

# **The Hybrid Nature of Realism in the Aardman Studio's Early Animated Shorts**

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## **Abstract**

### **The Hybrid Nature of Realism in the Aardman Studio's Early Animated Shorts**

This study investigates the complex operation of realism in the representational make-up of animated films of the Aardman studio. It focuses on ten early films made in a three-dimensional clay/puppet medium. All the films are based on 'real' soundtracks, gathered via secretly recorded conversations of ordinary people in everyday situations or by direct interview. The key argument is that these stop-motion films show a hybrid composition of realist strategies and approaches, in terms of their adaptation of realist aesthetics as well as their subject matter. It is argued that their aesthetic make-up is associated with, or copied, from certain modes of live-action documentary film such as observational style and interviews. The thesis contends that realism in these films is of a complex nature. It studies and illustrates different aspects of realism in the corpus, with particular emphasis on three films chosen for specific case study.

The research investigates issues of representation and realism in the moving image in two main categories: formal/stylistic realism and content realism. The examination is developed using Bazin and Kracauer's theories on cinematic realism as well as debates surrounding the specific features of a medium (medium-specificity theory) and theories of realism in non-fiction film. It addresses theories relating to animation and realism, with specific focus on traditional three-dimensional animation.

The thesis explores areas of aesthetic realism common to live-action and 3D animation, with reference to the Bazinian theory of 'spatial realism' used in Frierson's study of American clay animation and Wells' notion of 'hyperrealism' in Disney animation. Finally, issues of social realism in these works are discussed in depth, with regard to their use of 'documentary sound' and social themes as well as their appearance as simulations of live-action documentary form.

Questions of hybridity and intertextuality in terms of the hybrid make-up and copied aesthetics of the ten films are addressed using the theories of Jameson, Hutcheon and Lash. The thesis proposes a 'simulational' mode of realism in 3D animation, based on the specificities of the 3D medium and with reference to Darley's notion of second-order realism and Bolter and Grusin's thesis of remediation. It offers a close study of the films in terms of different categories of realism, resulting eventually in a 'typology' of realist modalities operating in the corpus. A relationship between realist themes, realistic aesthetics and the re-making of and borrowing from realist forms will be shown in three categories, identified as Collage, Factual and Fictional types.

The thesis also illustrates a trajectory of transformation and the changing balance of overall realist modalities in the corpus, which moves gradually from poetic to parodic realism, from non-fiction to fiction and from copying live-action to copying 2D animated cartoon.

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...مټ اون قله ي مغرور بلندي  
که به ابراي سپاهي و به باداي بدي مي خندي...

به

روزبه بزرگ

و

بامداد کوچک

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally 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.

Signed

Dated

## **Introduction**

*You don't want to be made aware of the fact that you are watching an animated film; you want to be made aware that you are watching a film which flows and has drama and all that. So you are following the same sort of rules you do with live-action drama when you follow the characters and camera move and sets.*

Interview with David Sproxtton, *Lip Gloss*

This is a study of realism in early short animated films made by the Bristol-based Aardman studio in three series between 1978 and 1989<sup>1</sup>. Aardman is perhaps most famous for entertainment and commercial films using clay characters, such as the three *Wallace and Gromit*<sup>2</sup> featurettes and the more recent animated feature films *Chicken Run* (2000) and *Wallace & Gromit - the Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005) as well as their most recent Christmas special featurette *Wallace and Gromit: A matter of Loaf and Death* (2008). In recent decades Aardman, with its familiar characters and reputation for commercial entertainment animation, should be regarded as being in the vanguard of the resurgence of puppet animation in mainstream animation, along with large-scale US animation companies such as Disney<sup>3</sup>. The ten films studied here, however, date from when Aardman was still building its reputation: the final series, *Lip Synch*, was made at roughly the same time as the first *Wallace and Gromit* film *A Grand Day Out* in 1989.

Aardman's early films under investigation are vastly different from later productions: they are short, experimental, non-commercial films commissioned by the BBC and Channel Four for late-night broadcasting and thus aimed at a limited audience. In terms of aesthetic obsessions and artistic approach they are experimental innovations in clay-puppet

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<sup>1</sup> These films were selected from the *Animated Conversations* (1978), *Conversation Pieces* (1981-3) and *Lip Synch* (1989) series. Each film is introduced in Appendix 1 (Aardman Corpus in Detail) in one page, including a short description, production information and a selection of stills from the film. To study these films, a DVD entitled *Aardman Classics- DVD*, 2000 (Momentum Pictures), UK has been used.

<sup>2</sup> These include *A Grand Day Out* (1989), *The Wrong Trousers* (1993) and *A Close Shave* (1995)

<sup>3</sup> These important films, which in the early 1990s began a renaissance of feature-length commercial puppet animation, include Disney's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and *James and the Giant Peach* (1996).

animation, differing from most conventional animations because their imagery is based on real-life soundtracks recorded from conversations of, or interviews with, ordinary people. Two films from the third series *Lip Synch* including *Ident* and *Next*, were excluded from the study because they are not based on a real soundtrack. The corpus as a whole reveals an obsession with the documentary form: the films replicate the codes and conventions of certain modes of live-action documentary, and many attempt to represent their 'stories', including people, settings and events, in a scrupulously naturalistic and realistic manner akin to documentary. In this respect, they reveal a preoccupation with the stylistics of original forms of live-action cinema associated with realism of social content. Their stories, which derive variously from the 'reality' of their soundtrack, also deal in an unusual and inventive way with the question of realism as mediation of a factual content. This thesis is thus concerned with exploring the operation of the complicated network of realisms at work in these films.

As a prelude to discussing the research question and the hypothesis of this thesis, the trajectory of the journey to realism will be sketched. The author became acquainted with the Aardman oeuvre only as an MA animation student in Teheran in 1997<sup>4</sup>. The Oscar-winning film *The Wrong Trousers* (1993) especially left a lasting impression because of its resemblance to a miniature of a mainstream live-action film: in short, its 'cinematic' features. The film, with its Hitchcockian thriller genre parodies and modern story departed radically from traditional Czechoslovakian, Russian, East German and Eastern European puppet animations normally broadcast by television. It had an instantly recognizable 'cinematic' narrative and an almost adult humour, spiced with animation and cartoon logic. The fascination with cinematic approaches in Aardman made the author carry out her MA dissertation on the works of the Aardman studio;

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<sup>4</sup> The three-year MA programme was based in the Faculty of Cinema and Theatre, Animation Department, Art University. Students from different art subjects and backgrounds learned the practice and techniques of animated filmmaking from traditional to digital. The course incorporated only a meagre body of animation theory, which was normally limited to animation history and general training on film language. Most students do not start the programme with a BA in animation, since until recently this was offered at only one Iranian university. At the end of the MA course students are expected to produce a short animated film and a dissertation of about 40,000 words.

its last chapter incorporated a textual analysis of the 'cinematic' ingredients implemented in *The Wrong Trousers*.

The concept of cinematic quality in Aardman films was carried over to an initial PhD proposal, to study 'the impacts of the contemporary cinema on traditional 3D and puppet animation'. This proposal was refined following research that identified 'realism' as a deeply-entrenched preoccupation of the Aardman studio, most evident in their earlier works. The diversity of Aardman's experimentation with clay and puppet animation, from the early 70s to recent times, offered extensive opportunity for research within the under-researched field of 3D animation; exploring the notion of 'cinematic-ness' in the form of 'cinematic realism' seemed to promise deeper understanding of the initial question. It became evident that it was not just the cinematic narrative of Wallace and Gromit-type films that made them resemble miniature live-action films. An investigation of the aesthetic diversity of Aardman films made before *Wallace and Gromit* and, crucially, the distinctive approaches of the ten films studied, led to identification of other aspects of, and alternative approaches to, realism at play. The final selection of films for this study was thus determined by distinctive approaches to realism *absent* from the *Wallace and Gromit*-type film.

All ten films eventually nominated for study are based on real-life soundtracks and deal broadly with realism of social content, but also adopt a set of cinematic/cinematographic narrative conventions dissimilar to those used in fictional mainstream animation. Apart from these general qualities, they display a wide range of responses, in terms of aesthetic approach and formal strategies, to the initial idea of using real-life conversations. Preliminary research showed how the extremely realistic, closely replicated observational style and mainly serious tone of the early Peter Lord and David Sproxton films was superseded, following Nick Park's involvement, by parodic, comic and cartoonish versions of

documentary form<sup>5</sup>. Two films in the third series, *War Story* and *Creature Comforts*, thus distinctly resemble *Wallace and Gromit* films in terms of formal traits and character design. The research thus set out to produce a typology of realism, via scrutiny of the trajectory of 'realist strategies' implemented within different types of films in the corpus. This led to the hypothesis that realism in these films is of a hybrid nature, as the complex operation of various approaches to realism.

Most mainstream research on realism in CGI is science-oriented, focusing on the technical/ technological aspects of producing the most believably realistic imagery known as virtual reality. This fuels the accelerating development and enhancement of the 'reality effect' in CGI production. The increasing popularity of CGI and its aesthetic obsessions with 'surface realism' and 'picture brilliance' (Darley, 2000), however, has reawakened scholarly interest in the question of realism in animation, especially in the last two decades. In terms of aesthetics and representational approaches this is underscored by 'new media' scholars, and also informs animation studies. Realism is therefore specifically at issue in new media research. With regard to realism in traditional 3D animation, mainly puppet and clay animation, however, there seems to have been little in the way of scholarly debate or theorisation. This is intriguing in view of the emerging interest in clay and puppet animation in contemporary mainstream films, as discussed earlier. The specific field of traditional 3D animation and to some extent the area of realism in animation is generally underdeveloped, with scant literature and scattered theorisation. One of the main aims of this research, therefore, is to plug a gap in knowledge that relates mainly to unexamined aspects of realism in puppet and clay animation.

In its approach to the question of realism, this research has benefited from both traditional and CGI-based research. Few pieces of research address the question of realism in puppet animation, but Michael Frierson's (1994) study of American clay animation and his specific

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<sup>5</sup> Nick Park joined the studio in 1983 to complete his degree film *A Grand Day Out*, and his impact on the aesthetics of the films began to show in *War Story*. His distinctive character design with googly eyes and embellished teeth is seen explicitly in *Creature Comforts*, the last film of the corpus.

attention to 'spatial realism' as intrinsic to 3D animation was vital in terms of its method of recognising specific characteristics of the medium and its unique relationship to the notion of realism. Bruce Holman's (1975) admittedly rather old history of puppet animation, however, prompted fundamental questions rather than answers on the subject of puppets. These factors eventually steered the research towards scrutiny of both their diversity and their crucial role in achieving realistic animation, leading to the identification of different categories of puppet, which is proposed in the second chapter of this thesis.

The thesis begins by discussing the notion that realism in animation has always occupied an oblique position, in view of the widespread belief that animation is an 'appropriate' medium for the representation of fantastic or imaginary worlds. In terms of representing reality, live-action cinema might be seen as the ultimate champion in that it records physical reality 'objectively' and 'transparently'. Despite such assumptions, research into realism in animation cannot avoid engagement with the debate on realism in live-action film. Film theory in general has refused to acknowledge animation as a sub-species of film on the basis of the disparity of the ontological pedigree of its imagery with that of 'film' (Kracauer, 1969; Bazin, 1967; Cavell, 1979). The realism of live-action film is compared to the allegedly faked nature of the animated image, reduced to its 2D drawn form; animation is thus disqualified from representing reality. A number of animation scholars use similar medium-specific polemics to insist on the separation of the two media, based on dissatisfaction that animation is seen as secondary in status to live-action film (Moritz, 1988; Wells, 1998). Scholars and theorists in both camps equally bar animation from engagement with realism, especially in the form of replicating the codes and conventions of mainstream narrative film.

It is argued that, since animation is essentially a 'copying' medium (Lotman, 1988) it may adopt live-action codes of narration for its storytelling, just as diverse sources such as painting and sculpture may inform its imagery. It is further shown that, despite dismissive theories,

animation from its inception has been driven by realism as a specifically 'formal' question. Mainstream animation, at least from early Disney films of the 1930s to the present, has demonstrated a fascination with realism. It is evident that as a complex and multi-faceted notion, realism in animation, just as in any other medium, must imply more than one meaning or aspect. It also seems clear that the same 'realism' from which theorists disbarred animation has held the most appeal in terms of mainstream animation production. The emergence of CGI animation has exacerbated demand for the kind of realism that is obsessed with surface accuracy and lifelikeness. As such, it becomes a vehicle for spectacular effect in animation, a medium that, according to Paul Wells, only 'resists realism' (Wells, 1998: 25).

The Aardman films under investigation remain conspicuously aloof from the kind of spectacular mainstream trends of realism outlined above. While drawing on the limited body of work dedicated to puppet and clay animation, this inquiry must also take account of studies and theories dealing with realism in mainstream 2D drawn animation. As will be discussed, the question of realism in animation seems to have been ignited by the aesthetics of early Disney feature films, which were an attempt to get closer to the type of 'realism' represented in contemporary mainstream live-action films. 'Disney realism' thus sparked numerous debates concerning whether animation is the medium 'appropriate' for such realist, or rather realistic effects.

A major argument surrounding animation realism will be Paul Wells' thesis of 'Hyper-realism' (1998) with regard to feature-length Disney animated film aesthetics. Stephen Rowley's (2005) investigations of realism in 2D drawn animation, which are at times at odds with Wells' deliberations, is discussed in detail. Various studies of the subject, all of which relate mainly to US 2D drawn cartoon aesthetics or Disney animated features, are examined and some conclusions drawn. These in turn illuminate the thesis' inquiry into realism in puppet and clay animation and the Aardman corpus.

The thesis of medium specificity also plays a central role in these debates. It is argued that most anti-realist views of 2D drawn animation, including those supportive of realism in 3D animation such as that of Frierson (1994), are based on the long-established theory that each medium should create only the effects in which it excels. In this respect, realism is a function of live-action film that is able to 'record' reality *per se*. A 'constructed' medium such as animation should not try to emulate physical reality, which may easily be 'inscribed' and shown by the cine camera. In the same way, Frierson tries to show that 3D animation 'shares' many of the specificities of the live-action medium and as such is 'apt' for realism, based on a Bazinian understanding of spatial realism. The shortcomings of such arguments are illustrated by reference to Noël Carroll's debate (2000). This research will also address a constructive aspect of medium specificity theory: the attempt to 'define' or revealing the 'essence' or 'nature' of a medium as a way into understanding realism in 3D animation. This is particularly relevant to the Aardman artifice, so this thesis also endeavours to examine 3D animation's specific properties, particularly those adopted and used extensively by Aardman.

The question of realism has so far been discussed from a formal and stylistic point of view, identified as the main focus and concern of animation theory. The question of realism of 'content' or authenticity of subject matter is, however, absent from many of these debates. Animation of an *avant-garde* or experimental nature, on the other hand, seems to have been more preoccupied with representing the 'deeper' realities of the social, historical and political life. It is therefore evident that such reflections are not always dependent on a 'realistic' depiction of the surface of life, or in fact any specific stylistic instructions. Some approaches to social realism in live-action cinema, therefore, aim to represent the social and historical world as they really are, while others adopt a deliberately non-realistic and highly formalistic approach<sup>6</sup>. The

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<sup>6</sup> While the documentary form in general as well as many social realist cinemas such as Italian Neo-realism and British New Wave are known for their dedication to surface accuracy in portraying the social realities of the world, many alternative approaches such as French New Wave, and especially Godard's counter-cinema, claimed to penetrate reality by deliberately and reflexively breaking the rules of cinematic realism understood as conventional mainstream narrative cinema.

history of animation practice is also interspersed with experimental and *avant-garde* animations that have serious pretensions to mediate social realities. Abstraction, stylisation and adoption of non-realist forms and controversial imagery and narrative are part and parcel of such films, which cover a broad spectrum of dissimilar aesthetics and stylistics and are often highly political or even revolutionary. This in no way suggests that all such films withdraw from realist form; it rather suggests that many scrupulously avoid the use of mainstream realistic trends to represent 'invisible' realities, or the adoption of familiar realist stylistics only to disrupt and subvert them.

In this respect, the ten Aardman films are unusual. The content of many reveals a high reality/factuality index. Almost all, in one way or another, adopt a non-fictional style of narrative, mainly replicating codes and convention of modes of documentary film. They are all based on real-life interview soundtracks or secretly recorded conversations, which takes them even further from mainstream fictional animation. What makes them so fascinating and complex is the unusual marriage of realistic animation styles and realist content. In many of the films, 'visual' realism, that is copying live-action documentary film, is highly developed, yet this 'realistic' form refers to a 'realist' aesthetic associated with non-fictional modes of representation in live-action film, mainly fly-on-the-wall and interview. Further, in most of these films, the non-glossy depiction of everyday events in a grainy style of filming associates them with the specifically British tradition of social realism. The question of realism in these films must therefore address 'content' realism and what makes many of them 'social realist texts'<sup>7</sup>.

The formal make-up of these films does not, however, conform to a specific approach to realism. From the earliest to the latest films significant differences are manifest, in terms both of stylistics and implementation or avoidance of fictional, cartoon elements within their documentary structure. As such, they demonstrate a spectrum of

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<sup>7</sup> This is of course, part of the investigation of this thesis to examine the notion of social realism and its applicability to (some of) these films in Chapter Three.

realism(s) that is different, diverse, and of a 'hybrid' nature, as hypothesised by this thesis. A main objective of this thesis is, therefore, to demonstrate such hybridity. Close deconstruction of these films in terms of both their formal and content components identify three different 'typologies' of realist strategy that include different 'formulae' of merging these realist traits in each film and also in each 'type' of film generally.

This hypothesised hybridity has two aspects, the most obvious of which is the way realist and/or realistic forms have been mixed and matched in these films. As such, the diversity and multiplicity of stylistic approaches and formal choices are shown with the aid of tables that itemise the realist and non-realist elements of these films and measure them against each film.

A more complicated dimension of hybridity in these films becomes the way in which different notions and 'discourses' of realism are implemented in their signifying systems. The significance of the copyings and borrowings present in their make-up, or the 'intertextuality' of their configuration becomes central to understanding these rather unusual films. The notion of intertextuality in the films is crucial, since they are basically 'copies' of other modes, genres and media. Their borrowings from non-fictional modes of live-action are so extensive that the state of animated-ness is almost denied in certain films such as *On Probation*. These are not simply formal hybridisations: such painstakingly created copying does not occur spontaneously and is significant in terms of *what* they copy as much as *how* they do so. Questions must be asked about the meaning of an animation that dons the mask of a live-action documentary. After all, however closely the copy approaches the original, it is an animated replica in which all the characters, movements and events are constructed rather than recorded from reality. It cannot match the reality of an actual profilmic space with real people and events.

It is therefore impossible to draw meaning from these films in a straightforward way without considering that they are animations. On

one hand, borrowing, recycling and copying the stylistics of 'the previously represented', including photographs, films, or television programmes, seems to be a habit of most contemporary representations. On the other hand, the borrowings and hybridisations in these films are different in nature to the ways in which such copying approaches are implemented in a live-action film. In other words, in reading and close textual analysis of these films, account must be taken of what these copyings represent, and of their implicit or explicit meanings. What, for example, is the position of a film that is based on an interview with a WWII veteran, but represents his memories as a cartoonish 'parody' of a similar film in live-action?

Theories of postmodern representation are heavily preoccupied with the issues of recycled imagery, parody and pastiche. Fredric Jameson's (1991) notion of postmodern pastiche, Linda Hutcheon's (1989) idea of postmodern parody or ironic borrowing and Scott Lash's thesis of discourse versus figure (1988) is central to this discussion. Similar lines of inquiry are followed with regard to pastiche and parody and hybridisation in these films, to enlighten their analysis as hybrid texts that refer to their original sources. Seminal works on the new digital media, that deal with similar kinds of question of hybridity and stylistic borrowing in another medium, are also considered. Reference are made to Andrew Darley's thesis of 'second-order realism' (2000) and Bolter and Grusin's (2000) notion of 'remediation', with regard initially to the aesthetics of new digital media. These are examined in respect of the identification by this thesis of a mode of realism specific to certain films of the corpus: 'simulational realism', or point-by-point reproduction of the live-action documentary mode in their clay puppet animations.

The structure of the thesis is based on a fundamental divide between two broad categories of formal/stylistic and content realism. It is evident that a film's signifying system cannot be divided so emphatically into form versus content, with form assumed to contain content. This is also argued in *Film Art* (Bordwell and Thompson, 2008). Rejecting such reductionism, Bordwell and Thompson assert that all the components of a

film function in a *system* and within its overall pattern. In this model, there is no 'inside or outside' to a film, and most of its compositional elements would overlap and 'interact' on the boundaries between form and content (2008. 55). While this thesis agrees that such a divide is impossible in a pure sense, it argues that as a heuristic device it might assist the investigation of realism, especially in animation. Animation has limited capacity for accidents and arbitrary compositions, especially in its narrative form as a totally constructed medium that has a non-organic relationship between its imagery and its sound. As such, the formal aspects of realism in any animated form are highly planned and painstakingly achieved. Further, as mentioned earlier, realism in animation theory has frequently been a question of form and stylistics. Thus, animation facilitates far more detailed study of the purely formal aspects of realism than live-action film, in which the reality effect is easily achieved simply by recording events in either fictional or non-fictional modes. Engaging with the reality of a social content has not been treated as part of the greatest abilities of the conventional animated form. In this respect, and with regard to the emerging discourses of 'animated documentary' and social realism, the ten films are worth examining purely because of the subject matter, themes and messages they convey. It is of course true that the ways in which these films convey non-fictional content cannot be studied without consideration of the formal and stylistic choices they adopt. Elements such as narrative structure, naturalism versus abstraction and observational style versus cartoon logic play a major part in how a film may be read in terms of content.

This thesis, however, takes a 'deconstructive' approach to studying the ten films, based on a Metzian model that breaks down their formal aspects according to five channels of information. Further, it offers certain binary criteria by which to measure aspects including both the content and overall 'function' of each film. Such a mechanical method of dissecting a film's components seems appropriate for preliminary analysis, especially for animated films in which imagery and sound are artificially assembled. The eventual meaning read and interpreted from

these animated films, cannot be complete unless they are seen holistically and with reference to the way their form and content collaborate as interwoven constituents.

This research acknowledges both the blurred boundaries and the interaction of form and content. It consciously scrutinises them as separate entities, examining in turn the question of form and content realism in animation. Following this, however, it assumes that the two categories are finally located in an interrelated network of processes of making meaning, based on the intertextuality and hybridity of these films. As such, this thesis does not adopt a traditional structure in that it does not include one chapter dedicated to literature review: its key discussions and arguments are *generated* by the process of reviewing and examining relevant literature and theories, and provisional conclusions and theorisations are reached at the end of each chapter. Similarly, although the thesis has a specific methodology chapter (Chapter Five), the methodological approaches by which the hybridity of realism in the corpus will be demonstrated are introduced and justified progressively, on the basis of scrutiny of theories germane to the discussion. This was an informed choice that followed extensive experimentation to identify the most effective structure by which to represent the findings of this thesis. It is hoped that this introduction will facilitate more comprehensive understanding of its key arguments and conclusions.

The four chapters of Part One focus on the main questions of this thesis: realism and hybridity of realism in the corpus. The inquiry into realism in animation focuses on the meanings and implications of realism in a 3D medium such as puppet and clay animation, techniques broadly used in the Aardman corpus. Chapter One addresses the initial problem of realism in animation, understood as a formal concern related to animation's generic definition as a medium distinct from, and in some respects opposed to live-action film. It also engages with the thesis of medium specificity and its effect on biased perceptions of both media, in an attempt to illuminate and broaden the remit to assist understanding of

any medium. In Chapter Two, this leads to the study and identification of specific qualities of 3D media, mainly puppet and clay. Eventually, the distinct specificity of the 3D medium, as opposed to 2D drawn animation, is defined as the question of 'puppets'; in other words its exclusive representational system in terms of realism is identified as puppet realism. Three different modes of puppets in puppet animation are proposed according to the thesis of 'simulational realism' and crucially, the 'hybridity cube' is introduced as a model to study realism in any kind of animated film in terms of such an examination. These models also inform the itemisation and examination of the formal realist elements of the films in the tables and discussions in the second part of this thesis.

Chapter Three examines the realism of social content, focusing on the particular modes of fictional and non-fictional films Aardman works seem to copy. Fundamental consideration of 'forms' and stylistics is offered, including the documentary form and other social realist forms in the fictional genres. Animated documentary is introduced, in relation to the representational schemes and aesthetic effects demonstrated by the ten films, as a form with a claim to mediate documentary realism as well as the idea of 'poetic realism' in the British social realist tradition of 'kitchen sink' drama. The thesis endeavours to set criteria by which the function of the ten films may be measured as documentary animations, borrowing Plantinga's notion of 'social function' (1997) in the overall textual voice of non-fictional films. The issue of soundtrack gathering and editing is thus crucial in terms of the authenticity of, or rather the manipulation of, the factual content of the films in question. In this respect, the thesis addresses various theories relating to the conventions and uses of sound, especially in the two distinct documentary modes- observational and interview - mostly adopted by these films.

Chapter Four interrogates hybridity and intertextuality as the hypothesis of this study, with regard to the notion of realism in the corpus. Theories of postmodern representation, as mentioned, are discussed as functional to these films' explicit copied and borrowed aesthetics. Further, their simulational tendencies in terms of obsessive realist effect are

investigated, to pinpoint how they may be understood as similar to the aesthetics of new digital media genres, informed by the theories of Darley (2000) and Bolter and Grusin (2000). Linda Hutcheon's (1989) notion of paratextuality, in relation to its uses in historiography as well as postmodern novels, is also examined as a model applicable to the ways in which paratextual narrative has been adopted as a 'realist strategy' to offer deeper or even alternative accounts of reality in the Aardman corpus.

The two chapters of Part Two offers a detailed breakdown and analysis of all ten films of the corpus with regard to their formal and content criteria, as theorised and argued in Part One. Chapter Five provides a reading of films broken down into tables and arrives at an initial grouping of the films in relation to their realist components. Chapter Six proposes eight binary poles or criteria as the final outcome of analysing the films in terms of their formal and functional features. The ten films are located in different parts of a spectrum extending between two series of poles to identify an eventual 'typology of realism' in the corpus. Ultimately, one film is defined as the best exemplar of traits peculiar to each of the three realist types, for further textual analysis.

The three chapters of Part Three provide a close comparative textual analysis of the three case study films: *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* (Chapter Six); *Going Equipped* (Chapter Eight), and *War Story* (Chapter Nine). These readings enlighten the complex operation of realism in the films, in their diverse dimensions and hybrid composition, in terms of all relevant theories and arguments proposed in the previous chapters. Part Three closes with a summary and re-assessment of the three realist types and some further observations and suggestions in relation to the notions of 'simulational realism', 're-mediated observation' and identification of different approaches to realism in animation. These are in fact some outcomes and findings of the research exhibited, based on the analysis of three selected case study films.

In the concluding chapter, a review of the research process and its specific approaches to the question of hybridity of realism in the films studied locate the position of this thesis' within the existing body of knowledge in the field. It also demonstrates its major contributions to knowledge in the field of animation studies. Further, the unexplored or less developed aspects of the research are examined, and areas that provide opportunity for further research are addressed.

**PART ONE**  
CONTEXTUALISING AARDMAN:  
REALISM AND HYBRIDITY

## **Chapter One:**

# **Animation, Realism and the Question of Style**

The question of realism in animation seems to parallel the complex historical debate on the relationship between reality and its representation that concerns all visual arts. The concept of realism as *mimesis* or imitation originates in classical Greek philosophy<sup>8</sup>. Modern ideas of realism, however, were mostly concentrated on 'showing things as they really are', 'the presentation of *real and existing things*' and of 'all visible objects' (Courbet, 1861' cited in Nochlin, 1971: 23). This view dates from the birth of Realism, the major 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature and art movement.

The emergence of new media, especially the moving image, has not affected the essence of the debate, but only has broadened its scope and complexity. The questions that dominate realism debates and practices in the arts still relate to the diverse aspects and layers of reality, from visible to invisible; the way in which it is depicted<sup>9</sup> in terms of medium, technique and style, and which category of reality deserves to be represented.

On one hand, the notion of realism in animation can be seen generally to perpetuate polemics similar to the above argument. On the other, as a technique that lends itself conveniently to numerous styles and aesthetics, animation proposes specific challenges to the idea of realism. A major issue is its particular, pre-destined association with live-action

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<sup>8</sup> The duality of universal 'forms' or 'ideas' as opposed to observable reality that is 'constantly in flux and decay' (Jary & Jary, 2000:460) dates back to the notions of the Greek philosopher Plato (428-348 BC), a 'realist' who believed in 'absolute and objective existence of the universals' (Williams, 1985: 257). Further, according to Raymond Williams, such diverse changes in meaning and application have taken place that different, and sometimes completely opposite concepts have been assigned to realism and the notion of what constitutes a 'realist' at different stages of history. (Ibid. 258)

<sup>9</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Realist movement targeted 'the existing and real objects' in the world as the type of reality to be represented as opposed to an ideal representation of beautiful things, known as *idealism*. There has always been a dispute whether non-visible qualities and things can be represented at all. As late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Kantian logic of *noumena* 'things in themselves' as opposed to *phenomena* 'things as they seem' suggested the inaccessibility of 'noumenal' objects, and the structure of our mind as capable only of experiencing the phenomenal things. (Ibid. 323)

cinema: the technique and the systems by which it is represented share a pre-history, and use the same basic principles of inscription and projection. Traditionally, animation is a frame-by-frame process<sup>10</sup> in which the impression of movement, though not necessarily life, is created by registering successive single images of a subject on celluloid, using various 2D or 3D techniques. Animation therefore seems to reverse the cinematographic process of 'recording', in which actual movements are captured on film stock at 24 frames per second<sup>11</sup>. In other words, live-action records successive images of natural movement in the real world, while animation creates the impression of movement artificially using successive images. These fundamental characteristics of movement production may explain why animation is often seen as directly opposed to live action. Live-action film is seen as a transparent medium that is capable of 'showing' reality, while animation is expected to 'create' and 'construct' images and movement, whether abstracted from reality or totally imagined. Live-action represents reality; animation may only create its own reality. Animation is therefore an unsuitable medium for, and is in fact incapable of, realism: realism resides in the recording facility of the cine camera; it cannot be achieved with, and should not be attempted by, animation.

There are obvious fallacies in this line of argument, which will be further discussed with reference to Bazin and Kracauer's realist theories of cinema. Yet, as will be shown, general definitions and assumptions that place animation fundamentally in opposition to live action still predominate. This thesis will present a range of arguments about realism in animation by engaging with historical debates and theories for and against such assumptions. These initial premises create the basis for Chapter Two's enquiry into realism in puppet and clay animation, which will further investigate notions of realism and hybridity in the chosen Aardman films.

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<sup>10</sup> The frame-by-frame basis is only true if the new digitally produced animation is temporarily disregarded.

<sup>11</sup> Not all live-action film records movement. It can equally record a motionless scene with objects.

## The Thesis of Medium Specificity

GE Lessing's thesis of 'medium specificity' (Carroll, 2000: 41) is a pervasive and long-established paradigm that has influenced modernist treatment and judgment of all art.<sup>12</sup> It consists of an essentialist confidence that a medium's 'exclusive' powers and possibilities are its 'legitimate' ones, by which its proper 'subjects, themes and expressive resources' may be assessed (Bordwell, 1997: 27). In short, an artwork should adhere to the specific stylistic properties of its own medium, and thus should not copy effects created by other media that are better able to create them. This notion granted a supposedly logical basis for separating live-action cinema and animation and strongly influenced both theorists and filmmakers. As Bordwell notes, it is still influential, albeit in a diluted form (Bordwell, 1997: 30).

Lessing's thesis, and particularly its prescriptive account of each medium, has been challenged as essentialist and flawed. Noël Carroll (2000), for example, believes the debate conflates two different theses, thus rendering it inaccurate. He asserts that in finding 'the nature of a medium' in medium-specificity-based debates these two are mixed up; firstly, that each medium should pursue those effects that it and no other can achieve – the differentiation component – and secondly that each medium should pursue those effects that it achieves best – the excellence component (2000:40). Carroll argues that it is not always possible to assign to a medium a single quality that may be regarded as its nature, whether by the first or second set of criteria. He gives supporting examples of painting and cinema that display more than one or two specificities. Carroll suggests that this provoked the historical battle in traditional film theory about whether cinema's essence is to record reality or to artistically assemble it through montage. He concludes that a medium is capable of change, depending on the purposes its practitioners find for it, and therefore 'has no secret purpose of its own' (Ibid. 42).

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<sup>12</sup> The thesis, according to Carroll, is a revolt 'against the kind of art theory proposed in Charles Batteux' tract *Fine Arts Reduced to the Same Principle*', a pre-enlightenment approach that 'treats all arts as the same – e.g. as striving for the same effect, such as the imitation of the beautiful in nature' (Carroll, 2000: 41)

Further, he argues, Lessing's thesis is essentialist in that it seeks to ascribe certain 'legitimate' effects and functions to a medium but denies the legitimacy of other creations of the same medium. Refuting this approach, Carroll says: 'Art forms are not... designed and invented to serve a single, specific purpose or...functions' (Ibid. 48) and asserts that if 'excellence can be achieved by a medium without meeting those specificity-based criteria, we should not be deprived of it. Excellence in art should not be sacrificed' (Ibid.).

The clash between formalist and realist approaches to cinema is usually exemplified by the Lumière / Méliès dichotomy<sup>13</sup>. Lumière used cinema as a means to record and show the physical world and the reality of everyday life. Méliès, however, explored other potentialities and technical capabilities of the medium, including framing, acceleration and slow motion, substitution, superimposition and dissolves, to create illusionist effects and 'trick' films (Armes, 1974: 24-25). Siegfried Kracauer is among film theorists who directly compare the two, giving precedence to Lumière's approach (Kracauer, 1960:30). This opposition clearly derives from the fact that cinema is as much about recording reality as its formal capacity to be used as a language, taking Sergei Eisenstein's view of cinematic shots as the building blocks of the medium (Andrew, 1975:46). From its very early stages, therefore, it has been asked whether cinema is an ideal medium for the reconstruction, recreation and interpretation of reality by divergence from recorded reality, or one that shows and represents reality and the real world as loyally and precisely as possible (Carroll, 1988: 96).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In the realm of film theory, the duality is seen in different terms. Noël Carroll contrasts theoreticians and filmmakers like Arnheim, Eisenstein and Vertov - 'creationists' - with realists like Bazin and Cavell (Carroll, 1988: 96). Dudley Andrew compares the ideas and cinematic theories of 'formative theorists' such as Munsterburg, Arnheim, Eisenstein and Belasz, to 'realist theorists' like Bazin and Kracauer (Andrew, 1975). David Bordwell sees it as the challenge between 'the basic story' and the 'dialectical program' of Bazin in terms of film style (Bordwell, 1997). André Bazin compares filmmakers 'who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality' (Bazin, 1967: 24).

<sup>14</sup> As early as 1910, in the debate epitomised by the Lumière / Méliès duality, the formalist approach began to dominate and led to a stylistics paradigm now known as realist. As a result, the Hollywood narrative system of 'continuity editing' took shape with works like those of DW Griffith, which managed to tell a 'coherent story' and create the illusion of a consistent spatiotemporal unity by juxtaposition of certain shots in certain orders. A 'language of cinema' began to make sense to audiences and became accepted as the only 'correct' way of

André Bazin's influential theory of cinematic realism (1967) dwells on such an essentialist account of cinema as a mechanical process, and therefore the most 'objective' and 'transparent' medium by which to record physical reality without any 'creative' human intervention (Bazin, 1967: 13). For Bazin, this is an extension of the nature of the photographic image, in which something of the reality of the object is intrinsic:

The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. (Ibid. 14)

Bazin goes further to assume that a photograph can be seen as 'identical' with its model, since 'it shares, by virtue of the very process of its becoming, the being of the model of which it is the reproduction; it *is* the model' (Ibid.). He links the ontological property of photography as 'objective record' to its exclusive power to represent unadorned and actual reality (Ibid. 15). In other words, the extreme *realism* of a photograph as the resemblance of the image to its referent, as opposed to any kind of painting, makes it a representation of reality. He considers cinema the heir, albeit in motion, to photography; he is convinced that identical properties can be applied to the cinematic image and therefore '...the cinema is objectivity in time... now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were' (Ibid.). Bazin's thesis of 'record and reveal' (Ibid. 24) places absolute faith in the cinematic image as a transparent representation of reality that may, if the 'right' conventions are used, be totally objective and thus let images speak for themselves. An important outcome of this

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narrating a story in the cinema, and thus became mainstream and common practice. This is, importantly, one aspect of the aesthetic realism associated to ideas of transparency, illusion and continuity of time and space, and understood as 'traditional' or 'classical' realism.

is his thesis of 'spatial realism', which elaborates his preference for the specific cinematic techniques of 'shooting in depth' and 'long takes' as used in the films of Orson Welles and William Wyler, especially in *Citizen Kane* (1941).

Thus, Bazin believes that cinematic realism is best achieved as spatial realism; that the more a shot can show of the 3D pro-filmic space and geographical location of the actors and settings, the more it will be perceived as real. A shot of deeply staged setting with many planes in focus if recorded as a long take rather than cutting to different shot sizes accompanied by uses of techniques such as re-framing, wide-screen and camera movements should facilitate investigation of the dramatic space and maximise the effect of spatial continuity. The potential of what can be shown within the constraints of frame is thereby augmented; the viewer may choose where on the frame to focus to draw information from the shot. Bazin realises that the use of cuts and montage cannot be completely eliminated, but suggests that to retain the maximum 'unity of image in space and time'<sup>15</sup> (Bazin, 1967: 35) they should be implemented as an 'internal part of the "plastic" of image' (Ibid.). His thesis of *spatial realism* and its implications in puppet and clay animation will be expanded in Chapter 2's analysis of the specific properties of 3D animation.

Kracauer's realist theory of cinema (1960), while substantially different, is based on a similar medium-specific line of reasoning. Much like Bazin, Kracauer believes in an 'essence' exclusive to cinema and stresses from the outset that his study 'rests upon the assumption that each medium has a specific nature that invites certain kinds of communication while obstructing others' (Kracauer, 1960:3). He therefore seeks the essence of the photographic image, beginning, like Bazin, with an attempt to trace and define the nature of still photography. He concludes that

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<sup>15</sup> 'What we are saying then is that the sequence of shots "in depth" of the contemporary director does not exclude the use of montage – how could he, without reverting to a primitive babbling? – he makes it an internal part of his "plastic". The storytelling of Welles or Wyler is no less explicit than John Ford's but theirs has the advantage over his that it does not sacrifice the specific effects that can be derived from unity of image in space and time' (Bazin, 1967: 35).

'photography... is and remains the decisive factor in establishing film content' and that the 'nature of photography survives in that of film' (Ibid. 27). Kracauer's initial thesis of 'record and reveal', again much like Bazin's, is thus set in motion.

Unlike Bazin, however, Kracauer does not infer the 'sameness' of the photograph and the referent<sup>16</sup> or emphasise the 'objectivity' of the photographic image. On the contrary, he asserts that 'objectivity in the sense of the realist manifesto is unattainable' and views attempts to achieve it as futile. Instead, he believes that 'photography sees things in its "own soul"' (Ibid. 15-16). Further, he acknowledges the photographer's key role as an agent in shaping the photographic image (Ibid.). For Kracauer, photography is a tool to register physical reality that is later shown and thus 'redeemed'; hence his title: *Theory of Film; the Redemption of Physical Reality*.

Kracauer describes his theory as 'a *material* aesthetic, not a formal one. It is concerned with content' (Kracauer, 1960: ix), but examines extensively the 'dos and don'ts' of cinematic form and stylistics. This 'content-based' theory nevertheless scrupulously defines his category of 'camera reality' or the types of reality that meet the criteria of being recorded and shown by cinema (Ibid. 29).<sup>17</sup> He suggests that 'films are true to the medium to the extent that they penetrate the world before our eyes' (Kracauer, 1960: ix).

Like Bazin and others, Kracauer recognises two main cinematic tendencies: realist and formative. His theory considers both approaches

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<sup>16</sup> He notes that photography is the transformation or metamorphosis of three-dimensional phenomena with colour and other material properties to a two-dimensional black and white image (the photograph in his time). He is convinced, though, that this 'may be discounted because in spite of [this] photographs still preserve the character of compulsory reproduction - as the way we take cognisance of visible reality'. (Kracauer, 1960:15)

<sup>17</sup> Kracauer tries to illustrate his notion of camera reality, saying that there are different visible worlds, but what he calls camera reality is not of the same order of reality of a painting or stage play; they are not part of the flow of life, or forming it. He says; 'the only reality we are concerned with is existing physical reality - the transitory world we live in. (physical reality will also be called "material reality", or "physical existence" or "actuality", or loosely just "nature". Another fitting term might be "camera-reality")...The other visible worlds reach into this world without, however, really forming a part of it. A theatrical play, for instance, suggests a universe of its own which would immediately crumble were it related to its real-life environment' (Kracauer, 1960: 29).

legitimate and useful, but he believes they should aim to show 'the flow of life not the filmmaker's imagination' (Ibid.). This leads him to conclude that live-action cinema should not represent unreal events and fantastic worlds, hence his thesis of 'camera reality' as the 'right' reality worthy of representation. Conversely, animation should not try to implement realist schemes similar to those of live-action cinema. Kracauer seems allied to theorists for whom realism belonged solely to live-action cinema with animation as its opposite. He expresses his belief in the unsuitability of animation to represent camera reality, and offers a fundamental definition of animation as 'drawings brought to life' (Ibid. 90). He criticises the realist tendencies that ultimately dominated Disney aesthetics:

There is a growing tendency towards camera-reality in his [Disney's] later full-length films. Peopled with the counterparts of real landscape and real human beings, they are not so much "drawings brought to life" as life reproduced in drawings. (Kracauer, 1960: 90)

Whether this type of reductionism has caused animation to be perceived in limited ways will later be examined. Kracauer is not alone in his criticism of Disney aesthetics, based on their assumed specificities of animation. William Moritz reaches an extreme in his medium specific stance when his model of 'true' animation is denied any conventional narrative:

No animation film that is *not* non-objective or non-linear can really qualify as true animation, since the conventional linear representational story film has long since been far better done in live action. (Moritz, 1988: 21)

In a similar vein, Alexandre Alexeïeff in Giannalberto Bendazzi's book *Cartoons* seems to propose a medium-specific argument that live-action cinema and animation are totally separate media:

*Animation film* falls victim to an error in classification – or rather, to two errors. One consists in mistaking animation for animated drawings (as one might mistake an airplane for a kite); another, in considering it simply a sort of ‘cinema’, well it could just as well be *Painting, drawing, engraving* or even, *sculpture in movement* (do we ever consider an oil portrait as a sort of photo?) (Alexandre Alexeïeff’s preface in Bendazzi, 1994: x)

From this, it may be concluded that Alexeïeff is also unhappy with the idea of reducing animation to its drawn forms; the hand-made rather than recorded nature of animation is tacitly applauded. Animation is derived from the limitless ‘raw material *exclusively of human ideas*’ (Ibid. xxii); by implication, live-action film is constrained by the realities of the outside world. This displays a Kantian logic, in which the representation of the phenomenal world is related to the recording ability of the camera, while noumenal processes that only exist in the human mind are related to animation. This dichotomy, as will be expanded, recurs in many medium-specific notions of animation. It grants animation an intriguing status as a ‘different’ way of representation, one that is intended exclusively for a different array of invisible realities. It may be argued that not all elements of human minds and ideas are independent of the real physical world. As such, their representations depend on certain forms that reflect on, or copy facets of the real physical world. In short, as the phenomenal and noumenal worlds are not totally separable, neither are their representations.

The definition of animation is a major problem in all these arguments. Those that prescribe certain ‘legitimate’ areas of exploration for animation mostly fail to consider all its properties in the broader sense. All these theorists refer to its miscellaneous forms, modes and styles (Stephenson 1967, Alexeïeff 1994), yet most focus only on the properties of 2D drawn animation, and the majority (barring Moritz and Alexeïeff) unconsciously focus only on *cartoons*. The idea of animation becomes increasingly abstract and is finally reduced to the notion of 2D drawn

animation<sup>18</sup>; the remainder of the spectrum of aesthetic properties imaginable and perceivable in animation is ignored. The same problem arises with regard to realism in animation: if the only realist approach considered is that of Disney, 2D drawn animation is taken to represent animation *per se*.<sup>19</sup>

Further, theories that separate animation and live-action fail to notice that animation without live-action cinema is impossible. It is true that Reynaud's Praxinoscope projected a series of images that were not photographed and technically this facility was independent of cinema. In reality, the cine camera cannot be eliminated from a medium-specific study of all styles and modes of animation, because before digital media it was the only means of inscribing still images. Further, many other/mixed and hybrid approaches to filmmaking rely on both the 'record' and 'construct' properties of the medium as evidence that live-action cinema cannot be defined by a single feature. A useful argument is Comolli's notion of *cinematic apparatus* (1980), in which all cinema's visible and invisible parts must be taken into consideration in order to gain a full understanding.

An obvious but essential point is that the stop-frame shooting ability of the cinematic camera has provided enormous potential for experimenting with still images of various origins. This area is part of the 'record' capability, inherent in live-action cinema as a descendant of still photography that is often overlooked. Experimental/abstract cinema, in

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<sup>18</sup> When Wells theorises on the distinctive aspects of the 'body' in animation, he seems mainly to have 2D animation in mind, and excludes those treatments that take the body as a *real* body. Wells (1998: 188-9) says that, generally, in animation:

1. The body is malleable
2. The body is fragmentary
3. The body is a contextual space
4. The body is a mechanism
5. The body has impossible abilities
6. The body directly expresses 'explicit emotions'
7. Bodies of humans/ animals/creatures that are apparently incompatible are rendered equable in size, strength, ability, etc...
8. Bodies may re-determine the physical orthodoxies of gender and species.

<sup>19</sup> There will be discussion later in this chapter of Wells' theory of hyper-realism that proposes Disney films as the yardstick by which to measure other realist approaches. Its problems will be addressed in more detail, especially with regard to realism in 3D animation.

which the boundaries between animation and live-action are almost inseparable, is heavily indebted to this property. Further, the ability to cut and paste cinematic shots is essential to both live-action and animation. It may therefore be argued that, like all 3D forms, most experimental animated forms simply could not exist without the camera's recording ability. The frame-by-frame process is therefore a function of the cinematographic camera's basic recording quality. Many animated forms, such as collage and pin-screen, and under-the-camera techniques such as oil on glass or sand animation rely as much on the recording ability of the camera as its stop-frame inscription.

Further, some of animation history's most celebrated 'experimental film' works are based on techniques that in the pre-digital age only the 'optical printer' and 'the cinematic apparatus' *as a whole* could provide,<sup>20</sup> including repetitions and double exposures. These films, which should be located between live-action and animation, demonstrate that animation must be part of cinema as a whole. Excluding recording quality from animation equates to depriving it of the diversity of its forms and the different sub-media created within the whole body.

So far, this thesis has covered the essentialist and at times dogmatic aspects of medium-specific theories that have influenced perception of animation and live-action film. The thesis's thrust, however, is its attempt to define the features of a medium, its strengths and weaknesses, what it is commonly designed for and the areas in which it may function best. This kind of investigation may be constructive provided it does not produce dogma. Also under examination will be the effects for which the medium has most frequently been used, and how various creative and 'unconventional' artistic applications may influence its evolution. Different theories of cinema and animation, based on a medium-specificity paradigm, will be used to aid understanding of 3D animation and the specific qualities that demand particular attention. It will be shown that, while medium specificity is the basis for most arguments and usually

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<sup>20</sup> Examples are numerous, including the abstract works of George Griffin using the techniques of Step Print and Block Print which, as abstract animated effects stand somewhere between the two media (based on a screening and presentation by the artist at the Pervasive Animation Conference, March 2-4 2007, Tate Modern, London.)

leads to essentialist theories of cinema and animation, it has also made a valid contribution to knowledge about both media. Similar scrutiny will be given to specific properties and limitations of the 3D medium, in order to detect 'communal' qualities that also relate to live action. This will illuminate the specific methodology by which the Aardman films will be examined in terms of realism. As an essential diversion from the initial thesis, both mutual and dissimilar traits of 3D animation and live-action film will be examined. It will be demonstrated that the diversity and strength of animated forms in the 3D realm owes more to properties shared with live-action cinema than their separation. This 'inclusive' approach will identify the main area in which animation and live-action cinema meet, thus offering a more comprehensive understanding of the two media.

## **Animation-Realism Conundrum**

It has been proposed that animation, as a technique used to create various forms of moving image, may adopt different styles and forms that carry different aesthetic implications. This renders reduction to a single 'essence' impossible. Yet, as discussed, animation has largely been disqualified from engagement with realism, on the basis of medium-specific understandings of it as a constructed and hence non-realist medium. Focusing on these arguments, it will be proposed that the notion of realism in animation mainly hinges on a very specific factor: 2D drawn animation's copying of codes and conventions of mainstream narrative live-action cinema. As will be discussed, this seems also to concentrate only on formal and stylistic aspects of animation.

The history of animation practice and the response of theoreticians seem to suggest that animation may be, and in fact has been, used to reflect on realist 'content'. The many avant-garde and non-mainstream examples of the type including non-fictional approaches to animation

known as 'animated documentary'<sup>21</sup> may testify to such capabilities and legitimisations. In general, however, animation is not admired for its attempts to become 'formally' closer to a copy of live-action film, Disney feature-length films being the well-known example.

Wells, for example, rightly complains that simplistic accounts of animation are predominantly based on its constructed-ness. He also dismisses assumptions, drawn from its frequent reduction to children's cartoons, that it is a 'benign' medium and may therefore be seen only in contrast to the recorded reality of live-action cinema. Dissatisfied with such exclusivism, Wells proposes that animation is also a proficient medium, able to 'carry important meanings' or deal with real issues of the social world (Wells, 1998:4).

Acknowledging that any definition of realism must be subjective, Wells sees realism as a notion 'open to interpretation' (Ibid. 24). He considers, however, that cinematic realism resides in films that show life as it is, avoiding conventionality and artifice in favour of a more loyal depiction of everyday life. Crucially, he gives precedence to the 'record' aspect of this process:

...the kind of film which seems to most accurately represent "reality" is the kind of film which attempts to rid itself of obvious cinematic conventions in the prioritisation of recording the people, objects, environments and events which characterise the common understanding of the lived experience (Ibid.).

Reading between the lines, it may be inferred that in this definition 'formalism' and 'realism' are set against each other. Wells seems to define realism, at least in live-action mode, as an *objective* attempt to portray everyday life, avoiding spectacular effects and 'glossy' stylistics. As such, most 'social realist' films of different eras, including Italian neo-realism, British New Wave and most documentary practices may be

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<sup>21</sup> The animated documentary and its implications on studying the Aardman films in question will be investigated in Chapter Three.

regarded as 'true' realism in live-action cinema. His definition disqualifies most mainstream Hollywood films, however, despite their being 'realistic'. In summary, Wells' notion of realism resides in the 'reality of content' and a truthful representation of 'the lived experience' (Ibid.). This crucial issue will be examined in depth in Chapter Three.

If such truthful representation of reality may be shown efficiently only by live-action 'recording', animation's alleged 'faked-ness' and lack of indexicality must surely exclude it. Nevertheless, as already suggested, Wells does not deny animation's capacity to deal with social issues, and shows his dissatisfaction with such a divide (Wells, 1998: 4). Rather, he emphasises animation's ability to deal efficiently with realist contents and mediate a message about reality. Despite this, he proposes: 'Purely in visual terms the cartoon, echoing silent slap-stick comedy, has the capacity to amuse but, more importantly, it possesses the ability to absolutely *resist* notions of the real world'. (Ibid. 6 italics-FHS) He places the two media specifically in opposition, as he thinks of animation as having a 'narrative space and visual environment radically different to the live-action version of the world' (Ibid.). This confrontation is highlighted by his reference to the categorisation of animation as 'what is not live action' by John Hallas and Joy Bachelor: 'if it is the live-action film's job to present physical reality, animated film is concerned with metaphysical reality – not how things look, but what they mean' (Hoffer, 1981: 3 cited in Wells, 1998: 11).

In all these comments, as Wells stresses the 'purely visual terms' of his argument, formal issues seem to be embodied in his discussion of realism in animation. The last remark seems to indicate his belief that most of the oppositional traits of animation and live-action to which he refers remain in the realm of cartoon. In stylistic terms, then, he believes that animation '*resists* "realism" as a mode of representation and uses its various techniques to create numerous styles which are fundamentally *about* realism' (Wells, 1998: 25). According to Wells, this is particularly because of that distinction which sets animation's status as a 'completely fake' medium against a view of live action as basically 'completely real'

(Ibid.).

Wells' arguments therefore produce some useful outcomes. He believes that animation is competent to mediate reality and is potentially fit for 'social realism'. As evident from his reference to Hallas and Bachelor, he also feels that it is better able to show 'noumenal' than 'phenomenal' realities, in Kantian terms. He also believes that animation is a distinct and different medium that should not approach the realism of live-action film. In his comments on how animation deals with realism, he seems to have mainly 'stylistic' issues in mind. In short, for Wells as for many theorists, realism in animation is a formal and stylistic question.

It is important to note that the medium-specific understandings of media, and especially the kind of relationship between live-action and animation discussed above, are based on the 'reality' of their situation as two cultural discourses, one subordinated to the other. As such these theories all focus on the most popular forms of each medium. In this respect, medium-specific accounts of animation do not derive only from the accounts of theoreticians; there is a general assumption that animation is a medium for fantasy and imagination, or an entertainment medium suitable for children. The lay notion that animation as cartoons is inferior to and also totally contrary to live action seems rooted in the history of animation, its dominant practices and institutions.

Kristin Thompson (1980) shows how the two-sided relationship of animation to its greater 'cousin' live-action cinema greatly influenced the aesthetic of mainstream animated film, and led to marginalisation of other forms, aesthetics and practices of animation (1980:106). She explains that when the novelty of cinema as a mechanical process was exhausted in the early 1910s, and the spectator was familiar with the notion of the 'machine' in films, the ideology of '*realism* of the depicted events' in live-action cinema became dominant and accepted as routine (Ibid. *italics FHS*). The decline of cinema's freshness is thus located at the point when animation became a novelty to the spectator. Animation, much like live-action film, resulted from a mechanical process. This gave

it a self-reflexive aspect, pointing to the method of its construction. Further, animated cartoons were screened usually as 'fillers' combined with live action, which tacitly underlined the mechanical magic of the motion picture apparatus.<sup>22</sup> As Thompson points out, however, the idea of magic within animation in contrast to live-action shaped the notion that animation can do things that live-action cannot do. This led to the general assumption, she maintains, that animation *should not* do what live-action does. Subsequently, cartoon shorts did not utilise realism.<sup>23</sup>

It is unclear when critics, historians and audiences began to see animated cartoons as a distinct mode within the motion picture phenomenon. Thompson notes that around 1913 animated cartoons began to be shown fairly regularly on theatre programmes. She nevertheless believes that, but for the advent of the cel technique, they 'might have remained an occasional novelty' (Thompson, 1980:107). In other words, cel animation provided the conditions necessary to establish the cartoon as an industry partly because it enabled mass-production<sup>24</sup>. Animation was seen as a 'novelty', as was live-action film, so it had to integrate with live-action cinema and 'appeal to the same audience viewing habits' (Ibid. 108). She suggests that cartoons took a subsidiary position to live action because of their short running time (as a prelude to the main feature film) and what she calls the 'disruptive properties of animation'. Thus, by trivialising animation, Hollywood 'made it compatible with the classical cinema' (Ibid.).

With the advent of feature-length Disney animated films like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the aesthetic of mainstream animation showed increasing realism and a more 'cinematic' narrative. Cartoon and

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<sup>22</sup> Thompson points to Emil Cohl's film in which 'a live-action hand occasionally enters the frame to manipulate the figure' and also Winsor McCay's films *Little Nemo* and *Gretie the Dinosaur* in which McCay himself appears in live-action '...where he makes bets with sceptics that he can make drawings move'. (Thompson, 1980: 109)

<sup>23</sup> Here, of course, she acknowledges that Disney's impulse for realism is mainly related to his feature films, which were closer to live-action features, rather than his shorts, which were made at the same time as the features.

<sup>24</sup> Thomson looks into the ways cel technique saves both labour time and specialisation of labour in the animation studio, resulting ultimately in the formation of the 'factory' system in animation production between 1915-1917. This coincided with the establishment of the Hollywood motion picture production system (Thompson, 1980: 107-108).

Disney aesthetics became the only kind of animation known to the public. Wells criticises the hegemonic status of Disney animation that 'led animation to be understood in a limited way' and 'overshadowed other types of innovation and styles of animation which have extended the possibilities of the form and enabled other kinds of film to be made' (Wells, 1998:24). Disney's dominance, however, offered scant potential for animation to be seen as a legitimate medium for realism. The problem of realism may began when theorists started to attack Disney realism as 'incompatible' with the specificities of the medium, but it did not contribute to more serious treatments of the animation medium either. Disney films, as part of the 'dream factory' remained in the realms of fantasy, fairytale and imaginative worlds designed for entertainment.

It is essential, thus, to separate the two discourses: general perceptions of animation as frivolous, and its overt constructed-ness taken as anti-realist. The latter concerns this thesis, since the fact that animation is understood in a limited way as children's entertainment derives from its status as an industry second to live-action cinema. Views of animation in terms only of Disney-style aesthetics arose because it was at one time the only type of animation for mass distribution and consumption. The recent popularity of aesthetics such as 'anime' and various CGI that have distinct characteristics and do not resemble classic Disney, suggests that if other stylistics had been mass-produced and sold like Disney films they might have been just as popular.<sup>25</sup>

The question of stylistics and representational issues is therefore pivotal to this thesis. For theorists, as discussed, realism in animation has always been related to form and style, and as such subject to controversy. Wells' 'resistance' thesis on realism in animation is a stylistic argument. He seems to suggest that animation has an 'innate' resistance to resembling real life, while the creation of imaginary 'worlds' with characters, movements and events that do not necessarily resemble the real world is within reach of, and more readily expected of, animation. By

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<sup>25</sup> Obviously, there must be historical and socio/economical reasons behind this, but a more detailed investigation of why and how certain stylistics become mainstream cannot be undertaken in this thesis.

noting that all realistic approaches of animation are, essentially, styles 'about realism' (Wells, 1998:25), he rules out the possibility of creating a life-like experience using animation, or the need to try.

Wells and others seem correct in their assumption. Simulating life in animation, especially human movement and behaviour, is a real challenge, while filming the same type of event in live action, with real people in real spaces, is relatively easy. Live-action recording and creating something frame by frame are, after all, totally different methods of representation. It is correct to separate the two media, as they are able to do different things. It is also obvious that some things that are possible in animation are impossible in live action, unless using animation techniques, and *vice versa*. In other words, these conceptions about animation and live action refer to their 'normal' status and the way they are generally expected to function. It seems, however, that discussions of stylistics of realism have considered only 'Disney-esque' or more recent CGI approaches. Some areas, effects and approaches to stylistic realism do not conform to these mainstream realisms because they have alternative schemes with other, non-spectacular and non-entertainment purposes. The Aardman films under investigation, and many other kinds of realistic animation, fall into this grey area. Some of these alternative realist animations will be discussed in later chapters.

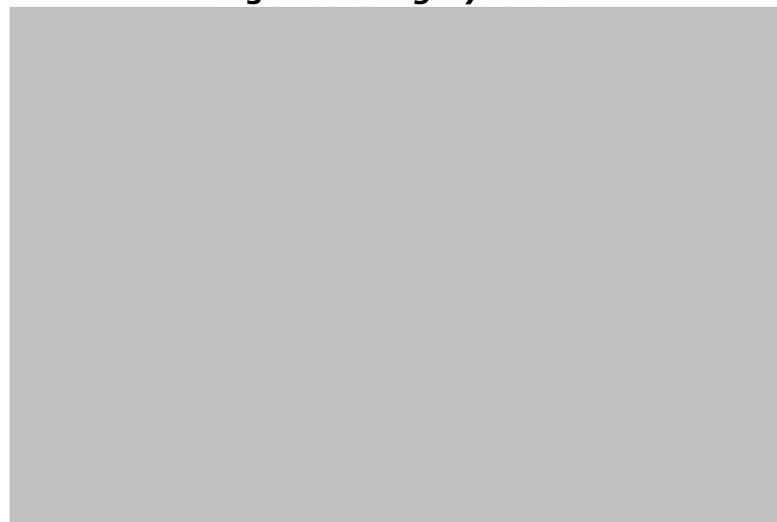
The allegedly problematic status of animation and realism deserves attention because of several overlooked points. Firstly, in assigning a specific 'faked-ness' to animation, the constructed-ness of the medium is extended to its 'content', whereas a faked form does not entail a false message. From this perspective, animation is no more constructed than any other medium. Painting, for example, is a construction using paint and brush, and remains 'faked' whether the depiction is 'realistic' or abstract. This faked-ness should not lead to the conclusion that painting mediates only faked meanings. Secondly, reducing the question of realism to that of visual stylistics, it may be argued that animation would 'resist' or 'give way' to realism as readily as other visual media. In this respect, animation has never been excluded from the visual realism of

painting, drawing or sculpture. Animation looks so faked because it is 'compared' and 'contrasted' to live-action film, and not necessarily life. It seems that in most discussions of animation and realism, as Rowley (2005) suggests, two subjects of copying life and copying live-action cinema are conflated (Rowley, 2005: 76). Most life-like animation visuals pose no problem unless they also copy very closely the codes and conventions of mainstream live-action film. In these cases, animation realism seems to become highly questionable to many theorists. As will be discussed, animation began to copy live-action from its infancy, but became problematic only when Disney's aesthetic attempted to emulate the contemporary mainstream live-action films.

Thus, one way to approach realism in animation is simply to analyse the graphic descent of the image, whether drawn or painted pictures or other effects and media in 2D, or animated images of puppets, clay, objects and other media that may be grouped as 3D. From this viewpoint, the formal realism of the animated film may be compared with the traditional media to which its single frames belong, including painting, drawing or sculpture. This category of realism includes discourses such as 'naturalism', 'photorealism' and 'illusionism', by which the image is measured against its visual verisimilitude to its referent in the real physical world. For example, it may be said that Frédéric Back's *Mighty River* (1993) is rendered in a naturalistic painting style that is very close to nature as its main subject, including river, water, fish and other components of the physical world (See figures 1.1 and 1.2). Images of nature and other elements such as industrial cities are represented very nearly as in the real world, but via an expressionist style of painting that does not attempt photo-realism, and leaves space for artistic expression by the filmmaker.



**Figure 1.1 *Mighty River***



**Figure 1.2 *Mighty River***

But there is more to animation than its single frames. Evidently, animation in any shape, genre and mode involves movement, something that is often stressed as its quintessential characteristic. Hence Norman McLaren's famous definition: 'Animation is not the art of drawings that move, but rather the art of movements that are drawn. What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame' (Solomon, 1987:11). He seems to imply that a single image of animation is less important than what happens in its relationship to other frames. Also, because an animated image is not a single frame of painting or sculpture, the subjects within the frame need to move. Further, most conventional animations tell a story. These basic facts

mean that animated movement and narration need a formal system within which to operate; a prominent example might be the codes of mainstream narrative live-action film. Animation as 'moving image' seems therefore naturally to copy the narrative codes and styles of live-action film.

Another way to measure the realism of the animated image, therefore, is to assess the extent to which an animated film in any mode, 2D or 3D, borrows from or avoids such conventions. *Mighty River*, aside from being realist in a certain visual painterly way, is presented and narrated in documentary style. It resembles a live-action 'nature' documentary, with a voiceover and a clear message, even relying heavily on live-action footage of natural settings and city locations. What is seen, in terms of the conventions of narrative, is created through the codes and conventions of editing and narration of live-action documentary, and even functions as such.<sup>26</sup> Yet the camera angles, shots and movements are all 'drawn' on a frame-by-frame basis, and as such the film's cinematographic language is a drawn and copied one.

With regard to narration and editing, it should be noted that evidently not all styles, modes and genres of live-action cinema share the same series of codes and conventions. While all kinds of styles and genres seem to be available to be copied in animation, most discussions of such codes and conventions intend a specific case: the long-established narrative code of Hollywood cinema known as 'continuity editing'. In this, an illusion of space and time unity is essentially created by the use of certain cinematic shots and editing. As the *Mighty River* example suggests, animation uses different sets of rules and stylistic conventions from different modes of live-action film, from mainstream fictional to non-fictional and documentary genres. In most animated forms, the use of cinematographic shots or viewing events through a cine camera's viewfinder is all too common. It is actually difficult to identify, or even to

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<sup>26</sup> Discussion of social realism and the way a film like this 'functions' as a vehicle to carry social messages is avoided here. Obviously, the themes and subject matter of animation can mediate something about the real social world, an aspect which is not the focus of this part of the investigation and will be addressed in Chapter Three.

imagine, an animated film that is not depicted from a camera's point of view. Further, as will be broadly discussed, avoiding the cine camera in 3D animation is impossible.

Other formal systems of narration and movements are perceivable in animation. The Zagreb School, for instance, is famous for creating most of its narrational space in a long-shot to extreme long-shot, avoiding dialogue and relying on sound effects and conventions of silent performance. Movement and the representation of the world and characters are also subject to considerable stylisation.<sup>27</sup> Yet it seems that any formal system adopted by animation still relies on other media systems of representation and narration, if not totally copying them.

In this respect, animation seems always to 'copy' a style or form already created in another medium such as drawing, painting or puppetry. In this respect, it is a 'copying' medium. This does not mean that it must be confined to the same 'functions' and contexts as the original media, which is another point of disagreement for theorists.<sup>28</sup> Wells' idea – that animation's total constructed-ness entails that it should resist realism of live action – may be evident in a slightly different tone in the discussion of 'basic properties' or 'the language' of animation by Yuri Lotman (1981, 37). Lotman observes that, if live-action film is considered as a 'moving photograph', this movement is a 'natural continuation of the basic material, which results in the illusion of reality becoming a major element in the language of the feature cinema' (Ibid.). For animation based on painting, sculpture or similar static forms of image making, introducing movement is a step towards increased 'conventionality', because an image such as this is not expected to move, unlike a still photograph which is a frozen moment of a real movement. He thinks that because the original frame of animated film, in any style or mode, is subject to abstraction, or is already copied from life, an animated image is always a

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<sup>27</sup> Zagreb, on the other hand is famous for its political and philosophical content. As such, it can be argued that it is a non-realist style that contains and mediates highly real themes and questions.

<sup>28</sup> This is the case, for instance, with puppet animation which was initially regarded as the continuation of puppet theatre, as Holman (Holman, 1975: 76) suggests and thus not suitable to do things outside that medium. This line will be explored further in the next chapter.

copy of a copy:

The basic property of the language of animation is that it operates with signs of signs; images of images are what moves on the screen in front of the spectator. Besides, if movement doubles the illusory nature of a photograph, it also tends to double the conventionality of the drawn frame. (Ibid.)

Lotman seems to imply that animation is always the movement of 'an already coded' image, which makes it naturally hybrid and intertextual in that it always refers to its 'original' source. Whether it is a child's painting beginning to move or a puppet animation, it has only to depend on its image sources and has no independent, totally new property. Animation may therefore reproduce the 'realism' or rather realistic-ness of the media it copies. Returning to the medium specificity discussion, it may be suggested that it is not possible, or even useful to seek a single essence for a medium like this, because it is basically a 'copying' medium.

It is true, however, that recreating movement or the frame-by-frame technique allows unrealistic, imaginary or abstract movements to be created as conveniently and plausibly within the medium as realistic, or naturalistic ones, if not easier. As Lotman argues, the movement of any sign adds to its conventionality or in other words its constructed-ness. If that movement itself is very naturalistic and close to live-action, it is still a conscious conventionality. Therefore, even if the essence of animation is founded on movement, the degrees of realism or abstraction of the movement by no means is prescribed by McLarens's definition.

## **Animation and Copying**

In anti-realist arguments, different aspects of copying in animation seem to be conflated. As discussed, animation on a single-frame basis, can and does copy real life like any other medium. This may result in different styles of image-making akin to other visual arts. Yet animation's

obsessive copying of 'mainstream' live-action codes and conventions seems to be regarded as the kind of realism that is both pervasive, and to be avoided.

Examining broad and general categories such as animation, live-action and realism does not help to clarify the situation. More specific studies of different forms of animation are needed, along with consideration of their relationship to their representational systems. Realism can mean different things in different contexts, even solely in terms of formal concerns, as sets of rules and codes of representation. The theorists who disapproved of Disney's realist aesthetic seem to have tried to prove that animation and realism are incongruent, based on their medium-specific polemics. This thesis claims that these 'generalised' theories implied that the aesthetics of 2D drawn cartoons should not be used in non-cartoon contexts, since if a real account of physical reality is to be shown, cartoon characters and the anarchic logic of their 'worlds' would not survive. This area offers interesting possibilities for analysing how the contexts in which a medium is used may progressively affect its aesthetics and *vice versa*. In the Aardman films in question, for instance, certain styles associated with certain kinds of realism are copied, and the relationship between their realist forms and themes will be examined in detail.

Returning to realism and copying in animation, it may be said that changes in the formal component of the early animated films as a 'form in making' significantly affected its aesthetics. The clash between the cartoon world and reality as well as realism began with the advent of sound in cinema and animation. In his study of the seven-minute American cartoon, Norman Klein (1993) shows that in its earlier forms, the medium of animation was barely influenced by live-action cinema. Live performance vaudeville was far more of an influence than silent comedy (Klein, 1993:19). Klein describes these as 'anti-realist' cartoons 'drawn specifically for the flat screen', continuing a tradition of graphic narrative that stems from 19th-century illustration. In this respect they were depicting imaginary worlds and actions operating self-sufficiently

from live-action cinema (Klein, 1993:2):

They were animated comic strips with a frantic life of their own. They borrowed very little from live action, except from silent comedy, and much from Chaplin, but not the point of view of an imaginary camera (as in Disney later on), nor the cartoon zooms, pans and cinematic simulacra. They did not pay homage to Griffith's montage, but rather to a montage of their own. (Ibid.)

The coming of sound to animation changed this graphic narrative – an expansion of the illustrated or printed page – and consequently silent cartoon characters like *Felix* could not survive. His 'world' was a non-aural one; 'Felix lived in a fantasy world, which was literally made up of parts of speech and punctuation and was visualised as in the comic strip. After the introduction of sound, he became clumsy and sugary' (Klein, 1993: 8). Sound animation then had other inevitable implications: the rubber-hose character replaces the line cartoon figures, new visual gags are possible, even inanimate objects now *sound* alive and most importantly, sound brings the gravity and consequently the logic of physical reality to animation. (Klein, 1993: 11)

Donald Crafton's (1993) study of silent-era animation before Disney's dominance focuses on the trajectory of changes within early animation. Crafton illustrates the random, haphazard nature of animation history as scattered 'experiments' rather than an institutional practice compared to that of live-action cinema of the same era.<sup>29</sup> He points out that a pen-and-ink character such as Felix admits its 'parodic' status in being a drawing, which implies a drawing of something.<sup>30</sup> Crafton identifies the stages of these transformations of early animation from 'lightning sketch genre' and 'the hand of the artist' to films with 'human characters and

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<sup>29</sup> Crafton believes that in the first 30 years, animation cartoon should be considered a form-in-the-making with lots of fluctuations. He does not believe, however, that they were 'meaningless or incomprehensible: the development of the animated cartoon from 1898 to 1928 was anything but orderly. Haphazard and serpentine are most apt characterisations. Like the history of the period, the films themselves present a welter of confusing plots, protagonists, and visual styles (Crafton, 1993: 347).

<sup>30</sup> For Crafton, Felix as the earliest established cartoon character highlights the early recognition of animation as a modernist art and Felix 'as the imagery of modernism'. (Crafton, 1967: 4)

animal stars' (Crafton, 1993:299). Yet he maintains that animation in its earliest decades was an entertainment-based practice with 'magic' and 'trick film' characters that moved gradually towards narration and storytelling. The change of role of the narrator from 'magician' to 'narrator' of moral tales, or the shift in subject of the film to *themes* other than the animator's relationship to his drawings is seen as a result of animation's need to adopt a more wide-reaching language by 'making the process of identification as universal as possible' (Ibid.). This, in his view, '...culminated in the rising interest in animals, long established as empathy-arousing objects in Western culture' (Ibid.).

For many theorists, the tendency for realism in animation begins with Disney's scheme for cinematic realism. For Crafton, it begins much earlier, with the introduction of the 'rotoscope' process used for Fleischer's *Ko-Ko the Clown*. He believes that the great difference between the two early characters of *Felix* and *Ko-Ko* may be understood in terms of the realism/abstraction of their movement; while *Felix* can be seen as a 'living being' with an 'abstract and choppy' movement, *Ko-Ko's* movement is influenced by gravity and 'to a greater degree an index of real motion'. *Felix* is thus 'innocent of any such mimetic tendencies' whereas *Ko-Ko* may be considered 'an index of a real personality' (Crafton, 1993:338). Here Crafton clearly suggests that realism can be seen as copying physical reality, but does not conflate it with cinematic codes of realism.

From early sound animation to Disney's feature-length animated films, the cartoon travelled far. The animated flat form of 1928 'graphic narratives' thus metamorphoses into the earliest *Mickey* sound-cartoons, maturing into the 'full-animation' of 1936 when the cel-animation-based Studio System became established practice in the US industry.<sup>31</sup> (Klein, 1993)

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<sup>31</sup> Klein also studies the forms of American cartoon after this, his typologies such as such as chase cartoon, zip-crash school, screwball noir...

These systematic resemblances did not end with image production itself. According to Thompson, they involved all elements of the 'industry': 'the star system, the dominance of the story, the companies' trademark, genres and the use of elaborate spectacle' (Thompson, 1980:106). The reasons for the 'Disney-fication' of all commercial animation are far more complex than a sheer formal implication, as animation as an 'institution' was formed alongside live-action cinema. Yet for many these changes meant a divergence or deviation of animation's 'true' essence: 'cartoons became *films*, leaving behind their *origins* as drawings which came to life under the eyes of their artist-demiurge... Comic inventions were drawn ever more often from situations and accidents, rather than *metamorphoses* or the sudden activation of inanimate objects (Bendazzi, 1994:83).

Some early film theoreticians, such as Eisenstein, displayed a philosophical tendency to consider animation a 'liberating form'. In its earliest form, animation was defined as 'animated drawings' and was therefore abstracted to the movement of line. It was believed to have an autonomous eminence, a 'plasmatic' quality so admired by Eisenstein in Disney's early *Mickey* films (Leyda, 1988:21). Wells also assumes that the introduction of realist aesthetics to animation robbed it not only of its freedom of form, but also of its liberal or indeed anarchic laws that made it a medium in which virtually anything was possible. He observes that Felix lived in an unrealistic, 2D world, where everything was possible and morals not an issue. The main characters in Disney feature films, however, were real human beings in the real world, albeit in fairytale contexts with imaginary events and creatures. This meant that morals, ethics and the rules of reality had to be observed (Wells, 1998: 21). Copying cinema therefore robbed animation not only of its freedom of form, but also of its self-sufficiency of themes and contents. In other words, Wells believes that Disney's 'hyper-realist' aesthetics placed freedom of imagination under siege.<sup>32</sup> For those who regarded

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<sup>32</sup> Some critics see in this an escape from animation's essentially abstract essence to an imposed realistic form, while for others it fills a gap in the formula of animation making. Michael Barrier borrows from Walter Kerr who called silent comedy films like those of Chaplin and Lloyd 'a fantasy of fact', in which the special properties of silent film transform fact recorded by the camera into fantasy; however he believes that though a cartoon

animation's anarchic form as a potentially liberating force, these changes and transformations were not always welcomed. As discussed, cartoons began to look at live-action cinema for inspiration.

In what follows, Wells' thesis of hyper-realism to describe Disney's realist (realistic) style will be examined. Compared to Rowley's method of studying realism in 2D drawn animation, this study will attempt to scrutinise more closely Disney's realist formal systems. This should afford deeper understanding of realism in animation as a stylistic choice and the immense diversity it can offer, one of which is Disney's.

While studying the historical reasons for such aesthetic hegemony is necessary, other/non-Disney discourses of realism in animation should not be ignored from the side of animation theory. Consideration of those 'other' discourses has been a vital aspect of this study, since the Aardman films in question, with all their obsessions with realist aesthetics, seem to function more or less outside the dominance of Disney 'realism'. As a result, it will be demonstrated that animation can and indeed does copy live-action as much as life, and that such copying can take different forms and aspects totally outside the Disney discourse.

## **Disney Aesthetics and the Thesis of Hyper-Realism**

What Wells, borrowing from Eco (1986:7 cited in Wells, 1998: 25), terms 'hyper-realism' in Disney feature film aesthetics, is based on how they copy, correspond to or approximate the live-action codes of representation of reality. Such verisimilitude-based aesthetics do not make a Disney film look exactly like the real world, in that they 'move beyond traditional modes of realist representation' to achieve a status which is neither a replica of reality nor totally free from the laws of the reality, as did early animation (Wells, 1998: 27). Wells refers to Andrew

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character like Felix could do virtually anything, the lack of 'foundation in fact' prevented audiences believing in its reality. (Barrier, 1999: 3) He proposes that the coming of sound and progress towards more realistically believable cartoon characters added 'the missing ingredient' – plausibility – that brought to life the fantasy, tracing most of this 'dramatic improvement' through Disney (Barrier, 1999: 4).

Darley's thesis of second-order realism (1997) in the computer graphic image, in which an over-determined account of reality is constructed that is 'simultaneously realistic but beyond the orthodoxies of realism'. He labels this kind of animation 'over-illusionism' (Wells, 1998: 27), and eventually suggests that Disney's hyper-realism is the yardstick by which other kinds of realism can be measured. The more an animated form departs from Disney aesthetics, therefore, the more it may be defined as unrealistic (Ibid.). He summarises the aesthetics of 'hyper-realist' animation thus:

- 1- The design, context and action within the hyper-realist film approximates with, and corresponds to the design, context and action within the live-action film's representation of reality
- 2- The characters, objects and environment within the hyper-realist animated film are subject to the conventional physical laws of the 'real' world.
- 3- The 'sound' deployed in the hyper-realist animated film will demonstrate diegetic appropriateness and correspond directly to the context from which it emerges (e.g. a person, object or place must be represented by the sound it actually makes at the moment of utterance, at the appropriate volume etc.)
- 4- The construction, movement and behavioural tendencies of the 'body' in the hyper-realist animated film will correspond to the orthodox physical aspects of human beings and creatures in the 'real' world'. (Wells, 1998: 25-6)

In short, the four areas of Disney's version of realism according to Wells, are that the animated world should physically resemble that of real life; it should conform to its physical laws; sound should be appropriate in terms of context and volume, and the body should look and behave in a 'real' way. These categories are a useful basis for studying other kinds of realism in animation. As they stand, however, they do not explain why, if in Disney animation the world is depicted so closely and in such a point-by-point manner, it should be seen as hyper-realistic. Wells describes in detail why Disney realism is not an exact replica of reality, but falls

somewhere between the laws of reality and the freedom of early animated cartoons. This is a fairly crucial element of Disney animation, and may be seen simply as the 'hybridity' of Disney realism, in that it borrows from and relies on short cartoon stylistics and logics to the same extent as live-action's representation of the real world. What prevents Disney realism resembling reality overall is 'exaggeration' and its impossible, fairytale contexts, which Wells terms 'exaggerated reality'. Rowley believes that Disney's version of realism, in which fantasy and reality co-exist, should be seen to represent 'the height not of reality, but of a particular reality' (2005: 69). The challenges of creating the effect of reality in drawn animation have led Disney to seek strategies that emphasise and exaggerate some aspects of reality in order to create a heightened effect. This has led eventually to its orthodox set of conventions (Ibid.).

General theorising on the evolution of aesthetics since Disney's first feature-length animated film in 1937 presents an extreme challenge. Though Disney has always tried to imitate or at least incorporate the most spectacular effects, codes and conventions of contemporary Hollywood live-action cinema, the formal components of its realism have changed over the decades. It becomes increasingly difficult, or impossible, to define aesthetics that are specifically 'Disney'.

In his four criteria, Wells places more emphasis on how Disney tackles the notion of copying from the reality of the physical world than on how it copies from mainstream live-action film. This problem is what Rowley also points at (Ibid. 76). It is, of course important to note that the representation of the world as it is may derive from live-action footage of real events and places. As Rosenstone notes, in our era, most people's experiences come from watching films about unknown places and events rather than actually seeing them (Rosenstone, 1995: 22). Though they are very different, the line between the ways in which the human eye and the camera perceive the world is fine. When Disney developed the multi-plane camera to add perspective to backgrounds and planes of the image, it facilitated copying real life because perspective and three-

dimensionality is a property of the real world. Yet, the representation of perspective and depth of field is also a function of the cine camera.

The same can be said of the use of the rotoscope to create realistic movement; actors filmed for rotoscoping were 'performing' in a certain manner and observing certain codes and conventions. In other words, they were performing a stylised type of movement such as dancing, not moving as in real life, so their movement can belong both to the real physical world *and* to live-action film. This was a reality stylised by the convention of performance and seen from a cine camera for animation. In this respect there is little difference in reality index between rotoscoping and live action. As such, Disney realism stands between real life and the obsessive 'cinematographic' representation of it with which, importantly, some of the established codes and conventions of the short cartoon are blended. After all, the films are still cartoons. The many ingredients of these aesthetics will be briefly discussed.

Early Disney films display a sharp contrast in the way human and animal characters are represented. This division can be more conveniently registered as 'cartoon' and 'non-cartoon' characters, since many early film characters, such as the dwarves in *Snow White*, are in fact humans with comic faces and round and flexible cartoonish bodies<sup>33</sup>. Birds and jungle animals are depicted as cute and cuddly while Snow White and Prince Charming are rotoscoped humans; they are not in fact 'merged' with the rest of the film world (See figures 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5). Leonard Maltin refers to the problem that rotoscoping brought to the formal make-up of the film, which separated the two categories of character (Maltin, 1987: 56). Barrier also mentions the huge difference in characterisation between Snow White and Grumpy<sup>34</sup>. These non-rotoscoped characters have simple faces formed from a few lines and

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<sup>33</sup> This difference can be seen as 'rotoscoped' versus 'non-rotoscoped' characters in early Disney films, too.

<sup>34</sup> Barrier says:

In Tytla's animation of Grumpy, that gap between "inner" and "outer" – that gap that Stanislavski called upon the human actor to bridge – simply didn't exist. Whatever passed through Grumpy's mind, it seemed, was simultaneously visible in his face and body, through acting of a kind that was possible only with a cartoon character. (Barrier, 1999: 208)

bodies with no exaggeration or extraordinary physical traits. They are also, as Wells has shown, subject to physical laws. Yet the stepmother/witch is shown with far more stylised, exaggerated and visible facial traits than the 'good' characters. In other films such as *Dumbo* (1941), the anthropomorphised animals are highly cartoonish characters with exaggerated traits drawn from both humans and animals (Figure 1.6 and 1.7). In *Bambi* (1942), on the other hand, the animals resemble, and act like real animals, though they are still cartoon animals (Figure 1.8). In *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), all the creatures, animals and even 'humans' in the dream episode apart from Alice and her sister are created within various types of cartoon aesthetic (Figures 1.9 and 1.10).



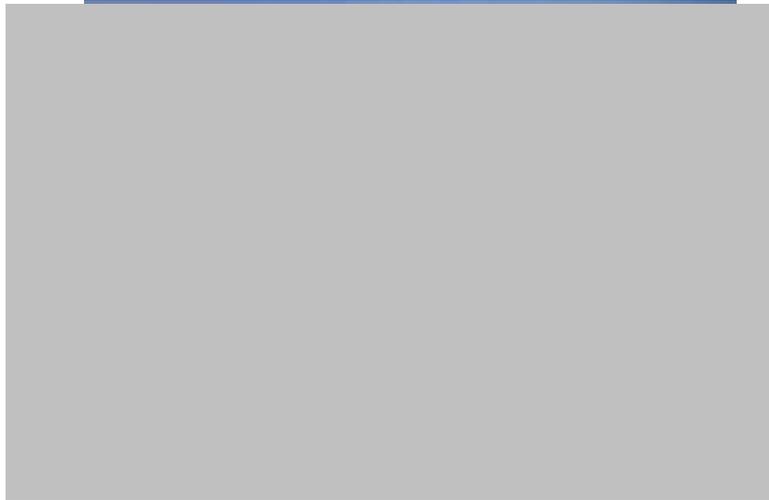
**Figure 1.3 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs***



**Figure 1.4 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs***



**Figure 1.5 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs***



**Figure 1.6 *Dumbo***



**Figure 1.7 *Dumbo***



**Figure 1.8 *Bambi***



**Figure 1.9 *Alice in Wonderland***



**Figure 1.10 *Alice in Wonderland***

It is evident that Disney tried to create a more congruent world in which rotoscoped humans and cartoon characters could coexist. From *Snow White* (1937) to *Cinderella* (1950), Disney aesthetics move gradually towards a more unified style. It is important to note that the impact of forms and conventions of theatre, operetta and Shakespeare's romantic works explicit in *Snow White*, as Allen has shown (1999:40-41), are replaced by an over-reliance on live-action film conventions. The action then becomes increasingly dependent on the live-action footage. As Barrier explains, *Cinderella* was shot completely in live action before being animated: 'However much *Cinderella* might resemble *Snow White* as a story, and even as a film, Disney was making it in a very different way' (Barrier, 1999: 400). On the other hand, the rotoscoped characters were not the empty templates seen in *Snow White*. They served as a guideline and cartoon traits were added, as Solomon explains:

...As the animators studied the live-action frames, they discovered that the movements of the human form were even more complicated and subtle than they had imagined. But tracing live-action produces dull, lifeless animation; the poses and expressions must be exaggerated and caricatured to work effectively on the screen. The live action footage could be a useful reference – or an annoying hindrance.' (Solomon, 1989: 188)

Moving forward to New Disney films including *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Tarzan* (1999), the categories of cartoon and non-cartoon characters begin to fuse more explicitly. Increased exaggeration and stylisation of body and especially of face, similar to cartoon characters, become evident. Such caricatured traits are more versatile in demonstrating heightened feelings, facial gestures and lip synch that are coded and received as realistic (See figures 1. 11, 1.12 and 1.13). In short, they approach more closely caricatures of human beings, retaining a close resemblance to reality while emphasising and projecting those parts that will be used for movement. These caricatured characters, with large eyes and exaggerated body features,

nevertheless maintain a safe relationship with cartoon aesthetics. The animals in these newer films, however, become more cartoonish, and the way in which humans and animals are depicted comes more closely together, creating a more homogenised aesthetic. In line with other mainstream Hollywood films, however, these characters show a 'spectacular' added element that Snow White and Cinderella lacked. The term 'hyper-realism' therefore seems to find a more appropriate use in the context of what might be called New Disney (as in New Hollywood), in which both stories and characters live in a more 'real' world but simultaneously perform extraordinary, super-human acts, in Wells' terms, 'exaggerated reality'. This is true of *Pocahontas* (1995), which he, referring to Jeffrey Katzenberg's comment, describes as 'the studio's most live-action oriented cartoon feature' (Wells, 1998:26). The eponymous heroine dives safely and plausibly '300 feet from a cliff into a pool of water' (Ibid.)

In all these examples, depending on the corresponding aesthetics of contemporary live-action cinema, Disney borrows from and re-creates cinematic conventions not only of camera movements and editing, but also of cinematic codes 're-appropriated' for a fictional, hybrid world consisting of humans, animals and anthropomorphised objects. Eventually, Disney would use many different aspects of the so-called realist aesthetics of live-action, but the way in which they copy physical reality in a spectacular and exaggerated manner, is far from a neutral replica of reality.



**Figure 1.11 *Beauty and the Beast***



**Figure 1.12 *Pocahontas***



**Figure 1.13 *Tarzan***

It seems, then, that the Disney formula of realism is just one possible way of hybridising realist stylistics, and as such is not the only yardstick by which to measure other realisms. Wells's four criteria of realism, while to some extent elucidating, are not specific enough to be applied only to Disney. Stephen Rowley's suggestions for a methodology to analyse aesthetic realism in 2D animation seems a good starting point. In his paper *Life produced in drawings: preliminary comments upon realism in animation*, Rowley re-examines traditional realist theories of cinema like those of Bazin and Kracauer, comparing them to the ways in which writers of animation have dealt with realism in cartoon/drawn animation. He argues that most realist theories of cinema rely heavily on the specific relationship of live-action film to the 'real', and proposes a preliminary sketch of a realist theory of animation by adopting the same approach (Rowley, 2005: 65). Rowley does not seem to agree with Wells' 'yardstick' proposal of Disney's hyper-realist aesthetics. He argues that any type of animated realism would seek to deploy strategies to translate physical reality into certain substitutes that create the same impression. It may be gathered from Rowley's account that Disney's aesthetic, much like that in many other animations, is still 'abstracted' from reality, with some parts emphasised and some played down to create a set of codes and conventions that are used to 'imply' a substitute for reality. In this process, then, Disney uses, copies and borrows from both live-action and reality. Disney realism is still abstracted, coded and hybridised, a combination of formulae that creates a sense of realism by different means, the most apparent of which is cinematic realism.

To show that Wells' 'appropriateness' thesis is not always sufficient, Rowley gives several examples in which there is no 'realistic' correspondence between the image and its sound. He also shows that the use of non-diegetic sound is present everywhere in Disney. For instance, there are many scenes, such as in *Snow White*, in which a movement is either accompanied by a musical sound effect or is not accompanied by any sound <sup>35</sup>(Rowley, 2005:75). He also argues that appropriateness

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<sup>35</sup> Rowley recognises two modes of sound, which accompany the actions in Disney, musical and ordinary 'appropriate' sounds. In *Snow White* he observes :

cannot always be an accurate measure to determine the realism of an animated film, since even in the most cartoonish or unrealistic characters like Donald Duck, the sound actor's accompaniment *can* be interpreted as an equivalent cartoon character of a talking duck (ibid.). It may always be argued, however, that the realism of sound even in a live-action film is a highly coded concept; it draws heavily on fictional/conventional uses of sounds that are accepted by the audience as real or realistic sound.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that Rowley is trying to show that Wells' ideas of 'appropriateness' and 'correspondence to context' are not always applicable or specific enough to belong exclusively to the realist aesthetics of Disney.

Rowley suggests that other treatments of reality in animation should not be dismissed as marginal, since Disney's set of conventions is just one possibility of many that are equally capable of dealing with issues of reality in different degrees, levels and ways. Wells is also a proponent of this, and does not offer such essentialist prescription for animation anywhere in his book. Rowley agrees with Wells' thesis of 'appropriateness' and 'correspondence to context' principle, when he argues that realism in animation is not about the indexical bond between the image and the real world, but its specific substitutes which are understood and accepted by the audience as real (Ibid.70). Finally, most of the examples on which Rowley's arguments are built draw on the very first Disney feature film. As suggested earlier, Disney animated features have changed so much over time that more recent films should be evaluated in order to assess Disney realism. The examples of the uses of sound in *Snow-white* which is so much based on orchestral music rather

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What is interesting in the context of realism, however, is how purely "musical" the sound outside of the song sequence is. While sound effects are not entirely absent, they tend to be discreet and are far less frequent than normally would be expected, with music usually covering the absence. For example, as Snow White looks down on the dwarfs' cottage she bends back a branch and releases it: there is no *swish* or creak of wood. She then proceeds with a host of animals to the cottage door, but there are no animals or woodland noises to be heard, only the lush orchestral score. (Rowley, 2005: 75-6)

<sup>36</sup> I shall come to the principles of sound in fiction and non-fiction film in chapter four when examining the conventions of observational sound as opposed to its usage and conventions in fictional modes of cinema.

than sound effects cannot be applied to many later films of Disney<sup>37</sup>. In his thesis of Hyper-realism Wells seem to have considered Disney with regard to more recent films which were emulating newer models of Hollywood formula.

Despite this, Rowley seems to be correct in suggesting the need for a methodology that will accommodate a 'spectrum' of different types of realism, which may later be identified in any given animated film either individually or in combination. Obviously, all elements may not appear in one film; this is how different degrees, qualities and hybrids of realism are created. As seen, his argument of realism is based on two main criteria. His first criterion analyses *not* how close a copy of physical reality is maintained in an animated film, but rather how appropriate substitutions for reality are translated into cartoon aesthetics. His second asks to what extent they are accepted and received by the 'audience' as being close to the experience of real life. Rowley's ranges of 'realism' include:

**Visual realism:** The extent to which animated environments and characters are understood by the audience as looking like environments and characters from the actual physical world.

**Aural realism:** The extent to which the sounds of animated environments and characters are understood by the audience as resembling the sounds of environments and characters from the actual physical world.

**Realism of motion:** The extent to which characters move in a fashion that is understood by the audience as resembling the way characters move in the actual physical world.

**Narrative and character realism:** The extent to which the events and characters of animated film are constructed to make the audience believe they are viewing events and characters that actually exist.

**Social realism:** The extent to which the animated film is constructed to make the audience believe that the world in which the events take place

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<sup>37</sup> This is something that Rowley also admits, saying that the soundtrack in Disney's later animated features had a much closer diegetic relation to the imagery. (Rowley, 2005: 76)

is as complex and varied as the real world.' (Ibid.70)

The main basis for Rowley's realist criteria is the way different components of realism are 'made to make the audience believe or accept' that they are near to their real-life experience of them. Yet sole reliance on audience reception does not seem a very clear basis. Rowley's notions in fact stress the highly coded-nature of realism in fictional 2D animation, by which the audience is conditioned to receive certain effects as realistic or fictional. Moreover, Rowley's thesis of 'resemblance as understood by audience' is not far from that of Wells's 'verisimilitude theory', in that both correctly point at the coded-ness of realist aesthetics in animation. The point seems rather to identify the extent to which such coded-ness is processed from physical reality, or derives from duplications of previously-coded realism of live-action cinema that generations of audiences have accepted as 'natural' representation.

If only fiction/2D animations are considered, Rowley's last category, 'social realism' again seems fair. With regard to animated films with non-fictional or documentary tendencies, as in this thesis, it does not seem sufficiently clear or cover all aspects of social realism. Further, this general category cannot adequately deal with the types of animated film that deal with issues of social realism by other means and deploying other aesthetics. The world constructed in a film such as Tim Webb's *A is for Autism* (1992) does not seem visually to show anything near the experience of any audience in the real world. It does, however, show the complexities of a mental condition using signs and traces such as the use of autistic people's drawings and voices, while animating those drawings and trying to make them resemble what the sufferer describes. It is doubtful that such a film can come visually anywhere near the actual experience of autism. Realism of a social content may adopt a vast range of aesthetic possibilities to mediate itself, not all of which are necessarily realistic. The realism of this film is not resemblance-based, and it is certain that the filmmaker tries to convey a 'true' message about realities that have no visual equivalent, rather than claiming to show the actual

state of the sufferers' minds<sup>38</sup>. In this respect, Rowley's thesis on social realism seems underdeveloped, since it does not sufficiently address the relationship between aesthetics and the social contents they might be representing<sup>39</sup>.

In spite of this, Rowley's categories of realism are useful and able to deal with different aspects of realism in most cases of 2D drawn animation. While his first four criteria fall under what this thesis designates as 'formal/stylistic realism', his last accords with 'content' realism. However, as addressed in the Introduction with reference to Bordwell and Thompson (2006, 56), the issues of content and form are not cleanly separable. The way they are used in a film as a system implies that issues such as narrative, or even character development, inform both criteria. Yet the study of realism in the Aardman films under investigation will be based more or less on such criteria, which are of course broken into more detailed sub-divisions. The method by which the films will be investigated, in terms of their realism and other related issues, will benefit from Rowley's attempts to identify and recognise different levels, categories and combinations of realism. However, as will be elaborated, this group of Aardman films differs vastly from most conventional 2D, drawn cartoon and even 3D puppet animations. Breaking down any animation into Metzian 'channels of information' (Andrew, 1976, 217) or evaluating its components, as does Rowley, mean that virtually infinite structural patterns may be created even within the specific area of realism. Also, as Rowley points out, in some cases it is possible to produce certain levels of realism in animation by combining a mixture of both realist and non-realist components. This implies that not all channels of information or building blocks of aesthetic realism need necessarily and individually be realist. In creating a realist aesthetic, what seems more important is the interaction between those initial building blocks that, in turn, may create more complicated notions such as 'narrative strategies', 'genres' or 'styles'. As Rowley argues, receiving

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<sup>38</sup> The social reality and other aspects of content realism will be examined in Chapter Three

<sup>39</sup> Of course, Rowley himself proposes his work as a starting point, suggestive of how a theory of realism in 2D/Drawn animation should work.

certain forms as realist, to whatever degree, would in animation, to a greater extent than in other forms of moving image, be more a matter of codes and conventions.

Rowley's theory concentrates on the issues of realism solely in 2D drawn animation. Wells' hyper-realist model, also seems more relevant to mainstream Disney-esque animation. As an extension to Wells' hyper-realist animation, this thesis will seek to identify and study a different type of realism among Aardman's short animated films, which avoids any exaggeration, abstraction or approximation. This model, as opposed to the 'spectacular' aesthetics of hyper-realist aesthetics, is constructed round a 'neutral', non-spectacular and point-to-point depiction of the world and its events. This will be termed 'simulational realism' and will be investigated and introduced in depth at the end of the next chapter, following an examination of the specificities of puppet and clay animation and its different aspects as opposed to those of 2D and cartoon realism.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Realism and Three-Dimensional Animation**

As a major sub-category of animation, 3D animation incorporates various techniques and styles, not all of which will be discussed here. Many under-the-camera techniques, including sand animation, cut-out and pin-screen fall into the broader category of 3D animation. The major techniques under scrutiny in this section are clay and puppet animation, which represent the main body of the Aardman films under investigation.

As indicated in Chapter One, like many non-mainstream or non-cartoon forms of animation, 3D animation has been subject to two discriminations. Firstly, in defining animation, only its most common form is considered: the 2D drawn cartoon. Most of the debates surrounding animation aesthetics, including realism, thus disregard the specific properties of many other forms of animation. Secondly, a medium-specific perceptive based on such a generic definition of animation prescribes missions for all types of animation, even if the basic specific traits of the common form are absent. It has been suggested that these 'generic' definitions of animation create more problems than are solved. Any discussion of realism in animation should take into account the associated technique and medium, as each raises specific issues about, and has different relationships with the representation of reality.

This thesis avoids dogmatist accounts of animation as a medium specific polemic. It proposes that a more intensive analysis of the medium is necessary in order to understand realism in these Aardman examples as 3D, clay and puppet films. Based on such reasoning, this chapter will offer an in-depth analysis of the specificities of the medium of puppet and clay animation. The question of realism in terms of copying live-action film is central to this study. It will be demonstrated, with reference to Frierson's (1994) study of 3D and US clay animation, that what this thesis terms *cinematic realism* is at the heart of most forms of 3D animation, and is among specificities shared by both media. This, it will

be argued, is true even from a medium-specific viewpoint. It will also be suggested that the idea of 'puppet realism', as a specific property of puppet animation, has a pivotal place in studying realism in 3D /puppet animation.<sup>40</sup>

Eventually, the research will propose the thesis of hybridity in the formal aesthetics of puppet animation, which may, in certain circumstances, be extended to other forms of animation.

## **Cinematic Realism at the Heart of Puppet Animation**

The early history of puppet animation, at least in terms of 'trick film' and stop-motion special effects, seems to be integrated with that of live-action cinema. The general view, shared by Klein (1993), is that the emergence of animated film is rooted in some popular traditions 'including comic strips, stage, and journalism' (Crafton, 1993: 9). Donald Crafton (1993), however, believes that a more convincing source is cinema itself, and the 'trick film' genre initiated by George Méliès (Ibid. 9). Eventually, he proposes that 'the iconography and primitive narrative structure of animation' developed from those films that began to use the stop-motion substitution technique (Ibid.).

Historically, most 3D mainstream animation in the form of puppet films, clay animation, and stop-motion animation as 'special effects' has had an easier relationship with live-action cinema, at times blending unnoticeably with it. This is not true of 2D drawn animation which, when combined with live-action film is typically used for didactic purposes. One of its major uses is for animated diagrams and graphs to explain

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<sup>40</sup> This approach to puppets is immensely reliant on non-traditional notions of puppets and more pertinent to copying from live-action film. It therefore relates to the ways in which humans behave in real life, in fictional or factual situations, or may be a live-action record of their actions. It will be demonstrated that a realistically-rendered puppet intended to behave as, and resemble, a real human being may take its appearance and movement either from real life or a live-action record of humans. In each case, their movement and behaviour may be, depending on context, a natural or coded performance.

concepts such as mechanical systems or human body processes<sup>41</sup> in documentaries. These animated sections are normally separate from the main body of the film. In contrast, stop-motion animation has had diverse functions in live-action film, beginning with its use for magical effects in the 'trick films' of Méliès. Another early use was for brief episodes integrated within a live-action film, primarily as dream scenes or fantastic events. An early example is *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Wallace McCutcheon and Edwin S Porter, 1906).

Thus, since the early days of cinema, stop-motion animation has been merged with the main body of live-action films as special effects showing imaginary events or creatures such as dinosaurs<sup>42</sup> (Frierson, 1994:98). It was no coincidence that masters of stop-motion and special effects were also puppet animators.<sup>43</sup> This use of stop-motion animation as a self-effacing device in live action contexts plays a major role in the special effect culture of American movies, and might in itself explain how 3D animation can integrate with the live-action image. In contemporary mainstream live-action film, the increasing use of 3D CGI animation to incorporate fantastic and imaginary phenomena in the most believable manner can be seen as a continuation of the tradition of stop-motion special effect.<sup>44</sup> Puppet animation existed from the very early stages of cinema. In *Dreams of Toyland* (Arthur Melbourne Cooper, 1908), officially considered the first puppet film, toys come to life in a boy's dream (Bendazzi, 1994: 40).

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<sup>41</sup> Winsor McCay's *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918), normally regarded as the earliest documentary, includes an animated demonstration of an actual historical event, the sinking of a passenger ship.

<sup>42</sup> Frierson cites two early silent films that used animated clay dinosaurs: Buster Keaton's *The Three Ages* (Metro, 1923) and *Monsters of the Past* (Pathe Review, 1928).

<sup>43</sup> In films including *The Lost World* (1960), *King Kong* (1933) and *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) special effects pioneer Willis O'Brien used realistically modelled creatures that were animated to move and seem part of the live-action world (Holman, 1975:25). Another puppet animator, Ray Harryhausen, created special effects for live-action cinema fairytales including *Little Red Riding Hood* (1949), *Hansel and Gretel* (1951) and *The Story of King Midas* (1953) (Lord and Sibley, 1998:48). He also made a series of science-fiction and fantasy films that mixed live action with stop-motion photography of models and puppets (Ibid.).

<sup>44</sup> It is interesting to see the use of these two categories of functions in live-action films such as Spielberg's 1993 *Jurassic Park*. The dinosaurs in the park and incubation room are 'interwoven' into the film's body as part of the real world, but 2D animated cartoons are also used during a lecture to a group of archaeologists to show dinosaur DNA in a mosquito.

Returning to Chapter One's argument on animation and copying, two discrete categories of realism in 3D animation may be identified. These are *image realism* or naturalism, defined as an attempt to depict life-like imagery, and *cinematic realism*, defined as the adoption of established codes and conventions of narrative live-action film maintained only by a cine camera. In the latter, puppet animation in forms ranging from extremely naturalistic to stylised have never avoided engagement with cinematic realism. As early as 1911, Ladislav Starevitch depicted an extremely naturalistic rendition of beetles mating. The following year, Starevitch's first narrative film *The Cameraman's Revenge* reveals in theme and narrative structure a penchant not only for naturalism, but also for cinematic realism. Though it depicts insects, it closely mocks the narrative conventions of contemporary black and white silent live-action films<sup>45</sup>.

Moving ahead, the geometric shapes and mechanical body parts and joints of George Pal's wooden Puppatoons are not at all realistic. Pal devised the substitution technique, using different puppet heads to show various facial expressions and produce rough lip-synching. He also liked to parody live-action genres and narrative styles, as in *Western Daze* (1941), which alluded to Westerns or cowboy movies (Solomon, 1989: 171). Pal's puppets have been described as 'highly stylised with movements that have an almost mechanical precision' (Lord and Sibley, 1998:31), though this was at time believed to be to the detriment of 'artistic poetics' (Bendazzi, 1994:107). It may be said, however, that Pal's abstract, overtly wooden puppets were moving and acting realistically.

Czech puppet animation, particularly the works of Jiri Trnka, seems rooted in the country's grand tradition of puppet theatre. Trnka was initially a puppet maker and puppeteer. Bendazzi believes

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<sup>45</sup> For example, the keyhole scene in which a grasshopper spies on the affectionate beetle and dragonfly may be considered the equivalent of a keyhole shot in a contemporary live-action film. In the absence of close-up lenses, the keyhole shot seems to function as a focus on individual subjects and acts. In addition, the use of explanatory inter-titles and realistic props and scene design, alludes consciously to contemporary live-action films.

Czechoslovakia's cultural tradition of wooden puppets made it easy for it to enter the realm of cinema:

There is no visible hiatus between puppet theatre and animated puppet cinema. The transition occurred smoothly, with those minimal changes required by the new means of communication but with the same acting and scene design. (Bendazzi, 1994:168)

Trnka seems deliberately to have adopted such theatre-based aesthetics. He saw his puppets as symbolic beings, dismissing the idea of making them resemble real people in movement, facial expression or lip-synch. They were *puppets* and behaved as such. According to the requirements of the story, their design might vary from caricature-based to more abstract, especially in terms of face; nevertheless, they have solid painted faces, with unblinking eyes and fixed mouths. Bendazzi regards them as 'true' puppets that did not try to look like human beings (Bendazzi, 1994:170). He sees in Trnka's method a notion of puppet faces as theatrical masks, which were therefore 'to be fixed and sacred as masks' (Ibid.). Bendazzi regards these puppets, 'characterised by contained expressions and almost stately movements' as superior to those of artists who 'loosened' their puppets' joints, making them look like 'animated drawings' (Ibid.). In this, he implies that lip-synch and facial expression are attributes of 2D drawn cartoons.

Bendazzi observes that in Trnka's puppets, human expressions were suggested by framing and lighting, and proposes that Trnka marked 'the passage...from external representations to internal dramatic experiences' (Ibid.). This separation of *external* and *internal* representation seems to accord with Halas and Bachelor's view of animation (see Chapter One) as a medium to represent 'metaphysical reality' and what things 'mean' rather than how they 'look'. In Bendazzi's view, puppet animators may be seen in terms of approach as 'Trnka vs. pre-Trnka', in which Trnka's

method is considered as an iconoclastic rebellion against what Bendazzi considers as 'traditional' puppets<sup>46</sup>.

Trnka's films were greatly influenced by fairytales and epic stories of Czech folklore. The feature-length animated *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1959) is a highly theatre-driven representation of a story that was originally a play, with heroic theatre-based characters created using meticulous attention to detail. The 'cinematic language' of contemporary live-action film is also a huge influence, especially in those Trnka films with modern themes. He drew heavily on cinematic codes and genres, especially in films with more current themes such as *The Cybernetic Grandmother* (1963) or *The Devil's Mill* (1951). The latter, for example, has a narrative structure akin to live-action film. The set design of the woods and mill, the use of dramatic camera angles and cinematic lighting, and the suspense-filled night scenes, are reminiscent of the horror genre.<sup>47</sup> Another departure from fairytale and epic is *Song of the Prairie* (1949), a bandit story that refers explicitly to the Western genre.

This somewhat 'relaxed' attitude to the adoption of cinematic realism by puppet, and most, 3D animation may be a result of the medium's cinematic ontology. The cinematographic shots in puppet animation are, after all, real not drawn. The *innate* cinematographic quality of puppet, and in fact all 3D animation, elevates the camera's status from simple inscription tool, as in 2D drawn animation, to a vehicle with narrative ability.

Theorists and filmmakers disagree on the question of puppets and how they should move and act. Bendazzi, as has been shown, opposed 'non-

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<sup>46</sup> Consider, for instance, Bendazzi's description of realist puppets of the Norwegian puppet animator Ivo Caprino as what he calls traditional and pre-Trnka type. (Bendazzi, 1994: 320).

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that the genre known as Czechoslovakian puppet animation is not limited to Trnka's stylistics; it covers a spectrum of different styles and should not be assumed to be anti-realistic. Tyrlova was fascinated by animating materials including 'balls of yarn, silver paper, pieces of wood, handkerchiefs, towels or toys' in modern stories for children (Bendazzi, 1994: 165). Zeman used various techniques and unusual materials such as glass in his science-fiction films. (Ibid. 166) Trnka pupil and main animator Bretislav Pojar showed even more cinematic-driven aesthetics in *One Drop Too Much* (1953), which is represented as exactly a cinematic version of a contemporary story with realistic sets and characters, though the puppets still have painted faces, do not speak and convey the story through mime-like action. (Ibid. 363)

Trnka' puppet animation, in which puppets were engineered to resemble real human beings with lip-synch and non-theatrical performances. In his book on puppet animation, Bruce Holman (1975) also takes a medium-specific stance on puppets. Noting Kracauer's line of reasoning, he says: 'a work should be in keeping with the medium in which it is executed' (Holman, 1975:75). In this, he suggests that the characteristics, parameters and limitations of the medium should be defined in order to achieve a form that coheres with its medium. His position is evidently based on a definition of puppet animation as heir to puppet theatre and thus distinct from both live-action and cartoon characters. Holman stresses the centrality of puppets in the medium, and praises Trnka puppet films as the most successful form:

... a puppet is a puppet. He is neither a live actor nor a cartoon film character, he is unique and in a medium of his own. To force puppet animation beyond its point of efficiency by over elaboration, or to waste carelessly the potentials which puppets possess, are violations of the principle of poetic economy...The integrity of the medium, however, should be respected. Style and presentation, and much of the form itself may change, but there should not be conscious attempt to imitate other media, nor should puppet animation be forced into a configuration to which it does not lend itself. (Holman, 1975: 76)

It is interesting that both Bendazzi and Holman stress the differences between puppet and 'cartoon' characters, but neither seems to consider the *similarities* between the puppet medium and live-action cinema. Both reject categorically a puppet that approaches the appearance or behaviour of a live-action actor. In terms of the discussion of copying codes of live-action film or physical reality, both seem most strongly opposed to the latter.

In his rejection of 'imitation of other media' Holman fails to observe that puppet animation cannot afford *not to* imitate live-action codes of narration. As discussed, most medium-specific accounts seem to take for

granted partial copying of other media, proscribing only extremes of copying, or approaching closely another medium. It is believed that 2D animation should avoid extreme use of cinematic codes of narration, and that puppet animation should ideally steer clear of extreme naturalism, particularly in terms of how the actual puppets are shown and moved. As such, the question of puppet becomes central to various kinds of puppet animation, including the films under examination. With their realistically modelled heads and close lip-synching, Aardman's characters are far removed from Holman's ideal puppet.

In order to assess the extent to which realism in puppet animation is embedded in particular aspects of realism in live-action cinema, and identify its points of departure, the specificities of the medium will be discussed and set out more comprehensively. For this thesis, this methodology has proved appropriate and effective in demonstrating how, in order to create their obsessively realistic worlds, the Aardman films under scrutiny have exploited and benefited from the specific traits of puppets and clay<sup>48</sup>. Thus, based exactly on the medium-specific theories of Bazin and Kracauer, the shared properties of live-action and puppet/clay animation will be shown. Later, the thesis will attempt to locate the problem or challenge of realism in such a medium, epitomised in *the question of the puppet*. Vinton Studios' Claymation® clay animations will be briefly discussed as relevant examples of groundbreaking realistic 3D clay animation. The study will conclude with an examination of hybridity and a proposal for a model to demonstrate how formal hybridity in 3D animation and animation in general may be studied and analysed.

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<sup>48</sup> In earlier Aardman films, the puppets/characters are all clay with armature used in puppet animation. In later films, clay is used for human faces, hands, other exposed body parts, and additional objects that require movement, metamorphosis and animation.

## **Specificities of three-dimensional medium (puppet and clay animation)**

Summarising previous discussions, it is proposed that the question of realism in the world of puppet and clay animation falls into three major areas. The terms *ontological* and *technical* are borrowed from Kracauer's categorisation of 'cinematic properties' (Kracauer, 1960:41):

- 1- *Ontological*: spatial realism (realism of spaces, objects, textures and the material world)
- 2- *Technical*: cinematic realism (the use of cinematographic techniques of inscribing and constituting shots as well as established codes of narration peculiar to conventional narrative cinema)
- 3- *Character*: puppet realism (specific to puppet animation)

It will be argued that the first two categories are shared by all 3D animation. The second results from the first, as cinematic realism becomes a function of spatial realism, i.e. the three-dimensionality of the world of puppets and objects. The criteria will be examined separately, though some issues will recur or blend. The third category may be regarded as specific to puppet animation.

### **1- Spatial Realism**

In *Clay Animation: American Highlights 1908 to the Present* (1994) Michael Frierson proposes that, compared to 2D drawn animation, the nature of 3D animation, including clay, is more *real*. He thinks that 'clay metamorphoses – and at some level, any dimensionally animated action – benefit from the fundamental realism of cinema by being *an objective recording of raw, three-dimensional reality*' (Frierson, 1994: 24). He believes that three aspects of cinematic realism as shown by Bazin, can be found in 3D animation: 'objectivity', meaning that the images are photographs of tangible objects in the real world; 'rawness' meaning that the medium is transparent or 'effaced', much as in live-action where the

viewer is unaware of the medium involved, and 'three-dimensionality', meaning that the real and three-dimensional space is shown as it is, using the same process as live-action cinematography (Ibid.).

Here, Frierson is insisting on a 'Bazinian' realism of the photographic image, focusing on 'objective record' and 'spatial realism' that seem equally present in 3D animation. Thus, a logical conclusion of his argument, which he mentions occasionally, is the fact that 'cinematic realism' may conveniently be achieved in 3D animation. To support this, he cites clay animator Art Clokey, creator of the television character *Gumby*. Clokey reiterates the notion that a photograph of real space looks more real to the viewer than a photograph of a *drawing* of a 'real space' (Ibid.).

Unlike cel films, which are created on a single plane, dimensional animation, like live-action film, is movement occurring in real space, albeit miniaturised space. So our "spatial hunger" (Clokey's term)<sup>49</sup>, our need to read depth into two-dimensional representation of reality (here, the projected film image) is better satisfied by a dimensional film rather than by a cel film. (Ibid.)

Frierson argues that, since the image of a 'real space' is once removed from reality, as opposed to the twice-removed image of a drawing, a 3D animation has a far greater presence and immediacy than a cel animation<sup>50</sup>. It is therefore able to show the reality of spaces, textures and objects by using a photographic representation of them. In 3D animation spatial narrative and the depiction of most textures and

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<sup>49</sup> Clokey says: ' Trimensional Animation looks real because it is photography of *spatial reality*. Cartoon animation does not look real because it is photography of an *abstraction*... You can see how abstract a cell [*sic*] drawing is if you compare it to a fine detailed painting by a Dutch Master... In cartoons they are working with a strong handicap of ABSTRACTION; whereas with Trimensional Animation we do not have that basic handicap. Trimensional Animation satisfies our SPATIAL HUNGER without having to resort or tricks that don't really succeed, because our senses feel that the drawing is fake. In this sense Trimensional Animation is far more sensual in its appeal'. (Frierson, 1994: 24)

<sup>50</sup> In a sense, Frierson and Clokey seem correct: a 3D world is generally more real than a 2D one, since reality is three-dimensional. Yet they seem to ignore the fact that most objects, puppets and spaces in various types of puppet and clay animation have been subject to abstraction, just as a drawing of similar settings would have been, and that photographing an image does not change its reality index. In short, the three-dimensionality of the puppets makes them more real than a drawing, and a photograph of either does not change this fact.

materials are therefore 'real' representations, while 2D animation only recreates them in drawing or painting.

The spaces and objects in the 3D medium may be termed Bazinian, after Bazin's thesis of transparency and mechanical record. In simple terms, this means that puppets may be located in 'real' spaces such as a real kitchen, wear 'real' clothes made from real fabric, or use 'real' objects such as furniture or cutlery. Similarly, puppets may be placed in miniature settings with model objects that appear real or abstract, yet remain 'real' objects and spaces. Object animation, as in the works of Jan Švankmajer or Brothers Quay, shows real objects. These may not always represent the object as it is and may be used symbolically or allegorically. For example, in *Dimensions of Dialogue* (Švankmajer, 1982), a fork is used as a sword in a symbolic war between two clay heads. Yet a real fork remains a fork, and stridently asserts its 'fork-ness' in whatever context it is used. In other words, even if an object is used in a symbolic context – a film – the viewer is still able to see that it is a real fork or a real stone. Further, models and miniatures of settings and objects from the real world may equally easily be made within the realm of 3D animation. A close replica of a fork may therefore also be shown as a real fork. Objects, just as in live-action film, may be designed to look like, or to represent stylised versions of real things. For example, a non-functioning model of a clock or piano may be used in either live-action or animated film to represent the real object. In this medium, different categories of objects and textures may be used, either to emphasise their real-ness or in other, symbolic contexts. This is not true of 2D animation, in which all textures and effects, however realistic, are only drawn or painted, and are not ontologically real; they should be created from scratch as the depiction of things and characters.

Spatial realism in 3D animation may be encapsulated in the idea of 'object' as a generic term for three-dimensional 'things', including puppets, present in a 3D film. As Suzanne Buchan (2006:30) observes, the absence of any real object in 2D animation, as opposed to 3D animation, is a medium-specific issue that separates the two forms or

sub-media of animation<sup>51</sup>. The objects and puppets in 3D animation, though identical to their photographic image, are not exactly real objects; it is understood that they are 'artificially constructed' or put to a different use, and as such are not real. This is why, she suggests, 'the *status* of animated objects and how we relate to it' is central to the specific kind of spectatorship demanded in 3D films (Ibid.). Buchan thinks that, despite ontological resemblance to a real object, 'the representation of a puppet (*or animated object* - FHS) has a quality different from objects that are not manipulated or constructed' (Ibid.). It is possible that the representation of real objects in 3D animation may also have a factual epistemology: that is, objects representing themselves as real rather than manipulated or artificial things. They may thus become part of the pro-filmic reality of a live-action film, or construct an almost-real relationship with it.

Spatial realism in the 3D medium also entails the presence of all means available to live-action film in terms of set design and lighting. These may be put to different uses, from the most realistic to the most abstract. The ability to copy cinematic effects of live-action genres, such as the dramatic lighting effects or settings of horror movies, is within easy reach of 3D animation. This additional aspect of the shared qualities of spatial realism may be used for fictional, imaginary, fantastic and surrealist, or for realistic and lifelike purposes, just as in live action. Dramatisation by means of lighting and set design, in fictional or realistic contexts, is therefore a function of spatial, and accordingly cinematic, realism shared by both media.

The reality of three-dimensional spaces and objects is directly reflected in a photograph or film of them, but this does not suggest that spatial realism is the 'essence' of realism in 3D animation; it simply offers a convenient route to a life-like representation of things. Spatial properties of the 3D medium may equally conveniently be used for other, non-realistic effects. Yet the three-dimensionality of 3D animation can hardly

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<sup>51</sup> Obviously, as Buchan also mentions, the real object in 2D animation must be considered the cel or paper it is drawn on which is of course disregarded and not brought into play as an object. As such, 2D objects are only virtual objects.

be concealed, and extra effort must be made to achieve 2D effects in a 3D medium. This ontological aspect of the medium suggests only that three-dimensional properties are 'naturally' easy to achieve in the 3D medium.

## **2- Cinematic Realism**

As an extension of Frierson's thesis of spatial realism in 3D animation, this study will argue that cinematic realism as a function of spatial realism is inherent in 3D animation. In consequence, the adoptions, copying and borrowings from the codes and conventions of live-action cinema are easily achievable and are almost always used in this kind of film. In most figurative story films with puppets, a three-dimensional miniature replica of the real world is built. Camera shots, angles and movements may be made as though in conventional live action, and non-moving objects, props and spaces may be recorded using the same cinematographic process. Even as models, they are as real as buildings, furniture and objects in the real world, at least in terms of how these elements are represented in fiction films. Whereas 2D animation is drawn or constructed, in 3D animation the space and three-dimensionality of the world, including objects, places, backgrounds and depth of field, are real<sup>52</sup>. Both are the result of recording things in a 3D space. Thus, an obvious element of cinematic realism is the 3D medium's ability to mimic cinematic narrative in 'real' cinematic shots, angles, movements and ways of editing.

A further implication of cinematic realism in the 3D medium is its ability to show the same 'types' of physical reality, in the same way as in live-action film. The 3D medium is capable of creating panning shots over inanimate objects and unmoving spaces to focus on the content and create a chance for the viewer to observe. This is the intersection of the two worlds: a liminal space that not only allows special effects invisibly to enter the world of live-action film, but also allows real objects and places

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<sup>52</sup> Such tricks including painted backgrounds, glass shots and back/front projection are routinely used in live-action films to create a sense of depth, or to represent a deep-focus background such as skies and fields; these are created in much the same as they in 3D animated films.

to be used and come to life in animation. This subtle and somewhat neglected aspect of 3D animation is shared with live-action cinema, and demonstrated in Kracauer's realist theory of cinema.

An important aspect of Kracauer's study of filmic quality is his identification of two functions of film: 'recording' and 'revealing'. In the first, he identifies different types of 'movement' as specificities peculiar to cinema. He then focuses on 'inanimate objects', showing how a cinematic record of them, mainly in the form of close-ups, may underline their importance or explore their 'physical existence', even though they belong to the non-human world (Kracauer, 1960: 41-59). This property is shared by 3D animation, which is capable of focusing on inanimate objects on a frame-by-frame basis, with camera movements and cinematic shots like those in live-action recording. Such emphasis by the cine camera on inanimate objects in either media may therefore highlight their importance or veiled meanings<sup>53</sup>.

An interesting element of Kracauer's theory is the notion of 'revealing' as part of the realist mission of cinema. To reveal means to expose aspects that are unseen, invisible or hard to capture. Clearly, recording is not the only means of revealing reality. In terms of Kracauer's 'record and reveal' thesis, the concern is for the modes and aspects of reality that may be revealed by the act of recording. Cinema's ability to focus on objects, whether ordinary objects that demand attention, very large things, or objects so small that they are not easily seen by the human eye, seems within the spectrum of ideas that 3D animation can handle efficiently. Similarly, in terms of revealing functions of cinema, Kracauer outlines ways in which the camera can reveal *things normally unseen*, including 'the small' 'the big' and 'the transient'; 'blind spots of the mind', including 'unconventional complexes', 'the refuse' and 'the familiar'; *phenomena overwhelming consciousness* and *special modes of reality* (Ibid. *Italics all Kracauer's*) This is, of course, a familiar and accepted function of the cine

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<sup>53</sup> This deliberation on objects and spaces will be covered in the analysis of *Going Equipped* (Chapter 8), in which highly constructed, frame-by-frame scenes that depict the interviewee's past are disguised as live-action footage.

camera, yet is crucial in that it may provide a host of viewing experiences otherwise impossible or ignored. Kracauer's notion of 'blind spots of the mind' asserts that not all that is visible attracts attention or is observed. In this respect, the cine camera may function as an additional observational tool, offering visual experiences that might otherwise pass unnoticed. Most observational modes of documentary film seem to operate within this principle. Bazin's suggested use of the long-take to achieve better cinematic realism similarly implies an enhanced observation process.

Expanding the same function, it may be argued that reconstructing real events in a puppet medium, in a way that closely approaches reality, creates an intense experience of observation for the viewer. The events depicted in many of the Aardman films in question therefore create a sense of simultaneity and 'fly-on-the-wall-ness', allowing the viewer to experience an otherwise mundane incident. They also offer the viewer the chance to observe human behaviour, facial expressions, and emotions expressed in the body language of obsessively realistic bodies, and witness words articulated by realistic lip-synching. In this respect, Paul Ward has suggested that animation may provide an 'intense route' to reality (Ward, 2005: 91). It is worth noting that realism in this sense may be achieved by 'realistic-ness': unlike in an ordinary record of an event, there is an overt absence of an indexical link between the imagery and a profilmic reality, or the actual event heard from the soundtrack. The route to reality is therefore not straightforward; it is proposed only via a covert, constructed event that nevertheless vividly resembles a real-life occurrence. The laborious process of representation renders the act of viewing demanding. The viewer must 'observe' not only the event, but also the painstaking process by which a malleable substance is manipulated to resemble human flesh and 'express' emotions.

Buchan suggests that watching 3D animation and 2D animation are different experiences, because of the realisation of puppets as 'inanimate objects' that move, displaying movement and behaviour that does not exist in the real world, despite the fact that they are real objects. While

the profilmic material of 3D animation is real, that of 2D animation is only 'hypothetical' (Buchan, 2006:32). This may be why the process of watching even the most realistically rendered puppet animation becomes intense, and events presented attract more attention than would a live-action record of them. It may be a suggestive analysis of spectatorship of these films, made possible by the cine camera which not only records, but has the ability to reveal to the viewer hidden meanings and ignored angles. As such, Kracauer's special modes of reality may also be applied to the ways in which Aardman depicts everyday events in a 3D medium, and brings to the fore 'the familiar' in ways that resemble a live-action representation of them.

So far, an attempt has been made to demonstrate the specificities and properties of 3D animation that are shared with live-action, and as such derive from similar orders of realism. In short, adopting a 'narrative' like that of live-action and a look similar to the real world resides in the heart of most forms of puppet animation. The conclusion here may be that theorists' major criticism of Disney realism was its obsessive use of codes of live-action cinema, coupled with excessively naturalistic human characters<sup>54</sup>. In other words, Disney realism is perceived as excessive realism of copying both life and codes of live-action cinema. In most 2D animations where just one of these is used, such copying is not perceived as 'untrue' to the nature of the medium. This is true of the US 7-minute cartoon in which many cinematic codes are used or drawn in a non-realist world with non-realist creatures and characters. By the same token, the adaptations and borrowings of other non-mainstream animators raise no concern, especially when humans are not depicted as naturalistically as in Disney-esque films<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that, as discussed in Chapter One, Disney characters are not all human characters, and that even human characters are not all intended to look like real actors and actresses. From the very early feature film *Snow White* both realistic and cartoon humans coexist in Disney.

<sup>55</sup> In Caroline Leaf's films there is an intense use of camera movements and angles, combined with a fluid metamorphosis of spaces and worlds, but such amalgamation is perceived as artistic and novel. Leaf's *Street* (1976), contains a beautifully crafted scene in which the head of the family and the family doctor share a quiet moment on the balcony after the grandmother's death. The camera pans over almost 360 degrees, showing rooftops, washing lines and other minute details of the neighbourhood. The aesthetic of oil on glass, under-the-camera animation gives this scene a different quality from that of a 'neutral' observational shot taken by a cine camera using the same kind of movement. Yet the constantly moving 'camera' that Leaf uses in this and other

Hence, the 'missing' ingredient in any realism in terms of copying of life, or a live-action record of it, seems to be *movement*. In the 3D medium, the problem of maintaining realistic movements of human and other creatures is equally present. The 'illusory' part of puppet animation, which is not shared with live-action, is the autonomous movement of the puppets and inanimate objects. This makes an acute difference, and tears the two worlds apart. In 3D animation, far more than in any other animated form, the question of realism seems to reside generally in movement, but specifically in design, movements and lip-synch of the human puppets. This is perhaps a major area of study within the field of realist animation, and will be discussed in detail. More specifically, however, the movement of objects and non-living things is less problematic than complex human movements, expressions and speech. In *Going Equipped*, for example, the movement of shadow and light is easily faked frame by frame and made to look real. Camera movements are the preferred means of achieving cinematic realism in puppet animation; in fact, when human movement is absent, there is little difference between a live-action panning movement and a stop-motion, frame-by-frame construction of it<sup>56</sup>.

Despite this, it seems that human beings are an ever-present problem or challenge to all kinds of 2D or 3D animation, especially 'realist' ones. CGI animation seems to have inherited this problem, and to which it has found different solutions.<sup>57</sup>

The third category of realism crucial to 3D animated film therefore comprises the human characters. It is not difficult to create realistic

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scenes that involve hybrid, complex movements is borrowed from camera movements mostly used in live-action films .

<sup>56</sup> Such extensive deployment of intricate camera movements (cranes, dollies, hybrid moves) is manifest in recent puppet films such as Tim Burton's *The Nightmare before Christmas*, and is increasingly evident in Aardman fictional feature-length animations including the *Wallace and Gromit* series. Technical advances in traditional 3D animation mean that mainstream puppet animations are now mimicking and copying many of the complicated and spectacular camera movements used in contemporary mainstream live-action cinema.

<sup>57</sup> It is interesting that entering the keyword 'realism' in online search engines will primarily result in literature relating to research on digital imagery of human beings, facial traits and body movements

settings and objects in 3D animation, but it is extremely difficult to make a puppet look and move in a way that is indistinguishable from human beings. Stylised puppets, with certain levels of resemblance to real people, are usually seen sufficiently as puppets and are thus perceived as credible. Even extremely abstract objects may be symbolically animated to represent an adequately believable character, for example the vegetables that represent the main characters in *Oedipus* (Jason Wishnow, 2004). This is not true when characters closely resemble real human beings in terms of features, appearance, movement, behaviour, and speech if used. The challenge of creating a puppet that can look as real as a human being, and behave like one, seems always to remain.

Puppet realism thus plays a central role in the specific examination of realism in puppet animation in this thesis. The attempt to create 'almost-human' characters that represent real human beings rather than fictional characters in several films of the Aardman corpus makes them extraordinarily realistic in terms of make-up<sup>58</sup>. What follows is a re-examination of the notion of the puppet in animation and the various aspects and forms a puppet can take. This will eventually lead the thesis to identify different categories of puppets in terms of realism and locate Aardman puppets within that categorisation.

### **Puppet Realism (or Puppet Incarnation?)**

The aim of this examination of the idea of 'puppet' in puppet animation – and all other kinds of 3D stop-motion animation that features humans, animals and other creatures – is clarification and more specification of the ambiguous and non-specific realm of 3D stop-motion animation. The focus on the specificities of what is understood as puppet therefore has the same aim: to illuminate the question of realism in 3D animation, particularly the Aardman corpus.

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<sup>58</sup> This extreme realistic-ness is of course a relative ascription and makes sense only in the context of Aardman films compared to many other puppets. It is obvious that other types of puppets and animated characters can be imagined and in fact do exist that are far more realistic and life-like than that of Aardman's.

It is useful initially to consider the type of puppets used in the ten films under examination. Most Aardman films are referred to as 'clay' films and clay animation, but it is important to determine whether they are really clay-only films, puppet films, or both. Is the man in *On Probation* a puppet, a clay figure, something in between, or none of these? What about the jaguar in *Creature Comforts*, the old man near the window in *Palmy Days* or the two women in *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*? (See figures 2.1-4)



**Figure 2.1 *On Probation***

**Figure 2.2 *Creature Comforts***



**Figure 2.3 *Palmy Days***

**Figure 2.4 *Confessions of a Foyer Girl***

While clay animation describes a specific technique of animation, the idea of puppet in animation is extremely broad and at times indistinct. In technical terms, all the examples of puppets above have an armature, much like other characters in other puppet films. Their bodies are sometimes represented all in clay, as in *Down and Out* or *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, in which even the puppets' clothes are made from coloured clay. In some films, the characters have clay flesh (hands, face) and realistically sewn real clothes. Some, as in *On Probation* or *Palmy Days*,

have realistic hair made from material similar to hair, while others have roughly-defined moulded clay hair, as in *Confessions...*, or *Early Bird*. In some later films, body parts that do not need to move are cast in 'faked-clay' latex, and only moving parts are made from actual clay. An example is the jaguar in *Creature Comforts*. Generally speaking, Aardman covers the puppet armatures in different materials according to the film's aesthetic requirements. These films may at best be described as a combination of clay and puppet animation, or simply clay-puppet animation.

Apart from the technical specificities of creating these puppets, there is also the question of the context in which they stand. Most of the puppets in these ten films, apart from *Creature Comforts*, directly represent typical British citizens in real-life situations. The characters stand unambiguously for real British people, despite their location in imaginary or cartoonish settings. This is true even of the more fictionalised characters in *Palmy Days* or *War Story*. The type of puppet and animation used in *War Story* dominates later Aardman fiction films, beginning with the *Wallace and Gromit* series (see figures 2.5 and 2.6 for comparison). The context, or rather content of the animated film, thus makes an important contribution to the realism or fictionality of a puppet and the character it embodies. Technical aspects alone cannot determine the realism of an animated film.



**Figure 2.5** *War Story*

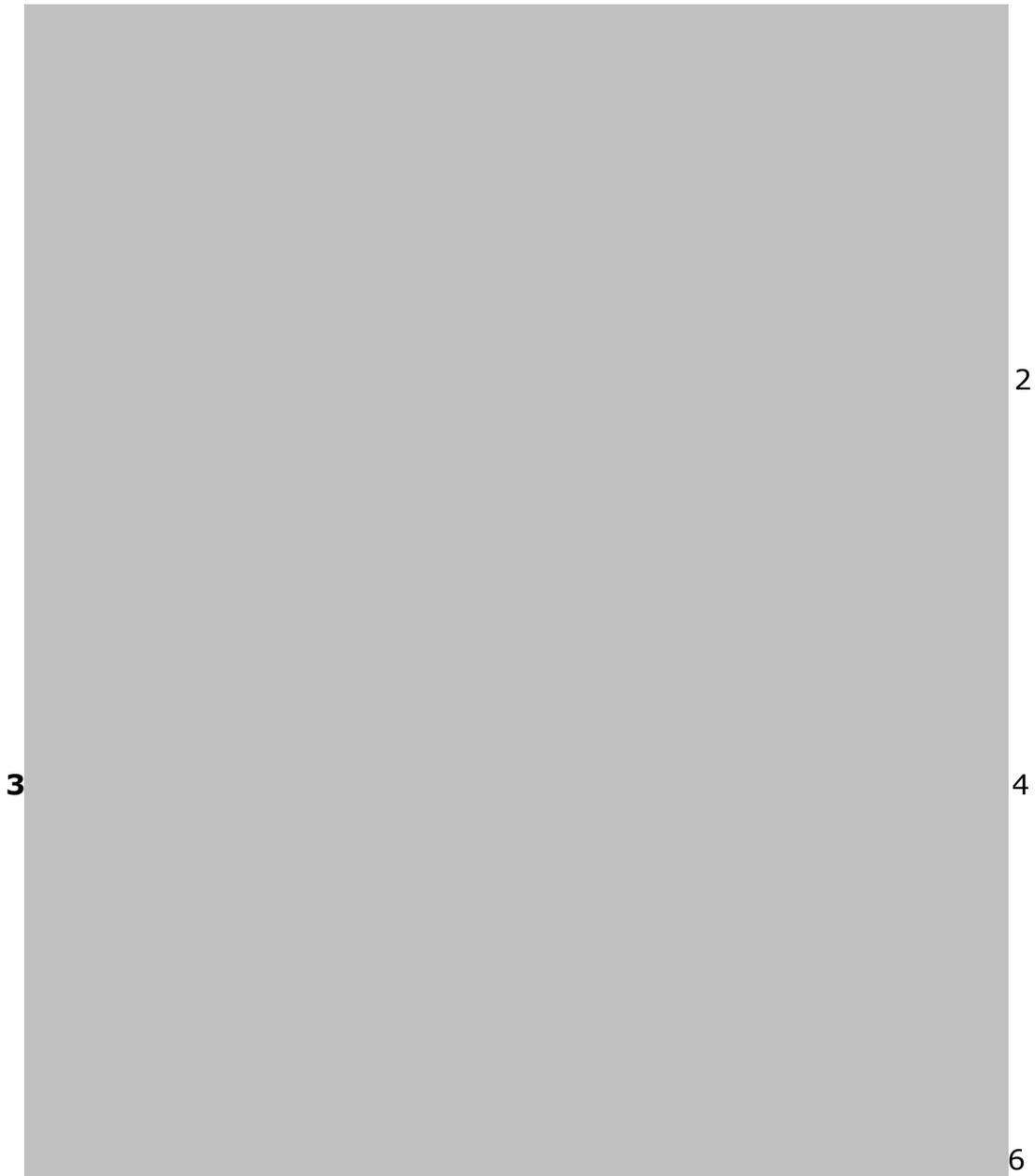
**Figure 2.6** *A Grand Day Out*

In addition, the idea of the puppet does not always accord with that of puppet theatre, as Holman and Bendazzi have suggested. The many

different types of puppets found in puppet theatre are defined and moved according to their technical structure; string puppets act differently from hand or Bunraku puppets. In 3D animation the idea of the puppet as a 'puppet theatre' puppet is only one way of using and in fact animating puppets. Any type of puppet movement should be animated frame-by-frame with different types of timing and mechanics of movement. The three-dimensional character may represent any kind of being, unless there is an intentional stress on its puppet-ness in the theatrical sense, for example a story featuring a stringed puppet that is expected to move like one. Puppets in animation may represent dolls, toys, fairytale characters, epic heroes and heroines, and of course live-action actors and actresses as real human beings. The puppets in Trnka's epic *A Midsummer Night's Dream* represent a theatrical version of Shakespeare's story, yet the girl and her grandmother in *The Cybernetic Grandmother* represent not theatrical puppets but modern humans, albeit in a fictional context. In Trnka's last film *The Hand* (1965) the simplicity and puppet-ness of the character that refuses the Hand's orders is overtly emphasised. In this respect, Czech puppet animation is famous for 'puppety' puppets in fairy-tale contexts, in which the characters' movements are limited to what a doll-like puppet can do: they do not blink, move their lips or perform extreme human movements.<sup>59</sup> (See examples of Trnka's puppets in Figure 2.7)

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<sup>59</sup> This does not imply that it is limited only to this kind of puppet. Realist tendencies are abundant in the works of other puppet animators including Karel Zeman, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. (Footnote 8)



**Figure 2.7 Examples of Trnka's puppets**

1.The Hand; 2.The Devil's Mill; 3.The Good Soldier Svejk; 4.The Emperor's Nightingale; 5. Archangel Gabriel & Lady Goose; 6. One Drop Too Many

Yet, as Holman has suggested, puppet animation has not confined itself to a Trnka approach<sup>60</sup>. In Tim Burton films such as the *Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), the puppets belong to various species of beings not easily categorised by any traditional notion of puppets. Jack Skellington's girlfriend Sally is a rag doll that can move and behave autonomously and in a realistic, human-like manner. Yet her 'body' as a doll is stressed; her

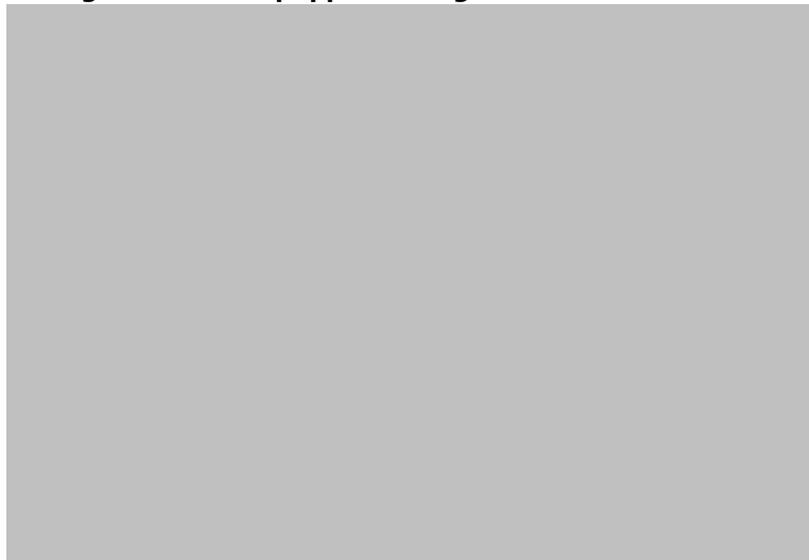
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<sup>60</sup> This is also the case with puppet theatre. Puppets in puppet theatre and television puppet shows also have moving jaws, blinking eyes and many realistic features. In this respect, Holman seems to have very limited notion of both.

body parts are joined with large stitches and subject to being torn apart and rejoined. Jack is a puppet resembling a skeleton, though with many human-like traits and a dance style like Fred Astaire. (Figure 2.8) The film's numerous creatures are called puppets, though not all derive from puppet performances in puppet theatre. In Barry Purves' film *Next* (1989), there are two 'human' puppets: the interviewer and the interviewee who is Shakespeare himself. There is also a 'dummy' puppet, almost as big as the man with no clothes and a simple face. The man arranges it in different poses, dances with it, makes love to it and kills it according to references to Shakespeare's play (Figure 2.9). Yet it is known that both the man and the doll-thing he interacts with are actually played and 'animated' frame-by-frame by 'Master Barry Purves'. So, which of these characters is really a puppet?



**Figure 2.8 Main puppets in *Nightmare Before Christmas***



**Figure 2.9 puppets in *Next***

In recent decades, increasing focus on different modes of puppet animation has challenged to the notion of puppet as a puppet offered by such as Holman and Bendazzi. In Susie Templeton films such as *Dog* (2002) the extremely expressive characters communicate deep 'human' emotions in a life-like manner, which does not make them resemble puppets (Figure 2.10). In the religious stories of Derek W Hayes and Stanislav Sokolov, such as *The Miracle Maker* (2000), the extremely naturalistic clay puppets allied to an extreme use of codes of live-action film genres makes the puppets and their world very close to live-action actors in conventional films with similar subject-matter (Figure 2.11). The characters in the Brothers Quay's *Street of Crocodiles* (1986) are animated in a stylistic manner with symbolic movements and no lip-synch or blinking (Figure 2.12). They represent surrealistic and poetic dimensions of puppets (and objects) narrated via a cinematic language that is not easily achieved by conventional live puppet performances. These examples show the diverse range of functions of puppets in what is generally and non-specifically termed puppet animation. All borrow and copy from life as well as live-action codes of performance and narration to create different hybrids, or sub-branches of puppet animation very different from each other.



**Figure 2.10 *The Dog***



**Figure 2.11 *The Miracle Maker***



**Figure 2.12 *Street of Crocodiles***

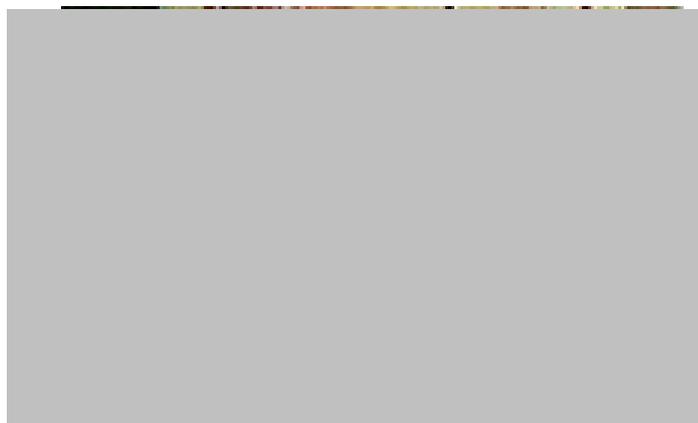
To see other aspects of puppets it may be useful to deconstruct Barry Purves' exceptionally complicated treatments, in which their representation both as puppets and 'not puppets' becomes a main theme in itself. Purves consciously confronts viewers' rigid notions of the puppet, as his puppets self-referentially become autonomous humans. In *Screenplay* (1992), two lovers step out of their roles as actors in traditional Japanese theatre to show the 'true' story after the performance ends. Purves plays with the notions of puppet and puppeteer; the characters, the black-clad puppeteers and the interpreter are all animated puppets. Yet they are so 'realistically' animated that the viewer understands them as puppets and puppeteer (Figures 2.13 and 2.14). At the end of the play within the film, as the puppet interpreter describes the 'happy ending', the filming style begins to change. Until then it was recorded from a fixed vantage point: all changes to setting and actors took place simultaneously on the rotating stage and nothing

was hidden. The camera goes beyond the stage set – in fact a newly introduced setting which is the backyard of the lovers’ house – to show the characters in close-up, moving like a ‘cinematic’ camera. Another account of the story begins, one that could not be shown by the previous sets of conventions of theatre or cinema. In this new system of representation, the puppets are shown in extreme close-up, and their ‘puppet’ traits such as their synthetic hair and the artificial blood on their bodies are revealed. (Figure 2.15) In the final scenes, the puppet-ness of puppets as hand-made objects is brought to our attention while simultaneously they become autonomous characters.<sup>61</sup>



**Figure 2.13 Screenplay**

**Figure 2.14 Screenplay**



**Figure 2.15 Screenplay**

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<sup>61</sup> For instance, while in the first performance blood was symbolically shown in colourful strips of cloths, here a red substance is seen on the puppets body as if real blood.

While the body of the film is a 'simulation' of a live-action record of a theatrical performance, the final section is an imaginary event 'filmed' with shaky camera movements as though spontaneous and real. Purves craftily plays with codes and conventions of 'performance' to reference the multifaceted aspects of representation and realism. He also extends the idea of puppet in animation to an abstract notion of simulating effects of something-ness or someone-ness. In most of his films, Purves simulates theatrical performances, playing with the idea of puppeteer and the puppet and tacitly referring to an 'upper hand' that animates both. This may be linked to the uses of stop-motion animation as special effects and the fact that it may be used to simulate all kinds of creatures, including theatrical puppets. Purves and other special effect masters seem to refer to a notion of puppet and all 3D animation as a means to create different 'effects' as believably as possible. In this respect, realism may be defined not as a link between reality and its representation, but as the highlights of illusionism and craftsmanship to generate an excessive 'reality effect'. This reality effect does not confine itself to the representation of reality *per se*, but also creates a make-believe effect of the most unreal events and happenings.

The significant use of clay to produce realistic effects of human facial expression and body language in the Aardman works under investigation makes it a crucial component to consider. Thus, what is of concern are the specific ways clay has been used in 'clay puppets', while clay is a medium in which diverse effects and styles can be created. If simple clay characters such as *Gumby* cannot be easily called puppets, the characters in Will Vinton's films including *Martin the Cobbler* (1976), *Rip Van Winkle* (1978) and *The Little Prince* (1979) are very much clay puppets (Figures 2.16-18)



**Figure 2.16 *Martin The Cobbler***

**Figure 2.17 *The Little Prince***



**Figure 2.18 *Rip van Winkle***

In his all-clay worlds and all-clay puppets that nevertheless have a conventional armature, Vinton shows a penchant for increased realism and a type of puppet and narrative distant from traditional puppet films. Frierson observes two areas in which Vinton's aesthetics have moved towards more realism; one of the major achievements of Vinton's *Claymation*® technique is its realistic depiction of gestures, movements, and more importantly lip-synch of the clay characters created. Frierson also sees in Vinton's works a more 'cinematic' use of camera movements and the adoption of a cinematic language which is discernible in terms of characterisation and story development and more convincing animation (Frierson, 1994: 136). He also describes how the process of characterisation, gesture and action in Vinton's works is developed by the use of close reference to live-action footage. Vinton's formula should

therefore be seen as taking reference from both real-life (in the form of live-action performance) and also camera movements and cinematic realism. It seems that the question of realistic puppets in dramatic situations is also central to Vinton's realist films:

As adaptations of narratives of substantial length, they present human action within a specific setting and develop dramatic conflict and in-depth characterisation. These dramas marked a significant break with the existing body of clay shorts – trick films, humorous clay films and even the short clay adventures of Art Clokey's Gumby– and foreshadowed Vinton's interest in bringing a clay feature to the screen. (Ibid.)

Clay, as a material that lends itself to frame-by-frame manipulation, is capable of maintaining accurate lip-synch. Further, as Frierson explains, it has proved an appropriate medium for demonstrating human expressions, gestures and emotions. Frierson analyses how Vinton's use of 'portrait-charge' technique in his Claymation® films, and their distinctive realism has contributed to the realist depiction of characters that are predominantly human beings, rather than anthropomorphised animals and objects, or cute and cuddly cartoon characters. In this technique, which is basically created according to a traditional style of caricature with 'a loaded likeness' a large caricature head is placed over a small but detailed body (Frierson, 1994: 140). Frierson refers to the initial function of portrait charge in printed caricature and cites William Feaver (1981) who believed that its purpose '...was a focusing of attention, a means of peering at a man, scrutinising him as a fortune-teller's deliberation, noting every crease and wrinkle' (Feaver, 1981 cited in Frierson, 1994: 57). Considering the techniques as 'the ripest form of caricature', Feaver believes the technique reveals 'the force of personality rather than the whole man' (Ibid.)

In Vinton's films, the technique of portrait-charge is operated, as Feaver suggests, to bring out the 'personality' of the characters<sup>62</sup>. Frierson indicates how the use of the technique contributes to the identification of the characters 'so the audience can quickly identify their gross traits: for example, the angular features and long, hooked nose of Vanderdonk in *Rip Van Winkle* suggests the archetypal miser' (Frierson, 1994: 140).

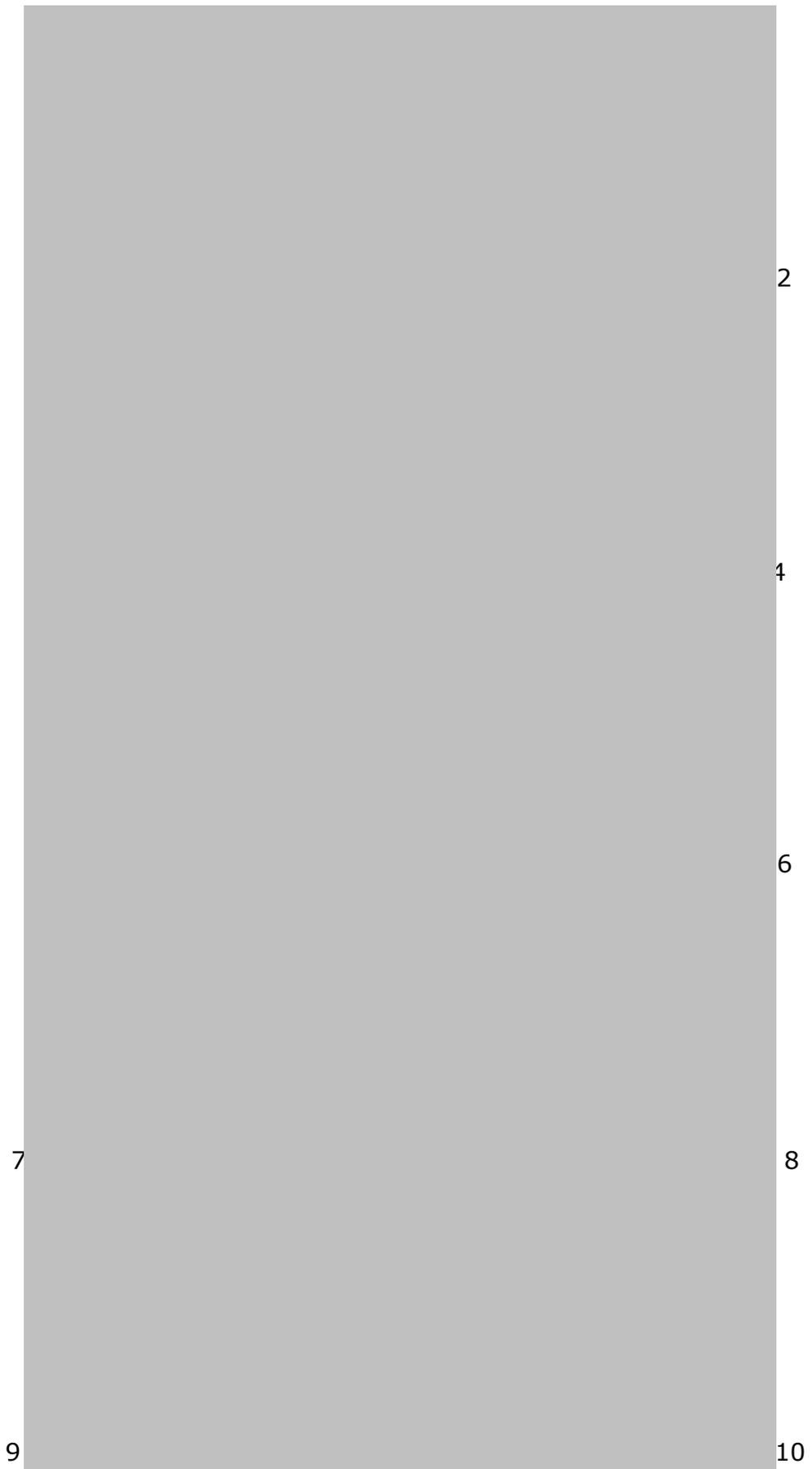
Aardman also used this technique to realistic effect in earlier films of the corpus, although in later films they begin to transform it to a less caricaturised and more neutral version of likeness. It is not only head size that becomes proportionately smaller compared to the body. Moving from *Confessions...* and *Down and Out* to *Going Equipped*, the use of exaggerated facial traits, especially elongated noses, diminishes to give more truthful portrayal of the human head and its detail. Within the study of the formal aspects of the Aardman films, which will be expanded later in this chapter, is an analysis of the kind of material hybridisation by which Aardman has evolved its puppets in line with efforts for increasing naturalism in its human characters<sup>63</sup>. In the images of figure 2.19 gradual changes in puppet design can be traced in terms of how the use of portrait charge techniques in the earlier films has been transformed to a more naturalistic depiction of the head, manifest in later films especially *Going Equipped*. It is also interesting to see the totally different aesthetics of the three films of the *Lip Synch* series: compare the head of the man in *War Story* with that of the man in *Going Equipped*<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> In *Rip Van Winkle*, Frierson identifies the 'cleaner, more expressive faces' depicted using the portrait-charge technique. (Frierson, 1994: 140). This style, which later became the trademark of the Vinton studio, allowed depiction of the face in minute detail, showing the slightest movement or change of expression. As Frierson points out, it is most evident in later Vinton studio works, such as their first and only feature-length film *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1985) and also in the caricatures of Ray Charles and Michael Jackson commercials for the California Raisin Advisory Board (Ibid.).

<sup>63</sup> The use of clay in early films of the group, as a tradition continued from the successful TV series *Morph*, seems also to have created certain problems. These, which will be explained below by reference to Frierson's study of clay, have led to the move from all-clay puppets to puppets using clay for only face and hands and other real material to dress them.

<sup>64</sup> Obviously the anthropomorphised animals in *Creature Comforts* demand an entirely different type of puppet aesthetics.



**Figure 2.19 Aardman corpus puppets from earliest to the latest**

In his study of clay animation, Frierson examines the pros and cons of working with plasticine, which is generically described as clay. He notes that one advantage, shared with other dimensional media, is that 'the figures move in three-dimensional space, create their own perspective, and cast their own shadows'. (Frierson, 1994:2) Further, clay is a flexible and malleable substance that lends itself easily to animating frame by frame and the incorporation of far more meticulous detail than most drawn and cell animation can achieve. (Ibid.25) In addition, clay is eminently capable of creating metamorphosis, gradually and gently transforming one form to another frame by frame.

Yet, as Frierson notes, clay has its limitations. Firstly, it is relatively heavy and saggy. Secondly, it has a limited palette and therefore difficulties in 'achieving deeply saturated colours', which compared to cel and many other paint-based media, makes it a 'low-saturation' medium' (Ibid.). Other problems are that it may become soiled, or lose its original shape when exposed to hot studio lights. It is also unreliable for the creation of realistic textures and objects. Its low saturation means that a clay world, even when meticulously created as in Vinton's first and only feature-length film *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1985) looks dull, monotonous and unappealing to an audience (Frierson, 1994: 148).

In Aardman films, unlike those of Vinton, the world is depicted as a miniature of the real world with real materials, textiles and textures. This style is pursued throughout the films in question and further in Aardman's featurette and feature fiction films, albeit with some variations. Clay is, however, used for animating detailed movements and hand gestures, or delicate facial traits and lip-synching. In this respect, it is ideal for producing the look, feel and function of human flesh. The metamorphic property of clay, a plasmatic quality that resembles the flexibility of human skin and flesh, makes it appropriate for frame-by-frame change.

Analysing Vinton's all-clay feature film and its lukewarm reception, Frierson tries to draw a comparison with the Disney studio and the

reason for its success<sup>65</sup>. Alongside issues of production and the transformation of a small-scale practice to a major industry, Frierson tries to identify and compare the specific traits of clay and 2D cel animation. He observes that, while in Disney the principles of 'stretch and squash' and character animation create a certain, but nevertheless *stylised* version of 'the illusion of life', Vinton's technique does not revolve round character animation. As opposed to Disney, which used 12 principles of animation<sup>66</sup> including personality animation, Vinton's films are based on human characters in fairytale contexts, and simply lack the well-rounded ebullience usually embodied in animal characters. Frierson also flags up the problem of animated movement of clay characters in Vinton's work, feeling that they are less expressive and fluid than Disney characters<sup>67</sup>. According to Frierson, then, the missing ingredient in the Vinton films is the 'cartoon' quality of Disney. In other words, for Frierson, Disney is epitomised not by excessive realism, as is the case with Wells (1998), but by his cartoon aesthetics, fluid movements and flexible characters<sup>68</sup>.

Comparing Disney and Vinton aesthetics here provides abundant opportunities for further identification of realist aesthetics in 3D animation. Frierson positions Disney aesthetics as a yardstick by which he measures the 'success', or rather failure, of Vinton's feature film.

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<sup>65</sup> Frierson describes this as the way Vinton studio it confronted obstacles to achieve the goal of 'passage from the bush league to the big league, from trivial entertainment to full-scale narrative'<sup>65</sup> (Frierson, 1994: 148) He enumerates the Vinton studio's similar commitment to achieving technological perfection, and maintains that viability is necessary for a medium to be put into large-scale practice as an industry. He even compares Disney's term 'full-cel' animation with the 'full-clay' animation Vinton was determined to accomplish. However, he identifies fundamental differences between the two which might be seen not only due to the different implications of the 2D medium vs. 3D, but also in the diverse worlds of the two key controlling characters who are most responsible for them.

<sup>66</sup> As articulated by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (1995) in their book *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation*

<sup>67</sup> Frierson believes 'In spite of its numerous technical innovations and refinement of clay lip sync, Claymation® simply has not broken much new ground in the area of expressive character movement' (Frierson, 1994: 150).

<sup>68</sup> Frierson asserts:

Perhaps any character animation might seem stiff and tight in comparison with those of Disney, whose early, unrestrained explorations of movement and synchronised sound earned him more respect than any previous animator. Grounded in naturalistic human narratives, Vinton's films have characters whose movements are more uniform and limited than those founded in Disney, and suffer from a kind of sameness – they are evenly told human stories that feature evenly animated human characters... Early Vinton animation seems unadventurous compared with the rubbery, bouncy, kinetic 1930s animation of Disney, and at worst, it can be even stiff and unnatural (Frierson, 1994: 150).

Though Frierson's point here is not simply 'realism', he still thinks that in order for a feature-length animated film to succeed, it should follow Disney's character formula in terms of the bounciness and 'cartoon-ness' of characters rather than their naturalism. While Holman believed that a puppet is neither a cartoon character nor a live-action actor, Frierson holds that Vinton's clay/puppets should become cartoon characters. Disney's cartoon aesthetic, then, is seen as a hybrid one in which the elements of copying live-action conventions and copying real life (naturalism) are mixed and appropriated in different proportions to that of Vinton<sup>69</sup>.

It may be proposed that for Frierson, Vinton's characters are too realistic compared to those of Disney's<sup>70</sup>. Vinton prefers a story-book character design nearer to caricature than cartoon, with puppets that look far more like traditional non-clay puppets than Disney-esque cartoon characters. Obviously, in both caricature-driven portrait charge and cartoon styles, certain levels of abstraction and exaggeration are employed. While cartoons are regarded as non-serious and comic renditions of realities, however, caricatures that exaggerate certain parts of the face or body are still seen as more naturalistic, closer to reality and serious. Examination of character types in former Disney animator Preston Blair's classic *How to Animate Film Cartoons* (1990) including hero, bully, goof and child, shows that audiences accept these as 'personality types' and are not therefore made uneasy by their most exaggerated or outrageous behaviour. Eventually, despite being talking puppets in more cinematic narratives, Vinton's puppets stay closer to more traditional modes of

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<sup>69</sup> It must, however, be considered that cartoon aesthetics, normally addressed by a 'stretch and squash' aptitude, are not a homogeneous phenomenon. It is possible to differentiate between early Disney *Merry Melodies* and Warner Brother's *Looney Tunes* cartoon aesthetics, or the modernist styles of animation of UPA and other studios, and production companies that took similar 'modernist' styles for televisual series in different manners. More recently, US cartoon sitcoms including *South Park* and *The Simpsons* offered a multitude of cartoon styles, none of which resembles classical ideas of cartoon.

<sup>70</sup> Frierson thinks that the problem with Vinton's clay characters and worlds was that they were 'more detailed than sparse, more colourful than subdued, more smooth than textured, more evenly animated than kinetic, more interested in caricature than character' and adds to his charges 'more realistic than experimental' (Frierson, 1994: 155).

puppet animation in the context of fairytale and story-book with non-comic and non-cartoon themes<sup>71</sup>.

In contrast, Aardman has adopted a totally different approach, steering clear of fairy tales and departing even further from cartoon contexts. In several of the corpus, puppets represent real human beings. In later films, which are predominantly affected by Nick Park's aesthetics, the puppets more closely approach cartoon characters. From the fictional *Wallace and Gromit* films onwards, Aardman puppets become hybrids of cartoon characters and parodic borrowings from live-action actors and narrative conventions.

## Cataloguing Puppets

Based on the examination so far of various notions of the puppet, it may be proposed that, in very general terms, puppets may be seen in three different categories. These include puppets as puppets (fairytale and puppet theatre puppets), puppets as live-action actors or real human beings (puppets in real-life situations in both fictional and non-fictional contexts) and puppets as cartoon characters. This is only a general method of locating puppets in different films: obviously, they may be hybrids that fall into more than one category, and different types of puppet may coexist in a single film. Finally, the categories are not comprehensive: the possibility of imagining or creating other kinds of puppet cannot be dismissed. In object animation, for example, objects may represent people in an abstract or surreal way<sup>72</sup>. This kind of representation, however, should be considered an abstract extension of puppets outside the spectrum defined here.

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<sup>71</sup> This is of course, not true of Vinton's feature length film, *The Adventures of Mark Twain* in which his characters are much closer to human beings and depart significantly from that 'fairy-tale' stereotypical contexts of his early films.

<sup>72</sup> Many films of Czech animator Hermina Tyrlove fall into this category, in which textiles and clothes and similar material become rough puppets.

A clearer picture of the way in which the groups function may be provided by imagining a spectrum with 'puppets as puppets' at the mid-point, and cartoon puppets and human-like puppets at the polar extremes. The last two may be considered hybrid forms that draw their formal properties from both reality and fantasy. Puppets as puppets stand somewhere between a resemblance to human beings, with different degrees of abstraction, and restrictions of movement and symbolic behaviour taken from reality; their representation is based on an imaginary account of characters from fairytales, epic stories and so on. Cartoon puppets are copies of 2D cartoon characters; as such they are mainly comic and exaggerated renditions of puppets in cartoon contexts, but they are also parodic copies of live-action actors. Puppets as human beings are neutral 'simulations' of real human beings, with no exaggeration and minimal abstraction; as such, they may be copies of an imaginary live-action reference.

Further, according to the fictional or non-fictional contexts in which they appear, puppets as human beings fall into two sub-categories: those that represent humans in real-life non-staged events, acting in a similar way to humans in observational and other modes of documentary film, and those that represent humans as actors in theatre, television, live-action films and all kinds of live performance, using an appropriate coded performance. As discussed, these sub-categorisations may sometimes blend, because the use of puppets to simulate spontaneous human behaviour may sometimes contain references to live-action footage of humans, which may be a re-performed act that only resembles spontaneous behaviour.<sup>73</sup> It is also important to note that this category may be applied to animals and all living creatures depicted in various ways, whether neutrally as in reality (i.e. animals behaving like animals) or anthropomorphically like Gromit or the animals in *Creature Comforts*. Puppet animation has used both approaches: in many films animals play only their usual roles, while those in many films such as Starevitch's *Tale*

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<sup>73</sup> This seems the case in *Going Equipped* in which the interviewee faces the camera and talks to an imaginary viewer about his past, an act that may only be imagined by using a live-action actor who performs spontaneously and without the coded performance of fictional contexts.

of the Fox (1939) are anthropomorphised animals in human-like stories. The category is shown in table 2. 1, below.

<b>Puppet as Cartoon Character</b>	<b>Puppet as Puppet</b>	<b>Puppet as Human Being</b>
<p>Puppets in 3D cartoon animations and anthropomorphised puppets</p> <p>e.g. <i>The Nightmare Before Christmas</i>, <i>Wallace and Gromit</i>, <i>James and the Giant Peach</i></p>	<p>Traditional puppets in puppet animation such as in many Trnka films or Russian puppet animation. Puppets as a continuation of puppet theatre in fairy tales.</p>	<p>Many of the Aardman films in this study including <i>On Probation</i>, <i>Down and Out</i>, <i>Confessions...</i>, <i>Going Equipped...</i></p> <p>Some of Purves puppets in films such as <i>Screen Play</i> and <i>Rigoletto</i></p>

**Table 2.1 Puppet Categories**

The three categories should be seen as this thesis's specific identification of puppet realism suitable for the purpose of studying Aardman and similar films, not a holistic account of all possible conditions. The situation of 'puppet as puppet' in this table does not imply that it falls between the two other categories or is necessarily a blend of the two forms. Taking the two poles from Holman's rejection of them as not proper puppets, the category of puppet as puppet is situated between the two as how 'traditionally' puppets in puppet animation were perceived<sup>74</sup>. It is also evident that puppets may cross these boundaries and become hybrids of more than one type. Within what this thesis assumes as traditional puppets, examples of puppets similar to cartoon characters are numerous (See figures 2.20 Hermina Tyrlova's woven puppet characters).

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<sup>74</sup> The use of the term 'traditional puppet' here may seem paradoxical since Bendazzi thought Trnka-style puppets were a new and ground-breaking approach to the 'traditional' realist puppets with talking heads. Due to the increasing uses of both realistic and cartoon-like puppets in the animated puppets of generations after Trnka, especially in recent decades, this thesis considers Trnka-type as the perfect traditional approach as opposed to the two other approaches.



**Figure 2.20 Hermina Tyrlova's puppets**

Further, it is important to note that puppets alone cannot determine the realism/fictional aesthetics of a puppet film. The anthropomorphised animals in *Creature Comforts* are very similar to cartoon characters, yet the use of a real soundtrack and a content that refers to the lifestyles of people in a specifically British context distance the film from the cartoon world. Similarly, Vinton puppets may not always be regarded as 'puppet as puppet'; while those in *Rip Van Winkle* stay closer to conventional puppets despite their realistic traits, the puppets in *Martin the Cobbler* (1976) and *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1985) are very similar to human beings in live-action children's fiction films.

The Aardman films under examination are often closer to one of the table's polar extremes. For this reason, the category 'puppet as puppet' may largely be disregarded. It will therefore be proposed, by reference to a detailed deconstruction in Part Two, that in these films the formal aesthetics of puppets oscillates between the two poles. This notion has the advantage of showing their 'hybridity' of form, as in many early films they tend to be closer to the live-action side while in later films cartoon aesthetics are to a certain degree evident. A tendency towards either pole, however, does not always suggest a transformation into purely cartoon characters or real human beings; they are 'hybrid' puppets with different degrees of cartoon-ness or human-ness. Finally, in some films, the attempt for puppets to become human or live-action film actors is obsessively close. This is highlighted in a film such as *Going Equipped*, as will be shown in Chapter Eight.

## Thesis of Formal Hybridity in Animation

In *Art in Motion* (1998), Maureen Furniss suggests that to avoid the pitfalls of defining animation, all 'moving image production' of various styles and modes may be imagined across a spectrum from total 'abstraction' to total 'mimesis' (Furniss, 1998: 5). Calling this a 'live action – animation continuum', she considers live-action as the apex of mimesis while placing animation somewhere near abstraction (Ibid. 6) Furniss admits that the two terms are not ideal, but elaborates the opposite poles thus:

The term 'mimesis' represents the desire to reproduce natural reality (more like live-action work) while the term 'abstraction' describes the use of pure form – a suggestion of a concept rather than an attempt to explicate it in real life terms (more like animation) (Ibid.).

Furniss's binarism in fact shows a spectrum of representational aesthetic possibilities in all kinds of moving image in different media. Using the same idea, this thesis, however, proposes the theory of hybridity 'exclusively' for the animated form based on the 'copied' nature of any animation from abstraction to mimesis. Thus, the two poles of mimesis versus abstraction are regarded as existing *within* the animation medium; for example, the pole of extreme mimesis may refer to those cases when animation closely approaches its live-action equivalent.

In terms of excessively hybrid styles of animation (including 3D animation) this thesis suggests that imagining such a spectrum in terms of linear progression between poles excludes consideration of hybrid forms that take their forms from different parts of the spectrum. It may therefore be more useful to imagine it as spreading across a three-dimensional space, and accommodating different combinations of

aesthetic possibilities. This may be seen as a Cartesian space<sup>75</sup> in which stylistic possibilities are located on three different axes. If the general style of a puppet film or any other kind of animated film is reduced to three elements of character, narrative and the world depicted, these elements are imagined on each of the three axes, each starting from pure abstraction (-100) and moving towards extreme mimesis (+100).<sup>76</sup> The zero between the extremes is a kind of neutral point, at which any of the three specific traits is in equilibrium and does not tend toward either extreme. In reality point zero and the two extremes are difficult to imagine, just as it is difficult to imagine a purely abstract narrative. Most conditions seem to fall in the area between the two extremes, tending to one or the other.

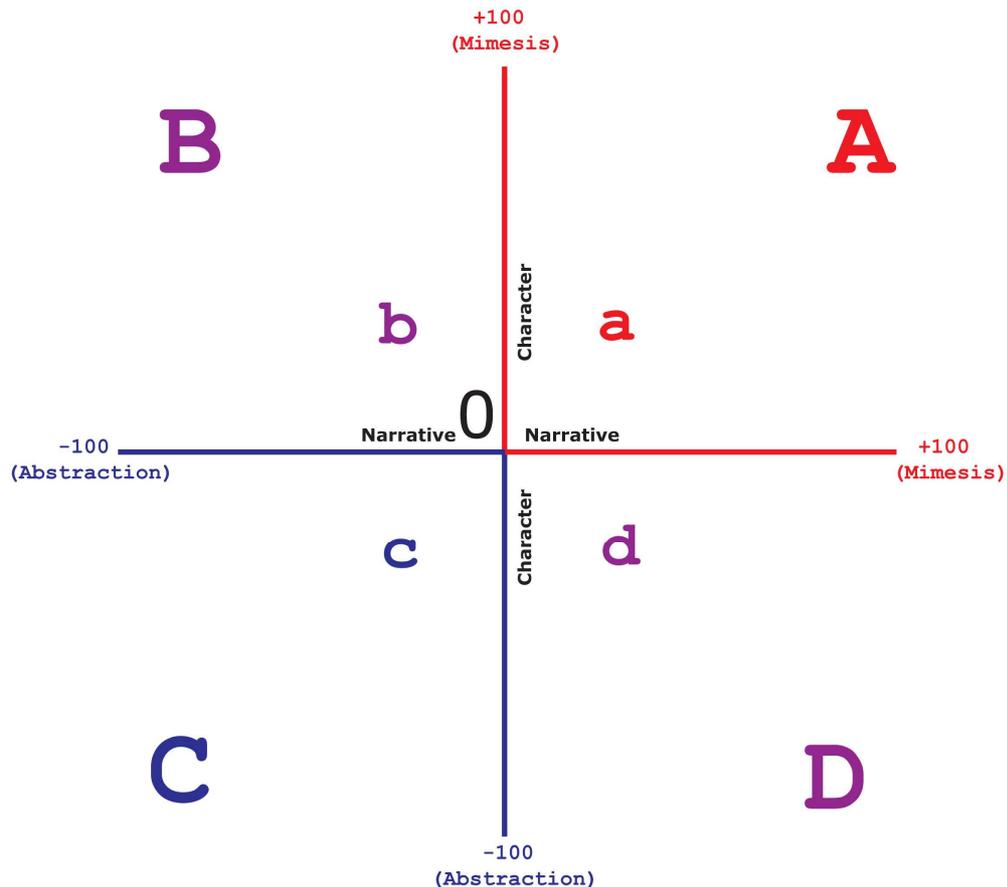
As such, any two of the three elements may be shown on a perpendicular axis to see how they may be different hybrids of the two factors. In Figure 2.21, for instance, the combination of two elements of 'character-narrative' is shown to see how the characters and narrative of a film can be combined under four possible conditions, shown in the graph as zones A-D. [A: both in the mimesis area; C: both in the abstraction area; B and D: one element in mimesis and the other in abstraction]. The use of lower and upper case letters shows the strength or weakness of each trait. For instance, while a small 'a' indicates a film's minor tendencies to mimesis in terms both of narrative and character, a large A demonstrates strong tendencies to mimesis. Should a film's narrative and character attributes each tend below 0 and towards -100, it would appear in the C area of the table; as mentioned, depending on which part of the C area they turn up in, the strength of their abstraction may be measured. In areas B and D (shown in purple) there is an element of abstraction and

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<sup>75</sup> This is by using the 'Cartesian coordinate system' to determine the coordinate of each point uniquely in a plane through two numbers on the two perpendicular axes (X&Y) or by three numbers in a three-dimensional space using three axes. It can be also used to determine the properties of a point in higher dimensions.

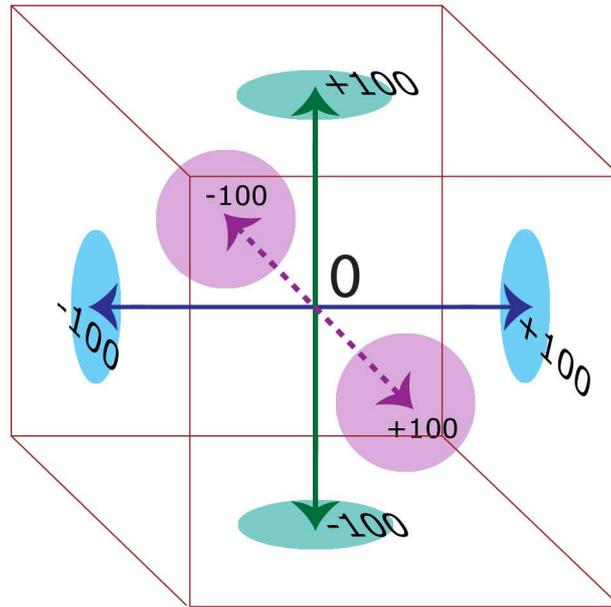
<sup>76</sup> The reduction of the animated form into these three elements is a deliberate strategy to look at the concept of hybridity in a more systematic manner. It is obvious that each element of the three may in itself be seen as the median of many sub-categories of traits. For instance, examining character from mimesis to abstraction should be assessed by recourse to many aspects from its appearance and design to its movement, behaviour and interaction with the world, as much as by the 'context' in which it appears. This is how, for example, character has been broken down to its compartments in Chapter Five. It is also possible to consider any other set of traits in such a model with combination of formal and content elements, which is again the method used in Chapter Six to show different aspects of hybridity within the films at issue.

another of mimesis. For example, a film that appears in the D area may have highly abstracted characters, which are nevertheless 'filmed' in a realistic narrative. This of course, will be the opposite for films in the B area.



**Figure 2.21 Character/Narrative pair in a 2D Cartesian coordinate model**

By the same token, a combination of other pairs in the 'narrative-world' or the 'character-world' may easily be conceived. If these elements are imagined on three perpendicular axes, they in fact constitute a cube, with point zero (the mid-point of all axes) at the centre and the extreme points of (-100) and (+100) on its corners. This may be called the *Hybridity Cube*, in which virtually all combinations of the three elements in different degrees from (-100) to +100 are possible. (Figure 2.20)



**Figure 2.22 The Hybridity Cube**

In this three-dimensional model of 'formal hybridity', almost no pure form exists (unless located at the point (+ /- 100) and all animated forms are imagined as more or less hybrids of different degrees. Yet, if the narrative, puppets and the world depicted by a 3D animated film become very close to their equivalent (imaginary or real) in the real world, they are considered to be a close replica of a live-action version of themselves (whether or not such a version exists). Therefore, in this model, naturalism of puppets (or characters in general) and settings, and cinematic codes of narrative go hand in hand to stand for mimesis, a live-action depiction of the event replacing reality itself. This is because, as argued in Chapter One, animation in its representational linear narrative forms cannot normally exist unless it adopts established live-action codes of narration. Further, cartoon aesthetics become a hybrid form, taking elements from abstraction and stylisation, yet also borrowing from the mimesis side of each element. As such, total abstraction may only be imagined in purely formalist and abstract animation, such as the works of Oscar Fischinger or John Whitney. It is suggested that this model may work similarly for all other kinds of animation and is not peculiar to 3D or puppet films.

Considering this, the thesis will suggest that not only puppets, but also the whole formal make-up of Aardman films may, in such a model, be seen to oscillate between the general poles of live-action versus cartoon, in which the possibilities of pure abstraction are excluded. These films are therefore imagined in a space between the two poles of live-action as extreme mimesis and cartoon as a hybrid form in itself, with the proviso that in either case they are only copies of original live-action or cartoon aesthetics or a hybrid of both.

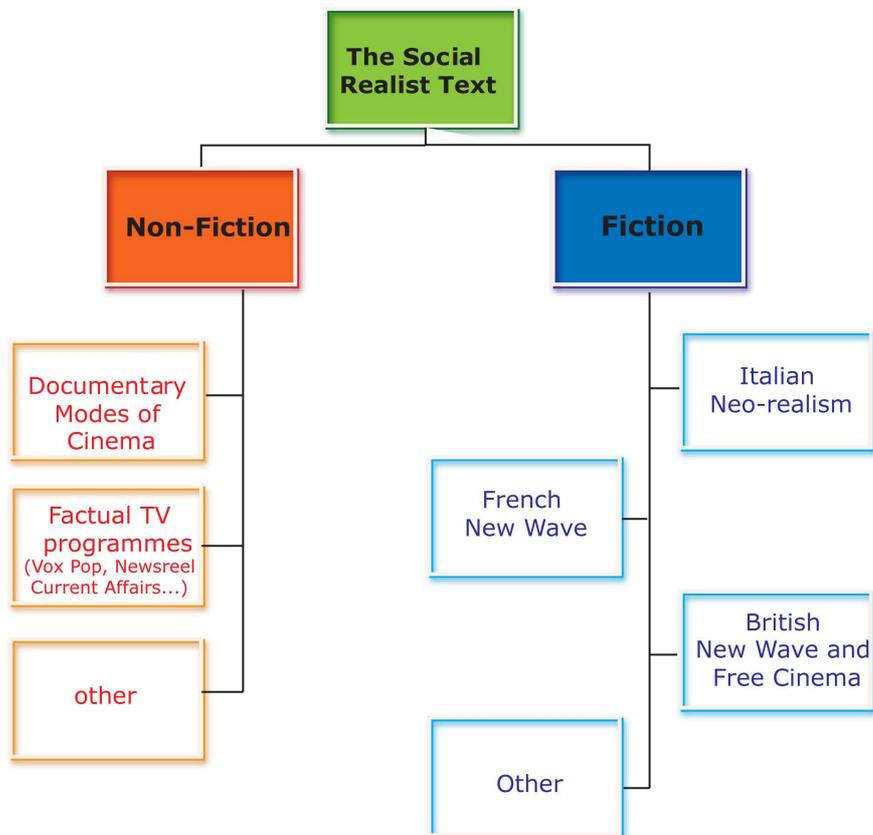
Hybridity, then, can find several dimensions and meanings in these films, not all of which relate to their formal aspects. It is possible, for instance, to imagine a similar Cartesian 2D or 3D space, with elements relevant to content realism, and measure them in terms of the two poles of fiction and non-fiction. It is also important to consider that no pure and non-hybrid form of live-action is imaginable, inasmuch as any cartoon is inevitably hybrid. In their formal components, live-action films are themselves hybrids of different styles, genres and modes (i.e. fiction/documentary). It will therefore be demonstrated that, even films in the corpus that adopt an almost 'pure' simulational version of a live-action film borrow from more than one style of such film. Films that mix cartoon stylistics with those of live-action modes are also considered hybrids, and will be analysed in Part Two.

Yet, as argued, consideration of content in these films makes them even more complex hybrids, in that they base their non-fiction and factual content on real-life soundtracks. In this respect, therefore, they engage highly with realism of content and mix that factual content by forms and copies of modes of representation in live-action film that are associated with realism of subject matter. As animated films with factual soundtracks their hybrid make-up becomes unique in terms of analysis. The questions of content realism and hybridity will be examined in the next two chapters of Part One, as each constitutes a significant aspect of this inquiry into realism.

## Chapter Three

### **Realism of Social Content in Animation**

This chapter will investigate issues of social realism, with the aim of providing a theoretical foundation for the ways in which the ten selected Aardman engage with social issues, identified as 'content realism'. It might seem obvious that engaging with, and having a critical view of social realities does not prescribe any particular style. In practice, however, certain modes of representation are more readily associated with social realism, whether fictional or non-fictional. An imagined main hub of 'social realist text' (Lay, 2002:8) that holds virtually all styles, practices and modes of representing social realism in the moving image, may therefore be divided broadly into fiction and non-fiction divisions, each with its own sub-divisions (Figure 3.1)



**Figure 3.1 The Social Realist Text and its sub-divisions**

It will be suggested that the ten Aardman films fall under the general category of social realist text. In terms of representational make-up, they borrow heavily from certain modes and genres of both fiction and non-fiction associated with social realism. More specifically, with regard to their copied representational make-ups, it will be investigated whether these films fit into either category<sup>77</sup>.

These are unusual animated films based on factual soundtracks, so it is more difficult to define this categorisation emphatically than with most live-action films. The films will therefore be examined in terms of how they engage with factual and non-fictional themes and styles. Issues relating to distinctions of fiction, non-fiction and documentary form will thus be discussed in terms of the main style they mimic. It will also be asked whether they may be seen as 'animated documentaries', a recent discourse within non-fiction film that mediates its factual content using animation rather than live-action footage. Finally, there will be a brief examination of the conventions of sound in two distinct modes of documentary, namely observational and interview, with a focus on the question of realism of soundtrack. This will eventually aid the study of content realism in the films to evaluate the fictional/factual relationship between their sound and image.

## **Social Realist Text and Aardman**

This thesis suggests that the ten films studied may be described as 'social realist texts'<sup>78</sup>. From *Morph* in 1978 to the first *Wallace and Gromit* film in 1989, many Aardman films demonstrate a continuing fascination with different aspects of social issues and problems. *Babylon* (1986) stands out because of its bitter, sarcastic, overtly political content and realistic

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<sup>77</sup> Particularly the documentary form and its various modes, such as observational film, interviews and *Vox Pop*.

<sup>78</sup> The term is borrowed from Samantha Lay's (2000) examination of the social realism in the British cinema in her book *British Social Realism*.

aesthetic; works including *Next* (1989), *Ident* (1989) and *Stage Fright* (1997) reveal a less direct, more playful and at times more complex engagement with social phenomena. Many films refer, in various ways, to familiar aspects of social realism in live-action cinema. The dominant feature of the ten films, however, seems to be their attention and allusion to long-established formats of British social realism, from the Griersonian documentary of the 1930s to the British Free Cinema and New Wave of the 1950s and 1960s. As television began to dominate in the 1970s, social realist film began to find new forms, dimensions and implications, including soap operas and light-hearted documentaries<sup>79</sup>. These have more entertainment-based formats and engage with their social content in a less serious or political way. This change of direction, and the impact of television, seems to become gradually evident in the ten Aardman films. Some of the later films avoid serious engagement with social criticism and opt for a more comic/parodic encounter with everyday situations; they engage with more banal aspects of social life, using the observational form only in specifically televisual formats, such as the interviews and *vox pop* in *War Story* and *Creature Comforts*.

Some pre-conditions are necessary in order to compare short, animated Aardman films with fictional and non-fictional traditions of British social realism. Firstly, these films are always an animated copy of the live-action originals and thus only 'recreate' the initial aesthetics in another medium. This raises distinct questions and demands different methods of analysis than conventional live-action film, and is a key area of inquiry into the copied aesthetics of those films that draw upon live-action modes of representation<sup>80</sup>. Secondly, none of these attributions should be seen as absolute rules; they are meant to serve as 'approximate' and 'relative' prescriptions.

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<sup>79</sup> Lay observes that after the 1960s filmmakers of the Free Cinema and New Wave who continued to make social realist films, including Ken Loach, gradually and inevitably changed direction towards newer formats, making films for television instead, which entailed making film for a different kind of audience. By the 1990s fewer and fewer of these kinds of film were being made for the cinema (Lay, 2002: 101).

<sup>80</sup> Questions of intertextuality and a hypothesised formal hybridity in these films will be examined in the next chapter with the aim of 'reading' the implications and possible meanings of such copying and borrowings.

In *British Social Realism*, Samantha Lay (2002) explores the trajectory of so-called 'social realist texts' in a British context<sup>81</sup>. Admitting that 'there is no singular, unified social realist 'form', she declares that a general attribute of most social realist texts is their attempt at 'a high degree of verisimilitude, placing an emphasis on ensemble casts in social situations which suggest a direct link between person and place' (2002: 20). Further, and unlike entertainment films, these texts in diverse ways and to various degrees attempt to show 'things as they really are' (Ibid.).

Social realist text may therefore be considered an umbrella under which are gathered different modes of filmmaking, from non-fiction, mainly documentary films, to fictional forms with a social realist tendency, such as British New Wave. In general, Lay suggests that a social realist text accommodates some or all of these factors:

1. They tend to be independent, low budget, directed towards either the art-house and/or video and television market, and stand as texts in contrast to classical Hollywood realist text (Ibid. 8).
2. They involve 'social extension', a term borrowed from Raymond Williams (1977: 61-64), meaning that they 'tend to extend the range of characters and topics to include marginal or previously under-represented groups and issues in society' (Ibid. 9)
3. They are in most cases politically motivated or at least politically conscious (Ibid.).
4. Most are reformist, educational or socially purposive in some way: 'the choice of issues and the prevalence of certain themes is bound up with a mission or a message' (Ibid.).
5. They tend to show a 'slice of life' as it was or is, particularly in the British context (Ibid. 13).

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<sup>81</sup> Her investigation ranges from the emergence of 'the documentary shorts of the 1930s, the popular 1940s story documentaries, feature films from the 1950s to the present' and other kinds of realist texts in television (Lay, 2002:20).

6. They are believed to favour 'content over style', hence the terms Brit-Grit and 'kitchen sink' drama, particularly in a British context. (Ibid.)
7. They 'are commonly associated with an observational style of filmmaking, which tends to produce distance between text and spectator' (Ibid. 22).

Though Lay's wide definition of social realist text barely considers animated form as a possible category<sup>82</sup>, the common characteristics she identifies may be applied to Aardman's docu-fictions. Four of Lay's factors concern social themes and social realism (2,3,4,5) and two relate more to stylistics and formal issues (6,7), though areas may overlap. The first factor emphasises budgetary considerations that nevertheless impact on both the content and formal attributes of a film. The ten Aardman films conform to this criterion, in that the BBC and Channel 4 commissioned them as low-budget art-house films for specific non-commercial broadcasting. It may therefore be argued that style-related attributes and formal concerns in live-action social realist films cannot be measured directly against them. What follows, then, is an attempt to examine Lay's criteria and discover the implications of applying them to all ten Aardman films. The results can be seen in Table 3.1.

As stated, the ten Aardman films are non-mainstream, low-budget films. Their realism is measured against their degree of departure from, rather than their resemblance to, mainstream Hollywood cartoons including Disney. Their theme and content mainly concerns the representation of marginal characters: ordinary working class people, the elderly, an ex-convict and women, in either problematic contexts or everyday situations and challenges. A few have explicit or implicit political undertones, and

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<sup>82</sup> In her investigation of Channel 4's history as 'a major contributor to the so-called (and somewhat previous) renaissance in British cinema' (Lay, 2002: 79), Lay notes how it supported and commissioned directors and works that 'address minority audiences, and by and large represented the under-represented, thus extending the subjects and representations in British film culture' (Ibid.). Two of the three series of Aardman works under investigation were commissioned by Channel 4.

<b>FILMS</b>	<b>Down and Out (1978)</b>	<b>Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)</b>	<b>On Probation (1981-3)</b>	<b>Sales Pitch (1981-3)</b>	<b>Palmy Days (1981-3)</b>	<b>Early Bird (1981-3)</b>	<b>Late Edition (1981-3)</b>	<b>Going Equipped (1989)</b>	<b>War Story (1989)</b>	<b>Creature Comforts (1989)</b>
<b>SRT</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1. Low budget, art house	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Social extension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Politically motivated/conscious	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	?	✓	✓	?
4. Reformist, educational or socially purposive	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	✓	✓	✓
5. A slice of life	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?
6. Content over style	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	?	✓	?	?
Questionable in animation										
7. Observational style	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓?	?	?

**Table 3.1 Social Realist Text Criteria [Lay (2002)]**

many may be seen as 'slice of life' films (see Table 3.1.). In terms of style and aesthetics, it may be said that they mainly adopt the 'gritty' or plain appearance linked to the 'kitchen sink' tradition of British realist film. In this respect the fact that their style is a copy of live-action films in another medium must be considered: while place and context are implicitly British, the location is a fabrication, just as in some British New Wave films about the so-called Industrial North. Their plain, gritty style, more evident in some films than others, is a conscious choice, not the usual budgetary limitation of live-action film<sup>83</sup>.

Another issue that does not seem directly applicable to the Aardman films is that of preference of content over style, as it is complicated and at least two-fold. As Andrew Higson has observed, in contrast to Hollywood cinema, British social realist film was not known for its 'visual pleasure' (1996:135). The prioritisation of content over style or form is normally understood as the avoidance of 'spectacular' effects or glossy and entertaining imagery in favour of a more truthful representation of ordinary situations. Ordinary events in the lives of ordinary, mainly working-class people are depicted via a cinematic representation that provides only a site for 'observation' of life as it is<sup>84</sup>. On one hand, as animated copies of such aesthetics, Aardman films seem only to replicate the surface of such categories of imagery and cinema. In most 3D animation, the settings are nevertheless a creation of the makers rather than a choice influenced by budget. In this respect, a dull and a colourful setting are equally constructed. On the other hand, the ten Aardman films not only mimic the surface of such imagery, but also try to depict typical events and characters in social contexts through clay-puppet animation, taking their lead from the factual soundtrack. They therefore seem to emphasise the content in a way similar to social realist film and,

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<sup>83</sup> David Sproston and Peter Lord explain in a DVD commentary (Aardman Classics-2000) how for instance, they used technical printing processes to create the grainy effect for the imagery in the film *Going Equipped*.

<sup>84</sup> This is also true of post-war Italian Neo-realism films, which were shot in real locations with natural lighting and cheap equipment. In his work about this cinema, for example *De Sica: Metteur en Scène* Bazin promotes a different aspect of his realist theory in terms of 'content realism' (Bazin, 1967: 87)

in most films of the corpus, avoid the spectacular effects of both mainstream live-action cinema and animation.

Further, the fact that they are low-budget films commissioned for specific late-night television broadcasting impacts on the quality of imagery. From the earliest to the latest films, a gradual progression from low-tech towards a more 'professional' appearance is evident, as the filmmakers themselves note in *Creating Creature Comforts* (2003). Early films like *Confessions...and Down and Out* have a simple, experimental appearance, but as the studio becomes more professional and commercial this is reflected in its films, especially in the final series *Lip Synch*. The 'quality' of image and the animation itself become far smoother, more sophisticated and professional, as do the characters, settings and narrative. The clear difference between *Confessions...* and *Going Equipped* is arguably indicative of the maturation of their obsessively realistic and film-like style. It may therefore be said that Aardman films tend to copy forms that prioritise content over style, while their gritty imagery is both a stylistic choice – to resemble the established tradition of social realist aesthetics – and a production implication of being experimental, low-budget films not targeted at a mass audience.

Lay's final criterion on observational shooting style invites a similar question. What makes an observational mode in live-action is the decisive fact of recording an event spontaneously and with minimal intervention from the filmmaker<sup>85</sup>. This principal imperative of live 'recording', especially as the cornerstone of most discourses of documentary and non-fiction modes of representation, seems to make it difficult for any animation form to be regarded as observational documentary. While most of these films are copies of the observational mode, they do not qualify as observational documentaries because they are in direct opposition to the principles of observational 'recording' of

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<sup>85</sup> Observational and other modes of documentary will be discussed shortly.

events as they happen<sup>86</sup>; they are only mimicking or reconstructing that effect. It may therefore be proposed that these films qualify as observational documentaries *only if* the 'copying' and frame-by-frame process is discounted. As such, these films are only simulating the effects and aesthetic qualities of what Lay identifies as a social realist text.

Further investigations into the question of fiction/non-fiction will be undertaken by examining the debates surrounding the question in live-action films and its implications and applicability on the animated form.

## **Non-fiction and the Documentary Form**

*Documentary is persistently treated as a representational mode of filmmaking, although at its core is the notion of film as record.*

*(Bruzzi, 2000, 11)*

In the light of Bordwell and Thompson's form versus content argument, elaborated in the Introduction, it is almost impossible to separate issues of stylistics and subject-matter in a film of any kind. Stylistics and modes of representation play an essential role even in a non-fictional form like documentary, which is mostly associated with representing realities of the social world. Though this chapter's main concern is content realism in non-fiction and mainly documentary film, the issue of style cannot be avoided. The nature of documentary film, as an attempt to 'record' and reflect on the real world's events using a mechanical device or process, prescribes a close relationship between the material of reality and the technology that facilitates its representation. As Paul Ward observes, the crucial question in documentary representation is '...the tension between, on the one hand, the capturing of some aspect of the real world and the people who inhabit it, and on the other hand the inevitable use of

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<sup>86</sup> Of the ten films, the last three are interviews [*Going Equipped*, *War Story* and *Creature Comforts*] which show observational tendencies within an interview mode. The rest are overtly observational or fly-on-the-wall replicas, though some ultimately get closer than others to this form.

aesthetic and representational devices to achieve that aim' (Ward, 2005:4).

While all 'realist' cinemas, whether fiction or non-fiction, have a specific relationship with technical and technological possibilities and formal aesthetic effects, the kind of themes they mediate are implicitly entrenched in those technical issues. The history of documentary practice may be seen as a relentless attempt to provide the most efficient resources – lighter cameras and equipment, synchronous sound, more sensitive film stock for under-lit locations – to facilitate the most immediate and truthful recording of events as they happen (Nichols, 1991:33). This in turn provokes questions relating to 'objectivity' and objective representation in the documentary film, in terms of Bazin's faith in the mechanical record. Such mechanical processes cannot in themselves guarantee either a truthful demonstration of reality, or a purely objective representation. Films, fictional or otherwise, are subjective constructions as creations of their makers. All means of image manipulation and mediated meaning are accessible to the cinematic apparatus, and may equally concern non-fictional modes of film. There is a belief that such possibilities, which with CGI advances are becoming infinitely broad in scope, render any non-fictional representation highly suspect (Winston, 1995:6). Gunnar Strøm (2003:52) referring to the types of documentary that manipulate the photographic image (including animated documentary) admits that any claim of authenticity based on an objective record for the documentary image is idle since the indexical quality of documentary live-action shot is lost. Strøm, however, argues that this should be seen as an expansion of the very process of manipulation previously available to the medium of live-action (Ibid). He concludes that belief should be moved from 'technological truth' to 'institutional trust', and that instead of expecting a photograph or film to tell a recorded reality, faith should be placed in the story of a trusted agent who wishes to tell something about reality (Ibid. 54).

Despite this, as the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction film are increasingly blurred, it is not always possible to tell the two discourses

apart. The technological manipulation and shared codes of representation of fictional and non-fictional forms thus inevitably obstruct the 'institutional trust' Strøm suggests. New forms, especially the factual animation known as animated documentary, exacerbate the situation, as the imagery has usually lost that Bazinian visual 'indexicality' to a profilmic space and event. This point is crucial to the enquiry into content realism, since this type of film represents factual events in a non-indexical imagery that is at best only realistic. With this in mind, this thesis attempts to formulate some conclusions about the disputed boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, which will enlighten further examination of the films in terms of how they have dealt with their factual material.

### **Fiction/non-fiction: where is the borderline?**

As concepts, fiction and non-fiction seem obvious enough, but distinguishing between them is highly problematic, especially with documentary film. Paul Ward (2005) observes that, though in theory there is a clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction because one is 'made up' and the other is 'real', they are not always easy to tell apart because 'there are countless nuances and points on a spectrum that suggest that this relationship is more fraught than it first appears' (Ward, 2005:7).

Social realism and representing realities of the social or historical world do not seem to be bound to a specific style or mode of representation. The key concern of many fictional modes of live action cinema, much as with documentary films, is a dynamic engagement with contemporary social, political, and historical realities. In a similar vein, animation is not confined to fictional themes and modes; throughout the history of short non-cartoon, *avant-garde* and experimental films, it has shown an aptitude for engaging with the social aspects of the real. The ten selected films closely mimic a non-fiction, documentary form. In the earlier films,

however, Aardman engages more deeply with certain aspects of social reality than in a simple copying of the documentary form. In consequence, as the product of hybridisations of various realist modes, these works are less easy to categorise as either fiction or non-fiction.

Despite this, differentiating the two distinct discourses may sometimes seem more of an intellectual exercise than a genuine difficulty. In most cases, unless there is a deliberate intention to confuse, viewers are able to work out whether what they are watching is, in Ward's words, "'fictional", "non-fictional", or some kind of hybrid' (Ward, 2005: 20). Carroll (1983: 5-46) has made a useful contribution to the debate with his 'indexing' theory. This suggests that because producers, filmmakers and distributors 'index' films as fiction or non-fiction, viewers generally adjust their expectations accordingly (Ibid.). Such labelling is, however, irrelevant in the case of animation, especially animated documentaries; there is still no system to distinguish fiction from non-fiction in them.

The question of representation and stylistics is rendered problematic, if not baffling, in claims that documentaries are 'representing reality' (Nichols, 1991); support '*Epistophilia*, a pleasure in knowing' (Nichols, 1991: 178); may be considered '*evidence from the world*' and are therefore 'a source of knowledge' (Ibid.) and are eventually regarded as 'discourses of sobriety'<sup>87</sup>(Nichols, 1991:3). Relating the documentary to the realm of rhetoric and persuasion (Nichols, 1991:134), Nichols believes that documentary logic facilitates *perspective*, because the documentary text offers a particular point of view through its depiction of the world, and *commentary*, via direct addresses like voiceover and tactics or devices such as style and rhetoric to construct an *argument* (Nichols, 1991:118). This therefore raises the question of subjectivity and identification. In Nichols' view, these issues are more often explored in fiction than documentary, while the documentary debate often bears the hallmarks of objectivity, ethics and ideology. He believes that this

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<sup>87</sup> Nichols grants to documentary film the status of 'discourse of sobriety', like other non-fictional systems such as science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare which are assumed as having instrumental power to change the world, effect action and entail consequences (Nichols, 1991:3)

division is a matter of aesthetic convention and historical circumstance, and that there is no good reason to bar documentary from 'incorporating moments of identification' or 'pegging them to the indexical linkages it has to the world' (Ibid. 156). Thus, as an alternative to using fictional aesthetic devices like point-of-view editing, documentary subjectivity 'strengthens the sense of human engagement within the historical world' (Ibid. 157). From Nichols' argument it may be gathered that stylistic conventions are inevitable, even in the most 'direct' kind of documentary that seeks to promote an argument about the real world.

Two opposing views of documentary film are thus recognisable. The first is the emphasis on its 'record' quality (see earlier reference to Bruzzi). This bases its reality claim on 'objective' recording and registering the actual event, mobilising Bazinian realism of the cinematographic image (Bazin, 1967:13). In its radical form, this view regards any kind of dramatisation, narrativisation, staging or reconstruction as manipulation of reality, and thus outside the accepted criteria of documentary representation. If in general a fundamental ambition of documentary film is the pursuit of (technological) advancements by which to facilitate more immediate, truthful and direct access to image and sound of the real event, it may be said that it was a particular belief of *aficionados* of American Direct Cinema and French *cinéma-vérité*.<sup>88</sup> The Direct Cinema influence casts such a shadow that that the fly-on-the-wall, shaky handheld camera approach to filming sometimes functions as a shortcut to 'documentary-ness'. Stella Bruzzi notes that in general, documentary is perceived as unedited, un-doctored material that avoids any subjective view or a clear argument. The use of any kind of editing, even minimal narrativisation or the presence of a subjective view in a documentary film – as opposed to the apparent 'lack of authority' of the observational voice – is a kind of deviation from being true to reality (Bruzzi, 2000: 69). Ward also proposes that directness of filming is considered equal to 'objectivity' and thus led to a general belief that documentary should not be 'staged' since 'truth could only be represented via the literal unfolding

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<sup>88</sup> Much like Bazin they hoped for a time when the barrier between representation and reality was totally removed.

of events, captured as if the camera and crew were not present' (Ward, 2005: 8). He contends, however, that 'staging is an unavoidable part of the filmmaking process ... and it is not staging or dramatic (re)construction *per se* that is the problem, but our attitudes towards it' (Ibid.).

The other view of documentary film, defined by Grierson as the 'creative treatment of actuality', is that the act of simply recording events, as in newsreels and what he called 'lecture films' (Ward, 2005: 9) is an artless, degraded or lower category of documentary film, if it is documentary at all. In many cases, documentary is very close to fiction film in terms of narrative structure. Some documentaries tell stories in the shape of a drama, though many do not. Documentarists including Leacock avoided editing or re-staging events, aiming for total non-intervention with the real story taking place in front of the camera (Armes, 1974: 70-73). Flaherty and other Griersonian documentarists, however, tried to 'uncover or reveal the shape that is already within the material'<sup>89</sup> (Armes, 1974: 31).

Among those who have attacked Grierson's definition is Winston (1995) who insists that, after the creative treatment, nothing will remain of the actuality (Winston, 1995: 99-101). Paul Ward, however, notes Grierson's candour:<sup>90</sup>

The important thing here is that Grierson makes no bones about using creative 'shaping' – indeed this is what defines the still-prevailing orthodoxy in the wake of direct cinema: that

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<sup>89</sup> '[L]ife as narrativised' is Winston's description of the events in Flaherty's *Nanook* (1922). He thinks that in Grierson's definition of documentary as 'creative treatment of actuality', *treatment* indicates 'dramatisation', 'narrativisation' or even 'fictionalisation' of the reality image (Winston, 1995: 99-101). Borrowing from Dai Vaughan, he argues that 'non-narrative works better in the head than on the screen' (Winston, 1995: 113). He not only tries to show a narrative structure as a justified principle in Griersonian realist documentaries (Winston, 1995: 103) but also moves the discussion further to demonstrate that 'narrative is unavoidable' and 'is never absent in documentary films, even if its presence is more or less marked'. (Winston, 1995: 119) Of course, here Winston is going to show that the truth claim cannot be linked to the non-narrative structure of a documentary film and should be sought elsewhere.

<sup>90</sup> 'As Grierson says, once one moves beyond the lower categories, "we pass from the plain (or fancy) descriptions of natural material, to arrangements, rearrangements and creative shaping of it"' (Grierson 1966:146 cited in Ward, 2005: 9).

documentary should not only consist of “natural material”, but that this should appear to viewers as objectively, transparently and “undoctored” as possible (Ward, 2005: 10).

Considering contemporary practices of documentary film, even excluding Aardman-style animated texts, the idea of setting boundaries between fiction and non-fiction film is complex. These new approaches to documentary film show a wide range of borrowings, copying, recycling and simulations of different genres and modes. Fictional films use and hybridise many of the aesthetics and stylistics originally associated with non-fiction, mainly documentary film; the fly-on-the-wall style with shaky hand-held camera is the prime example. Documentaries also adopt increasingly complicated aesthetics, some of which belong originally to the realm of fiction film.

Carroll (1996) disagrees with the idea of using certain techniques and formal structures as the criteria to distinguish fiction from non-fiction, and suggests some useful ways out of the conundrum. He claims that both fiction and non-fiction filmmakers can and do imitate each other, so a film’s status cannot be decided by deconstructing its formal techniques. Instead, he proposes that ‘...the distinction between non-fiction and fiction is a distinction between the commitments of the texts, not between the surface structure of the texts’ (Carroll, 1996: 287). For Carroll, the deciding factor is the filmmaker’s commitment to the accepted ‘standards and protocols’ of their particular mode of film-making (Ibid.). These protocols may be determined by a constant negotiation or, in Ward’s view, ‘complex interaction between text, context, producer and spectator’ (Ward, 2005: 11).

Carl R. Plantinga’s (1997) suggestion of considering a ‘fuzzy boundary’ for the concept of non-fiction, ‘where certain films fit the category only uncomfortably’ may be an appropriate solution (Plantinga, 1997: 12). This, he says, does not influence the initial distinction, and allows some

films to stay on the margins of a category<sup>91</sup>. He argues instead that fiction and non-fiction 'perform distinct social functions' and are therefore understood by viewers 'with reference to a different set of expectations and conventions' (Plantinga, 1997:11). Thus, he believes that if both fiction and non-fiction use a similar aesthetic device –manipulation– the difference should be sought elsewhere (Ibid.).

A valuable contribution to the debate is Plantinga's notion of a model of 'family resemblances' to accommodate different nuances of non-fiction film and avoid the trap of unyielding definitions. The idea, initially posited by Wittgenstein<sup>92</sup>, is used by Morris Weitz to examine the difficulties of defining art. In this model, it is suggested that no attempt should be made to find a common 'essence' of all forms of 'open concepts' such as art. They should instead be seen in 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (Weitz, 1956: 32 quoted in Plantinga, 1997:14).

In their studies of the documentary's broad spectrum of practices and forms, Ward (2005) and Bruzzi (2000) seem to call for such open-mindedness, which in turn may make way for more complex forms and ideas of documentary and non-fiction film, many of them marginal. Such an attitude might help to resolve the historical conflict between the idea of constructed-ness and documentary representation. In this system of thoughts, then, the spectator is as aware of the constructed nature of any kind of cinematic representation as the filmmaker, and discussion of realities of social life need not rely solely on 'recorded' material of reality. This mindset has allowed certain modes of factual animation to be considered as documentary or as Wells calls it 'animation with a documentary tendency'<sup>93</sup> (1998: 28).

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<sup>91</sup> Referring to Metz and his successor Jacques Aumont who believed that 'every film is a fiction' (Aumont et al. 1992 cited in Plantinga, 1997: 11), based on the notion that every film is a construct and that any manipulation equals fiction, Plantinga says that this definition of fiction is so broad that it inevitably covers any discourse.

<sup>92</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1958) *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York, Macmillan)

<sup>93</sup> The question whether the ten Aardman films can be considered animated documentaries will be addressed later when looking more closely at this emerging discourse of animation.

The discussion of the distinction between non-fiction and fiction provided here may illuminate a hypothesis that Aardman films occupy a status somewhere between the two discourses. The documentary form, as the basis of all factual films, is sometimes taken as synonymous with non-fiction<sup>94</sup>. This leads to the examination of the documentary film, which aims to promote a more in-depth reading of the formal and thematic make-up of the Aardman films in question. With reference to Nichols' (1991) classification of different modes of documentary and Plantinga's (1997) recognition of 'voices' in the documentary film's diverse forms, this thesis will strive to locate the areas of similarity between these modes and voices and the formal and thematic contents of the ten Aardman films. It will be argued that although in their visual make-up these films copy or mix certain modes of live-action documentary, based on their functions they seem to adopt different voices as identified by Plantinga.

## **Documentary Film: Modes and Voices**

It seems that Nichols' categorisation of 'modes of documentary' is based mainly on restrictions or developments in the technological possibilities that increasingly made the process of 'documenting' the factual events achievable (Nichols, 1991: 33). Films of the 1930s realist movement headed by Grierson are sometimes termed the 'classics' of documentary practice (Ibid. 34). Nichols places these films in the general category of 'expository mode' with an overt rhetoric promoted by a voiceover to present the film's main argument<sup>95</sup> (Ibid. 32).

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<sup>94</sup> Ward, however, correctly notes: 'All documentary films are nonfictional, but not all nonfictional films are documentaries' (Ward, 2005: 11).

<sup>95</sup> Its exponents are seen to have been motivated by dissatisfaction with the dominant mode of narrative fiction film, particularly Hollywood films made purely for commercial entertainment purposes. They thought these films distracted attention from serious matters such as social problems, and that they could not educate or inform people about crucial aspects and dilemmas of their lives.

Other modes in Nichols's classification include 'observational', 'reflexive' and 'interactive'.<sup>96</sup> He notes that 'observational documentary', with key exponents including Leacock-Pennebaker and Frederick Wiseman, 'arose from the availability of more mobile, synchronous recording equipment and a dissatisfaction with the moralising quality of expository documentary' (Nichols, 1991: 33). The most prominent movement within this mode known as Direct Cinema emphasised the non-intervention of the filmmaker. Thus, in its purest form, it avoided voice-over, inter-titles, reconstruction and re-enactment, and even interviews or added music. Editing was used only if it could add to the 'impression of lived or real time'<sup>97</sup> (Nichols, 1991: 38).

As examples of the 'reflexive' mode, Nichols cites the early works of Vertov<sup>98</sup> and 1960s *cinema vérité* filmmakers such as Jill Godmillow and Raul Ruiz. He notes that the major difference between this and other modes is the focus on the properties of the documentary as text rather than as historical reference (Ibid. 57). In reflexive documentary realist techniques are used only to interrupt and expose them as textual constructs<sup>99</sup> (Ibid.).

Nichols's 'interactive' mode, which gained weight in the late 1950s with work produced by the National Film Board of Canada<sup>100</sup> seems to have provided the foundation for the 'reflective' documentary. Nichols says that, compared to expository and observational modes which try to conceal the production process and conventions used to convey their

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<sup>96</sup> In his book *Blurred Boundaries* (1994) Nichols modified and added more modes to his previous categorisation.

<sup>97</sup> The ten Aardman films have copied this fly-on-the-wall style of filming heavily, so there will be increased focus on this mode, especially during the examination of the conventions of sound in observational documentary at the end of this chapter.

<sup>98</sup> Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov's works and obsessions with 'the newsreel camera's ability to report life as it happens' (Armes, 1974: 40) in the 1920s marked a new fashion in filmmaking. This approach may be considered the opposite of what was being done in contemporary Soviet cinema by masters like Eisenstein. Motivated by the events of his time as a communist with social/political concerns, Vertov produced a number of weekly newsreels (1918-19) and also from 1922 'film-newspapers' under the title *Kinopravda – Cinema truth*. (Winston, 1995: 164).

<sup>99</sup> Nichols observes that reflexive documentary being such a text with such a problematic (mentioned above), cannot incorporate the conventions of realism, which is intended to facilitate the viewer's access to the world using conventional rules of the style.

<sup>100</sup> Particularly *The Candid Eye* series (1958-59), and Gilles Groulx and Michel Brault's *Les Requetteurs* in 1958

message, the interactive mode is as an attempt to differentiate 'the saying of something as distinct from that which is said'. (Ibid. 56). In this mode, he notes, the filmmaker *does* intervene and interact (Ibid. 57).

With regard to Nichols's modes, it is not always possible to 'locate' animated films such as those of Aardman directly within these documentary modes. It is easier to identify the areas of formal copying, but simply mimicking an interview format does not make a clay puppet film an interview. To determine the final effect of a film like *On Probation* on the viewer it is important to see how it 'functions' and is understood in relation to other prevalent modes of live-action documentary. In other words, however much these obsessively realistic films approach observational form, as animations they still retain a highly reflexive feature that may eventually make them closer to Nichols's reflexive mode.

### **Intrinsic Reflexivity in Poetic and Parodic documentary**

Plantinga's recognition of 'voices' within the documentary assists comprehension of films according to the voices they adopt rather than their stylistic connotations, and depend less on their visual 'indexicality'. Recognising the voice adopted by a documentary film is a far more complex process than determining its 'mode' of representation. It may help to read highly hybrid and non-conventional texts such as Aardman's, in which there are multiple layers of meaning to decipher. One possible approach might be via Plantinga's suggested approach of 'the formal, open and poetic' voices of documentary (Plantinga, 1997: 106) He remarks, however, that this broad typology is:

...not meant to exhaust what we mean when we speak of a film's distinctive voice. The formative, open and poetic voices refer to a film's broad epistemic and aesthetic concerns; the films may have other functions and qualities in addition to those. (Ibid.)

Plantinga makes it clear that his typology, as a 'heuristic device', not confined to one mode or one historical period, that is based on 'the narrational authority assumed by the film (in the case of formal and open voice) and on the absence of authority in favour of (broadly) aesthetic concerns in the case of the poetic voice' (Plantinga, 1997:106). He says his proposal aims not so much to categorise, but rather 'to draw attention to some of the major functions of non-fictions and the textual means by which films perform those functions' (Ibid.)

Plantinga finds affinities between the formal voice and Bordwell's account of classical Hollywood narrative as an 'erotetic narrative'; it sets a 'series of questions which the text impels us to ask', that will eventually be answered 'unequivocally' (Ibid. 107). By the same token, the formal voice in non-fiction film, however rhetorical, will 'pose a clear question or a relevant and coherent set of questions' that eventually, 'answer every salient question they pose'. (Ibid. 107)

Open voice, on the other hand, is more 'hesitant' than confident, more implicit than explicit in its rhetoric. As Plantinga says, film in this mode does not pose explicit questions or if so, avoids finding a clear-cut answer: 'It *observes* or *explores* rather than *explains*' (Ibid. 108). Plantinga notes that, though this voice seems associated with direct cinema and cinema-verité, it may also cover some very highly reflexive films: 'Discourse in the open voice need not be implicit or hidden, as it often is in direct cinema. The withdrawal of strong knowledge claim is not necessarily coextensive with "invisible style"'. (Ibid.) Returning to the ten Aardman films, it may be argued that most typify 'open voice' discourse. While their make up might not always be observational, they avoid any commentary and therefore function within Plantinga's category of open voice. Their 'animated-ness' as opposed to their use of real-life events and voices also makes them ambivalent in nature with no straightforward rhetoric; as such they resemble Plantinga's model.

Finally the poetic voice, as Plantinga describes, 'is less concerned with observation, exploration, or explanation – traditional epistemological

concerns – and more with the non-fiction film as art and/or a means of exploring representation itself’ (Ibid. 109). This type of narration, which Plantinga calls ‘*epistemic aestheticism*’ encompasses the limits of what is generally accepted as poetic documentary and accommodates in itself a range of other genres such as *avant-garde*, meta-documentary and documentary parody (Ibid.).

It is interesting to note that the ten Aardman films also conform to Plantinga’s notion of poetic voice. By his definition, poetic voice is less about explicit argument and more concerned with the aesthetics of representation itself. The ambiguous status of these films, which stand between pre-defined modes and voices of documentary, is the manifestation of their unconventional and uncategorised nature. Their copied styles, whether as neutral simulation of serious live-action modes or parodies of such modes mixed with cartoonish forms, may be seen as a poetic demonstration of the assumed triviality of situations they depict. Yet, in avoiding a clear rhetoric but offering nevertheless an ‘observational’ stance to the viewer they become open voice prototypes.

While Plantinga extends his notion of poetic voice to accommodate parodic documentary, Nichols makes both poetic and parodic modes subcategories of his ‘reflexive mode of representation’. This includes all strategies that may ‘address the question of *how* we talk about the historical world’ and in which ‘the focus of the text slides from the realm of historical reference to the properties of the texts itself’ (Nichols, 1991: 57). Dividing reflexivity into *formal* and *political* aspects, he locates ‘parody and satire’ as a strategy that may heighten ‘awareness of a previously taken for granted style, genre, or movement’<sup>101</sup> (Ibid. 74). Considering all varieties of the categorisation, then, reflexivity becomes part and parcel of parodic and pastiched copying.

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<sup>101</sup> Nichols admits that such genres are not very developed in the realm of documentary filmmaking, though he believes that they can be also considered as a sub-genre of ‘social criticism’. (Ibid.)

Ward differentiates two categories of comic copying in relation to the documentary form as parody and satire<sup>102</sup> (Ward, 2005: 68). He contends that while in the former, the *formal* properties of a style are ridiculed, in the latter laughter is used deliberately to serve a wider critical approach to a social problem (Ibid.). Ward's 'satiric parody' therefore performs as a means of 'political or social reflexivity', rather than a mere formal copy, which draws attention to a broader scope of problems and so 'has implications for elements beyond the text itself' (Ibid.). It may be inferred that what seems to have that poetic quality is satire itself. Yet, in films of the Aardman corpus that parody documentary modes, including *Early Bird*, *War Story* and *Creature Comforts*, the formal conventions of documentary are imitated to reflect on a deeper reality. While this does not always have a social or political content, it carries a poetic licence that rises above the film's comedic surface. It may be argued that the animated nature of these ten films becomes the vehicle for that poetic quality. As such, hovering between a fictional image and non-fictional content, these animations' highly reflexive imagery, whether serious or comic, becomes in itself a poetic expression. This arises from the tension between the realisation of the imagery as highly constructed and the actuality of content typified in a British social realist format.

While Ward stresses the reflexive nature of parody, Nichols also refers to a self-referential quality in poetic documentary. Ward asserts that, to assist the process of interacting and understanding a parodic film, implicit and explicit references to an 'original' form are usually made. He also says that in order to understand a particular film as a parodic or satiric text, rather than 'an *actual* documentary' (Ibid. Italics FHS), both filmmaker and viewer must recognise and agree on the initial codes and conventions that it parodies. Documentary parodies, thus, inevitably address self-consciously their copied structure, which borrows from one or several original forms.

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<sup>102</sup> Ward considers the films that aim mainly 'to satirise the textures and conventions of certain types of documentaries and documentary practices' as parody while terming 'satire' the films that might 'use documentary strategies in order to satirise other subjects' (Ward, 2005: 68).

For Nichols, on the other hand, poetic films in their stylistic reflexivity '...draw attention to their own patterns so consistently that they evolve into a poetic or essayist mode of representation' (Nichols, 1991: 70). In this kind of film, he contends, the link to the historical referent is discounted in favour of concentration on its formal aspects including 'colour, tonality, composition, depth of focus, rhythm'. Yet a poetic documentary may also bring to the fore 'the personalised sensibilities and perceptions of the author' (Ibid.). According to Nichols, poetic documentaries may therefore be referencing not only their textual make-up, but hinting at their specific 'auteur' and the individual ways they have engaged with the textual material of their artifice.

A number of conclusions may be drawn from the discussions about poetic and parodic modes and voices of documentary by Plantinga, Ward and Nichols. The element of reflexivity is present in both poetic and parodic documentary, though parodies refer to the originals they copy 'outside' their textual schema, and poetic films refer to their own construction and the auteur 'inside' their textual system. Nevertheless, as previously argued, parodies may be reflective of their own artifice and thus become poetic, while poetic modes may also borrow from other sources in parodic, neutral or serious ways. Further, while in parody an act of copying is always involved, a poetic documentary need not necessarily be a copy; in fact, as Nichols implies, many poetic films seem to be original, essayistic and auteur films.

Copying a predominantly live-action mode of documentary, with or without cartoon borrowings, is central to the ten Aardman films. These copyings are made in both serious and comical ways. Yet, in Aardman films the notions of poetic and parodic mode as well as the concept of reflexivity find different and at times dissimilar significances. Firstly, a parody of a documentary need not necessarily be a documentary. Secondly, Plantinga's notion of a poetic voice does not imply that only documentaries may be poetic; the idea of poetic voice may also be extended to a non-documentary and fictional form. Thirdly, the notion of reflexivity and self-referentiality in animated film, as a frame-by-frame

construct, is general and almost intrinsic to the form. Several factors relating to the ten Aardman films, primarily the fact that they copy live-action modes of documentary, render such reflexivity two-fold or; for films like *War Story* that also borrow from cartoon aesthetics and conventions, multi-fold.

The latter type of reflexivity that results from copying or satirising a form of documentary representation inevitably comments on those conventions and modes of representation. Ward notes that since documentary's function is, first and foremost, to represent 'the real social world', any parodic take on documentary's conventions inevitably challenges those basic functions<sup>103</sup> (Ward, 2005: 68).

The same may be said of a non-parodic copying. In many of the ten films, including *On Probation*, a full copy of an observational live-action film is simulated in a very realistic manner. Although the film avoids promoting any explicit rhetoric, being an exemplar of Plantinga's open voice, its obsessively-copied form inevitably destabilises, questions or at least comments on the original mode. A substantial task of this thesis is therefore to analyse closely the significances of these copied texts<sup>104</sup>.

In order to analyse the ten films, a bespoke classification system will be used, which benefits both from Plantinga's theory surrounding 'the voice of authority' heard from a film's overall text (Plantinga, 1997: 106) and Nichols's and Ward's discussions of parody and poetics in documentary. For these films, two categories of *poetic realism* and *parodic realism* are proposed. While admitting that under a broader view of voices identified by Plantinga, all may be poetic texts, in their formal and thematic copying they are either serious/neutral or comic copies of original live-

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<sup>103</sup> Ward believes: 'Any specific examples of parodic undermining of the assertive, apparently objective stance of documentary inevitably mean that the certainties of documentary as a mode, as a way of understanding and representing the world, are thereby also undermined' (Ward, 2005: 68).

<sup>104</sup> This will be undertaken in Part Two and further in the chapters of Part Three in the specific films of the case study.

action documentary forms<sup>105</sup>. These copying strategies are allied to the notion of realism, since both eventually promote a realist manifestation of a real content. As will be demonstrated, however, such reality is not always mediated via an outright documentary function. Not all these films qualify as animated documentaries, but they do allude in one way or another to social realities<sup>106</sup>.

### **Aardman's Copied Poetic-ness**

Many Aardman films, as discussed, may be termed poetic films. They seem nevertheless to be heavily influenced by the specifically British 'Kitchen Sink' kind of social realism, and its non-glossy aesthetics of depicting working class situations and characters. A unique association of the Aardman films to the idea of poetic realism will therefore be explored with regard to how they re-make the aesthetics of what Andrew Higson (1996) terms poetic realism.

In his essay *Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the 'Kitchen Sink' Film* (1996), Higson looks specifically at films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960) and *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961). His main focus is the deployment of urban landscapes and townscapes of the industrial North where these films were set. As Higson states, the use of these locations adds to the 'documentary realism' of the narrative, while simultaneously producing a romanticised, poetic effect (Higson, 1996: 134). Higson sees a tension between these two factors, which eventually elevates the place to a signifier of a character, his mood and 'a metaphor for the state of the mind of the character' (Ibid.). Noting the non-spectacular nature of British realist cinema in general, he says that many of these landscape shots in particular and the 'ordinariness' or gloominess of these films'

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<sup>105</sup> Importantly, poetic realism in these films, as a serious copying of documentary formats, will be linked to Fredric Jameson's idea of pastiche as a neutral and empty parody as well as to the notion of nostalgia in his model of the 'nostalgia film' (Jameson, 1991: 17), all of which will be addressed when specific issues of intertextuality and hybridity are discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>106</sup> These claims will be shown and argued for in the rest of the chapter as well as in Part Two when a close analysis of the ten films is provided.

atmosphere in general may also be seen as a pleasure to the eye, as *spectacle*. Thus Higson sees a series of tensions: 'the tension between the drabness of the settings (hence the 'kitchen sink') and their "poetic" quality'; between 'documentary realism' and 'romantic atmosphere'; between social problem and pleasurable spectacle. (Ibid.)

Higson identifies two levels of *surface realism* and *moral realism* in New Wave films. Admitting that these films utilise similar types of narrational conventions akin to the classical Hollywood cinema, he argues that they function beyond a simple storytelling that disguises 'fictional diegesis as the real world' (Ibid.). What distinguishes these 'quality' British films from Hollywood narrative films, then, is a claim of 'surface realism' which is a loyal depiction of 'visual and aural surfaces of "the British way of life"' (Ibid.). As Higson observes, in order to achieve such surface realism, it is not sufficient to break some of the studio conventions of classical cinema such as shooting on location in actual British landscapes; rather, it involves a 'fetishisation of certain iconographic details' (Ibid.). Yet, these films are also committed to a realism of social content that Higson calls moral realism, by which he means an incorporation of and commitment to a 'particular set of social problems and solutions, a particular social formation'. (Ibid.)

In drawing attention to such poetic realism as an implicitly romanticised and spectacular effect within a form that prioritises content over form, Higson divides discourses of poetic realism from documentary realism<sup>107</sup>. Thus, by the time the 'kitchen sink film' emerges, what he calls 'the discourse of poetic realism' (Ibid. 137) is distinguished and separated from 'documentary realism' that was 'assigned to the more prosaic renderings of surface realism and moral realism' (Ibid.). Documentary realism is defined as being opposed to poetic realism that 'in fact *transcends* ordinariness, which makes the ordinary strange, beautiful –

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<sup>107</sup> In his view, the latter refers to the educational/propagandist stand and 'rhetoric of social responsibility, of education and instruction' of Griersonian documentary, with its self-conscious resistance to aesthetics in favour of a simple, more straightforward structure. Yet he traces the poetic realism of British New Wave to the works of Humphrey Jennings, a documentary filmmaker within the documentary movement itself '...who has been described by Lindsay Anderson as 'the only real poet British cinema has yet produced'. (Anderson, 1954 cited in Higson, 1996: 138)

*poetic*'. (Ibid. 138) Aesthetics therefore find a new position within the social realist text, which in turn makes way for a more personal vision and reflection by the artist. Hence, such a strand of realism results from an inevitable tension 'between the sociological and the aesthetic, the moral and the poetic' (Ibid.).

It is important to see that the ten Aardman films, as briefly explained earlier in this chapter, conform to Higson's poetic realism mould, in that each has a surface realism and moral realism component. Yet, as their surface realism is not the result of a live-action record of spaces, places and settings, it may be said that the overall poetic quality of British New Wave film is only imitated in them. As such, some of the films not only become original poetic films in a Plantingan sense, they also re-make and re-mediate a kind of poetic-ness that belonged initially to an established tradition of social realist film.

In conclusion, it may be said that the ten Aardman films use and hybridise both 'documentary realism' and 'poetic realism', as outlined by Higson. Thus, on one hand, their observational style works as a shortcut to their 'documentary-ness' (Ward, 2005: 4) while on the other, the unpretentious, simple and non-glossy settings and characters in everyday situations evokes a poetic realism in the British social realist tradition. A further consideration of all these realist mechanisms, which makes these films even more distinct from both documentary and the 'kitchen sink' tradition, is that they are all animations. As a result, it may be said that their realism is a chosen and constructed, and a copied effect, which may nevertheless create a sense of poetic-ness and function while reminding viewers of their constructed-ness<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>108</sup> This wavering between genuine poetic-ness and reference to a previous tradition of 'poetic realism' will be discussed in the next chapter in terms of both Andrew Darley's notion of second-order realism and Bolter and Grusin's thesis of remediation. An example may clarify how such different aspects of social and documentary realism are (re) mediated in Aardman films. Thus a film such as *On Probation*, as an extremely close replica of a live-action observational documentary, may therefore be read firstly as a spectacle, a beautiful, astonishing constructed vision. Secondly, the viewer is related to social problems, because it is understood that the puppets represent real people whose voices are heard. Thirdly, it is reminiscent of such films in live-action; this conveys a deeper impression of seriousness, since these are familiar conventions that the viewer is conditioned to perceive in certain ways. It is suggested that the first effect may be called poetic realism, the second social/documentary realism and the third nostalgic realism. These areas and senses overlap and come together in different ways and in different films.

## Non-fiction Animation and the Discourse of Animated Documentary

Non-fiction animation has always existed on the margins of mainstream fiction forms of animated film. On a very general level, it is suggested that non-fiction animation takes its mediated content from a non-fictional and non-imaginary source. In this sense, fiction and non-fiction are more conveniently applicable to representational and especially narrative modes of film: this focuses on whether the events and people depicted in a film are taken from actuality or only imagined. Subsequently, what concerns this thesis comprises only a tiny area of the broader concept of non-fiction animation, known as animated documentary.

Though a fairly new discourse in animation studies, the genre now known as 'documentary animation' or 'animated documentary' existed as early as 1918 with Winsor McCay's *The Sinking of the Lusitania*<sup>109</sup>. Nevertheless, the animated documentary accommodates a wide range of non-fictional subject-matter as well as an extensive spectrum of aesthetics and styles that may include, but are in no way confined to, photo-realistic concerns.

The notion of documentary film as the representation of historical actuality has been considered (or rather simplified) as being possible only by recording of the factual material by means of the cinematographic camera. Based on Bazinian polemics of indexicality, animation and documentary would therefore sit together only obliquely. Yet, as discussed, the various forms of documentary film in the live-action mode, which inevitably used re-construction as well as what Rosenstone terms postmodern documentary (Rosenstone, 1995: 50-51) have created a more inclusive definition for documentary that is not solely reliant on visual indexicality. In this sense, the expanding definition of modern documentary – as exemplified by the 'film essays of Chris Marker and

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<sup>109</sup> In this film animation comes to the aid of a live-action documentary to depict the sinking of a huge passenger ship by a German submarine during WWI (Strøm, 2003: 48).

Trinh T. Minh-Ha' (Strøm, 2003:61)<sup>110</sup> – together with the obsessions of contemporary animators for experimentation and exploration converges the two forms and brings them closer. Under such a comprehensive classification, animation may also be included within the discourse of documentary, to mediate a message about the actual world in a non-literal and non-indexical way. Further, John Grierson's infamous definition of documentary animation as 'the creative treatment of actuality', though attacked by many as paradoxical and impractical (Winston, 1995), is welcomed and invigorated by the supporters and theorists of animated documentary (Strøm, 2003:58) & (Ward, 2005).

In the same vein as Grierson, Paul Wells suggests an alternative view of actuality in the context of animation: 'not as the unmediated recording of reality, but as an interrogation of the ways in which "the real" has been constructed' (Wells, 1997:41). The use he and others make of Grierson's 'creative treatment', seems therefore to go beyond what Grierson initially had in mind, suggesting that the ambiguity of the maxim granted permission for more extensive interpretation. As explained, Griersonian films were identified by Nichols as expository mode, and adopted a very clear rhetoric promoted by the voiceover to guide or to send an educational or informative message to the viewer. Yet, Wells' interpretation of this, and in fact most practices of animated documentaries instantiate Plantinga's 'open voice' in that they offer a non-literal and less straightforward route to reality and at times interrogate the existence of any coherent reality. In such an extension of Grierson's formula, therefore, the inherent reflexivity of the animated medium obstructs any 'transparent' representation of reality offered by most conventional modes of live-action documentary. Instead, the ever-present allusion of the animated form to its constructed nature offers a different way to understand the factual content of an animated documentary.

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<sup>110</sup> Strøm compares different types of animated documentary with Bill Nichols' definitions of modes of documentary. He thinks that Nichols's fifth (new) category 'performing mode', 'which stresses "subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse" and is more concerned 'about the aesthetics and artistic components of the films than the contents' would come close to animation documentary (Strøm, 2003: 52).

Reflexivity, as the modernist's alternative to dominant practices of 'realism', is also discussed in Darley's (1995) inquiry on the history of British non-fiction film<sup>111</sup>. Darley associates the resurgence of a fascination with social themes to the influence of Brechtian/Godardian polemics, with their experimentalist and reflexive modes of representation, in the 1960s and early 1970s. Individual experimental animators responded by defining their concept of 'realism' in terms of distinctness from dominant practices in both media; cinema and accordingly animation (Ibid. 7). The liberating nature of these modernist, individualistic approaches – what Darley calls 'post-Godardian political modernism' (Ibid.) – coupled with animation's potential for creating imaginary or virtually impossible imagery, provided ideal conditions for the birth of these new forms of non-fiction animation (Ibid.).

Thus, the kind of realism promoted by visuals that completely lack indexical links to what Ward calls 'a *pro-filmic* actuality' is achieved as a result of non-conventional, yet important ways of corresponding to the real rather than realistic representation or live-action record. Ward suggests that in this sense reality is mediated via an 'intensified route' by a particular dialectic built up between a factual event and a reflexively constructed representation of it<sup>112</sup>. (Ward, 2005: 91)

Despite this, for an animated documentary to function as such, it must not only mediate a message about the social world, but also ascertain that the message *is* from the actual world. Though this is not true of all forms, in most animated documentaries there is a reliance on a soundtrack taken from an actual event in interview or other form. This does not imply that imagery backed by use of a real soundtrack equals animated documentary. The vital aspect to consider, as with many of the

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<sup>111</sup> Andrew Darley's unpublished paper entitled 'History and the British non-Fiction animation' presented at the 14<sup>th</sup> annual conference of The Society for Animation Studies, 1995.

<sup>112</sup> '...animated film offers us an *intensified* route into understanding the real social world, by virtue of the peculiar dialectic that is set up between knowing that this is a film about a real person (and we can hear their *actual* voice) and knowing that what we are looking at is an animated construction, with nothing of indexical correspondence that we have become so accustomed to'. (Ward, 2005: 91)

ten Aardman films, is rather the relationship between factual soundtrack and imagery, or how the sound has been represented. This relationship is what Ward, borrowing from Renov<sup>113</sup> (2004), calls the 'acoustic indexicality'; a bond which suggests that in films such as *Going Equipped* the clay character represents a person whose real voice testifies to the true story of a ruined life. This is a story of a 'speculative nature'<sup>114</sup> that refers to the social inequality and discrimination that led a man from unhappy childhood to delinquent adulthood. The notion of 'realism' of soundtrack – how the voices and other sounds are gathered, to what extent they are manipulated and in what context they are used – therefore becomes a particular aspect of realism investigated in these films.

Paul Wells, considering the diverse range of practices in non-fiction and documentary film, presents a dedicated categorisation which includes the Imitative, Subjective, Fantastic and Post-Modern modes<sup>115</sup> (Wells, 1997: 41). According to Wells, the imitative mode echoes directly 'the dominant generic conventions of live-action documentary' which include didactic, informational and propaganda animated films, including *The Sinking of the Lusitania* previously described, and 1950s Disney television series including *You and Your...*, with educational themes about 'safety, swimming, domestic dangers, anatomy, the senses, etc'. (Ibid. 41) As he notes, this type of animated documentary parallels Nichols's characterisation of 'expository mode' in live-action, in that it seems to have a clear argument or instructional theme, and attempts to promote a persuasive rhetoric with the aid of animated form and other means.

Wells designates the imitative mode and also the subjective mode – which mainly parodies other modes of documentary and undermines the possibility of objectivity of the filmmaker – *mock documentaries*. Among

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<sup>113</sup> 'Animation: Documentary's Imaginary Signifier', lecture delivered at University of Westminster, December 6, 2004

<sup>114</sup> Ward's term to refer to the ambiguous yet thought provoking nature of many animated documentaries, in which the relationship between representation and the reality they try to reflect is less than direct. (Ibid. 101)

<sup>115</sup> Wells builds his category based on Richard Barsam's articulation of non-fictional categories in the live-action context

diverse examples of the latter are Tex Avery's late-1930s parodies of MGM Fitzpatrick travelogues, Nick Park's *Creature Comforts* (1989) and Marjut Rimminen's *Some Protection* (1988). Wells assumes that this type of film:

...effectively hybridises *observational* and *interactive* documentary (Nichols' terms), defining the role of animator as observer, *re-creating* what has happened from the stimulus of aural sources, but retrieving what might be termed "naïve history" from a single interviewed subject, essentially the only "witness" to the events. (Ibid. 44)

As he explains, the fantastic mode is 'a model of documentary which is re-locating the "realist" mode within a seemingly non-realist context' (Ibid. 44) and suggests as an example the work of Czech animator Švankmajer's in films such as *The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia* (1989). In this mode, Wells says, the ordinary notions and conventions of representing reality are de-familiarised and subverted in order to re-define a new reality (Ibid.).

Wells' last category, the post-modern mode, obviously draws on notions and styles associated with post-modern texts, including inter-textuality, pastiche, parody and bricolage, in rejecting a conventional narrative and 'asserting that "the social" and therefore "the real", is fragmentary and incoherent' (Ibid.). For Wells, the mode is epitomised in Paul Vester's *Abductees* (1994) in which people who believe they have been abducted by aliens are interviewed. Their actual voices are accompanied by images from different aesthetic and graphic styles that attempt to represent comically the psychological states of the speakers' minds during their experiences. Here, Wells explicates the ways in which notions of authenticity and objectiveness are toyed with and rejected in a context that seeks to reflect other dimensions of reality. He contends that: 'Historical perspectives and contexts in this instance are not even "naïve" but wholly imagined', and calls them 'the documentary of imagined states and suggested vistas'. (Ibid. 45)

Wells' labelling, though not exhaustive, covers most known practices within the realm of non-fiction/documentary animation. The animated documentary, however, as a prominent contemporary mode of non-fictional animation, continues to discover different aspects of reality and challenge orthodox accounts of documentary realism by providing highly hybridised instances of modes of realism that may defy solid categorisation. Hence, it is not always possible to locate the Aardman films studied in Wells' classification. Many seem to conform to his notion of both imitative and subjective documentary, as mock documentaries. Many, in their simulation of 'fly-on-the-wall' conventions, are imitations of what Wells calls 'the dominant generic conventions of live-action documentary' (Ibid. 41) yet do not belong to the direct rhetoric of didactic and propaganda documentaries. Many, since they are not parodies, do not sit comfortably with Wells' notion of subjective documentary. Finally, many of these films may function as Wells' post-modern documentary in that they question or subvert a unified reality by the very act of simulating a transparent representation of reality in 3D animation.

This thesis, proposes a different approach to Wells's and those other categorisation of documentary animation which are mostly based on sheer formal aspects. Based on Plantinga's notion of 'function', this approach examines whether or not a film's overall signifying systems operate to a documentary end. The relationship between formal concern and factual content mediated is pivotal to determining the function of an animated film. As such, many mock documentaries, while mimicking documentary conventions, do not communicate any factual content. It should be stressed that, though this typology does not claim to be exhaustive or flawless, care has been taken to create criteria that are not bound only to stylistic imitation. The general argument is the 'function' of any animated film that has formal or thematic associations with the discourses of documentary in live-action formats. The advantages of formulating a typology of documentary animation for this thesis seem two-fold. Firstly, it may provide a summation and more developed study

of the animated documentary discourse. More importantly, it offers a basis for further analysis of the Aardman films under scrutiny and the creation of a typology of realism in them.

1. Some animations have a make-up similar to that of familiar modes of documentary, but do not reflect on any factual event or social problem. They may use 'non-performed' or 'real' soundtracks, but not put them in a context relevant to the actual event represented, or implied by, the soundtrack. This is true of *Creature Comforts* and *Early Bird*. In other respects, however, these films may be categorised as animations with documentary propensity in terms of formal make-up but may also contain delicate documentary undertones.
2. Some films are pedagogical, teaching something about facts in the world, whether instructional (the *You and Your...* series) or historical, by recourse to interviews and evidential documents from the past (*The Sinking of the Lusitania*). Both may use animation to assist to illustrate their cases or be fully animated but based on non-fictional contents. These are first and foremost documentaries, and only later animations.
3. Some films 'parody' an instructional or historical documentary to subvert the meanings attached to those modes they mimic and say something different or in contrast to the originals about reality or truth of those situations. These still function as documentaries.
4. Some films parody documentary modes, but have no basis in the factual world and do not reflect on an event (whether interview, testimony or something else). They use parodic mimicry as a means to provoke laughter, to situate imaginary people and fictional contexts as though they were filmed in modes associated with documentary representation. These are *not* documentaries, and it may be better to call them fake-documentaries.

5. Finally, some non-fictional animations have 'documentary potential'. These rely mostly on imaginary events that exemplify realities of the social/historical world. These may be called non-fiction animations that do not always function as documentaries. Many politically subversive animations that reflect on realities of the world in parodic ways and do not use documentary conventions may be categorised as such. These include *2DTV* which, while reflecting on the realities of the contemporary political scene, and as such functioning as a kind of documentary film, does not use the conventions of documentary format; in terms of formal make-up it actually resembles cartoons and sitcoms. Yet, it is heavily loaded with comments about the socio-political reality of the world.

So far, the examination of the animated documentary form and function has been concerned with its imagery and visual aesthetics. Sound is therefore the final criterion that must be looked at carefully, in particular the innovative ways in which Aardman has used factual sound in 3D animation. Of equal importance are the treatment of soundtrack in these films (methods of gathering; extent of manipulation; purposes of such treatment), and its relationship to the visuals. In what follows, there will be a brief examination of the conventions of sound in documentary film, in the two specific modes of observational and interview as prominent forms copied and simulated by Aardman.

### **The Observational and the Interview in Aardman: The Question of Sound and Form**

In 'normal' fiction animation the ordinary viewer takes no notice of the constructed-ness of the sound, while being generally aware of it. In the ten films under investigation, however, the soundtrack imposes itself immediately on the first-time or ordinary viewer. The non-fiction quality of the soundtrack in Aardman films is enormously influential in making

them completely different experiences of animation viewing. In its analysis of the films and the typology to which they will eventually belong, this thesis is mainly concerned with the specific features of the soundtrack and the relationship it makes with the imagery. It is accepted that the obsessively realistic imagery is totally fabricated and that the 'recording' or 'direct' quality is absent, so what remains to investigate about the factual content is the 'directness' or 'manipulated-ness' of the soundtrack. As will be seen, the extent to which the imagery depends on the soundtrack varies between films of the corpus; as progress is made towards the later films, this relationship becomes more challenging.

Before embarking on this discussion, a few points should be made. Firstly, when designating to, or comparing modes of documentary in live-action with, the ten films a flexible approach is necessary. This will allow comparisons of the highly constructed imagery of films like these and the recorded quality of the live-action footage. While there is an organic and digetic relationship between people, environment and sound in live-action film, in animation such a bond is totally absent and thus constructed. Secondly, the few theories relating to sound in documentary begin their arguments by comparing similarities and differences between the conventions of sound in live-action films of fictional modes and documentary/non-fictional representations. In this respect the Aardman animated shorts, like many experimental and non-commercial animations, are subject to double-marginalisation: they are secondary to live-action cinema, and they are secondary to animated mainstream films. Sound theory in this sense is also discriminatory in that, despite its relatively recent arrival on the scene of film theory, it is still mostly focused on fictional modes of mainstream narrative cinema<sup>116</sup>. Thus, attention must initially be focused on that area, in order to redirect it

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<sup>116</sup> Stam indicates the 'lateness' of the study of sound in the cinema. The first serious study was the 1980s *Yale French Studies* compilation of essays, *Cinema/Sound* (Stam, 2000 b: 212). Referring to Altman's contribution, Stam talks about the general way of understanding cinema as visual, as evidenced by the way cinema is addressed as movies and motion picture. These terms 'stress the inscription of visible phenomena, destined for spectators (not auditors) who go to see (not to hear) a film'. (Ibid. 214) He admits also that 'the critical meta-language used to speak about film, similarly is better equipped to speak about such things as eye-line matches and point-of-view editing than it is about sound. (Ibid.)

towards animation and especially works that are so dominantly informed by live-action styles and modes.

Interestingly, as Stam observes, three of the five Metzian channels of information – dialogue, music, and sound effect - are aural (Stam, 2000 b: 212). A soundtrack, however, mainly emphasises the dialogue or verbal information offered by a film. In his study of mainstream live-action cinema *Projection of Sound on Image*, Michel Chion (2000) examines such 'vococentrism', or 'verbocentrism' (Chion, 2000: 112) in the moving image<sup>117</sup>.

Chion's contemplation shows not only how the spoken voice is of prime importance to the soundtrack, but how it may greatly affect the way an image is read and *vice versa*. He terms this 'value added by text'<sup>118</sup> (Ibid. 112). He also shows how music can affect or alter the meaning of an image, as well as how different deployment of sound may influence the perception of movement, speed and time in the live-action film (Ibid.). Further, he draws attention to the fact that what the spectator takes as a realist sound in the so-called realist Hollywood cinema is in fact a highly coded and conventional practice of sound. In his words: 'Cinematic sound, in sum, has been highly codified, constructed, hemmed by restrictions, the product of myriad protocols and prohibitions' (Chion, 1994: 217).

In most of the ten Aardman films such codes of sound in fictional modes are avoided in favour of the more documentary/immediate effect of a fly-on-the-wall style. Chion's study therefore speaks volumes about the

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<sup>117</sup> Chion says: 'The sound of the spoken voice, at least when it is diegetic and synched with the image, has the power to inscribe the image in a real and linearised time that no longer has elasticity. The factor explains the dismay of many silent filmmakers upon experiencing the effect of "everyday time" at the coming of sound' (Chion, 2000: 112).

<sup>118</sup> 'Added value works reciprocally. Sound shows us the image differently to what the image shows alone, and the image likewise makes us hear sound differently than if the sound were ringing out in the dark. However, for all this reciprocity the screen remains the principal support of filmic perception. Transformed by the image it influences, sound ultimately re-projects onto the image the product of their mutual influence. We find eloquent testimony to this reciprocity in the case of horrible or upsetting sounds. The image projects onto them meaning they do not have at all by themselves. Everyone knows that the classical sound film, which avoided showing certain things, called on sound to come to the rescue. Sound *suggested* the forbidden sight in a much more frightening way than if viewers were to see the spectacle with their own eyes' (Chion, 2000: 122).

relationship between a soundtrack of a real event and a fictionalised imagery put on it. Sound realism in fiction genres is mostly about the believability and appropriateness of the image and the sound known as the *intelligibility* and *fidelity* index. In documentary, however, the main concern is the extent to which the sound of people and events belongs to them and are used to truly represent them. In other words, the question of realism in such cases is a matter of veracity rather than appropriateness.

In his *Conventions of Sound in Documentary*, Ruoff (1992) studies the different ways in which sound is used in documentary practices, focusing on the uses of synchronous sound in the so-called observational documentary of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>119</sup>. He begins by examining very briefly the areas of similarity and difference between sound practices in the fiction film and documentary. Ruoff observes that 'while documentary sound tracks typically include voice-over, dialogue, music, and effects, the hierarchy and distribution of these sounds differ in important ways from classical Hollywood conventions' (Ruoff, 1992: 217). Referring to Rick Altman and his extensive study of conventions of sound in classic Hollywood cinema, Ruoff emphasises the interplay of the factors of *intelligibility* and *fidelity* in fictional sound, in which faithfulness to reality is mostly compromised to accommodate the clear comprehension of narrative that is the central endeavour of such films (Ibid.). Drawing on Noël Carroll's discussion of Hollywood movies as prioritising 'uncluttered clarity' and 'comprehensibility', he emphasises the coded nature of such 'heightened intelligibility' in Carroll's words, which is in contrast to the way everyday events are normally experienced (Carroll, 1988: 180 cited in Ruoff, 1992).

Two oppositional positions are evoked by what Ruoff, in line with Nichols, describes as a non-interventionist approach to documentary practice, or the observational mode<sup>120</sup>. On one hand, the 'observing' quality of filming

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<sup>119</sup> He closely examines these conventions specifically on the 1973 PBS series *An American Family*.

<sup>120</sup> Ruoff notes that some of the general conventions of observational documentary are an attempt to record real events with minimal intervention of the filmmaker. They therefore avoid intruding on their subject's lives or the

stakes a claim to objectivity in terms of showing 'only' what has taken place in the real world. On the other, as Nichols points out (Nichols, 1991: 41), precisely because of such a non-interventionist and transparent style, observational documentary uses a style of editing much like the so-called 'continuity editing' of classical narrative film. Nichols stresses, however, that this style of editing is used merely to 'sustain the spatial and temporal continuity of observation rather than the logical continuity of an argument or case'<sup>121</sup> (Ibid.) In fact, the observational mode of documentary in its purest/non-hybrid form shares the transparency claim of classical fiction narrative and obstructs any access of the viewer to the world behind the camera. In the 'sheer observing' mode, any access to knowledge beyond what is represented, which is after all a collection of selected events, people and orders, is denied. What Nichols calls 'observational realism', therefore precludes any 'abrupt shifts of time or location' or 'strange juxtaposition'<sup>122</sup>. Hence, Nichols acknowledges that observational film 'conveys the sense of unmediated and unfettered access to the world'. (Ibid. 43)

Further, Nichols suggests, the observational mode is a vivid form of 'present-tense' representation, which uses continuity editing for 'sustaining' the spatio-temporal unity of the real events rather than creating a fictional one. He notes that the presence of the camera on the scene implies its presence in the real world, which in turn creates the impression of the 'immediate, intimate and personal', comparable to what the viewer might experience if present at the event (Ibid.). The observational mode, as he indicates, avoids voice-over or 'images of

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interviews, or directing people or staging events for the camera. They also steer clear of direct narrational devices such as voiceover. Instead, they represent the events apparently without a narrator, letting the story unfold only by scant editing of shots and recorded footage.

<sup>121</sup> Ruoff, on the other hand, gives more weight to the similarities between the two, pointing to examples such as the works of Drew Associates who opted overtly for stories with 'inherent drama' that were 'structures around crisis' and had 'clear beginnings, middles and ends' (Mamber, 1974: 115-38 cited in Ruoff, 1992: 218).

<sup>122</sup> He argues that any observational film which utilises the techniques associated to other modes should be considered as a hybrid, since in a pure observational style, any utilisation of techniques which disrupt the immediacy of the film, juxtaposition of images and shots which are not taken in the same spatio-temporal order and so forth – even if used – tend to remain 'unobtrusive and rarely commented upon'. (Ibid. 41)

illustration' as used in the expository mode, since these have no real association to the moment of filmmaking.

Nichols also ascribes certain themes and subjects to this mode including 'the representation of typicality – the types of exchanges and activities that are likely to occur (*High School*), process – the unfolding of a set of relationships over time (*An American Family*), or crisis – the conduct of individuals under pressure (*Primary*)'. (Ibid. 41) 'Representation of typicality' is an interesting element that recurs in the ten Aardman films. However, as Ruoff makes clear, a second element of 'process' is inherent in these topicalities, in that in many films of Aardman that use a purely observational style a minor narrative or hidden message is unfolded as the film progresses<sup>123</sup>.

Ruoff stresses that the sound and image should be recorded at the moment of observational filming, and that in this type of film no other sound is usually allowed (Ibid.). In other words, in pure observational mode, the sound is as much of an observation as the image. Such an observational quality might be assigned to those films in the Aardman corpus that use a secretly recorded soundtrack. This thesis terms this 'direct sound' since it is gathered in a non-interventionist way, and those involved were unaware that it was being recorded. Further, these soundtracks lack the 'intelligibility' of fictional sound and are often accompanied with ambient sound, use of dialect and accents, and non-staged speech. In documentary film, speech typically demonstrates a wider variety of accents, dialects and speech patterns than in fictional films<sup>124</sup>. The hesitations, repetitions, corrections and sometimes vague or unfinished sentences of ordinary speech make it totally different from constructed dialogue of actors in fiction films or animations.

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<sup>123</sup> This gradual unfolding of the story is manifest especially in films such as *Down and Out, On Probation, Late Edition, Palmy Days, Sales Pitch*

<sup>124</sup> Ruoff refers to Benson's discussion of Wiseman's films and the way they use and present a rich breadth of American dialect, the type of 'conversational passages' that he believes most filmmakers would abandon. This is primarily true of Aardman films in their use of diverse British accents a trend that becomes a hallmark of the later *Creature Comforts* television series directed by Richard Golesovskie, echoing the formula of the original *Creature Comforts* film.

In terms of interview, however, soundtrack is in many ways more intelligible, more controlled and staged, and less spontaneous. Ruoff explicates that 'interview films attempt to circumvent the fullness of ordinary speech in various ways. Staged to be filmed, interviews may be miked for maximum intelligibility of speech' (Ruoff, 1992: 223). He also notes that documentary makers learn how to stage interviews so the interviewee appears to speak directly to the viewer. They also control the 'clarity and directed-ness of speech by means of editing techniques and specific conventions of filming the interview' (Ibid. 223). It may therefore be said that interview sound is *mise-en-scène* sound. Compared to secretly recorded speech, the content of people's speech in interviews is more subject to control and manipulation, both at the time of making the interview and later during editing. Lord and Sproxtton describe how, when editing and choosing the soundtrack, they had to select their material from hours and hours of recorded sound. (*Lip Gloss*, 1991) They looked for little stories or any 'image-able' event within those everyday conversations.

It is important to make a distinction between the 'directness' index and objectivity. The goal of many purist direct cinema filmmakers has been the achievement of maximum objectivity via maximum directness of speech and sound, to the extent that these two are often considered synonymous. Despite this, there are always serious challenges to claims that objectivity is guaranteed by directness. Disregarding such scepticism, directness of sound is a legitimate focus in the case of the ten Aardman films, which provide access to the 'reality' of an event only through soundtrack. Direct versus staged sound or observational versus interview sound therefore represent opposite sides of the index by which sound realism will be measured. It may even be argued that, in those Aardman films that use a non-interview soundtrack, 'synchronous sound' as the hallmark of observational documentary is being challenged. While achieving a realistic sound was the challenge before the technology of synchronous sound was mastered, here the challenge is creating images to accompany 'direct sound' as if they were recorded simultaneously.

As will be clarified, both direct and interview sound may be part of a realist strategy when considered in relation to other elements of each film's make up. Thus, while direct sound or interviews cannot in themselves tell how realist a film is, they may still roughly indicate the 'type' of realist strategies they belong to. This is why in Part Two, the examination will cover the extent to which a soundtrack is manipulated, the nature of the strategies used to gather such soundtracks, and whether they influence the type of (hybrid) realism they eventually produce.

The next chapter will focus on another aspect of realism in Aardman films: their hybridity and intertextuality. In the light of this discussion, a final thesis of 'hybrid realism' in the Aardman films under investigation will be proposed. This will enable the study to show how these films demonstrate more than one category of realism, and how they might be read or interpreted in light of the complex operation of hybrid realism they adopt.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Realism, Hybridity and Intertextuality**

In the first three chapters, this thesis addressed different aspects of realism in animation, from formal concerns to matters of content. The examination was tailored to angles and features of realism specific to the necessary focus, the Aardman corpus of films. As hypothesised by this thesis, however, realism in these animated films is of a hybrid nature and make-up; the films engage with and hybridise different aspects of realism in the formal and content categories, becoming crossbreeds of multiple realisms. Further, as completed hybrid texts, they are highly intertextual: their significances and connotations cannot effectively be read unless the various texts to which they refer and from which they borrow are taken into account. It is thus virtually impossible to discuss realism in these films in the traditional sense, in which representation and its referent are directly linked. Claims of hybridity and intertextuality, and the methods of analysing them, must be therefore substantiated and shown in the Aardman corpus. This chapter will examine theories of intertextuality and hybridity in contemporary practices of art, specifically the moving image.

The fundamental hypothesis will define and contextualise notions of hybridity and intertextuality that will subsequently form the primary methodology for analysing the Aardman films. There will be more specific scrutiny of intertextual referencing, with regard to notions of Jameson (1991), Hutcheon (1989) and Lash (1988) surrounding the postmodern habit of borrowing, copying and recycling previous forms of representation, in the key copying patterns of parody and pastiche predominantly used by Aardman. Issues of historicity, representation of the past and eventually nostalgia will be addressed with regard to the ten films, which seem actively to engage with past styles and modes of representation in a nostalgic way. The films' obsessively realistic aesthetics will be discussed in relation to Darley's (2000) thesis of 'second-order realism' and Bolter and Grusin's (2000) notion of

'remediation'. The final discussion will focus on Hutcheon's notion of paratextuality as a distinct mode of intertextuality in history writing, and its application in her 'historiographic metafiction' model of the postmodern novel. It will be suggested that animated films such as those of Aardman may be understood in terms of a model of paratextuality, which like Hutcheon's model engages obliquely with the question of the past, offering alternative accounts of it and open-ended readings of history.

## **Hybridity and Intertextuality as Methodology**

The distinct yet interrelated terms 'hybridity' and 'intertextuality' will be used when analysing the ten Aardman films. Hybridity is by definition the state of being mixed, and may therefore be used for aspects of both form and content; the same film may hybridise more than one style and mix different subject-matters. Hybridity, however, is primarily understood as a *formal* feature of artwork and representation in which more than one form or style blend. Intertextuality goes further: in the light of theories that see not just literary but all representational forms as text, it may include both formal and thematic aspects of all signifying practices. It is interesting that both formal and thematic aspects of realism seem to be hybridised and blended in the Aardman corpus. The terms hybridity and intertextuality are thus used not only to define formal hybridity, but also to show how, by copying and mixing these styles and aesthetic effects, the films refer to other themes, styles and 'discourses' they are a copy of. In demonstrating their hybrid make-up, it may also be demonstrated how the different aspects and elements of realism covered by this thesis operate to make realist strategies<sup>125</sup> in different films. As previously mentioned, in addition to formal aspects such as imagery,

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<sup>125</sup> In this thesis the terms 'realist strategies' or 'realist schemes' refer to the ways in which the makers of the Aardman corpus adopt specific formulas or patterns of engagement with realist forms and contents; it is suggested that these are deliberate choices. It does not imply that the typology of realist strategies is the result of a deliberate choice to make these films in different categories; rather, that they seem to represent a 'trial and error' or experimental period of about a decade, in which different forms and styles mainly associated with non-fictional forms of live-action film seem to have been adopted in the treatment of documentary sound.

characterisation and narrative, these realist schemes also examine how the content is informed by discourses that have an established association with (social) realism.

Intertextuality, as noted, may be understood with regard to theories that view all signifying practices as texts (Stam: 2000a, 145). As such, most texts may be seen as intertextual in that they reference other texts they borrow from, consciously or unconsciously. In the post-war era, 'semiotics' initially concerning theories of language and the literary text (Barthes, 1977) was extensively applied to all aspects of art and representation<sup>126</sup>. Christian Metz extended it to the moving image; in *Language and Cinema* (1974) he developed the concepts of 'semiotics of cinema' and 'textual system' (Andrew, 1976, 217). Stam, noting that the etymological root of the word *text* is 'tissue' or 'weave', claims that in order to extend theories of 'text' and 'intertextuality' to film, it must be considered 'not as an imitation of reality but rather as an artefact, a construct' (Stam: 2000a, 145). Structuralism and post-structuralism are therefore among influential theories that attack realism as a mirror or reflection of reality, based on the textuality and 'constructed-ness' of any representational system. Textual analysis, in reading the diverse roots of any text as intertextual, thus fractures any apparently coherent realism, exposing both its formal construction and the ways in which meaning is created from such a system. It might therefore be proposed that the process of reading highly intertextual texts should begin by breaking down the formal hybridity of these essentially 'copied' forms and attempting to relate this to their associated contents, contexts and connotations<sup>127</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> Semiotics, the science of signs, was developed by Charles Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure as an attempt to read and study literary texts (Andrew, 1976, 214). Textual analysis, as 'close reading' or interpretation of film as 'text' draws heavily on Barthes' method of reading literary texts and also notions that images are not innocent creations of the writer, but are a construct, a site in which infinite previous texts collide and intermingle:

We now know that the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the message of an Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. (Barthes, 1977: 146)

<sup>127</sup> Stam observes two aspects of Metz's notion of textual analysis as exploration of both 'the work of cinematic codes (camera movement, off-screen sound) and extra-cinematic codes (ideological binarism of nature/culture, male/female)' in a text or texts (Ibid.). In other words, no film is the construction of sheer cinematic codes; films are 'mixed sites' of cinematic and non-cinematic codes, so they 'always speak of something' (Stam, 2000a: 146). Stam also notes that the Metzian approach oscillates between two poles of textual analysis: a

Postmodern scepticism of the traditional view of realism as *mimesis* is not, however, limited to the language-related theories of structuralism and post-structuralism. Other influences on contemporary thought and studies of the media include Lacan's theory of psychoanalysis, based on re-readings of Freud; Derrida's 'deconstruction' and Althusser's theory of ideology as a reawakening and revisiting of Marx's notions. In the field of postmodern art and especially the moving image, the ramifications of these theories were immense. Some of these will be addressed, with regard to hybridity and intertextuality, as quintessentially characteristic of all postmodern representation.

In general terms, Metzian semiotics of cinema involve breaking down filmic text into five information channels: images; graphic traces; recorded speech; music and sound effects (Andrew, 1976, 217). The basic method by which this thesis will 'dissect' the Aardman texts in question is based on such a Metzian approach in which two broad categories of visual and aural realism are examined. Such analysis, shown in Part Two, demonstrates the films' hybrid make up in terms of both formal compositions and contents. In short, while Part Two examines the formal and thematic hybridity of these texts, Part Three addresses the implications of such hybridity in the light of intertextuality theories. This is undertaken with reference to the ways in which they inform other texts and discourses, and create a network of effects that surpass their appearance as formal copying.

Thus, this chapter examines the postmodern theories of representation with a focus on the idea of 'copying' in the form of pastiche, parody and other copying strategies Aardman corpus use. In light of such theories, the chapter endeavours to shed lights on the possible implications and

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structuralist/formalist point of departure that takes a more neutral and scientific approach to text as a finite organisation of discourses created to communicate meaning, and a more 'dynamic' poststructuralist view that takes a deconstructionist sense of text as containing more than one neutral meaning and going beyond the obvious, or what Barthes called 'denotation' and 'connotation'. Both, however, work with the relationship among 'codes' (Hall, 1997: 38). Stam, who calls the latter 'Barthesian-Kristevan' view of text 'productivity, displacement and 'écriture'', feels that in consideration of text as a 'non-finalised' meaning, communication plays a more important role in Metz's book (Ibid.).

meanings of such intertextual, copied texts and a deeper reading of them.

### **Self-reflexive imitations: Pastiche and Parody**

In general, pastiche and parody are seen as imitations of original styles and are used interchangeably. This thesis, however, will use them discretely to delineate distinct forms of copying identified in the Aardman corpus. Thus, parody is a comical copying of formal aspects of a style or mode of representation, while pastiche is a neutral, non-comic and sometimes serious copying of such modes. In the previous chapter, some aspects of parodic copying were examined with regard to documentary form and the effect of reflexivity they usually create. Any form of allusion to a previous text or style, as either comic or non-comic copying, thus becomes intrinsically reflexive. Interpretation of a copied text may be flawed unless both this reflexive effect and the relationship between the copied and original form (or forms) is considered. Though meanings drawn from a text in general may not always represent its maker's actual intentions, those intentions are central to the analysis of deliberate copying strategies such as pastiche and parody. In this respect the ten Aardman films, which not only borrow from, but at times totally mimic another medium, place particular emphasis on the question of reflexivity. The 'original-copy' relationship is crucial to reading them.

Questions of copying, borrowing and recycling 'the previously represented' seem fundamental to the study of postmodern representation evident in contemporary practices of making still and moving images. While theorists have diverse views on the postmodern condition and the significances of such representation, all seem to agree on its recycling and copying habit. Yet some of the ten Aardman films pose the question of copying – either as parody or pastiche – beyond its conventional status as they seem basically to copy the effects of an altogether different medium. The postmodern theories this thesis initially refers to in relation to the idea of copying and realism, hardly touch on animation and its manners of copying and hybridity. They should

therefore be seen only as guidelines, or 'models' by which the implications of copying and borrowing in these films may be approached.

Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon are theorists whose hypotheses on postmodern aesthetics are fundamentally opposed, especially in relation to postmodern intertextuality and its connotations. Jameson, in line with Baudrillard's notion of simulation and simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1989) is among those who regard postmodern art as empty, depthless or meaningless, taking the form of nostalgic reproductions or recycled signs and representations, and therefore symptomatic of 'the crisis of referent' (Jameson, 1991: 96). Hutcheon (1989), however, concurs with Angela McRobbie (McRobbie, 1994: 4) and to some extent Lash (1988), taking the far more affirmative view that postmodern representation does indeed signify, though differently<sup>128</sup>.

Some copies are neutral, in that they try to replicate a previous style in a seemingly transparent manner, so that only those who recognise the 'original' aesthetics are able to identify them as re-makes. Jameson calls this 'pastiche', parody without laughter<sup>129</sup> (Jameson, 1991: 114). The other copying strategy is parody, a comic copying of a style or a genre. While the first kind of remake – which in its purest or most extreme mode is referred to by this thesis as 'simulation' – is not always explicitly self-reflexive, parody openly refers to the texts or stylistic conventions it mimics. Jameson (1991) considers postmodern intertextuality depthless and impossible to interpret; his main examples are either pastiched images in his model of the 'nostalgia film' (1991: 280) or a *bricolage* of fragmentary texts recycled or remade from previous texts as in 'music video' (Ibid. 92). Hutcheon on the other hand, thinks that postmodern

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<sup>128</sup> In discussion of most of these theories, a crucial angle is the understanding of postmodernism and postmodern representation as 'a departure from, continuation or critical reaction to' modernism's representational schemas (Harvey, 1990: 7). The link to modernism and its representational schemes, thus, is also implied in the discussion of self-reflexivity and its meanings in Jameson and Hutcheon's discussion of contemporary representation.

<sup>129</sup> Jameson explains:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. (Jameson, 1985: 114)

intertextual referencing is more than Jameson's 'blank parody'; it is rather a critical, political irony, a double-edged parodic discourse that both inscribes and subverts. (Hutcheon, 1989: 95)

Jameson's model of 'nostalgia film' is based on a seemingly realist narrative which is nonetheless a nostalgic pastiche of styles and images of previous decades. He is specifically concerned with how such films or texts deal with the past, noting that in novels such as Philip K Dick's *Time Out of Joint* (1959) or films including *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986) there is a deliberate attempt to create effects that evoke previous decades, for example the 1950s (Jameson, 1991: 279). He believes, however, that this is maintained by juxtaposing and embodying certain clichés normally assigned to those decades, which function as a shortcut. Jameson believes that the representation of the past in this kind of novel, as much as in his model of the 'nostalgia' films, is maintained via typecasts or familiar stereotypes of that past. He argues that the writer of *Time Out of Joint* does not present 'a list of facts or historical realities' (Ibid.) about the 1950s in order to evoke the flavour of that decade, but rather a series of *ideas, concepts or stereotypes about* those realities (Ibid.). He admits that the items represented are not totally invented and have some authenticity, but claims that what confronts the reader is the reinvention and reconstruction of certain older art objects that 'reawakens a sense of the past associated with those objects' (Ibid. 116). Hence, in Jameson's view of pastiche, realism becomes a problematic concept, since there is a disparity and distinction between what evokes a certain past in representational terms and the 'realities' of that past (Ibid. 281). He locates such typecasting of the past in 'the cultural sources' from that era that underscore a familiar and positive image of a happy US in the 1950s, which he encapsulates as 'Peyton Place, best-sellers and TV series' (Ibid. 280). In other words, the reality or the referent to which these mediums point did not necessarily exist, but derived from previous representations of the era, or simply the *already represented*. In line with Baudrillard, he calls this condition 'the effacement of the referent', in which all

representations become empty copies of other representations and are thus devoid of any link to a reality out in the world.

Linda Hutcheon, however, takes a more positive view of copying and allusion in postmodern representation. In her study, which covers the postmodern novel and what she calls 'historiographic metafiction' as well as photography and film, she addresses the intertextuality and hybridity of postmodern texts as a self-conscious choice to foreground postmodernism's interrogative approach to representation. She sees postmodern parody as the result of a cultural paradox: it cannot escape the tradition of visual and narrative representation but, at the same time, it has lost faith in the power and inexhaustibility of 'those exciting representations' (Hutcheon, 1989:8). She holds that the process of de-naturalization, distantiation and problematising representation can be traced in most postmodern art (Ibid.).

Hutcheon, while admitting that postmodern parody is primarily seen as 'value-free, decorative, de-historicised quotation of past forms' and apt for a culture 'oversaturated with images', argues that 'postmodernist parody is a value-problematising, de-naturalising form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representation' (Hutcheon, 1989: 94). She refutes Jameson's view of it as nostalgic and ahistorical, claiming that it is always 'critical' and 'de-historicizing' (Ibid. 93-94). In her view, postmodern parody undermines modernist assumptions about 'originality and uniqueness and our capitalist notions of ownership and property' by constantly borrowing from other styles and alluding to past forms. This, she asserts, does not mean that art has lost its meaning, but may imply that it has a new and different significance<sup>130</sup> (Ibid.). For her, postmodern allusion to past is an active engagement, re-reading and re-evaluating of it that 'both confirms and subverts the power of the representations of history.' (ibid. 95) Drawing on Owens (1980a: 67) who calls this the "allegorical impulse" of postmodernism, Hutcheon terms

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<sup>130</sup> Drawing on various postmodern parodic texts including Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, Hutcheon declares that these intertextual references are more than sheer play and total textuality. Since the whole process of representation is problematised and called into question by irony, she suggests that any kind of 'totalising model' to resolve the confusions and contradictions of representation is impossible. (op cit.)

such a double-edged kind of referencing a past style or text, parody (Hutcheon, 1989: 95).

Hutcheon points out that in common notions, representation belongs to the realm of mimesis, and observes that, by making it an issue, postmodernism challenges and questions our mimetic assumptions about representation (Hutcheon, 1989: 32). She refers to the traditional assumption that forms such as literary fiction and photography are transparent media that can master/capture/fix reality and are thus essentially realist. For Hutcheon, however, postmodern self-reflexivity continues the modernist tradition that viewed representation 'as a matter of construction, not reflection' (Ibid. 41). There is, however, a vital difference: while modernist reflexivity and recourse to the alienation effect was 'to the detriment of the referent, that is, by emphasising the opacity of the medium and the self-sufficiency of the signifying system' (Ibid. 34), postmodern self-reflexivity adopts a seemingly realist strategy which is nevertheless double-edged. By means of parody, thus, postmodernism 'denaturalise both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining (in its typically complicitously critical way) the historically attested power of both' (ibid.).

The disparity between Jameson's and Hutcheon's judgments may be attributed partly to a divergence in source material. For example, Hutcheon focuses on literary texts such as Rushdie's *Shame* and ignores music video, while Jameson's view that postmodernism is an empty pastiche of past styles derives from certain films and novels. Further, it may be argued that if not all postmodern intertextual copyings are empty pastiches as in Jameson's model, equally they are not all ironic and subverting as in Hutcheon's view. Each of the ten Aardman films is, however, examined against each model to ascertain whether they can be read in the light of it, and if so to what extent. Specifically, those films in the corpus that settle on a simulational pastiche are examined to see whether they are empty, trivial or meaningless copies or whether they adopt a subversive and problematising stance towards what they represent. Borrowing from Jameson and Hutcheon, this thesis uses the

terms parody, as a comic mimicry, and pastiche, as a point-to-point simulation of styles and media.

Scott Lash's (1985) categorisation of cinema offers a possible solution for the dissimilar understandings of Jameson's or Hutcheon's model of postmodern texts. In his discussion of postmodern cinema, *discursive* and *figural* significations are separated. Borrowing the terms 'discourse' and 'figure' from Lyotard, Lash explicates his theory of postmodern representation as 'figurative', denying that it is meaningless. He contrasts postmodern and modernist representation, arguing: 'postmodern cultural forms *do* indeed signify, only that they signify differently...modernist culture signifies in a largely "discursive" way, while postmodernist signification is importantly "figural"' (Lash, 1988: 312).

Lash's close examination of modernist and postmodernist representational strategies is also helpful. He enumerates their differences and identifies important attributes of postmodern aesthetics<sup>131</sup>, observing that 'Modernism distantiates the spectator from the cultural object, but postmodernism operates through the spectator's immersion' (Ibid. 312-14).

In terms of postmodern cinematic representation, Lash's four-part classification identifies two categories of postmodern film. He explains that while classical mainstream cinema's realism is 'rooted in non-teleological causal temporality, with beginning, middle and end from the 19<sup>th</sup> century novel', films in the mainstream postmodern cinema, though still based on conventions of realist narratives, are more figural and thus 'foreground spectacle over narrative' (Ibid. 316). He also defines what he calls 'transgressive postmodern cinema', which has more affinity with his

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<sup>131</sup> Lash enumerates modernist and postmodernist oppositional attributes thus:

1. Modernism's use of words over postmodernism's use of image
2. Modernism values formal qualities of objects postmodernism devalues formalism and just juxtaposes
3. Modernism develops a rationalist view of culture but postmodernism contests rational, and/or didactic views
4. For modernism meaning is important, for postmodernism not what it means but what it 'does' is important
5. Modernism distantiates the spectator from the cultural object, but postmodernism operates through the spectator's immersion (Lash, 1988: 313-14)

notion of modernist/discursive cinema. In the modernist cinema, much as in his category of transgressive postmodernist cinema, the viewer's position is an open and ambiguous one in which meaning is not fixed. For Lash, however, discursive cinema problematises the cinematic representation via strategies of de-differentiation 'in that it separates the process of signification from reality' (ibid. 314). Transgressive cinema, on the other hand, does not problematise the representation; though, like modernist cinema, it positions the spectator in a "nomadic", rather than a sedentary manner'; it problematises the 'real' itself. Lash believes, therefore, that 'the fixed nature of reality' rather than the signifying process is in question (Lash, 1988: 329). The spectator's 'nomadic' status in Lash's transgressive cinema seems roughly to fit Plantinga's category of open voice in which meaning is not fixed and is thus open to interpretation<sup>132</sup>.

In both cases of realist and mainstream postmodernist cinema, the subject is placed in a fixed, rigid and stereotyped position. As Lash shows, only in transgressive postmodern cinema is the 'real' interrogated and undermined<sup>133</sup>. Lash feels that in mainstream postmodernist cinema there is a discernible move towards an image-centred, 'spectacular' cinema in which narrative is increasingly replaced by images. He argues that in non-mainstream, or what he calls 'critical cinema', an alternative "regime of pleasure" is reinstated in the place of older critical forms of cinema which was 'modernist, discursive and intellectualist' (Lash, 1988: 314).

The ten Aardman films have little affinity with the type of 'spectacular' mainstream postmodern cinema Lash describes. In line with his notion of

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<sup>132</sup> It is of course important to note that while Plantinga talks about voice as the voice of authority and as such has the filmmaker in mind, Lash is speaking about the process of spectatorship in which the viewer is left in a itinerant position and not offered a clear-cut meaning. These two concepts are doubtless interrelated, and there is a real connection between the production of a text and its consumption and interpretation.

<sup>133</sup> He believes that in a postmodernist film such as Jean-Jacques Beneix's *Diva* (1981) or David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* distantiation does take place but is achieved by referring the audience to the "picture surface". *Blue Velvet* starts with a 'startling immediacy', a super-realistic and immersing imagery which is later revealed as artifice:

Thus at the end of *Blue Velvet* the camera focuses on a flower, which then turns out to be made of papier-mâché. It shows a return to "normalcy" in its ending which is in fact a send-up and suggests an integral flimsiness and instability to reality itself (Lash, 1988: 329).

transgressive cinema, however, their audience is not placed in the comfort zones offered by realist live-action film, mainstream postmodern movies or conventional fictional animations. Rather, in most of these films, the viewer is placed somewhere between immersion and critical engagement and is thus in a state of uncertainty. One of the ways in which Lash differentiates modernist and postmodernist transgressive cinema is by their dissimilar manner of self-reflexivity and interrogation. In line with Hutcheon, he believes that while modernist cinema interrogates the representation, postmodern art cinema interrogates the real. All the films of the Aardman corpus, which seriously or satirically copy live-action documentary, seem in fact to be interrogating 'the real'. If the documentary form, especially the observational mode of recording a factual event in live-action film, is regarded as representing the real, a copy of it in an overtly 'animated' medium may be seen not only as an interrogation of the representation but also a problematisation of the real. These films generally play with the idea of observation and objectivity of the camera, or challenge notions that interviews in live-action format represent the real ideas of people. Meanwhile, in line with Lash's observations, the 'reality effect' created in the 3D medium still works as a spectacular effect, which constantly draws attention to its mastery and illusionism, and refers to its constructed-ness. This chimes with Hutcheon's view of the nature of self-reflexivity in postmodern art as interrogating and problematising while being 'realistic' and 'immersive'. Further, in identifying both models in contemporary cinema, Lash's argument seems to incorporate both Jameson's and Hutcheon's side of the postmodern agenda.

While it is crucial to differentiate between different types and functions of reflexivity and referentiality, it should be also noted that not all reflexive strategies are maintained via ironic copyings and allusions<sup>134</sup>. Yet, as Lash has also shown, self-reflexivity or any formal disruption to the seamless realism of conventional narrative, even if conducted for

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<sup>134</sup> Reflexivity may be as simple as a comedy character who speaks straight to camera; dances and scores within a musical genre, or other devices that break the barrier between the viewer and the transparency of the representation. This kind of reflexivity is as old as cinema itself, is unrelated to the notion of copying, and besides is not necessarily subversive or inquisitive.

different purposes, is considered anti-realistic. Further, many of the disrupting and anti-realistic reflexive strategies that belonged initially to avant-garde, political modernist cinema have been used in mainstream contemporary cinema as sheer 'spectacular effects' implemented within the classical realist narrative. These reflexive strategies are not mainly subversive or critical, either. It seems that such borrowing and intertextuality is becoming habitual for contemporary mainstream cinema, in which visual spectacle and sensory pleasure precedes and is preferred to discursive narrative and critical engagement of the viewer.

Modernist cinema's reflexivity, on the other hand, can claim a far stronger effect on the viewer. It is supposed to subvert what is taken as 'normal' or 'goes without saying' and make the viewer rethink such naturalising and neutralising effects of conventional cinema. Notions of self-reflexivity, or rather, the *distinct modalities* of self-reflexivity that may be found in mainstream cinema and equally in modernist and 'transgressive' film, need closer scrutiny. In this respect, the ten Aardman films will be studied to identify the types of reflexive strategies they adopt and whether they are ultimately of a critical or spectacular character.

## **Nostalgia, Historicity and the Question of the Past**

In the previous chapter the ten Aardman films were discussed in terms of the ideas of 'poetic realism' and 'British-ness', as intrinsic to the poetic quality they copy, and which is linked to certain modes of British cinema in the 1950s and 1960s. Latent in this discussion of poetic realism was the idea of nostalgia and the way certain representations of the past evoke a nostalgic effect. As noted with reference to Hutcheon and Jameson, postmodern representation is, at times, also understood as nostalgic for past styles and decades. The question of intertextuality and referencing past representations or styles will therefore be examined from the additional perspective of nostalgia. These discussions will provide a basis for an investigation of the extent to which the films

promote nostalgia, in terms of their exploitation of previous moods, images and styles, and of how they replicate a poetic realism 'effect'. Nostalgia also becomes an issue in the kind of film that deals with the past as history, such as historical documentary or costume drama. Under investigation will be the truthfulness of the representation of a historical past to the viewer, and more importantly whether a nostalgic obsession with showing the past in a romanticised way obstructs this truthful portrayal. The Aardman films that use 'documentary sound' and have some claim to the authenticity of the events depicted would therefore raise interesting and complex questions about their representational strategies and the nostalgic effects they might employ. Consciously or otherwise, Aardman engages with history or at least a 'petty oral history' creating unique examples of how certain aspects of a past event may be portrayed in diverse ways and eventually create certain meanings and effects<sup>135</sup>.

One question that might be formulated is whether Aardman's depiction of real events – which is normally achieved by recourse to certain past styles – is a realist or a nostalgic approach, and whether such binary opposition between realism and nostalgic depiction is after all a valid argument. Another might be whether such an obsession with past styles, mainly a 'gritty film' look, suggests the filmmakers' romanticised and nostalgic relationship with the realities of those past times. As Jameson suggests in his model of nostalgia film, they may be imagining and constructing the past in fantasised imagery, thereby obstructing the true realities of the past to be mediated. Or, as Hutcheon suggests, their allusions to past styles might still be read as ironic, thereby creating an interrogative stance towards those previous representational modes.

This thesis, by reference to Robert A. Rosenstone (1995) and further scrutiny, will attempt to find a common location for both notions of

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<sup>135</sup> This thesis terms Aardman's overall thematic content 'petty oral history' as the films mainly draw on a past event based on a real-life soundtrack, either through simple conversations or by addressing problem-based situations of ordinary British people. As such, they do not instantiate history in its conventional sense and do not deal with remarkable historical events. It is argued that they pose the question of personal history understood as opposed to collective/public history.

allusion to the past. In the Aardman corpus at least, a nostalgic impulse to recreate a style of live-action film – itself known as poetic *and* nostalgic – seems to coexist with an ironic and subversive standpoint.

Interesting insights are available into the different ways in which dissimilar types of film – under the umbrella of ‘historical film’ – make a connection to and represent the past. In *Visions of the Past: the challenge of film to our idea of history* (1995) Rosenstone, himself a historian, posits that textuality theory has revealed that, like other representational systems, all written history is ‘a construction not reflection’ (Rosenstone, 1995: 11). Film, as a medium different from written forms, is eligible to ‘construct’ its own version of history, though in a totally different way and in distinct modes of ‘the dramatic feature’ and ‘the documentary’ (Rosenstone, 1995: 31). Rosenstone holds that, as a medium, film is far more capable of reflecting on the past as it has more than mere words at its disposal:

This new historical past on film is potentially much more complex than any written text, for on the screen, several things can occur simultaneously – image, sound, language, even text – elements that support and work against each other to render a realm of meaning as different from written history as written was from oral history. So different that it allows one (us?) to speculate that the visual media may represent a major shift in consciousness about how we think about our past. (Rosenstone, 1995: 15)

Unlike conventional forms of historical film, Aardman films are built on or refer to an oral history in an individual and non-traditional way. The fabricated imagery added to Aardman’s ‘real’ soundtracks sets up a tension that makes these difficult texts to read. The question of history in these films is not just about the truthfulness of the images in relation to the realities taken from soundtracks. More importantly, it relates to how Aardman creates its own version of history, how it comments on and/or subverts conventional views of history and how these ‘petty histories’ are retold in the shape of Aardman stories.

Aardman's approach to the question of the past in these films may perhaps be linked to Rosenstone's category of 'history as experiment' (Ibid. 50-51). Rosenstone outlines new breeds of documentary film that he calls postmodern historical film. These follow the strategy of placing fictional characters next to historical ones in settings alternately documentable and wholly invented,<sup>136</sup> in a way similar to Hutcheon's model of historiographic metafiction (Hutcheon, 1988, 106) As with some of the Aardman films, many of these postmodern films are also loaded with memory that interrogates the idea of history, how it may be reflected or represented in the shape of personal memories, and whether it may be regarded as history at all<sup>137</sup>.

The Aardman films in question do not formally conform to the notion of postmodern historical film discussed by Rosenstone. Yet, in their engagement with the question of representation of past events in the form of oral history, and especially by closely mimicking past styles and modes associated with conventional forms of historical film such as documentary, they seem to offer alternative histories. They proffer an ambivalent yet important approach to history disguised in individual memories and images, which is incongruent with 'normal' history and 'has escaped the ghost of positivism that lingers in the machine of social sciences' (Ibid.) In this respect, they seem to represent what Rosenstone calls 'alternative historical films', as an acknowledgement of the fact that '...public history is no more than a collective dream' (Ibid.). Here, nostalgia as an effect created within representations of the past comes to the fore. Like Rosenstone, Jameson believes that what emerges from the collective consciousness is usually an empty, nostalgic image by which a nation may remember its past; it is not necessarily reflective of the realities of that past. This approach to nostalgic representation directly

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<sup>136</sup> These will be expanded later in this chapter in relation to the notion of paratextuality and historiographic footnoting.

<sup>137</sup> Rosenstone admits that what is witnessed in films such as *Sans Soleil* does not resemble any notion of history in written form or on screen (Ibid. 165). Yet, he thinks, it might be regarded 'as a possible form of history, one that is densely visual and verbal, that privileges neither the word nor the image but somehow sets them against each other to achieve new sorts of understanding' (Ibid.)

opposes realism: its most obvious and pernicious manifestation are the images of archive photographs and film which, as Rosenstone has shown, have an inbuilt sense of nostalgia (Rosenstone, 1995: 52). While they are of documentary value and are supposed to demonstrate specific captured moments of the past, they seem to present it in a loaded way.

Rosenstone argues that the kind of films and photographs used in some formats of documentary film as 'document' or evidence or "'historical' materials', produce the most problematic part of their claim to represent (a past) reality, in that 'all those old photographs and all that newsreel footage are saturated with a pre-packaged emotion: nostalgia'<sup>138</sup> (Ibid.)

Nostalgia is defined as a desire to return to, or a fond remembrance of, an earlier time in one's life. Though the past may not have been as pleasant or glorious as in memory, the nostalgic mind operates a selective process of choosing only happy images: nostalgia is also associated with rose-tinted spectacles. It may also carry implications of a neo-conservative mentality that yearns for a politically incorrect (colonial) past, and as such a white-middle-class dream. Those who display such nostalgia may be criticised for their dreams of returning to a time when human relationships were based on injustice and exploitation<sup>139</sup> (Hutcheon, 1998). Hutcheon feels that what makes nostalgia significant is its roots in people's 'current' status compared to feelings about the past, rather than what actually happened. She refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'historical inversion', which implies that 'the *ideal* that is not being lived now is projected into the past' (Bakhtin, 1881: 147 cited in Hutcheon, 1998). She thus concludes that this is rarely the past exactly as lived and experienced, but a past 'as idealised

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<sup>138</sup> Rosenstone contends that traces of the past in the form of old photos and films are not a loyal representation of the past, since the past was not really like those old photos and films:

The claim is that we can see (and presumably, feel) what people in the past saw and felt. But that is hardly the case. For we can always see and feel much that the people in the photos and newsreels could not see: that their clothing and automobiles were old-fashioned, that their landscapes lacked skyscrapers and other contemporary buildings, that their world was black and white (and haunting) and gone (Rosenstone, 1995: 52).

<sup>139</sup> In this regard Hutcheon says: 'But most often, the post-colonial focus of attention has been on the nostalgia of the (usually) European colonisers, on their sense of loss and mourning for the cultural unity and centrality they once had. But as Fredrick Jameson says: "a history lesson is the best cure for nostalgic pathos' (Jameson, 1991: 156 cited in Hutcheon, 1998, ).

through memory and desire' (Ibid.). Nostalgia in this sense seems therefore to be more about the present: a dissatisfaction with the here and now that is projected on to a desirable past, which involves memory and forgetting, and of course distorting and reorganising past events and status.

On the other hand, nostalgia on a very personal level is a kind of 'feeling' or emotional impulse. Its relationship to imagery and visual effects is thus only a secondary issue, derived from contemporary visual culture which recycles and recreates past styles and effects in an obsessive way. It is therefore essential to transcend general ideas of nostalgia, to determine whether having a good feeling about a past must always involve rosy images of that past. This thesis would suggest that the familiarity and intimacy of nostalgia is more important than its visual beauty. Many photos and objects retained from the past are not beautiful, yet have the power to evoke pleasant feelings. In this respect, beauty is an individual reaction unrelated to the general concept of beauty. On another level, therefore, nostalgia may be reflective of a true past or aspects of reality that cannot be presented in indexical terms; a highly individualistic, though certainly subjective account of the past. From this perspective, nostalgia is not anti-realist, as it may offer alternative channels to realities dormant in personal thoughts and feelings.

This point is associated with the previous chapter's discussion of Higson's idea of poetic realism, and how a seemingly ugly and drab setting may become reflective of beauty and may in this sense be poetic. In this respect, nostalgia seems to find two different, but related dimensions. On one hand, as a personal feeling or emotional state, nostalgia becomes independent of any representational system. On the other hand, individual feelings actually have a crucial link with all that is experienced, and nostalgic impulses are triggered by all sensory stimulants including aural and visual ones. Further, though nostalgia is not now seen as an illness but as a kind of emotional impulse, it has retained its links to

concepts of time and place<sup>140</sup>. This is because nostalgia is mostly yearning for a past time, which is often epitomised by certain places where those events have taken place. Thus, in many instances of visual representation of the past, spatial strategies are used to evoke a past time<sup>141</sup>.

As previously mentioned, Hutcheon disagreed with Jameson's idea of postmodern representation as ahistorical and nostalgic, deeming it ironic and historicist. Yet she later returned with new insight to her old debate of irony versus nostalgia in her article 'Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern' (1998). Hutcheon confesses that she had previously ignored 'the very real and very uneasy tension between postmodern irony and nostalgia' (Hutcheon, 1998). With reference to the pervasiveness of nostalgia in contemporary culture, Hutcheon proposes that it may have found 'surplus meaning and value'<sup>142</sup>. She notes, however, that according to the media, nostalgia is the obsession of both 'mass and high art', though she thinks that most people believe it is really 'the *media's* obsession'. (Hutcheon, 1998) Interestingly, Hutcheon places 'sentimentalised nostalgia' absolutely opposite to 'edgy irony' and thinks that the combination – or rather the conflict, conflation or confusion – of these two should make people think (Hutcheon, 1998).

From Hutcheon's findings, it may be proposed that the aesthetics of nostalgia are 'necessarily realistic', though not always realist. She notes that the aesthetics of nostalgia go beyond simple memory and recalling

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<sup>140</sup> The term nostalgia was coined from Greek roots [*nostos*: to return home and *algos*: pain] in 1688 by a 19-year old Swiss medical student as a sophisticated (or pedantic) way to describe severe homesickness in Swiss mercenaries far from home. Hutcheon notes that the remedy for this medical-pathological condition was to return home. Initially, it was a 'disorder of the imagination', albeit with physical symptoms, related to missing and wishing to return to a certain *place*. As Hutcheon shows, the meaning linked to a physical/medical condition receded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is now regarded as a psychological condition. Further, from being a *curable* disease of the body it became an *incurable* condition of the spirit or psyche. Hutcheon says: 'As early as 1798, Immanuel Kant had noted that people who did return home were usually disappointed because, in fact, they did not want to return to a *place*, but to a *time*, the time of youth' (Kant, 1798 cited in Hutcheon, 1998). This shift from *spatial* to *temporal* implications of nostalgia made it so powerful and incurable: it may be possible to return to a place, but is impossible to go back to a past time. 'Time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact' (Hutcheon, 1998).

<sup>141</sup> This will be explored further in Chapter Eight when a close reading of the film *Going Equipped* is provided.

<sup>142</sup> She quotes David Lowenthal's assertion that '[while] formerly confined in time and place, nostalgia today engulfs the whole past'. (Lowenthal, 1985: 6 cited in Hutcheon, 1998)

the past; they rather involve complicated acts of projection. The idealisation of a 'partial past' in preference to an undesirable present epitomises the intense power of nostalgia. For nostalgia to be represented as strong and close to what a person or people feel, it must be as credible and 'real' as possible; it must stimulate sensory feelings powerfully. This is why, as Hutcheon notes, there is such a need to access traces and evidence of the past. As she also explains, a major and perhaps controversial role in this is played by the present with its facilities, its technological equipment and its devices of reproduction (mechanical or electronic). Technology, including data banks and image saving, aid the representation of nostalgia and the notion of virtual travel to a certain past. 'Nostalgia no longer has to rely on individual memory or desire: it can be fed forever by quick access to an infinitely recyclable past' (Ibid.). This may explain why nostalgia remains in and continues to occupy the cultural environment more than ever.

Despite nostalgia's individualistic character, it seems that contemporary visual and aural culture actively creates collective nostalgia. As Hutcheon observes, this seems to belong more to the media than the public. Thus, nostalgia and image-making processes become acquaintances. Questions of copying, borrowing and intertextuality find direct associations with the creation of imagery that is redolent of a nostalgic past in the form of a style or aesthetic quality. If the creation of the effects of past styles, moods and images requires means of copying and simulation, the question of simulation becomes central to the discussion of intertextual referencing, borrowing and mimicking.

In the corpus of Aardman films, nostalgia is prevalent both as individual memories and as a more collective representation of certain aspects of British nostalgia with references to modes linked to poetic realism<sup>143</sup>. The grainy film quality, observational style of filming, gloomy aspect and non-glossy and gritty setting are all maintained by means of simulational mechanisms and copying techniques. This is, as shown in Chapter Two,

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<sup>143</sup> A more individualistic side of nostalgia is manifest in the depiction of the man's childhood in *Going Equipped*, while a more public aspect of specifically British nostalgia is observable in other films of the corpus, including *Confessions...* and *War Story* that are similarly accompanied by paratextual imagery.

by recourse to the very specific properties of 3D animation shared with that of live-action film. The quintessentially simulational quality of these films, however, constitutes an important area of scrutiny in this research, which will shortly be explored in relation to theories of remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) and second-order realism (Darley, 2000).

## **Simulation, Remediation and Second-order Realism**

In this thesis, the term 'simulation' is used in a specific way, on which Baudrillard's thesis of simulation and simulacrum (1983:11) does not necessarily have a direct bearing. Nevertheless, there are some probable areas of intersection, in relation to the aesthetics of new/digital media and the kind of imagery they produce. The terms Simulation, Remediation and Second-order Realism were coined to relate to the aesthetics of what is known as 'the new media': all kinds of CGI and the sub-mediums it has created, from computer/video games and CGI animation and film to the web and internet. In this thesis, they will be explored with regard to certain aspects of realist aesthetics in Aardman. Phenomenologically, the realm of traditional 3D animation is distinct from virtual reality and CGI. However, further investigation will demonstrate that CGI/3D animation has increasingly been used for the same purposes and with the similar functions (mostly as especial effects) that are now more plausible and economically viable with computers.

Some of the ten Aardman films take intertextuality, borrowing and copying of other styles or media to extremes: *On Probation's* visual aesthetic resembles an exact replica of a short fly-on-the-wall documentary that takes the medium of puppet/clay animation to a point of denying its representational mode. Though the animated-ness of the whole picture and clay/puppet-ness of the characters are immediately obvious, films such as this will not be described as a conventional 'puppet animation'. As will be shown, even this film, which so closely resembles live action, contains traces of paratextual referencing such as the 'real photographic' images on the wall, which form an immediate contrast

between people on the posters and those in the scene. The propensity for 'realistic-ness' in these films, which begins with *Down and Out* and *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, becomes more evident in some of the five films in the second, 'Conversation Pieces' series, and is perfected as a style with *Going Equipped* in the 'Lip Synch' series. This tendency will be termed 'simulational realism'. In this sense, simulation means reproduction point by point, to the extent that the representation approximates a referent or produces the same visual effect as if the 'original' was experienced. As discussed in Chapter Three, it seems obvious that a puppet will never resemble a human being so closely that it is mistaken for one<sup>144</sup>, so this will remain an impossible challenge to the 3D medium. What makes this kind of aesthetic simulational is the vigorous pretence of being another medium<sup>145</sup>.

The 'simulational' tendencies in these animated forms have some common ground with Baudrillard's 'simulation' and simulacrum thesis (Baudrillard, 1983: 11). Much like Baudrillard's model, they are mimetic representations not of reality but of previous representations, media and 'signs'. His tragic scenario of contemporary representation of signs as anti-representational, however, relates mainly to the ways in which the mass media constantly cannibalises previous signs, creating, as he suggests, a simulacrum of reality which has no basis in reality itself<sup>146</sup>. Simulational tendencies in animation depart from Baudrillard's model of

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<sup>144</sup> This is part of the reflexivity of such simulational realism, as will be investigated shortly.

<sup>145</sup> This type of simulational realism is not peculiar to the Aardman films in question. As discussed in Chapter Two, it may be seen in Barry Purves' astonishing theatrical performances in animation such as *Rigoletto* (1993) or *Screenplay* (1992) as well as the purely live-action-esque animation episodes in *The Miracle Maker*.

<sup>146</sup> Baudrillard details a catastrophic and chaotic postmodern representational crisis. In this culture of cannibalising signs and images, signs refer to signs rather than a basic reality, so the real loses its meaning (Baudrillard, 1983: 11). The story progresses through reflection of a basic reality; masking and distorting a basic reality and masking its *absence* to the present in which 'it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum' (Ibid.).

Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference (Ibid.).

In his view, simulation is *opposed to* representation: while the basis of representation is equivalence between the sign and the real (referent), simulation is based on the 'negation of the sign as value'<sup>146</sup> and he regards 'the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference' (Ibid.). 'Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum'. (Ibid.)

mass-media representation: they are not always weightless, anti-representational or meaningless. It may be argued that the self-reflexivity intrinsic to an Aardman film that attempts to approach closely a replica of a live-action version, but that eventually fails and projects its constructed-ness, is what differentiates it from the mass-produced 'simulacrum' imageries of Baudrillard's thesis. Aardman films are removed from the pure playfulness and spectacular aesthetics of the new digital media, as studied by Bolter and Grusin (2000) and Darley (2000). This difference lies in the dissimilar modes of live-action original they copy, accompanied by the themes and contexts into which the imagery is placed, and above all the documentary quality of the soundtrack. This thesis will show that this simulational imagery, which in terms of appearance and representational make-up at times closely approaches Jamesonian 'pastiche' and at others Hutcheon's 'parody', stands somewhere between Lash's purely discursive and purely figural poles. The in-between status of these films is probably due to their ambivalence in terms of cinematic image, which in most cases does not conform to one series of attributes and oscillates constantly between the representational and functional poles identified by this thesis<sup>147</sup>. The similarities between simulational tendencies in 3D animation and those of newer media such as CGI and digital animation thus seem to fit Bolter and Grusin's (2000) 'remediation' thesis.

It is interesting to note that when traditional animation techniques are used to replicate other mediums, the supposed competence by which a style is mimicked is fated always to be recognised, however faithfully it resembles the original. The dynamic tension between the similarity of the copied medium to the 'original', the success or otherwise of the imitation, and the fact that it is still an imitation and construct rather than the original, creates the dialectic of such kinds of simulational aesthetics in animation.

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<sup>147</sup> These will be expanded in Part Two, Chapter Six.

In Bolter and Grusin's (2000) thesis of 'remediation', such dialectic is expounded as a tension between 'immediacy' and 'hypermediacy' in the new media. Throughout the history of representational media, Bolter and Grusin see an urge for 'transparent immediacy', an attempt to minimise or perhaps remove the burden between what is represented and its representation. They show that such immediacy is the variation of a 'family of beliefs and practices' that is presents in different ways at different times. From the linear perspective of painting, to the photographic process which Bazin and others believed was so immediate and transparent, 'the common feature of all these forms is the belief in some necessary contact point between the medium and what is represented'<sup>148</sup> (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 30) .

The other part of the 'double logic of remediation' is 'hypermediacy'; 'the fascination with media' *per se*, which foregrounds it and breaks the spell of transparent representation (Ibid. 31). Bolter and Grusin believe that hypermediacy, much like transparent immediacy, 'has a history as a representational practice and a cultural logic' (Ibid.). This visual style, however, is far more prevalent in the new media: the 'Window Style' of the World Wide Web being its most familiar example, that foregrounds 'process or performance over the finished art object' and is based on 'fragmentation, indeterminacy and heterogeneity' (Mitchelle, 1994: 8 cited in Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 31). Bolter and Grusin's application of what they call the logic of hypermediacy obviously recalls the notion of self-reflexivity and self-referentiality discussed earlier<sup>149</sup> .

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<sup>148</sup> They stress, however, that apart from *Trompe l'oeil*, which was created expressly to deceive the viewer, 'probably at no time or place has the logic of immediacy required that the viewer be completely fooled by the painting or the photograph' (Ibid.)

<sup>149</sup> Bolter and Grusin argue that hypermediacy acts as a counter-balance to the more prevalent tendency for immediacy in the digital technology. They also note that the use and practice of hypermediacy in the new media is more intricate and mostly featured with 'multiplicity':

If the logic of immediacy leads one whether to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible. Where immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which the representation is conceived as not as a window on to the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself – with windows that open on to other representations or other media. The logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and in this way tries to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience. (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 34)

Eventually, Bolter and Grusin propose that remediation is the tension between these two major stylistic tendencies. Referring to the idea of 'repurposing' in which one property of a medium is recycled in another without direct referencing or acknowledgment of the 'referent medium', they argue that 'with reuse comes a necessary redefinition' (Ibid. 45). Bolter and Grusin identify their thesis of 'remediation' as the main feature of most digital forms, as the representation of one medium in another, in which the 'digital medium' is trying both to erase itself and appear transparent by highlighting and projecting the old medium 'without apparent irony or critique' (Ibid.) . Meanwhile, the act of representation via 'another medium', in this case a computer, always involves the new medium being projected and interfered with (Ibid. 45). On one hand is the extreme attempt at 'immersion' in the old medium, to minimise the discrepancies between the old and new media. On the other hand, as Bolter and Grusin argue, 'the very act of remediation, however, ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced, the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways'. (Ibid. 47)

Beyond animation's general copying nature, noted by Lutman and addressed in Chapter One, it seems that a similar tendency is specifically at work in the Aardman corpus. In their implementation of both schemas, extreme immediacy and hypermediacy, Aardman films in different ways and to different degrees seem eventually to remediate the medium or rather media they are copying and referencing. It will be shown that these copyings are initially 'unacknowledged' yet overtly realised. This places the nature and make-up of remediation in the films in at least two categories: one that copies a seamless documentary film, and another that hybridises cartoon aesthetics with live-action codes and has more affinity with hypermediacy or as Bolter and Grusin put it, use 'multiplied' ways of representation (see footnote 25).

The question of remediation prompts a return to the problem of realism. To remediate, the new medium must, in its new capabilities or specificities, duplicate an old medium or media. As the new medium

becomes proficient in copying the old, it is increasingly concerned with perfect copying and replication, so that it becomes unrecognisable from the old medium. This obsession with 'realistic-ness' makes the imagery act as spectacle in itself, regardless of the message it is trying to convey. In such remediation there are fundamental functional differences between Aardman-type obsessions and those of most entertainment mainstream CGI imagery, but they create a similar spectacular effect. The wonder of the accuracy and mastery by which the image is replicated thus functions as a spectacular effect in itself. Such spectacular effects are central to Darley's (2000) study of the computer-generated image. Hence, 'picture-perfect-ness' is a major way by which the 'new' medium is projected as spectacle: 'the technology itself is the message' (Darley, 2000: 53).

According to Darley, '[T]he fascination with technologies of spectacle' (Darley, 2000: 45) which is quintessentially a 19<sup>th</sup>-century phenomenon, reveals itself in early cinema as 'the culmination of all these preoccupations' [*previously mentioned-FHS*]. Darley notes that, in early Lumière films, the 'realistic illusion' created by the (then) new medium becomes a far more entertaining spectacle than what is being shown. Thus, 'the cinematic apparatus itself is being wondered at' (Ibid. 45).

Darley also recognises a similar resurgence of the aesthetic of 'surface play and spectacle' in what he calls the new media genres (Ibid. 52). His extensive investigation focuses on the aesthetic of mainstream trends of CGI and digital imagery that are entertainment-based. Despite this, his thesis of 'second-order realism' in relation to the kind of 'surface accuracy and image brilliance' (Ibid. 54) and 'the ever greater realism' (Ibid. 55) he identifies within the digital aesthetics is relevant to the discussion of 'simulational tendencies' within the ten Aardman films.

Darley identifies in the aesthetic of most new digital media a propensity to replicate 'the already mediated' (Ibid. 75). He refers to Baudrillard's 'hyper-realism', Jameson's pastiche and Eco's thesis of 'repetition' and 'schemas' that in the new media replace the 'innovation' doctoring of

modernism (Eco, 1985: 161). Like these theorists, he recognises that the main aesthetic of digital media is more likely to mimic existing techniques of mediation than take reference from the real world. In his view, the old notion of realism no longer applies, since these representational modes are of a 'second degree or second order', in which representation is no longer the goal and simulating representation seems to be more the case (Ibid. 75).

In their obsessively realistic make-ups many among the Aardman corpus of films seem to fall into Darley's thesis of second-order realism. Yet, as detailed in Chapter Two with regard to the shared specificities of live-action and 3D animation, these films cannot conveniently be considered bottom-up creations or sheer copied effects. This is because, in CGI, all effects including 3D and cinematographic realism are only virtual effects or visual tricks, to the same extent as in 2D drawn animation. Similar to live-action film, however, the three-dimensionality and cinematic syntax of 3D animation is ontologically real,

Notions of 'playful-ness', 'depthless imagery' and 'prioritisation of the senses and enjoyment over narration and meaning' (Darley, 2000) or being 'figurative rather than discursive' are associated with CGI or commercial and mainstream visual culture. They cannot, however, be assigned so assertively to Aardman films. Most of the Aardman films at issue are not primarily entertainment-based or commercial; they specifically steer clear of such glossy and spectacular imagery and do not in any case exemplify the 'picture brilliance' of Darley's proposed aesthetics. On the contrary, especially in the first series, the kind of imagery they mimic is deliberately non-colourful, non-perfect and non-flamboyant. Thus, in order to interpret these films' copying strategies, hybrid make up and intertextual referencing of other realisms, more specific analysis methodologies are needed, that are tailored to their exclusive approaches to copying and simulation<sup>150</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> While in Part Two the different categories of these copying strategies are identified and addressed, in Part Three an in-depth textual analysis of three key films of the corpus will address these specific issues.

It is true that these films are faithful copies of original live-action films, which nevertheless did not actually exist. In broad accord with Baudrillard's idea of simulation, their imagery is totally faked and does not indexically represent a real event. They are not, however, of the depthless, spectacular and value-free nature which Jameson and Baudrillard assign to mainstream film's recreation and simulation of previously-represented signs. On the contrary, the 'real-life' sound track as an 'indexical bond' to a reality out there lends these films a degree of documentary realism, making them different from empty pastiche and the depthless model of nostalgia film exemplified by Jameson. In this respect they remain somewhere between two poles: total simulation of already represented realisms and a true mediation of social realism.

### **Paratextuality and Historiographic Footnoting**

The ten Aardman films pose questions of oral history, as does live-action documentary in its use of 'documentary sound' on animated image. In these films, the relationship between a factual component taken from the historical world in combination with fictional imagery seems in accord with Linda Hutcheon's notions on historicity in literary forms. In her investigation on the postmodern novel and what she calls *historiographic metafiction*, Hutcheon observes how the specific strategies within this kind of writing interrogate the nature of historical representation (Hutcheon, 1988, 105). With reference to the use of historical facts and settings in a fictional context and the way this genre of novel blends the two, she argues that they raise the same questions posed by theories of textuality on history writing. Hutcheon believes that 'new scepticism or suspicion' about history writing, of the same order as that proposed by the works of Hayden White and Dominic La Capra, is reflected in historiographic novels such as *Shame*, *The Public Burning*, or *A Maggot*. These novels take a similar interrogative stance on the conventions of

narrative, the problems of reference and subjectivity, and their own identity in terms of textuality<sup>151</sup> (Ibid. 106).

Several parallels may be drawn between some forms of animated documentary, and the scepticism that Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction provokes by penetrating issues of 'textuality, ideology and truth, sources of the past and question of narrative' (Ibid.119). One aspect of her association of historiographic metafiction with history writing, 'paratextual referencing', offers a useful insight into how an animated documentary might similarly deal with the past. Hutcheon suggests a model of 'paratextuality' in the way the postmodern novel blends historical facts and the writer's imagination<sup>152</sup>. She compares this with the act of history writing where the 'main' text is bolstered by additional means of clarification including footnotes, graphs and images. Footnotes, she believes, can be particularly double-edged, as they may present information from another source that does not necessarily support the main story, but contradicts it or suggests another angle.

Hutcheon points to the use and misuse of archival texts in history writing as evidence to support or subvert a claim. These take various forms from footnotes, endnotes, illustrations and maps, through forewords, epilogues, and postscripts to titles and sub-titles. They belong to the conventions of history writing, but are used in postmodern fiction, according to Hutcheon, to problematise the existence of a unified, consistent narrative and instead create parallel micro-narratives that are

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<sup>151</sup> Hutcheon says:

It is part of the postmodern stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of the dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both. (Ibid.)

<sup>152</sup> Hutcheon says that historical metafiction in itself is the summations of seemingly opposite elements; fictive writing beside historical facts which are sometimes distorted, sometimes chronologically displaced, and so forth:

What postmodern novels like Fowles's *A Maggot* or Findley's *Famous Last Words* do is to focus in a very self-reflexive way on the process of both the production and the reception of paradoxically fictive historical writing. They raise the issue of how the intertexts of history, its documents or its traces get incorporated into such an avowedly fictional context, while somehow also retaining their historical documentary value. The actual physical means of this particular incorporating representation are often, perhaps not surprisingly, those of history-writing, especially its 'paratextual' conventions: in particular, its footnotes and illustrations, but also its subtitles, prefaces, epilogues, epigraphs, and so on. (Hutcheon, 1989: 82)

intended to establish paradoxical readings and interrupt the unity of the process of narration and the making of meaning.

Such paratextuality, Hutcheon argues, is first and foremost of the order of intertextuality: they still refer us to other texts (Hutcheon, 1989: 84). They are also, however, highly self-reflexive in that they overtly offer alternative readings that may or may not agree with the main account. Hutcheon also points to the use of footnote, which actually distracts attention from the *main* text to another discourse, and another reading of the same event. In history writing, this normally presents an oppositional view, but may also support or complement. In this respect, footnotes function both as 'self-reflexive signals to assure the reader as to the historical credibility of the particular witness or authority cited' while they also 'disrupt the reader's assumption of any coherent, totalising fictive narrative' (Hutcheon, 1989: 85). Paratextual referencing may therefore operate both to submerge the reader centrifugally and at the same time disturb their immersion 'centripetally' (Ibid.) Further, as Hutcheon explains, paratextual referencing makes the viewer an active participant in the process of meaning-making rather than a passive consumer, a function similar to 'Brecht's alienation effect' (Hutcheon, 1989: 88).

Paratextuality theory may potentially be applied to many forms of representation that deal with the question of historiography. A case in point is live-action documentary film, in which factual contents may be mediated by recourse to different channels of information, from on the spot recording of events to reconstruction and recreation. Very generally, this model is also applicable to animated documentary, as a representational system that artificially blends different channels of sound and image. A paratextual make-up seems evident in animated documentary's roots in the world of actuality and its usual use of a real soundtrack yet with fictional imagery.

In the corpus of Aardman films, paratextuality is identified as a conscious strategy to bring into play more than a literal illustration of the events heard from the soundtrack. Paratextuality may both confirm and subvert

the ways in which a film should be read, so these parallel strategies will be examined in relation to their realist/fictionalisation functions in the films. Further, paratextuality adds to the dimensions of hybridity in the texts that certain films have created. The overt paratextual strategies used have therefore helped to determine the choice of certain films for case study, as substantiating most aspects of intertextuality and hybridity.

In light of the preceding discussions, let me conclude this section by clarifying how the term 'realism' is understood and deployed in the analyses of the films that follows. Notions such as pastiche, parody, simulation and hybridity are ostensibly at odds with general understandings of the term realism. However, despite contemporary notions, theories and practices which are highly sceptical towards traditional notions of realism, this research suggests an alternative, more inclusive understanding of the concept; a 'model' which can more suitably underpin the multifaceted aspects and implications of a term as complex as that of realism.

First and foremost, in this model the traditional notion of 'mimesis' understood as mirror image or 'verisimilitude' is only one sense among several of how the term 'realism' is to be understood. Although such an indexical bond between reality and its representation is still perceivable and possible, trouble arises when life-like representations alone cannot guarantee a truthful mediation of reality. If reality is reduced to the appearance of things and essentially is of a visual nature, then realism must be the most loyal visual copy of that appearance. However, if the visible is only one feature of reality, albeit a very important one, and if reality has a discursive side to it which can not always be reflected by literal/visual transcriptions, then there should be a space for alternative means to arbitrate it.

Anti-realist stances towards classical notions of realism seem, in one way or another, to be implying that mirroring the surface of reality, however precisely and 'objectively', is not necessarily a truthful enough

representation of it. In other words, as indicated at the beginning of chapter One (Page 25), in all disputes and claims over realism, the means and strategies of mediating reality – not only as appearance, but for all intents and purposes as *truth* – are equally important questions to be asked<sup>153</sup>. This is the underlying reason that this thesis has introduced and considered 'content realism' complimented by the doctrine of 'social function' as essential foundations in examining realism in any text in which the 'process' of representation is equally as important as the 'ends': i.e. the result of such representational schemas.

Further, the cultural and representational obsession of contemporary art practices, especially in the moving image, with 'copying', borrowing, recycling and simulating the previously represented only exacerbates the complexity of the question of realism. By replacing the 'original' with the 'already represented' it is the *referent* that has changed from the raw material of reality to a representation of it. Although Jameson (1991), Baudrillard (1983) and others rule out the possibility of reading any meaningful reality from these copied texts, this thesis claims that at least some of the Aardman films in question here instantiate models of pastiche and parody which are not merely empty and meaningless, but rather promote a deeper understanding of realities otherwise obscured or ignored.

Thus an alternative notion of realism is advanced and explored in which realism (i.e. mediating reality) is maintained by creating 'representational strategies' including copying other media, adopting particular narrative schemes and other audiovisual/narrative tactics. This is admittedly a less than straightforward notion of realism. However, the Aardman works at issue exemplify, I suggest, the ways in which 'realist strategies' can be deployed to mediate a multifaceted account of reality which is not visually/indexically 'there' to be watched and filmed but is only communicated as a result of the tension built among the elements of representation itself. Realism here is of an 'inter-relational' nature and

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<sup>153</sup> Truth and truthfulness are here used to refer to 'facts' and realities which go beyond what is seen in visual terms. For more discussion of the term see Chapter Three.

can be imagined as the median of many factors implemented within the 'network' of both figural and discursive components of the text. In this regard, realistic-ness of the imagery, a close copying of codes of documentary narrative schemes, the use of a real-life sound track and the 'knowledge' that all these are a 'pretend' version, a copy of another medium and mode associated with realism become essential elements of such a 'realist strategy'. The extent to which a film is determined as realist is reached by an in-depth examination of how these elements work together and how the meaning arises from the similarities as well as discrepancies between the original and the copy.

It is of course important to take into account that, for the most part, the constituents of these strategies are still visual and interestingly enough of a highly 'realistic' and verisimilitude-based character. Hence, this thesis proposes the term 'realist strategies' instead of outright realist representation to suggest that there exist diverse representational approaches, schemas and techniques to reflect realities many of which are at complete odds with literal transcriptions of reality per se. Representational strategies which aim to be realist, in this sense, are inevitably less direct and more complex than sheer verisimilitude-based approaches and may utilize a host of contradictory, ironic and subversive techniques.

Techniques such as parody and pastiche, for instance, do not obviously 'mimic' reality for a flawless reproduction of the surface of reality. Admittedly they do not have an essential 'bond' to 'reality': rather by definition they are copies of previous forms, styles, techniques and discourses and in this respect are understood as inconsistent with realism. It is obvious that pastiche and parody 'alter' an original reality, or copy a copy of it rather than directly reflect it. This alteration, depending on the aims of the maker, can have different outcomes; they can be undertaken for sheer entertainment purposes, but also they may be consciously adopted for more serious ends. So, for the sake of argument, this thesis considers them only as representational strategies with no claim to realism, but with an essential 'link' to those previous

representations they are a copy of. Thus the 'function' of any representational strategy, pastiche and parody included, depends on many other factors within the hybrid network of elements they are interwoven with. On the other hand, the fact that most of the films at issue copy modes of representation in the live-action cinema, themselves strongly linked to discourses of social/documentary realism, makes the examination of pastiche, parody and simulation of the original modes and styles in them significant. As a result an important feature of the hybridity of realism lies in these films' close association with previous modes and discourses of realism.

Part of the task of this thesis is, therefore, to understand these figural and discursive strategies in the Aardman corpus and read the social/cultural implications of them to understand to what extent realities of the social/historical world are mediated by visual and narrative strategies that refer to discursive accounts of reality not present in the image in a literal way.

In Part Two: Reading Aardman an analysis of the ten films under investigation will be presented with attention to the thesis of hybridity. This will be demonstrated by deconstructing the films in question in terms of their diverse formal and content attributes.

**PART TWO**  
READING AARDMAN

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Methodology and Analysis**

This chapter will introduce the methodological tools by which the ten Aardman films will be analysed. These, as will be discussed, are based on the arguments and propositions developed in Part One. They will be set out in detail and all aspects of realism defined by this thesis will be itemised in various categories. The films will be analysed against these criteria in specific tables. In each category of realism, the information presented will be explained and discussed, and initial groupings of films proposed. Eventually, a final 'typology' of realism peculiar to the ten films under investigation will be offered.

#### **Methodology**

The Aardman corpus will be examined in categories based on a form/content division<sup>154</sup>. In terms of formal realism, the focus will be the material aesthetic of the films, under the two main categories of *visual* and *aural* realism, based on Metz's division of filmic channels of information as visual (image, graphic traces and text) and aural (dialogue, sound effect and music). The visual realism category will be sub-divided into 'image realism' and 'narrative realism', under which each film will be measured against several criteria. These will be argued and justified below each item and illustrated and summarised in tables 5.1 and 5.2. The aural realism category covers several elements of the soundtrack, with emphasis on the word/conversation-based soundtrack common to most of the corpus (table 5.3). A detailed breakdown of their most significant elements may be seen under the heading 'content realism' (table 5.4)<sup>155</sup>.

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<sup>154</sup> Other possible terms used to refer to this binarism would be stylistics/subject matter division.

<sup>155</sup> Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 appear in whole pages at the end of the Chapter Five.

The basic method of reading an Aardman film is the interaction of sound and image. Certain realist attributes in the visual and aural divisions may therefore overlap, appearing in different tables under similar descriptive titles. In addition, the question of narrative lies at the intersection of the 'form and content' division. This inevitably informs both criteria, as argued in Introduction, with reference to Bordwell and Thompson's rejection of a clear distinction between form and content.

The tables are intended as an analytical breakdown of realist traits specific to Aardman films, using data *produced* item by item by close observation and deliberation, based on the main arguments of this thesis. Relevant examples will be given in the detailed examination of each table. In a few cases, as indicated, either no clear conclusion was reached, or a trait may have seemed irrelevant or non-applicable. This applies primarily to the last of the ten films, *Creature Comforts*, which seems to depart totally from the main methods and aesthetic obsessions of the previous nine.

The main claim in reading the ten Aardman films is that they copy, in different ways and with different connotations, live-action modes of representation. This fundamental 'copying' peculiarity was detailed in Chapter Two, especially in the conclusion where the thesis of hybridity was proposed. It was suggested that, while Aardman films in general are overt imitations of live action modes of documentary films, at times they are blended with cartoon aesthetics. They are therefore examined from the basis of their closeness to, or departure from – as a simulation of – those initial modes. In stylistic terms, this relates to how 'directly' they copy such live-action effects as opposed to the extent to which they opt for other/alternative/comic and especially cartoon aesthetics. While it is clear that realism in these films may not only be sought in live-action modes and/or their close copying, such binarism creates a space in which 'hybridity' makes sense in terms of both mixed forms and mixed contents. With reference to Chapter Two, different arrays of realist traits are thus seen as polar opposites, representing fictional or realist aspects

of these qualities. In each table, the films are assessed in terms of whether they are close to either of the poles or somewhere in between.

As a result, the binary oppositions set by this thesis in the formal realm are based mainly on live-action versus cartoon aesthetics. As such, different species of hybrids and cross-breeds both exist and may be imagined in the corpus. Realism in terms of the non-fiction/documentary type of mediating knowledge about the factual world in the animated form is obviously not confined to the adoption of the documentary conventions of live-action modes<sup>156</sup>. In the case of the formal attributes of the ten films, however, it is deliberately assumed to be so. In terms of the 'content' analysis of realism, it seems clear that both the sound/image relationship and the question of whether the films successfully communicate factual information led by their soundtrack will become crucial and indicative.

As argued in the formal realism chapter, based on Rowley's (2005) argument, most of what is believed to be 'realist' in animation is a combination of both realist and non-realist attributes. In the tables, blue and red ticks represent the polar extremes of non-realist/ fictional and realist/realistic properties. These poles relate generally to the opposing traits of: cartoon aesthetics, fictional qualities or mainstream/spectacular modes of live-action as opposed to correspondingly live-action aesthetics, non-fictional and/or social realist modes. A purple tick denotes a status somewhere between the two poles.

It should be noted that the terms *realist* and *realistic* are both used to express the qualities and aesthetic attributes of the Aardman corpus. While 'realistic' mainly describes a film's formal aspects in terms of its verisimilitude and surface accuracy in the depiction of physical reality or

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<sup>156</sup> With the discussions made in Chapter Three, for an animated documentary to function as a documentary, it does not have to utilise the codes and conventions of documentary modes in live-action. Yet, in the case of these films, such application of codes of observational or interview is taken deliberately as indicator of content realism as opposed to divergence from these codes and deployment of fictional ones especially those of cartoons. Obviously, in deciding the overall 'function' of a film in the corpus, this criterion is not the only one that affects the final judgment and several other criteria are also considered in different categories of realism identified by this thesis.

the appearance of things, 'realist' denotes the communication of a social reality and/or factuality as in documentary realism. The term 'realist' is also used for aural concerns, such as the fidelity of the recorded soundtrack in respect of sound-gathering and editing methods, and the way its content is made to interact with the imagery. There are some areas of overlap: a realist narrative may be taken to refer to a direct, observational style of 'filming' an event but more commonly to the established codes and conventions of mainstream narrative cinema and continuity editing. While in live-action film, the former is considered a more realist (=truthful) depiction of a factual event, the latter is 'realistic' in that it offers a credible illusion of spatiotemporal continuity<sup>157</sup>. In either case these films, which are only a frame-by-frame copy of those styles or forms of narrative, may only be deemed 'realistic' in creating a stylistic effect closer to either discourses of realism in live-action. Despite this, in terms of sheer formal narrative concerns, this thesis considers the documentary style 'realist' and codes of mainstream narrative cinema fictional. Hence, in terms of the interaction of sound and image some purely observational and realist narratives are seen as fictional, or somewhere between fiction and realism, because of the fictional 'content' implemented within their documentary form. For example, *Late Edition's* shooting style is purely observational (see table 5.2) yet the film contains a fictional character which is not represented in the soundtrack. This affects how the film is viewed in terms of aural and content realism (tables 5.3 and 5.4).

As the main aim of this thesis is to show the diversity and hybrid nature of realist traits in these films, it is believed that three colours are sufficient to demonstrate this clearly and effectively. In rare cases both a tick and a cross have been used: while the tick indicates the presence of a trait, the cross indicates that in this case the trait does not exist or apply. The colour of the cross defines the realistic or fictional quality of that element in that film. The tables do not indicate the *degree* of realism in the audio/visual or content divisions, as this has proved impossible to

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<sup>157</sup> Hence realist cinemas or movements are recognised to be those which are socially conscious and prioritise content over stylistic matters such as Italian Neo-realism or British New Wave and Free Cinema.

measure accurately. For example, though table 5.1 attributes similar realistic traits of characterisation, lip-synch and representation of the physical world to certain films, it does not indicate which of these films might be judged more realistic<sup>158</sup>. This is because such comparisons do not advance the aim of demonstrating the 'hybridity' of realist strategies in these films. They may, however, be made through further discussion, and will be noted in the concluding chapter as by-products of the study.

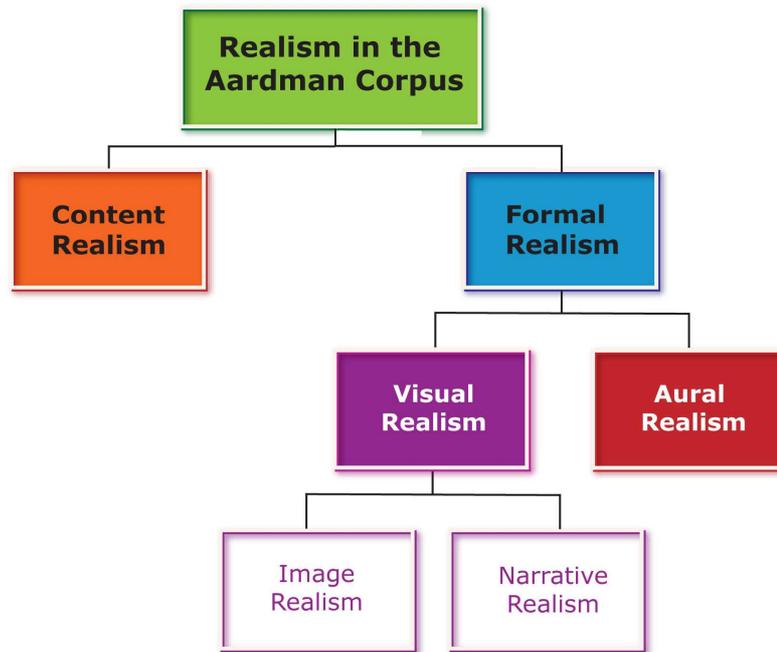
A concentration of a certain colour against a particular film may indicate that it has a more 'coherent' character in terms of being generally closer to live-action or cartoon<sup>159</sup>. The distribution of colours in a particular column may indicate more diversity of realist criteria. The image realism table may, for instance, show which films are more realistic in terms of image (i.e. closer to a live-action simulation); which are more fictional, and which are visually a mixture of the two. It cannot, however, show whether a film is realist, nor indicate to what degree certain films with similar traits are realist or fictional. In the next chapter, the ultimate designations and reading of realism(s) in each film or in their typological grouping (which is still of a wavering quality) will be discussed, and the idea of 'in-between-ness' introduced. There will also be a more discursive examination of the ten films and the question of realism in their overall signifying system.

The basic divisions and methods of breakdown of the Aardman films, based on an extension of Metzian duality and Rowley's (2005) method of reading 2D drawn animation, is summarised in figure 5.1. Further phases of the methodology used to read the films will be developed in the next chapter.

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<sup>158</sup> Attempts to create naturalistic human characters with precise lip-synch and real human behaviour may be seen in earlier films such as *Down and Out* and *On Probation*. As will be shown, however, realistic traits improve with successive films, culminating in *Going Equipped* which is very close to a simulation of a live-action film.

<sup>159</sup> As explained earlier, this polarisation (live-action/cartoon) is deliberately taken also to mean fiction/non-fiction, especially in terms of formal aspects of an Aardman film.



**Figure 5.1 Basic divisions and methodology**

In studying realism in the Aardman corpus, and with regard to the hypothesis of 'hybridity', the systematic method proposed by this thesis is to consider the stylistic and formal components of realism apart from the elements which may contribute to a truthful mediation of a factual content. While examination of the former (formal realism) is based on Metz's (1974) categories of visual and aural channels of information – each having their own components – the latter (content realism) is inspired by Rowley's (2005) notion of social realism as an important separate category to be considered in investigating realism in animation.

Admittedly, these are two overlapping areas and as will be shown, some elements will recur in both categories in the actual analyses of the films. Yet, the usefulness of such artificial separation of the two approaches to realism is especially beneficial for studying hybridity since they identify at least two distinguished components in any animated text which may also be used to examine other categories of moving image including live-action films. In this respect, it is beneficial to have these two separate categories of realism, to specify what we mean when talking about realism in any text; do we mean how close the audiovisual material

resembles reality, or even how believable it is made to look as if it is real? Or rather, are we referring to how a real/factual content is represented regardless of the style utilised for that representation? Or, as is the case with the films at issue, is a combination and hybridisation of both approaches at work which ultimately may or may not result in realism; that is communicating realities of the social or historical world despite having a crossbreed structure and alluding to different styles or discourses which are about realism.

Furthermore, indicating how a text 'combines' both categories of realism or only focuses on one of them assists our understanding of the extent to which a text is hybrid or unified. Considering the 'hybridity cube' model expounded in Chapter Two (above) almost all animation must be some kind of hybrid and imaging a 'pure' type is somewhat difficult. Nevertheless, the degree and complexity of hybridity (of realism) in any given text may be determined by a break down of each of the two categories of realism present to smaller components and thus a methodical and detailed approach to analysing the components of any hybrid text is made possible through the analytical approach used below.

The colour coding system used to 'demonstrate' such hybridity considers several important binarisms of realist versus non-realist features, in both formal and content realism categories and examines them against each of the ten films. With these binary poles and a state of in-between-ness, indicated with three colours, the thesis assumes that enough diversity of approach can be shown amongst the different films at issue to assist in identifying the patterns and 'types' of realist approaches in them.

## **Formal Realism (including Visual and Aural Realism)**

### **Visual Realism in Aardman**

In this category, different aspects of 'image' will be examined, with specific regard to Aardman films created in the puppet/clay format.

Central issues are the extent to which the characters are constructed and made to move and act in a 'realistic' or 'cartoonish' way; how realistic or fictional is the construction of the world they inhabit, and what formal and stylistic strategies are used to make them look as they do. The question of *narrative* will partly be explored, since the narrative of these films is closely linked both to the aesthetic of the styles they copy, and to codes and conventions of editing and lighting associated with both documentary practices and fictional modes of live-action cinema. The ultimate reading of narrative or 'the story they tell' must take account of their relationship to the aural (mostly verbal) information offered by the soundtrack, as well as the *function* of such narratives, meaning whether they simply look like certain modes of representation, such as 'fly-on-the-wall' documentaries, or also function as such.

### **Image realism (Table 5.1)**

#### **GENERAL: *Mimesis versus abstraction and/or cartoon aesthetics***

This comprises general criteria relating to whether the world recreated in 3D animation in these films represents a 'naturalistic' copy closer to the 'surface appearance' of things and people, or moves towards abstracted forms of representation including caricature and cartoon aesthetics.

#### ***Character movement and development***

This examines how the puppets move and are generally animated, following this thesis' differentiation between different types of character movement: the pose-to-pose movement used in most cartoon aesthetics; the kind of movement that, to differing extents, demonstrates abstraction and stylisation in modes of representation including theatre and television live performances, and realistic movement similar to those seen in live-action fiction and non-fiction films. It also examines whether their body language and facial movements are closer to those seen in real life and/or live-action films, or are less realistic, more abstracted, exaggerated and approximated as portrayed in various ways in cartoons.

### ***Character design, make-up and appearance***

This sub-category of character development attempts to gauge how closely a puppet resembles a human in terms of factors such as appearance, proportions and textures used, or whether it is of 'cartoon' make-up, with stylised or exaggerated traits. The degree of realism is assessed by the extent to which the design of the character's head and body departs from 2D mainstream cartoon style and approaches the naturalism of live-action modes. The talking heads of the puppets are probably the most important part of their make-up: the naturalism at work in some of these derives neither from the type of abstraction seen in 'human' Disney characters nor from the rounded characters in the US seven-minute cartoon. In those with portrait-charge heads, this is to some degree abstracted. In other films, however, the make-up of characters, especially their faces, is more akin to 2D cartoon characters.

### ***Lip synch***

This examines how precisely and realistically lip-synch is executed in relation to the more simplified approximation normally used in cartoons.

### ***Puppet as live-action character versus puppet as cartoon character***

This examines both the appearance of the puppets (stylised, symbolic or anthropomorphised as opposed to naturalistic humans), and the *role* they play or their context, following the categorisations made in Chapter Two.

### ***Sets, props and objects***

This analyses the extent to which objects, props and settings resemble those found in real life, or whether they are designed in more abstracted styles, or used in contexts that are more fictional/surreal than in normal life or the ordinary world as represented in documentary films<sup>160</sup>.

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<sup>160</sup> In this criterion, settings and props represented are measured against real life rather than fictional live-action films, as both live-action and puppet animation are capable of making unrealistic or abstract or surreal props and settings.

### ***The physical world and events***

This relates to realistic settings and objects and spatial realism. In animation, surreal, unreal and imaginary events may take place even in the most realistically rendered settings. The issue is whether the film's 'world' is rendered and treated in a way that is similar to the physical world, or whether the ways in which the characters interact with its spatial traits and objects create imaginary or surreal effects and impossibilities.

### **Narrative realism (Table 5.2)**

#### ***Narrative format***

This examines whether the film 'copies' the modes and formats associated with non-fiction and documentary or follows a fictional format, i.e. more conventional narratives either in mainstream live-action or animation.

#### ***Shooting and editing***

This focuses on whether filming and editing techniques used are akin to documentary modes (non-fictional: observational/interview) or follow more subjective styles of shooting and fictional styles of editing<sup>161</sup>.

#### ***Lighting***

This examines the ways in which spaces and places are lit; whether it is a realist lighting i.e. settings (in relevant contexts) are presented as they might be in real life, or a more dramatic type of lighting is used as a narrative tool to provide extra information about the 'context' of the story.

#### ***Use of graphics and words in opening and closing titles***

This may offer significant information about whether a film is 'meant' to be treated as a reconstruction/simulation of a live-action documentary, or

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<sup>161</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two with reference to Ruoff and Nichols, a shot-reverse-shot may still be within the codes of observational or interview mode, while a point-of-view shot or a match-cut belongs to the realm of the fictional mode of live-action film.

as a parody of either cartoon forms or certain modes and genres of fictional live-action film.

### ***Single narrative/Parallel narrative***

This attempts to define whether a 'seamless' narrative style is adopted or more than one narrative style is used. As discussed in Chapter Three, in some films of the corpus explicit strategies of paratextuality are used as 'illustrative' images, as in conventional interview films but in different ways and for different purposes. Paratextuality may be seen to go beyond aesthetic choices and concerns, but it is usually achieved via the use of dissimilar categories of images to create parallel narrative information for the viewer. This strategy may not be at all 'illuminating' or 'clarifying' but may, perversely, add in some sense to the ambivalence and multiple facets of a narrative. It may also function as a self-reflexive, dissociating tool, breaking the seamlessness of an immersive one-style narrative.

### **Aural Realism in Aardman**

As argued and shown in Chapter Two, the atypical and innovative use of real-life soundtracks is what makes the Aardman output a distinct species of animated film<sup>162</sup>. Some of this closely approaches a simulation of a typical live-action documentary, to the extent that it raises questions about the point of the exercise.

The aural realism criteria, as discussed, will focus on how these soundtracks are 'treated'. The division of 'direct sound' versus 'interview sound' is key to determining how realistic the soundtracks are, or to what extent they are manipulated. As previously noted, there is a distinction between directedness and objectivity, and the former does not guarantee the latter. This is relevant because these films provide no access to the 'factual event' except by soundtrack information, which in most cases

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<sup>162</sup> As discussed in the brief history of documentary animation, this is not exclusive to Aardman; the 'documentary' pretence in its imagery and narrative is, however, unparalleled.

centres on conversations or monologues obtained via interview (Chion's verbocentrism (2000: 112)). Even with supreme objectivity, it may be understood that the idea of maximum 'truth' is an illusion: this thesis therefore seeks to avoid assumptions about objectivity and truthfulness based solely on the 'objectivity' of soundtrack gathering. It is, however, valid to examine the *degree* of objectivity in that it represents the only access to the factual world, and is a decisive realist factor in terms of its relationship to the relevant image. This is particularly true when this relationship is examined in terms of 'function' theory, to determine whether the completed film manages eventually, however indirectly, to mediate some factual knowledge about that specific event, or whether it fictionalises the content of soundtrack to the extent that the factual content is not faithfully mediated.

The main focus of the examination of the sound/image relationship will be on verbal/image, as central to the investigation of aural realism. The filmmakers may have imagined a 'typical story' for the soundtrack, or may have fictionalised it totally. They may have taken a far more subjective stance, locating themselves in the film not only in terms of image interpretation, but also by the use of 'parallel' imaginary illustrational narratives. This sets up several important links to the initial question of realism. It may be argued that – even in the Aardman oeuvre - the most 'realist' films are not the most realistic in terms of imagery. It may also be said that those with a parallel narrative are better able to communicate an efficient or profound account of reality, whether in a serious way or by use of sarcastic parodies.

Less central to the examination of the aural realism of Aardman artifice is the use of sound effects, as distinct from the main recorded soundtrack. In most of the films, sound effects such as tapping a pencil against a table or crushing paper are used sparingly to 'naturalise' acts, but have no real influence on the account of reality represented. In some cases silent characters are present, of which the soundtrack contains no evidence. They seem to be located in the film only through the imagination of the filmmakers and by recourse to 'faked' sound effects;

their presence is therefore suggested only by minimal effective use of soundtrack<sup>163</sup>. In a few cases, sound effects are used as they might be in cartoons, in that they are approximations of exaggerated or cartoonish actions taking place in the film<sup>164</sup>. In the tables, such use is deemed fictional.

Another factor to be explored is whether the soundtrack has exclusively determined the event depicted. While in some films the event closely corresponds to the soundtrack content and represents it in a typical way, in others the event is deliberately depicted as slightly different from the actual event, or deviates from it in major ways. Again, such deviations may, to different degrees, impact on a truthful representation of the 'documented' event, as will be discussed briefly in the films' analysis.

The final question proposed by this thesis about aural realism relates to the use of music in certain films and its avoidance in most of the films. Music is used in only a few of the ten films, primarily to imply certain effects or styles or modes of filmmaking that belong to the past. In films with more serious, observational pretensions, it is usually avoided. It is therefore important to consider the function of music in the films that make more explicit use of it, such as *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* and *War Story*<sup>165</sup>. The aural elements in Aardman films in terms of realism are therefore as follows:

### **Aural realism (Table 5.3)**

#### ***Soundtrack gathering***

This examines the main soundtrack as whether it is a secretly recorded or 'direct' (D) sound or a recorded interview sound (I).

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<sup>163</sup> There is no real evidence that the old man by the window in *Palmy Days* existed in the same space as the people seen round the table. The non-speaking struggling writer in *Late Edition* features on the soundtrack only as the crunching of paper thrown away in despair.

<sup>164</sup> This mainly applies to *War Story* which will be closely examined in Chapter Nine.

<sup>165</sup> In *Confessions...*, the use of historical pastiche ( see Chapter Seven) in music and opening titles might be seen as double-edged or even subversive (see the textual analysis). In *War Story*, the image of a fighter aircraft, allied to music from WWII films, are parodic devices designed to provoke feelings of nostalgia about the forthcoming film. In other films such as *Going Equipped*, music is used very subtly to create implied moods.

### ***Sound and story***

This examines whether the story heard from the soundtrack is a typical or in context depiction, or a fictionalised or out of context account.

### ***Characters and their voices***

This studies the existence of imaginary, voiceless characters in the film with no basis in the soundtrack, versus depiction of (typically) all speaking people in the soundtrack with no imaginary character.

### ***Literal versus non-literal depiction of speech***

This studies whether the event is represented typically, based on a literal account of the speech heard, or via extra imagery or fictional side stories.

### ***Use of sound effects***

This examines whether the main soundtrack is accompanied by faked/extra sound effects.

### ***Use of music***

This notes whether (theme) music is used

## **Content Realism in Aardman**

Inevitably some areas of enquiry into the verbal/image relationship will overlap with the content of the films in question, since this relationship is what essentially makes these films signify as films. Other questions relate to issues concerning the 'social realist text' discussed in Chapter Three, including the voices these films might adopt, or the history and historicity debate and their treatment of what this thesis terms 'petty oral history'. The itemisation of these specific queries of subject matter, and how realist they are eventually, is summarised as follows:

## **Content Realism (Table 5.4)**

### ***Story***

This examines whether the stories in these films are ultimately fictional or factual, based on the type of treatment of the original soundtrack, and also their use of imagery. Through more intensive examination, however, it may be said that, while some of the films are fictional stories that happen to use a real-life soundtrack, others 'tell' factual stories even though the images and narratives used are totally imaginary.

### ***Sound/image relationship***

This examines whether the reality of the soundtrack content is directly mediated through imagery or is fictionalised and imagined; whether the information from the soundtrack is truthful to the 'context' of the story depicted or is a deviation from the factual discourse. It may even be just an excuse to build 'creative imagery' that is both entertaining and comic or ironic but has no documentary factual value.

### ***Text Type***

This examines the content realism in each film, based on the criteria proposed by Samantha Lay (2002) as demonstrated in table 3.1. It is an important factor, though it does not guarantee 'documentary realism'.

### ***Voice***

This examines whether the films are of a more poetic tone and voice while others have a parodic voice. As discussed in Chapter Two, in their multilateral and ambivalent rhetoric the films may loosely be regarded as open voices.

### ***Function***

This problematic question, which is not transparently verifiable, analyses whether, in mediating factual knowledge about the real world, each film 'functions' as a documentary. The types of designation will feature again

in the analysis section, with reference to the discussions in Chapter Three.

### ***Petty oral history***

*Illustrated as a recorded event: indicated in RED*

*Illustrated with parallel images of the past: indicated in PURPLE*

*Fictionalised and disguised in other stories: indicated in BLUE*

This final criterion examines whether a particular, personal past in the shape of oral history has helped to form a closer bond between the reality of the situation or the attitudes of the characters and audience, either via monologues (characters speaking directly about their memories or ideas) or conversations between two or more characters shown in images. If an event is only 'shown' typically, or represented using an objective, fly-on-the-wall pretence, it is indicated in red. If the imagery as a whole comes closer to fictionalising and displacing the context and 'reality' of the soundtrack information, it is indicated in blue. Cases that use both approaches, making hybrid stylistics and functional choices that may be very subjective are indicated in purple. The subjectivity/objectivity question is latent in this criterion, but should be pursued via a more discursive reading of the films. Issues raised include whether such subjectivity leads the filmmakers to fictionalise their stories, or to make a more intensive, efficient or effective account of the reality they wish to communicate. In either case, subjectivity does not necessarily mean anti-realism, just as objectivity does not guarantee realism.

These tables should not be taken too literally, and the meaning drawn from an individual criterion should not be seen to relate to the whole film. The notion of 'in-between-ness' elaborated in the next chapter is intended to offer a more 'processed' way of reading these films, and an ultimate median of interaction between various factors. Before this, however, the four tables will be analysed and each case will be classed as realist, fictional or 'in-between'.

## **Analysis of the Tables**

This section comprises the attempt to read the four tables that itemise the realism of the ten films from Visual (image/narrative), Aural and Content viewpoints. It will both explain possible ambiguities and clarify how the films have been studied and assigned certain traits. Each table will be described and discussed with reference to the film, or films, that require further justification and clarification<sup>166</sup>, and it is hoped that this will reveal more comparisons within similar groups of films. Traits that relate to similar types of qualities in these films may be discussed in groups rather than individually.

### **Analysis: Image realism (Table 5.1)**

#### ***General***

This examines mimesis versus abstraction and/or cartoon aesthetics in the overall make up of the films at issue and thus is a rough median of all image realism criteria.

#### ***Character movement & development***

This is an overview of the characters in each film, broken down into elements of character make-up, movement and development, to reveal whether they represent objects and beings in a more life-like or cartoon-like way. Three films are identified as having, to differing extents, a non-realistic make-up: *Palmy Days*, *War Story* and *Creature Comforts*. In *Palmy Days*, the depiction of people corresponds broadly to other naturalistic depictions in films such as *On Probation*, though not all display the same naturalistic traits or modes of behaviour. Apart from its fictive/surreal context, *Palmy Days* shows characters doing unbelievable things, such as using a tortoise as a table or eating crocodiles and octopuses raw. It features an old man whose head and exaggerated facial expressions set him apart from other characters depicted. His voice is not

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<sup>166</sup> In Appendix No 1 (Aardman Corpus in Detail) all films has been allocated a separate descriptive page, illustrated by stills that aid reference and provide a clearer idea of the descriptive and discursive accounts of each with regard to their realist traits.

heard, except for sound effects that accompany his reaction when he is surprised by the sight of an approaching ship. The film also features small animals, particularly the mouse, that are designed and animated in a less naturalistic and more cartoonish way.

In *War Story* many characters are portrayed as cartoon characters, though not of the Disney variety. The man in 'present time' interview is depicted closer to a real-life character, though with facial cartoon traits. In the flashback imagery, however, the world of his youth and all that happens in it is explicitly cartoon-like. Along with the numerous visual 'impossible' gags in this section, which interpret the man's words literally, all serve to confirm the generally fictional style of the film.

It is also useful to note that, while some later films closely approach cartoon aesthetics, Aardman films as a rule eschew the totally unrealistic roundedness of characters in the seven-minute US cartoon. Cartoon timing, exaggerations and gags enter into these worlds to differing degrees, yet they eventually are more realistic than cartoonish.

### ***Character design, make-up and appearance***

With regard to previous explanation of this criterion, the colour designations in the table should be straightforward.

### ***Lip synch***

It is only in *Creature Comforts* that precise lip-synch is replaced by the simplified mouth and mouth movements that later become the hallmark of Aardman characters such as *Wallace and Gromit*. In the other nine films precise lip-synching is attempted and in most cases very elegantly and believably achieved. In *War Story*, the man's mouth is obscured by a moustache and lip-synch is shown mainly by its movements, while in his memory flashbacks nobody speaks. This criterion is therefore shown in purple, representing something between a realistic and fictional mode.

### ***Puppets***

On similar lines, it may be argued that only in *Creature Comforts* do puppets actually represent human beings in a symbolic, non-indexical way. In the remainder of the films, puppets represent typical British people in real-life situations. In *War Story* this becomes complicated: the puppet that presents the man in current time represents a real British wartime veteran, but nevertheless has explicit cartoon traits, while the puppets in his memories have remarkably cartoonish make-ups. Both strategies seem to have been applied, so are indicated in purple.

### ***Sets, props and objects***

With regard to previous explanation of this criterion, the colour designations in the table should be straightforward.

### ***The physical world and events***

In general, despite group similarities, several of the ten films display diverse attributes in terms of how their 'worlds' are built aesthetically. In this respect, *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* is different: its world is constantly changing by the use of narrational tools that alternate between the foyer and the cinema screen. The live-action images that are apparently shown on the cinema screen tear the film's spatial realism apart, making it a potentially fictional or surreal world in which both everyday activities and visual depictions of the woman's mind occur simultaneously<sup>167</sup>. The kind of visual graphic by which newspapers and the posters on the foyer wall are designed again disrupts the realism of the characters.

The world in *Palmy Days* is seen as far less realistic than the previous films. The setting is a fictive 'desert island' in a fictional context, which is also aesthetically more cartoonish and abstract. The island, palm trees and hut are shown in a cruder, more cartoonish way with brighter, saturated colours and the more abstracted forms typical of fictional puppet animations. Though interiors are more realistically portrayed, the

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<sup>167</sup> This film will be examined in more depth as the first case study in Chapter Seven.

relationships between the living beings and their surroundings have a far higher fictive index than most films in the group.

In *Early Bird*, the world stands somewhere between fictive and real. The man is shown in a naturalistic way, while his surroundings are shown in a relatively 'naturalistic' manner, with slight degrees of abstraction and fictive spice<sup>168</sup>. For example, the objects he uses are to some extent stylised but still look fairly naturalistic. The uses he puts them to, however, and his relationship to his spatial surroundings are certainly surreal and non-realist. The whole event takes place in silence while the man goes 'on air' with his morning programme, and is of a highly surreal or unbelievable nature, which peaks as the man leaves the studio and the parrot starts speaking to the microphone.

The world in *War Story* is ambivalent (shown in purple) as there are two different orders of relationships between the human characters and their surroundings in different parallel parts of the film (present and past), as previously described.

The world in *Creature Comforts* is depicted as in a typical zoo, though with anthropomorphised animals that can talk and comment. In terms of both attributes this is again very different from *War Story*, in that it situates talking animals in a 'usual' zoo.

### **Colour distribution and reading**

*Creature Comforts* is the only film with a full complement of blue ticks in terms of image realism, and is therefore of the highest fictive index. In *War Story*, though all ticks are purple, image realism is consistently poised between fictive and realistic because of its dual parallel styles.

While *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* and *Early Bird* are shown to have fictional worlds along with many realistic features, *Palmy Days* seems the

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<sup>168</sup> The colour schemes, for instance of the man's surrounding and the spaces and objects around him look greyish, somehow old and not represented in natural colours.

most interesting in this table in terms of image. It displays all three features, appropriately indicated, which makes it potentially significant in terms of diversity and hybridity in the formal sense.

Films may also be visualised generally in groups (though sometimes of only one film) to identify those with a similar 'image realism' index, as well as comparing the gradation from red through purple to blue.

A rough summary and outcome of reading table 5.1 is provided in table 5.1.S (S= Summary), which identifies five groups. With the exception of *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* from the first series, and *Down and Out in Animated Conversations*, the films move generally towards a fictional 'image-realism' index in chronological order of production. It is, however, important to note that these films show far more diverse patterns of 'visual realism' in terms of narrative, which will now be addressed. The backgrounds of these summary tables shows a left-to-right gradation from red through purple to blue, allowing the status of each to be shown in a blended way that suggests the unfixed nature of realistic traits. This way, films may be compared in less clear-cut and more 'relative' terms, while nevertheless remaining roughly in a certain area.

<p><b>Down and Out</b>  <b>On Probation</b>  <b>Sales Pitch</b>  <b>Late Edition</b>  <b>Going Equipped</b></p>	<p><b>Confessions  of a Foyer Girl</b>    <b>Early Bird</b></p>	<p><b>Palmy Days</b></p>	<p><b>War Story</b></p>	<p><b>Creature  Comforts</b></p>
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**Table 5.1.S (Image realism summary)**

## **Analysis: Narrative realism (Table 5.2)**

### ***Narrative format***

### ***Shooting & editing***

### ***Lighting***

The narrative realism table focuses mainly on how narrative is structured in different films in relation to non-fictional formats, though the breakdown accommodates different aspects of the narrative. The first three criteria define whether the stylistics of the main narrative are closer to either observational and/or interview (realist modes) by examining the shooting and editing styles they have copied, as well as the lighting which may be neutral, a creation of an 'ordinary' setting with natural or location lights, or a more dramatised, specifically-designed and lit scene.

In terms of narrative strategy, four films approach an observational style with all or almost all criteria ticked in red. These include *Down and Out*, *On Probation*, *Sales Pitch* and *Late Edition*, in all of which a coherent realistic, fly-on-the-wall style is adopted. In *Late Edition*, however, certain fictional elements affect the realism of the narrative style. The silent writer's dawn to dusk struggle, apart from being a totally fictional story, is depicted in slightly cartoonish matter. The passage of time is shown in a fictional manner, and the accumulation of crumpled paper and the detritus of the food and drink he consumes throughout are emphasised and somehow exaggerated in a way that resembles cartoon narration.

It is interesting that *Creature Comforts*, which has a high fictive index in terms of visual imagery, achieves most of its 'realist' red ticks for its totally coherent *Vox pop* style of shooting, editing and lighting.

*Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, *Going Equipped* and *Early Bird*, receive all three colour indexes, and may be said to reveal the most diversity in

their narrative realism, despite dissimilar natures. Both *Going Equipped* and *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* use paratextual imagery, but their narrative format is very different<sup>169</sup>. In *Early Bird*, the soundtrack of a real-life morning radio show allows the construction of a fictional 'behind the scenes' story using styles of shooting, editing and lighting that swing between documentary and fictional formats. The film, with its numerous match cuts and fictional ways of continuity editing, could not have been shot in this seemingly spontaneous manner in live action.

*War Story* has different approaches, both paratextually and in its 'main' interview, in relation to fiction and non-fiction formats. It has no red ticks, remains mostly 'in between' with purple ticks and at times displays both elements<sup>170</sup>.

Finally, *Palmy Days* is mostly fictive in terms of narrative, but still has a single narrative. It may be said that the type of lighting used in the outdoor world is of a fictional, omnipresent type, similar to that used in fictional puppet animation space. In the hut, however, the lighting has more realistic traits and is closer to reality. Its lighting is thus of both fictional and realist qualities, and is indicated with a purple tick.

### ***Graphic traces and words in opening and closing titles***

Opening and closing titles may reveal a great deal about the kind of film to be expected, and pastiche and parody of the titles in other films is central to this examination. In *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* the opening and closing titles are total parodies of various types of live-action and cartoon films, and have a significant and also contradictory effect on the overall viewing experience. The closing title is a pastiche of a classic black and white romantic movie, which places the film's content in constant opposition to those titles. In *War Story*, a pastiche of a black and white war movie is also created; in *Palmy Days*, an establishing shot

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<sup>169</sup> The former is a fictional depiction of the secretly-recorded conversation of two cinema workers, while the other is a simulation of a genuine interview with an ex-convict, fronted by a puppet character talking to camera.

<sup>170</sup> It does not, however, twist the reality of the man's story despite numerous cartoonish exaggerations, visual gags and non-realist aesthetics and the use of extremely playful, comic and at times ironic strategies to illustrate his words.

zooms into the hut occupied by the plane crash survivors and in a closing shot the camera (the viewer's eye) leaves the same scene. The technique of creating a beginning and end to the 'slice of life' of the fictional characters is mainly associated with fictional modes of filmmaking and animation, yet is also used in documentary films. It is also used in *Late Edition*. Context therefore seems relevant in determining whether the technique should be considered purely fictional, or one that has no significant effect on the realist content of the film. In this thesis, it is considered a fictional opening style in *Palmy Days* and shown with a blue tick, while in *Late Edition* it is deemed between fictional and realism and shown in purple.

In the remaining films, opening and closing titles usually appear in simple words on a black background in silence, with no music and no past-style imitations. The exception is *Going Equipped*, in which the titles appear in a certain style on one of the window-panes on a rainy night. In addition, the man's voice over this opening scene, along with the lights of passing cars, creates a realistic 'mood' more readily associated with the fictional format of live-action films than documentaries<sup>171</sup>.

### ***Narrative strategies***

Though paratexts are seen broadly as any kind of information from titles, illustrations and even production information, this thesis concentrates on 'illustrating' imageries from just three films: *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, *Going Equipped* and *War Story*<sup>172</sup>. These paratexts have very different natures: their relationship with the 'main' body of the film makes them vital strategies that 'illustrate' or fictionalise the 'main' part of the story, while supplementing the tedious information heard from the soundtrack. In the second and third examples, which take the form of interviews,

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<sup>171</sup> It must be noted that it is difficult to indicate with certainty whether a certain type of titling may be regarded as realist or fictional, or even to indicate the form in which titles are normally used and in which type of 'documentary' format. To some extent, film titles become narrative sites in their own right, to tell stories and/or serve as 'paratexts' to add or imply information that cannot be derived from the film's main imagery. It may therefore be said that a meaningful interpretation of the type and use of titles in these films cannot be made unless they are seen both in the context of the whole film and as a separate but important part of the film's entire signifying system.

<sup>172</sup> Less-obvious uses of paratextuality will be discussed in case studies of these films in Part Three, with regard to use of objects, props and titling.

these paratextual strategies may be located in the documentary tradition. In *Confessions...*, however, they are used in a subversive way that sets it apart from the other examples.

***Independent stories and little narratives***

In this criterion, understanding how the soundtracks are ‘represented’ is crucial, as the factual events on which these films are based have not been recorded visually. Minor narratives with no basis in the soundtrack may be used to add to the visual diversity and typicality of a dull or unclear conversation. *Late Edition* has an early establishing shot of a window-cleaner and the long pan that shows people doing various things in the newspaper office. In *Sales Pitch*, a neighbour eavesdrops on the conversation. In *Late Edition* and *Palmy Days*, characters with no location in the soundtrack find an almost central place in the main story. In *Early Bird*, the ‘real’ story that takes place in the studio becomes the ‘fictional’ one. These examples deliberately play with the viewer’s lack of access to what really took place, and may be a comment on whether a sound recording can tell the whole ‘truth’ about an event. Not all these stories can be deemed necessarily realist or non-realist in terms of the verbal/image relationship, but they certainly go beyond ‘typifying’ the event or environment to create a story of their own. A red cross indicates the absence of this element. Table 5.2.S is a general summary of narrative realism based on the discussions of table 5.2.

Down and Out On Probation Sales Pitch	Late Edition  Creature Comforts	Confessions of a Foyer Girl  Going Equipped  Early Bird	War Story	Palmy Days
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**Table 5.2.S (Narrative Realism Summary)**

Comparison of the two table summaries reveals that all but one film appears in certain parts of both tables. This is true of *Creature Comforts*, which surprisingly figures next to the first series of films in terms of narrative realism. This may be explained by the fact that the criteria set

examine how unified or mixed these films are in terms of narrative style. If anthropomorphism (image realism) is temporarily disregarded, it may be seen that the film adopts a 'single' documentary narrative, a purely *Vox pop* style that is repeated throughout, with simple cuts between interviews and with no disruptive element or significant self-reflexive strategy to disturb the unity of the narrative style. As its narrative style is a 'parody', however, it is still of a highly fictive nature that does not advance the film towards realism. This film is very different in one respect: the kind of documentary format it adopts is closer to popular televised formats. In consideration of its 'fabricated' soundtrack<sup>173</sup>, it might therefore be regarded as a different species. Readjusting it accordingly might change the general overview of both tables thus:

Down and Out	Confessions of a Foyer Girl	War Story
On Probation	Going Equipped	Palmy Days
Sales Pitch	Early Bird	Creature Comforts
Late Edition		

**Table 5.VRS (Visual Realism Summary)**

### **Analysis: Aural realism (Table 5.3)**

The primary question here is whether the soundtrack is a 'direct' sound or an interview. It also asks how 'truthful' the image is to the sound and in what ways it contributes to a better illustration, intensification of effects, dramatisation, or otherwise fictionalisation of the reality that may be heard from the soundtrack. Certain information about how these soundtracks have been both gathered and edited and possibly manipulated – or even manufactured in the guise of documentary sound – have been used in the designation of direct versus interview sound. In the case of the final film of the group, *Creature Comforts*, the soundtrack is the result of extreme interference and ultimately manufacture of the speech of various people commenting on the condition of their lives. Its

<sup>173</sup> The justifications for this claim will shortly follow in the analysis of the 'Aural Realism' table.

documentary value is highly suspect, and the filmmakers have revealed that they posed leading questions to obtain roughly the answers they needed<sup>174</sup>. For this reason, this thesis terms it a 'faked *Vox pop*' and treats it as the least realist soundtrack of the corpus. As such, with all the close observations of formal issues of such a mode of documentary, it does not ultimately qualify as a truthful documentary; it has been considered as having a mostly fictive status that sometimes oscillates between fiction and fact. It not only uses a faux soundtrack but also dislocates notions of 'the British nation' by placing them in a context altered from 'reality', even if this has some allegorical significance.

Further, the use of sound effects and music in these films has been examined to see whether they serve a realist or fictional function. As this table mainly relates to verbal/image relationships, there are some areas of overlap with 'narrative realism'. The aural realism table seems fairly straightforward. Some points, however, must be made about certain traits that do not apply to all films or are not totally specific.

*Down and Out* stands apart in terms of the almost point-to-point translation of the conversation between the old man and the two hostel officials. The background characters hardly move and are not shown clearly, so their only role is to normalise the environment. The later films *On Probation* and *Sales Pitch* are of almost identical make-up, except that the marginal people present in the same profilmic space are more visible: they are shown more clearly and in detail. They do not, however, intensify the truthfulness of the relationship between the sound and image. The female neighbour in *Sales Pitch* seems more than simply an onlooker: her facial expressions and actions seem to indicate that she has an opinion about the conversation between the door-to-door salesman and the old couple, and wants to know its outcome. In *On Probation* several people are present: the presence of three probation officers and a couple of ex-convicts are emphasised using cuts that locate the theme within the event. The room's geography is revealed using various shots of different

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<sup>174</sup> This is explained in many interviews, but also explicitly described in their book *Creating Creature Comforts*

people in relation to the main character. One onlooker is shown in a more active state, leaning over a wall with a matchstick between his teeth and using a mocking tone and body language to comment sporadically on the conversation between the man and the authorities.

*Going Equipped* and *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* reveal very similar sound/image relationship though one is an interview and the other an overheard conversation. The specific non-realist construction of *Confessions...*, along with the theme music used in its opening and closing titles gives it more of a non-documentary and at times fictive quality than *Going Equipped*, in which the use of music is avoided. Both, however, use more than one type of narrative to accompany and illustrate their stories, though in very different ways<sup>175</sup>.

It may be argued that both films, despite their different strategies of paratextuality, have made an effective relationship between soundtrack and image, and have appended 'added-value' text to the information usually heard from the soundtrack. These paratextual imageries certainly add to the visual diversity of the image, making them more engaging and at times playful. They are obviously subjective in that they may not necessarily be the man's real memories, or represent what is actually in the foyer girl's mind as she speaks: they are rather the filmmakers' created version of them. They nevertheless contribute to the intensification of the content of the soundtrack, as well as conveying multiple aspects of reality that are supposed to be found only in a soundtrack. This leads to the conclusion that *Going Equipped* should supersede *Confessions...* in terms of realism of sound. *Confessions...* will therefore be grouped with *Late Edition*, which shows a virtually identical logic of audio/visual translation relationship, in which there is both an in-context depiction of the event and a certain fictive element that is not

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<sup>175</sup> The paratextual imagery in *Going Equipped* merges with the rest of the narrative in terms of spatial schemes and camera movement, and viewers are transferred from one space to another smoothly and almost unconsciously. In *Confessions...*, however, viewers are continually surprised by the transformation from foyer space to the imagery seen on the cinema screen. With regard to the soundtrack information, the spatial relationship between the two parallel texts is non-realist, reflexive and illogical: the spatial unity is disrupted, though viewers are always returned to the foyer area.

dictated or implied by the soundtrack, but fabricated in the imagery<sup>176</sup>. In both films, then, such fabrication makes their eventual status sway between fictional and factual, yet does not prevent either from showing the 'reality content' of its soundtrack or make a totally faked account of it.

Though *War Story* uses paratextual illustrative imagery to represent the man's memory and the past, which is itself shown in an exaggerated cartoon-like way, it may be still argued that it represents the 'real' content of its soundtrack despite its laughter, visual jokes and excessive events<sup>177</sup>.

*Early Bird* and *Palmy Days* may also be seen in similar terms with similar traits, as they are fictionalising the content of their soundtrack. It seems clear that the latter has a far higher fictional content in terms of imagery, which affects the way information heard from the soundtrack is processed. It is important to note that the documentary sound in this film has a different angle, being a recording of an early morning radio programme. Though it is part of an everyday event and in this respect real, it is not situated in an everyday homely situation. It is part of a (nevertheless) staged radio programme and though it has documentary value, is from a different species of documentary sound than other films based on direct sound. In terms of 'banality' of verbal information, of an everyday quality similar to *Palmy Days*, the soundtrack of these two films may be seen in similar relationships to their imagery. The use of theme music in *Palmy Days* also makes its fictive index higher than that of *Early Bird*.

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<sup>176</sup> But for the 'struggling writer' character, *Late Edition* might have been grouped with the first three films. The character, however, finds a central, though dormant and unacknowledged, place within the narrative. This in no way indicates that the imagery is untruthful; the conversation among the other two groups is adequately shown and emphasised. It is, however, a fictive element within the film, which makes it distinct from the other three films.

<sup>177</sup> These claims about *War Story* will be argued and demonstrated in detail in Chapter Nine.

This summary of reading the table represents a rough outcome of the discussions and comparisons between the sound/image relations in the ten films. (Table 5.3.S)

Down and Out	On Probation Sales Pitch	Going Equipped	Confessions of a Foyer Girl Late Edition	War Story	Early Bird Palmy Days	Creature Comforts
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**Table 5.3.S (Aural Realism Summary)**

### **Analysis: Content Realism (Table 5.4)**

In terms of realist treatment, the three films that dominate, with exactly similar columns, are *Down and Out*, *On Probation* and *Sales Pitch*. All tell factual stories in a direct and observational style as a recorded 'oral petty history'; all are social realist texts and as such lack commentary or any extra/emphatic dramatisation; all seem to function as documentaries in animated mode, revealing ordinary or social problem-based stories of the factual world. Whether they are effective as such, and to what extent, is a question that cannot be answered by this table alone. In terms of unity of subject matter as set by this thesis, however, they seem the most realist.

The next two films are *Going Equipped* and *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*. These are very similar to the last three but different in the way they use paratextual imagery and thus realist content. They are also both of a poetic voice, informed by the debate on poetic realism in Chapter Two.

*Late Edition* follows, despite being very similar in realist make-up to the first three. It shares many realist content qualities with them: fly-on-the-wall camera movement, direct sound used *in* context, and a social realist text concerned with certain social aspects of a group of people in a local magazine office. It shows people interacting and doing everyday jobs,

and functions as a documentary in mediating the factual content of a recorded event. Nevertheless, the central, silent character at times makes the factual index of this film move towards fiction. His everyday challenge of writing from dawn to dusk is a fiction that is fabricated by the imagery and the specific added sound effect, though it is convincingly interwoven with what is heard from the soundtrack. A woman's voice is occasionally heard, but never finds a 'character' equivalent. In this film certain elements relating to the realism of subject matter are of an in-between nature. These include the verbal/image relationship which is as much factual as fictional, and the film's overall 'voice' which again commutes between poetic realism and parody.

*War Story* is exceptional in terms of subject matter, in that it seems always to stand between fact and fiction. Though the story of the subject's past is told in flashback 'memories' and is believable in terms of narrative, it is totally fictional in terms of exaggeration and literal interpretation of his words. On the other hand, the man's 'current-time' appearance, behaviour and the world he inhabits are of a far more realistic nature, especially when he is shown in his living room with the interviewer. The difference between this and other films that also shift between fictionality and factuality, such as *Early Bird*, is that there is a line of separation between the two worlds presented in parallel, and they do not co-exist.

Paratextual strategy aside, in *Confessions...* the profilmic space in which the girls are placed is unfixed, is the setting for surreal events, and eventually serves as 'other' space. This is not so with *War Story*: in addition to the generally 'parodic' impression the film might give, it creates a poetic quality via the handling of its subject matter and the way its apparently light-hearted parody is ironic and sometimes critical. It may be read in two ways, since its 'serious' socially-motivated theme is not evident on the surface but may be seen in its deeper structures. It wavers between fictive and real, and does not stay in one place for long.

*Creature Comforts* comes next in terms of realism of subject matter. It shows ambivalence in its social realist status and moves between poetic and parodic realism. In comparison with *War Story*, *Creature Comforts* has more purely fictional tendencies in terms of documentary function, its verbal/image relationship and the way it deals with oral history. Though more parodic than *War Story* in terms of imagery, visual jokes and treatment of factual information, on a deeper level it may be read as poetic as it centres its parodic aesthetic on serious factual issues.

Finally, *Early Bird* and *Palmy Days*, reveal the least realist index in their content. It could be argued that in both films, voice is the only criterion that might be read as in-between. These are not totally of a poetic or parodic category; they least resemble a documentary and are furthest from the social realist text criteria. In terms of treatment and representation of their subject matter, they are therefore the most fictional films of the ten.

Another useful point might be the 'nature' of the stories told initially by the soundtrack, and how serious and socially loaded, or banal, light-hearted and unimportant they are. In this respect, again, the last two films are of the least serious nature, as the summary table (table 5.4.S) shows.

Down and Out	Going Equipped	Late Edition	War Story	Creature Comforts	Early Bird
On Probation	Confessions of a Foyer Girl				Palmy Days
Sales Pitch					

**Table 5.4.S (Content Realism Summary)**

## **Conclusion:**

Various aspects of realism in both formal and content attributes of the Aardman films in question have been demonstrated, to some extent, by itemisation and comparisons made possible by the four tables and their

summaries. It may therefore be said that the preliminary hypothesis of this research as hybridity of realism has been partly shown and discussed. It now remains to read these films as eventual texts, drawing meanings from them as films that, while formally diverse and multi-layered in terms of narrative, nevertheless share sufficient common characteristics and areas to make them belong to similar groups. Preliminary conclusions are revealed in the four summary tables, before moving to a more in-depth discussion of the films and their locations within each table summary.

- 1 Certain films appear consistently in the first column or columns of the tables (left to right, realist to fictive), in roughly the same order. These include *Down and Out*, *On Probation*, *Sales Pitch* and *Late Edition*. This might suggest that they are not necessarily the most realist, but are the more coherent and least hybrid in terms of adopting realist sounds: they have realistic, almost simulational aesthetics, and linear and straightforward fly-on-the-wall narrative that is not usually disrupted by extra, fantastic, surreal or paratextual imagery. Though still hybrid texts, they substantiate what this thesis terms 'simulational' realism, which is a point-by-point copying of a live-action documentary film.
- 2 Certain films appear not necessarily at the end, but in a roughly similar position in that they remain at a distance from the first series. *Early Bird*, *Palmy Days* and *Creature Comforts* seem to embody the most fictive traits and in this respect represent the non-realist category. In comparison with the first group, they also tend to have far more mixed and hybrid formal and stylistic compositions. Ultimately they show a display of affinity with fictional modes of animation, especially cartoon aesthetics.
- 3 Finally, some films change place within the tables, but seem to fall mainly between the two rough groups already discussed. These include *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, *Going Equipped*, and *War Story*, which show more diversity of aesthetics and themes in

terms of realism. They also share paratextual narrative strategies<sup>178</sup>, which gives them the highest hybridity in terms of both form and content.

A final grouping indicating a median of all four table summaries may read thus:

<p><b>Down and Out</b></p> <p><b>On Probation</b></p> <p><b>Sales Pitch</b></p> <p><b>Late Edition</b></p>	<p><b>Confessions of a Foyer Girl</b></p> <p><b>Going Equipped</b></p> <p><b>War Story</b></p>	<p><b>Early Bird</b></p> <p><b>Palmy Days</b></p> <p><b>Creature Comforts</b></p>
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**Table 5.G (Aardman Realism initial grouping)**

In general, then, this grouping can be interpreted as how purely simulational or crossbreed these films are in relation to their visuals, soundtrack and narrative, as well as the interaction of these elements towards mediating a realist or a fictional content. The groups are placed in a spectrum from red, through purple to blue. It may generally be argued that the films in the red grouping are of more coherent simulational qualities, in that they are a close replica of documentary forms and content. Those on the blue side indicate a departure from both form and content of pure documentary towards more fictional qualities. Those in the middle display a plethora of qualities of stylistics and subject matter, hybridised and amalgamated. The three films in the middle group are initially potential candidates for textual analysis in that they best represent the hybridity theory of this thesis. The final selection of case studies will, however, be undertaken at the end of the next chapter: a holistic reading of the films and an eventual typology of realism will be presented based on the overall 'function' of these films as finished texts.

<sup>178</sup> These three films and their specific paratextuality will be discussed in the chapters of Part Three.

FILMS Image Realism	Down and Out (1978)	Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)	On Probation (1981-3)	Sales Pitch (1981-3)	Palmy Days (1981-3)	Early Bird (1981-3)	Late Edition (1981-3)	Going Equipped (1989)	War Story (1989)	Creature Comforts (1989)
General Naturalism vs. cartoon/abstraction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Character Movement & development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Character design make-up, and appearance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lip sync Precise v. approx.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Puppets as live-action v. as cartoon character	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sets, props and objects Realistic v. Surreal/fantastic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	both
The physical world and events Realistic v. Surreal/fantastic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	both

Table 5.1 Image Realism

Realistic	✓
Fictional	✓
In-between	✓

<b>FILMS</b> 	Down and Out (1978)	Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)	On Probation (1981-3)	Sales Pitch (1981-3)	Palmy Days (1981-3)	Early Bird (1981-3)	Late Edition (1981-3)	Going Equipped (1989)	War Story (1989)	Creature Comforts (1989)
<b>Narrative Realism</b> 	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓
Narrative Format <b>Non-fictional</b> vs. <b>fictional</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓
Shooting & Editing <b>Documentary</b> v. <b>fiction conventions</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓
Lighting <b>Neutral</b> vs. <b>mood lighting</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓
Use of graphics and words in opening and closing titles <b>Serious</b> v. <b>pastiche/parody</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓
Narrative Strategies <b>Single</b> vs. <b>parallel</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓
Independent stories and little narratives <b>unacknowledged stories</b> within the <b>main story</b>	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓

Table 5.2 Narrative Realism

Realistic	✓
Fictional	✓
In-between	✓

<b>FILMS</b> 	Down and Out (1978)	Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)	On Probation (1981-3)	Sales Pitch (1981-3)	Palmy Days (1981-3)	Early Bird (1981-3)	Late Edition (1981-3)	Going Equipped (1989)	War Story (1989)	Creature Comforts (1989)
<b>Verbal/image</b> 										
Soundtrack gathering <b>Direct (D)</b> vs. <b>Interview (I)</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>I</b>
Sound and story <b>Typical and /or in context</b> vs. <b>Fictionalised and/or out of context story</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Characters and their voices <b>imaginary characters</b> vs. <b>no imaginary character</b>	✓	<b>X</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<b>X</b>	✓	✓?
Speech/image <b>Literal v non-literal depiction of speech</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓?
Use of sound effects <b>soundtrack only</b> v. <b>extra sound effects</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Music <b>Use of (theme) music</b> vs. <b>no music</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 5.3 Aural realism (Verbal/Image Relationship)

Realistic	✓
Fictional	✓
In-between	✓

FILMS Subject matter	Down and Out (1978)	Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)	On Probation (1981-3)	Sales Pitch (1981- 3)	Palmy Days (1981- 3)	Early Bird (1981- 3)	Late Edition (1981- 3)	Going Equipped (1989)	War Story (1989)	Creature Comforts (1989)
Story Factual v. fictional story	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sound/image relationship Fictional v. typically real	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Text Type Social realist text v. not SRT	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Voice Poetic v. Parodic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Function Documentary vs. non-documentary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Petty oral history As a recorded event With parallel images of past Fictionalised	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓

Table 5.4 Content Realism

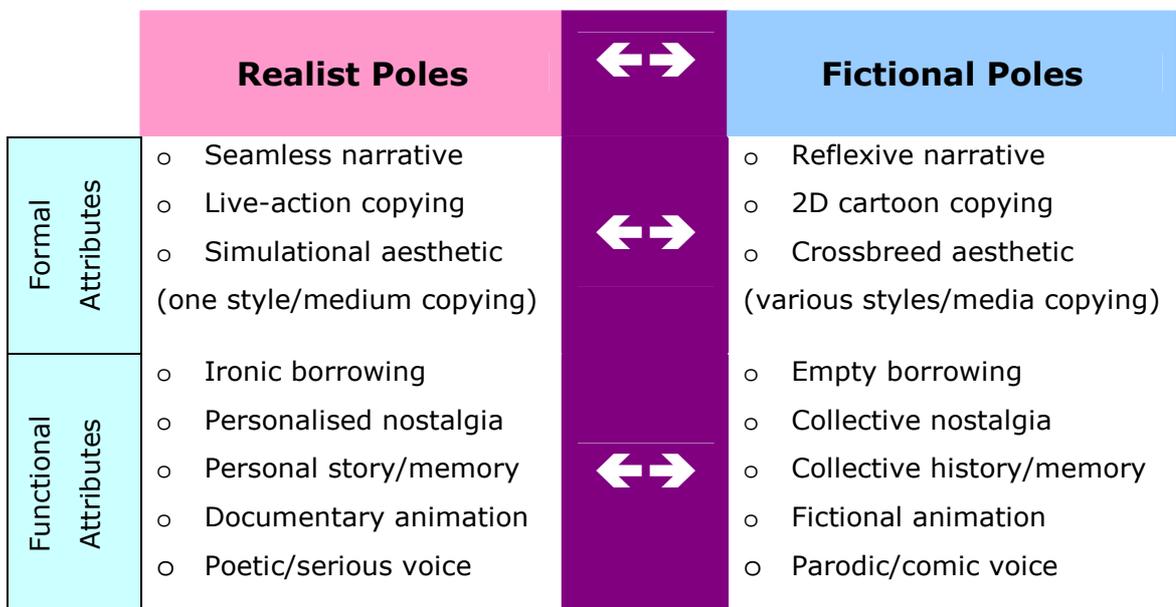
Realistic	✓
Fictional	✓
In-between	✓

## Chapter Six:

### Typology of Aardman hybrids

In Chapter Five, all ten films of the corpus were 'deconstructed' and examined item by item in different categories relating to their realist or fictional aesthetic elements. They were grouped under the headings Visual, Aural and Content realism, each being broadly sub-divided into realist and fictional. This chapter will offer a holistic reading of each film against a set of binary attributes, based on the discussions that identified these initial groupings. This process will be discussed and justified, based on arguments proposed in Part One, and the films will be comprehensively assessed to produce a typology of their realism. Finally the goal of demonstrating the hybrid nature of realism in these films, also outlined in Chapter Five, will be achieved by displaying the spectrum of identified aesthetic qualities extending between realist and fictional poles.

The sets of realist versus fictional poles, shown in Figure 6.1 consist of:



**Figure 6.1 Aardman set of realist/fictional binary poles**

Table 6.1 uses red, blue and purple ticks to summarise the characteristics of the films in relation to these poles<sup>179</sup>. These points should clarify the process:

1. In attributing realist and fictional natures to these poles, it should be noted that the first three elements primarily concern stylistics, while the remainder relate to the film's overall function. These are assigned based on the arguments and discussions in Part One. Also, instead of 'content' as opposed to formal attributes, here 'functional' attributes are designated to measure the overall operation of the films in relation to these five criteria. This is because these five binary criteria are identified in the light of the intertextuality and hybridity discussion of Chapter Four and thus examine the films as finished texts; it is assumed that the interaction of form and content in the corpus create certain final qualities and attributes specific to these films.
2. It is assumed, based on discussion in chapters One and Two, that in terms of formal composition, these films are *all* copies of original forms, media or modes of representation, mainly live action. The 'Formal Attributes' criteria therefore show how their formal copyings may be located near pure live action, 2D cartoon or between the two.
3. The divide of live-action versus 2D cartoon film is fundamental. While animated films may copy different modes of representation or different media, most films of the corpus seem to waver between these two major forms of copying. In general, they copy the narrational conventions of observational, interview or *vox pop* documentary modes. Some films, however, are pure copies of live-action documentary in all aspects of their formal and content attributes, while others mix the narrational conventions of documentary with cartoon imagery and logic. This thesis therefore proposes a 'simulational' mode of copying, in which a close replica

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<sup>179</sup> Table 6.1 and 6.2 appear in whole pages at the end of the Chapter Six.

of a live-action record of a real event or fictional narrative is copied point by point. Its polar opposite is a copy of the aesthetics of modes of 2D cartoon in the 3D medium, which as previously argued, is highly hybrid.

4. It is assumed that, in a film with a factual compartment such as the soundtrack, sheer copying of fictional styles of animation (mainly cartoon) does not make it a fiction film. Similarly, simulating a serious live-action documentary film does not make a film non-fiction. The key to evaluating the extent to which a film is realist or fictional is the *interaction* of the factual material with the imagery, which may be a copy of either cartoon or live action forms. In short, a film cannot be deemed realist or fictional simply because of the 'realistic-ness' or 'cartoon-ness' of the imagery *per se*. Thus, while the first three sets of polar criteria deal only with a film's formal attributes, the remainder deal with its function, such as the interaction of form/content, or image/sound. Account must also be taken of whether a film has a poetic or a parodic voice, and whether it functions as a documentary animation or is closer to a fictional animation.

From the above points, it may be seen that a typology of realism in the corpus must take into account all eight polar criteria in table 6.1. Using this, it will be shown that different films of the corpus may 'mix and match' attributes under both poles, thus demonstrating hybridity of realism. For example, in terms of formal structure a film may be generally closer to the realist pole, but the inclusion of some fictional attributes may take it closer to the fictional pole in terms of sound/image relationship or overall textual function. The distribution of different-coloured ticks will be used to compare the films and produce an eventual typology.

In the table, the sets of polar criteria identified are measured against the films to demonstrate the hybridity of 'realist strategies'. This hybridity means that if a film's overall signifying system is assumed to consist of

Visual (image, narrative), Aural and Content compartments, it may adopt myriad combinations of these elements or aspects of realism identified by this thesis. This resembles the 'hybridity cube' argument in Chapter Two, in which virtually infinite combinations of choices may be imagined, to differing degrees, among different elements of a film's composition. In practice, however, not all these possibilities will occur in the ten films. As will be elaborated, three types of hybrid compositions of realism in the corpus will eventually be identified and introduced. Examined in minute detail, these films might well reveal ten unique or at any rate dissimilar make-ups or 'realist strategies', but their affinities and shared structural make-ups make them eligible to be grouped according to this rough typology.

An explanation about the use of terms such as 'realist strategies', 'typology of realism' and 'spectrum of realism', in which stress is placed on the 'realist' side of attributes, is necessary. These films may seem to fall between realist and fictional poles, but for the purposes of this thesis they are generally assumed to be realist, because the general aim is to examine the operation of realism in the corpus. Further, as variously discussed, these films seem to display not only an obsessive relationship with the formal aspect of realism as realistic-ness and verisimilitude, but also an overt engagement with forms originally associated with realism of social content. The general question is whether these realist-inclined films may also be realist in mediating a factual content to the viewer. Realism is therefore the key dynamic, albeit in different compositions and with dissimilar functions. Subsequently, attempts will be made to measure the position of each of these films in the spectrum of aesthetic and functional possibilities between realist and fictional attributes, to illustrate their closeness or departure from different aspects of realism.

An essential point is that these assumed poles are not fixed: they are rather indicative of attributes of a film that make more decisive sense only in relation to other films of the corpus. Thus, what is marked as the ultimate in simulational copying in terms of the films studied might seem far less realistic in a film outside the Aardman corpus. While these poles

somehow 'distinguish' and 'cast' the types of such assumed hybrid strategies, their position on opposite sides of a spectrum creates a space for a flexible reading of films that do not necessarily sit close to either pole. This 'in-between-ness' seems also to match their ambivalent position within conventional categories of film, i.e. fiction versus non-fiction, or animation versus live action.

## **Binary Poles in the Aardman Spectrum of Realism**

### **Formal Attributes:**

#### ***Seamless narrative – Reflexive narrative***

In this criterion, the films are examined in terms of narrative strategy. It will be asked whether they are a copy of a seamless narrative of a live-action format, or adopt deliberate reflexive strategies to disrupt the transparency pretence of their narrational schemes. Red ticks denote that a film has a largely non-reflexive narrative in which a short story is narrated in an observational 'filming' style that, as argued in Chapter Three, adopts the conventions of continuity editing. Such a film normally contains no reflective moments, events or elements to project onto its 'animated-ness'. Paratextual narrative may potentially be read as a distanciation technique, though with regard to *Going Equipped* it is not seen as disruptive to the seamlessness of the narrative, for reasons that will be elaborated in the film's analysis (see Chapter Eight). Blue ticks, however, show that the narrative structure of the film in question is reflexive. Purple ticks show that a film falls between the two: the narrative seems to be created within the conventions of continuity editing, but the story contains some disrupting or distracting elements. In all these, the innate reflexive nature of animation as a constructed medium is discounted. Overt mixings of cartoonish events or surreal instances, if present, have, however, been considered reflexive narrative.

### ***Live-action/life-like copying – 2D cartoon copying***

This criterion examines films in terms of general copying style, and whether they are copying an outright live-action event or recreating the aesthetics of 2D cartoon in a clay-puppet medium. It goes beyond sheer narrative copying to enquire whether the world and characters are created to look like their counterparts in real life, or are explicitly akin to cartoon characters and worlds, or take elements from both worlds.

### ***Simulational aesthetic – Crossbreed aesthetic***

In this summation of the two previous criteria, films will be examined to determine whether their overall aesthetic formation is copied from only one style of live-action film or whether it is a crossbreed of more than one style. In the latter, as previously mentioned, this should be a hybrid of live-action and cartoon stylistics conventions.

## **Functional Attributes:**

### ***Ironic borrowing – Empty borrowing***

This will examine whether a film's borrowing schemes are simply weightless, sheer spectacular effects or, in parodic cases, playful games for entertaining and comic effect, or whether they transcend an act of sheer copying in an ironic manner, to engage critically with the past styles and effects they copy or borrow from. This will obviously demand close and inclusive scrutiny of a film, and contextual study of the 'original' styles and imagery it duplicates.

### ***Personalised Nostalgia – Collective Nostalgia***

It has been shown that, to some extent, all ten films demonstrate a certain degree of nostalgia associated with the kind of 'contexts' they copy: everyday life in Britain, especially the aesthetics of 'British social realism'. Beside this general, collective nostalgia, some films reveal certain levels of personal and subjective depiction of the past. Such films, which normally use paratextual imagery, seem to offer a more personal and individualised account of the story. As noted in Chapter Four, this

kind of nostalgic depiction of a personal past, by avoiding popular images or clichés and opting for less common and more subtle depictions, is seen as an attempt to penetrate deeper layers of reality and a realist strategy. As with any film, however, this personalised nostalgia belongs more to the filmmaker's imagination and interpretation of a subject's past, though taking clues from the factual content of their speech.

### ***Personal story or memory – Collective history or memory***

This asks whether the 'petty oral history' of anonymous individuals is represented in the shape of collective images and representational modes or is a more individualised account. Some films of the corpus manage to foreground an individual's problematic circumstances by creating ultra-elaborate and human-like puppets, animated delicately to show human emotions. In conjunction with an observational style of filming, they reveal the sensitivities and subtleties of human behaviour and penetrate the apparently petty story, elevating it to the status of a little piece of historical fact worth considering. In other films a more conventional account of individual stories is offered, which is mainly reminiscent of established modes of live-action, or draws on familiar popular imagery, and as such is deemed a more fictional or superficial encounter with the factual story of nameless individuals.

### ***Documentary animation – Fictional animation***

In this crucial criterion, the overall textual function of a film will be evaluated. It is intended to make comprehensive judgments about whether a film manages truthfully to mediate a factual event, or engages only superficially or indirectly with that social content<sup>180</sup>.

### ***Poetic/serious voice – Parodic/comic voice***

This criterion examines the textual voices in the films as either of a poetic or parodic tone. As previously discussed, the categories are not mutually exclusive: parodies may be poetic and *vice versa*. With regard to the ten

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<sup>180</sup> It should be remembered that a film may fail to mediate factual reality and function as a documentary, but still qualify as a social realist film in a fictional mode. The centrality of the question of documentary versus fictional animation here is because of these films's use of a factual sound track. Other criteria, in this respect, will consider the question of realist content or realist functionality with no emphasis on documentary function.

films, however, the discourses have been separated in order to identify the films closer to either side distinct from those which enjoy an in-between position, oscillating between the two statuses.

This initial clarification of the binary poles of traits in the Aardman corpus will be followed by a closer examination with regard to individual films. This will describe table 6.1, explaining the sets of poles and how each film of the corpus is judged and measured against them. In the previous chapter's table analysis, items of realist criteria were measured against the films, either individually or in similar groups; in this section each film will be briefly 'analysed' in relation to the binary poles or elements of their 'realist strategies'. This thesis is therefore able briefly to reprise the important aspects of realism identified in the ten films in terms of the two poles, and thus make a connection to Part One's exposition of the ways in which the films are read. It is also notable that the designation of realist and fictional attributes are only discussed generally and not justified item by item, except in cases that required more clarification. To avoid unnecessary repetition, the three films closely analysed in Part Three are here discussed only minimally<sup>181</sup>.

### ***Down and Out (1978)***

The film seems very close to the whole sets of realist poles. In formal terms, it closely copies a coherent fly-on-the wall narrative with no reflexive moments, attempting to unveil the story of the man in visual terms as closely as it is heard from the soundtrack. Its serious and overtly socially problematic tone lends its simulational aesthetic an interrogating and critical nature, in which the puppets stand for real people in real-life contexts. The man, as a typical elderly British subject rather than a conventional puppet character, presents the viewer with an ambiguous conversation with Salvation Army hostel staff. Several aspects make it a close replica of a British social realism film, including the vagueness of his story and why he needs a free meal if he can pay; the unresolved ending; his disappointment, and the film's stylistic qualities and aesthetic effects. Despite this, it seems successfully to mediate the

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<sup>181</sup> These include *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, *Going Equipped* and *War Story*.

truth of the man's little story to the viewer, as a documentary animation with a poetic tone that specifically arises from its animated and copied nature. The non-glossy and low-tech clay animation used to 'observe' and retell the story of a typical old man elevates its ordinariness and pettiness so that it becomes an important (poetic) criticism of the (real) social and political milieu in which he is situated.

### ***Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)***<sup>182</sup>

This is one of the most controversial and intricate texts of the corpus, but is also among the earliest and technically least sophisticated films in the group. A study of colour distribution in table 6.1 reveals that the film's multi-faceted status within the sets of polar criteria is not exactly close to either side. Its dual aesthetic style mixes and collages a 3D animation setting with many still images and clips of old films as illustrative imagery, and creates a tension between what is said (a mundane conversation) and what is seen. Further, its content of live-action images with diverse aesthetic and connotative roots, makes it a poetic comment on the banality of the situation of the two foyer girls, as well as a critical engagement with history both as recycled images in collective memory and a petty history in the form of the girls' dull lives.

The film's engagement with (petty oral) history is lent a romantic nostalgia by the use of old, past footage of various descents, and the type of generally nostalgic effect they create, as argued by Rosenstone (1995). In terms of documentary function, it stands somewhere between a fictional account and a genuine depiction of the event.

### ***On Probation (1981)***

This film is probably the closest to *Down and Out* in terms of position within sets of poles, as its narrative style (fly-on-the-wall, continuity editing, non-interventionist, realistic characters and so on) is also the closest, albeit rendered in a far more sophisticated and 'developed'

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<sup>182</sup> A closer reading of this film will be provided in the next chapter.

manner. The use of 'real' photos and newspaper cuttings, and its trace of 'naturalising' sound effects create a minor element of fictionality within its highly realistic and transparent narrative. In this film, as in *Down and Out*, poetic realism derives from the observation of the true story of the man's humiliation when pleading in vain for a day off. It may be said that the observational style, reproduced in animation, still functions in an effective, no-comment, 'objective' way to unfold the event, with occasional shots showing people's reactions. It also demonstrates closely in voice and body language the man's discomfort, and his final disappointment before numerous pairs of 'uncaring' eyes. These include those in authority, who consult their watches in evident boredom, and the impartial 'audience members,' who are in fact in a similar situation and cannot but wait and watch how the story will end.

### ***Sales Pitch* (1983)**

This film is very similar to *Down and Out* and *On Probation* in terms of fly-on-the-wall shooting and narrative style, and realistic simulational style. There is a slight different in tone because its subject matter is more banal and problem-free than the previous examples such as *On Probation*, which take place in problem-based contexts. A more collective and non-personalised kind of history telling and nostalgia is therefore assigned to *Sales Pitch*. The three films have a common theme of a man being watched 'performing' and in some sense 'begging' for something, witnessed by people who are either not interested or are actively enjoying his human struggles. There are very delicate lines of reference to how all three subjects 'suffer' and are eventually, in various ways, disappointed and humiliated. In this film, nonetheless, the world outside seems less hostile, disturbing and eventually destructive, because the elderly couple mean no harm in chatting to the door-to-door salesman from whom they have no intention of buying. If there is nostalgia in this film, it derives from the 'Britishness' of the settings and situation, which are depicted very realistically, with close attention to detail and accompanied by a real and typical soundtrack. While the viewer is connected to a story brought to attention by realistic animation, it hardly

goes any further than a story narrated in a typical manner using the kind of imagery present in the collective memory and image bank.

### ***Palmy Days (1983)***

As the table also suggests, this film is very different from those so far discussed. It sits closer to the blue criteria, and has a totally different hybridity of realist ingredients; it is closer to parodic or at any rate a fictional account. The film's conceit is that the conversation of a group of elderly people around a tea-table is that of the survivors of a plane crash on a desert island. The story of the island and its inhabitants is promoted only by the visual narrative. There are many surreal moments or imaginary elements within the story's apparently seamless narrative, which in formal terms is being 'observed' by the camera. The shooting and editing are yet closer to fictional codes of narration, and there are many diagetic narrative clues offered by the image and unsupported by the soundtrack information. This makes the 'real' voices of the chattering group simply an excuse for a 'creative' and 'imaginative' play with imagery. Though the main method of shooting the events inside the building is close to an observational nature, the film goes further than the observational codes of continuity editing to create a fictional continuity by means of the narrative conventions of mainstream fiction film. The fictional 'establishing shot' as the film opens later takes the viewer into the hut; at the end it leaves via a window. The film also presents little imaginary stories and shows characters that have no basis in the reality of the soundtrack, such as the old man by the window. Its borrowing from live-action styles therefore becomes not very critical: only by further reading of its allegorical meaning (the forgotten land of the elderly, perhaps) may it be seen an ironic parody. For this reason, in the judgment of this thesis, it stands somewhere between an ironic and an empty copying. Its formal make-up and narrative is also located somewhere between a seamless live-action and a hybrid, self-reflexive narrative that adopts cartoon conventions. Its engagement with oral history and the kind of nostalgia it evokes is recast in 'desert island' imagery that belongs to the collective realm of public memory; in this

sense it is highly nostalgic and almost clichéd. In addition, it does not engage with history on a personal level, but re-narrates it in a more detached way. The viewer is not linked to any individual or closely observed human situation, but is rather invited to laugh at the people's wretched condition: they wear rags and have hardly anything to eat, yet insist on the British teatime ritual, even if they have to eat live sardine sandwiches or nibble on crocodiles and octopuses. Subtle layers of irony and even sarcasm can be read from such imagery, which nevertheless does not imply a socially critical stance by the filmmakers: it serves yet as another play on the discrepancy between the imagery and the soundtrack. For this reason, the film's status is deemed as somewhere between a comic/ parodic and a poetic voice; it does not function as a documentary.

### ***Early Bird (1983)***

The film shares much with *Palmy Days* in that it eventually ends up closer to the 'blue' poles of the spectrum, or somewhere in between. Firstly, the kind of borrowing and re-narration of the radio DJ's morning rituals resonates a British 'radio days' nostalgia that is close to Jameson's notion of pastiche as empty parody, and in this sense is not very critical or ironic. The filmmakers' engagement with the soundtrack is a jolly game of imagery that has nothing to do with what might have happened in the studio, and is full of surreal events and cartoonish or impossible happenings. The story of a DJ who lives and sleeps in the studio, goes 'on air' as soon as he wakes, and performs his ablutions during intervals, is a fictionalised account of the sound heard. The relationship between the man, his spatial surroundings and the objects he uses are of a totally fantastic nature. For example, he spreads butter on a cassette tape instead of a piece of toast and uses a disc as a plate. The frog that creates surreal jokes and the parrot who takes over the programme when the DJ leaves belong to this imaginary realm. As such the film adopts a parodic voice and does *not* serve as a documentary animation. Its realism stays between a seamless live-action and a hybrid, cartoon style

that refers to its fantastic nature by implementing surreal and imaginary events.

### ***Late Edition (1983)***

The film is very close to a simulation of a live-action observational documentary and shows the conversation from the soundtrack in context. It closely approaches earlier films in the table such as *Down and Out* and *On Probation* in its seamless make-up, that makes little or no reflexive reference to its animated-ness and is made as a coherent story. On closer inspection, however, it uses establishing and concluding shots and a fictionalised passage of time during which the 'imagined' story of a writer struggling with his writing from morning to night becomes the main one witnessed. At the same time, in terms of visual narrative, the conversation of the two groups of people discussing the order of the headlines from opposite sides of the room is shown in a more detailed way. The people are shown in close up using shot-reverse-shots with an emphasis on their behaviour, body language and lip-synch. In spite of this, the content of their conversation is marginalised in comparison with the story of the 'imaginary' writer. For this reason, in criteria such as the voice, seamless realism and ironic borrowing, the film stands in an indeterminate position between two poles. Its engagement with oral and mundane history is similar to that of *Sales Pitch* and *Palmy Days*: it is remote from a personal account and is just watched from a distance. The only kind of closer, personalised account of reality is the writer's, and he is just a fictional character. In terms of documentary function, therefore, the film both does and does not make connections between the reality of the soundtrack and the imagery: while the soundtrack with its conversations is represented in a matter-of-fact way, the imagery fabricates some realities that do not necessarily or significantly change the reality of the event heard from the soundtrack. The creation of side stories, on the other hand, may be read as a critical interrogation of the documentary nature of the recorded sound. Similarly, the idea of 'voice' as the only channel representative of people and their ideas is challenged, to suggest that those who speak little or for various reasons

have no voice have no say or are not seen or heard. The film may be subconsciously suggesting that reality and the real are normally regarded as having a *visual* nature. It may also be seen as a little piece of poetic comment, in which the story told is less important than *how* it is told in visual narrative.

### ***Going Equipped* (1989) <sup>183</sup>**

This film may be seen as very similar to films such as *Down and Out, On Probation, Sales Pitch* and *Late Edition* in terms of its exceedingly naturalistic and realistic aesthetics, both in terms of image and narrative. Arguably, Aardman's mastery of formal realism is at its height in this film. However, its simulational realism and obsessively live-action copying is given a twist because of its very narrative structure. *Going Equipped* simultaneously blends an observational style of shooting and an interview that is 'performed' by the man addressing the camera or viewer. The extra-realistic space in which he is situated is, in fact, a highly-dramatised one created by the filmmakers, in which the man's closely lip-synched monologue takes place. The smooth camera movements that blend into his flashback memories are designed to create the illusion of a seamless, live-action-style realism without creating shocking or self-reflexive effects to disrupt the delicately interwoven and 'unified' images of both kinds. It may therefore be suggested that, unlike in *Confessions...* and *War Story* the use of paratextual memory scenes is not aesthetically self-reflexive. Further, the kind of history they (help to) mediate is a very personalised one. By the same token, the kind of nostalgia in both sets of worlds (present and past) is a personalised account of the man's story, realistically simulated to create a sense of present-ness and past-ness and in a way that can reflect on his mental images and state of mind. *Going...* tells a real story of a real person, adopts a strong poetic voice and works as documentary.

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<sup>183</sup> A closer reading of this film will be provided in chapter 8.

## **War Story (1989)<sup>184</sup>**

In this film, while the man's interview time and flashback memories resemble each other aesthetically and visually, the worlds depicted in them are from two different degrees of reality and logic. Closer scrutiny shows that his past is imagined in a cartoonish way while his present interview time is depicted as realistic. In evaluating this film's overall traits, it was therefore necessary in some cases to use a purple tick and the indicator 'both'. This is because many of its formal and narrational traits, in either world, have distinct realist or cartoonish attributes; two worlds or sets of traits exist in parallel and do not mingle, thus producing a status more of 'both-ness' than 'in-between-ness'. Though the man's physical traits are more or less the same in both past and present imageries<sup>185</sup>, the 'present' world, in which nothing extraordinary happens, is far more realistic in its make up. It seems, therefore, that the film's types of copyings are both ironic and neutral in that they adopt a parodic style in depicting the past, and also interpret it as comic, as do the man's commentary voice and light-hearted remarks about that past.

Thus, while it is suggested that the film functions eventually as a documentary, its borrowings are of an ambivalent nature between poetic and parodic but closer to the former, and are created in both an ironic or simply (visually) playful manner. Further, since the man's memories are treated as cartoon, they are in fact portrayed in less personal and more popular collective types of imagery, and the kind of nostalgia of wartime Britain is created by recourse to realist and cartoonish aesthetics in a typical style.

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<sup>184</sup> A closer reading of this film will be provided in Chapter 9.

<sup>185</sup> The old man has a cartoonish, vertically elongated head with exaggerated facial traits and a somehow cartoonish mouth and rough lip-synch, far from the excessively realistic traits of the man's head in *Going Equipped* for instance.

### ***Creature Comforts* (1989)**

The fictive nature of a parodied *vox pop* narrative as well as the fictive and/or tentative nature of its 'real' soundtrack, as discussed in the previous chapter, takes the *modus operandi* of hybridity of realism in *Creature Comforts* closest to the blue pole. Yet, regardless of the representational strategies, the soundtrack speaks for itself so the viewer is aware of characters' feelings, such as when an old woman says she feels safe in some kind of care home. This is true even if the content of the speech is removed from its initial context, such as when remarks made by someone who is unhappy and wants to return to Brazil are visually attributed to a jaguar caged in a zoo. The film's aesthetic copyings and structure do not offer a very truthful account of reality, so it functions as a documentary only tentatively<sup>186</sup>: it is deemed as wavering between a highly parodic make-up and an allegorically poetic voice because of its sarcastic and biting tenor. However, it conforms to the conventions of similar TV programmes in its faked *vox pop* structure, which is nevertheless closely copied, and its visually non-interventionist, unified style of shooting and editing. The film stands closest to the blue side of the poles and creates a formula of hybrid realism that is most distant from the rest of the films in the group.

### **Aardman Typological Spectrum of Realism**

The two sets of poles, termed generally Realist and Fictional by this thesis, are identified and appointed by examining how coherently the sound, imagery and narrative work in depicting (certain) facts about the world more effectively via both realist and non-realist mechanisms. It may be observed that the location of many of these films between two poles but closer to one of them, stresses their in-between nature while demonstrating their hybridity in terms of form and content, without adhering to either 'absolute' attribute. Similarly, certain films show a

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<sup>186</sup> In the table 6.1 this film has been deemed eventually as NOT a documentary, indicated with a blue tick.

closer affinity to one side of the spectrum, suggesting that by and large they have more pure fictional or realist qualities in the criteria indicated.

With reference to table 6.1, it is possible to sort films into five categories according to colour distribution. This may be achieved simply by shuffling the order of their appearance in the table, so that films that are similar in terms of colour configuration sit beside each other. This is shown in table 6.2, which is a rearrangement of the previous table. The summary of table 6.2 below in Table 6.2.S (S= Summary) therefore covers five degrees from realism to fiction, which are eventually recognised as three distinct 'types' of realist strategy.

Factual Type		Collage Type	Fictional Type	
Going Equipped On Probation Down and Out	Late Edition Sales Pitch	Confessions of a Foyer Girl	Creature Comforts War Story	Palmy Days Early Bird

**Table 6.2.S Aardman Typological Spectrum of Realism**

A study of the spectrum shows that films with most red indexes are situated nearer to the red pole while those with most blue indexes are at the blue end. Films with a combination of various characteristics are in between, while their distance from either pole shows the neighbourhood to which they belong. In this respect, *Down and Out*, *On Probation*, *Going Equipped* and their neighbouring group *Sales Pitch* and *Late Edition* are named Factual, while *Palmy Days*, *Early Bird*, *War Story* and *Creature Comforts* are in adjacent Fictional groups. Neighbouring groups also reveal how close the films are to their original designated poles of realism, as well as more incongruous or slightly alternative features that move towards the opposite pole. For example, comparing Fictional Types, *Palmy Days* seems to have far less cartoonish aesthetics in terms of

image realism (as discussed), than *War Story*. Yet its fictional sound/image relationship and narrative (and eventually its function as 'not a documentary') makes its fictional side stand out more. For this reason it stands on the far right of the spectrum in its group types.

*Confessions of a Foyer Girl* becomes a type in itself: the Collage Type which remains almost exactly between the two poles and has little in common with either. This film's realist schemes are not repeated in most other films of the group and it is unique in its strategies of self-reflexivity, use of theme music and illustrative images that resemble no pre-defined style of documentary. Instead, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, it approaches modernist accounts of counter-narratives and anti-realist storytelling.

The films chosen to represent each of these Realist types are those that best represent their group's traits and instantiate a diverse range of hybridity in their realistic ingredients. All three films, in different ways, have paratextual narrative of various styles. This eventually offers a useful space to study how different hybrid strategies within films of their assigned group function in very different ways, despite the fact that they seem at first glance to be simply animations with documentary traits. *Confessions...* is the first candidate for close textual analysis, as the only example of the Collage Type. *Going Equipped* will represent the Factual Type because of its extreme traits of simulational realism and its paratextual imagery. *War Story* will represent the Fictional Type, since it shows a more diverse range of aesthetic hybridity than other members of its group, and may also be usefully compared and contrasted with *Going Equipped* in terms of its treatment of interview sound. A close textual analysis of the three films will be provided in Part Three, and will eventually lead to the thesis' main argument and conclusion.

<b>FILMS</b> <b>Poles</b>	<b>Down and Out (1978)</b>	<b>Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)</b>	<b>On Probation (1981)</b>	<b>Sales Pitch (1981-3)</b>	<b>Palmy Days (1981-3)</b>	<b>Early Bird (1981-3)</b>	<b>Late Edition (1981-3)</b>	<b>Going Equipped (1989)</b>	<b>War Story (1989)</b>	<b>Creature Comforts (1989)</b>
<b>Seamless v. Reflexive Narrative</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Live-action copying vs. 2D cartoon copying</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓
<b>Simulational v. Crossbreed aesthetic</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Ironic vs. Empty borrowing</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Personalised v Collective Nostalgia</b>	✓	both	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ NA	✓	✓	✓
<b>Personal story/memory v Collective history/memory</b>	✓	both	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Documentary v Fictional animation</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Poetic/serious v Parodic / Comic voice</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Table 6.1 Realism/Fiction Table**

Realistic	✓
Fictional	✓
In-between	✓

<b>FILMS</b> 	<b>Down and Out (1978)</b>	<b>On Probation (1981)</b>	<b>Going Equipped (1989)</b>	<b>Sales Pitch (1981-3)</b>	<b>Late Edition (1981-3)</b>	<b>Confessions of a Foyer Girl (1978)</b>	<b>War Story (1989)</b>	<b>Creature Comforts (1989)</b>	<b>Early Bird (1981-3)</b>	<b>Palmy Days (1981-3)</b>
<b>Seamless v. Reflexive Narrative</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Live-action copying vs. 2D cartoon copying</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓	✓	✓
<b>Simulational v. Crossbreed aesthetic</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Ironic vs. Empty borrowing</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Personalised v Collective Nostalgia</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA	both	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Personal story/memory v Collective history/memory</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	both	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Documentary v Fictional animation</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Poetic/serious v Parodic / Comic voice</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

**Table 6.2 Aardman Realism Typology**

<b>Realistic</b>	✓
<b>Fictional</b>	✓
<b>In-between</b>	✓

**PART THREE**  
CASE STUDIES

## **Chapter Seven:**

### **Collage Realism in *Confessions of a Foyer Girl***

*Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, one of the two *Animated Conversations* films made by Aardman in 1978<sup>187</sup>, is an animated clay film based on a real-life conversation between two female cinema workers. As the only representative of the 'Collage Realism' type identified by this thesis, it occupies a special place in the ten Aardman films under investigation. One of the earliest examples of Aardman's experiments with covertly recorded sound, the film displays specific formal properties, most of which are not repeated in later films of the corpus. In the previous two chapters, the formal and content attributes of the film in terms of realism as well as its eventual typology have been itemised. This section will offer a more in-depth analysis of its distinctive formula of hybrid realism, which sets it apart from films in other types identified. The complex operation of realist strategies will be examined with regard to the ways in which the 'real' soundtrack and the imagery are combined to create a narrative depicting a 'slice of life'; an everyday conversation between two women foyer assistants<sup>188</sup>.

One of the differences between *Confessions...* and the other films in the corpus is its narrative form, which deviates from copying conventional documentary modes. Though the soundtrack clearly implies the non-fictional nature of the conversations, the visual narrative is not represented in an outright documentary format. It is true that the two women are shown in a non-staged, casual situation and 'filmed' in an almost observational style; in conjunction with the real soundtrack, this creates a non-fictional atmosphere, in which the event is depicted as an animated version of an actual event, albeit trivial. This non-fictionality is not, however, accompanied by a precise documentary narrative: the images of the women are interspersed with genuine archival footage and

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<sup>187</sup> The other is *Down and Out*.

<sup>188</sup> A full breakdown of the film's imagery and soundtrack can be seen in Appendix 2

images that connect only loosely with the content of the first woman's speech. Within the apparently realistic animation of the two characters is an example of typical animation metamorphosis<sup>189</sup>. Continual transformation of the main setting to other spaces disrupts the 'seamless' realism of the narrative and its spatiotemporal continuity; the unity of space is also interrupted by the intervention of live-action fragments. These live-action sections are not historical evidence, or directly linked to the women's words, and are not integrated into the 'main' body of the film i.e. the clay animation. The disparity between the two strands of imagery that are explicitly 'collaged' together creates a spontaneity that keeps them separate. Further, as will be discussed, the *properties* of the space in which the characters are situated change as the film progresses, so that it becomes mainly surreal/fictional. Finally and unusually, the film's opening and closing titles are a parodic remake of several styles of titling in fictional modes. This will be further expanded in relation to the aesthetic attributes, including the use of theme music, that distinguish the film from the observational aesthetics of others such as *Down and Out, On Probation* or *Late Edition*<sup>190</sup>.

In what follows, an investigation around the film's formal make-up, including its visuals, spatial schemes, narrative and soundtrack will be presented in relation to their realist or fictional attributes. Later, a more general reading will be offered with regard to the film's strategies of self-reflexive subjectivity, paratextual narrative and 'collage' realism. Notions of stylistic 'pastiche' will be explored in relation to the idea of nostalgia and the way in which the film evokes nostalgic impulses in the viewer, as yet another channel of paratextuality.

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<sup>189</sup> This is when the first woman's remarks about a facial mask are translated literally as it is seen to solidify on her face and fall off.

<sup>190</sup> In many of these films of the 'Factual Realism' type, the titles are presented in a serious, conventional way on a black background and in silence, avoiding any music.

## Reality Typified: Selective Settings and Portrait-charged Puppets

As the earliest of the films made in the late 1970s by Aardman, *Confessions...* can be considered low-tech, with a somewhat limited animation of the puppets which are seen only down to their torsos. As in *Down and Out*, the puppets are made entirely of clay with large 'portrait-charged' heads and hands, and an obvious 'clay-ness' in their make-up. Their features, body and clothing are fairly crudely executed. The puppets comprise a torso with a large clay head and stylised hair; their abnormally large eyes, unmoving pupils<sup>191</sup> and elongated noses make them somehow caricaturised, exaggerated renditions of typical British women.

As discussed, *Confessions...* does not present a coherent and straightforward narrative. Despite this, realism plays a major part in its make-up. The characters are designed to represent *real* people in real life situations: they are not all-round cute-and-cuddly or toy-like clay puppets; rather, they are designed to exemplify *typical* working class women. It is interesting to note that in this film the 'portrait-charge' technique which caricaturises the faces of characters serves as a realistic technique. The effect of such realism is further accentuated by the close lip-synching and the 'realistic' movements and 'behaviour' that brings the characters closer to real people in real life.

The main part of the simple setting comprises the foyer and a wooden ticket booth inside a largely dark space. The few props used, including the *Sun* newspaper read by the first woman and the copy of *17* magazine perused by the second, are all overtly hand-made. The poster on the wall represents a comic drawing of a smiling nude woman in an erotic posture; a large letter X above her head refers directly to the x-rated film on show. The words '*Animated Emmanuelle*', partly obscured by the body

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<sup>191</sup> In their promotional book *Creating Creature Comforts* (2003), Peter Lord gives the example of how the use of glass 'teddy bear' eyes in the *Animated Conversation* films gave the characters a 'scary' fixed look 'absolutely lacking life'. Later, they discovered how to use beads as pupils and move them within a plasticine eye (Lane, 2003: 50-51).

of the second woman, confirm this. The poster, along with the opening titles, suggests that the film on screen is a contemporary soft-porn 'B-movie'. The settings cannot be regarded as strictly realistic, since they represent only a small selection of items that would normally be seen in the foyer of a movie theatre<sup>192</sup>. In this respect, the settings are chosen carefully to 'typify' rather than 'illustrate' meticulously a real reception area.

At first glance, it might be said that the clay puppets and their surroundings seem realistic, representing the real physical world rather than a fictional situation. When compared to characters in later films, especially of the Factual Realism type, however, they seem less realistic; many of these puppets are rendered with obsessive naturalism and attention to detail. Further, the two women would not in reality have been the only people in the cinema; additional marginal characters such as staff members or customers<sup>193</sup> would have been in the reception area. It might therefore be said that the settings and clay characters represent a somewhat stylised, partly abstracted version of a typical location which is nevertheless not far from reality. If, however, the non-fictional content of the film is disregarded, it is easy to imagine the setting and characters in fictional contexts. It seems that the realism of the 'situation' derives in part from the realisation of the soundtrack as a factual element; conversely, the 'situation' of humdrum chatter, piloted by the soundtrack, divorces the setting from fictional contexts.

## **Humdrum Voices and Exhilarating Theme Music**

The muffled and at times unintelligible voices of the two women clearly suggest that the soundtrack is taken from a real-life event. At the beginning of the film, the first woman manicures her nails and gazes casually out of the frame, while her voice is heard speaking to someone

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<sup>192</sup> For instance, there might be a large number of movie posters on the wall, and more general paraphernalia.

<sup>193</sup> In the hostel scene in *Down and Out*, 'background' people are used to typify the situation.

off-screen. The noise of doors opening and shutting is heard. Later, the woman faces the frame with a smile and names a price, while another voice – apparently that of a customer – thanks her.

It is significant that from this very early scene the film shows no characters apart from the two women; only they are seen in the foyer, and the ticket sale serves simply as an establishing scene to introduce the settings. In addition, the visual translation of the soundtrack focuses only on the spoken words or conversations; other sounds, such as that of doors opening and closing at the beginning of the film, are not given a visual equivalent. By the same token, this 'direct' sound is not supplemented by fictional sound effects, as added to the soundtrack of films such as *On Probation* or *Going Equipped*, described in Chapter Five.

The avoidance of 'added' sound is not carried into the live-action archival footage. In these images, many sound effects that seem to belong to the original archival footage are used. Examples include the sound of whistles, of steam gushing from a factory chimney, and a car chase with apparently authentic sound effects.

The use of theme music in the opening title is accompanied by an actively mimicked fictional style of titling, which proposes a paradox when set against the non-fictional setting and grainy visuals initially presented to the viewer. The opening titles begin with exhilarating music typical of the 'an inspector calls' genre of 1970s television drama. They appear on the film's parodied certificate using comic references such as *British Board of Fish Fingers, Chairman: Lord Haddock* or *This film has been approved X...* Title cards that appear in succession read: '*Sleazy Films Ltd. Presents*' and: '*Confessions of a Foyer Girl*'. The cartoonish, bold, round typography on a black background is reminiscent of the title sequences of 1930s American cartoons.

Thus, from the opening of the film, the juxtaposition of sounds and images of an opposing nature begins to establish a sense of contradictory styles. From the opening titles, the film's narrative structure shows a

pattern of montage and bricolage. As a starting point for the film's events, the soundtrack does not follow a linear or 'cause and effect' trajectory; all that is heard are disjointed fragments of the first woman's 'thinking aloud' type of speech. There are, of course, moments when the second woman is heard speaking or responding, but what evidently matters most, to the filmmakers as well as the viewer, is what the first woman says. In other words, only the speech of the first woman is focused on and interpreted using different strategies, including the live-action assembled fragments. In terms of portraying the second woman, nothing extraordinary or outside the context of realist clay animation is observable.

In brief, the foyer girl's speech can be broken down into the following fragments, as she:

1. chats to someone off-screen (her colleague) while manicuring her nails before the titles
2. speaks to an off-screen customer who is buying a ticket list separately
3. chats to her colleague about last night's events, eliciting some unclear responses
4. talks about her sleeplessness, the pills she takes to stay awake and the 'gay' person who gives her the pills
5. describes an adventure during which a friend was driving an automatic car very fast
6. comments on stories in *The Sun* newspaper
7. describes a beauty mask, how it works, and remarks on her appearance
8. Remarks: 'What a day' at the end of the dream-like scene.

Obviously, there is no story in its conventional sense to the whole narrative with an actual beginning, middle and end; these are fragments of conversation, mostly in the form of monologues by the first woman, selected and put together by the filmmakers as a 'slice of life' film. Despite this, the loosely connected snatches of speech do not propose much inconsistency for the general viewer, as the nature of casual chat is

that sections of speech may not follow a logical narrative flow. The combination of the clay animation and the live-action footage, however, emphasises the discontinuous nature of the speech. As such, the imagery does not add coherence to these fragments; despite the clay animation of the two realistic figures and their close lip-synching, it in no way attempts to keep the viewer in a seamless, realistic world.

At the end of the film, a kind of romantic theme music starts up. This integrates with the main soundtrack - the voice of the first woman - as she continues to speak. The sound of her voice fades, until all that may be heard is the theme music. Her moving lips and body, however, suggest that the conversation with her colleague is continued. The theme music continues to be heard over the last scene, which shows the first woman in a spoof of the film *Bride of Frankenstein*<sup>194</sup>, in which after the sound of thunder she emerges 'alive' from behind the white sheet. The closing titles - the words *The End* and the credits - appear on a black-and-white background of shiny satin, pastiched in the manner of 1930s classical film credits.

## **Multipurpose Surreal Space: Spatial Paratextuality**

The spatial function of the place in which the clay puppets are situated is many-faceted. It is true that the foyer area is introduced early, in an establishing shot, as the orientation point to which all other events and images return. In several instances, however, this animated space operates as the place in which the archival live-action footage is simultaneously shown. In an early establishing shot, the ticket booth and the second woman's small confectionery stall are seen, in dark surroundings and with a large horizontal poster behind. More of the space

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<sup>194</sup> As the sound of the women's conversation fades into the theme music, there is a fast zoom to a cinema screen with a black-and-white image. This quickly dissolves into the last scene, which is a 3D animation. A black-and-white, high-angle shot of a strange clinic or laboratory is seen. The camera zooms down into the space, which contains lots of gadgetry and machines with tubes, wires and cables. In the centre is a hospital bed that apparently contains a sleeping person whose body and face are obscured by white sheets. Lights are reflected in an external off-screen window, and lightning outside bleaches out everything in the room ominously. As the camera nears the bed, the head of the first woman emerges suddenly from beneath the sheet and the words: 'Oh, what a day!' are heard.

behind the women is revealed, with some close-ups. Gradually, the backgrounds behind the two women begin to change and show images and places that did not exist in their original environment. It becomes a *surreal* space, within which other spaces are introduced as the viewer witnesses this spatial metamorphosis. Unlike most of the films in the corpus, the space is not a conventional 'cinematic space' or a dead background; it is rather a changing, multifunctional space, a conduit for several other spaces and events. The screening of live-action sections on a white screen behind the first woman lends the space a double identity; the viewer is in both the movie theatre and the foyer. At times the camera zooms inside the black and white footage so that the entire frame is occupied by the live-action image and the voice of the first woman is heard over this imagery; the background becomes the 'main' image.

Two obvious examples in which the space is transformed via a changing background include:

1. The use of the floral wallpaper background behind the foyer girl as she talks about the facial mask, and the metamorphosis of the mask on her face suggest that the viewer is now in her living room.
2. The use of a totally black background, when, after a series of images of live-action, black-and-white factories and old footage of an industrial urban landscape, the action returns to the second woman reading a magazine. The logic of continuity editing and spatial unity would suggest that the setting is the foyer, but the poster behind her in earlier shots cannot be seen; there is only a black background which suggests that the setting is still the screening area. This resembles a game, placing the two women somewhere between the *main* foyer setting and the theatre.

Further, the large poster on the wall behind the second woman, with its cartoon-like, hand-drawn graphic style, may also function as a piece of paradoxical narrative that is at odds with both the realistic clay world of the characters and the live-action film projected on the screen. The

words *Animated Emmanuelle* on the poster add to the controversy, serving as yet another self-referential channel to the content of the film on show in the cinema. Hence, this also flags up the 'animated-ness' of the film as a whole, or more probably the constructed make-up of all live-action film including that night's feature. The erotic posture of the poster girl, along with its cartoonish drawing style, references the superficiality of the film star. The suggestion that it is a low-budget movie provokes notions of the 'behind-the-scenes' reality of the life and relationships of people who inhabit this world – the film industry – and what the industry makes of them. In contrast, the clay women in the film, with their ordinary working clothes and banal talk, seem far more real, and part of the reality of everyday life. They are not sexy, attractive characters; they do not wear glamorous clothes or experience extraordinary adventures or excessive situations. Unlike the poster girl, these are 'real' people who can be imagined as authentic.

The concept of *background* as a metaphor for 'background information' suggests parallel layers of reality that is not shown or heard in the actual event. Such deeper understanding is delivered mainly by the insertion of live-action background images. During the first part of the woman's speech, as she talks about her nocturnal activities, a series of mainly monochrome images is shown. These are all related to mines and factories, and may be taken to imply that her background is a working-class family in the former industrial north of England. Her accent reinforces this assumption. The structural make-up of these images, meanwhile, accords with Eisenstein's theory of montage, in which the juxtaposition of certain shots creates an effect that does not necessarily belong to any of the individual shots. Within this first series of live-action footage is a section in which several shots are assembled and projected one after another, thus creating a sense of 'overflow' and 'outbreak'. These include the loud steam whistle of a huge factory; conveyor belts inside a mine; molten rocks producing sparks from giant melting pots; explosions and erupting volcanoes. These images are apparently unrelated to the tedious nature of the woman's words; rather, they seem evocative of her inner thoughts, feelings and characteristics. She is a

restless soul who is constrained by her dull life and unexciting job; a woman who is passionate about partying, sleepless nights and flights of fancy. Her inner life is totally at odds with her boring job.

In another example, as the foyer woman reads a headline from *The Sun*, a contemporary colour newsreel is screened. Three policemen are dragging a man and forcing him along a busy street. His hands are thrust violently behind his back as they push him off-screen. This clip is shown as the first woman reads a story about a *post mortem* examination to establish whether a murdered woman has been raped. This ordinary news item is enhanced and given a new dimension by the live-action images seen behind the woman; their aim seems to be to reveal the other, true story of the arrested man's treatment by the police. Since the live-action image by itself is of a political nature, its juxtaposition with the information offered by the soundtrack generates a sharp note of social/political criticism. This is further highlighted when the woman is heard to say: '*Oh, I reckon that's terrible, Jane*' as though commenting on the event the viewer has just witnessed.

It is notable that not all the live-action footage shown on screen is of a factual nature, or has a political undertone. The images of factories, chimneys, furnaces and townscapes of the industrial north, as well as the police scene described, are of a factual quality because they are actual newsreel footage. This is not true of the images that accompany the first woman's speech as she describes her adventure as a passenger in a speeding car. This is accompanied by live-action footage that seems to replicate her personal account, but is evidently an unedited scene from a contemporary action movie. This may be taken to suggest that, having seen many such films, the foyer girl unconsciously imagines her own experiences in the form of an adventure movie.

It is obvious, however, that the two women are unaware of the screening of the imagery in the same space they are chattering, as if these are two completely separate spaces. At one point, the woman turns her back, notices the images being screened behind her, and displays

astonishment<sup>195</sup>. This seems to imply that she was unaware of the images behind her; these are the subjective, parallel 'texts' of the filmmakers, who are interpreting her words according to their whims. This in turn suggests that the filmmakers have chosen consciously to 'play' with ideas and images, while keeping them deliberately separate and in parallel to the 'main' narrative and making no attempt to integrate them. The effect of such 'assemblage' or bricolage is heightened when the first woman discusses the facial mask and how it should be used. Here, the viewer is shown a series of montage-type images that represent different ideas of *mask*. These include a person wearing a papier-mâché mask; a fast zoom shot into a terrifying African mask; a close-up of a middle-aged woman smiling and laughing, and finally a series of shots showing the heads of US Presidents carved into Mount Rushmore. These images, which eventually cut to a black-and-white shot of a waterfall, are taken from different archival sources and again apparently have nothing in common except that they represent different ideas of 'mask'. These live-action images, along with an earlier 'metamorphosis' animation in which a facial mask sets on, then falls off the first woman's face, seem plainly to reinforce the idea of 'mask'. First, the woman's words are taken literally by showing how the mask should be applied, while the background metamorphoses into her living room. A shot of a woman laughing is the only non-literal element in this 'mask' scene, and perhaps refers to the act of masking one's feelings with a smile or an artificial laugh. It may also refer literally to the woman's explanation that smiling or laughing should be avoided in order not to crack the mask. Finally, the series of masks and the waterfall seem to suggest the hardened mask being washed off the face.

A certain degree of playfulness in the speculative relationship between imagery and words seems to be manifested here. Apart from the implied connection, the live-action footage and photos find a life of their own. As such, especially when this live-action imagery occupies the whole frame, the connection between the first woman's speech and the images is submerged. The intermittently muffled quality of the soundtrack seems

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<sup>195</sup> As she talks about the facial mask, an extreme close up of a pair of eyes is projected on the screen behind.

to make the 'film' on screen begin to operate as an independent film, a montage of various images. Thus, the return to the foyer and the 'clay' animation world creates both a 're-orientation' effect and a 'shock' at the realisation of a different world; the animated world of 'everyday reality' in parallel with the live-action world of 'images'.

## **Distantiating Narrative and Paratextual History**

In the promotional book for Aardman's Creature Comforts series, *Making Creature Comforts* (2005) Andy Lane compares the use of the recorded sound of real people's conversations – which can be called 'found sound' – to that of the modernist use of 'found objects' or *objets trouvés*<sup>196</sup> in which something ordinary is transformed into a work of art (Lane, 2005: 50). The narrative pattern of the film in question seems to have some affinity with the concept of 'bricolage' or 'ready-mades' in the work of Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). In this approach, everyday objects and gadgetry find a new function by being placed at a different angle, located in unfamiliar surroundings or mixed with other objects. Duchamp's 'ready-mades' were created using existing objects collaged together or dislocated from their original context or function. Such a modernist approach to image making and the visual arts is also evident in postmodern art's tendency to recycle previously-made images in a similarly 'out-of-context' way. There are, of course, differences between the approaches of modernist and postmodernist artists in their reference to recycled and represented material.

As Andy Lane suggests, Aardman's specific approach in *Confessions...* and in many of these ten films generally, seems closer to the modernist schema in its use of 'found sound' (Lane, 2005:50). It seems that Aardman's attempt to 'experiment' with these found sounds, which is

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<sup>196</sup> For example, Lane refers to Duchamp's artwork created from urinals.

here termed 'direct' sound<sup>197</sup>, has arrived at different results. Such dispositioning of found sound, placing it front of the 'found imagery', distantiates the viewer from the 'represented', and thus focuses on the formal aspects of representation (Lash, 1988: 312-14). The 'formalist' approach to mixing clay animation and grainy live-action footage and old photographs with parodic remakes of soft-core porn movie titles therefore takes it even closer to the anti-realism of the modernist tradition. But *Confessions...* presents an intentional scheme of disparity; a blatant 'patchwork' of diverse styles, modes of presentation, media and imagery from various sources. As such, the faked, parodied opening and closing titles, the clay animation with its surreal moments and unrealistic spatial strategies, and the strange array of live-action images and photographs of various origin create a collage aesthetic. This special mixture has been termed 'Collage Realism' since it adopts anti-realism as a 'realist' strategy that uses the discrepancy between different elements of the narrative to achieve a realist end; it reflects on realities that are hidden from view and disguised in the mundane nature of everyday life.

The role of the spectator in this kind of film, as Lash claims in his account of modernist cinema, is 'an open and ambiguous one, where meaning is not fixed'. (Lash, 1988: 329) The spectator in the modernist cinema, unlike in mainstream realist cinema, is invited to interact with the process of signification and not to accept a fixed pre-destined meaning. Similarly, the process of reading meanings from this film seems to be an open-ended one, in which the relationship between elements of narration is only speculative and tentative.

In what follows, the idea of bricolage and found material as a formal spectacle and also as representative of social reality will be elaborated. Further, these collage patterns of narrative will be linked to the idea of historiography and how it serves as a new way of inscribing the (tentative, constructed) nature of history presented in parallel channels

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<sup>197</sup> This term is used to differentiate secretly recorded sound and interview sound which cannot simply be called 'found sound'.

of information. These are mainly discussed and suggested in the works on historiographic footnoting by Hutcheon and Rosenstone.

## **Displacing Representation: Collage Realism**

It has already been suggested that the non-realistic narrative of the film in its use of non-integrated styles and imagery works as a realist strategy. Associating the practice of using 'found' material in the film with modernist art by artists like Duchamp, it has been proposed briefly that Aardman's compilation of miscellaneous footage and imagery as a bricolage of non-cohesive narrative seems to follow the modernist representational ritual. An even closer association to this type of representation, as already suggested by reference to Lash, might be sought in European modernist cinema: an example that comes to mind is Jean-Luc Godard's anti-narrative, counter cinema. Proponents of this kind of cinema were hostile to the conventional so-called realist narrative schemes of Hollywood cinema, in which the illusion of a spatiotemporal continuity is created by the use of cinematographic techniques, or what Baudry (1970) and Jean-Louis Comolli (1980) call the *cinematic apparatus*. This type of narrative pattern, which Noël Burch terms the 'Institutional Mode of Representation' (IMR) (Burch, 1990), seeks to provide the viewer with an 'immersive' illusion of reality as a consistent narrative. Filmmakers such as Godard were trying to de-stabilise such institutional 'realistic' representation by distancing the viewer from what he or she is accustomed to understand as reality. Modernist cinema, especially *French New Wave* was therefore a highly political, Marxist-based, anti-capitalist and anti-Hollywood movement that attacked the realism of the conventional narrative as a false realism or an illusion of fabricated reality. Instead, based on strategies of self-referentiality as seen in the films of Dziga Vertov and the alienation effect of Brecht's *Epic Theatre*, makers were finding ways to disrupt the spatial and temporal unity of narrative in their films. They followed the *credo*: 'The cinema cannot show the truth, or reveal it, because the truth is not out there in

the real world, waiting to be photographed' (Wollen, 1982:16). In order to reflect on realities, a non-realist, counter narrative should therefore be adopted. Cinema should not pursue excessive realism, but should constantly remind the viewer that what he or she is watching is only a construct.

Returning to *Confessions...* such non-narrative structures can be traced in the composition of the film's live-action sections. The technique may be regarded as conventional insertion of archival footage as in documentary film. Yet, even if these still and live-action footage images are taken as 'illustrative' imagery of a documentary film, they still fail to qualify as 'illuminating'. Even if they make a haphazard connection to the woman's words or are somehow 'led' by her speech, they do not always help directly to 'illustrate' what she is saying<sup>198</sup>. Neither do these images allow the viewer direct access to the woman's thoughts and feelings, as in the paratextual imagery in *Going Equipped*<sup>199</sup>. The connection between them may be tentatively 'read' only by closer investigation and in-depth analysis.

On the other hand, the theme suggested by the provocative title of the film is in stark opposition to its actual content. The main body of *Confessions...* as an animation of women in a cinema foyer conforms to the gritty 'slice of life' model peculiar to the tradition of British social realism. It stands out only as an animated version of a dull conversation between two real working-class women, depicting their life and environment with deliberate drabness. Contrary to the expectations set up by the title, not many confessions are being made<sup>200</sup>.

The introduction of live-action imagery later in the film enhances such aesthetic contrast, because it creates a tension between the realistic

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<sup>198</sup> The 'car-chase' scene is an exception in that it is taken directly from a fiction film and is not a 'point-of-view' depiction through the woman's eyes.

<sup>199</sup> This will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>200</sup> The title of the film seen on the promotional wall poster parodies the 1970s soft porn series starring Mary Millington that began with *Confessions of a Window Cleaner*. At this time, British cinema experienced a minor boom in low-budget sex comedies and soft-core porn movies. (McFarlane & Slide, 2003)

nature of the clay animation and the 'realism' of recorded life. Thus, the two media or types of imagery confront each other and clash rather than blend. Instead of homogeneity, the viewer is constantly confronted by a deliberate projection of non-congruency. It can be argued, however, that the reality arises from these very tensions and confrontations. The viewer is kept at a distance from, rather than immersed in, the constructed make-up of both clay animation and the 'montaged' live-action imagery and pastiched opening titles. The content of the woman's speech serves only as the vehicle for the filmmakers' subjective account of the event. It is the filmmakers who are overtly trying to 'reveal' the banality of the two foyer girls' lives. It is 'their' images, their interpretation of the 'situation' as a general social question. The film may not be as politically loaded as *French New Wave* films, but it comments on a social situation and people who are not necessarily from the filmmakers' own social class, but about whom they wish to project their understanding and opinions.

Realism, then, does not reside solely in the realistic aesthetics of the clay animation and the unsentimental grainy imagery of the setting. Nor is it inherent in the liberal use of live-action footage that adds a 'documentary' edge to the film. It may be suggested that it is a 'reflexive realism', a realism of social content derived from the tension set up by the kind of 'realistic' aesthetics it both directly recycles, mimics or parodies from forms already associated with realism. On the other hand, the way that these forms of 'social realism' concur with the fictional titling styles and other references including the 'sleazy' discourses of '*Confession...*' movies comes to represent realities absent from the actual imagery. As previously suggested, the superficiality of the actress represented in a comic, cartoonish way on the poster is underscored by the 'real-ness' of the foyer girls, despite the fact that they are clay puppets. It is less about what the women say or the images imported by the filmmakers; it is more about the way in which the two classes of women are set against each other, or rather, their entire mundane situation is placed in opposition to something they are close to, but separate and alienated from. They work in the same cinema, are obsessed with trivia such as beauty masks, read *The Sun* and *17*, and

regard tawdry film stars as role models, yet they are situated in a totally different discourse of working class life and its petty concerns. This seems to be the kind of reality projected by the film's collage realism.

## **Parallel Histories**

The question now is whether *Confessions of a Foyer Girl* is a documentary animation, or whether it in any sense deals with the real historical world and its events. The soundtrack is, after all, taken from a real-life conversation and it refers heavily to non-fiction formats in its use of 'archival footage' and its partly observational, non-fiction mode of recording the event. Does recording and representing an everyday conversation that embodies no 'important' message, contains no remarkable argument and is linked to no 'historical event' deserve to be called history? The only factual element of this film is the soundtrack. Is mediating knowledge about what this thesis has termed 'petty oral history' a kind of historiography or for that matter, a 'function' of documentary film?<sup>201</sup>

In his book *Visions of the Past*, Rosenstone (1995) refers to the insufficiency of standard historical film (1995: 12) in dealing with the past. He points to a new kind of historical work that he terms postmodern history film, 'one which uses the medium to revision, even reinvent the history'. (Ibid.)

...[a] work that, refusing the pretence that the screen can be an unmediated window onto the past, foregrounds itself as a construction. Standing somewhere between dramatic history and documentary, traditional history and personal essay, the postmodern film utilises the unique capabilities of the media to

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<sup>201</sup> Rosenstone asks: 'Is the movement of a tree in the wind history? The shape of a hat? Or of a hut? The gestures of a man when he rises? These too are questions to ask. Cannot such pieces of data also be used in written history, used because they have some meaning behind their mere brute reality? And are they not essential in a historical film? And how are we to understand what they mean?' (Rosenstone, 1995: 232)

create multiple meanings. Such works do not, like the dramatic feature or the documentary, attempt to create the past realistically. Instead they point to it and play with it, rising questions about the very evidence on which our knowledge of the past depends, creatively interacting with its traces. (Ibid.)

The kind of film Rosenstone examines in his category of postmodern film is of course the long, live-action films such as Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983). Yet his idea of re-visiting history as a more inclusive notion, and the possibility of representing it in a *non-literal* way (Rosenstone, 1995: 69-70) using the medium of film is central to the way Aardman has handled the material of petty oral history. As such, Aardman has recorded a piece of oral history and worked on the material in a way similar to a historian; they have selected, edited and put together the fragments of history and created a narrative of that oral history. The soundtrack serves as the raw material of history; the actual pieces of data are edited and trimmed, with parts omitted, emphasised, compressed and reshaped to produce a relatively comprehensive story.

The animation of the clay figures that articulate the words on behalf of the two absent women in the real event is also a truthful attempt to *approximate* the action and atmosphere of the event as it might have happened. This is again similar to the ways in which historians deploy conventions of narration and history-writing to make a historical event a unified and reasonable story (Hutcheon, 1988:114 and Rosenstone, 1995:35).

Despite this affinity, the use of live-action footage and imagery deviates from the traditional way of dealing with history. As they stand, these sections stylistically and thematically act to deny, interrogate or create problems with both the 'real' words heard and the 'real' world inhabited by the two clay figures. On one hand, the inventions and imagination of the two filmmakers in translating the words into actions are aimed at creating more realism, i.e. establish the credibility of the characters and their worlds. This is achieved by typical acts such as manicuring nails,

reading magazines or applying lipstick. Gestures and body language used when the characters are speaking also exemplify a typicality which may not necessarily represent the truth of the situation. Nevertheless, they make the actions more credible and *natural*.

Such realistic typification of everyday life is short-lived, as 'other' information begins to penetrate the narrative in parallel. To use Hutcheon's terminology, these live-action collections of texts are parallel narratives, acting as the extra information we receive from footnotes and endnotes, charts, illustrations and diagrams. Hutcheon argues that, although these are normally integrated into the main text as a means of providing more clarification and illumination, they sometimes have the opposite effect. The role of a footnote, though in some cases supportive of the main debate, is specifically counter-argumentative; it usually offers a further or alternative insight into an event or an argument. In short, it works as a BUT. It also functions as a comment on someone else's arguments or viewpoints<sup>202</sup> (Hutcheon, 1989: 85).

The use of live-action footage in *Confessions...* functions in a very similar way to footnotes. The live-action component, however, does not serve to represent the speaker's particular viewpoint or better to elucidate her opinions; it looks more like the comment of an outsider, primarily the filmmaker, on the event. The woman is talking about her sleepless nights, and the filmmakers seem to say: 'yes, but we can imagine where this woman is coming from', as they show pictures of factories and mines. The woman reads the newspaper, and the filmmakers seem to say: 'yes, but do *you* know how the man was treated by the police?'

Despite this, all the live-action footage 'added' to the *actual* story of the two foyer assistants has a common element. The imagery is not something seen through the woman's eyes or a point-of-view shot<sup>203</sup>; it is

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<sup>202</sup> On the use of footnotes Hutcheon says: 'They do indeed function here as self-reflexive signals to assure the reader as to the historical credibility of the particular witness or authority cited, while at the same time they also disrupt our reading – that is our creating – a coherent, totalising fictive narrative. In other words, these notes operate centrifugally as well as centripetally' (Hutcheon, 1989: 85).

<sup>203</sup> Of course, speaking in terms of the cinematographic techniques, they also include POV shots.

a blatant manifestation of the filmmaker's subjectivity rather than her intentions. It is the filmmaker's account of the story, presented in the form of interfering pre-existing images. As such, these do not resemble traditional footnotes and clarifications. Here, the filmmakers abandon the role of 'objective narrator of history' for the more active role of interpreter, commentator and creator of questions rather than answers. The viewer is presented with a collision not only of aesthetic disparity, but of clashing realities. The footage of policemen dragging a man serves to distract from the main point the woman is making, yet draws attention to other realities not to be derived from her words.

In addition, when the live-action pictures on the screen behind the woman take over the entire frame, the peripheral and main discourses exchange places; footnotes become the main history, and the 'real' event is driven to the margins. It is a playful game with reality and its representations; a game that attempts to indicate the different angles of reality.

Moreover, the inclusion of live-action footage supposedly to 'illuminate' the speech, which often distracts rather than focuses, may be read as a parallel comment on the contemporary era which is dominated by images. The seemingly irrelevant nature of the two orders of image allegorically testifies to the features of 'a world deluged with images, one in which people increasingly receive their ideas about the past from motion pictures and television, from feature films, docudramas, mini-series, and network documentaries' (Rosenstone, 1995: 22). Even these images are read as belonging to the first woman's mind-map, they are relating how individuals recall their thoughts in the shape of popular imagery. As such, the fragmentary live-action images on the screen behind the woman are indicative of the zeitgeist of the time, which sees the most ordinary stories of real people, such as the foyer girl, in the form of cinematic shots and archival film and substitutes 'typical' representations for those realities.

A further line of paratextuality may be found in the premeditated 'nostalgic' impulses generated in the viewer by the film's use of old imagery. From the start, *Confessions...* employs different kinds of pastiche in either assembling original images of various kinds and sources or parodically re-making them. The sparse but strategic deployment of music as an audio-pastiche in a few instances, such as the opening titles and the final sequence, works in the same way. This is because these pieces are borrowings from or reworking of various familiar genres of music; they contain strong characteristics and associations that remind the listener of certain films or television programmes.

Besides, the contemporary style of the animated section in terms of characters and setting seems at odds with the vintage quality of most of the live-action imagery. The initial series of 'screened' images, mainly black-and-white and old archival film prompts the first sense of nostalgia. Rosenstone (1995: 52) connects a built-in sense of nostalgia and thus an anti-realist nature to the archival, black-and-white photos and footage normally used in documentary or historical film as evidence and proof of truths<sup>204</sup>. For example, an unquestionable sense of nostalgia is attached to images of the so-called Industrial North, some images of which are shown in the film. These images of industrial/urban landscapes in turn provoke all manner of related 'nostalgic' assumptions about the working classes, from poetic realism of the type derived from the post-war landscape paintings of L S Lowry (Waters, 1997) to the more recent visions of social and poetic realism in the live-action film, as elaborated and discussed by Higson's tradition of British social realism (Higson, 1996: 134).

Such nostalgic effects evoked by stylistic pastiches and parodies as much as by the use of very old gritty films can be linked to the discussion of paratextual realism. Although the nostalgic feelings created by these

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<sup>204</sup> As discussed in Chapter Three, Rosenstone argues that it is precisely because the past was *not* black-and-white, and the clothes, cars and buildings seen in old photos were *not* outmoded in their time, they cannot provide a realistic representation of the past. The viewer cannot help but see these images through rose-tinted spectacles, which makes them remote, unreal and out of touch forever (Rosenstone, 1995: 52).

images are not overtly reflexive, they seem to link the present to the past or how the past 'might have been'. This nostalgia-loaded imagery, especially in the earlier images, work as vehicles of communication between a past that is 'suggested' by the filmmakers and the viewers. Whether they are regarded as providing information about the woman who is speaking or about an autonomous story imagined by the filmmakers and promoted by the soundtrack, they communicate a kind of reality intended by the filmmakers. These are an assemblage of pre-existing images consciously 'selected' by Aardman; the intention is that the nostalgic connection will be seen, identified and inspected by a British viewer who can relate to its hidden layers of meaning. These are deliberate 'clues' to a reality that Aardman wishes to build; a kind of nostalgia that is directly linked to the theme of the film, and an attention to and fascination for a peculiarly British type of 'ordinariness'.

## **Conclusion**

*Confessions of a Foyer Girl* stands at the crossroads of realism, deploying both realist and realistic strategies, but dynamically steering clear of creating any 'illusionist' account of reality for the viewer. It actively sets out to disillusion the viewer by its constant interruptions and interventions in the way of a 'seamless realism', which may be produced by the realistically rendered clay animation. As such, it is suggested that its exclusive strategies of realism may be described rather as 'strategies of displacement', in which any element that may provide a formal or thematic illusion of unity and coherence is denied.

The tension and confrontation between the animation and the live-action arises from the apparently 'objective', 'innocent', and 'transparent' character of the clay animation as it exists – pretending to be the objective translation of the soundtrack and the event – and the overtly subjective, interfering presence of live-action footage and its diverse, unpredictable and confusing pattern of appearance. It is understood that

both sections are constructed by the filmmakers, and it may probably be said that the animation is far more constructed and controlled than the live-action compilation. The film's live-action segments are recorded from life, but are they or the clay animation more real? The question of which section is more constructed and manipulated and also which is a better representative of reality speaks volumes about the textuality and constructed-ness of any 'realism'. The way in which the live-action and animation is perceived cannot always be decided by the 'nature' of what is represented, whether recorded live or made frame by frame. Reality also depends on how, in what context, and in opposition to what else a film or an animation is being seen.

As a stylistic collage, therefore, the film builds its realism from the displacement strategies of representation. Placing different realism(s) next to each other, alienating both the images and the viewer from their initial context and creating a patchwork of imagery raises a banal, petty oral history so that it becomes a manifestation of realities that are not derived from the acoustic content. This kind of reality is dormant in the situation and is brought to attention by the conscious choices made by the artists: a ready-made is de-familiarised to tell a new, other and parallel story; the story of 'others' latent in the interwoven texture of banality and everyday reality.

## **Chapter Eight:**

### **Factual Realism in *Going Equipped***

This chapter offers a close reading of *Going Equipped*, the film that fully instantiates the Factual Realism typology identified by the thesis. Its aim is to examine in depth the specific hybridity of realist strategies implemented in the film. The film's initial mood will be described, as will the ways in which it builds the world inhabited by the subject, who is an interviewee. It will analyse in detail his body language, movement and lip-synch as he speaks to camera and communicates his ideas<sup>205</sup>.

The film begins with a close-up of the pane of a French window. It is dark outside, and water trickling down the glass is seen and heard, suggesting a rainy night. The sound of rain continues, though more muted, throughout. The front lights of a car appear, are reflected on the blurred window glass and disappear; the effect is accompanied by the sound of an engine that builds then gradually fades. The title appears in white against the dark background of the window, in a frayed typeface that suggests the mood of the film. A man's voice is heard saying: '*I think...there were six of us...only the father was working...*'

The picture dissolves to a tracking shot of a large, sparsely furnished room in semi-darkness. The long establishing shot reveals a denim-clad male figure seated behind a desk; a puppet with extremely naturalistic human traits and face and hands made from clay. The room is dimly lit, shabby and otherwise empty except for some discarded cartons in a corner and a few scattered items. Behind the figure is a blocked-up fireplace with an ornate surround. The shadows on the walls behind the man and to his right suggest that the window with which the title sequence began is on the wall to his left.

The camera pans in to a close shot of the man, who gestures with his hands as he recalls his deprived childhood. '*Very poor...definitely, I*

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<sup>205</sup> A full breakdown of the film's imagery and soundtrack can be seen in Appendix 3

*don't... I don't ...I can't really remember no affection in the family'. On the table are a beer can and a pack of cards; he occasionally takes a card and toys with it. A simultaneous short pan left and dissolve reveals a series of what appear to be live-action flashbacks of the man's past, and his image fades out. The screen goes black, and grainy patches begin to appear then gradually assemble into a high-contrast image of a rusty gate that swings open. The sound of a crying baby and people quarrelling accompanies the scene. The camera moves forward to reveal a crumbling path with a discarded toy car and bicycle, then dissolves with a horizontal camera movement to show a shabby doorway. On the step is a large pair of feet in stout black shoes like those worn by policemen. The visible area is dirty, crumbling and covered in dead leaves and moss. The picture dissolves to a pan over a low-resolution image of woodlice, one of which is upturned and struggling to right itself, over which the interviewee is heard recalling that his siblings were treated more favourably. A dissolve returns the action to the man at the desk.*

The rest of the film is a variation of the same pattern of stop-motion images of the man recalling memories and describing his experiences as a burglar, interspersed with images of his past in images resembling live-action 'archive' footage.

## **Visual Realism: Formal Hybridity and Unconventionality**

Initially, *Going Equipped* might seem to be an animated version of a 'talking head' interview; a man before a camera describes his past, while 'illustrative' images show it in dark, grainy footage. On closer inspection, however, it is not a typical copy of a conventional interview<sup>206</sup>.

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<sup>206</sup> Comparison with a live-action interview makes sense only if the film's animated aspects are temporarily disregarded and it is imagined in live-action. This is primarily because it endeavours to depart from animation and assume a live-action appearance, evident from the way in which the physical world and the character are depicted and animated. For example, the film's setting is meticulously planned to resemble a 'real' room. These include things such as the crack or recess on the bare wall behind the man; the empty boxes; the fireplace and the table and chair, all of which are made to look naturalistically real. The physical world, events depicted and animated characters are all rendered in a naturalistic way that resembles a live-action recording. The surface accuracy of the depiction of the physical world contrasts with the conventional cartoon aesthetics in which

The interview takes place at night, in a room lit only by street lamps. The empty setting seems neither connected with the man nor a typical interview space; it is large with almost no furniture except for the desk and chair the man is using. Further, he is frequently shown in long shots, distant from the camera and framed by the setting. Though cuts and track-ins also show him in closer shots, the *largeness* and *emptiness* of the environment to which he is central is emphasised. This is atypical of conventional interviews, in which the interviewee is usually set against a carefully chosen *unchanging* setting; a 'dead' background, that is maintained throughout the interview. Sounds or lighting sources outside the 'staged' interview space are eradicated. In contrast, the interview space in *Going Equipped* is a dynamically 'animated' place where things happen and information is communicated through spatial interactions. The film does not therefore follow a typical non-fiction interview format; it settles on fictional 'dramatisation' and, as an animated film, consciously creates those dramatic effects.

Such 'unconventionality' also applies to camera movements, which take the viewer inside the frame. The style of shooting in the stop-motion section is at first impression observational, with the camera constantly moving in the space to 'observe' and 'document' the event in ways that resemble observational modes. But this event is an interview that focuses on the man's responses; in conventional interviews, these would not be regarded as an event *per se*<sup>207</sup>. A 'normal' filmed interview might incorporate a maximum of three different fixed camera perspectives of its subject. Camera movements, except in the case of *Vox Pop* or 'on the spot' interviews, are not typically shaky, with track-ins and outs or match-cuts<sup>208</sup>. While shaky camera movements imply a 'documentary'

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exaggerations and other fantasy-based animated worlds are represented, inhabited by extraordinary people and events.

<sup>207</sup> There are of course exceptions, such as when journalists interview people on the spot or while chasing them. In this kind of interview what the interviewee *does* is probably as important as what he or she says.

<sup>208</sup> Match-cuts, created using calculations and repetition of similar movements, are mainly used in fictional formats where there are many 'takes' for each shot. In an event recorded spontaneously, even with more than one camera, match cuts are neither common nor easily achieved. In television interviews, two cameras may be used for shot-reverse-shot type cuts between two or more people in conversation, and another to provide a group shot.

status, match cuts and elaborate editing are associated with fictional formats rather than live interviews. Obviously, there are different formats of interview and hybrid styles of documentary; yet mixing the 'talking head' and observational style of interview is not common practice except in special circumstances.

The man's response in the film also seems far more than usual for an interviewee<sup>209</sup>; he seems to be performing for the camera or rehearsing lines, albeit in an extremely natural way. He plays with a set of playing cards, drinks from a beer can or stands up and walks a few steps before resuming his seat at various stages during his speech. In short, despite its initial fly-on-the-wall shooting pretence and its transparent, neutral appearance, the film is actually highly 'dramatised' and planned. The types of editing, cuts and dissolves used demonstrate that, even imagined in live-action, they are more than a simple record of an event in front of the camera. Of course, the animated nature of the film implies a certain level of reflexivity that places *more* emphasis on the existence and significance of such dramatisation than if it was in live-action.

The flashback scenes in live-action footage also deviate from the standard documentary style of 'illustration' images. Documentaries may use archive footage or historical documents and photographs, or zoom in on different parts of a photograph or document to aid understanding of past events. *Going Equipped* might have been expected to include representations of the man's childhood or time in prison, or photographs of his home and family. But the images are not supported by outside evidence from the real world; they only fabricate the *type* of image in which he may remember his past. The 'point of view' shots of places that constantly dissolve into each other as he reminisces are more like a *mindscape* created to depict a mental image for the viewer. In terms of aesthetic copying, therefore, the film seems to deviate from the conventions of one type of documentary, and to hybridise at least two

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A precisely calculated match cut such as the close shot of the man looking right to a close-up of his fidgeting fingers is not common in either interview or observational formats.

<sup>209</sup> 'The man's response' is defined as the edited final version of the interview used in the soundtrack, accompanied specifically by the way in which the animated character 'plays' the speech and is 'filmed'.

further documentary modes in addition to its borrowings from fictional modes. Despite this, it manages to create a coherent narrative in which strategies of hybridity and mixing modes, and highly dramatised and constructed *mise en scene* are unnoticed, as a copy of a homogeneous interview film. In examining visual aesthetics, such hybridity will be linked to the main argument concerning specific realist strategies, mainly spatial and cinematographic, adopted by this film. These are the aesthetic choices that make it resemble a 'neutral' recorded life event while adopting fictional, illusionist effects to create such naturalism.

The film's visual content falls into two categories of imagery: puppet/clay animation and live-action. The first, which primarily relates to the visibly 'animated' figure seen talking to the camera and its setting, comprises a mixture of clay and puppet animation and will be referred to as 'stop-motion animation'. The second comprises the illustrative or 'flash-back' scenes in an apparent live-action mode. As will be demonstrated, however, many of the latter are *not* simply recorded in live action but are constructed, at times frame-by-frame. Despite this, they show 'real' physical spaces, places and objects that are meant to link to the man's memories<sup>210</sup>.

In line with the realist categories and specific strategies of realism so far explicated and identified, the diverse aspects of realism in this film will be examined with reference to its formal and content components. Further, the specific operation of realist strategies in order to approach a replica of a live-action film will be addressed and explored to demonstrate the hybrid schema of realism in the film. It will be argued that it highlights specifics of the three-dimensional medium: spatial (Bazinian) realism; cinematographic realism and puppet realism. Flashback scenes will also be scrutinized, specifically to deconstruct how the worlds of 3D animation and live-action somehow meet with few problems in a liminal space.

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<sup>210</sup> These live-action-esque illustrative imagery can be equally considered as 'cut-aways' in which an alternative story is offered and as such considered as explicitly the filmmaker's account of the story the man rehearses. Yet, in this analysis, and for the reasons elaborated, they are deemed as 'integrated' into the main body of the interview with smooth dissolves and being of the same tempo to the animated interview in terms of camera movement and narrative.

In *Going Equipped* cinematographic techniques and film language are supported by spatial realism, creating a homogenous world in which an animated character representing a British subject recollects his past through images of real-life spaces, places and objects he has supposedly lived through. The formal and stylistic aspects of realism in the 'stop-motion' section of the film will therefore be examined. The realist strategies by which flashback images are constructed and merged into the 'main' or 'stop-motion animation' part of the film will be examined, with reference to stylistic choices and formal components. Attention will be focused on the soundtrack and its formal properties in terms of the way it is gathered, the extent to which it is manipulated and whether it is accompanied by sound effects. Finally, in a more holistic reading, strategies of paratextuality, nostalgia and poetic realism in relation to the film's overall signifying system will be examined. Specific reference will be made to the ways in which these create a link to the 'reality' of the film's content, to which the viewer has access only via the information provided by the man's voice in his interview.

## **Stop Motion: Spatial Consciousness and Cinematic Syntax**

Mindful treatment of space in the stop-motion animation part of the film makes it an active and significant narrative tool by which its story is built in a flowing and poetic manner. This is achieved both by meticulous attention to detail in the space the man occupies (staging) and the *mise en scene*. Equally important are the lighting, camerawork and editing, which constantly and rhythmically roam inside the 3D space. Overall it may be said that particular devices are adopted to project the dimensionality of the space and the reality of the man's presence. These can be summarised firstly as spatial realism, in which the emphasis is on showing more of the 3D space, and secondly as cinematographic realism,

which deploys cinematographic shots and editing to create a narrative akin to modes of live-action.

### **Spatial realism: Staging, Lighting and Shooting in depth**

In terms of lighting, *Going Equipped* – unlike other films in the group – is not shot (or in fact animated) in 'daytime' mode. The room at night is filmed in low-key or *mood* lighting. From the visible objects and the areas in which the camera moves, it may be deduced that there is no interior source of light. Two outside light sources penetrate the room; the first is the omnipresent yellowish-orange glow of street lamps through the window that dimly light part of the room<sup>211</sup>. The man is on the boundary between dark and light so that when he leans back, his face is seen in *chiaroscuro*; only when he leans forward is his face seen clearly in the light of the street lamps. The second is an intermittent light source from the headlamps of cars passing in the street. The half-lit interior is flooded suddenly with dazzling light; the man's face and other objects are bleached out, and their strengthened shadows move on the walls. Gradually the light and the rumbling of the car engine recede, leaving the interior dark and almost silent again. This effect is used frequently from various angles to suggest cars approaching from different directions. It becomes part of the sequence of the film's events, creating plays of light and shadow that maintain the setting in a dynamic relationship with the outside world.

The interview environment is therefore influenced strongly by the intermittent lights and sounds of the street. At times the shadow of the man at the desk is seen on the right wall mixed with the chequered shadow of the entire window. The effect of the approaching cars transforms these and creates new moving patterns of light and shade. Sometimes the shadow of rain on the window is reflected on the man's face as dark, dripping marks. Beyond their aesthetic and visual qualities,

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<sup>211</sup> This refers to the effect produced by the lighting, and does not imply that the filmmaker has used street lamps to light the scene. The effect was undoubtedly achieved by careful use of various lighting techniques.

such scenes are also dramatic devices to create certain *moods* within the film, as might be the case in a live-action film. They also enhance the physicality of the 3D setting, the environment in which the 'puppet' is situated and the credibility of its material existence as a 'living' being.

The use of space as an expressive narrative tool in which action takes place is shared by live-action cinema and puppet animation, as discussed in Chapter Two. With regard to aspects of spatial realism in *Going Equipped*, Aylish Wood's notion of animated space or 'reverberating' space in animation seems helpful. In her essay *Re-Animating Space* (Wood, 2006: 136) Wood argues that animation makes space function as more than a conventionally unchanging and 'used-up' resource (Heath, 1981:39 cited in Wood, 2006: 136) to provide the action. Wood regards the animation space as one which is frequently reinvigorated and visually reformed, and which can become a visual event in its own right<sup>212</sup>.

Wood's notion of a constantly re-formed space is mostly explicable in 2D animation, in which the space is drawn rather than actually filmed. These are especially observable in the kind of animated films in which the background is re-drawn each frame instead of using an unchanging, still background common to cel animation. The under the camera films of Caroline Leaf, such as *Metamorphosis of Mr Samsa* (1977) or *The Street* (1976) are good examples of such ever-changing background space, by reference to which Wood elaborates her idea. Yet in 3D animation, space is phenomenologically 'real', much like the pro-filmic space of conventional live-action film. In conventional puppet animations or 3D films, space is treated in a conventional manner as a typical background. In many of the ten Aardman films, such as *Down and Out* or *On Probation*, the space remains static and simply provides 'background' in terms of introducing the place, typifying it and normalising it with certain marginal characters or props. In *Going Equipped*, however, the dramatic play of light and shadow lifts the space from a 'used-up' one to an actively engaging, visually eventful phenomenon.

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<sup>212</sup> Wood studies many 2D animated films and one 3D work of the Brothers Quay to elucidate how the experience of cinematic space in animated films differs from that of live-action films.

It is true that these 'animated' shadows are a re-make of something that might have taken place in real life or in a live-action film. If in Caroline Leaf's films the viewer's encounter with the metamorphosing space is surreal or at least unrealistic, in this film nothing extraordinary happens to contradict the laws of the physical world. It is the animated nature of the shadows and lights that highlights them and forces the viewer to 'observe' them, rather than take them for granted as might be the case in real life or a live-action film. The space is dramatised by lighting *mise en scene* to look like a real room at night, but is animated frame by frame and is therefore – and despite its realistic pretensions – highly projective of the animation process. It might be said that the viewer receives such 'spatial consciousness' more through the animated and re-formed character of space than via its dramatic effects; had the film been shot in live-action, even using similar strategies of lighting and camerawork, the intensity of space would not have been significant. It is possible, then, to consider the room the man is situated in and all the spatial strategies as a parallel channel of narrative to reflect on his state of mind; his loneliness within a large and barely furnished room, exposed to the lights and noises of the outer world. The room becomes a metaphor of his life.

The specific experience of space in the animated part of the film therefore resembles neither live-action nor the type of animation examined by Wood. Neither does it resemble the films of the Quay Brothers in which, Wood argues, space contributes to the ambiguity and eeriness of the 3D world created. In these films, the space often avoids establishing any geographical orientation or clarifying the dramatic situation of the characters. In contrast, the space in *Going Equipped* is a physically *possible* and defining part of the narrative; it is a conventional cinematic space that provides clues about physical reality, rather than deceiving or playing with expectations of normal space. In short, the dramatisation of space and the performance of the human character is emphasised by specific characteristics of the medium. The contrast with the naturalistic appearance of the settings makes the space a highly

reflexive one in which 'spatial expression' is intensely felt and experienced.

The emphasis on the dimensionality and 'real-ness' of the world in the stop-motion part of the film is also evident in the choice of cinematographic shots. Bazin's favoured techniques of shooting in depth and using long-takes are mirrored in the way in which the settings of the stop-motion section and the man's position are introduced. The room he occupies is relatively large, and the viewer has access to many long shots of him in deep focus and many planes of visibility in the room. These are at times cut or superimposed to closer shots. The camera movements, choreographed as smooth tracks back and forth or flowing horizontal or vertical moves, allow the viewer to explore the space and obtain necessary information. In addition, the rhythm by which the camera moves inside the space and fades smoothly into the flashback images, themselves of a similar tempo, makes the passage from *present* to *past* unconscious and intrinsic. The cinematographic syntax of fades, dissolves and superimpositions as well as pans, tilts and tracks serves both to create a coherent spatiotemporal account of the present and to grant access to a past that the man 'could have' remembered. The viewer, however, is always brought back to the present and the initial setting by the same gradual transfer, mainly via dissolves. This smooth transformation of animated space to that of apparent live-action and *vice versa*, blends two categories of image. The close application of cinematic syntax makes the overall effect of the film very similar to a live-action film containing memory or flashback scenes.

### **Puppet Realism: An ex-convict or a puppet?**

Arguably, the clay animation in *Going Equipped* is among Aardman's most realistic in terms of surface accuracy in representing human beings and the physical world. One of the most significant aspects of the type of realism discussed here is *naturalism*; the man and his surroundings are clearly rendered in extraordinarily naturalistic detail. Head and hands are

still made from clay, but the character is far more 'human' than in earlier films such as *Confessions of a Foyer Girl*, in which the puppets have larger, fixed eyes that even the filmmakers have described as problematic (Lay, 2005: 50). The man's head size is reduced and facial compartments are less exaggerated than is typical of the portrait-charge technique<sup>213</sup>. He wears 'real' clothing including a t-shirt, denim jacket and trousers, and trainers, though the latter are slightly exaggerated in size in order to make the puppet more stable. The 'animation' of the figure is remarkably natural and believable; facial expressions, gestures, mannerisms and body language all resemble real human actions. Close lip-synching is used, and the hands are used expressively to reveal more about the character's emotions and thoughts, such as when he mimes holding a cigarette or absent-mindedly shuffles cards while struggling to articulate the 'right' words.

The soundtrack is another way in which the filmmaker creates subtle connections between the tenor of the character's voice and the way in which it is animated. The man's emotions are not communicated only by the words he speaks; there are also clues in the tone of his voice, his silences, stammering, sighs, laughs, repetitions and unfinished sentences.

While it is true that the 'behaviour' of the character in *Going Equipped* is extremely realistic, the very nature of animation as a frame-by-frame process renders his performance and communicative body artificial in comparison with a similar live-action film. The filmmaker alludes occasionally to the nature of this performance in close-ups that underscore the 'clay-ness' of the face and especially the hands. The gradual transformation of the clay is seen in the raising of an eyebrow or a hand movement in close shot. Paul Wells (1998) suggests that attention is mainly drawn to the clay figure's otherwise ordinary body movements because they are animated. (Wells, 1998: 110) Movements and body language are copied from an actor's performance and recorded in live-action, and thus address 'performance' and 'the coded language of

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<sup>213</sup> The characters in *Confessions...or Down and Out* have elongated noses and exaggerated eyes and heads.

physical expression' (Ibid.) that in real life or a live-action documentary are taken for granted. Such 'animated-ness' of body language and codes of expression, however naturalistically performed, may therefore draw attention to their possible meaning.<sup>214</sup>

It may be proposed that the naturalism and highly 'human' animation of the clay character departs as radically from the traditional idea of puppets (with more stylised and abstract traits and movements) as do Disney characters, which are of hybrid make-up (partly exaggerated cartoon traits, partly coded naturalism) as argued in Chapter Two. The highly naturalistic look of the world and humans in this film, the dramatic use of space, and codes of cinematic realism (in non-fiction modes) create a kind of realism that is both poles apart from Disney realism and equally a (rare) example of *illusionism* in a non-mainstream context. As Frierson observes (Frierson, 1994: 24) such illusionism, pretence of transparency and effacement of constructed-ness is intrinsic to the 3D medium, in which the 3D space and objects are 'recorded' rather than drawn. The very possibility of attaining such a 'neutral' yet 'dramatised' version of reality in 3D, then, may explain why opposing stylistics might be seen as equally realistic, even if they do not adhere to Wells' thesis of 'hyperrealism'. In this film, it may be argued that the exaggeration and 'hyperrealist' animation associated with Disney realism – which by Wells' account is neither a replica of reality nor totally free from its laws (Wells, 1998: 27) – is abandoned for a *neutral* representation of ordinary life. In effect, a totally different version of excessive realism is created. In this 'normal' world, with no supernatural events or creatures much as in the physical world, the puppet is incarnated as a human being. In this case, he is a working-class British ex-convict, a man whose confessional voice testifies to his being, and who lives in more or less the same kind of world that the clay figure is shown in.

In order to clarify the argument, it might be helpful to imagine this realistic style of animation in a fictional context. There is a vast difference

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<sup>214</sup> For instance, Wells points to the man's discomfort as he tries to express himself and the way 'he slouches in his seat, half-bored, half-engaged'; his struggle with words that recall 'unpleasant events' is in line with the discomfort and anxious physical language of the animated character. (Ibid.)

between films such as *Going Equipped*, in which imagery and realism is deeply rooted in the 'reality' of the man's voice, and the hyper-realist yet fictional films of mainstream animation. Had the 'real' soundtrack been replaced by a dubbed track read by an actor, the delicate connection between the 'performance' of the character and the subtleties of his voice would have been lost. Equally, had a track of the interview read by an actor formed the basis for the animation, the animated performance would have been profoundly different. It is easy, especially in CGI, to find examples of super-realistic animations in which characters closely resemble human beings in terms of naturalism and body language (thanks to Motion Capture and other technological facilities). In some examples, such as *Final Fantasy* (2001) and to some extent *Polar Express* (2004), the representation of the physical world and particularly the humans is perhaps more naturalistic than in *Going Equipped*. This is because their representation of the fictional characters is based on a fictional, coded voice, whereas in *Going Equipped* the man's speech is not 'performed' or coded. Correspondingly, the dramatisation of his actions, although fictional and created by the filmmakers, is rooted in a reality that is not 'manufactured'.

While the similarities between 'simulational' approaches in clay/puppet animation and CGI are acknowledged, in most of the ten films and specifically in *Going Equipped*, Aardman's approach raises puppets to human status, not only via exceedingly naturalistic animation, but also because of the real-ness of the 'people' they represent. In other words, it is documentary realism that causes the man in the film to personify a British subject; not only because of its appearance, but also because of the way its 'performance' is rooted in its 'real' existence. This is an effective example of what Renov calls 'the acoustic indexicality' (Renov, 2004). It is the factuality of the voice transferred – subtly yet faithfully – into imagery that makes the animation of the clay character seem so real.

## **Flash-Back Memories: Panning back to *the past***

The use of spaces, objects and textures to create a realistic effect in the 'illustration' images seems as important as the stop-motion animation. These mindscapes are integrated almost invisibly into the man's speech with smooth dissolves. The filmmaker treats the 'past' spaces with minute attention to detail to create the required mood. Close observation of these flashback memories makes it clear that nothing, from furniture to objects and textures, is placed arbitrarily. Similar meticulous attention to detail in the images of the man's family home and prison creates an atmosphere in which every item in the apparently haphazardly-recalled memories is deliberately designed to tell something of the man's background. From the pattern of the bedroom wallpaper and the cluttered kitchen to the colour schemes and objects in the prison, everything contributes to the credibility and familiarity of the man's memories. These images initially read as 'memory' and thus regarded as 'imaginary' or 'less realistic', play a significant role in establishing the authenticity of the man's experience. They depict the *kind of world* he has lived in; a world, shown by point-of-view shots in which humans are totally absent.

It is significant that, in the absence of human beings<sup>215</sup> in the flashback section, the two series of images (stop-motion animation and live-action flashback) merge easily and unobtrusively. As argued in Chapter Two, the main technical challenge to animation in both 2- and 3D seems to be realistic representation of human beings and their movements. The 3D space and its non-human habitats seem therefore to be the point at which the worlds of puppet animation and live-action may meet with few problems. This does not imply that these worlds may not be separated by the viewer; it proposes that when in animation a naturalistic version of physical reality is mixed with cinematographic images of real places and settings, they can be seen as similar, even though one is created frame by frame and the other is a mixture of live-action recording and stop-motion. Paul Ward describes these images as 'stylised live-action footage'

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<sup>215</sup> Except for a pair of feet in big black shoes seen when first entering the garden, and a pair of legs belonging to someone who is apparently watching the television set from the sofa.

(2005: 98) referring to the fact that they are constructed and highly controlled while being recorded in 'real' spaces such as a bedroom or the back room of a shop. But if no human characters are involved, how is it possible to tell whether a camera movement in a real setting (or any kind of 3D space) is a live record of the objects and spaces or a frame-by-frame construct? What is the difference between the two? For example, is the opening title of a window on a rainy night and an approaching car recorded in live-action, or is it constructed frame by frame? The former seems to be the case, and the first-time viewer would initially anticipate a live-action film; yet the transition to the next shot with the clay figure is so seamless that the viewer soon forgets all about the title sequence.

The operation of these 'closely-observed' mindscapes by a travelling camera – the man's eyes – seems to be maintained by what Kracauer assigns to the camera's ability to 'record'. This recording function includes both the different movements of the cinematographic camera and the camera's ability to record *inanimate objects* to bring to the fore their 'physical existence' and their hidden meaning (Kracauer, 1960: 41-59). An extension to the 'record' function, Kracauer thinks that cinematographic camera can 'reveal' realities normally unseen or hidden from the ordinary eye<sup>216</sup>. It is important to note that many of the 'record' and 'reveal' functions of the cinematographic camera are present in *Going Equipped*, which is primarily considered an animated film. It may therefore be said that, in recording objects, textures and spaces, focusing on them and bringing them to the viewer's attention, the cinematographic and stop-motion camera share the same abilities and can serve the same function.

In the first scene we are taken into the world of the man's childhood via the gate of the family home, accompanied by the sound of a crying baby and adults quarrelling and shouting. The camera roves over the furniture and objects in the garden, living room and shared bedroom. The shots

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<sup>216</sup> These include 'The Small' and 'The Big', the *transient, blind spots of mind* including 'unconventional complexes', 'the refuse' and 'the familiar', *Phenomena overwhelming consciousness* and *special modes of reality*. (Kracauer, 1960: 41-59)

are close - extremely close in most memory scenes<sup>217</sup>. In slow pans over the living room, kitchen, garden and bedroom, the chaotic and unkempt world of the man's childhood is revealed. The camera focuses closely on the surface of things; a crawling woodlouse; a bedcover; a coarse prison blanket. Such closeness to objects and textures and the claustrophobic nature of the indoor spaces suggest the man's emotional imprisonment. These images imply that the man's world is a world of spaces and 'objects'. The minute detail suggests that he has a perceptive personality that remembers both images and the tactile physical properties of things; a mind obsessed with objects and memories. The recurring image of the Dinky car may suggest that as a child he had always wanted such a toy. Perhaps ownership of the car<sup>218</sup> was his prime motivation for stealing things, under cover of the 'instant recognition' of being a 'little thief'. These 'reconstructed memories' seem mainly intended to portray the opposing worlds of the man's childhood and his later time in prison. One is of clutter, chaos and mess, with chaotic rooms and a neglected garden; the other is of meticulous order, discipline and routine, characterised by blank spaces with bare walls and few objects. The contrast is simple: he is transferred from an anarchic world to one of strict discipline.

It may be argued that the flashback memories function as a silent commentary on the man's speech. In 'voice of God' documentaries, the narrator tells the viewer how to read images and what people say. In this film, however, the flashback images become a subtle but persuasive hidden 'voice' that instructs the viewer how to read his story. Many visual clues are left in the flashbacks, though most cannot be located immediately. A casual observer might grasp only the 'mood' of the man's mental state by watching these images, but under the surface layers of visual information are consciously implemented and are in sharp focus

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<sup>217</sup> As will be shown, this closeness to the objects and surface and textures of things is mostly accompanied by a deep-focus in which deeper parts of the setting are also in focus.

<sup>218</sup> The Dinky car is first seen in the back room of the shop in flashback, confirming the man's remarks about his youth when he started stealing. Later it is seen partly hidden by bedding on the bunk bed. In the 'prison' images, the same toy is shown in its transparent packaging quickly superimposed by another image of the now-empty box to suggest that it has been stolen as confirmed by the man's words.

within the deeply staged settings<sup>219</sup>. For example, when the camera roams over the living room or bedroom, every plane of the image is in focus, from the nearest objects to the furthest extent of the setting. In closer shots, though there is an emphasis on the first plane of action, as when the camera shows the *same* toy car hidden under bedding, the whole background is actually in focus. This emphasis on 'layers' of visual information inside an ordinary setting that is invariably in deep focus seems to accord with Bazin's idea of deep focus as a 'free' space for the viewer to discover<sup>220</sup>. Such use of deep-staging and deep-focus, however, is slightly different from what Bazin praised in Gregg Toland's camera work. In a film such as *Citizen Kane* (1941), Toland accompanied unusually long-takes of a very deep setting with an unchanging vantage point; the length of time allowed to the viewer and other instructions given by *mise en scene* therefore clearly direct attention to the 'intended' part of the scene. (Bordwell, 1985: 347) In *Going Equipped*, especially in the flashback memories, there is little 'clear' direction or emphasis on specific parts of the setting; they do not 'open out' unless careful attention is paid to the slow but short pans that constantly dissolve into each other. It may therefore be suggested that they are there for the viewer to 'discover'; as such, they function as hidden layers and 'suggested' meanings.

There are two interesting episodes in the film during which an element of animated-ness intrudes on these seemingly live-action images. The first

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<sup>219</sup> For instance, in a flashback scene while the man's voice is heard speaking about his delinquent childhood, the cartoonish wallpaper on the wall of their shared bedroom fades away and is quickly replaced by a bare grey wall (a prison wall), suggesting the future of the little thief.

<sup>220</sup> It is, however, useful to draw attention to Bordwell's discussion of the use of deep-focus or shooting in-depth. Bordwell (1985: 347) refers to Gregg Toland's well-known use of extremely deep-focus shots in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) and how Bazin regards it as a 'realist' (rather than realistic) technique along with his penchant for spatial realism. Bazin thinks that in such shots, where all planes of action from foreground to the deepest background are in sharp focus, viewers are 'free' to choose for themselves which part of the shot or plane of action to look at. Bordwell, however, believes that the orthodox Hollywood view was that these shots were confusing for the viewer, and sacrificed the simplicity and clarity of Hollywood realist narrative. He argues that Welles did not repeat his 'weirdly deep focus shots' in his later films (Ibid.). In this film, the use of 'unusually long takes' showing things from only one angle are not, as Bordwell puts it, devices to offer more freedom of choice or spatial realism as Bazin claimed. On the contrary, along with other *mise-en scene* strategies, they served to 'compensate' for the lack of clarity such deep space would have created and draw attention to the 'right' or intended parts of the image (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Bordwell demonstrates that even in *Citizen Kane* (1941) the use of deep focus in many instances is still used to put emphasis on certain planes of action, or as Toland said they had used takes longer than usual to avoid cuts.

is when a table lamp begins to move independently and turn from side to side. This is as the man relates how he 'crept' through the back room to steal money while someone distracted the salesman. The second, less obvious to the casual observer, is when the page of a magazine in the cluttered living room turns over by itself, accompanied by an appropriate sound effect. Such direct allusions to the animated-ness of these seemingly live-action sections may be more than the filmmaker's playful imagery; they may actively confirm that many parts of these apparently live-action images are in fact filmed frame-by-frame.

It is meaningful to compare the functions of the two categories of image, stop-motion animation and the live-action style footage of flashback scenes, in relation to their use of spatial and cinematographic realism. Both categories use the spatial properties of the 3D medium in cinematographic rather than animation terms. This is evident in the way the cinematographic camera, shots, editing – effectively, the film language – is put to emphatic dramatic use to create imagery very close to that of live-action film. Nevertheless, the presence of a 'human' character in the stop-motion section, albeit a puppet with clay flesh and realistic clothing and expressive hands, body language and lip-synch, reveals the constructed-ness of the whole. This is where a tension between the realism of the puppet and its extremely lifelike surroundings is generated. Both the representation of the world and the puppet are far from the exaggeration or comic abstractions in either animated cartoons or traditional puppet animation; both are made to look like normal reality. Yet it is the presence of a clay character with astonishingly human traits that *re-mediate* the cinematographic realism of the whole. Conversely, since the flashback imagery is mainly created in real-life spaces with minimal human presence they tend to be seen as outright live-action images. This difference creates a further tension between the two groups of imagery, in which the archival, old and grainy images of the past are seen as more realistic than the stop-motion. This again opposes the conventional interviews in live-action where the present time (interviewee) is seen as more real than the monochrome archival footage of a bygone time.

Consequently, there is always an ambiguous relationship between the two categories of image concerning which demonstrates more realism. Do the real-life spaces and places demonstrate more realism than the stop-motion and the puppet that represents a real ex-convict? Which are more constructed, imagined and faked, and which demonstrate more effectively the authenticity of the man's speech?

Other aspects of realism or realist strategies in the film will be discussed when reading the film as a 'whole', with reference to the interaction of its images with its soundtrack. Before that, attention will be given to the soundtrack as a fundamental compartment of the film's realist effects and representational strategies.

### **Soundtrack: Acoustic indexicality with a fictional flavour**

The soundtrack mainly comprises a shortened and edited, five-minute version of an hour-long interview with an ex-convict. (Ward, 2006: 117). As in many live-action interviews, the interviewer is unseen and his questions are not heard. It may therefore be said that the original soundtrack of the man's speech has been greatly reduced, and that only pasted-together extracts are heard. These form an apparently coherent narrative in which the man describes his childhood, growing up as a petty thief and his years in prison mainly for the crime of 'going equipped'. He comments on the inefficiency of prison punishment and criticises his family and society. He also says that his present life is not 'too honest'; that although he no longer commits 'crime crime', he has to commit minor offences to survive<sup>221</sup>.

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<sup>221</sup> These are heard in the last moments of the films as the man confesses: *I mean...I suppose, even now, there's things that's happening...that isn't too honest, that isn't really a hundred per cent legit. But it gets me by without doing real crime...without doing crime crime. I mean life...goes on like this. You have to survive...*

The soundtrack here is a key element; it is a window to the man's emotions, psyche and disposition. His voice, contrary to what might be expected from a lifelong offender, is mostly sad, sometimes bitter, yet calm and relaxed. At certain moments as he remembers the thrills of being a 'little thief', his voice becomes carefree or even mischievous. Nothing in his voice suggests the aggressiveness or violence that is associated with such characters. Despite the cuts in length, the filmmaker's treatment of this interview retains something of the spontaneous nature of the man's responses; his stammering, his search for the right words, his false starts. In other words, although the *interactivity* or the questions posed during the interview are effaced (Ward, 2006: 117), the soundtrack still represents a conventional documentary interview.

Despite this, the specific way in which the man's long interview has been treated to create a short semi-story, with a beginning, middle and end represents the filmmaker's active role to 'shape' the man's story. This does not necessarily imply that his actual story is manipulated or fabricated. Yet it is certainly true that it is his story 'told by the filmmaker' and as such, the delicate thread of reality here is the man's voice. As can be seen, there is little difference here between a live-action and an animated interview in treating the content of the soundtrack; it is the imagery that makes the difference. Arguably, the soundtrack of an interview of someone reminiscing about the past (as here and in *War Story*) can be a reliable source or access to actuality if it is not subject to a lot of displacement. For example, if fragments of an interviewee's remarks are mixed with questions that were not actually asked, the 'truth' of the interviewee's speech is compromised. Ward observes how in what Nichols (1991: 32-75) calls 'interactive documentary', such interaction might be fabricated or effaced, as in *Going Equipped*. (Ward, 2006: 117). It seems that, whether the imagery shows the exact opposite of an interviewee's speech or attempts to illustrate it closely, the actual content may still be 'heard' and judged independently. It may be said that Lord's downsized and edited version of the original interview, even without the images, is still representative of at least part of the

man's speech. Thus Lord has tried to find certain parts of the speech that are more revealing of the man's experiences, yet these selections are likely to be Lord's decision rather than the interviewee's perspective<sup>222</sup>. It therefore seems that in both *Going Equipped* and *War Story*, with similar 'interview' soundtracks, the 'acoustic indexicality' is to a great extent observed<sup>223</sup>.

The soundtrack of *Going Equipped* seems initially to consist only of the 'diagetic' voice of the man and the occasional squeaking of his chair, but further study reveals an extremely subtle use of different soundtracks. Firstly, the sound of rain with which the film begins can be heard dimly yet persistently throughout the film. The sound of cars in the street outside is heard occasionally, accompanied by appropriate sound effects as discussed earlier. There is a vast amount of 'added' sound over the flashback images, including vague pieces of music, the sound of television or radio, babies crying and people arguing. These are used faintly but effectively to create a mood that is intended to reflect the man's past.

Closer examination of the soundtrack reveals the influence of these sound effects, which in conjunction with the flashback imagery create a space that transfers the viewer to the man's past. The noise of television programmes in the family home and the radio in the prison images deliberately reinforce the environment shown by the imagery. These sound effects are used subtly so they do not overwhelm the broad 'silence' intended 'in the air' as the man performs his monologue. Music, apart from that used in specific instances, is specifically avoided, contributing to the quietness of the man's surroundings; the sound of rain throughout the film as 'white noise' emphasise this silence. Such avoidance of 'added' soundtracks or music seems typical of pure

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<sup>222</sup> Such statements cannot be made with maximum certainty unless some pre-production information is available. There are other instances such as the animated film *Snack and Drink* (2000) by Bob Sabiston, in which according to Paul Ward the filmmaker has used the ideas of the subject and his family ideas in creating the film, and has even asked them to choose some parts of the imagery or to do it themselves with the help of software he was using (Ward, 2006: 126).

<sup>223</sup> Unlike them, in *Creature Comforts* the fragments of people's interviews displace the content of the interview and put them in an imaginary context.

observational modes, as discussed in Chapter Three. In this respect the conventions of sound in the film seem to combine observational modes, interviews and some fictional use of sound to normalise events. The sparse use of soundtrack in the flashback and stop-motion parts helps to typify the scene and create its mood. They may therefore be seen as 'realistic' tactics to create the effect of reality demanded by the film's subject matter, and in accordance with its 'realistic' imagery.

### **Content Realism: Poetic voice, Nostalgia & Paratextuality**

Despite its formal hybridity, it is not unreasonable to regard *Going Equipped* as a film that is ultimately *about* realism. Whether it is considered in terms of form, style, narrative or content, it shows elements of realism. The imagery (image realism) is arguably the most realistic of the ten films under scrutiny, in view of both its excessively naturalistic portrayal of the physical world and its human characterisation with its realistic movement, lip-synch and performance. The narrative on the whole resembles a close copy of a live-action interview, and the soundtrack consists of the 'confession-like' voice of a real ex-convict talking about his experiences of childhood and prison.

As previously suggested, visual realism in *Going Equipped* is the result of conscious choices and planned constructions, much as in any animated film. Yet the types of realism operating in its formal components are in opposition to cartoon realism. The type of image realism used diverges from what is normally understood as 'Disney' realism in its avoidance of exaggeration, abstraction or caricaturing the world and its characters. Further, realism in this and some other films in the group resides in a 'neutral' depiction rather than a 'spectacular' portrayal of things. In Chapter Two it was shown how such neutral depiction involves naturalisation of the character and the world it is situated in. The apparently non-interventionist, observational style of filming/depicting

the interview also plays a part in such neutralisation. It may, however, be argued that certain strategies of 'dramatisation', very similar to those used in live-action fiction film, are implemented to *emphasise* the tone of social criticism. The intense dramatisation, *mise en scene* and other spatial tactics, therefore mediate the absence of exaggeration and abstraction, strategies by which cartoon aesthetics normally bring certain 'ideas' or 'intended information' to the fore. The formal realist strategies therefore seem to emphasise social comment; in conjunction with the real-life interview sound they remove the viewer from fictional accounts of realism to a 'documentary' realism in a non-conventional manner.

### **Poetic Realism Re-mediated**

The spatial characteristics of the kind of world in which the interviewee is depicted contrasts greatly with that of conventional cartoons. The man in *Going Equipped* is not seen in an ideal, spectacular, glossy or fantastic environment; his world is physically possible and mundane. The emphasis placed by the dramatised, animated space, which is absent from other films of its group, can be read as his state of mind. Links can be made between the film's somewhat 'poetic' use of space and what Andrew Higson (1996) identifies as poetic realism in the British New Wave film, addressed in Chapter Three<sup>224</sup>.

It may be argued that *Going Equipped*, unconsciously or otherwise, implements similar 'poetic' qualities, by focusing on spatial qualities in both image categories. In stop-motion animation we see a lonely man in a depressing, dark and sparsely furnished room on a rainy night. The impression derived from such an uncomfortable interview environment,

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<sup>224</sup> In the British New Wave film the criminal character is depicted as an ordinary, everyday person; a rebellious youngster from a poor working-class background and a neglected childhood, as in *A Taste of Honey*, or *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. There is a link between home and the family in which they have grown up or still live and their behaviour. The girl in *A Taste of Honey* is obviously ignored by her single mother. Similarly, the main character in *Loneliness...* is a young man who has suffered greatly because of the death of his father and his mother's negligence, quick remarriage and squandering of the inheritance. A typical British New Wave character is an outraged, rebellious young man (seldom a woman) who commits petty crime (though some times a bigger one such as burglary) and to a great extent rejects the rigid rules of society. The character of the man in *Going Equipped* fits this profile; it is therefore suggested that he is a typical British New Wave protagonist, specifically close to that of *Loneliness...* and with a similar background.

with its dull tones and disturbing plays of light and shadow cannot but be of gloom and despair; as the story ends, a happy ending is nowhere near. Yet the miserable space seems to have been transcended to a spectacle and a pleasurable visual experience, perhaps even to a greater extent than identified by Higson in live-action films of British social realism. The animated-ness of the image is certainly influential in creating a poetic quality from these gloomy images. Moreover, similar to Higson's argument, the lonely, dark and empty room becomes a metaphor for the man's loneliness and helpless life; a 21-year-old who has already spent many years in prison and as a serious offender, and has lacked the support or love of his family from a very young age, has no bright future ahead of him.

The flashback memories in the film, however, strive consciously to depict an atmosphere of claustrophobia, coldness and gloom. This is a world of old objects and rough material, of clutter and mess. Lord carefully depicts the man's childhood with little bits and pieces, debris typical of what children collect and that may be precious to them, such as a bottle of bugs, a key, an old car and other paraphernalia. The man's mind as he recalls prison functions in the same manner as when recalling childhood, revealing a preoccupation with the detail of things, textures, sounds and smells, mainly linked to specific 'places'. In these memories the viewer touches the texture of the man's thoughts, and feels the grains of his memory. For him, the macro-world he lives in is a dark, lonely place inhabited by no other caring being to inhabit. The micro-world of his thoughts and memories is equally dark, lonely and sad, full of decaying things and decomposed memories. The two worlds portrayed by Lord are integrated into a consistent body that does not clash or oppose but simply tells different lines of the same story.

Unlike more straightforwardly live-action copying in other films in the group such as *Sales Pitch*, *On Probation* or *Late Edition*, there is a choreographed rhythm within the film's inner cadence. This is maintained equally by the smooth movement of cameras in both stop-motion and flashback memories, as by the way in which they are blended together. It may be argued that such specific use of cinematographic techniques

(absent from other films in the group) adds to the poetic flavour of the film.

The other component contributing to a poetic tone in the film is the way in which the protagonist is depicted. Paul Wells notes that the 'ordinariness' with which the ex-convict is portrayed contrasts with the mythologised and sometimes glamorised version of the villain both in conventional fictional live-action and animation (Wells, 1998: 110). In British New Wave films, just as in *Going Equipped*, the criminal characters are depicted as ordinary, everyday people; they are not gangsters or outlaws capable of committing atrocious crimes, but petty thieves and rebellious youngsters from deprived backgrounds. In a fictional cartoon, the villain displays exaggerated traits of face, body, clothing, language and accent that are notably absent in *Going Equipped*. In line with both fictional versions of social realism and the documentary tradition, the main protagonist is portrayed as a 'real' man with human traits, not a monochrome character. His appearance, though typical of his class and background, in no way implies that he is anything other than an ordinary British man. He is capable of commenting both on his deeds and others' faults and responsibilities. As he speaks about himself, the audience learns that he is painfully aware of his faults, and cannot deny that he was '*guilty, all the time...all the time*'. At times, however, he seems to enjoy talking about his 'clever' tricks and boasts that what he does is still not '*a hundred per cent legit*'. He also describes his formative years and the domestic discrimination he suffered as well as the praise he earned for his wrongdoings. He speaks of his hatred for the prison system and chastises society for believing that '*prison is ...generally a happy life*'.

In this five-minute film, then, Lord manages to represent an ex-convict with the subtlety and complexity of a real person. In other words, the man is not 'stereotyped' by his appearance, rather he is 'observed' and 'known' by the viewer from his own words, comments and of course his subtle performance and believably human-like behaviour. Lord's extra attention to the man's minute facial expressions and body language as well as his extremely expressive and remarkably natural hands

emphasises and brings to attention more layers of meaning to these words. The flashback memories underscore the man's inner feelings, yet still function as 'illustration images' as in live-action documentary modes. The film illustrates 'poetic realism' even more convincingly than Higson's own examples by drawing attention to the constructed 'realistic' tactics that hover somewhere between stop-motion and live-action. The 'documentary' realism finds a poetic and visually realistic space in which to reflect itself and become known using the device of one medium that is mimicked in another. Yet the realism of live-action reproduced in stop-motion and puppet animation *re-mediate* the realism of previously established styles, genres, and media (namely live-action). It becomes, as suggested by this thesis, a novel and intrinsically hybrid realism. The tension between the exceedingly realistic visuals and their 'animated-ness', allied to the constant wavering between 'real' sound and fictional imagery is the important feature of such realism.

### **Parallel Lines of a Past**

Another aspect of this hybrid realism is its paratextual structure. The film draws on flashback imagery as a parallel narrative to communicate extra information. In the case of *Going Equipped* this paratextuality is used to intensify, elucidate and project meanings not directly derived from the man's words or his animated figure. In Chapter Three by reference to Hutcheon's idea of paratextuality (1989: 82), it was discussed that documentary forms of investigation into a historical figure or event commonly use a range of parallel information including archival footage, photographs and personal ephemera; in this sense, paratextuality is a familiar device.

The nature of flashback scenes in *Going Equipped*, however, does not conform exactly to uses of 'illustrative images' in the 'talking-head' documentary. These flashbacks do not draw on any evidential or archival footage, or use an objective projection of such footage or photographs. In this film, the 'memory' images are imaginary constructs suggested by

the interviewee's words; a conscious though subtle substitution has taken place, replacing archival (real, public) evidence with personal, point-of-view, subjective and imaginary information. The viewer is persuaded to believe that these images illustrate the man's past, though they are not even reconstructions based on evidence. Neither are they events recorded in live-action, though they are deceptively presented as live-action footage. All these examples seem to deviate from the norms of live-action documentary and the paratextual tools it adopts.

The inserted flashbacks, though constructed and fabricated by the filmmaker, function as a parallel channel of information that provides different, perhaps deeper, readings of the same uttered reality. They are attempts to depict an 'inner' reality that cannot be proved, though they take their reference from the 'outer' world of spaces, objects and texture. Lord is not trying to retrieve evidence from the outer world of texts, or as Hutcheon calls them, the 'traces of the past' (Hutcheon, 1989). He is rather trying to *illustrate reality* in the form of memory images he has made, which may represent the height of illusionism. These fetishised, intensified paratextual images of ugliness, murkiness and claustrophobia extend the viewer's knowledge of the man's experience and function as a realist device.

### **Pastiche and Nostalgia: Viewing the past in spatial terms**

Despite what has been said about *Going Equipped's* close copying of live-action, it must be asked whether it is possible to see it as a pastiche of a British Social Realism film or a documentary. This film will be investigated in relation to Jameson's idea of pastiche and nostalgia discussed in Chapter Four. It will be examined to see whether its uses of past styles and modes of representation is an empty stylistic pastiche, nostalgic of past styles and times or rather a realist strategy as a channel to deeper realities of an individual's life; in other words, the film is scrutinized in terms of how realistically or nostalgically it copies the styles and themes of British social realist films. This final discussion is proposed in order to

elucidate the initial question of realism in *Going Equipped*, and to see whether it can be regarded as a realist film overall.

It is obvious that the film(s) in question differ from Jameson's model in material ways: they are short, non-commercial, non-mainstream animated films, based on a non-fictional soundtrack and with a tendency to the documentary format. Nevertheless, they share an interest in past styles and modes of representation, and in fact copy closely certain modes of live-action. This close copying of live-action filming, narrative and representation makes *Going Equipped* or *Sales Pitch* good examples of pastiche in animation. The use of 'observational' or non-interventionist filmmaking functions more or less as a shortcut to 'documentary-ness'. The recreation of grainy, non-glossy images and everyday working-class spaces and context is a reminder of a tradition of British films of social realism. In *Going Equipped* however, such remakes do not appear to be simply depthless borrowing and romantic nostalgia. It is true that the images, especially in flashback, are loaded with nostalgic touches, yet they avoid using popular images that promote a collective sense of the past. As discussed earlier, these images create a specific and individualistic mood to represent the man's mental state. There are occasional references to popular culture such as a specific piece of music on the radio, a Chopper bike or a Dinky toy, yet in general the imagery does not reflect any prominent symbol. In other words, the past is created using subtler strategies and hints rather than direct representation by reference to its 'traces' or documents. As previously suggested, the translation of the man's thoughts and feelings into imagery by the filmmaker is characterised by minute detail; the objects, textures and spaces are as important as the cinematographic techniques in creating a poetic rhythm in these dream-like pictures. The poetic voice of the film created by such imagery, in addition to constant reference to the past, lends a nostalgic energy to these images that cannot be seen simply as romantic or unrealistic. The innovative device of representing the man's mind instead of evidences of his past transcends ordinary archival footage; the viewer is invited to enter the past by reviewing the spatial quality of his mind.

Returning to the past is impossible; it is possible, though perhaps unsatisfactory, to visit past places<sup>225</sup>. Nevertheless, in this film the past is represented in a nostalgic way, mainly by reference to spaces. These are, of course, drawn from Lord's imagination; the man's description of childhood and prison are anything but 'romanticised' or 'rosy' memories, described by him as *a nasty childhood*. Neither are Lord's realisations of those memories beautiful images of a romantic past; the flashback imagery is therefore specifically loaded with an inbuilt, evocative sense of the past. This accords with Higson's theories on the spatial properties of British New Wave films, with the ugly industrial landscapes that become poetic and beautiful. The very attempt to put these images 'right' in tone and voice lends them a sense of nostalgia. This is arguably a characteristic of the middle-class filmmaker<sup>226</sup> who 'imagines' and reflects on a poor thief's upbringing and past. In this sense, it may be appropriate to challenge the common perception of nostalgia as a rosy and romanticised return to iconic images, figures, photographs and music. By definition, nostalgia is a desire to return to the past that may also be linked to pain; it is not difficult to see in *Going Equipped* and many other films a wider account of nostalgia that is visual, yet does not belong to the visual bank of public memory as an 'idealised' picture.

Thus, the hybrid formula of realism in *Going Equipped* reflects on the possibility of representing reality in unconventional ways while adopting a veneer of conventionality. To de-familiarise the familiar and reflexively play with the conventional anticipations of viewers, re-mediate a previously established genre and medium in a new one by obsessively replicating it and yet emphasising on such imitation. *Going Equipped* assimilates 'real' acoustic material and realistic imagery to constantly create the state of in-between-ness for the viewer. To be a documentary while not exactly being so, to refer strongly to the recorded-ness of the imagery by mimicking the fly-on-the-wall mode while overtly animating a clay puppet, yet basing the imagery on the content of a 'real' man's

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<sup>226</sup> Such assumption is confirmed by the commentary Lord and Sproston make on this film, in the original DVD of 'Aardman Classics'. They mention at the very outset of the film that this is 'their' account; that is two middle-class men, imagining the life of a man with a different background to them.

speech. *Going Equipped* is obsessed with being 'realistic', but still manages to be a 'realist' film by subverting that very realistic-ness that it so painstakingly fabricates.

## **Chapter Nine:**

### **Fictional Realism in *War Story***

This chapter offers a close reading of the film *War Story*, which represents the 'Fictional Realism' type indicated by this thesis. A brief outline of the film will be followed by an examination of the specific composition of its realist strategies<sup>227</sup>. The main aim will be to demonstrate the 'type' of hybridisation of realistic and fictional compartments in its overall structure, as distinct from Factual Realism and Collage Realism, which have been examined in the previous two chapters.

*War Story* can be described as an animated interview, in which an old man recalls his work at BAC and as an air-raid warden during WWII. The film differs significantly from most others in the corpus because of the presence of comedy in its tone and depiction of events. This perhaps derives mainly from the tone of the man's speech as he reminisces cheerfully, often emphasising the comedic aspects of situations described. The film comprises a talking-head interview section in which the subject – a clay puppet – is seen speaking to camera or an invisible interviewer, and a series of animated illustrations of his memories. The theme of these illustrations is light-hearted, and the comic index is enhanced by the filmmaker's humorous imagery. The comic tone of the film, which is based on a real-life interview soundtrack, makes it a 'parody' of a live-action interview; as will be demonstrated, however, the authenticity of the man's voice promotes the film's status from formal parody so that it also functions as an interview.

The 'story' of the film departs from the conventional structure of beginning, middle and end; it follows three separate strands of memory including a merry description of the man's marriage and first home. Though the man's words are obviously edited and shortened to produce

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<sup>227</sup> A full breakdown of the film's imagery and soundtrack can be seen in Appendix 4

the final version, an apparently self-reflexive moment has not been cut. As the man tries to remember the number of his first home, the action switches to a 'behind the scenes' shot of his living room. He calls to someone off-camera, evidently his wife, and the interviewer reminds him that the recording equipment is still switched on. The interviewer is seen from behind, sitting on a chair in front of the man. His shoulder movements and gestures reveal his amusement. He is also heard laughing, and saying that the interview is: '*the hardest job I've ever done...*'; the man, in jest, asks him to turn the machine off.

The film's visual narrative is structured round the 'content' of the interviewee's speech in these three 'themes', which are briefly:

1- The man describes his journey and arrival home exhausted from night shift at BAC<sup>1</sup>, and his difficulty sleeping through the noise made by the coalman during the day.

2- He recalls his marriage and his first marital home, including his memories of its sloping floors and the (comic) troubles it caused.

*NB: this section is interrupted by the self-reflexive moment described above.*

3- He describes nights during the Blitz, including the preparations for his volunteer work as an air-raid warden and the air raids during which he, his pregnant wife and mother-in-law took shelter in the 'coalhouse'.

## **The Two Worlds: Real and Fictional Realities**

*War Story* seems to depart radically from Aardman's obsessively realistic and naturalistic imagery, as exemplified by *Going Equipped*. It shares many formal attributes with Nick Park's later films, especially the fictional animated *Wallace and Gromit* series. In view of its appearance in the *Lip Synch* series, it is perhaps ironic that the amount of actual lip-synching is minimal when compared to previous films in this group. This is because

most of the man's speech is heard over the flashback illustrations in which no character speaks.

In terms of visual aesthetic, the film mixes two categories of imagery; the interview represented in 'present time' and in 'past time' or flashback. There are surface similarities but, as will be shown, they differ in terms of 'realistic' formulation. The main area of disparity is the degree of fictionality by which the physical world, its events, and human characters and animals are shown. In order to analyse the film's specific rendition of realist and fictional strategies, these two 'worlds' will be examined separately, followed by a full reading of the film.

### **Present: The Animated Interview**

The interview sections in present time relate to the images that portray the old man in present time, speaking to the camera. The character, unlike the subject of *Going Equipped*, is made entirely from clay, and rounded and caricatured with an abnormally-high 'Simpson-like' forehead and stylised facial traits. The design of head and features also avoids the 'portrait charge' technique of exaggerated facial detail, deriving instead from a simplified version of a typical (perhaps stereotypical) old man's head and face, with far less emphasis on naturalism. The head is much longer proportionately than normal, with an extended, rounded nose, large eyes, 'cartoonish' eyelids, and fan-like ears. His body language and facial movements are essentially human, though to a lesser extent than in the naturalistic animation of *Going Equipped*. Lip-synching is relatively accurate, albeit obscured partly by a thick moustache. Though made entirely from clay, the clothing includes a stylised, cartoon version of a brightly-patterned knitted tank top. These factors combine to lend the man's spoken performance far more realism than his silent, mime-based and cartoon-like movements and behaviour seen in the flashback scenes.

The old man is initially shown against a simple black background, speaking in a strong Bristol accent to a person off-screen. This short

scene fades into images of the old man's work at BAC, and the interview setting and representation of the interviewee are gradually revealed. In the next interview image, the man is set against a neutral, brownish background; later, a close-shot shows him against a 'real' background that, during the 'self-reflexive' section previously detailed, is revealed as his living room. In the first of two consecutive long shots, he is seen in deep focus at the rear of the setting behind the recording equipment; part of the interviewer's hand enters the frame and indicates the device. The second long shot 'reveals' the entire setting with the interviewer sitting on a chair in front of the old man. Thus, as in many conventional live-action interviews, the viewer is initially denied information about the setting and the interviewer's voice. Later, the setting is revealed and the interviewer is seen and heard. The filmmaker also includes a 'behind the scenes' episode that would normally be edited out. In presenting a selected account of the recoded reality on screen, as well as allowing privileged access to an 'out-take' that implies a more 'real' side of the event, he plays with the notion of reality; both these recorded 'realities' are created in animation and are therefore manufactured; the out-take, ironically, is yet another imagined and constructed animated account<sup>228</sup>.

Here, there is a delicate reference to the inevitability of subjectivity and selectiveness in any representation that includes a live-action recording of events. Spatial information about the man's 'preset' place of interview is revealed gradually, demonstrating that shot size may be used both to provide access to the profilmic space and to restrict the viewer's knowledge. It also seems likely that setting an animated talking head against a blank background as opposed to a deeply-staged long-shot of a realistic room setting creates alternative assumptions about the reality of the character's situation; in general and in accordance with Bazin's argument on spatial realism, a long shot seems to provide more 'spatial' information. Of significance is the playful manipulation of the idea of 'acoustic indexicality', which is also evident in films such as *Palmy Days* and *Late Edition* that were discussed in Part Two. In these films, the

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<sup>228</sup> Compare this kind of self-reflexivity with the case in which the 'real' recoded interview is shown in live-action.

creation of fictional characters or events without basis in the soundtrack may imply that it is unwise to rely too heavily on soundtrack information: reality cannot be defined as all that is heard, nor all that is seen; each may be a hybridised fabrication of reality and fiction. This line of argument will be explored more fully in relation to the 'flashback' imagery that represents a fictionalised or rather 'distorted' illustration of the man's story.

With the exception of the reflexive scene outlined earlier, the rest of the 'present time' imagery is in simple talking-head form, showing the character mainly in close to medium shots against a non-specific background. Setting aside the character's animated nature and its obviously cartoonish depiction, the interview imagery is 'filmed' in a realistic manner; the 'present time' world is shown essentially as a physically possible one in which nothing extraordinary happens. The man's close-up is transferred to his past images mainly by the cinematographic syntax of fades and dissolves. At times, the device of a fade out and in is used to transfer the viewer from the man's image to a past time or space; such transitions to flashback are more readily associated with fictional than documentary modes of live-action film.

### **Past: An Animated Story**

The world represented in the interview scenes has a different make-up from that shown in flashback images; it belongs mainly to the logic of 2D animated cartoon, in which impossible events may happen and the laws of the physical world may be distorted or disregarded. Its aesthetics and stylistics also seem to be led more by animated cartoon than live-action film. Like cartoons, the interview scenes borrow from the codes and conventions of fictional modes of live-action film; these images, which 'illustrate' the man's spoken words, seem to find a life of their own by creating a parodic account of his oral history. In general, their approach is to take the man's verbal information literally – mostly too literally – to humorous effect. In terms of character design, movement and

'behaviour', however, the visual aesthetic is closer to cartoon than real human behaviour in live-action modes. In one respect, the flashbacks may be compared to 'Goofy' films in which an apparently serious voiceover accompanies a stupid, funny performance by the character. This is the traditional realm of cartoon animation: comedy, exaggeration and excess.

The world and its settings, such as the man's house, are a slightly cartoonish representation of the real world that seems to be the hallmark of later Aardman fiction animations. Objects and props are designed to look realistic, yet retain a 'model' or 'toy' quality, in brighter colours and slightly larger than actual size. In the early flashbacks, the aircraft is rounded, toy-like, and constructed with old-fashioned nuts and rivets<sup>229</sup>, though it is still a close representation of an aircraft. A comparison of the man's living room in 'present' and 'past' time further highlights these differences; the 'present' neutral or brownish colour schemes resemble those of a real British house, while 'past' images are shown in more vivid and saturated colours. Details of the house including the front door, living room furniture and objects used by characters are allied to the characters' graphic style; they are to some extent a blend of reality and the cartoon world. The non-living world here shows a considerable level of exaggeration or abstraction and faithful depiction of the non-living world and objects in terms of proportions and size, rather than detailed and obsessive naturalism of Factual Type films.

This blend of realism and exaggeration or abstraction can be seen, perhaps more emphatically, in the design of the characters. In terms of realism, the difference between the interview sections of *Going Equipped* or *War Story* is slight and subtle. When comparing character design, however, the difference is far more pronounced (see image series, Figure 2.16, Chapter Two). Such disparity is evident not only in the appearance of the characters, but also in the way they are performed, moved and animated. For example, in terms of body movement, facial expression

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<sup>229</sup> The nuts and rivets are proportionately significantly larger than in reality; this method of constructing machinery and centrality of the theme of gadgetry/machine became the stamp of Nick Park/Aardman fiction films from the *Wallace and Gromit* series onwards.

and lip-synching the main characters in *Going Equipped* and *On Probation* resemble 'real' men so closely that they seem to be based on live-action performances by actual people. Instead of approximating human traits and behaviour as in cartoons they attempt to 'replicate' them. In *War Story*, on the other hand, the man and his family are cartoon characters, with exaggerated cartoonish traits and behaviour<sup>230</sup>.

The representation of animals in flashback image is to a great extent inspired by the same logic; the cat, dog, and coalman's horse are seen as stylised versions of real animals. The horse, though, is represented more like a real, rather than a cartoon animal and also does not play a major role in the story. Its hoof and head are seen in only one instance, as part of a series of close-ups that mark the coalman's arrival<sup>231</sup>. In many scenes, even the cat and the dog display only typical animal behaviour. The dog, however, is at times anthropomorphised, most notably when it stands on its hind legs against the wall to avoid the man's feet; its gesture of relief when it escapes harm seems very human and much like a coded cartoon performance. Later, after being trampled by the man, the dog is again shown in a comic scene standing on its hind legs with a helmet on its head. It copies the actions of its master who puts on a helmet before going out to view the night sky during air raids<sup>232</sup>.

The comic and exaggerated world of the man's flashback memories is established from the outset. In an early scene, he is seen 'sleep-walking' home, eyes closed and dragging his body in an exaggeratedly rhythmic way. His voice over the scene describes his return, tired, from night shift. He opens the front door, tramples the dog and walks to the staircase where his wife, another cartoonish character in a gas mask, is cleaning the stairs. In this low-angle POV shot, the door swings open, and the dog's delight at his master's return is captured as the camera 'looks'

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<sup>230</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, the humans in cartoons are characterised by elements of realism alongside exaggerated and stylised traits that stress certain aspects of their appearance.

<sup>231</sup> The coalman's arrival is heralded by a series of fast cuts among a few close shots: the wheel of his cart coming into view, a pair of feet alighting from the horse, hands pulling the heavy sack off the cart, the head of the neighing horse and so on – see the breakdown of sound and image in the film in appendix 4.

<sup>232</sup> As is the cat's exaggerated panic and superfast escape to the street at the arrival of the coalman.

down. Later, it moves into the corridor accompanied by a yelp that suggests that the dog has been hurt. In a long shot the man walks upstairs, right over his wife and past a background of framed pictures of several 'dead dogs' on the wall. The world of the man's past is established as a comical, gag-oriented one, in which there is a deliberate play on the information received from his speech. The flashback imagery suggests that after night shift he was so tired that he trod on and accidentally killed several dogs; the pictures of dogs in funny situations suggest how each has been killed. Such violence is typical of, and also in effect acceptable in, a cartoon world in which physical harm is contextualised in a fictional framework. Later when the man goes upstairs, his sleeping reflection remains in the mirror long after he has finished brushing his teeth.

Exaggeration continues throughout the flashback images, from the way the man snores in his sleep with his moustache flying up and down to the way he is woken up each time by the coalman's noises. In one instance, the man and the cat sleeping beside him jump to an unbelievable height, and then twist round each other and the blanket. This comic situation resembles a typical cartoon gag in which little can be seen clearly; the gag is shown very fast and with 'action' lines. Later, hyperbole peaks when the man 'wakes' to find three German soldiers, one recognisably Adolf Hitler, by the bed. The night visitors turn on the light, look at each other and the man, then turn off the light and hide beneath the bed. The man hides under a blanket.

In these flashbacks, space is treated in a very different way from films such as *Going Equipped*, *Late Edition* or *On Probation*. In these, space is treated like a normal cinematic, live-action one in which nothing unusual or physically impossible takes place. One way in which the spatiotemporal continuity of the physical space in *War Story* is disrupted is via the visual gag that depicts the man's nightmare simultaneously in the room where he is 'actually' sleeping. Such mixed-up space is intrinsic

to fictional modes of animation and cartoon, as remarked by Wells<sup>233</sup>. Yet the whole section that depicts the man's wedding and first home is full of such exaggerations and cartoonish/non-realistic treatment of space. In this section, the cartoon gags and exaggeration take over the action; the man's words become mere vehicles by which the visual jokes are delivered, rather than conveying any 'deeper' understanding.

The absence of dialogue, mime performance and the many comic visual events that are not necessarily confirmed by the voiceover makes the tone of the film resemble Fritz Freleng's *Pink Panther* animated cartoons of the 1960s. One scene that relates to the man's wedding seems to be borrowed entirely from a *Pink Panther* short: In this scene, the bride and groom are first shown in a room, the whole picture in black and white, and they later enter a room that is in colour. The curtains and a picture on the wall are at a crazy angle, and the man explains that the house was on a slant. As the bride tries to straighten the picture on the wall, the camera tracks back; the whole scene becomes an image 'framed' in another picture frame. This frame is also at a crazy angle, and a pair of hands appears on the screen to straighten it. After a moment of silence<sup>234</sup>, bride and groom slide through the door and out of sight in a comical, cartoon manner, arms in the air. This resembles a gag in which the *Pink Panther* tries to correct a picture of a ship on the wall, and makes the water overflow from the frame. In this scene the house and street are shown from the vantage point of a vertical 'cut'; the two rooms are shown side-on in a long shot, revealing the cracks in their walls and part of the 'street', itself at a 45-degree angle to the house. The whole image is seen on top of the mine workings the man is describing. Lights emerge from the darkness beneath, then two miners wearing safety helmets to which the lights are attached. A black patch begins to move from left to right on the screen, erasing the previous image; it is in fact the hand that removed the picture frame, as a paler rectangle and

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<sup>233</sup> Obviously such unrealistic use of space can also be seen in live-action films, but these are normally either 'dream' scenes or in fantasy, sci-fi or horror films, with a very high fictive index.

<sup>234</sup> This waiting silence is a cartoon convention known as 'anticipation' in which the accident happens after a slight pause that creates suspense and emphasises its importance. It may be taken to represent the time that it takes the character to 'realise' the incident is taking place.

picture hook can be seen on the wall beneath. The whole scene seems to represent a past memory in the shape of a wedding photograph framed on the wall.

The remainder of this section comprises visual jokes relating to the sloping house. The wife brings the man's meal, scaling the steep gradient of the floor and opening the door with difficulty. The plate's contents lurch perilously, and the man wedges it level using a knife and salt-cellar. He also describes how the slant of the house made the contents of the coalhouse spill out, so they had to 'shovel it back'. As the coalman makes his delivery, the coal is seen sliding back into the hallway, filling the whole frame and sweeping away the coalman. The man also describes the difficulty of taking baths when all the water ran to one end. The antiquated geyser is shown in an exaggeratedly comic way, gushing hot water and steam before disgorging a narrow stream of water at a 45-degree angle.

In the final flashback, the man describes an incident during an air raid when the family sheltered in the coalhouse. His words are matter of fact, but are translated into surreal images spiced with cartoon exaggeration and situation comedy. The 'trampled dog' gag is repeated; the mother-in-law is shown wearing a saucepan as a safety helmet, and furiously knitting a huge pile of baby clothes. As the man's voice explains how everyone sat on his lap, the humour is enhanced by images from the man's point of view of the mother-in-law's rear filling the frame to exaggerate her size as she sits on his lap; her knitting needles poking his eyes, and the dog buried under the coal heap.

In short, the flashback imagery can be seen as a typical fictional animated story, and imagined as a complete narrative distinct from the present time interview scenes. The flashbacks, which make up almost two-thirds of the film's imagery, have a life of their own, whereas in the previous two films, the paratextual imagery or illustrative pictures serve as a supplement to the 'main' body of the film.

In terms of narrative structure, the flashback section departs from conventional live-action interview form. The illustrative images contain no documentary element; they do not use any archival footage in live-action or. They are also, not of an observational style to suggest that they are 'home recorded' films. No attempt is made to hide the film's cartoon composition, or the fictional nature of its visual imagery; the characters are obviously made from clay that carries the fingerprint of the animator. The space is a multifunctional one in which virtually anything may happen, and the story is told silently, with the clay characters 'acting' rather than speaking. The frequent use of point-of-view shots and other fictional codes of editing to reveal the story, aided by 'decoupage', as used for the coalman's arrival and explained in footnote 5, basically associate the film's narrative with that of conventional fictional animation.

## **A Hybrid Interview: Fictional Realism**

Taken as a whole, the film's formal structure may be regarded as having a more fictional than documentary make-up. There is nothing unusual about a fictional live-action film in which a narrator tells a story while the viewer is shown images of the past that represent an autonomous story. Many of these films, however, provide points of reference in which the narrator's voice is heard over the images, or there is some return to the present and the initial settings. In terms of stylistic formation, it might be said that *War Story* is more like a parody of a fictional film than a documentary interview; however, the 'interview' situation of the film is emphasised from the start, by depicting the man as a talking head, and an address to off-screen space implying that the man is being interviewed<sup>235</sup>.

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<sup>235</sup> This claim is made only on the basis of the film's visual aesthetic. The real interview soundtrack further informs the viewer of the non-fictional nature of the 'story', however fictionally depicted. The importance of the soundtrack will be explored later in the chapter.

The film opens with a monochrome image of an aircraft. In the first flashback image the man is shown under the same aircraft inflating its front tyre with a standard bicycle pump. This establishing shot seems to function as a hint that any preconceptions about the nature of war movies will be challenged and re-adjusted. Later the man is seen against a dark background, cheerfully demanding the attention of an unseen person: 'No, listen...no I got to tell you this...'. Immediately afterwards, the viewer is shown amusing images of a cartoonish past, and the man in comic situations. This seems significant when compared to the mood established by the opening scene of *Going Equipped*, which features a rainy night, a silent dark room, and a man's voice breaking the silence in a gloomy, understated tone.

The characters' performances in flashback scenes are in fact inspired by sources of comedy in the live-action mode – mime, situation comedy of Buster Keaton, slap-stick genre, and Charlie Chaplin silent films – rather than more realistic modes of performances in live-action. As Norman Klein (1993:2) has shown, such borrowings date back to when silent cartoon characters were inspired by live performances as gag-oriented short animations. Later borrowings came from live-action silent films, mainly in comic modes as previously discussed, which were themselves influenced by theatre, circus and other live performances. The language of cartoons (i.e. the US short cartoon) has therefore been established since early times as heavily influenced by comic modes of live-action. The aesthetics of what is known as cartoon in its many forms, as discussed in Chapter Two, is still of a hybrid nature, verging on both the fictional modes of live-action and the exaggerated, comic logic of early animated forms<sup>236</sup>. In this regard, the type of aesthetics in the flashback episodes in *War Story* is closer to certain modes of cartoon such as the cool, silent comedies of *Pink Panther* films as mentioned earlier.

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<sup>236</sup> For instance, when the cat panics and escapes into the street, or when the dog is shown in 'trampling' gags. Elsewhere, when the man comes to the living room to tell his wife and mother-in-law to take shelter, he takes the dog under his arm and 'zooms off' the frame. Later, he is seen near the coalhouse door, first throwing the dog into the hole and then holding on to his hat and 'jumping' into the coalhouse, again in a manner seen in cartoons. The mother-in-law's bottom as a huge black 'thing' in a POV shot fills the whole frame to suggest that she had to sit on the man's lap. These are all examples of cartoonish borrowings and exaggerations typical of cartoons.

The comic interpretation of the man's story is also implemented within the conscious yet silent narrative of flashback visuals, in which far more happens than proposed by the spoken narrative. This 'independent' story is told mostly by specific use of the narrative codes of fiction film and clever juxtaposition of single shots, to imply certain meanings absent from the original story<sup>237</sup>. The most obvious example is the use of point of view shots in the 'coming home' scene. In this, a medium shot of the man moving slowly towards his house switches to a point of view shot of him entering it. The door swings open, the camera looks down at the dog wagging its tail, and then moves inside the house to show the dog's scared face as the camera (the man) walks over it. The POV then cuts to a 'normal' shot in which the man is seen crawling upstairs. This scene is apparently included to 'depict' the man's experience in a way that situates the viewer momentarily in his place. It is rapidly supplanted by the comic gag of the trampled dog, thereby impeding the function of the POV as a channel to the man's world.

As a result, the interview episodes represent a neutral depiction of genuine, non-fictional everyday life, hybridised with an overtly fictional, comical and cartoon-like account of the past. Vitality, this past offers the man's words almost verbatim, and the extra/fictional/comic events do not detract from its 'reality'. The flashbacks add little to the information provided by the soundtrack, they simply visualise it. In terms of paratextual imagery they do not offer an oppositional account of the reality given by the soundtrack, even though many events are shown in the form of gags outside the main narrative. The very 'real' nature of the soundtrack dilutes the effect of the fictional visual forms; for example, the viewer knows that the house was slanted, but is aware that the visual depiction is exaggerated. Thus, the visual gags are benign companions of reality; despite their excesses, they add a humorous flavour to the tale of a mundane rather than an eventful or spectacular past. They are not there to 'distort' reality or influence the viewer's attitude to reality; they

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<sup>237</sup> The coalman's arrival is a good example of such editing.

are so unbelievable and funny that they can only be taken as jokes, with more or less ironic implications. Consequently, they barely affect the reality index of the man's speech or alter its context.

It is true that the 'content' of the man's story, although evidently about a serious subject, is unexciting and told in a frivolous rather than a sad or sombre manner. Unlike some of the films in the corpus, the content contains no significant element of social criticism. The seriousness of what must have been a frightening and dangerous situation is defused by its comic treatment. Closer examination might, however, suggest that the stress of the man's situation is revealed by the exaggeration of events such as his troubled sleep after a night shift. The man's final remarks about their time in the coalhouse comment on the discomfort of the situation, but in an uncomplaining, almost flippant way: '*...and I tell you, it was not like fun and games to be sitting on coal, "It's agony, Ivy", I said, "agony, Ivy"*'. It can be said, then, that the seriousness of the reality is hidden in the man's verbal reminiscences, in the very British manner of making light of a difficult situation.

Hence, in certain cases, the use of parody works as a subversive tool to highlight 'deeper' realities that are not overtly told by the film's light-hearted narrative. The use of theme music from heroic war movies in the opening title initially destabilises the viewer's expectations, suggesting that a typical war movie will follow. It may be seen as a wry comment on assumptions that war stories should feature epic adventures and heroes, and suggest that the story of an ordinary worker deserves as much attention as the heroes of mainstream fictional film. The film has none of the ingredients of a typical war story: no actual war, no bombing or violence, no overt heroism. Yet the story of an ordinary man who, like many, was part of a 'petty' history of war closes with epic closing music. This may be read in an ironic way, suggesting that heroism is also associated with men and women who survived the war and continued to live their 'ordinary' lives. Such a kind of rhetoric is not new in British cinema; for instance, Humphrey Jennings' *Listen to Britain* (1942) openly promoted a similar polemic during the years of WWII.

Examination of the soundtrack reveals many fictional uses of sound effects and music. The theme music borrowed from heroic war movies used for the opening and closing titles is a departure from the total avoidance of music in previous films apart from *Confessions...* There are also other instances; 'marching' music on the radio during the air raid; church bells ringing on the man's wedding day; the many fictional sound effects that accompany flashback events. The man's voice, Bristol accent and banal anecdotes, however, establish his story in a very specific context: for the British viewer, this is a typical British pensioner's yarn about the war.

The use of fictional sound effects and music in *War Story* goes beyond the 'typifying' effects used in earlier films such as *Going Equipped* or *On Probation*. This fictional sound actively helps to build the world of the man's past in flashback memories. As opposed to the more individualistic nostalgia in *Going Equipped*, these sound effects and particularly the music used are drawn from the shared bank of public memory. The 'marching' music heard on the radio during the air raid is reminiscent of a very specific past in wartime Britain. By the same token, the opening and closing title music is unmistakably a 'war movie' theme, which builds on a nostalgic impulse of a certain era and/or film genre. These nostalgic references directly address a specific historical and geographical context that is shared by members of the British public who can either remember those days or are familiar with its 'images' from media such as war movie genres and television programmes.

The world portrayed in flashback visual imagery is also very specific; it faithfully and believably illustrates a typical household in 1940s Britain with minute attention to detail. The coalhouse, the geyser, the clothing worn by the man and his family, their pets and the depictions of the man's workplace, colleagues and the aircraft combine to build a picture of a typical situation. It may be said that the whole setting is designed to mediate 'Britishness' in its mundane form and promote nostalgia for the

Good Old Days that might be remembered by the British nation<sup>238</sup>. From this perspective, nostalgia becomes a dynamic part of the film, which is predominantly represented in a parodic manner. The conscious use of a classical war movie titling, which is nevertheless a parodic remake of such imagery, promotes a sense of 'past-ness' close to that identified by Jameson as a 'nostalgia film', as do the black and white image of the aeroplane and the old-fashioned typeface used for the titles. The kind of nostalgia at work in this film, which draws on popular wartime icons with reference to war movies and genres rather than more individualistic accounts of the war resonate the Jamesonian model. Despite this, the comical or parodic undertone present in the flashback images removes the film from 'blank parody' as seen by Jameson. The parodic impulses in this film become vehicles to a past that is not glamorous or spectacular. Its parodic borrowings, though not as politically interrogating and sharp-edged as in Hutcheon's examples of postmodern texts, still penetrate and reach beyond the surface of mundane reality. As a result, a conflict is created between the man's real memories and their comical/cartoon depiction. He is shown as an interviewee, yet his stories are illustrated in an excessive way. A mode of representation associated with seriousness and 'sobriety' (Nichols, 1991:3) is accompanied by cartoon aesthetics synonymous with exaggeration, comedy and non-realism. The interview, flashbacks and behind the scenes shots are all created in the clay/puppet medium, which relates to the complex operation of realism in 3D animation. Different aspects of realism are brought into play by simulating conventions of three modes of representation: the live-action talking-head interview, cartoon aesthetics, and live-action 'behind-the-scenes' footage. These three levels of 'reality' create a network of readings that relate to its 'relative' nature, depending on its position in the film's signifying system.

Hence, the documentary realism of the film does not derive from either side of the story in isolation. The authenticity of the man's story, apart from the acoustic reference, arises from such fiction/reality tensions.

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<sup>238</sup> Obviously, the man in his 'present' time and especially when seen in his living room with the interviewer, is also depicted as typical British subject in a British house.

While in *Going Equipped* both imagery and the soundtrack ally to create a seamless realistic simulation of the physical world, here they diverge. As discussed earlier, but for the 'talking-head' present time images, the film's imagery could easily have been read as a completely fictional story. Hence, the documentary nature of the film established from the outset, plus the way that interview mode is interspersed with fictional flashback, constantly reinforce the tension. The incorporation of the self-reflexive 'behind the scenes' episode further stresses the separation of these two worlds, which are conversely frame-by-frame constructions. Reality is not conveyed by intensified representation, as in *Going Equipped*; it is rather downplayed and mixed with deliberately impossible events to prevent the viewer's immersion. Realism here is of a reflexive, non-immersive and at times subversive nature that is not emphatically implemented in the visuals. It is mediated only by an act of reflexivity, subversion and distantiation from the mundane and familiar.

## **Summary of Part Three:**

### **Re-assessing the three Realist Types: results and findings**

This section will present the major research outcomes of the study, with regard to the observations and conclusions produced by analysis of the films chosen to represent each of the three typological areas of realism.

#### **▪ Aardman Corpus Trajectory**

The case study closely deconstructed just three films, each of which was selected as the best exemplar of the formal and functional attributes of its type. As has been suggested, however, each of the ten Aardman films may be considered unique in its compositional make-up, and as such may not necessarily demonstrate all the identified characteristics of its assigned category. The aesthetic diversity of the corpus is unsurprising, in view of the creative challenge posed by using pre-recorded real-life sound as the basis for these animated films. There is nevertheless evidence of a rapid departure from the aesthetic fascinations and narrative strategies of the Collage Type, which are in fact seen only in the early film *Confessions...*, in favour of a purely seamless and observational style in succeeding works, especially *Conversation Pieces*. In some of the films of this central series, the filmmakers begin to play with the viewer by setting up a discrepancy between the story heard from the soundtrack and that seen from the imagery. In films such as *Palmy Days*, *Early Bird* and to some extent *Late Edition*, the observational pretence is broken by a departure from simulation of purely live-action effect to the inclusion of 'animation' effects in either surrealistic/fantastic or cartoon spectacles. Yet, in the three sound-based films of the 1989 *Lip Synch* series, both extremes of approach may be seen: while *Going Equipped* demonstrates Aardman's 'live-action-esque' effect in both its clay puppet animation and its flashback footage, *War Story* and *Creature Comforts* explicitly exhibit cartoon effects and logic, albeit in different ways.

The trajectory of these ten films from 1978 to 1989 may be meaningfully examined in terms of Scott Lash's notion of discourse versus figure, as discussed in Chapter Four, and his distinctive typology of modernist and postmodernist cinema<sup>239</sup> (Lash, 1988: 312-14). The association of *Confessions...* with modernist discourses of representation and specifically modernist cinema was demonstrated in the textual analysis. It was argued that in its depiction of the women's conversation, the film adopts a non-seamless narrative, formalistic collage and a disruptive narrative strategy. In the next two films made on the same sound-based principle, this specific schema is replaced by a non-interventionist narrative style. Succeeding films of the Factual Type, which copy and borrow from live-action documentary styles and have an immersive and highly realistic aesthetic, incorporate an implicit pretence of transparency that is nevertheless explicitly animated. It may therefore be said that the general aesthetic moved from modernist to postmodernist, and from being predominantly discursive to more figurative. This does not imply that imagery takes precedence in all these films, or that meaning is totally sacrificed; the documentary nature of soundtrack entails that the verbal content heavily determines the imagery, so that in most of the films it is the primary focus. At the same time, the alliance of an animated image and a strong non-fictional sound (conversation) sets up a paradox: the soundtrack projects itself, and inevitably brings itself to the surface. It therefore prevents the viewer's attention from being immersed in the excessively realistic imagery, whereas the voices and sounds in a 'normal' live-action film have an organic relationship with the image and do not contradict each other.

In those films which were termed Factual Type, therefore, the emphasis is not only on image but also on the exchange between image and soundtrack content. The ontological discrepancy between the *realist* sound and the *realistic* image is, however, minimised by aiming them in

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<sup>239</sup> It is important to note that these films are assigned to Lash's categories in an approximate rather than dogmatic way, that makes sense only within the specific comparative framework of this thesis. None is able to demonstrate an array of discursive or figurative qualities as definitively as Lash's examples, which are of a live-action pedigree. For this reason, the total abandonment or otherwise of a discursive schema cannot be declared with certainty even in the most fictional category.

similar directions in narrating literally the same thing. This is why, in the judgment of this thesis, they seem to work in tandem to depict a real situation in real life that is mainly socially critical. Thus, while moving away from the sheer discursiveness of a modernist model, Factual Type films seem to hover between discourse and figure: they strongly draw attention to their imagery as an excessively animated construct while effectively negotiating their social content. They fit more comfortably into the category of 'transgressive postmodern cinema' in which the 'fixed nature of reality' is interrogated via the process of 'de-differentiation', as shown by Lash (1988: 329). Beyond problematising representation, these films especially in their excessively realistic and immersive strategies problematise the real itself. Hence the position of the spectator encountering these films is ambiguous and undefined; the intense verisimilitude of the world depicted to the actual world is only destabilised by the soundtrack which is simply 'real' in its unintelligible and non-coded nature, recorded from a real situation. Most of the films represent the uneasy union of reality and realistic-ness or even illusionism; as such, they contradict the rituals of conventional animated film, and may be viewed as prototypes of transgressive cinema, which may perhaps more appropriately be termed transgressive animation.

Playfulness and spectacular effects gradually begin to creep into the visual narrative of films such as *Palmy Days* and *Early Bird*, taking them closer to more conventional animation. The visual narrative and the 'reality' heard from the soundtrack operate on different lines; the emphasis is rather on their divergence as a comic and spectacular effect. No attempt is made to hide this from the viewer or to leave it as a disguised and unacknowledged fact, so the ontological disagreement between reality and realistic-ness becomes less of an issue<sup>240</sup>. Again,

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<sup>240</sup> In *Palmy Days*, for instance, the content and its true meaning is submerged in imagery that shows a different and at times overtly fictionalised account. In *War Story*, a further challenge is presented. The information heard from the soundtrack is banal in the extreme, so Aardman encountered the challenge of inspiring something visually more entertaining and appealing to the viewer. The solution seems to have been the use of cartoon aesthetics: the question is no longer how the real soundtrack is mediated by the story, but rather how it lends itself to cartoon gags and visual jokes. The man's words become the vehicle by which the initial settings are established, but in no way affect 'how' that story is told. The documentary format is adopted only so that it may be subverted by events of a type that do not normally occur in an interview or flashback memory scene. Similarly, the anthropomorphised animals in *Creature Comforts* do not draw attention to the situation of the 'real'

figural concerns transcend discursive accounts and are at times used at the expense of reality itself. The entertainment aspect is paramount, and meaning is not given much opportunity to unravel.

It may therefore be concluded that Collage Type films, of which there is only one example, adopt a modernist representational strategy, maintaining a discursive account of the story by strategies of bricolage, distanciation and an anti-realistic narrative, as demonstrated in Chapter Seven. Films of Factual Type, though they reveal an increasing preoccupation with immersive, realistic aesthetics and are thus generally closer to postmodern cinema, place the viewer in an unfixed position where a straightforward and fixed meaning cannot be conveniently read. Finally, films of Fictional Type seem to display more of the traits of spectacular mainstream postmodern cinema, as identified by Lash, in that they become image-centred and place spectacle before content. In favouring style over narrative or image over content, they also seem to depart from the social realist text evident in early examples of Collage and Factual Types, and become less concerned with arbitrating a social content<sup>241</sup>.

It is worth noting that while Factual Type films resemble Jameson's idea of pastiche in terms of formal and stylistic concerns, their eventual function is closer to Hutcheon's idea of postmodern ironic borrowing. In their excessive simulation of the observational mode, films such as *Going Equipped* or *On Probation* raise serious questions about the representation of the past, the realism of the objective record and above all the mode of representation they copy, which is supposed to be the most objective document of a real event. They seem to revisit and

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subjects, though they do eventually mediate the content of the actual speech of a specific group of British people in intended contexts.

<sup>241</sup> This is an interesting controversy: in films of Factual Type the obsessively lifelike representation of the world and characters in a neutral manner creates a greater spectacular effect than the 'animation effect' of characters and events in *War Story* or *Creature Comforts*. The traditional view of puppet animation is that puppets and cartoon characters may do extraordinary things and be seen in fantastic events without surprising the viewer. However, an animated film that attempts to efface its animated-ness and resemble a live-action version of itself certainly creates a stunning effect for the viewer. For this reason, Factual Type films are considered image-centred, in that while they draw on human situations and have a social content, they are obsessed with extreme verisimilitude and surface accuracy.

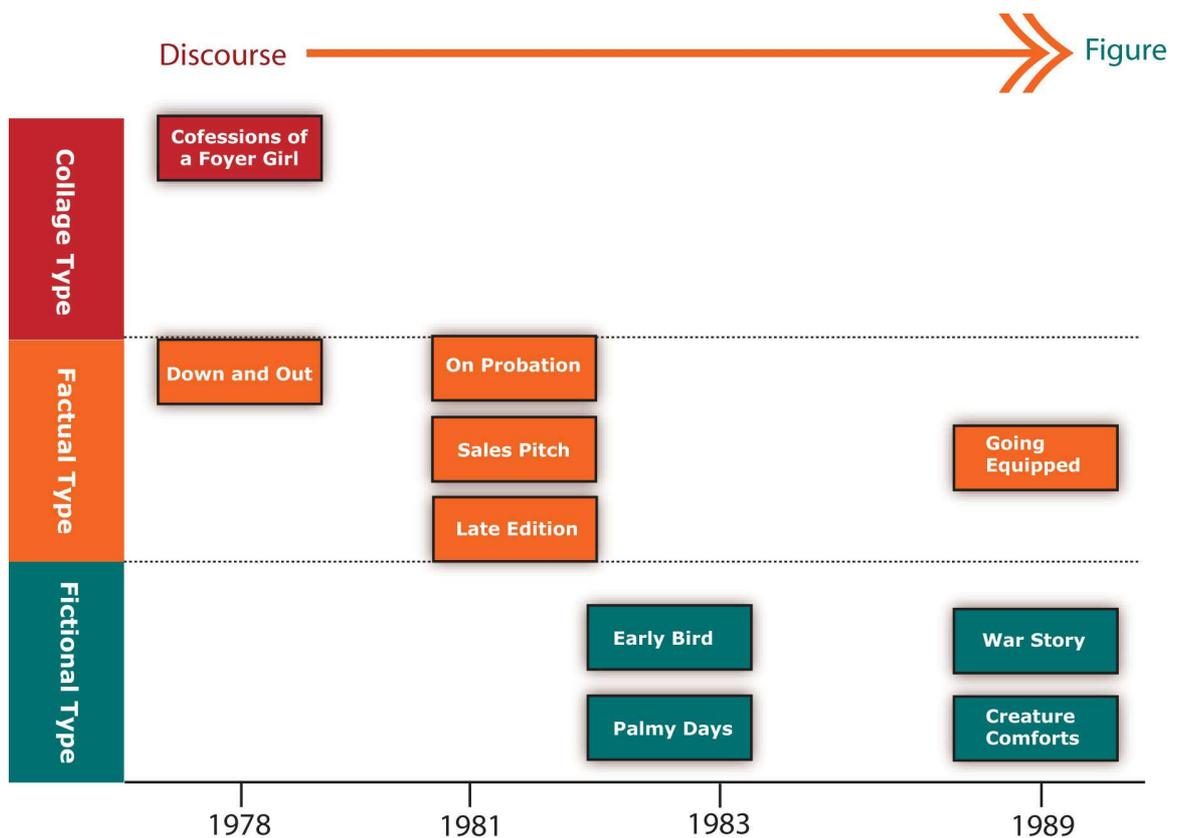
subvert live-action modes as entirely constructs; they also, in juxtaposing constructed imagery with a real-life soundtrack, throw doubt on the concept of the 'real' and its representation. Thus they not only interrogate the constructed nature of live-action realism, but also demonstrate the relativity of the notion of reality depending on what other 'realities' **is** it is compared to or contrasted with. The notion of realism in the Factual Type films is interrogated and destabilised, but ultimately redeemed as the acknowledgement of such constructed-ness; a resemblance pretence which is still able to surpass the burden of representation and penetrate the realistic form to let the reality shine through.

Another observation with regard to trajectory is the gradual transformation of the soundtrack not only from direct sound to interview, but also from more objective, non-interventionist approaches to sound gathering to more subjective and manipulated strategies. This change in 'nature' of the soundtrack also accords with the films' general movement from serious tones and socially critical voices to more light-hearted and banal in terms of content.

Figure 9.1 suggests a pattern for the gradual transformation of these films from a discursive to figurative scheme. As the diagram shows, at certain times these different tendencies have coexisted in films made at roughly the same time<sup>242</sup>.

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<sup>242</sup> The progressive changes that may be seen in terms of more figurative approaches to the formal make-up of *Conversation Pieces* films may be explained by the fact that the series was made over three years (1981-3).



**Figure 9.1 Trajectory of Aardman films from discursive to figurative**

- **Simulational Realism: the re-mediated observation**

As suggested in Chapter Three, all the Aardman films in question may be seen generally as poetic, in that that their animated aesthetic is effectively foregrounded in contrast to their unusually non-fictional soundtrack. In the films of Factual Type, however, a very specific representational scheme may be identified as the absolute realist strategy termed simulational realism<sup>243</sup>. Reality, observation and the real as recorded, observed and 'revealed' by the camera are simultaneously emphasised, interrogated, subverted and thus re-examined and re-visited. It is not suggested that a real content might only have been mediated using such a realistic aesthetic; rather that the association between cinematic stylistics and the live-action camera's ability to 'record

<sup>243</sup> Taken to mean the serious depiction of a socially real event created by means of excessively realistic imagery and a close mimicking of a narrative style associated with spontaneity and realism.

and reveal' physical reality objectively is put to the test in this 're-mediated observation'. The use of animation, which is known for functions exactly opposed to such rhetoric, seems to be an ironic interrogation of presumptions that each representational medium is 'meant' for a specific function. In this respect, the thesis of medium specificity is refuted.

Bolter and Grusin's (2000) notion of remediation seems to find deeper meaning here. A new medium that copies or pretends to be another provokes intense scrutiny and re-thinking about both the old and the new media. Their 'possibilities', potentialities and shared characteristics are also revealed by the double logic of remediation as immediacy and hypermediacy in creating a live-action-esque animation. It may be argued that whenever a new medium or sub-medium is created within, and based on borrowings and copying of, an existing technique or medium, the initial medium expands and finds new functions *in* and suggested *by* the new one. In the Aardman corpus, both 3D animation and live-action documentary are established media; Aardman's simulational Factual Type takes its specific aesthetic qualities from the principles of both, thus entering a dialogue with and re-mediating both<sup>244</sup>. It seems, then, that a new sub-medium has been created. Hybridity finds a new edge here: the specificities of two media are blended in a way that has affinities with both yet is overtly neither. In this hybrid, the animated and live-action medium are almost balanced, save for a minuscule bias towards animation.

Based on such reasoning, this thesis would claim that Aardman's Factual Type film, fully resolved in *Going Equipped*, demonstrates clearly that the stop-motion animation camera is capable of an 'observational' function akin to the live-action cinematographic camera, albeit with some reservations. The stop-motion camera can focus on objects and spaces in close-up, creating moods and implying meaning by various camera movements, lighting and framing. It can also offer an observational site

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<sup>244</sup> At first sight, however, the apparent emphasis on the concealment of animation and projection of live-action seems to remediate live-action in animation more straightforwardly rather than *vice versa*.

using long takes and shots of deeply-staged settings. It has been shown that in both media the imagery may be considered ontologically 'cinematographic', because of the material reality of the profilmic space and the identical method of inscribing it. Thus, when the two ontologically real worlds of live-action and 3D animation meet in the world of spaces, textures and inanimate objects, the camera is able to record non-living spaces, objects and movements on a frame-by-frame basis much as in live-action film. This was discussed with regard to the 'observing' role of the camera in *Going Equipped*, in terms of the two types of imagery employed: the camera moving within the three-dimensional space to focus on the specific spatial qualities of the setting, or showing the world of man's memories as spaces filled with objects and hardly any human presence.

Further, with regard to puppets as the most artificial element of 3D animation, the performance of a puppet animated to behave like a human being in a subtle and expressive way may be 'observed', recorded and brought to attention by the camera to reveal deeper and more intense meanings. This note may be pedantic, since it is impossible to compare this function of 3D animation directly with the observed behaviour and performance of real people in either fictional or non-fictional contexts. A puppet may be animated virtually to show human affections and emotions very convincingly; these emotions may be recorded and observed and revealed simply by a stop-motion camera. Thus, puppet realism seems to be a specific feature of the 3D puppet medium, in that only in puppet animation may such heightened realism of human behaviour and codes of body language be so expressively and credibly exhibited. By comparison, in 2D drawn animations the most expressive human acts and expressions are only drawn frame by frame on paper, cel or other 2D bases.

It is not suggested that 3D animation is a more effective way of showing realities or even all aspects of human behaviour, since this ability is not restricted to a realistic form or style. A simple 2D animation may reflect the intricacies of human behaviour and mind in less than literal ways. Yet

3D animation, in its ability to show physical reality and human behaviour, seems most closely acquainted with the many genres and modes of live-action film. In short, the 3D animation medium is more capable of being realistic than the 2D animation medium, in that it is best able to show some aspects of physical, material reality as they might look like in reality. It might be said that while not all categories of reality need a literal or excessively realistic representation, for example *noumenal* realities and the worlds of imagination, fantasy, abstraction and metaphorical meaning, the *phenomenal* realities or some aspects of them may be most efficiently demonstrated in 3D animation. This quality, which may be termed the 'physicality' and the 'object-ness' of the real, is most effectively brought to attention in 3D and particularly puppet animation. Films that best exemplify such propensities and aptitudes in terms of puppet performance include *Going Equipped* or many of Barry Purves' groundbreaking films including *Screen Play* that were made within a medium traditionally associated with 'puppets as puppets'<sup>245</sup>.

- **Simulational Realism as an Alternative to Hyper-Realism**

A major finding of the study of realism in the Aardman corpus is this thesis' proposal of 'simulational realism' as a mode or a formal peak of realism, as opposed to what Paul Wells has identified as hyper-realist aesthetics in the likes of Disney animation. A full-blown model for this kind of excessively realist/realistic form in 3D animation was identified in the films of the Factual Type and the way they exemplified such simulational paradigms. Several aspects of this approach distinguish it from the Disney-type of hyper-realist animation. Firstly, simulational animation is a close replica of a real event in the 3D medium, as if recorded in live-action mode in fictional or non-fictional formats. For this

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<sup>245</sup> The less realistic yet expressive puppets in Quay Brothers films also show how puppets can offer a site of observation of human behaviour and temperament. *Street of Crocodiles* (1986) places under scrutiny the puppet-ness of old puppets, broken dolls and other paraphernalia that come to life and their uncannily human behaviour, rather than a straightforward performance of puppets as live-action characters. Even in this different kind of puppet performance, it may be argued that the physicality and object-ness of the real is a crucial element of the efficacy of the performance of the puppets and the world they inhabit and interact with.

reason, it attempts to recreate a *neutral* depiction of that event without the interference of the exaggeration and abstraction common to hyper-realist animation. Any exaggerated or spectacular event that takes place in a simulational animation is thus rooted in the nature of the event itself as imagined in reality, rather than created using codes and conventions specific to animation. This reality may be of a spontaneous, documentary nature, or a performed reality in the shape of a fictional live-action narrative film or a live performance as in a play or live television programme. In this model, puppets should look like real people as they looked in an actual event, even if those people were performing in non-realist, fictional or even fantastic contexts. In *Screenplay*<sup>246</sup>, therefore, the whole world of a Kabuki theatre performance is recreated point-to-point, while in *On Probation* a real conversation between an ex-convict and probation authorities in the presence of onlookers is replicated. In the former, the spectacular theatrical effects belong to the original form that is being copied and simulated and animation adds nothing. The rotating stage that is changed before the viewers' eyes, and the symbolic representation of the act of murder by a 'fountain of blood' made from coloured fabric are 'simulated' point by point<sup>247</sup>. Similarly, the probation office and its everyday events are replicated in the same way as they might have been in a 'fly-on-the-wall' live-action documentary.

For this reason, in opposition to hyper-realism, this thesis defines a specific type of simulational animation which is epitomised in the films of the Factual Type, yet also present to some degree in the other films of the corpus. In hyper-realist animation, the formal elements hybridise exaggerated, abstracted, or caricaturised accounts of reality with less-abstracted and more naturalistic copies of real-life and certain codes and

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<sup>246</sup> An analysis of this film in relation to the notion of simulational realism was offered in Chapter Two.

<sup>247</sup> It is of course arguable that the cinematographic narrative, especially the latter part (as discussed in Chapter Two) does not comply totally with the simulation model. Though such a theatrical performance may be filmed and screened for re-screening on TV or elsewhere, the final section is the result of the filmmaker's overt creation of a different type of narrative intended to subvert the traditional conventions of Kabuki theatre. This would not have been the case with a simple live-action record of a live performance. In other words, in this film or Purves' opera-based film *Rigoletto* (1993), the style of 'filming' the event, the use of camera angles and movements and editing or all cinematographic narrative strategies is more complex and spectacular than in a sheer neutral record of such a performance in real life.

conventions of cinematographic narration. In this respect, the visual and aural elements of the film do not replicate reality exactly; they are 'approximated' – in Wells's term – to their intended function. Formal elements such as character design, action and movement, the world depicted and its events or narrative structure are selectively emphasised and exaggerated, or downplayed or ignored. As such, the exaggerated features and movements of a character in this kind of animation are not found in real life events, whether fictional or non-fictional, observed or performed. This is different from simulational animation, in which all the events may be imagined to have taken place and been recorded in real life.

Simulational animation is nevertheless as constructed and illusionist as hyper-realist animation. They differ in that simulational animation draws on all the abilities of the animated medium (in this case 3D) to copy effects similar to a live-action record, or aesthetic qualities peculiar to the live-action modes copied. In this respect, simulational animation has a greater 'illusionist' index in that it pretends to be a transparent representation of a real event. In hyper-realist animation, even with all the cinematographic codes of spatiotemporal continuity and pretence of three-dimensionality, its fabricated nature is overtly manifested by the exaggeration and abstraction of character traits and movement as well as the picturesque quality of the drawn or painted medium. While explicitly abstracted from reality, hyper-realist animation appeals to the viewer because they realise certain similarities between the filmic world and reality, for example lip synch and facial expressions<sup>248</sup>.

As an example, the realistic effects created in films such as *Going Equipped* are *not* simulations of a typical interview recorded from reality. Thus, the 'original' event in live-action may be imagined only as a performed event, not a spontaneous interview<sup>249</sup>. The visual representation of the whole event is a bottom-up creation and is

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<sup>248</sup> In a film like *Mulan* (Disney, 1998) for example, the facial traits of the characters in the 2D drawn medium are simplified, though they are rendered to look physically credible or close to reality.

<sup>249</sup> These claims have been justified and discussed in the analysis of the film in Chapter Eight.

therefore fictionalised. It is, however, possible to imagine it as a live-action record of such an event, which might have been performed for the camera or might have existed only in the filmmakers' imagination. In this sense, simulation is 3D animation's ability to copy; it not only creates the spatial realism of the real world but may also resemble grainy live-action footage or other aesthetic effects peculiar to different types of film.

In contrast to hyper-realist animation, simulational animation seems to foreground its representational form by what Higson, in his discussion of 'kitchen sink film' aesthetics, has identified as 'fetishisation of certain iconographic details' (Higson, 1996: 134). In this respect, neutrality of representation is only a visual deception that disguises the process of fetishisation. In Higson's examples the drabness of everyday life in certain real settings is emphasised and fetishised to create a poetic effect that evokes the protagonist's mindset. In Aardman films of the Factual Type, however, effects that derive from a popular aesthetic tradition are reproduced in the puppet medium in detail and with extra emphasis. Some of these formal elements were detailed as the spatial consciousness and cinematographic syntax, which in effect further exemplified such fetishisation: a formal schema by which to observe and contemplate the ordinary and the mundane. In these Aardman films the unimportant, unattractive or non-spectacular becomes the focus and as such is fetishised and of a spectacular order.

#### ▪ **Modes and Approaches to Realism in Animation**

Another significant finding of this research is the identification of the various ways in which the medium of animation can engage with realism, and how any realist form of animation usually hybridises two or more of these aspects. This thesis proposes several modes or features of realism in animation:

**1 Copying the form of life/traditional mimesis:** representing reality as *the visible*, copying the formal aspects and surface appearance of physical reality, producing the closest representation of the outer world in terms of likeness and verisimilitude mainly by means of naturalism, regardless of a factual content, or a story based on realities of the social world. A very naturalistic illusion of the material world may, however, be used as a credible fantasy in non-fictional contexts as well as in most fictionalised stories and impossible events. Most mainstream animated films adopt such realistic stylistics, though they hybridise it with some exaggeration and abstraction of certain aspects of reality, as Wells's model of hyper-realist animation suggests.

**2 Copying the content of life/realism of social content:** showing the social/political/historical world and its events and inhabitants as they are in real life, and not based on fantastic, surreal or impossible stories. This mode of realism does not necessarily demand realistic stylistics, though it normally draws upon typically believable social realities. It may in itself accommodate comedic, parodic and sarcastic accounts of the social world as much as a serious engagement with them. In the case of live-action films with a social content or 'social realist cinema' of various types, both form and theme of social realities are copied and represented. This may be the case with social realist animation, as it engages with a social content that may or may not adopt a realistic style in depicting social realities. Further, the content of an animated film may be taken from factual as well as fictional events based on realities of the social world. In this respect, animated documentaries may be seen as realist in their truthfulness to an actuality using different formal strategies and stylistics, not all of which are essentially realistic.

**3 Copying other realisms/realist aesthetic effects:** animation may copy aesthetic effects of other styles or conventions of modes of representation originally understood as realist and/or realistic.

This means, for example, that animation may replicate a grainy look and an observational style of filming to simulate a visual effect reminiscent of the stylistics of a documentary film. In doing this, animation not only recreates that original effect but also re-mediate the aspects of realism initially associated with that original form. In this respect, realism is of a second order, similar to what Darley defines in his examination of the aesthetics of what he calls New Media genres. This is how, as argued in Chapter Eight, in a film like *Going Equipped* the poetic realism effect borrowed and copied is transcended from an empty formal copying to a second order of poetic-ness generated in the re-mediated medium.

**4 Copying another medium from scratch/simulational realism:** taken to an excessive level, the aesthetic copying of another medium expounded in No. 3 may be re-created in animation. This is not restricted to traditional 3D animation as other media, especially CGI, seem to have similar capabilities and obsessions, but this thesis concentrates only on this category. In this excessive level, the aesthetic effects and stylistic conventions copied in 3D animation may not in themselves be necessarily realist/realistic. Expanding the notion of simulational animation identified in certain films of the corpus, sheer simulational animation, as discussed, obliterates transparency to the point of denying that it is animation. As simulation of a live performance, even the most abstract puppet theatre represented in 3D animation as if recorded by a camera may be deemed realistic in the sense of formal copying and mimesis. In this final sense, mimesis finds a new definition: the original is something already represented, whether recorded from a real event or only imagined as such<sup>250</sup>.

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<sup>250</sup> With some reservations on the significance of such a simulational aesthetic, this category resembles Baudrillard's model of simulation and simulacrum in that the whole simulational representation is a bottom-up creation of the previously represented rather than any reality. Yet, for reasons discussed in Chapter Four, this thesis avoids identifying this category of realism in animation as an all-encompassing application of Baudrillard's notion of simulation.

**5 Hybrid realism/ mixing realisms:** finally, animation may combine two or more of these means or approaches to create novel experiences of hybrid realism exclusive to its domain. It may mimic the realism of live-action as much as the naturalism of the physical world, and may mix these with 'other' aesthetics that are not regarded fundamentally as realist. Animation, over and above formal hybridity, may hybridise different categories or 'discourses' of realism identified in the last four groups. The Aardman films under investigation are good examples of such hybrid realisms in that they elevate the formal hybridity of hyper-realist animation by engaging with the discourse of social realism in both the fiction and non-fiction/documentary categories.

## **Conclusion:**

This final chapter collates all the strands of argument from previous chapters and offers a holistic account of the thesis's aims and objectives, to show the extent to which they have been achieved. It also demonstrates its main and subsidiary findings, based on the process of research and key arguments made throughout. It will be argued that this thesis has made a number of successful contributions to the existing body of knowledge in the field of animation studies. Eventually, those potentially fruitful areas of the research – which did not find a full-blown exploration and theorisation in this research and may be pursued in further research projects – will be identified and introduced.

As a study of the nature of realism in the corpus of selected Aardman films, the main objective of this research was to investigate the multiple aspects of realism in these films. In order to undertake this, an attempt was made to identify and examine several approaches to realism in the films. The fundamental divisions of form and content realism located the diversity of the concept of realism, in these films at least, in two distinct modes. Within each of these two broad categories various dimensions and implications were explored in terms of how their implementation might have contributed to the operation of multiple realism(s) in the films' composition.

The structure of Part One was devised to cover the range of realism-related issues, from general to specific, relating to the study of the corpus. Chapter One set out to explore realism in animation as an 'umbrella' term for a host of different forms, techniques and media and therefore historically ambiguous. The problem was situated in animation's inevitable affiliation with live-action cinema, based on Noël Carroll's scrutiny and rebuttal of the thesis of 'medium specificity' (2000), to demonstrate that problems in the relationship between animation and realism centre on a specific concern: how animation copies the narrative structures and aesthetic effects of mainstream narrative live-action film,

not only by copying life but also by certain established codes and conventions of cinematographic language. It was suggested, by recourse to arguments including Yuri Lotman's discussion of the 'language' of animation (1981) that animation should be considered a quintessentially copying medium.

Examining cases for and against realism in animation, it was importantly demonstrated that the question is primarily a formal and stylistic concern. Some aspects of realism in animation, in terms of stylistics and form, may have links with the ways in which realism may be explored and addressed in other non-moving visual media, yet it has been admitted that they are also closely associated with creating the effects of what is understood as realist in live-action cinema. For this reason, this thesis addressed the question of realism in animation, as exemplified in the aesthetics of feature-length Disney animated films. Paul Wells (1998) termed these 'hyper-realist': using his argument as the yardstick by which to measure all other kinds of realism in animation, it was proposed that many types of realism within the canon of animated works, including some of the Aardman corpus, do not fit comfortably in the model.

In order to show the disparity between hyper-realism and the Aardman films at issue, this thesis therefore offered a new approach to the thesis of medium specificity and its positive implications and contributions. It has been demonstrated that the medium specificity thesis can help to illuminate areas of commonality and difference in different media, in this case animation and live-action. A by-product of scrutiny of Wells's thesis of hyper-realism and Rowley's (2005) resulting critique of it was a closer study of Disney aesthetics and their hybridity as a distinct form of realism in animation, and as opposed to the kind of realist approaches in most of the Aardman corpus. In the light of this, and with reference to Rowley's suggested categories for examining realism in 2D animated films, the breakdown of formal traits of Aardman films was identified as lingering between two poles: 2D cartoon aesthetics and live-action film. This in turn led to a vital finding of the research: locating the Aardman corpus as a category beyond traditional norms of puppet-clay animation, as actively

copying the aesthetic conventions of either 2D cartoon or live-action documentary film.

In Chapter Two, based on the medium specificity argument, a study was provided of the specificities of 3D animation, with a focus on puppet and clay animation. The categories of spatial and cinematographic realism were specified as characteristics shared by the 3D medium and live-action film, based on the theories of two major realist theories of live-action cinema, Bazin and Kracauer. Michael Frierson's study of 3D and clay animation explored and addressed spatial realism. This thesis, however, explicitly identified the category of cinematographic realism and addressed it in relation to its crucial function in the construction of realist forms and stylistics in 3D animation. The category of puppet realism was also introduced and specified as the most challenging aspect of a realist composition in 3D puppet animation, a principle not shared by live-action cinema. A major argument that resulted from this study, and contributed to this thesis's model of simulation realism, was the identification of different categories of puppets: as puppets, as cartoon characters, and significantly, as live-action characters. It was further suggested that any realism in 3D puppet animation of diverse types may be assessed using three principles that consider their representation of 'the world, the narrative and character' resulting from the three specificities of 3D animation. A final and important outcome of the study of formal specificities of 3D animation was the suggestion of the 'hybridity cube', in which the formal hybridity of any animated form of 2D and 3D may be shown in a Cartesian space consisting of the three major representational elements of narrative, world, and character located between two poles of mimesis and abstraction. Within the hybridity cube was the key observation that most animated films in this space are not located very close to either pole in all three criteria, and are thus potentially hybrid forms.

Moving to content realism, Chapter Three discussed the essential association of Aardman films to the tradition of social realism in their engagement with socially-concerned issues (Lay, 2000) and their reliance

on non-fictional soundtracks. The thesis, by discussing the films' obsessive affiliation with non-fictional and mainly documentary modes of representation (Nichols: 1991, Ward: 2005, Bruzzi: 2000), attempted to locate these films within the categories of fiction and non-fiction, and examine whether they may be regarded as examples of animated documentary (Ward: 2005, Strøm: 2003, Wells: 1997). It was argued that the ten Aardman films did not conform directly to either category due to their highly unconventional make-up. Eventually, Plantinga's 'function' theory (1997), based on his recognition of different voices of authority within documentary modes of representation was explored in relation to the assessment of these films in terms of documentary function. It was deduced that while many of the ten films display general tendencies to social realism by engaging with social problems or everyday situations, not all function as animated documentaries. Thus, the thesis demonstrated that a determining factor in gauging the 'content realism' of these films is their engagement with social realities, above and beyond their copied documentary formats.

A key finding of this chapter was the application of Higson's (1996) notion of poetic realism to Aardman films, in terms of the use of spatial settings and environments of the British social realist dramas known as 'kitchen sink films'. In certain films of the corpus, a poetic quality was identified which had a direct link to the specific uses of spatial properties of the 3D medium, *Going Equipped* being its best example. The application of Hutcheon's (1988) notion of paratextuality to the films was a novel approach to understanding of the animated documentary form and many other animated hybrids, in the light of parallel channels of narrative. As suggested, in more exhaustive explorations of the paratextuality model, animated forms such as those at issue may be defined as having major and minor narrative channels (or rather, main and marginal texts) that create a network of meaning. At times, these offer more illustration and clarification, but at others they contradict or even subvert the main discourse to the point of complete denial of the existence of a main discourse. A very specific application of the paratextual model was used in examining the three case study films, and

demonstrated further hybridity in their compositions. Nevertheless, paratextuality may be seen as opposed to what MacCabe (1985) identifies in a specific literary type of text as the 'classical realist text', in that it has a hierarchy of narrative or discourses that allow access to reality via one main discourse. In this respect, paratextuality may suggest alternative approaches to realism, as hybrid paratexts that offer a paradoxical account of reality far removed from the classical realist text's straightforward narrative and unambiguous message. The paratextuality model may offer potential for further research, especially in terms of scrutiny of and theorisation about diverse forms of animated documentary, though this could not be explored comprehensively in this research.

A different angle to the questions of hybridity and intertextuality was proposed by the question of copying in animation and specifically these films' copying and borrowings from documentary modes of live-action in a pure sense, or in some cases their integration with conventions and aesthetics effects of 2D cartoon. It was suggested that these films cannot be read as outright animations or live-action documentaries, and that to understand their significance fully, they must be seen in the light of the 'original' effects and modes they copy. This in turn informed theories of postmodern representation, including Jameson's idea of pastiche and nostalgia film (1991), Hutcheon's postmodern ironic borrowing and parodic remake (1989) and Lash's thesis of discourse versus figure (1988). Comparison of the models proposed by these theories and the ten films studied allowed the implications of hybridity of realism in films of the Aardman corpus to be envisioned as going beyond formal copying of various styles and modes of representation, or even amalgamation of realistic imagery and real/realist soundtrack. As discussed earlier in this concluding chapter, deeper understanding of films such as those under scrutiny may be derived from close examination of both the destination and the original medium or media. Reviewing Bolter and Grusin's thesis of remediation (2000) and Darley's notion of second-order realism (2000), further implications of copying and borrowing were explored in terms of a tension between the original and the copy. Thus, above and

beyond confirming that a new medium remediates an old medium or media, the nature and specificities of either can profoundly affect the ways in which such a tension may be read and interpreted. It may therefore be considered that the most substantial contribution of this thesis to the existing body of knowledge in the realm of animation studies is the idea of 'remediated observation', or how the stop-motion camera may provide intense experiences of observation and scrutiny in similar yet discrete ways by recourse to the specificities shared by the 3D medium and live-action. Further, the main outcome of reading the corpus and the hypothesis of hybrid realism in the films is the recognition of a mode of animation realism, termed 'simulational realism'. This may be considered an extension of the method of measuring realism in animation that Wells set out to establish.

The particular formula of this type of realism was reached in Part Two via close deconstruction of all films of the corpus, and the eventual typology derived from scrutiny of several realist or fictional elements in both form and content categories. While these methodological tools were tailored to the task of analysing Aardman films, they may also offer a broad approach to assessing other kinds and types of animated films in terms of realism and hybridity. The tools formulated by this thesis to understand and study realism in the corpus may prove extremely useful in analysing the aesthetics of other types of 3D animation, especially puppet and cel animation. One area of research that proved impracticable within the remit of this thesis, but offers opportunities for further investigation, involves Aardman's fictional clay-puppet films such as the *Wallace and Gromit* series. In this respect, the thesis offers a holistic account of puppets and different categories of puppets and puppet films, which may be extended to a typology of various types of puppet animation.

Another exploration of the realist form addressed in this analysis was the detailed examination of the soundtrack of these films with regard to the conventions of sound in documentary modes. In most studies of animation, the soundtrack is overshadowed by visual elements and all

but disregarded. In this thesis, however, perhaps because of the soundtrack's crucial role, the basis of 'content realism' and the eventual reading of films centred on the degree of realism in the soundtrack and more importantly how it interacted with the imagery to mediate social reality. Thus, although in these films realism was believed and shown to be of a hybrid make-up, only films that had efficiently made a connection between factual material and their visual representation eventually qualified as realist. In this sense, realism was also assumed to derive from meaning and content rather than realistic form. Interestingly enough, the films of the Aardman corpus that were ultimately deemed realist were primarily those that had also adopted excessively realistic forms of the simulation realism model.

An inclusive and in depth outcome of this study was only possible after close textual analysis of the three films representative of their realist types, summarised at the end of Part Three. A trajectory of Aardman films in question was drawn with regard to their gradual move from discursive to more figurative in the light of Lash's argument, as well as their continuing shift from a copy of realistic/live-action forms to more fictional/cartoon aesthetics. With regard to these in-depth analyses, the thesis of 'simulational realism' and the notion of 're-mediated' observation was highlighted and a summary of different approaches to realism in animation was eventually identified and proposed.

This thesis claims to have made several fresh contributions to knowledge, some of which have already been indicated. In addition to major findings such as the theory of 'simulational realism' and the proposal of the prototypical hybridity of the animated form, this thesis has discussed some major issues and problems concerning animation and animation studies. The emergence of CGI and its obsession with 'realistic-ness', still addressed as realism, have certainly contributed to the resurgence of the topic in animation and media studies in the past decade. This research may therefore be considered a study of realism in animation *per se*, which also suggests useful ways to illuminate the presumed problematic relationship between animation and the notion of realism. On the other

hand, the hypothesis of hybridity of realism has added a sharp edge to this study: as suggested by the likes of Jameson (1991) and Darley (2000), in the postmodern milieu in which we live, understanding realism in animation, and largely in live-action cinema in its traditional straightforward 'mimetic' sense' is no longer possible. The question of hybridity and intertextuality thus situates this research's basic enquiry into realism in a historical and social context, as it addresses the quintessentially copied and collaged nature of any representational system as a contemporary cultural logic or habit.

On the other hand, the implications of the outcomes of this research on the hybrid nature of realism concern not only animation scholars, but may also be considered by researchers into live-action film and media studies. As discussed at the end of Part Three<sup>251</sup>, the films in the corpus may be seen as a constant negotiation and revisiting of the representational conventions and qualities of the media from which they borrow or absolutely mimic, in that they relate the question of realism in 3D animation directly to cinematic/cinematographic realism. This thesis places 3D animation and live-action film in a dynamic relationship, suggesting potential further scrutiny and study of realism as something shared by, rather than something that separates the two. In this respect, medium specificity has been used as a unique approach to portray the *integration* of media, rather than their distinction in a contemporary context: that all new media are necessarily hybrids of other media and as such are impossible to comprehend without acknowledging the blurred boundaries between the new and the old.

A further angle of the question of realism that emerged was the examination of the idea of nostalgia and nostalgic representation to suggest that, contrary to common perception, it may be used to realist ends. It was demonstrated, by close examination of certain films in the corpus, that very delicate, personalised and non-clichéd accounts of a

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<sup>251</sup> These findings were highlighted and discussed in detail at the end of Chapter Nine as the outcome of textual analysis of the three films of case studies in Part Three.

certain past may be represented in ways that provoke a nostalgic impulse, yet are not of the kind and category of public/collective/national nostalgia that is based on stereotypes of that past. An interesting potential topic for research that this thesis did not have space to pursue is the further exploration of the relationship between nostalgia and realism as two highly-motivating, yet complicated notions.

Another topic related to the notion of nostalgia in Aardman works – which this thesis believes is not limited to those studied here – is ‘Britishness Nostalgia’ or Aardman’s zealous determination to represent its films in unmistakably British contexts and settings. This becomes more manifest in later fiction films as the idiosyncratic ‘hallmark’ formula that makes these works different and appealing to a mass audience. This is a specific type of nostalgia closer to its collective representation. Though not explored deeply in this research, it may offer profound understanding of how truthfully as opposed to nostalgically and idealistically Aardman worlds are portrayed. Films of the corpus may, for example, provide a rich site for contemplation in terms of ethnographic and/or historical research into the representation of the British nation and its habitat, as much as the ideological implications of such depictions.

As the study of the hybrid nature of realism in the defined corpus of Aardman animated films, this research has covered a host of diverse strategies or approaches to realism peculiar to these films and their possible implications. Hence, through the recognition of patterns or types of realist strategies in these films, it also contributes to the under-researched area of realism in animation. It also offers fresh insights into the even more inadequately researched topic of realism in 3D animation, and its inevitable connection with the notion of realism in live-action film in its diverse modes and genres.

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## **Filmography**

*A is for Autism* (1992) Tim Webb, UK  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1959) Jiri Trnka, Czech Republic  
*A Taste of Honey* (1961) Tony Richardson, UK  
*Aardman Classics-* DVD, 2000 (Momentum Pictures), UK  
*Abductees* (1994) Paul Vester, UK  
*Alice in Wonderland* (1951) Disney, US  
*An American Family* (1973) PBS series, US  
*Babylon* (1986) Aardman, UK  
*Bambi* (1942) Disney, UK  
*Beauty and the Beast* (1991) Disney, UK  
*Blade Runner* (1982) Ridley Scott, US  
*Blue Velvet* (1986) David Lynch, US  
*Chicken Run* (2000) Dir. Peter Lord & Nick Park, DreamWorks LLC,  
Aardman Chicken Run and Pathé Image  
*Cinderella* (1950) Disney, US  
*Citizen Kane* (1941) Orson Welles, US  
*Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982) Jan Švankmajer, Czech Republic  
*Diva* (1981) Jean-Jacques Beneix, US  
*Dog* (2002) Susie Templeton, UK  
*Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (1906) Wallace McCutcheon and Edwin S  
Porter, US  
*Dreams of Toyland* (1908) Arthur Melbourne Cooper, UK  
*Dumbo* (1941) Disney, US  
*Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (2001), Hironobu Sakaguchi and Moto  
Sakakibara US  
*Hansel and Gretel* (1951), (especial effects – Ray Harryhausen), US  
*Ident* (1989) Aardman, UK  
*Jurassic Park* (1993) Steven Spielberg, UK  
*King Kong*, (1933) Willis O'Brien, US  
*Lip Gloss; Behind the scenes at Aardman Animations* (1991),  
Fourmations [Channel Four video recording] [27/05/91], UK  
*Listen to Britain* (1942) Humphrey Jennings, UK

*Little Red Riding Hood* (1949), (especial effects – Ray Harryhausen) US  
*Martin the Cobbler* (1976) Will Vinton, US  
*Metamorphosis of Mr Samsa* (1977) Caroline Leaf, Canada  
*Mighty Joe Young*, (1949) Willis O'Brien, US  
*Mighty River* (1993) Frédéric Back, Canada  
*Monsters of the Past* (1928) Buster Keaton, US  
*Nanook* (1922) Robert Flaherty, UK  
*Next* (1989) Barry Purves, UK  
*Oedipus* (2004) Jason Wishnow, UK  
*Pocahontas* (1995) Disney, US  
*Polar Express* (2004), US  
*Rip Van Winkle* (1978) Will Vinton, US  
*Sans Soleil* (1983) Chris Marker, France  
*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) Karel Reisz, UK  
*Screenplay* (1992) Barry Purves, UK  
*Snack and Drink* (2000) Bob Sabiston, US  
*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) Disney, US  
*Some Protection* (1988) Marjut Rimminen, UK  
*Stage Fright* (1997) Aardman, UK  
*Street* (1976) Caroline Leaf, UK  
*Tale of the Fox* (1939) Ladislav Starevitch, France  
*Tarzan* (1999) Disney, US  
*The Adventures of Mark Twain* (1985) Will Vinton, US  
*The Cameraman's Revenge* (1912) Ladislav Starevich, France  
*The Cybernetic Grandmother* (1963) Jiri Trnka, Czech Republic  
*The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia* (1989) Jan Švankmajer, Czech Republic  
*The Devil's Mill* (1951) Jiri Trnka, Czech Republic  
*The Hand* (1965) Jiri Trnka, Czech Republic  
*The Little Prince* (1979) Will Vinton, US  
*The Lost World*, (1960) Willis O'Brien, US  
*The Miracle Maker* (2000) Derek W Hayes and Stanislav Sokolov, UK  
*The Nightmare before Christmas* (1993) Henry Selick (animation director: Tim Burton), US  
*The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918) Winsor McCay, US

*The Song of Prairie* (1949) Jiri Trnka, Czech Republic  
*The Story of King Midas* (1953), (especial effects – Ray Harryhausen), US  
*The Three Ages* (1923) Buster Keaton, US  
*Wallace and Gromit; A Close Shave* (1995) (TV), Nick Park, Aardman, UK  
*Wallace and Gromit; A Grand Day Out* (1989) (TV), Nick Park, Aardman, UK  
*Wallace and Gromit; A Matter of Loaf and Death* (2008) (TV) Nick Park, Aardman, UK  
*Wallace and Gromit; The Curse of the were-rabbit* (2005) Dir. Steve Box & Nick Park, Aardman and DreamWorks animation  
*Wallace and Gromit; The Wrong Trousers* (1993) (TV), Nick Park, Aardman, UK  
*Western Daze* (1941) George Pal, US