidental.

#### Conclusion

Cinematic traditions have largely promoted the notion of Englishness as indicative of British culture. This happens both within Britain and beyond its

borders. Popular television has not necessarily helped in rectifying these inaccuracies. The success and creativity of British animation is well established here, in this country. However the multiculturalism of this nation is not necessarily reflected by such work. In most instances animation productions simply tread the 'safe' [depiction] route by choosing to go along with the falsehood of a monocultural landscape based Englishness, "the historically hegemonic form of Britishness" [Dave 2006:xi]. In concert with the idea of representational 'safety' Aardman, Britain's biggest and most successful animation outfit, has perfected the mythology of exclusive Englishness. In order to transmit such ideas the studio harnesses cinematic techniques and concepts from genres, periods and traditions that are not renowned for the casting of blacks in noticeable or significant roles. The resulting invisibility, or absence of blacks can be likened to a similar dearth of blacks from post-WW2 American television and cinema that prompted eminent African-American novelist Ralph Waldo Ellison to articulate through a nameless protagonist that:

[I] am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber [sic] and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me [Ellison 1952: Prologue].

Ellison's words encapsulate the spirit of this discussion on the studio's selective positioning of blacks. In Aardman's films especially, but also in mainstream animation on British [terrestrial] television in general, blacks are given voices only for the purposes of performing and entertaining, or protesting and complaining. As Stuart Hall has indicated, the 'racialized regime of representation' that largely partners blacks with attributes such as sentimentality, sensuality, spontaneity and sensationalism, is deeply rooted in colonialism [Hall 1997:225-290]. This indeed is a process I have termed 'templating', which is the application of stereotypes to 'stock' mannerisms, for the purpose of effecting simple characterizations [see discussion on representation in the second chapter in which I allude to the fractious relationship between the police and young black men]. These effectively prevent more rounded comprehensions of those being represented. Therefore it will be important to engage – actively - in the 'game' I call 'spotting the black

man'. This will be necessary anytime one is confronted with the animated form. However the 'game' should not be played passively, but interactively. It must engender a culture of positive reaction; one that results in popular programmes whose greatest achievement[s] would be to consign the 'game' to the annals of history. This will be a significant indicator of advancement in British multiculturalism. The final chapter of this study indicates that counter-strategies can provide helpful antidotes to prevalent representations of blackness in animation.

## Sample of character types in popular British animation



**Fig. 1** Chief / Principal characterization:

**Fig. 2** Central characterization: Daisy with



**Fig. 3** Marginal characterization: black centurion



**Fig.4** Mr. Ramsbottom and his 'faithful' invention

**Fig. 5** Series-specific centralization: Ajay and Nisha Bains in *The Greendale Rocket*



**Fig. 6** Episode-specific centralization: Walter and Nicola in *The Little Red Rocker*



**Fig.7** White ordinariness: Postman Pat at home with his family and his feline 'sidekick' Jess

<b>Generic Category</b>	<b>Ethnic Sub-group</b>			
White	<i>British</i>	<i>Irish</i>	<i>Other White</i>	
<i>Mixed</i>	White and Black Caribbean	White and Black African	White and Asian	Other Mixed
<i>Asian or Asian British</i>	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Other Asian
<i>Black or Black British</i>	Caribbean	African	Other Black	
<b>Other Ethnic Groups</b>	Chinese	Any Other		

**Fig. 8** British Ethnic Group Classifications

## Park-esque characters



**Fig.9** Creature Comforts [1989]

**Fig.10** Flushed Away [2006]



**Fig.11** Electricity Board Commercials [1990-91]

**Fig.12** Creature Comforts [2003]



**Fig.13** Flushed Away [2006]

**Fig.14** Creature Comforts [2003]



**Fig.15** Chicken Run [2000]

**Fig.16**  
Director – Animator  
Nick Park with  
Wallace and Gromit

**Thematizing singing and dancing in Aardman's *Creature Comforts* : *Being a Bird***



**Fig.17** Jazz-scatting *doo-wopp* 'black' birds



**Fig.18** Rap-scatting *freestyling* 'black' birds



**Fig.19** Close up showing 'rap' postures and dress style. Note the back-to-front baseball cap and Timmy headband - parody of popular fashion label Tommy [Hilfiger]



**Marginal characterization in Aardman's *Babylon***



**Fig.20** Adolf Hitler

**Fig.21** Elvis Presley



**Fig.22** Marlon 'The Godfather' Brando **Fig.23** Groucho Marx

Peripheral characterization: honoured 'Babylonians'



**Fig.24** Apparitional characterization and selective positioning:  
'unseen' black guest

**Marginal characterization in Aardman's *Babylo***



**Fig.25**

**Fig.26**



**Fig.27**

**Fig.28**

Shoving the black security guard



**Fig.29** Hard at work - black security guard



**Fig.30** Apparitional characterization: golliwog on Africa as a signifier of innate racism

**Problem context: white ordinariness and black emasculation in Aardman's *On Probation***



**Fig.31** Steve making his case

**Fig.32** Steve making his case

**Fig.33** Tooth-picking correctional worker



**Fig.34** Steve making his case

**Fig.35** resident Interjecting

**Fig.36** Ear-picking resident



**Fig.37** Despondent resident

**Fig.38** Strict supervising officer

**Fig.39** Strict supervising officer

**An intimate confessional: Aardman's *Going Equipped***



**Fig.40**

**Fig.41**



**Fig.42**

**Fig.43**



**Fig.44**

**Fig.45**

## Nostalgic marques in Aardman



**Fig.46** Morris



**Fig.47** Norton Motor-cycle with side-

## Problem context in Aardman's *Creature Comforts*



**Fig.48** Babs the flatulent 'West Indian' immigrant pigeon

**Entertainment context: thematizing exotic black females in  
Aardman's *Never in Your Wildest Dreams* [*Limoland*] and *My Baby  
Just Cares for Me***



**Fig.49**

**Fig.50**

**Fig.51**



**Fig.54**

**Performance / Entertainment context in Aardman's  
*My Baby Just Cares For Me***



**Fig.55** Black Piano Player

**Fig.56** Black Drummer

**Fig. 57 The 'African' Queen**



Image by Courtesy of Colors [Benetton]

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1 Indeed she claims in the same paper that:

Backed by millions of pounds of Lottery money – the Britain [that is being] disseminated on cinemas around the world is steeped in heritage, literary culture, and conventional ideas of class relations. [ibid]

2 Sports remains an exception. For instance I have heard Ian Wright [of black West Indian descent] and Monty Panesar [a Sikh of south Asian descent] described as Englishmen within the context of their respective sports of soccer and cricket. Curiously I have not heard academics Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall described any other way than Black British.

3 These productions frequently employ a combination of recorded interviews and ordinary conversations; which are then grafted on to Plasticine characters to simulate real-life situations – making them believable. Aardman's inclination towards this style developed during the 1970s, crystallizing in 1978 and rising to prominence in the proceeding decade.

4 For instance in the immensely successful British film *Notting Hill* [1999], supposedly named after a region of London renown for its cultural and ethnic diversity, only two black characters make appearances. The first is a tea-drinking security guard who is allocated a few lines of dialogue; the second is briefly glimpsed during a press conference. No other ethnic minorities are spotted in the production.

5 Produced and directed by African-Americans Donna Brown Guillame and Edward Bell, key contributions are made by prominent Americans from various cultural backgrounds, thus facilitating its transcending of ethnic boundaries. *Happy to Be Nappy* is a collection of animated shorts based on adaptations of children's books by prominent feminist academic bell hooks, poet Langston Hughes and several other American authors. Voiced by famous performing artists like singer Mary J. Blige, actor Melanie Griffith and ballet dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov these stories are designed to help children address adversity and celebrate difference.

6 Publicity notes on the video's packaging.

7 This is in harmony with the position that "ideology operates not explicitly but implicitly" [Turner 1992:27]. This is due to the fact that "we internalise ideology and therefore [we are] not easily made alert of its presence or effect [because] it is unconscious" [ibid].

8 Pan-Africanism subscribes to the notion that all Africans share common bonds. It advocates the unity of the continent and calls on all Africans both home and abroad to unite and work together wherever they are to promote this objective. Initially developed outside the continent, by Jamaican born Black nationalist Marcus Mosiah Garvey, there are two strands of the concept – Continental Pan-Africanism and Diaspora Pan-Africanism. The former endeavours to realize unity among the diverse nation states and is spearheaded by the African Union [formerly the Organisation of African Unity]. The latter relates to solidarity among all of African descent and continues to be a powerful element in political thought globally. Several Black leaders such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Kwame Nkrumah [Ghana], Julius Nyerere [Tanzania] and Nelson Mandela [South Africa] drew inspiration from this philosophical school of thought.

9 This symbolizes the Back-to-Africa initiatives developed and promoted by Marcus Garvey in the late 19th and early 20th Century. His ideas provided an ideological foundation for the pro-independence movement that spread across Africa in the period following the end of World War Two. The Rastafarian religion also draws a lot of inspiration from Garvey. The pan-African tricolour – Red, Yellow and Green [with the occasional Black to symbolize Africans and their Diaspora] is also Garvey-inspired.; Red is symbolic of the blood of lives lost during the African Holocaust that was the Trans Atlantic, Saharan and Indian Ocean Slave Trade; Yellow relates to the wealth of the continent, largely plundered; and Green represents its fertility and promise of prosperity.

10 Their nationalities are indicated in the appended credit list [see appendix 7].

11 He is credited as special effects supervisor, model supervisor and pyrotechnician on several productions such as the popular 1960s television series *Thunderbirds*, *Superman* [1978], *The Wind in the Willows* [1983], *Batman* [1989], *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* [1988], and *An American Werewolf in Paris* [1997].

12 These are generic facial images that can be utilized to represent the sounds that form components of speech. They are best noticed in jaw positions and mouth shapes.

13 Winifred Stroud who is credited in the production.



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14 <http://www.sonicfoundry.com/>

15 [www.thirdwishsoftware.com](http://www.thirdwishsoftware.com)

16 Circular rotating table- top

17 [www.pinnaclesys.com](http://www.pinnaclesys.com)

18 Joint Photographic Experts' Group – sometimes written as JPG – this is a popular [lossy] compression format used for digital image processing.

19 Culturally-detached – likewise the Chinese use the term Banana to imply the same phenomenon.

20 The term *négritude* was first used in 1935 in a magazine called *L'Étudiant Noir*. A notion of black African nationalism advocated by Francophone intellectuals Léopold Sédar Senghor [Senegal], Aimé Césaire [Martinique] and Léon Damas [Guinea]. Inspired by the Harlem Renaissance it was criticized in the 1960s for lacking militancy; and for projecting blackness through a white aesthetic of intellectualism without radicalism.

## Chapter 5

### School Dinners: Giving Colour to an Aesthetic of Invisibility

#### Introduction

When was the last time an elderly black person appeared on the BBC's *Antiques Road Show*? Of course that was a rhetorical question. Modern Britain is a multicultural society whose media should reflect its ethnic diversity accurately. However this is not the case. Black people are rarely portrayed, outside of a small number of narrow contexts. Blacks are seldom presented in a positive light. Blacks are indeed 'extra-ordinary'. It is generally accepted that the white majority have overcome innate racism and have learned, with time, to accommodate otherness. So how come in 1993 there was [almost] unilateral rage when an *African-Caribbeanized* Queen Elizabeth [see fig. 27] was featured in a series of Benetton billboards that appeared all over the country? The very thought of a *black* Queen was deemed scandalous; sparking protests in the tabloid press, and discussion in some broadsheets. The nation was being reminded that black is *not* beautiful; that black can not be associated with the stability that the monarch represents. Few of these 'loyalists' would admit to being racists, yet many indeed displayed behaviour – and exhibited rhetoric – that suggested otherwise. Those actions confirmed that racism is a complex phenomenon that can manifest itself in varying guises – ranging from the obviously hostile to the seemingly benign. What such conduct implied was that *their* sacrosanct icon of decorum had been defiled; their holy stereotype of sovereignty had indeed been defiled through association with blackness. Stereotypes consume each other in the effort to be deemed useful [Cripps 1977:265].

British animation commonly perpetuates a certain aesthetic of invisibility that takes its cue from British filmmaking. According to this audio-visual modus operandi blacks are not *ordinary*. They are seldom observed in ordinary situations. Blacks neither play Scrabble, Chess, nor dine with their families. They cannot seem to be portrayed without some form of overreaction. Blacks have to *entertain*, *perform*, or be attached to a *problem* in order to get seen [I have discussed this in the two previous chapters]. In an acerbic critique of

British film – that could be co-opted to illustrate this discourse on animation – scholar Karen Alexander notes that “British cinema is the place where ideas of nationality are played out” [Alexander 2000:113]. Commenting on the successes of films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* [1994], *The Full Monty* [1997], *Elizabeth* [1998] and *Shakespeare in Love* [1999] -acclaimed for heralding a so-called 1990s British cinema renaissance - Alexander is resolute that an altogether incomplete image of the British nation is constantly being transmitted. This unfortunate situation persists despite the oft-trumpeted multicultural make-up of Britain. Indeed the promotion of ethno-sanitized images neither happens in a vacuum nor occurs at national level<sup>1</sup> [ibid]. Such filmic representations, she adds without hesitation, are “also overwhelmingly white, in sharp contrast to our workplaces, high streets and bedrooms which tell a very different story” [ibid]. The ‘everyday’ Britain of hybrid ethnicities and cultural communities needs to be seen frequently and more broadly. Indeed this recurrent narrow and nostalgic view of Britain is inconsistent with the reality of the present.

Televised dramas and soaps are beginning to address some of these representational gaps – slowly. However animation has progressed at a slower pace. The work of Britain’s best-known animator, Nick Park employs a similar nostalgic [representational] stencil [see discussion on ‘Incomplete Britishness’ in the previous chapter]. It is this filmic template which dictates that blacks be allocated roles within entertainment, performance or problem contexts [Diawara 2000:236]. Such roles, or characterizations, in turn deny observations of black British ordinariness. In spite of Britain’s discernible multi-ethnicity, and evident multiculturalism, whiteness is pervasive in British animation; and the default focal point for social and cultural reference. Therefore televised programming matter-of-factly reinforces the omnipresence of whiteness by associating it [consistently] with ordinariness [Dyer 2002:126]. Meanwhile ‘screen’ blacks are normally [only] expected to demonstrate ‘exoticness’ - in expression or lifestyle. It would appear that ordinary British blacks are a threat to the cinematic / televisual ‘status quo’. They are seldom portrayed as Scottish, English, Welsh or Irish<sup>2</sup> but more frequently allocated the collective and indeterminate tag ‘black’. In contrast whites are Cornish, Geordie, Mancunian, Cockney or

Brummie; while those with ancestral ties to the Asian sub-continent are collectively place-labelled either broadly as Asians, or more specifically *nation-tagged* as Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, etc [2002:128]. Oddly enough only one group of black immigrants, Somalians, are consistently afforded what I have just called *nation-tagging*. Animation is labour-intensive at the best of times and it frequently contends for scanty production resources – such as limited budgets and tight time scales. Therefore animators have to make crucial decisions on characterization during the formative stages of their work. It is then that the process of excising and excluding of blacks, and other ethnic minorities, is effected [Kotlarz 1983:22]. Aardman frequently accentuates the ordinariness of the British people through an exposition of their foibles. The result of such work is often enjoyable. White audiences can even claim these idiosyncrasies as their own, making it easy to understand the humanity of whiteness. In other words they see reflections of themselves; but due to selective positioning in the media, blacks cannot make such claims. When blacks look into the mirror of British animation, they frequently encounter unrecognizable apparitions. For white audiences this is not problematic because the false impression that blacks exist on the margins [and need to remain there] has already been perpetuated by centuries of racist hieroglyphics.

#### Background to production

“Of course the children are getting so obese now aren’t they? Because they have too much choice”. These words from the stop-motion film *School Dinners* could be attributed to any ordinary senior citizen who has WW2 embedded in their childhood experiences. Despite this historical allusion the primary objective of the project is to depict *ordinariness* and not wartime discourse. *School Dinners* is an animation production constituting the practical element of my doctoral research. Involving a puppet constructed from *Plasticine* and *Silicon*, it has been designed and realized, to be indicative of ways in which counter-strategic practice can address negative black representation.

By casting an elderly black person [a representative of the most media-excluded sub-set] from an already marginalized group, to engage the audience with a mundane subject, *School Dinners* embarks on a counter-strategic

exercise. The film is a contestation of the customary absence of ethnic minority portrayal - an exclusivist mode of representation - that persists in popular British animation. Aardman's oeuvre whose characterizations are normally white typifies this aesthetic. The objective of this section is to provide the reader with a critical overview of the processes involved in the conceptualisation and realisation of *School Dinners*, and how it ties in with the hypothesis of this study on absences and stereotyping in British animation. With a running time of six minutes and twenty-two seconds, *School Dinners* draws inspiration from some of the earlier commissions of the UK animation studio Aardman. Of particular interest to this study are those films that employed imitation, or mock-documentary approaches – a style I referred to in the previous chapter as *Aardmentaries*.<sup>3</sup> *School Dinners* is inspired conceptually by both the Britishness and overarching ordinariness of the studio's oeuvre. Such Britishness is encapsulated in a plethora of mannerisms often associated with nationhood through cinema and television. These behavioural traits include good behaviour – reflected in politeness and under-statement; quirkiness – manifested in aloofness and conservatism and a general absence of ethnic minorities<sup>4</sup> [Giles and Middleton 1995]. Again the choice of Plasticine and a conversational style as my medium for creative articulation in *School Dinners* is motivated by the Aardman studio's most popular mode of operation. In an indirect way *School Dinners* also draws inspiration from two American children's programmes. The first is a series of nine 30-minute animated stories called *Happily Ever After*. Transmitted between 1995 and 2003, *Happily Ever After – Fairy Tales for Every Child* consisted of thirty-nine *traditionally European* fairy tales that are given multicultural adaptations, making the series an excellent counter-strategic exercise.<sup>5</sup> The second can be described as a collection of “captivating animated adaptations and illustrations from classic children's books”<sup>6</sup> and video shorts known as *Happy to be Nappy and Other Stories of Me*. Commissioned by the US television network HBO these programmes are designed to address representational gaps in black and ethnic minority children's television. *School Dinners* takes its title from a topical issue registering its presence in the consciences of television audiences in Britain, especially with the help of a popular series - *Jamie's School Dinners*. The presenter, Jamie Oliver a television chef, aims to improve culinary practice and gastronomically

revolutionize attitudes in schools across the British nation. However the purpose of this animation film is not to replicate what has already been broadcast. Rather it uses the programme's topicality as a springboard from which to address perceived gaps and absences in the representation of blacks - their histories and cultures - on mainstream British television. *School Dinners*, initially produced under the working title of *Senior Moments*, is the first in an anticipated series of animated shorts to be collectively known as *One Out of Many*.

#### Objective of the production

The film is designed to be elemental [the pilot] in a series of social commentary animation films that focus on, capture and espouse the views and experiences of older black and non-white Britons. *School Dinners* is essentially an exposé on Black Britishness. Informing the production are notions such as *ideology*, visited earlier within this work, and concepts like *ordinariness* – encountered while conducting research for the study. By confronting the audience with a discussion of eating habits, located within the context of popular history – wartime Britain - the film sets out to counter some of the preconceptions of Britishness and invite new understandings of blackness. *School Dinners* responds to Aardman's style by following in its tradition of featuring ordinary [non-celebrity] persons, thus giving the audience a glimpse into the life of a normally invisible black senior citizen. In the manner of *Going Equipped* [discussed in the preceding chapter] the film features a single chief or principal character. In the case of this film however the principal character, who is English and black, responds to an invisible 'foreign' male. But in direct contestation to Aardman the characters in *School Dinners* do not operate under the umbrella of the problem context – like the incidents of blackness featured in *On Probation* [discussed in the preceding chapter]; or as reflected in the characterization of the 'West Indian' pigeon discussed in the preceding chapter. Neither do the film's characters operate within a performance context, as manifested in *My Baby Just Cares for Me*. In contrast to the marginalization of blacks in Aardman's *Babylon*, both principal and ethereal characters in *School Dinners* feature prominently throughout the production.

### Pre-production and conceptual issues

*School Dinners* set out to be an animation centred on a conversation involving a senior citizen who happens to be black. As I have indicated earlier in this chapter such persons seem to have vanished from media radars. Therefore even though it is not uncommon to see older whites express their opinions on television – for instance in debates about pensioners' rights, and the so-called 'grey vote', it is extremely rare to encounter blacks who fall into the same social bracket. It is almost reflexive to assume that most have returned to the nations of their birth. This somehow compounds misconceptions about black family structures - as incomplete, and dysfunctional in the worst examples. Media exclusion of senior black British citizens demonstrates one of the worst forms of marginalization, when observed through the lens of my arguments about [black] absence. One thought that prompted the concept was the fact I have seen several old white animated characters in British animation but never glimpsed a black one. Yet the cultural diversity and extensive historicity of this social subset is enough to trigger a plethora of animated documentaries, series and episodes. I therefore commenced on the path to realization of my idea by recording conversations with several black pensioners. *School Dinners* was designed to represent the first of several instalments of short reflections of this media-excluded group involving animation.

Following these interactions I identified similar and recurring themes, which revolved around notions of citizenship and nationhood. It soon became clear there was a substantial sector whose ancestral ties lay more within the British Isles than any other place on the globe. Likewise there were those childhood experiences intersected with the last world war. In order to reach a very broad audience with a pilot [production] I extracted narrative that did not merely recount the past but involved the present. Following this I prepared and conducted a two-hour interview with one of the respondents, which was eventually restructured into a six-minute animation script. Several methods of production were explored; however it quickly became obvious that employment of cell and other two-dimensional processes would be immensely time-consuming, but equally unhelpful in facilitating my study on work from the Aardman studio. 3-D computer animation was also considered, because

Aardman has also produced work in this medium, but that was discounted because of production costs and limited time-scales. I settled for the option of *Plasticine* and silicon as they enabled me to carry out the project, while approximating some of the studio's best known work with available resources.

#### Observations at selected screenings

Although not officially 'released' *School Dinners* has been screened at various locations. The audiences have included members of the local community in which I resided [Reading, UK] at the time of its production; students in institutions where I have taught, as well as the public - at film festivals – *both* nationally and internationally. The objective of these exhibitions has been to gauge 'public' reactions to an animated documentary production of its kind – the pilot of a series that focuses on the depiction of blacks in ordinary [everyday] situations. Observations made during these occasions have provided useful insights, which will be factored into the scripting, design, construction and realization of future animated documentaries. The screening times and locations are indicated as follows:

Hatford Road, Reading, UK – December 2006

University for the Creative Arts, Farnham, UK – January/February 2007

Kingston University, London, UK – January 2007

Westminster University, London, UK – February 2007

Platform Animation Festival, Portland, Oregon, USA – June 2007

Savannah College of Art and Design, Georgia, USA – November 2007

Black Filmmakers Festival, London, UK – November 2008

The first viewers of the production were a selection of residents of Hatford Road - peers of the lady whose deliberations facilitate the production. They agreed with the subject, mostly wondering how a clay puppet could so accurately relate everyday facts. Their frequent 'interactions' with the film could be deemed as both entertaining and intriguing.

Students at the University for the Creative Arts saw the movie within the context of concept development. Therefore they seemed 'inspired' by the notion that it



was possible to create a film out of any idea. To them *School Dinners* typified that approach. However they seemed intrigued by the feature of a 'white-sounding' black character. Most of these students were white.

Kingston and Westminster Universities demonstrated the broadest spectrum of ethnic diversity to which the production has been exhibited. Their categories of ethnicity match those outlined earlier in this study [see fig. 8]. The former viewed the film within the context of a class on cultural representation; while the latter watched it during a session on montage. As such there was lively discourse on several aspects of the production. Some argued that it was not possible for blacks to sound like the character in the film. Others countered that it was racist to make such assumptions, maintaining that there were several people who while appearing black actually sounded [and even thought] like whites. A couple of black students went as far as to refer to such people as *Coconuts* – culturally detached from the tone of their skin – thus fuelling already heated discussions on ethnicity. There seemed to be a general consensus, however, that non-stereotypical black representation ought to be more common in British animation.

Screening at the Platform Animation Festival was the first opportunity to 'test' audience response[s] in a foreign country. During the exhibition I noticed viewers nod in agreement to, and comment on, the film's central discussion of food. It was also clear that some members of the audience were finding great difficulty associating the notions of 'black' and 'British'. Again this occasion reiterated the importance of exhibiting more of Britain's blackness both nationally and globally.

At the Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia, USA, the production was screened in class as part of a session on Documentary Animation. The film was seen alongside others such as Winsor McCay's *The Sinking of the Lusitania* [1918] and Chris Landreth's *Ryan* [2004]. Students, most of whom are white, have frequently expressed surprise at the portrayal of a black person of British origin. However they did not conduct any meaningful critique of the film. Instead the group was mostly interested in production strategies and

methodologies. Being primarily vocation-oriented the respondents were keen to know how I developed the idea for the film; and how the production was actually realized. While the non-critical appraisal was somewhat disappointing I was intrigued by their fascination with my *modus operandi* – which involved the use of a still camera.

In general the responses have been encouraging. While they highlighted the potential for black animated documentaries to engage, it also became evident that there are [still] fixed ideas of what blacks of British origin are expected to be like. Nonetheless the various reactions have collectively emphasized the usefulness of my work, which involves contextually informed textual analysis and animated filmmaking as a means for addressing stereotypes.

### Tackling stereotypes

As a counter-strategic project *School Dinners* works on a number of levels. Firstly the ordinariness of the main subject under discussion makes the film accessible to all age groups, therefore potentially guaranteeing it broad spectatorship. This in turn provides a forum for the seamless introduction of sub-themes that introduce audiences to ‘hidden’ histories of black British presence – as evidenced in the principal character’s references to WW2. The revelation of black British family life during that period is important because such glorious aspects of their histories are limited to the ghetto of special occasions like Black History Month. Yet the stereotypical portrayal of blackness within ‘problem’ or ‘performance’ contexts is quite commonplace. As television theorist Herman Gray has noted the tradition of negative black representation transpires at all levels, ranging from the trivial and celebratory to menacing. This creates a blanket false impression of blacks as the agents of social disorder [Gray 1994:178]. Through the employment of radical but subtle production methodologies *School Dinners* avoids the representational anomalies that are located especially in Aardman’s *My Baby Just Cares For Me* [1983], *On Probation* [1981] and *Babylon* [1986], as well as some more recent productions such as *Creature Comforts* [2003 and 2004]. In these productions blacks are ‘other’, and presented somewhat carelessly.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly what would be mundane dialogue if projected through live-action generates new levels of excitement. This degree of interactivity – between man and clay puppet - is especially rewarding. Audience fascination and amusement can be directly linked to factors such as the *ordinariness* of the subject and the interview situation; and the very English accent of the black old lady who is the production's *principal*. More precisely it is the *ordinariness* captured through stop-motion photography and re-transmitted in the animated form - as opposed to live-action or cine-photography – that amuses.

Until her first appearance, in a medium close-up, as she responds to questions from an off-camera interviewer *School Dinners'* protagonist is assumed to be white English. Indeed the very *English* accent is only part of a deliberate attempt at provoking viewers to confront the diversity of Britishness, and the fact that inflection or complexion should not be the signifier of nationality in this country. I draw inspiration from the *Aardmentary* tradition - of animated films that at first appear to be factual documentaries – but go further to *reconstruct* the life of a person. The overlapping histories and experiences of the three elderly interviewees meant that it was fairly easily to get the white member of the trio to agree to record the voice of the clay puppet. This is not problematic, but rather a deliberate tactic to force audiences of all colours to confront their own prejudices – about what the other should be. *School Dinners* displays several elements of the notion of counter-strategy. As an exercise it is at first confrontational. It does not conform to the stereotypical image of an English person. So while the *voice* and *history* that is being conveyed is *white*, the screen is awash with evidence of black culture. Such symbolism is mostly witnessed through the symbolism of a Pan-Africanist<sup>8</sup> colour scheme - red-yellow-green-and-black<sup>9</sup> – in the backdrop. Indeed the idea to experiment with a 'white' voice and black person was inspired by the work of Tilbor Kalman for Benetton, which featured a digitally-enhanced image of Queen Elizabeth in 1993 [see Fig. 57]. As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter the uproar that greeted the publication of this image was a poignant reminder that huge segments of 'white' Britain are not necessarily enamoured with, nor ready to entertain, the notion of strong black presence.

In spite of the clues of a 'foreign' cultural heritage in the character, the authenticity of her Britishness is undisputable. This fact is demonstrated by her childhood memories of puddings and parents - a "mother [who] had to go to work" during the war and a "Dad [who] was away...in the air force". Both parents are glimpsed in a fleeting monochromatic portrait. The character's multicultural heritage therefore epitomizes modern Britain's status as a commonwealth of cultural identities [see introduction to the previous chapter]. Viewers are indeed assured of her Britishness [and Englishness] somewhat matter-of-factly, as she casually recounts her place in national history - "during the [world] war" when:

[W]e were poor and you didn't have a lot to eat and they did give us quite a good dinner and sometimes there were seconds. You could go and get secondsssss [sic]. Yeah we enjoyed them. Before that we took sandwidgeesssss [sic] and they're not very nice are they? [*School Dinners* 2005]

With the etymon *animare*, animation derives from the Latin *to breathe life into*. *School Dinners* encapsulates this phenomenon on more than one level. It is essentially the *coming-to-life* of an effigy of a black senior citizen; her very reflections on seemingly mundane issues designed to register [and reiterate] the longevity of black Britishness.

#### Production issues and practical considerations

The production team can be classified as *multi-ethnic*, although the arrival at such a position was not based on a conscious decision. The talent pool consisted of white English craftsmen, artists of East Asian descent – Korea and Malaysia – and an African-born Briton.<sup>10</sup> In order to gain expert advice I compiled an inventory of support companies within the film and television industry. The catalogue consisted of model-makers, puppeteers and special effects technicians. Following further web-based and telephone research, the list was whittled down to four companies. Final decisions were made purely on the basis of who was willing to talk, provide free technical advice and [or] allow visits to their premises to observe how they worked; asking questions about techniques, production styles and methods. I was able to show the storyboard,

and discuss the production with dedicated personnel from the following companies:

- Complete Fabrication, Lewisham, London
- Jacobson Chemicals, Alton, Hampshire
- John Wright Modelmaking, Bristol, Avon
- Mat FX, Reading, Berkshire

#### *Complete Fabrication Ltd*

Located at an industrial estate in south London the company is responsible for some of the most excellent model-making, fascinating special effects, enchanting commercials and attention-grabbing idents on television [and film] in this country. Managing-director Josephine Pickett-Baker introduced her team, consisting of project managers, engineers, sculptors, designers, model-makers and puppeteers. Useful advice on model design, construction and cost-effective production strategies was provided by staff member Tony Dunsterville, whose career in the film and television spans four decades<sup>11</sup>. Advice from this expert influenced my decision to use a *ball-and-socket* armature, as opposed to an *aluminium wire armature*, in the construction of the puppet.

#### *Jacobson Chemicals Ltd*

With an extensive client list ranging from animatronics and special effects television shows and film productions, through aerospace engineering to advertising, this establishment – based in Alton, Hampshire - was suggested by the team at Complete Fabrication. This turned out to be an excellent recommendation. Jacobson Chemicals provides moulding and casting solutions; developing polymers and other similar technologies - especially with creative professionals in mind. A meeting with their spokesperson, Andy Cooper, was arranged, at which he advised on the suitability of materials for modelling and sculpture. For example, I was alerted to the fact that silicone only bonds to itself, and not to any other substance be it a chemical compound or otherwise. This was an extremely valuable piece of information, as the model used for the production consisted of two key materials – silicone and Plasticine. The body was initially sculpted in Plasticine, but finally cast in silicone, leaving its face, to be moulded in the more pliable Plasticine: necessary for

manipulations and movements that would facilitate the lip syncing that is elemental to the film.

#### *John Wright Modelmaking Ltd*

Offering bespoke models and armature construction from supplied drawings, this Bristol-based company is most famous for its work with the Aardman studio. However it has a policy of working on both big and small budget productions. This fact alone made them my first choice for armature fabrication. Following a meeting to discuss my script, it was agreed an upper body armature was the best option for the production. Such an armature best suited the interview-type style of the film, because it would allow for the character's hand and head movements.

#### *MatFX Ltd*

With an extensive portfolio comprising animatronics and special effects to puppet making, stage and theatre design, the Reading [Berkshire] firm proved highly supportive; with the Managing Director, Mat Lawrence, taking a keen interest in the project. For a modest price they created a cast from which the silicon puppet was eventually realized. The company went out of their way to provide silicone paints and hardeners, enabling me to add finishing touches to the model.

#### Puppet Construction

The construction process is summarized as follows:

- *Plasticine modelling*

The construction of a Plasticine figurine was the first of two main modelling stages. Here a figurine based loosely on drawings from the storyboard was constructed. The model measuring 11 inches [from head to foot], was sculptured from *Newplast* Plasticine, by a Korean colleague – Heeseung Jang. On completion the model was kept refrigerated [deep frozen] to prevent it melting, before transportation to John Wright Model Making Ltd so that precise measurements could be taken for the construction of an armature.

- *Armature construction*  
I conferred with John Wright in Bristol to discuss the 'behaviour' of character. Based on this meeting a decision was made to employ ball and socket armatures. Budgetary constraints dictated the choice of an upper body armature rather than a full body one. This was eventually produced by John Wright.
- *Fabrication of silicon model*  
Set up a meeting at Mat FX Ltd in Reading to discuss the fabrication of a silicon model based on the Plasticine sculpture. Here a fibre glass mould was constructed to facilitate the application of silicone on to the armatures.
- *Painting of silicon model*  
Special silicone paints called SO, were applied to the model. These had to be mixed with a 'hardening solution' - *Silicone Paint Base No2*. Without this mixing process, the paints would not have been able to dry. Because of the noxious nature of the resulting compound, I had to acquire and don a high quality respirator-mask during the mixing and application of colours. The entire process took place outdoors.
- *Construction of 'mouthless' Plasticine face*  
With the aid of a fibre glass mould – fabricated at Mat FX - I constructed a Plasticine face which had no lips. Since Plasticine does not adhere to silicon I attached Velcro to the back of the Plasticine face and the front of the silicon head, using *Silicone Paint Base No2* [hardener]. This method addressed the problem of adhesion. I blended different colours together to achieve my desired palette.
- *Construction of Plasticine Visemes*  
Mouth shapes and positions were moulded - to correspond with the various phonetic positions through a 'replacement' technique. This technique of substituting one position for the other to create the illusion of movement is based on the puppetoon style, popularized by Hungarian-born American animator George Pal during the 1940s. Thus

the building blocks for lip syncing, crucial to *School Dinners* - and other productions in an anticipated series – were laid.

- *Construction of hands*

For the fabrication of the character's hands I incorporated home-made wire armatures into *Modela* modelling clay. This pliable Swiss product does not melt under the heat of studio lights, but there was not enough for the production, hence my limitation to its use for the production of hands. This facilitated the manipulations necessary for the creation of gestures; a key element in the character's conversational behaviour.

- *Making faces*

I used various materials for the construction of the puppet. For instance silicon can withstand the heat of lights. It also has the ability to offer a clay-like look. *Plasticine* on the other hand enables facial expressions to be manipulated more easily; however it melts quickly so it was necessary to construct several heads. Unfortunately the two substances do not adhere to each other; therefore I had to devise novel ways of attaching them to each other. Another material I used was a Plasticine-like Swiss modelling clay called *Modela*. This does not melt under lights and is not so messy. However, I possessed little of the material – which I acquired five years prior to the production. Therefore it was only used for the construction of the puppet's hands.

- *Timing and Lip Sync*

Actions in *School Dinners* are mostly confined to head and hand movements. More specifically I focused on lip movements, and therefore spent a lot of time observing how different people formed their words, and behaved during televised interviews and singing. *Song of Praises*, the BBC programme was a very useful study guide, in this respect. The words of all songs are usually edited and transmitted to synchronize with the lips of the singers; whose emotions are exhibited alongside the hymn-singing. *Songs of Praise* also happens to be one of the few television programmes in Britain to consistently feature senior citizens.



These observations were followed by extensive reading on visemes<sup>12</sup> and phonemes [Fleming and Dobbs 1999; Osipa 2003; Whitaker and Halas 2005]. This was done in order to gain a further understanding of facial muscle movement, during the formation of words. Next I arranged a series of meetings with three senior citizens, two blacks and one white,<sup>13</sup> whose voice is heard in the production. Some of these conversations were taped for close study. The editing and splicing of the series of interviews into a single conversation of 5 minutes 30 seconds duration was the next action in the project. I subsequently converted the audio tracks into digital files [wave] format using software called *Sonic Foundry*<sup>14</sup>.

Following the digital audio transformation I exported the wave files into a type of professional lip syncing software known as *Magpie Pro 2.2*<sup>15</sup>. The decision to acquire a license for this digital tool was influenced by information that Aardman employed the same devices for most recent work. This tool enabled me to do precise phonetic analysis and dialogue breakdown. The software immensely reduced the task of identifying and separating phoneme forms in the recorded speech. The resulting *Exposure Sheet* formed the basis for the assemblage of Plasticine Visemes. The timing of concurrent gesticulations was based on mirror reflections of myself as I spoke, during which I employed a stop watch. A similar process was adapted for the measurement of body movements such as head-turns, nods and shrugs.

#### Animating and photographing the puppet

The principal photographic objective of this film was to simulate the image quality of 35mm film in the absence of substantial budget. Therefore I decided that a digital SLR would offer considerable resolution to this predicament. On a positive note, using a digital SLR enabled access to a wide choice of lenses, filters and other photographic accessories at reasonable prices. This made a potentially tedious exercise quite rewarding. Working with the aid of an Exposure [Dope] Sheet I photographed all the key visemes, ensuring that the puppet was firmly bolted down in all positions, and on all occasions. Next I

animated and recorded hand and head movements; referring to the Exposure Sheet and storyboard throughout the process. Having completed this exercise I then repeated the whole process with the puppet fastened on top of a *Lazy Susan*<sup>16</sup>. I then made minute turns of the disc, which I photographed in sync with movements of the puppet's body. The result can be observed in the [simulation] circular camera [pan] movement that is observed in the film – the combined subject and camera movement.

### Editing and Rendering

Digital audio and image files were transferred into *Pinnacle Studio 9*<sup>17</sup> software for assembly. Initially captured as high-resolution JPEGs<sup>18</sup>, the photographs were practically impossible to edit because of the huge processing power required to 'stitch' them together. Therefore the images were exported into *Adobe Photoshop 7* to be batched-processed at screen resolutions of 720 X 576 which conform to the television aspect ratio of 4:3. The resulting compression allowed image-processing to be carried out. *Pinnacle Studio 9* was used to render the final production of the film. Subsequent DVD copies were generated using Nero 6.0 software. VHS versions of the film were reproduced from the first DVD copy. DVD and VHS versions were all generated for PAL resolutions.

### Sectional Conclusion

*School Dinners* works in its capacity as an instance of a counter-strategy to prevalent perceptions of blackness. Overall it succeeds in its portrayal of 'hidden' dimensions of black culture; and realizes its objective of conveying ordinariness, without resorting to the practice of pigeon-holing [them] into performance or entertainment contexts. This is achieved on three levels. The first occurs through a mundane discussion on food. The second instance is an affirmation of black historicity, while the third manifestation involves a functioning of symbolism resident within the film's composition of images. The primary counter-strategic instance involves the narration, which features topical issues – such as obesity and school meals. The black principal character expresses the thoughts of many British senior citizens. Indeed she never once refers to her blackness, because the topic under discussion does not require an

affirmation of ethnicity. At this juncture it is worthwhile pointing out that several older people in Britain – all genotypes - are more at ease with the term *coloured*. This is probably because in Britain, the popularity of the term *black* was initially associated with militancy and is a post-1970s development. Her expression of genuine concern for healthy foods does not occur in a vacuum. She has the backing of history; she can trace the evolution of school meals and recount its role in sustaining Britain's future – children – during the last world war. This is an indirect manifestation of the counter-strategic approach through which she affirms her location within British social history; an element that has matter-of-factly ignored her kind. As a direct counter-strategy *School Dinners* positively subverts the status quo [see discussion on counter-strategic approaches in the second chapter]. The film is designed to destabilize presumptions about how blacks must sound; and what English people should look like. In fact until her face is revealed it is [easily] assumed the *principal* will be a white character. Audiences of all human classifications are compelled to 'live' [uncomfortably] with a black woman who possesses a 'very' English accent. Through her casual recollections of childhood events she discreetly informs the audience of the fact her kind has been in Britain longer than immediately obvious. This alludes to the fact blacks are not just 'here' to stay but that they have always been integral to the national fabric. Again the relation of such thought through a seemingly innocuous forum affirms the power of animation - as a fist in a velvet glove; the ideology of ordinary blackness being the fist, and animation the velvet glove. This is a deliberate inversion of Kotlarz's position to affirm the black principal's blackness [Kotlarz 1981:22]. Ironically the old lady typifies those disparagingly called *Coconut* – one who is thoroughly 'white'<sup>19</sup> inside - by other blacks for who the 'very' English accent could signify an attempt to distance herself from black identity.

This leads to the second counter-strategic facet of the production – secondary references projected through symbolism. Like the golliwogs on the 'Third World' map, which appears briefly in Aardman's *Babylon*, a Pan-African colour scheme somewhat persists in *School Dinners*. Both icons allude to a relationship with a distant 'home' land. But unlike *Babylon's* images which invoke negativity – and would inevitably generate disdain from blacks – the colours are an affirmation of

camaraderie. This solidarity with blackness is again validated by her greying dreadlocks. Through the rejection of the 'blue-rinse and set' hairdo widely popular with both white and mixed-race aging seniors, and by not opting for the wigs and hats which are commonly sported by black elders, she again demonstrates a steely *négritude*.<sup>20</sup> Thus she successfully activates all the manifestations of counter-strategic representation – through positive subversion and positive confrontation – to re-order the status quo [see discussion on counter-strategies in the first chapter]. As I have intimated, *School Dinners* is the first of an anticipated series of animated documentaries featuring ethnic minority principal characters and social commentary.

The notion of animated documentaries featuring black and ethnic minority principal characters is realizable. But the need to conduct these within the framework of Britishness is urgent. This is because Britain's obvious multi-ethnicity and plural culturality is not adequately represented by the animated form. There seems to be an aesthetic of invisibility that is applied to black cultures. Therefore the occasional manifestations of blackness appearing within animation have habitually conveyed an overarching misunderstanding of cultural sensitivities. This requires redress, and from creative and artistic levels; but such projects must reject stardom in favour of ordinariness in order to transmit their [corrective] objectives. *School Dinners* sets the tone for such exercise. By employing a tactical approach the production suggests that it is possible to reverse prevalent [negative] stereotypes of blackness.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Blacks are the most visible of the minority ethnicities that make up Britain's multicultural patchwork quilt. However media communication of their presence is fraught with problems. As a rule of thumb, blacks in Britain are easy to identify as instruments of celebration. They are equally easy to locate [and correct] when supposedly functioning as agents of chaos. Film, television and other media platforms have perpetuated this myth; which is rooted in a racist ideology that predates the same channels through which they are habitually propagated. But blaming popular media is the easy part – because they too are visible. Animation, which is disseminated consistently on all popular platforms, constantly imbibed by children; and ingested by adults often as harmless fun, is often the conduit through which ideologies that fuel prejudice thrive. This thesis was not only intended as a study of the stereotyping of blacks in British animation but also to facilitate the discourse on the obvious prejudices that affect other minority ethnicities; and the manner in which marginalization occurs.

British animation's habitual marginalization of blacks may not be halted immediately, as a result of this thesis. There is still a lot of ground to be covered between whites and blacks in Britain, in terms of understanding [each other]. Therefore the misrepresentation of blackness - blacks and their cultures - may take a while to be overcome. However there are steps that can be taken to make easy the processes necessary for reducing, and eventually eradicating the persistence of negative representation. At the same time the understanding acquired during the course of this work can be useful for two key purposes. The first involves motivation of practitioners who want to engage in [or embark on] reconciliatory productions. The second element offers theorists a unique insight into practical [and affordable] production approaches. The study's twin purpose encapsulates the theory-practice nexus that is integral to my doctoral work.

During the course of this investigation I pointed out that animation, as a form is wrapped up in a dilemma, which I have called the *conscious-unconscious*. This

semblance of a paradox can be likened to a similar situation located in the expression, 'going to the pictures'; which does not imply visits to galleries – for the purpose of viewing paintings or other still images. Rather the term, 'going to the pictures', relates to cinema and the idea of *motion picture* or *cinematography* - which also in apparent irony associate two [seemingly] conflicting notions - *movement* and *stillness* - for a desired effect. The concept *conscious-unconscious* should help to appreciate the complexities involved in animation's function as a representational forum. Animators, especially those engaged in practice, and in places of higher learning, in multicultural societies like Britain, cannot afford to be frivolous when depicting cultures other than theirs.

I have pointed out that racism does not always manifest itself in the most obvious ways. In concert with this position I also intimated that those exhibiting racist behaviour may be doing so under an ideological cloud [see second chapter]. I suggested that *selective positioning* is an active agent in the marginalization of blacks [see chapter three]. Stereotyping only provides the shorthand, and the stencil, with which these negative characteristics can be recorded and reproduced. On the other hand it can be employed to construct and project [or transmit] *positivity*. I have demonstrated that the absence of ordinary *non-performing, non-problem* blacks from British animation is endemic. I have therefore pointed out that a system of beliefs which purports to embrace blacks, in fact quietly positions them outside normality. *School Dinners* challenges such marginalization without making a raucous political statement. The film's black *principal* character dares to lift the lid off [popular] history, thus immersing deep inside accounts of wartime life, and emerging to engage in conversation about contemporary Britain without appearing exotic or extraordinary. The politics of the black pensioner is the politics of ordinariness. She is important but simply because she [surprisingly] remains an ordinary English old lady. *School Dinners* rejects the idea of *performance*. Therefore the film is purposely not entertaining - rather opting for a 'dry' conversational and, ultimately, informational style. The film engages such approaches in its effort to reflect this thesis [as intimated in the discussion on ideology and stereotyping in chapter two]. I am suggesting that the film needs to be seen as radical. For

instance the colour-scheme<sup>1</sup>, hints at opposition to the status quo – the Babylon system explained in the chapter four. *School Dinners* by its very ordinariness confounds stereotypes of blackness, as well as Englishness.

There is no doubt that instances of black presence in British animation have increased since its so-called golden age. However overt racial stereotyping has given way to more covert forms. Blacks continue to enjoy animated series like *Postman Pat* as much as their white counterparts. They are consumers of the merchandise accompanying such programmes. Their children are fans of characters as wide-ranging as Gromit, Bob the Builder and Shaun the Sheep. Yet the salience of implicit imagery advocates their exclusion. Even these contemporary animation productions consistently inform blacks of their invisibility. This applies to the young but the situation worsens exponentially with age. The Idyllic Englishness within which these animated masterpieces are set has very little room for otherness. Had this nation not been a *multiculturalism* such absence would not be a major issue - although it would have remained problematic. Therefore some have unfortunately internalized the alienation. Against such backdrops of estrangement the advent of new digital platforms, and their associated myriad channels, will only catalyze the fragmentation of a socially-hybridized Britain. Nonetheless visits to the nation's recent past reveal that, in comparison, today's representational situation is much improved.

There have been numerous studies on representation, stereotyping, race / racism and the concepts pertinent to discourse in this thesis. The research that produced such knowledge has mostly been carried out in other fields of enquiry, such as sociology, media and cultural studies. Indeed the scholarly work of Hall on representation, which actively employs discourse from popular culture, has been a guiding light for this study. For instance the constructivist mode I adopt during the course of textual analyses is especially reflective of Hall's *modus operandi*. In my specific area of interest – animation - work on the negative stereotyping of blacks has been topical, but mostly researched by US based scholars. For instance the work insightful of Sampson [1998] is an excellent exposé on racist animation; however it offers no substantive critique. Again scholars like Cohen [1997] and Kotlarz [1981] have examined racism in

animation; even offering useful analyses. However none of these excellent studies is British focused. This is in spite of Britain's tradition of excellent and eclectic animation. Perhaps the absence of the British equivalent of the Disney, Warner Bros and UPA studio culture is reason for the dearth of this type of scholarship. Black British scholars too have largely neglected the field of animation, electing instead to focus on the nation's cinematic traditions, its performing arts and other [popular] cultural arenas. In Britain it is almost as if animation as a field of critical study has been left to white scholars. As an animator and a black researcher, this is precisely the point at which my work intervenes – to make important contributions, primarily to the field of Animation Studies, and then Cultural Studies; but also to the emerging area known as Black British Studies.

This thesis is a combined project involving the practice of an animator and the theoretical studies of an academic. My thesis is unique in this sense because it identifies a problem, analyses and discusses it; and then produces a piece of work that offers ways of redressing the problem. In a sense my film *School Dinners* is a viable pilot for a television series that strives to examine notions within contemporary discourse, such as Blackness, Britishness, Englishness and ethnicity. Each element of my work is therefore integral to this thesis. Animators have frequently [and matter-of-factly] written technical and instructional manuals. In such publications they have outlined methods that enable production. Some take the 'workshop' approach, meaning they design series of exercises and then offer step-by-step methods for realizing these ideas. Although crucial to the provision of training in the field, such texts are not expected to inspire meaningful discourse – once the mechanics of production have been followed through. The fields of enquiry that animators pursue are frequently limited to those of technique, style and aesthetic. I am suggesting that animators seldom participate in critical analysis themselves, although their productions generate much debate. Theorists on the other hand, frequently conduct analyses [and critique] of animation attempting to address or resolve issues through discourse. This is also very useful, and indeed Animation Studies has demonstrated great flair in this respect. However there is also a danger of isolating the very artists and technicians whose specialisms inspire



such discourse. My work contributes new knowledge by demonstrating ways of bridging this chasm.

Another key contribution that this study makes can be found in the making of the film *School Dinners*. The work offered a number of undergraduate students the experience of being paid to participate in a production that had direct academic implications; and is anticipated to impact the broader society – not just because of what it addresses - but also because of who the production features. Recognizing the fact that there are huge cultural gulfs between blacks and Asians – especially those with no family ties to Britain - I undertook an ‘ambassadorial’ role, and assembled a production team that had at its core a Korean sculptor and a Malaysian illustrator. Working together as an international group had merits beyond the obvious financial rewards [for the undergraduate students]. The numerous discussions and conversations that took place during the course of the production exposed these students to elements of animation theory, and other fields of enquiry to which their counterparts were not privy. I was also informed of the prejudices they had had to dispel as a result of working closely with a black person. They went on to produce animation that directly related to their theoretical work - thus complimenting their undergraduate dissertations. One of them successfully completed a postgraduate [MA Animation] in the University College for the Creative Arts. The work produced by these students - after their participation in my production - reiterates my belief that the integration of theory and practice can be immensely beneficial for animation scholarship.

Textual analyses and discourse should not be the end of representational work. Indeed as I have demonstrated through the production and discussion of *School Dinners*, practice informed by theory is immensely useful for redressing issues such as the problematic representations of blacks, examined in this thesis. It is my hope that this combination of critique and filmmaking will herald a new approach to the manner in which research is undertaken in Animation Studies, and other similar fields of enquiry. There ought to be more collaborative work across ethnic lines; and future research, especially in creative areas could import the practice-theory paradigm. To this end I employ

the metaphor of a piano, on which the different keys integrate to harmonize – hopefully creating beautiful music. Likewise theorists [academics] and practitioners [artists] need to work together, channelling the resulting new intellect into the improvement of practice and production of even more meaningful work.

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<sup>1</sup> The Pan-African tri-color commonly associated with Rastafarians has often signified opposition.

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*Postman Pat*, Produced by Entertainment Rights;  
Series broadcast since March 09/05 on the dedicated  
[digital] children's channel CBeebies

- [Tx Dec 2004] 'Little Red Rocker', *Little Red Tractor*,

- [Tx Dec 2004] 'New Addition', *Little Red Tractor*,

Produced by Entertainment Rights;

Series broadcast since Feb 22/06 on the dedicated [digital]  
children's channel CBeebies [Children's BBC]

CITV [Tx since 1984] *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends*,  
Produced by Britt Allcroft and Hit Entertainment

Channel 5 [Tx circa 2000] *Dig and Dug with Daisy*, Produced by  
Dorling Kindersley Vision [1993]

### Programme Guides

Radio Times [2003] December 20 – January 2, 2004 [Special Christmas  
Edition]

[2002] December 21 – January 3, 2003 [Special Christmas  
Edition]

[2001] December 22 – January 4, 2002 [Special Christmas  
Edition]

[2000] December 23 – January 5, 2001 [Special Christmas  
Edition]

[1999] December 18 – 31 [Special Christmas Edition]

[1998] December 19 1998 – January 1 1999

[Special Christmas Edition]

[1997] December 20 1997 – January 2 1998 [Special  
Christmas Edition] London

[1996] December 21 1996 – January 3 1997

[Special Christmas Edition] London

[1995] December 30 1995 – January 5 1996 London

[1995] December 16 - 29 [Special Christmas Edition]  
London

[1994] December 17– 30 [Special Christmas Edition]  
London [1993] December 18 1993 – January 1 1994 –  
[Special Christmas Edition] London

TRILT database [http://joseph.bufvc.ac.uk/TRILT/FMPro?-  
db=profiles.fp5and-lay=Alland-  
format=detailed.html&serial=2and-find](http://joseph.bufvc.ac.uk/TRILT/FMPro?-db=profiles.fp5and-lay=Alland-format=detailed.html&serial=2and-find)  
[accessed September 23/04]

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1 Series 1 Part 1, Episode 9

2 Series 1 Part 2, Episode 6

\* These films have been broadcast on numerous occasions on UK terrestrial television channels.

## Appendix 1

### Radio and TV Times Data

The TRILT [Television and Radio Index for Learning and Teaching]<sup>1</sup> database of the BUFVC [British Universities Film and Video Council] provided access to listings for the five main terrestrial television channels from 1995 onwards [bearing in mind Channel 5 commenced transmission in March 1997 – reiterated in the overview of terrestrial channels]. The organisation’s library holds further [hard] copies of listings dating back to 1991 [the year *Radio Times* began to list ITV programmes]. Another important data source was the British Film Institute’s Cataloguing Department, which held hard [bound] copies of *Radio Times* listings dating from 1930 onwards. The unit was closed at the end of October 2004.

Because I set out to argue that there are links between racial stereotyping and representational modes in popular British animation, the insight gained from television programme guides has been invaluable. Data employed for this purpose has been drawn largely from transmission records that relate to festive seasons. I embarked on such an approach because programmes scheduled for such periods provide a clue to *family-friendliness*. This is clearly implied by the Family Viewing Policy, according to which:

Broadcasters expect parents to share responsibility for what children watch, and will help them decide, but will not under normal circumstances show programmes before 9pm that they believe unsuitable. The earlier in the evening a programme is placed, the more suitable it is likely to be for children to watch on their own.

[1995 *Radio Times* 16-29 December: 75]

Festive occasions are indelibly linked to the understanding of families in Britain. Thus notions of ideology – that I have deliberated upon throughout the study – are implicit in the timing and content of such viewing material.

Outlined in the table below is a list *Radio and TV Times* editions accessed for the study.

December 20, 2003 - January 2, 2004 [Special Christmas Edition]
December 21, 2002 - January 3, 2003 [Special Christmas Edition]
December 22, 2001 - January 4, 2002 [Special Christmas Edition]
December 23, 2000 - January 5, 2001 [Special Christmas Edition]
December 18 – 31,1999 [Special Christmas Edition]
December 19, 1998 - January 1, 1999 [Special Christmas Edition]
December 20, 1997 - January 2, 1998 [Special Christmas Edition] London
December 21, 1996 - January 3, 1997 [Special Christmas Edition] London
December 30, 1995 - January 5, 1996 London [This edition featured programmes televised in the metropolis, however it was not a Christmas special]
December 16 - 29, 1995 [Special Christmas Edition] London
December 17 - 30, 1994 [Special Christmas Edition] London
December 18, 1993 - January 1, 1994 [Special Christmas Edition] London

Details of programming related to the table are outlined below as follows:

**Radio Times December 20, 2003 – January 2, 2004 [Special Christmas Edition]**

Creature Comforts [Feeding Time]

5:30 – 5:45pm

ITV1

Saturday, December 20/03

Chicken Run

6:10 – 7:30pm

BBC1

December 24/03

Belleville Rendez-vous

7:00-8:20pm

BBC2

December 25/03

Comment: The above-mentioned production is not British, but I discuss it briefly because it involved BBC funding, and due to its 'interesting' use of stereotypes, for example its employment of caricature of a black person Josephine Baker<sup>2</sup> during its portrayal of 1920s Paris.

**Radio Times December 21, 2002 – January 3, 2003 [Special Christmas Edition]**

\*Cartoon Time [a compilation of animated antics]

5:10am!

ITV1

December 25/2002

**Radio Times December 22, 2001 – January 4, 2002 [Special Christmas Edition]**

\*The Snowman

4:45-5:15pm

\*Ivor the Invisible

5:15-5:45pm

Channel 4

December 24/2001

**Radio Times December 23, 2000 – January 5, 2001 [Special Christmas Edition]**

\*The Snowman

3:55-4:25pm

December 24/2000

\*Father Christmas

3:05-3:35pm

December 25/2000

\*The Bear

3:35-4:05pm

Channel 4

December 25/2000

\*Raymond Biggs

**Radio Times December 18 – 31, 1999 [Special Christmas Edition]**

\*The Snowman

4:10-4:45pm

\*The Bear

4:45-5:15pm

Channel 4

December 26/1999

\*Raymond Briggs

The Faeries

4:45-6:15pm

ITV1

**Radio Times December 19 1998 – January 1 1999 [Special Christmas Edition]**

Rex the Runt  
6:25 – 6:35pm  
7:15-7:30pm

Canterbury Tales [pt1]  
7:30-8:00pm  
BBC2

**December 21/1998**

Rex the Runt  
6:25-6:35pm  
7:20-7:30pm

Canterbury Tales [pt2]  
7:30-8:00pm  
BBC2

**December 22/1998**

Rex the Runt  
6:25-6:35pm  
7:20-7:30pm

Beowulf  
7:30-8:00pm  
BBC2

When The Wind Blows [Jimmy T Murakami 1986]  
2:15-3:45am – late night slot

**December 23/1998**

\*The Snowman  
4:30-5:00pm

The Bear – First TV screening  
5:00-5:30pm  
Channel 4  
\*Raymond Briggs

Rex the Runt  
6:05-6:15pm  
BBC2

**December 26/1998**

Rex the Runt  
6:05-6:15pm  
BBC2

**December 27/1998**

Rex the Runt  
8:20-8:30pm  
BBC2



**December 31/1998**

Rex the Runt  
7:20-7:30pm  
BBC2

**Radio Times December 20 1997 – January 2 1998 [Special Christmas Edition] London**

Flatworld  
7:00-7:30pm  
BBC2  
Rpt. 8:30-9:00pm January 1, 1998

The Snowman [Growing Up With 4 Season]  
5:15-5:45pm  
Channel 4

**December 24/1997**

The Nativity  
4:45-5:00pm

Gogs  
10:00-10:10pm  
BBC2  
December 25/1997

Creature Comforts [Growing Up With 4 Season]  
7:20-7:30pm  
Channel 4

**December 31/1997**

**Radio Times December 21 1996 – January 3 1997 [Special Christmas Edition] London**

Gogs  
BBC 2  
6:45-6:55pm  
December 23/1996

8:20-8:30pm  
December 24/1996  
The Wrong Trousers  
4:00-4:30pm

The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends  
4:30-4:55pm  
BBC 1  
December 25/1996

Abel's Island [dir Michael Sporn] check if British  
5:25-6:00pm  
Channel 4

December 26/1996

The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends  
4:30-5:05pm  
BBC 1  
December 27/1996

The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends  
4:10-5:35pm  
BBC 1  
December 29/1996

The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends  
4:30-5:05pm  
BBC 1  
December 30/1996

Gogs  
9:30-9:40pm  
BBC2  
January 2 1997

**Radio Times December 30 1995 – January 5 1996 [Special Christmas Edition] London**  
No show

**Radio Times December 16 - 29 1995 – [Special Christmas Edition] London**  
Creature Comforts  
6:55-7:00pm  
Channel 4

Crapston Villas – find contact for Sarah Ann Kennedy [dir] and Richard Bennett [prod]  
11:15-11:30pm  
December 22/1995

A Close Shave  
6:15-6:45pm  
BBC1  
December 24/1995

The Wind in the Willows  
5:05-6:30pm  
ITV  
December 25/04

The Wrong Trousers  
6:00-6:30pm  
BBC1  
December 27/1995

The Wrong Trousers  
6:00-6:25pm  
BBC1  
December 28/1995

**Radio Times December 17 – 30 1994 [Special Christmas Edition] London**  
Animation Now – look for details of programme  
7:20-7:30pm  
BBC2  
December 20/94

Creature Comforts  
6:50-7:00pm  
Channel 4  
December 23/94  
[rpt 4:55-5:05pm December 27/94]

The Wrong Trousers  
4:55-5:25pm  
BBC 1

War Story  
5:15-5:20pm  
Channel 4

The Snowman  
7:00-7:30pm  
Channel 4  
December 25/94

Yellow Submarine  
6:20-7:55pm  
Channel 4  
December 26/94

**Radio Times December 18 1993 – January 1 1994 – [Special Christmas Edition] London**  
Cartoon Time  
5:15 – 5:30pm  
ITV  
December 18/93

Four-Mations UK  
[Geoff Dunbar's work – collectively named Dunbar's Lore for this session. Films screened: Daumier's Law and Lautrec]  
8:00-9:00pm  
Channel 4  
December 18/93

Four-Mations UK

[Ubu – Dunbar; Grow Up – Cleo Harrington; John Kay - Pear people in a car race]

11:45-12:15am

Channel 4

December 19/93

Animation Now

7:40-7:50pm

BBC2

December 21/93

The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb – the Bolex Brothers

9:30-10:30pm

BBC2

December 23/93

A Grand Day Out

5:35-6:00pm

BBC2

December 25/93

The Wrong Trousers

5:20-5:50pm

BBC2

December 26/93

Prince Cinders – Derek Hayes

7:00-7:30pm

Mouse Soup

7:30-8:00pm

Channel 4

December 27/93

Animation Now

7:55-8:00pm

BBC2

December 30/93

## Appendix 2

**Working Title:**      **One Out of Many - Home to Roost**

Producer & Director: Charles daCosta

**Concept:**              The first of an anticipated series of socially-inclusive *animementaries*<sup>3</sup> in which clay models tell ‘untold’ stories of ordinary members of society.

**Format:**                Plasticine [Clay] Animation

**Duration:**             Approximately 5 minutes

**Idea:**                    Britain is a cultural kaleidoscope. Green and pleasant is the result of a continuous cultural amalgam, in which several people play a part. Everyone has a story to tell; experience[s] to share. Stories from the ‘unheard’ will confound embedded stereotypes and begin the process of fomenting the understanding [and appreciation] of others.

**Objective:**            Be a channel for transmitting the views of people [especially ethnic minorities] not usually represented on popular media platforms. This mode of production is destined for success because animated models are more likely to draw attention [to audiences] than ‘normal’ live-action.

### Appendix 3

One out of many | home to roost

Treatment

Working Title: One out of many: home to roost

Producer and Director: Charles daCosta

Synopsis

School dinners were an important part of the war-time English experience. For a lot of children it was an opportunity to get a good meal – and they loved it!

Concept: A Briton [Black] Remembers

Format: Plasticine Animation

Duration: Approximately 5”

Idea: Britain is a cultural kaleidoscope. Green and pleasant is the result of a continuous cultural amalgam.

Summary: A senior Black Briton talks about growing up English, while sitting in the comfort of their home.

Method: Video interviews and vox pops to be closely studied as basis for modelling and lip-synching.

The Look: Chiaroscuro-esque / dramatic: 4-point lighting employing strong key light coupled and tobacco-coloured gels – to create warm atmosphere.

## Appendix 4

**Working Title:**      **Reggae Got Soul - Groundings with my Bredren**

Producer & Director: Charles daCosta

Concept:                Conversations with Reggae Musicians

Format:                 Plasticine Animation

Duration:              Approximately 4" X 4

Idea:                    Britain is a cultural kaleidoscope. Reggae musicians [social commentators in their own right] express their views on issues such as Multiculturalism, Family, Parenthood, Queen and Country.

Treatment:            The first episode takes the form of a *Master Mind*-type interview situation. The scene opens with a long shot of the back of a silhouetted figure in a high back swivel chair. Spotlight brightens and the camera begins tracking in slowly, stopping to frame a medium shot of the 'interviewee'. The face of the subject is revealed. He is a reggae musician.

In the second episode two men with dreadlocks are sitting on a sofa watching and commenting on the news. Their conversation reveals a deep understanding, and extensive knowledge of current affairs.

The third episode features music producer Ray Simpson in a studio, expressing some of his views on Britain and humanity [does he think 'Inglan is a bitch'?].

A senior Black Briton talks about growing up English, while standing in front of his primary school.

Method: Video interviews and vox pops to be closely studied as basis for modelling and lip-synching. Possible participants in this project are Tony 'Gad' Robinson [Aswad], Brinsley Forde [ex-Aswad], Ray Simpson [producer, Maxi Priest] and Steve 'Grizzly' Nisbett [ex Drummer, Steel Pulse, and music producer].



## Appendix 5

### Episode One: Questions

Approx: 4 minutes

#### Synopsis

Dialogue. Silhouette of a man in a 'high-back' leather chair being interviewed. The host is heard [asking questions] but not seen. The silhouetted guest talks with a London accent and regularly gesticulates as he responds to questions about family life, fashion [Brogues, Ben Sherman shirts, etc.], making other cultural references in the course of the conversation. At the end of the session the interviewee is revealed to be a dreadlocked musician. He reaches for a guitar which he plays.

#### Visual

FS of a man backlit in a spot light.  
Camera starts to crab-dolly slowly round the host who is gesturing as he speaks.

Camera continues to crab-dolly throughout the session ending on a MS of a dreadlocked black man at the conclusion the interview.

Cut to MCU of the face of dreadlocked man sitting on a chair. He nods in agreement with host.

Dreadlocked man reaches off-screen for a guitar and begins to strum.

CU of his fingers as he changes chords

Slow fade to black and credits appear.

#### Sound

Dialogue between host and guest

Dialogue between host and guest

Dialogue between host and guest

Host: Thanks for coming in today.

Guest: Cool. Easy. Pleasure. It's a pleasure. My pleasure.

Reggae music

Reggae music

Reggae music

## Episode Two: Reasoning

Approx: 4 minutes

### Synopsis

Multiplicity of Language. A television switches on. The main evening news is being televised. English voices can be heard in another part of the room. The camera pans slowly across the room - the voices get louder - to reveal two black men with dreadlocks discussing current affairs and news as it is broadcast.

### Visual

Shot of television in a room. It switches on, flickers, and then changes channels, finally stopping on the evening news.

Slow track in to MCU of television set showing a news programme. Dissolve into wide shot of TV.

Slow pan from TV across room

Flickering light from television as camera continues to pan, stopping on CU of remote control on arm rest [of sofa].

Camera tracks out to reveal two black men sporting dreadlocks, sitting on a sofa and watching the news.

Camera inter-cuts between close shots of two men as they discuss current affairs and comment on the news report.

FS showing the back of the two men gesturing as they continue their

### Sound

Incident sound – television

Incident sound – television. Voices – speech not very clear – in the background

Incident sound – Voices in the background get clearer

Incident sound. Male voices [English accents] discussing current affairs. Television can be heard in the background.

Voices in conversation. Television can be heard in the background.

Voices in conversation. Television can be heard in the background.

Voices in conversation and television get fainter and fainter. Sounds of cars,

conversation. Camera tracks slowly away from the characters until it is out of the house, and reveals a row of terraced houses on a street - cars and trees lined up on one side. One or two cars drive past.

dogs, etc.

Slow fade to black. End credits roll up. Fade in instrumental reggae music.

### **Episode Three: Reflection[s] 1**

Approx: 4 minutes

#### Synopsis

Monologue. Evening - a row of terraced houses. Soft soul music can be heard in the background. Camera tracks in to reveal a recording studio. The engineer stops working and talks about his experiences.

#### **Visual**

#### **Sound**

High angle shot of row of terraced houses

Instrumental soul music

Slow track in to one of the houses.

Turning pages cross-fade over

Dissolve into sound studio with engineer behind desk. He turns round, looks into camera, and begins to talk.

instrumental music

Questions 'type themselves' on to the bottom of the screen, and the man mouths his responses.

Typewriter Fx

Voice of man

"LKJ once said 'Inglan is a bitch'? would you agree with that position" appears on the screen.

As above

"Does music happen like magic?"

As above

"How did you get into music?"

As above

"Do you think awards like the OBE have a place in today's Britain?"

As above

"Do you feel English?"

As above

“If you had absolute power for a day what would you do to make the world a better place?”	As above
Freeze frame, zoom out to reveal album cover	Fade in soulful reggae music
Fade to black. Credits roll	Soulful reggae music

**Episode Four: Reflection[s] 2** Home To Roost / One Out of Many

Synopsis

Several flags come together to make the Union Jack. A old black man talks about his English experiences, recalling memories of his school days.

**Visual**

**Sound**

Grey screen. Slow track out and tilt down to reveal a flat three dimensional map of Britain surrounded by the sea, with dots indicating Southampton, London, Birmingham and Manchester.	Rule Britannia [Slow tempo, conveying mournfulness] Wind and waves
Several little Commonwealth flags ‘swim’ towards Southampton	Rule Britannia [Tempo increases]
Circles of colour spread outwards from key cities [indicated on the map]. The topography begins to change; revealing hills, rivers and vegetation.	Rule Britannia [Fast; Ska rhythm]
Camera tracks out to reveal the image being played on a television set in a ‘living’ room.	Rule Britannia [Ska] fades in sync with camera movement.
FS. Camera continues tracking out to further reveal a man seated on a couch with his back to camera. He raises his hand to point a remote control at the television set.	Rule Britannia [Ska]

Cut to CU of his right hand – which presses button on remote control to switch television set off	Click!
Cut to MS of man who strokes his chin and begins to reminisce.	Voice of character
Dissolve to FS of black man with a white beard is standing in front of a school. He talks about growing up in England; reflecting on some of his teachers, school dinners and music.	Voice of character
Inter cut shots of man with photos of 1950s and 60s England	Voice of character
Fade to black. Credits roll	Voice of man is still heard. Gently fade up 'credit' music.

## Appendix 6

### Production Crew / Plan

Production / Crew Plan											
Title	Name	Start	End	Wks							
Producer/ Director	Charles daCosta										
Technical Supervisor	Roger Noake										
<b>Art Direction and Design</b>											
Storyboard	Andy Yap	03/05	03/05	5							
Layout	CdC										
Modelmaker	HeeSeung Jang	04/05	05/05	3							
Silicon Casting	Mat Lawrence										
Colouring	CdC										
Sets	CdC										
Armatures	John Wright Modelmaking										
<b>Audio</b>											
Location	CdC										
Effects	CdC										
Editing	CdC										
Music	CdC										
<b>Animation</b>											
Timing	CdC										
Animation	CdC										
Photography	CdC										
Editing	CdC										

## Budget

### **Artistic, Technical and Material**

Storyboard Artist - AY	£	100
Modelmaker - HSJ	£	100
Set Construction + materials	£	
Silicon Casting – Mat FX	£	571
Lazy Susan [Turntable]	£	12
Plasticine	£	90
Height gauge[s] x 2	£	594
Armatures - JWM	£	300
Digital [Single Lens Reflex] Still Camera [Canon]	£	683
Colour Gels and Filters	£	
Total	£	2652
Less	£	202
<b>Amount Required</b>	£	<b>2450</b>

## **Appendix 7**

### Credits

Written directed animated and edited by Charles daCOSTA - *African/British*

Featuring the voice of Winifred STROUD - *British*

Made with financial assistance from the Business Development Unit of The University College for the Creative Arts, at Farnham

### Production Team

Storyboard - Andy YAP - *Malaysian*  
Model - Heeseung JANG - *Korean*  
Armature - John Wright Modelmaking, Bristol - *British*

Silicone Casting and Moulding - MatFX Ltd, Reading - *British*  
Felt Background - Christine SMITH - *British*  
Camera Assistant - Noah daCOSTA - *British*

Shot with a Digital SLR by Charles daCOSTA

nuff thanx...

Andy DARLEY  
Roger NOAKE  
George BARBER  
Bill FOULKE  
Uwe DOERKSEN  
Katie HAMILTON-BOXALL  
Edmund VAUGHN  
Miriam daCOSTA  
Peter daCOSTA  
John FORYA  
Joe DOUGAN  
Chris ADDO-YOBO  
Adwoa MUWZEA

not forgetting...

Josephine Pickett-Baker, Complete Fabrication Ltd  
Andy Cooper, Jacobson Chemicals Ltd  
Mick Astlin  
Linda Lawrence  
Jason Wishnow  
Jesse daCosta  
Charis daCosta

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## Appendix 8

### Inventory of Equipment

The following was used in the production of *School Dinners*:

1. Photographic equipment process
  - a. Canon EOS 350D [digital SLR]
  - b. 18-85mm zoom lens
  - c. 50mm fixed lens
    - Cokin filters –
    - Standard Sepia 005
    - Mild Sepia 045
  - d. Ring mount
  - e. Filter Holder
2. Support systems
  - a. Vinten [heavy-duty] tripod
  - b. Manfrotto [lightweight] video tripod
  - c. Photographic clamp
  - d. Lazy Susan [rotating table top]
3. Video recording equipment for interview
  - a. Panasonic NV-DS30B Digital Video Camera
4. Sound recording equipment
  - a. Sennheiser Evolution [e 825 S] cardoid microphone
  - b. Necktie stereo microphone
  - c. Windshield
  - d. Sennheiser telescopic microphone stand
  - e. Sharp MD-MT80 portable minidisc recorder
  - f. Philips SBC HP096 stereo headphone
5. Hardware for digital image storage and processing

- a. 512mb compact flash card
  - b. Generic Card reader
  - c. Desk top PC and monitor - for transfer and viewing images
  - d. Lap top computer [Acer] – for post-production
  - e. Iomega 80Gb external hard disc drive - for storage of edited work
6. Software for digital image processing and editing
- a. Magpie Pro 2 – for audio track breakdown, phoneme analysis and synthesis, and lip sync construction
  - b. Pinnacle Studio 9 – for editing
  - c. Adobe Photoshop 7 – for batch-processing of JPEGs
7. Miscellaneous equipment
- a. Liteon – DVD Writer

## Appendix 9

### Minimum Animation Rates [for productions utilising animation]

(Cel, sand/paint on glass, puppet, claymation and computer generated imaging techniques)

Producer Director Production Designer	Fee to be individually negotiated, but not less than the equivalent of £644 per 40-hour week
SFX Rostrum Cameraperson Art Director (Visual Developer) Production Manager Editor	£570 per 40-hour week or equivalent
Character Designer	£115 per character; contract should include a copyright clause which enables the Character Designer to benefit from the commercial success of an original character including a share in the profits of any spin-off programming or merchandising.
Model (Lighting) Cameraperson Senior model Animator	£606 per 40-hour week
Key Animator (including glass, cgi and comparable techniques)	£606 per 40-hour week
Storyboard Artist Layout Artist	Minimum fee £3,500 per 10 minutes of animation; higher rates for longer boards and particularly complex work
Senior 3d/2d Computer Animator Artworking Animator	£576 per 40-hour week
SFX Designer Set Maker Model Animator Computer Animator Model Costume Designer Model Set/Prop Designer	£549 per 40-hour week
Background Artist	Minimum £577 for simplest work; higher rates according to complexity
2d Animator	£549 per 40-hour week
Computer Animation Compositor	£520 per 40hour week
Studio Manager	£490 per 40hour week
Dubbing Editor Rostrum Cameraperson Production Co-ordinator Assistant Model Animator Assistant Model Designer Assistant Model Maker Assistant SFX Designer Assistant Rostrum Cameraperson Colourist Checker Supervisor Paint and Trace Computer Department Supervisor Assistant Background Artist	£455 per 40-hour week
Assistant 2d Animator	£455 per 40-hour week
Clean-up Artist (Storyboard and layout)	£1730 per 10 minutes of animation higher rates for more complex work











































