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# South African stop-motion animation from 1980-2005

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# South African Stop-Motion Animation from 1980 - 2005

**Andrew Haycock**

A Research Report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in the field of Digital Animation by Course Work and Research Report.

Johannesburg 2010

**Abstract**

A critical history of South African animation that focuses on the use of three-dimensional (3D) stop-motion techniques in South Africa between the years 1980 and 2005, by three stop-motion studios: Klaybow Films, XYZoo, and Triggerfish. The history of these studios, as well as the technical and stylistic elements of the stop-motion they produced, will be discussed in terms of the social, political, economic and technological conditions that existed in South Africa during these years. Through this understanding of context, history, technique and style an attempt will be made to suggest a uniquely South African 3D stop-motion aesthetic.

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in field of Digital Animation at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Andrew Haycock
18 day of February 2010

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Aim

The aim of the following research is to document the history of three-dimensional stop-motion animation in South Africa from 1980 to 2005, by focusing on the development of three studios during this period and to critically assess the development of a unique South African stop-motion aesthetic.

## 1.2 Scope

The research report is primarily concerned with the historical documentation of South African animation history. It will only include South African stop-motion animation produced between the years 1980 and 2005. The research report will focus on the history of three South African animation studios that existed during these years. These studios are Klaybow Films, XYZoo Animation, and Triggerfish.

This research report focuses on stop-motion animation techniques, which Maureen Furniss calls "three-dimensional animation", which include "clay, puppets and pixilation" *(155).* These are known as stop-motion animation techniques, since they involve the animation of three-dimensional forms in front of the camera, unlike cel animation, which is first drawn and then photographed. Animated movement in stop-motion is created with small incremental movements of these forms in front of a camera, which captures each of these separately. Clay animation is created using forms constructed out of plasticine, although actual clay is sometimes also used. Puppet animation is created with pre-constructed articulated puppets, usually with the use of a metal armature, which are suited to the requirements of stop-motion animation and are able to support themselves. Pixilation is created using pre-existing forms, such as furniture and the human body.

The research was restricted to the technical processes, history and aesthetics of stop-motion animation. Although Klaybow Films, XYZoo Animation and Triggerfish produced animation with all three of the relevant stop-motion techniques described above, they were primarily involved in the production of clay and puppet animation.

The research report will therefore discuss the technical aspects and characteristics of all three techniques. However, only clay and puppet animation will be included in the discussion on the history and aesthetics of stop-motion animation.

## 1.3 Methodology

The proposed study is a study of the history and aesthetics of traditional three-dimensional animation produced in South Africa and, therefore, I will use the "contextual approach" prescribed by Furniss, which states that when trying to understand the aesthetics of an animated production, it is important to understand the context in which that work was produced and the "historical, economic, social, technological, political and industrial" factors that may have influenced its production, as this allows the researcher to study animated films as products of specific times and places *(7).* Therefore this research seeks to present the historical and cultural factors, together with the aesthetic and technical factors, that have influenced the development of three-dimensional stop-motion animation techniques in South Africa during the period in question.

The research was conducted with a qualitative model, which consists of four stages: 1) Observation; 2) Analysis of texts and documents; 3) Interviews; and 4) Recording and transcribing *(Silverman 8-9).* Research into the technique, history and aesthetics of stop-motion animation was conducted using pre-existing written sources. My discussion of the history of three-dimensional animation is drawn from Bruce Holman's *Puppet Animation in The Cinema*, Michael Frierson's *Clay Animation*, and Giannalberto Bendazzi's *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation.*

For the discussion of aesthetics, my research uses a combination of techniques, based on those outlined by Paul Wells and Maureen Furniss. Furniss discusses "three-dimensional" animation aesthetics in terms of the treatment of three-dimensional forms and spaces, as well as the movement of these forms through these spaces *(155-169).* Wells shows that it is useful to discuss an animated film in terms of orthodox and experimental animation tendencies, as well in terms of "narrative strategies" and animation genres that he has identified *(35-126).*

When researching South African animation history, the researcher is faced with the problem of limited sources and documentation. In her research into the SABC Animation Unit, Shapurjee states that there is a very limited amount of pre-existing material on South African animation studies[i] *(4)*. Due to this paucity of published material, my research on South African stop-motion animation history has primarily been gathered from interviews. There were four subjects who participated in the research through interviews. The table below lists the participants and their relevance to the research.

| Subject | Relevance to Research | Job Description |
|---|---|---|
| Ted Berenson | Founded Klaybow Films in 1981. | Director and Animator. |
| Lindsay Van Blerk | Founded XYZoo in 1990. | Director and Animator. |
| Jacquie Trowell | Founded Triggerfish in 1996. | Director and Animator. |
| Emma Kaye | Founded Triggerfish in 1996. | Producer. |

The interviews were conducted using Skype, as well as in in-person, face-to-face interviews. My interviews were semi structured and comprised of several themes based on the interviewee's involvement with the South African animation industry between the years 1980 to 2005. The interviewees provided the historical documentation of the studios that they founded. The interviews revealed the training and qualifications of the subjects as well as the major artistic influences on the work they produced. This was useful, as it guided me towards the relevant animators and studios to research and include in the final research report. The subjects were questioned about their studio practices regarding technique and aesthetics, as well as the contextual factors that influenced and determined the work that they produced.

The research also involved the viewing of stop-motion work produced by these three South African studios. During these viewings, I conducted an aesthetic analysis with the theoretical techniques mentioned previously. Using the previous research into technique and history, I was able to identify relevant styles and influences prevalent in the work. The aesthetics of the work produced by these studios was also regarded as being the product of contextual factors that may have influenced the studios during production. I was able to compare the style and aesthetics of these South African

works with other stop-motion animation produced in other parts of the world, and was thus able to ascertain not only what made the South African animations similar to these international works but also unique. Thus, I was able to identify a uniquely South African stop-motion aesthetic.

I have also authored two DVDs, on which can be find some of the stop-motion animated films discussed in the research report.

## 1.4 Rationale

Furniss states that research into animation and its history is important because the development of animation has suffered as a result of the commonly held belief that "animation is not a real art form" which has resulted in the serious neglect of animation studies *(3-4).*

Although the 1980's saw a large increase in scholarly research into animation in Europe and America *(Furniss 4),* this neglect is still seriously prevalent in countries like South Africa. Shapurjee highlights the urgent need to document South African animation history, as it is in serious danger of disappearing due to scholarly neglect, both internationally and in South Africa itself, as a consequence of bad archiving and preservation systems as well as the fact that "veterans" within the industry are passing away "without their histories being properly documented" *(4)*.

This research aims to add to the small amount of research conducted by Shapurjee and others into the history of South African animation. However, Furniss points out that within the neglected area of the study of animation, the neglected study of three-dimensional stop-motion animation techniques exists, which has generally been "overshadowed" by two-dimensional cel animation, in terms of both academic study and commercial success *(155).*

The small amount of research conducted into South African animation deals solely with two-dimensional animation and there has been no focused research into South African animators who have worked with three-dimensional stop-motion animation

techniques. Therefore, this research into the history and aesthetics of stop-motion animation in South Africa is relevant and urgently needed.

I wish to highlight here that Darley has pointed out that the neglect of animation research has further hindered animation studies by creating an "inferiority complex" within the field and as a result animation scholars compensate by conducting research into animation that is overly abstract and idealistic, in the sense that it treats animation as some sort of super medium. *(63-67).* This has resulted in a lack of more important research into animation such as research into the history, aesthetics and technique *(Darley 63-67)*. Because of this, I decided to focus my research on the technical, historical and stylistic aspects of stop-motion animation and tried to avoid dealing with some of the more abstract and obtuse research conducted into this field.

This research into three-dimensional stop-motion aesthetics is relevant today, since three-dimensional computer animation (which is obviously closely related to stop-motion 3D animation) increasingly becomes the dominant mode of animation production. Although, 3D stop-motion techniques will never enjoy the popularity that 2D cel and 3D computer animation enjoys, it seems short-sighted to ignore the history and aesthetics of 3D stop-motion.

Obviously 3D computer animation is a relatively new animation technique. However, important developments in 3D aesthetics and narrative strategies can be discovered by studying 3D stop-motion animation, and the development of 3D computer animation would benefit greatly from this. Thus, it is fairly obvious that those wanting to study and practice the three-dimensional computer animation technique would benefit greatly from the study and analysis of the technique and aesthetics of three-dimensional stop-motion animation.

Initially, I began this research wanting to document the entire history of stop-motion animation techniques in South Africa. However, as my research progressed this seemed unrealistic for several reasons. Firstly, I realised that research of this scope would be too broad for the required length of my final research report. Secondly, researching animation in South Africa prior to 1990 is difficult as a result of the difficulty of gathering and viewing animations produced in South Africa before this

date. This is a result of the lack of archiving of material, as well as the difficulty in accessing the SABC's archives[ii]. It was virtually impossible to assess exactly how much stop-motion animation was produced in South Africa before 1990. Thus I realised it would be necessary to structure the research over a much shorter time span, as well as limiting it to the South African stop-motion animation that I would be able to view.

I eventually decided to focus the study on three studios: Klaybow Films, XYZoo and Triggerfish, as a result of significant information I gathered that linked the development and growth of these studios with one another. I had always been aware that Triggerfish had produced a relatively large amount of stop-motion animation during the late nineties, and one of my first steps was to contact Jacquie Trowell, one of the founders of the Triggerfish animation studio in 1996. She informed that she had learnt the techniques of stop-motion animation from Lindsay van Blerk, a master of clay animation, who had started XYZoo Animation in the early nineties, and she suggested that I should contact him.

On making contact with Lindsay van Blerk, he informed me that he had learnt the technique of stop-motion animation during the eighties in Cape Town, when he worked as an animator and character designer for Klaybow Films, which had been formed by Ted Berenson, a Romanian by birth, who had immigrated to South Africa with his wife in 1980. Although I had found some indication that clay animation may have been used in South Africa as early as 1967[iii], Klaybow Films seemed to be the first animation studio in South Africa concerned solely with producing three-dimensional animation.

I realised that I had discovered a stop-motion genealogy that ended with Triggerfish, which is currently one of South Africa's most successful and highly regarded animation studios. Thus, I decided to focus my research on these three studios and the work they produced between the years 1980 to 2005. This period also corresponds with a period of history during which South Africa saw important social, economic and political change. Furniss's contextual approach is necessary to understand the history and work of these three studios, which existed and developed during an important period in South African history.

## 1.5 Structure

Following this introduction the research report will be structured as follows:

1. **Technique and characteristics of 3D stop-motion**

The opening chapter will summarise the production process involved in the production of 3D stop-motion animated film, and the characteristics that arise out of this process.

2. **The history of 3D stop-motion techniques**

This chapter will give an overview of the history and development of 3D stop-motion animation techniques in both Europe and America, highlighting early pioneers and key practitioners. It will include a summary of important stop-motion figures such as Jiri Trnka and Will Vinton, both of whom clearly influenced South African stop-motion animation produced by Klaybow Films, XYZoo and Triggerfish.

3. **The aesthetics of 3D stop-motion techniques**

Following these technical and historical discussions, a discussion dealing with the aesthetic elements that are relevant when discussing 3D stop-motion animation will be presented. These elements will be used in the discussion of the aesthetics found in South African stop-motion animation.

4. **South Africa 1980-1989: Ted Berenson and Klaybow Films**

After this initial discussion of stop-motion technique, history and aesthetics, the historical research into South African stop-motion animation will be presented. This will be started with a chapter focusing on the history of and the work produced between the years 1980 and 1989 by the South African studio, Klaybow Films, which was founded by the Romanian Ted Berenson,.

5. **South Africa 1989-2005: Lindsay van Blerk and XYZoo**

A chapter that focuses on Lindsay van Blerk, who founded the animation studio XYZoo in 1990, will follow. This chapter will be a discussion of the history and work produced by XYZoo Animations between the years 1989 and 2005.

6. **South Africa 1996-2005: Jacquie Trowell, Emma Kaye and Triggerfish**

A chapter focusing on Jacquie Trowell and Emma Kaye, who founded the animation studio Triggerfish in 1996, will follow. This chapter will discuss the history and work produced by Triggerfish between the years 1996 and 2005 and will reveal how the studio developed a distinctive South African style in their stop-motion animated films.

7. **Case Study: Triggerfish stop-motion produced for Takalani Sesame**

Following this historical discussion of South African animation, a case study of the work produced by Triggerfish Animation will be presented. It will be argued that this work represents the first successful attempt to produce a uniquely South African stop-motion aesthetic.

8. **Conclusions and speculations**

Finally, the conclusions drawn from this research will be presented, and the possible future uses of 3D stop-motion in South Africa will be discussed.

**Appendix**

An appendix is attached that includes a filmography listing 3D stop-motion animated films produced in South Africa. This filmography represents the initial attempts to document the production of 3D stop-motion animation in South Africa, and should in no way be seen as complete, but should rather be seen as serving as a starting point for further research into the history of South African animation. The appendix will

also include relevant timelines, which summarise the South African animation history presented in this research.

There is also an appendix outlining the contents of three DVD disks attached to back cover page of this research report. Selected films produced by Klaybow Films, XYZoo and Triggerfish are included on this DVDs.

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[i] These individuals are Sarienne Kersh, Silvia Bazzoli and Giannalberto Bendazzi, all of whom published work dealing with South African animation history *(Shapurjee 4)*. My own research into South African animation history used two written sources: Shanaz Shapurjee's A Historical Enquiry into the Animation Unit, Situated within the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) 1976-1988 and Theresa Collins' Beyond Cartoons: An Exploration of Independent forms of Animation.

[ii] I was unable to gain access to the SABC's archives. As a result I was unable to view episodes of the clay animation produced by Klaybow Films. In the end, the only example of work produced by this studio that I was able to get hold of was a VHS copy of their showreel, which Lindsay van Blerk had in his possession.

[iii] During the early stages of this research, I met with Sarienne Kersh, who through her own research into South African animation history had reason to believe that James Reindorp produced a clay animation commercial for the Natal Building Society in 1968.

## 2. The Technique of 3D Stop-Motion Production

Before discussing the history or aesthetics of stop-motion, it is necessary to understand how one produces a three-dimensional stop-motion animated film. It is important to understand the differences between the three techniques that make up this category of animation, as well as the similarities that they share. This will help reveal the advantages and limitations inherent in these techniques.

All forms of motion-picture production can be broken down into three stages: pre-production, production and post-production. However, within in this framework, the technique and process followed by stop-motion filmmaker creating 3D stop-motion animation has fundamental differences and distinctive characteristics when compared to the process followed in 2D cel animation production. The stop-motion filmmaker begins with an initial idea, which is developed into a written script. Working from this, the filmmaker begins to develop this script into a tangible film.

"During pre-production, the designer-animator makes concrete decisions about the film's aesthetic. The overriding concern is to mould every production element – character, set, sound design – to support the film's thematic or aesthetic end" *(Frierson 5).* During the pre-production stage, the filmmaker designs and plans the final look of the film and thus ascertains the physical and logistical requirements that must be assembled before production can begin. The filmmaker then constructs and assembles these requirements[i]. Generally, this is the most intensive phase of production for any animation technique, and generally the filmmaker plans the film down to the very last detail.

After completing pre-production the filmmaker moves onto the production stage. Frierson explains that most creative decisions are completed in pre-production and that during the production phase can be considered as "donkey work" aimed at bringing all those decisions to fruition *(4).* The filmmaker assembles all the characters and sets, assembled or constructed during pre-production. As with live-action, the filmmaker then lights the character and the set and frames up the shot with the camera. Once this is complete the animator then begins the time-consuming process of stop-motion animation.

This is followed by the post-production stage. In stop-motion animation this is the least intense stage of production, and is generally characterized by the straightforward assembling of shots, sound track and special effects into a completed film.

## 2.1 Characteristics, advantages and limitations

Frierson points out that all forms of animation have inherent advantages and limitations, and the filmmaker seeking to produce a stop-motion film must be aware of these before beginning production *(2-3).* The 3D stop-motion techniques using puppets, clay and pixilation, are all concerned with the animation of three-dimensional forms through three-dimensional spaces, and they generally follow the same process during production. The fundamental difference between these three techniques lies in the type of forms used, and it is the material and physical nature of these forms that defines the limitations, advantages and characteristics inherent in these techniques.

### 2.1.1 Clay animation

Clay animation is usually created using plasticine; however in some cases actual clay may be used. Frierson explains that while all three-dimensional animation can be created through the simple incremental movement and sequential photography of three-dimensional forms, the physical nature of plasticine gives it an advantage over other stop-motion techniques *(2-3).*

The shape and surface of plasticine, which is very malleable, can be adjusted and manipulated easily with either hands or tools, and thus clay/plasticine "is very adaptable to different forms of incremental manipulation" and therefore can be animated with relative ease *(2-3).* However, because of this malleability, fingerprints are also easily left on the surface of the plasticine, which can become a disadvantage if it is necessary to keep the surface clean and smooth, which can become very time-consuming.

Plasticine, because of its weight, may also tend to sag over successive frames. This sagging can happen in such small movements that the filmmaker only becomes aware

of it once he/she is watching the final shot. Sagging can also occur because of the lights used during production. Plasticine tends to become soft and unmanageable when it heats up, and this poses problems for the filmmaker producing clay animation. Frierson also points out that plasticine has a low density and therefore can only absorb a limited amount of pigment *(3)*. Therefore only a limited amount of saturated colours can be created with plasticine, as opposed to the huge range of saturated colours available to the 2D cel animator *(Frierson 3)*.

### 2.1.2 Puppet animation

Puppet animation is created with articulated puppets that are constructed with armatures[ii] that allow incremental movement. This means that the puppet is able to hold a position without the aid of additional support. In comparison with clay animation, the type of movement available when using puppets is limited since the materials used to create puppets are generally fixed, and cannot be manipulated or reshaped like plasticine. Performance and movement may thus be limited to fixed expressions on the puppet's face *(Furniss 163)*. This problem can be overcome with more sophisticated armatures and replacement animation systems[iii]. However, these will considerably raise the cost of production, and so may not be a viable option to the animator with limited production resources. It should be pointed out that puppets can be built from a wide variety of materials and are not always built using an armature.

### 2.1.3 Pixilation

Pixilation is created using "ready-made" forms that the filmmaker can easily find in the world around him, such as toys, furniture or even the human body. Dave Borthwick and Richard Hutchinson[iv] employed this technique to create various stop-motion animated films, such as *The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb (1993)*. They explain that they "couldn't afford models so we tended to work with ready-mades, anything we could find around the house; Action Men and things like that. And of course one of the best ready-mades you can get is the human body" *(Furniss 159)*. Obviously the process involved in the production of pixilation is significantly cheaper than that used in clay or puppet animation, and is useful to the stop-motion animator faced with extremely limited production resources.

### 2.1.4 Inherent three-dimensionality

The forms in 3D animation have actual body and have height, width, and depth *(Furniss 155).* All 3D stop-motion films involve the photography of existing physical three-dimensional forms and spaces. Citing Art Clokey[v], Frierson argues that this physical photography of actual three-dimensional "spatial reality" makes 3D stop-motion animation superior to 2D animation techniques, which are merely flat abstractions of "spatial reality" *(25).* A two-dimensional drawing is an "extreme abstraction" of reality and three-dimensional space, while 3D stop-motion films, like live action, recreate the spatial conditions the audience member finds in his own reality. This gives 3D films a level of appeal and credibility that is not found in 2D animation *(Frierson 23-25).*

While this idealistic argument is what Darley in his overview of animation studies would call "*essentialism*" *(78)*, it does highlight the most important characteristic of these techniques: their inherent three-dimensionality. Clearly 3D stop-motion animation in some ways has more in common with live-action than it does with two-dimensional animation techniques. Furniss suggests that there must be some difference between how an audience experiences a 3D stop-motion film compared to a 2D animation, arising from watching forms which one "knows to be real" *(169)*. Therefore, I would agree with Frierson, who states that this inherent three-dimensionality is "the source of dimensional animation's immediacy and presence" *(25).* However, one cannot say this makes 3D superior to 2D animation, though it is an important characteristic the filmmaker must be aware of.

Firstly, this inherent three-dimensionality is the greatest advantage of working with these stop-motion techniques, as the forms being used "move through three-dimensional space, create their own perspective, and cast their own shadows" *(Frierson 2).* The forms used in 3D stop-motion have an inherent level of texture, detail and shadow which doesn't need to be created for each frame, as in 2D cel, where all this detail must be recreated in each drawing *(Frierson25).* Three-dimensional camera moves can also be created with relative ease in these stop-motion techniques, while in 2D cel animation, camera movements like this must be created by simulating depth cues, which can be time consuming and complex to animate. 3D

forms can also be photographed from any angle, as in live-action, with relative ease, while in contrast, during 2D animation production, the choice of camera angle is limited to what has been storyboarded and changing to an unplanned angle is virtually impossible.

Clearly these techniques have many benefits deriving from their inherent three-dimensionality. However, this is also the source of the techniques' greatest limitation: the inherent weight of three-dimensional forms *(Frierson 3)*. Traditional three-dimensional animations have in the past been restricted by gravity. Since the techniques deal with real three-dimensional forms with real weight, the animator is faced with the problem of walking, jumping and flying, since these forms cannot stand upright by themselves. In the past it was necessary to use thin wires to hold up characters, or position the camera at an angle that hides the device supporting the character *(Priebe 89)*. However, there has been the recent development of computer effects programmes that enable the filmmaker to paint out "rigs" used to hold the character up, using a "clean plate" as reference *(Priebe 89)*. Although the issue of gravity has been addressed, the use of rigs and special effects programmes to remove them, adds other logistical considerations to the production of a traditional three-dimensional animation, such as budget problems. Access to this technology may be unavailable to the low-budget stop-motion animator.

The stop-motion technique used during production also creates a set of advantages and limitations. With stop-motion, animation is created in front of the camera, while in 2D cel, all the drawings, and thus the animation, are completed in pre-production and then photographed. The 2D cel animator is able to animate using the pose-to-pose method[vi], which allows a greater degree of control, as well as increasing the speed of production since many animators can work on a single scene. In contrast, the 3D stop-motion animator animates using the straight-ahead animation technique, since he is unable to refer to previous poses or drawings and works from the beginning position to the last position using only his/her intuition *(Furniss 50)*. However, Holman states that this allows for a level of spontaneity not found in cel animation, which is rigidly planned and executed. The 3D animator may sometimes deviate from the storyboard following a sudden insight or inspiration[vii] *(50-51)*.

However, from the late seventies onwards, stop-motion animators have been increasingly using "video assist" which allows them to view frames captured previously, and "better align his or her movements with those already recorded" *(Furniss 168).* Although some argue the increased control given by "video assist" has taken away the spontaneity and the resulting feel normally found in stop-motion *(Furniss 168),* others argue that this technology has added a level of control which has opened up a medium that was seriously limited by the crudeness that resulted from working "blind" in the straight-ahead method *(Van Blerk Interview).*

Although technology has increased the possibilities of 3D stop-motion animation, the animator using them still animates straight ahead, and due to this, the crews of these types of animated productions are sometimes limited to as few as two animators, in order to maintain the continuity of the animation and performance *(Furniss 166).* However, Furniss states that Henry Selick was able to work with a large crew of animators by using "replacement" pieces and other methods, which allowed him to rigidly control the performance of each animator on the set of *The Nightmare Before Christmas (Furniss 166).* However, the nature of 2D cel animation production lends itself more easily to being produced by a large group of animators compared to 3D stop-motion.

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[i] The processes involved in pre-production are complex and too many to discuss in detail in this research report. The primary concern is the design and construction of "characters" and sets. A storyboard - a series of still images showing each shot of the film - is also an important part of pre-production. The reader interested in this subject should consult Michael Frierson's Clay Animation, or Ken Priebe's The Art of Stop-Motion Animation, both of which cover the production process involved in stop-motion in excellent detail.

[ii] An armature is a metal "skeleton" over which the materials used to create the clay or puppet figure are placed. The armature is essentially a "joint system" and Holman explains that these joints must "be flexible enough to permit movement between exposures, yet sufficiently rigid to prevent him from collapsing during a scene" *(55).*

[iii] "The 'replacement' method of animation is a means by which some standardisation of movement can be achieved in 3D animation. Rather than distort the original figure by reshaping it under the camera, with this method an animator will use a series of prefabricated parts in various positions that replace each other in consecutive frames" *(Furniss 167).*

[iv] Borthwick and Hutchinson are the heads of the Bristol based English studio, The Bolex Brothers *(Furniss 159).*

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[v] Art Clokey was an American who pioneered the first use of clay animation for television in the fifties.
[vi] In 2D cel animation, the animator will draw two extreme positions first. Using these two extremes as a reference, the animator then adds in the in-between poses.
[vii] This is not necessarily true and depends largely on technique and the context of the production. Furniss points out that in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* these "spontaneous" and "arbitrarily" additions made by the animator to the animation were limited with the use of highly detailed storyboards with precise timing and posing *(166)*.

## 3. The history of 3D stop-motion techniques

Pixilation, puppet animation, and clay animation have never enjoyed the level and scale of production, commercial success and popularity that two-dimensional cel animation has, until relatively recent years. Furniss points out that the 3D animators developed and "persevered" over the years, through isolated yet significant use, "developing prominence in certain moments and in different locations" *(Furniss 154)*. Although these techniques share similar origins, which stretch back to the beginning of film production, the histories of these techniques diverge onto separate paths, developing in different places under distinctive and defining cultural, economic and political conditions.

### 3.1 The origins of stop-motion animation

"If any technical predecessor of animation need be identified, it would certainly be the stop-action substitution technique" *(Crafton 9)*. With the discovery of motion picture filmmaking, there grew a demand for innovative films, which enthralled and delighted audiences with never before seen techniques. This led to development of "trick films" which used "optical effects and cinematic sleight of hand" to create "magical illusions" *(Holman 21)*. One of the special effect techniques employed in these films was the "stop-frame substitution" technique, which involved stopping the camera during filming and then the placement of an object or actor into a new position in the frame after which filming would resume. When watching the final film, the object or actor would magically move from one position in frame to another.

Bendazzi states that it was probably the American, Alfred Clark, who first discovered this technique, which he used in the film *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, 1895*, to film a beheading scene with the use of a full size puppet, which was substituted for of the actor *(7)*. However, it was



***Figure 1: Still from "A Trip to the Moon" by George Méliés***

George Méliés, "the undisputed master of the trick film" *(Crafton 9),* who first used the technique to make objects move in an 1898 advertising film *(Bendazzi 7)*.

Early animation pioneers, whom Bendazzi calls "paleoanimators" *(7),* would employ this stop-action technique to create films that show the first uses of animation in the film industry. During the first decade of the twentieth century, these "paleoanimators" experimented with a variety of types of animation techniques, including the three-dimensional animation techniques of puppet, clay and pixilation. The pioneers include the filmmakers, James Stuart Blackton, Edwin Porter, Arthur Melbourne Cooper, Walter Booth, and Segundo de Chomón.

The earliest stop-motion animated films are early experiments with the technique that came to be known as pixilation. In England, Arthur Cooper animated matches to make the film *Matches: An Appeal (1899),* which is often considered to be the first animated film. In Spain, Segundo de Chom used the technique to make luggage and furniture move in *El Hotel Electrico (1905).* One of the most important American pioneers, James Stuart Blackton, also used the stop-frame technique in his film *The Haunted Hotel (1907)* to show objects and furniture "magically" moving. In France, Emile Cohl, often referred to as the first true animator *(Bendazzi 7),* also used the pixilated movement of furniture and objects in his film *The Automatic Moving Company (1910),* which shows furniture come magically to life and then move out of one house and into another.

These pioneers were also developing the first examples of puppet and clay animated films. Holman states that the earliest use of puppet animation was by the Englishman Arthur Cooper, who blended live action with animation in the film *Dreams Of Toyland (1908),* which featured the animation of jointed children's toys *(21).* The French animator, Emile



***Figure 2: Still from "Dreams of Toyland"***

Cohl, also experimented with puppet animation early on in his career. In *Le Petit Faust (1910),* a simplified version of the story of Faust, the puppets and sets were constructed with considerable skill, and the animation, although stiff, is "good considering it was Cohl's first attempt at puppet animation" *(Holman 21).*

Early examples of clay animation were also created during this period in animation history. Frierson identifies the American Edwin Porter's "lighting sculpting" film *Fun in a Bakery Shop (1902),* as an early predecessor of the clay animation film *(40).* Made with the special effect technique of under cranking the camera to create the effect of very fast action, the film shows a baker sculpting a series of "humorous faces" from "very soft modelling material representing bread dough" *(Frierson 40).* The film is significant because "like the filmed lightening sketches that foreshadowed the introduction of drawn animation - offering both narrative context and an iconography for its development - *Bakery Shop* provides the parallel antecedents for early clay animation" *(Frierson 40).*

However, the first "clay animation" films only appeared in 1908. *A Sculptor's Welsh Rarebit Dream (1908)* produced by the Edison studio, and *The Sculptor's Nightmare (1908)* produced by the Biograph Studio. Both showed the incremental movement and manipulation of clay using the stop-motion technique. Both films follow the same plot of a sculptor falling asleep and dreaming about clay that moulds itself into shape, and though these films differ slightly in terms of plot, both show clay moulding itself into the form of political leaders from this period *(Frierson 43-44).*

The American pioneer James Stuart Blackton, was also involved in clay animation production, and produced the film *Chew Chew Land (1910).* Clay animation is used as a special effect during a dream sequence in which a clay ball builds up into the form of a decapitated head. Frierson states that although the film lacks the level of quality and sophistication found in *The Sculptors Nightmare,* it is still significant as it shows that Blackton was open to experimenting with various stop-motion techniques *(59-60).*

It is clear that these early days in the history of animation were characterised by pioneering individuals who were experimenting with a wide variety of different

techniques. However, by 1915, the American animation industry would become increasingly dominated by 2D cel animation *(Furniss 16)*. This dominance arose as a result of the production process involved in drawn animation as well as some significant technological developments.

As discussed in the previous chapter on technique, in stop-motion, animation is produced in front of the camera, while in cel animation all animation occurs during pre-production[i]. As a result, 3D stop-motion animation can only be produced by a relatively small crew, while in comparison, the work involved in producing 2D cel animation can be divided and spread out amongst a large crew of people. Cel animation is therefore, specially suited to the principles of Taylorism[ii] and the assembly line method of production since it allows for the division of labour *(Furniss 18-19)*. Technological developments such as the introduction of the peg bar and clear cel sheet helped to develop drawn animation into an efficient and cost effective technique, which was therefore more suited to the competitive American market than stop-motion animation techniques which could not be produced as efficiently or at the same speed that drawn animation could *(Furniss 18-19)*.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the American animation industry, like the broader film industry, was driven by the search for more efficient and profitable techniques. Success in this animation industry was determined by the filmmaker's ability to use large production crews, as well as division of labour techniques, and thus 2D cel animation became the dominant mode of animation production in America *(Furniss 21)*.

However, at the same time in Europe, Bendazzi states that animation was predominantly produced by individuals or small groups of people, as a result of the European industry never being organised and developed, like its American counterpart, until the 1930s *(25)*. This environment in Europe allowed for the emergence of talented amateurs, who experimented and mastered alternative animation techniques other than drawn animation. As a result, this had the effect of allowing the development of puppet animation, particularly in Eastern Europe, into a sophisticated and widely used technique.

## 3.2 The history of puppet animation

Puppet animation is associated with Eastern Europe, which has produced many great puppet animators since the early 1900s *(Furniss 156).* Wells points out that this development of puppet animation in Eastern Europe was due to these countries having a long history and tradition in puppet theatre *(63).* Two of the most significant puppet animation pioneers are the two Russians, Ladislas Starewich, and Alexander Ptushko. They paved the way for future masters of puppet animation who would develop a distinctive Eastern European puppet animation style in post war Europe.

### 3.2.1 Puppet animation pioneers

Russian born Ladislas Starewich[iii], sometimes called the father of puppet animation *(Potamkin)*, was initially interested in studying entomology and began using film to document the lives of certain insects. In 1910, unable to film a fight between two stag beetles because the lights caused the nocturnal insects to become immobile, used stop-motion animation to recreate the fight using puppets created from embalmed stag beetle bodies in *Lucanaus Cervus (1910).* He created some of this first stop-motion armatures for these beetles, "which he articulated by wiring the legs to the thorax with sealing wax" and this film is regarded as the first puppet animated film *(Potamkin).* Starewich then used the technique and puppets to produce a "fable like" stop-motion film called *The Beautiful Leukanida (1910)* for which he received "much praise" when it was screened in 1911 around Europe *(Bendazzi 36).*

Obviously technically gifted, Starewich developed a successful career making sophisticated and poetic puppet animation. He produced puppet-animated films initially in Russia until the revolution in 1917 after which he moved to France, where he continued working until his death in 1965. His early films include *The Grasshopper and the Ant (1911)* and his most famous film *The Cameraman's Revenge (1912).* He is also well known for *Les Grenouilles qui Demandent un Roi (1923),* which was one of his first films made after moving to France. He also produced a feature length puppet animation called *The Tale of the Fox (1930).*




***Figure 3: Still from "The Camera Man's Revenge"***

Another Russian, Alexander Ptushko, created puppet-animated films during the twenties and thirties. The first puppet animation that he directed was *It Happened at the Stadium (1928)*. A puppet specialist, Ptushko developed a technical mastery of puppet animation with a collective of filmmakers he had been working with for several years *(Holman 26).* This technical mastery with the puppet animation technique is displayed in his feature length puppet animation, *The New Gulliver (1935).* The film was a "political satire of monarchy and a glorification of the workers who arise to over throw it" *(Holman 26).*

### 3.2.2 Czechoslovakian puppet animation

Although puppet animation was produced throughout Eastern Europe, the puppet animations produced in the communist controlled Czechoslovakia between 1946 and 1989 are highly regarded and Jiri Trnka in particular is considered to be a "master" of this technique *(Furniss 156)*. At the end of the Second World War, Eastern Europe fell under communist rule. Lucie Joschko and Michael Morgan argue that these films are characterised by the political and economic situation in Czechoslovakia during this period *(66-84).*

Much of the animation that came out of this period is characterized by a subtle and poetic use of metaphor and symbolism to create work that protested against the regimes but that was "ambiguous enough so as not to incur the wrath and intervention of the authorities" *(Wells 64).* Ironically though, it was the state funded animation industry that existed in communist Czechoslovakia that gave animators the economic

freedom to produce highly innovative and personal work. This freedom has disappeared in the capitalist orientated animation market that exists in the present-day democratic Czech Republic *(Joschko and Morgan 66-84)*.

In Czechoslovakia puppet animated films were produced as early as 1936 by animators such as Karel Dodal and his wife Hermina Tylova, who after seeing puppet animation produced by Alexander Ptushko, collaborated to produce the puppet animated film *The Adventures of Mr. Pry (1936) (Holman 32)*. However, it was only after the Second World War that Czechoslovakia saw the emergence of a distinctive puppet animation cinema at the hands of masters such as Jiri Trnka. Bendazzi divides Czechoslovakian puppet animation into three periods. Firstly, 1940 to 1970 during which time Jiri Trnka made huge contributions to the genre *(163-170),* 1970 to 1980, which saw the emergence of "Trnka's heirs", Bretislav Pojar and Jan Svankmajer *(360-364)*, and finally 1980 to 1985, during which time a new generation of animators emerged, the most important being Jiri Barta *(366-377)*.

Born in 1912, Trnka became involved in puppet theatre through the influence of his junior high art teacher, Josef Skupa, who hired Trnka as an assistant and taught him the art of carving wood puppets *(Holman 34).* Puppet theatre had been popular in Czechoslovakia for centuries and by the beginning of the 20th century puppet theatre shows of every genre could be found from traditional children's fables through to more adult orientated political satires[iv] *(Bendazzi 167-168)*.

Trnka started his own puppet theatre troupe after finishing his studies but closed it down after moving to Prague, where he was unable to attract sufficient audiences. In 1945 Trnka began working at Atelier Filmovych Triku, a small studio in Prague, where he became involved in the production of 2D cartoon animation. However, wanting to pursue his first love of puppetry, he eventually left this studio and together with like-minded colleagues, formed a puppet film studio in Prague in 1946 which they named Bratri v triku.

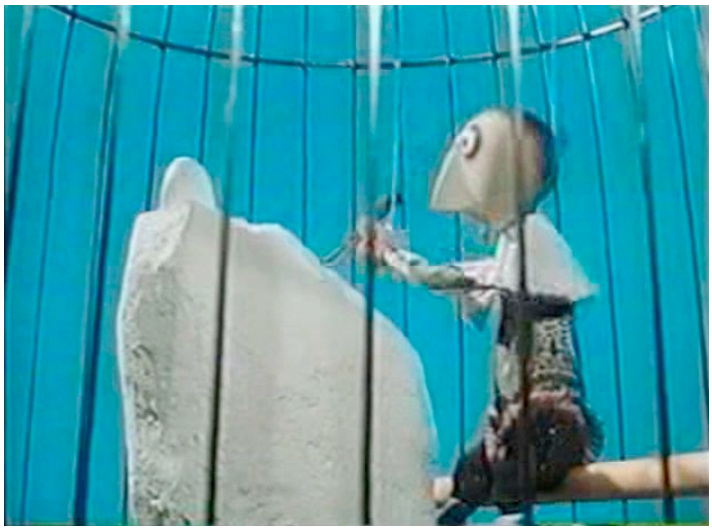


***Figure 4: Still from "The Hand"***

Trnka produced fourteen puppet animated films at Bratri v triku from 1946 to 1965, the most outstanding of which are *The Czech Year (1947), The Devil's Mill (1951) Old Czech Legends (1953), A Midsummer Nights Dream,* and his last film *The Hand (1965)* which Holman describes as the "epitome of puppet films" *(37).* Wells states that *The Hand* shows "Trnka's preoccupation with the role of the artist, the importance of social and artistic freedom, and the need to resist the erosion of tradition and preserve the particular nature of Czechoslovakian national identify and its expression" *(64)*. This is the most significant contribution Trnka made towards the development of puppet animation. He resisted creating popular 2D cartoons, and was rather concerned with the expression of Czechoslovakian tradition through the development of a puppet animation style influenced by traditional Czechoslovakian puppets.

Trnka is also regarded as the father of the puppet animation genre. He developed a "poetics for animated puppets", creating new performance and structuring techniques that would inspire future generations of puppet animators *(Bendazzi 170).* Holman states that he also encouraged using a "production-team method of working" which helped develop the skills of other puppet animators who worked with him and thus he made significant contributions to the future development of the puppet technique in Czechoslovakia *(37).* Perhaps most significantly, he was the first puppet animator to use puppets as symbols to create subversive metaphors and allegory that challenged the Soviet domination of his country, and thus helped to reinforce the long running Czechoslovakian Puppet Theatre tradition.

Thus, Trnka paved the way for a second generation of puppet animators who worked with him at the Prague studio. By "raising the technical and aesthetic status of the puppet animated film" Trnka was able to develop a "medium that could support significant social and political meaning" *(Wells 64).* Animator's like Bretislav Pojar, Jan Svankmajer, and Jiri Barta would follow the puppet animation tradition started by Trnka and go on to "extend the vocabulary of the puppet animated film by using puppets in different contexts and mixing puppets with other forms of animation" *(Wells 64).*

Bretislav Pojar joined Jiri Trnka's Prague studio in 1947. Pojar worked under Trnka's direction as an animator and from Trnka he learnt "cultural and ethical lessons" *(Bendazzi 362).* He began directing his own films in 1952, yet still collaborated with Trnka, who designed the sets and puppets in Pojar's first significant film *One Glass too Many (1954)* which was awarded the Grand Prix at Cannes. Bendazzi states that Pojar's best films were his lyrical and satirical pieces such as *Billiard (1961), Opening Speech (1962), Romance (1963)* and three films he produced for the Canadian Film Board, *To See or Not to See (1969), Balablok (1972)* and *E (1981) (Bendazzi 363).* Pojar was an innovator who developed a unique style of his own and experimented with many alternative techniques, including the animation of puppets in relief on several layers of glass *(Holman 39).*

Jan Svankmajer experimented with various stop-motion techniques - puppet, pixilation, clay, and cutout as well as live-action - to create surrealist films. In his films he tends to use multiple techniques, such as combining pixilation with various puppet animation techniques. *Jabberwocky (1971)* is created using toys, dolls, furniture and other found objects and creates an ironic child-like environment with threatening overtones. The theme of childhood would be one he would continue to explore and is best seen in the feature length film *Alice (1988),* which blends live-action with pixilation and puppets created out of found objects, to create a dark surrealist version of the Lewis Carroll story. His animated work is concerned with the depiction of the hidden life of found objects and so he would work with ready-made puppets from various sources. Svankmajer's work, like Trnka's, also created allegorical messages directed against the oppressive communist regime in control of

Czechoslovakia at the time. While not concerned with traditional culture like Trnka, much of his work draws influences from Czech culture, history and politics.



***Figure 5: Still from "Jabberwocky"***

Although not as well known as either Pojar or Svankmajer, Jiri Barta created puppet-animated films that signalled a new era in Czech animation and experimentation with three-dimensional forms *(Bendazzi 361).* He joined Trnka's studio in the late seventies and directed several innovative animated films including *Riddles for Candy (1978), Disk-Jockey (1980), Projection (1981)* and *The Secret World of Gloves (1982).* In *The World of Gloves,* like Svankmajer using ready-mades, Barta created puppets out of gloves, which are the protagonists of the film *(Bendazzi 366).*
His most impressive work is the feature length *The Pied Piper (1985),* which combines puppet animation with other techniques to create a visually striking film *(Bendazzi 366)* in which, in contrast to Trnka and Svankmajer, he depicts the loss of cultural and moral values in a society concerned with materialism and wealth.



***Figure 6: Still from "The Pied Piper"***

Trnka's concern with preserving culture and tradition, as well as the importance of individual artistic expression and experimentation, are the most significant aspects of Czechoslovakian stop-motion animation and its influence worldwide. The animators that followed after Trnka continued to experiment and create puppet animation that was influenced by Czech culture, art, history and politics. Clearly, these puppet animated films display a puppet animation aesthetic that is distinctively Czech.

### 3.2.3 Other important puppet animators

Eastern European puppet animated films have been a major influence on puppet animation produced in other countries. Some foreign animators, who were interested in making puppet animation, travelled to Czechoslovakia to study the technique. One of these was Japanese animator Khachiro Kawamoto, who studied with Trnka for two years in 1963 and then returned Japan to create puppet animation influenced by traditional Japanese theatre, as seen in *The House of Flames (1979) (Furniss 157)*. Co Hoedeman, originally from Holland, also trained with Trnka before moving to Canada to work with the National Film Board of Canada, where he made films inspired by Eskimo culture and stories like *The Owl and the Lemming: An Eskimo Legend (1971).*



***Figure 7: Still from "The House of Flames"***



***Figure 8: Still from "The Owl and the Lemming"***

Furniss explains that puppet animation "has been reinvigorated by a number of people working outside Eastern Europe" *(157)* and today the technique now enjoys far greater commercial success and popularity than it did previously. These animators include the Brothers Quay[v], Henry Selick and Barry Purves[vi] *(157-158).* Henry Selick has contributed to the development and commercial success of puppet animation and has directed several puppet animated feature films including *The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993)* and *James and The Giant Peach (1996) (Furniss 158).*

## 3.3 History of Clay Animation

While puppet animation saw significant development in Eastern Europe from the 1940s onwards, clay animation only saw similar development in the United States of America in 1970s, where it began to become increasingly popular as a result of the work of Will Vinton *(Furniss 156)*. This is largely the result of the dominance of 2D cel animation in the United States. The following chapter outlines the history of the development of clay animation, focusing primarily on North America, and the work produced by Art Clokey and Will Vinton, early clay animation pioneers who made significant contributions to the development of the modern technique. However, it is important to recognise the contributions made by Aardman Animation in England, especially the more recent clay animated films created by Nick Park, which will be discussed briefly at the end of the chapter.

### 3.3.1 Art Clokey

Two-dimensional cel animation came to be the dominant mode of animation in the American animation industry from the 1920s onwards, as result of the technique's compatibility with cost saving division of labour techniques *(Frierson 84).* Frierson states that clay animation saw limited production in the United States of America, usually by individuals such as Willie Hopkins, Helena Smith Dayton and Virginia May, who produced animation using clay in America before 1950 *(64-115).* In the late 1940s, the experimental filmmaker, Leonard Tregillus, made two experimental clay animated films, *No Credit (1948)* and *Proem (1949),* in which the filmmaker created episodic narratives using simple geometric shapes and stylised characters constructed of clay *(Frierson 64-115).* These films were the products of individuals and were not viewed by a mass audience.

Frierson states that with the advent of television and the decline of the cinematic cartoon, clay animation found a place for mass audiences on the television screen at the hands of the filmmaker Art Clokey *(116-131).* Clokey had a highly spiritually centred upbringing and "studied to be an Episcopal priest before attending film school at the University of Southern California" where he studied under Slavko Vorkapich, a Yugoslavian, who applied graphic art principles to filmmaking and developed a theory which Clokey explains stated that "motion pictures dealt only with motion and the illusion of three-dimensional objects created by the director's use of the shapes, shadows, colours and motion… if you organize those things through camera angles, camera movement, pace and so forth, you could make any film more interesting" *(Frierson 123).*

This combination of spirituality, Christian values and a theory of film based on a prioritising of strong visual structure would be very influential in the clay animation Clokey would later produce. One of his earliest films, *Gumbasia (1955),* is an abstract film in which simple geometric plasticine shapes move and transform in synchronisation with a jazz soundtrack. This film clearly shows Vorkapich's emphasis on visual structure and montage *(Frierson 123).*



***Figure 9: Still from "Gumbastic" (1988)***

Clokey's highly innovative use of clay animation attracted the attention of a television producer, who commissioned Clokey to produce the first Gumby pilot for television. The use of clay animation was relatively simple and Clokey was able to produce the episodes cheaply and relatively fast, which was ideally suited to the television market at the time *(Frierson126)*. Clokey would go on to produce 127 episodes between 1955 and 1971 *(Frierson 125).*

Clokey's Christian upbringing is evident in *Gumby*, who "embodies a simplistic ethic of fair play and kindness toward his fellow animated creatures" *(Frierson 120).* Vorkapich's visual style is also evident in the *Gumby* episodes, from the geometric character design, to the structured montage and shot design *(Frierson 124).* Clokey also developed an interest in Eastern philosophy, which is evident in his film *Mandela (1975),* "a film with spiritual overtones in which the camera takes a seemingly endless journey through a long series of richly detailed, sculpted arch ways" *(Frierson 122).*

Frierson states that it was the new technology of television that allowed Clokey to revive clay animation and bring it to a mass audience *(130-131).* Clokey was clearly a crucial contributor to the development of clay animation, as the Gumby series showed the potential of clay animation to entertain mass audiences and thus "paved the way for the new generation of clay animators" who would come after him *(Frierson 130-131).*

### 3.3.2 Will Vinton

The 1960s and 1970s saw the significant development of animation in America, with the emergence of a significant number of independent animators as well as a significant increase in the amount of student animated films being produced from 1959 to 1961 *(Bendazzi 231-232).* Frierson highlights the fact that the continued decline of the Hollywood cartoon and the emergence of these independent animators eventually resulted in the changing of the name of the Academy Award for "Best Short Subject - Cartoon" to "Best Short Subject - Animated Film" *(Frierson 132)*. The pioneering clay animator, Will Vinton, would win this award for his innovative clay animated film *Closed Mondays (1974)* and go on to develop the first animation studio in the United states dedicated to the production of clay animation. Bendazzi states that Vinton's clay animated films are significant because "for the first time after many unsuccessful attempts and limited uses clay found its place in animation" *(Bendazzi 257).* While Clokey had success developing a successful clay animation television series, it was Will Vinton and his film *Closed Mondays,* who signalled the birth of clay animation as a popular and respected technique.

Vinton's interest in clay animation started while studying architecture at the University of California in Berkeley, where he developed an interest in "the fluid clay sketches by Antonio Gaudi[vii]" *(Frierson 132).* In an interview cited by Frierson, he states that although he was interested in filmmaking, there was no film programme at Berkeley, so he began teaching himself and incorporating filmmaking into his architecture course by making live-action documentaries on architectural history as well as films, where he used an animated camera to move through miniature models *(Frierson 133).*

After leaving university he began experimenting with clay animation together with Bob Gardner, who he had met while studying at Berkley and together they produced *Closed Monday (1974)* in Vinton's basement over a period of fourteen months. In the film a homeless drunk stumbles into an art gallery, where he responds to various pieces of art and sculpture, which, as the story progresses, come to life. The film ends with the homeless man becoming a piece of sculpture himself. Frierson explains that the film shows "how art can unlock personal visions and personal responses in the

viewer", while the film's ending is ironic as it suggests "the ability of art to become all-encompassing to capture all aspects of life" *(Frierson 134)*.

*Closed Mondays* also utilised previously unused techniques and technology in clay animation production. Vinton utilised life-size scale models for close up shots, which, together with live-action lip synch and performance with references of actors saying dialogue, were used to rotoscope and create very precise lip-synch. Frierson states that these techniques "brought the full impact of this lip-synch technique to the screen for the first time" *(Frierson 134).* Vinton also utilised three-dimensional camera moves in this film, which had previously only been done in more expensive puppet films. However, Vinton implemented "low tech, plywood camera rigs" to create very effective and dynamic camera movements in his film *(Frierson 134-135).*



***Figure 10: Still from "Closed Mondays"***

After Vinton's success with *Closed Mondays,* he left his partnership with Gardiner and founded his own studio, Will Vinton Productions. He entered into a partnership with distributor and financer Frank Moynihan of Billy Budd Films. Moynihan was interested in adapting classical literature for children and provided Will Vinton Productions with the financial support to produce three twenty minute clay animated films in the late 70s: *Martin the Cobbler (1976), Rip Van Winkle (1978)* and *The Little Prince (1979). Martin the Cobbler* was a screen adaptation of Tolstoy's *Where Love Is, God Is (1885). Rip Van Winkle* was an adaptation of Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle (1819);* and *The Little Prince* was an adaptation of Antoine de Saint-

Exupery's *The Little Prince (1943).* All three of these were adaptations of popular literary classics with moral and religiously centred themes.



***Figure 11: Still from "Rip Van Winkle"***

These films allowed Vinton to experiment and develop his distinctive style of "full clay" animation. Vinton was also able to grow his studio by hiring artists to work with him, as well as developing the facilities and technology necessary to produce clay animated films. Bendazzi states, "gradually, the studio took shape as a large craftsman's shop with approximately twenty people including producers, animators and technicians" *(259).*



***Figure 12: Still from "The Little Prince***

This period of growth and development culminated with Vinton's development and patent of the Claymation process, which is explained and shown in the documentary

*Claymation (1978)*. By 1979, Will Vinton Productions was being restricted by the partnership with Billy Budd Films and Vinton ended the partnership with Frank Moynihan. This was due to several reasons, but mainly because the studio "was growing in leaps and bounds" and in order to pursue more ambitious projects, Vinton "wanted to pay valuable staff much better wages than before, thus the productions became more expensive than Frank (Moynihan) could or would finance. Also Frank (Moynihan) preferred to do socially significant and religiously orientated films while Vinton was less keen on the more blatant religious projects" *(Frances)*. The films were religious in the sense that they contain moral lessons regarding behaviour and relationships. These more ambitious projects included *The Great Cognito (1982)* and the first feature length clay animation film, *The Adventures of Mark Twain (1985)*. Bendazzi states that this film is "probably Will Vinton's finest work. It displays a self-assured sense of performance, a flowing well orchestrated rhythm and high quality visual inventions" *(259)*. Frierson states that the film met with "lukewarm" response *(148)* and therefore the film was largely regarded as a financial failure. However he also states, "the production of a medium's first feature is a milestone marking the maturation of a technique" *(148)*.

Will Vinton Studios continued producing Claymation throughout the nineties, and their most significant production was a series of five television commercials created for the California Advisory Board between 1986 and 1989. These commercials featured musical performances, singing and dancing by the plasticine band "The California Raisins". The songs and performances were created with "hip associations" using artists like Marvin Gaye, Ray Charles and Michael Jackson *(Frierson 156-157)*. Frierson states that they "are intriguing because they caricature the stars, conventions, and iconography of rock-and-roll video" and the "audience engages in an informed reading of the imagery, a playful decoding of references to classic gesture and stereotypes that have been built up over the 40-year association of television and rock and roll" *(157)*. The commercials developed into a national phenomenon and a craze for California Raisin merchandise developed *(Frierson 158)*. Frierson states that for the first time since *Gumby*, television viewers recognised clay characters, and that the Raisin commercials demonstrated the "power of clay animation to captivate the consciousness of the mass audience on the same scale as Mickey Mouse or Bugs Bunny" *(158-159)*.



***Figure 13: Still from "Michael Raisin" (1988). One of the commercials produced by Will Vinton for the California Raisin Board.***

Will Vinton is undoubtedly one of the most important figures in the history of the development of clay animation. Frierson states that "more than any other producer, Will Vinton has worked to make clay animation as big a phenomenon as cel animation, to make it as widely seen and accepted as the classic cartoon" *(159).* He developed a distinctive style of clay animation that had never been seen before, and "his use of clay cleared the trail followed by many others, dramatically reviving the field" *(Bendazzi 259).* Thus, Vinton, as with Trnka's puppet animation, created a new genre of animation and developed techniques and conventions of clay animation, which animators around the world would emulate.

### 3.3.3 Aardman Animation

Clay animation experienced a large revival in the nineties as a result of the British based animation studio, Aardman Animations, which has raised the commercial success of the technique to a level never seen before *(Lord and Sibley 51-61).* While Vinton made significant contributions to the development of clay animation, it is important not to overlook the contributions made by Aardman, and particularly, the work created by director Nick Park[viii]. David Sproxton and Peter Lord formed the studio in 1972. Over the years they produced some significant clay animations, such as *Morph (1976), Conversation Pieces (1982),* as well as the stop-motion music video for Peter Gabriel's *Sledgehammer (1986).* The nineties saw the studio "become the best most famous stop-motion animation studio in the world" *(Hall 1).* This is largely

due to the several films directed by Nick Park receiving Academy Awards and huge international success. These include *Creature Comforts (1989), The Wrong Trousers (1993)* and *A Close Shave (1995),* each of which received an Academy Award for Best Short Subject - Animated Film.

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[i] This is only true for cel animation and not other 2D techniques, such as cutout, which are created using stop-motion. Drawn animation can also be animated in front of the camera, such as in the stop-motion films produced by South African William Kentridge using charcoal.

[ii] Fredrick W. Taylor developed a "system of scientific management and assembly-line methods" that "advocate the use of machines and standardised, mechanised processes to assure uniform, predictable output. The division of labour is a key element in this system; management is clearly separated from the general labourers, whose work can be regulated systematically" *(Furniss 17)*.

[iii] Starewich's family was of polish descent *(Bendazzi 35)*

[iv] Bendazzi states that puppet theatre had been used in Czechoslovakia to stir up rebellion against the oppressive occupation of the region by the Austro-Hungarians and later the Germans *(167)*

[v] The Brothers Quay are the American twin brothers Timothy and Stephen Quay, who, working out of London, create surreal and "anti-narrative" puppet animated films that are largely influenced by stop-motion animation produced in Eastern Europe, particularly that of Jan Svankmajer

[vi] "Barry Purves is a British animator who has won acclaim for his sophisticated puppet animations including *Screenplay (1991)* and *Rigoletto (1993)" (Furniss 158)*

[viii] Although the contributions made by Aardman are of huge significance, it was felt that the work produced by Will Vinton in the United States was more relevant to the section on South African stop-motion animation, and therefore, the history of Aardman is covered only briefly in this research report

## 4. The aesthetics of 3D stop-motion animation

This chapter is a discussion of the formal elements that make up the mis-en-scene of the three-dimensional stop-motion techniques: puppet animation, clay animation and pixilation. Using specific examples of relevant animations, these formal elements will be discussed, while keeping in mind the production processes involved in the creation of these animation techniques. The aim of this chapter is to systematically present the aesthetic tendencies that should be considered when examining or analysing films made with 3D stop-motion animation techniques. This information will then be used in my textual analysis of the relevant South African animated films.

When researching the formal properties that make up the characteristic mis-en-scene elements of an animation technique, one should look at these techniques in terms of *image design, colour and line* and *movement and kinetics (Furniss 66-81).* Furniss states that the aesthetics of three-dimensional animation should be analysed in terms of the treatment of three-dimensional forms and spaces, as well as the movement of these forms through these spaces *(156-173).* However, Wells points out that when attempting to study animation, it is useful to consider it in terms of "orthodox and experimental animation" tendencies *(35-67)*, as well as certain "narrative strategies" *(68-126).* Therefore, in the following discussion, using methods from both authors, the aesthetics of 3D animation will be discussed in terms of narrative, 3D forms, 3D spaces and movement.

Wells constructs a continuum on which he places the extreme tendencies that separate "orthodox animation" from "experimental animation", such as the treatment of structure, form, spaces and sound *(35-67).* These categories are useful because, as Furniss points out, experimental and mainstream animation merely exist as alternatives to each other and they are in fact defined by their opposition to each other *(30).* These tendencies therefore show the range of choices available to the filmmaker producing an animated film and are thus useful in a discussion of aesthetics.

## 4.1 Narrative and structural design

Wells states that "orthodox" animated films will generally use "specific continuity", meaning that films will be based on a logically progressing sequence of events that build on an establishing event until being resolved *(36)*, while experimental animation will resist this and rather create "specific non-continuities", meaning that the films will be based on illogical, irrational and multiple continuities *(43).* However, Furniss states that animation "can be employed for a variety of reasons" and that when conducting an analysis of a film's "structural design", the researcher should first consider its "primary function" and the audience it is intended for *(97).*

The film may either be intended to entertain a large audience with a traditional narrative; or be an experimental animation intended for a small audience in which the filmmaker experiments with techniques or expresses a personal vision *(Furniss 97).* Furniss also stresses that the animation may be used to advertise products, as a form of documentary, or even as an educational tool, and that these structure types do not necessarily conform to traditional structural formats *(97).*



***Figure 14: Still from "Martin the Cobbler"***

Vinton Studio's *Martin The Cobbler* is an adaptation the story written by Tolstoy. The film opens on Martin, an old lonely cobbler, who has lost his faith in God and love of life. After a series of events, Martin learns to love life and believe in God again. The narrative follows a traditional three-act structure with events that follow a logical progression. The film was financed by Billy Budd Films, and was primarily intended for a Christian audience. In contrast, Clokey's *Gumbasia* has no characters or events and is merely a sequence of shots showing plasticine shapes in motion.



***Figure 15: Still from "Gumbasia"***

It is important to consider the cultural context in which a film was produced. Jiri Trnka produced puppet animations that were relevant to Czechoslovakia. *Old Czech Legends* is a series of traditional Czech stories, while *The Hand* is an allegorical tale that protested against the autocratic nature of the communist regime in charge of Czechoslovakia. This film uses symbols to create a metaphor that depicts the lack of freedom of speech in a totalitarian regime and its consequences.



***Figure 16: Still from "Creature Comforts"***

In England, Aardman created the clay-animated documentary *Creature Comforts,* with audio from interviews with English citizens speaking about their homes and lives. This documentary style was used by Aardman to create *Conversation Pieces,* and various other films in which no dialogue was scripted. In America, Will Vinton created the commercial series *The California Raisins* in which famous musicians and American pop-music culture were parodied through the use of plasticine raisins performing live music in an effort to change the American public's perception of raisins. Clearly, animation can be used for various functions, and animated films should never be looked at as either being abstract experiments or linear narratives.

## 4.2 Treatment of three-dimensional forms

Forms in animation can be "configurations" or "abstractions" *(Wells 36).* Wells states that "orthodox" animated films tend to use figures and forms which, while perhaps being highly stylized, are recognisable *(36),* while experimental animation will tend to resist presenting recognizable forms or figures to the audience and will rather "redefine the body" or simply show forms and shapes rhythmically moving without the motivation of character *(43).* Citing Scott McCloud, Furniss discusses these extremes and explains that images can either be photorealistic, abstract or iconic *(66).* Photorealistic images are exact mechanical reproductions of reality; while iconic images are non-realistic representations of reality and abstract images are the "total refiguring" of reality into a "mere suggestion" *(Furniss 66).* The treatment of forms and spaces in three-dimensional stop-motion animation is complicated by the fact that these films are created, like live-action, via the mechanical reproduction, or photography, of actual spatial reality. Thus, all stop-motion animated films are essentially photorealistic reproductions of reality (albeit reality created through a fabricated set). However, these definitions provided by Wells and Furniss, are useful in the discussion of the treatment of forms in three-dimensional animation.

Orthodox animated films are concerned with the "evolution of content", while experimental animation is concerned with the "evolution of materiality" *(Wells 36).* In commercial animation, the filmmaker does not want to "draw the audience's attention to its (the animated film's) construction" but rather to focus the attention on character and narrative while "the experimental film concentrates on its very materiality" and the filmmaker may wish to make the audience aware and question the actual process involved in creating the film *(Wells 37; 45).* Thus the filmmaker must decide whether to make the audience aware of the forms as constructions or not.

### 4.2.1 Treatment of forms in clay animation

Frierson states that the forms used in clay animation range from simple geometric shapes to traditional human or animal representations *(3).* In experimental clay animation, the forms used will tend to be abstract geometric simplifications, while

more mainstream clay films will feature figurative characters that will be "costumed" *(Frierson 5)*.

In *Gumbasia*, Clokey sculpts the plasticine into simple geometric shapes, which are pure abstract forms. Will Vinton's *The Adventures of Mark Twain,* an excellent example of the traditional clay aesthetic developed by Vinton, uses figurative characters, which are sculpted with fairly realistic detail, as well as clothes also sculpted out of plasticine. The characters in this film are created using a caricature technique known as *portraite-charge* and are characterized by their large heads and exaggerated features placed on top of a small but intricately designed body *(Frierson 140).* However, these puppets are also characterized by intricate detail sculpted into the forms, such as detail found on the character's hair and face.



***Figure 17: Still from "The Adventures of Mark Twain"***

The figures in *Mark Twain* are fairly realistic, traditional configurations of the human form. In Aardman's *Wallace and Gromit* and *Creature Comforts,* the forms are recognisable configurations of human and animal forms, although in comparison with Vinton's style, they are very much more stylised and "cartoony". However, the clay figure of a prisoner used in Aardman's "quasi-documentary" clay animation, *Going Equipped,* is characterized by a "naturalistic" style *(Wells 109-110).*



***Figure 18: Sill from "Wallace and Gromit:***



***Figure 19: Still from "Going Equipped"***

This figure, while clearly not photorealistic, is not as stylized or exaggerated as the figures used in *Wallace and Gromit* or *The Adventures of Mark Twain,* and in fact has accurate body proportions and has clothes sewn from real fabric.



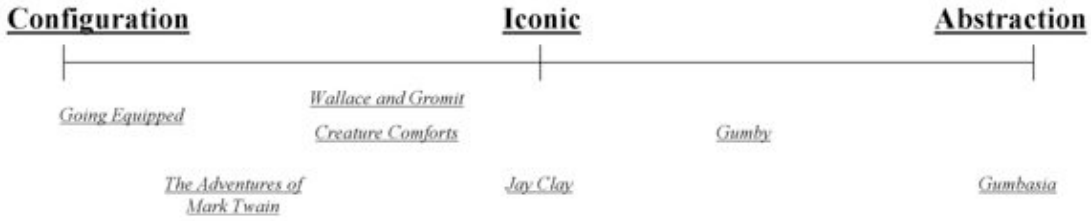
***Figure 20: Still from "Canhead" (1996). Directed by Timothy Hittle.***

In contrast to these recognisable forms is the figure of Jay from Timothy Hittle's[i] *The Potato Hunters.* Although Jay is a recognisable figure, it is impossible to identify him as belonging to any cultural or racial group since his form is simply sculpted and coloured in plain grey. While, Aardman and Vinton created clay characters with eyes created out of painted beads and mouths sculpted with a fair amount of detail, Jay simply has sculpted out holes where his eyes and mouth should be. Although Jay is a recognisable configuration of a human form, he tends towards being more of a simple abstract geometric shape than the figures used by Aardman and Vinton. Clokey's character, Gumby, is even more abstract as he is a simple geometric shape, however, his facial features make him a recognisable form.



***Figure 21: Gumby and his horse Pokey***
***Source: Derektanderson.com***

Clay forms can thus be discussed in terms of their tendency towards configuration or abstraction. This is demonstrated in the diagram bellow.




## 4.2.2 Treatment of forms in puppet animation

By definition, the puppet is a figurative form, and this makes the discussion of abstraction versus traditional configuration complicated. However, puppets can be discussed in terms of the materials from which they are constructed as well as their cultural context. With regard to the aesthetics of puppets, Holman states that "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" *(Holman 76).* Here Holman expresses the view that in a puppet animated film, the puppet should be seen as a puppet, and he criticises the

trend towards creating more naturalistic puppets as he feels that this detracts from the puppets "puppetness".

While this is a purist viewpoint, which Darley would call "essentialism", since Holman is stating that a puppet is best at being a puppet, it highlights a fundamental point when considering the aesthetics and treatment of puppet forms. The filmmaker may either choose to reveal the construction of the form and show the puppet as a puppet, or in contrast, he may try to hide this construction since it may distract from the narrative function of the animated film.

The are several different types of puppets, which can be constructed from a variety of materials and, as Furniss points out, the type of puppet and the materials used will determine the range of movement and emotional expression that can be achieved with the puppet. Holman identifies three basic types of puppets: the "classical" puppet, the moulded puppet and the animated toy puppet *(56)*.

The classical puppet is generally associated with Czechoslovakia and specifically with the puppets designed and used by Jiri Trnka. Trnka, a traditionally trained puppeteer, based the designs of his puppets on traditional Czech puppets. These puppets are normally wooden, and generally had a fixed, rigid expression, such as the puppet used in his film *The Hand.*



***Figure 22: Still from "The Hand"***

The moulded puppet is created from rubber or latex materials, which are applied over an articulated armature, usually with a casting and moulding process *(Holman 56)*. Puppets made from foam rubber are flexible, more so than the wooden "classical" puppets. The foam rubber can be painted so that it looks like clay/plasticine *(Priebe 159)* but it has the disadvantage of not being as alterable as plasticine *(Furniss 163),* but is relatively flexible in comparison to puppets made of wood or plastic. Modern puppet filmmakers tend to use these types of puppets, such as the puppets used by Henry Selick in his films *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *James and The Giant Peach.* The effect of using foam material is that it can be used to create puppets with a more stylized design.

Trnka designed his puppets to appear in his films as puppets. As a viewer, you are aware that you are watching a puppet and as Wells points out, while the puppet is like a human, its "specific function is that of an automata" since it is actually lifeless and this therefore enables the puppet to function as a symbol, while embodying multiple "metaphorical positions" *(61).* The puppet is suited to the creation of films with allegorical and sub-textual meaning.



***Figure 23: Still from "James and the Giant Peach"***

The *animated toy puppet* has a solid body, which is carved out of wood or plastic, to which jointed arms, legs and head were added, and the costume painted on *(Holman 56).* Sometimes animators may use pre-existing toys such as dolls, which already have joints. Holman points out that a wide variety of materials can be used to create puppets, such as sticks, cans, rags or just about anything that can be found *(59).* Czech

animators experimented with a wide array of materials. Starewich created puppets from “tin cans, egg shells, pieces of straw and scraps of rag” in his film *The Mascot.*



***Figure 24: Still from “Street of Crocodiles”***

This idea of using ready-made discarded material as well as toys is used by The Brothers Quay in their film *The Street of Crocodiles* in which “incomplete puppet figures, screws and bits of metal” are used as forms. Wells places this type of form under the “narrative strategy” of “fabrication”, with which lifeless, dead, or decayed material is redefined “ as if it still possessed an intrinsically organic life” *(90-91).* Wells states that these types of forms have an inherent history and associated meaning from contextual use, and that the Brothers Quay created the conditions of the uncanny by placing these familiar forms in an unfamiliar context.



***Figure 25: Still from “Street of Crocodiles”***

More abstract types of puppets can also be created. Wells states that "orthodox" animated films tend to use figures and forms which, while perhaps being highly stylized, emulate material reality (36), while experimental animation will tend to resist presenting recognizable forms or figures to the audience and will rather "redefine the body" or simply show forms and shapes rhythmically moving without the motivation of character (43). This is seen in the experimental puppet animated film, *The Coiling Prankster*, directed by Garri Bardin, in which the filmmaker creates the character from galvanized steel wire, abstracting the human figure into a basic and simple shape and at the same time simplifying and stripping the puppet down to its most basic form and material.

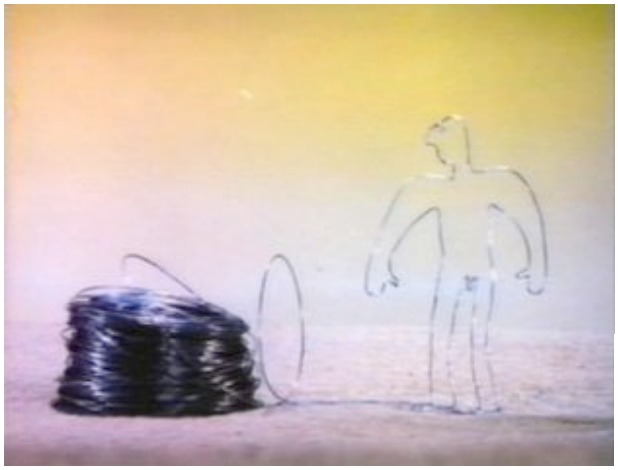


***Figure 26: Still from "The Coiling Prankster"***

## 4.3 Treatment of three-dimensional spaces

In puppet-animated films, the puppets are animated in a three-dimensional space and, therefore, the construction of these spaces should be discussed here with regard to the issue of configuration and abstraction in the animated film. Furniss states that in a three-dimensional animation, the filmmaker can either create sets that are "realistic" in the sense that they emulate reality, or they can create sets that are simplifications of reality and thus create "fantastic" environments *(Furniss 161-162).* In the same way that puppets and clay figures could be described in terms of their design tending towards photorealism, iconic, or abstract, so too can the sets constructed and used in puppet and clay animation.

Wells states that in an "orthodox" animated film, the "formal properties and style" of the film will remain constant and will not mix or blend different styles or techniques *(37-38),* while in an experimental animation, the filmmaker may blend different animation techniques and aesthetic styles in order to challenge orthodox ways of creating animations and also to create new effects *(45).* This concept of "unity of style" is important when considering the treatment of three-dimensional spaces in stop-motion animation.

The use of camera and lighting is also relevant with regard to this discussion of space in stop-motion animation, and these topics will be discussed here.

### 4.3.1 Treatment of spaces in clay animation

*The Adventures of Mark Twain* utilises Vinton's "full clay style". Vinton's style is characterized by the construction of a "complete clay world" which Barry Bruce, character designer, believes makes the "actions of the characters appear more convincing" and this results in a cohesive style with a "consistency and aesthetic wholeness" *(Frierson 136).* The elements that make up the set are all constructed, like the characters, from clay and the result is visually striking. Furniss draws comparisons between this total use of clay to the use of painted backgrounds with painted cels in cel animated films and "the aesthetics of most 2D techniques" that result in the creation of a "total fantasy world" *(Furniss 162).*



***Figure 32: Full clay worlds. Still from "The Adventures of***



***Figure 33: Full clay worlds. Still from "The Adventures of***

Although the audience recognises the environments in *Mark Twain* as miniature constructions, the audience accepts these more easily as being part of a complete fantasy world *(Furniss 161)*. Vinton's "full clay" aesthetic is clearly an example of "unity of style".

In contrast, Gumby lives in a "surrealistic Toyland" that is a stylized simplification of the real world *(Furniss 161)*. Clokey included real objects in his set, and placed pre-existing miniatures and toys throughout, which result in a childlike make-believe world, which has obvious appeal for young children *(Frierson 126)*. Furniss states that the spaces in Gumby are "a much simplified version" of space "of what the average viewer would read as a real world environment" and this results in a fantastic effect *(161)*. However, Frierson argues that these non-realistic spaces that include a mixture of real non-clay objects will be recognised by older audiences who then begin to decode the animated world's construction, and thus be distracted *(126)*.




***Figure 29: Still from "Gumbastic"***

Mixing arbitrary ready-made objects into the set of a 3D stop-motion animation can in itself become a formal component of the mis-en-scene. In Hittle's *The Potato Hunter*, a flat landscape is made up of wooden panelling, creating a surface that resembles a tabletop. Hittle filled this environment with various unrelated and arbitrary objects such as skulls, poker chips, and doll's heads. The environment is inhabited by Jay Clay, his dog, and a herd of potatoes. Jay is hungry and the film follows his attempts to catch a potato. Frierson states that the assembly of these unrelated and arbitrary elements creates a "surreal post-modern landscape that comments on the central character's hunt for food" *(14)*.



***Figure 30: Still from "The Potato Hunters"***



***Figure 31: Still from "The Potato Hunters"***

### 4.3.2 Treatment of spaces in puppet animation

In puppet animation it is possible to create realistic environments that are comparable to "locations" used in live-action. Furniss points out that in *The Street of Crocodiles* "the central puppet figure of the film walks through a setting that is realistic for its time and place - also very much like a location" *(161).* This arises out of the Brothers Quay's use of real objects and materials to construct this film world. They are thus able to "create a very realistic diegetic space" *(Furniss 161).*



***Figure 32: Still from "Street of Crocodile"***

### 4.3.3 Treatment of camera and lighting

Holman points out that Trnka used the camera and lighting of his sets to create enhanced dramatic effects to support the performance of his puppets *(66-69).* The use of the camera and lighting in three-dimensional stop-motion animation can be treated the same way as they are in live-action, although obviously there are differences, since puppet and clay animation involve the use of miniatures. In puppet and clay animation, the treatment of camera and lighting can be either simple or complex. The Brothers Quay and Will Vinton both use camera and lighting in a dynamic way in order to enhance the intended dramatic effects of their films and draw the audience into their film worlds.



***Figure 33: Still from "The Adventures of Mark Twain"***



***Figure 34: Still from "The Adventures of Mark Twain"***



***Figure 35: Still from "Street of Crocodiles"***

Their use of camera and lighting is similar to live-action. However, in three-dimensional stop-motion, camera and lighting can be used in a very simple manner. In Aardman's *Pib and Pog (1994)* only one camera set-up is used and the lighting is flat, creating a highly stylised cartoon effect.



***Figure 36: Still from "Pib and Pog"***

## 4.4 Treatment of movement in three-dimensional animation

The movement of puppets is generally characterized by being far more stylized than the performance of clay figures. Classical puppets, like the puppet used by Trnka in *The Hand,* are made out of solid materials like wood, and therefore have a fixed facial expression. The performances of puppets rely on the use of gesture and pantomime to express emotion.



***Figure 37: Still from "The Hand"***

In contrast, clay is categorized by its flexibility and ability to be sculpted after each exposure of the camera. Concerning the treatment of forms in clay animation, Frierson has this to say: “Abstract work may admit some of the natural qualities of clay - its sculptability, its plasticiness, its natural affinity for metamorphosis - and be unconcerned with refined surfaces, with avoiding fingerprints or stray scorings in the clay, with the need for armatures, or even with the need for figures at all” *(5)*. Movement in clay animation is defined by the flexibility and malleability of the medium, which allows for relatively easy use of exaggeration and distortion.



***Figure 38: Still sequence from “The Adventures of Mark Twain” Treatment of frog jumping demonstrates fluidity of clay.***

However, more mainstream work is generally concerned with "creating and costuming characters" that are designed and constructed to support a commercial narrative intended for a mainstream audience *(Frierson 5)*. Clay figures have a far wider range of possible movements as their form can be altered and allows for the use of the "squash and stretch" technique. This highlights clay animation's similarity to cel animation. Clay's ability to be reshaped and sculpted also highlights its ability to utilize metamorphosis techniques. Plasticine forms can be animated, transforming into other forms. Much of Will Vinton's work is characterised by this fluidity of clay.

The replacement mouth technique used to create facial expression and lip synch, is a technique exploited by clay animation and puppet animation. This means that the lip synch can be animated during pre-production, since these shapes are constructed then. This technique frees the animator up to concentrate specifically on the movement of the arms, legs, head and body of the clay figures or puppets and the creation of a performance.

Will Vinton's style is characterized by the sculpting process *(Shaw 4)*. The animator will sculpt the mouth and lip synch of the figure, frame for frame, in a way similar to cell animation techniques. However, he also employs replacement animation for certain characters in *The Adventures of Mark Twain.*



***Figure 39: Still sequence from "The Adventures of Mark Twain"***
***Use of replacement 'moustaches' for lip Synch.***



***Figure 40: Still from "The Adventures of Mark Twain"***
***Use of sculpting for lip synch***

This concludes the first part of the research report and the overview of the history and aesthetics of puppet and clay animation. In summary, it can be seen that although 2D cel animation has largely dominated animation production around the world, puppet and clay animation were still able to develop into distinctive genres of their own. Jiri Trnka is one of the most important figures in the early history of puppet animation as he developed many of the codes and conventions of the puppet-animated film genre, while Will Vinton did the same for the clay-animated film. Both Trnka and Vinton developed their own distinctive visual styles and these have been influential in the development of puppet and clay animation in other parts of the world, including South Africa. The rest of the research report will focus on the history of puppet and clay animation in South Africa between 1980 and 2005.

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[i] Tim Hittle is an American independent filmmaker who created a series with his character Jay Clay *(Frierson 160)*.

## 5. South Africa 1980-1989: Ted Berenson and Klaybow Films

The stop-motion animation produced by masters such as Vinton, Trnka and others influenced the development of animation in South Africa and this influence is evident in the aesthetics of stop-motion animation produced between the years 1980 and 2005. There is no evidence to suggest that any significant stop-motion animation was produced in South Africa before 1981. Even though animation has been produced in this country since 1915[i], the industry in South Africa has largely been influenced by American animation practices and thus 2D cel animation was generally the dominant medium of animation production.

However, in 1981, a Romanian called Ted Berenson formed a stop-motion studio in Cape Town called Klaybow Films. Berenson began hiring and training young South African artists, who were exposed for the first time to stop-motion animation produced by masters such as Will Vinton and Jiri Trnka. As a result of Klaybow Films, stop-motion animation would play a vital role in the development of the South African animation industry between the years 1980 and 2005. The following chapter documents the history of Klaybow Films between the years 1980 and 1989. During this period Klaybow Films grew into a relatively large studio capable of producing clay animation of a high standard. However, due to economic factors arising out of the political and social landscape of Apartheid South Africa, the studio was forced to moved to London in order to pursue more economically viable projects. However shortly after this, facing increasing financial pressure, Klaybow Films closed down in 1989. The studios history will be discussed in terms of these and other contextual factors.

### 5.1 The South African animation industry: 1976-1989

Before 1976, South African animation production was relatively small and primarily based in Johannesburg; where advertisements for cinema display, live-action special effects and titles for live-action films were produced. With the formation of the South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) in 1976, another avenue for animation production emerged. However, due to the simplistic view and understanding of

animation held by the national broadcaster, animation was restricted to children's entertainment productions.

It is important to take into account the political and social context prevalent in South Africa at this time in order to understand the South African animation industry in the 1980s[ii]. During apartheid, South Africa was characterised by oppressive laws that restricted the freedom and rights of non-white South Africans. Botha points out that these non-white communities were not only marginalised economically and politically, but also lacked any representation in South African film *(34-36).* The 1980s also saw an increase in international opposition towards the oppressive apartheid regime, resulting in the development and intensification of sanctions and boycotts against South Africa.

The SABC was a key institution used by the government to spread propaganda during the eighties and was used as an ideological tool to spread this propaganda mainly through the news and documentary departments. Even children's programming was often characterized by ideological themes *(Shapurjee 60).* Children's animation commissioned by the SABC during the seventies and eighties was characterized by the broadcaster's strict control, which resulted in content with a "wholesome, didactic identity" *(Shapurjee 57).*

## 5.2 Ted Berenson and the formation of Klaybow Films: 1973-1981

Ted Berenson was born in Romania during the fifties and, when he was eighteen, immigrated with his family to Israel in 1973. He initially disliked Israel, and went to Milan in Italy to study medicine. However, he shortly changed his studies to drama and theatre, and during this time developed an interest in puppetry and masks. He returned to Israel in 1977 and produced three alternative puppet theatre productions, which were shown at the Israeli Museum using puppets that were man-size or larger. Following this he studied film at the Beit Zvi School of Art[iii], although the focus was on live-action filmmaking, he was also exposed to puppet animation production. He then began working as an editor for Israeli Television. It was during this period that he met his wife Marcel, who was originally from South Africa. In 1980 they came to South Africa on holiday to visit Marcel's family. During this visit, Marcel's father

unexpectedly passed away, and they decided to remain in South Africa for at least two years while Marcel's brother completed his university studies. Berenson began looking into filmmaking in South Africa and for the SABC. He was in particular interested in getting involved in documentary production. However, he quickly realized that his options were limited. "You couldn't do any decent film making with the SABC, it was very distorted as you know. So I was very happy to do some animation film. In some ways the situation was very similar to Romania. Communism and apartheid had a lot of things in common, such as the distortion of reality and the control of the media. So it was pretty clear to me that it would be pointless to pursue anything in documentary filmmaking" *(Berenson)*. In this restricted and censored environment, Berenson saw animation as the part of the television industry he would like to get involved with, and together with his wife Marcel, formed Klaybow Films in 1981.

Their first official clay animation production, *Madam and Steve (1981)* is described as a "10 min rock musical. A satirical look at Adam and Eve's story" *(Klaybow Films[iv])*. The film, which was more of an initial experiment with an unfamiliar technique, was a collaboration between Berenson and South African rock musician Tully McCully, who composed music and "tongue in cheek" lyrics, to create an "erotic film in clay", which besides McCully's contribution was "not remarkable in anyway" *(Berenson)*.

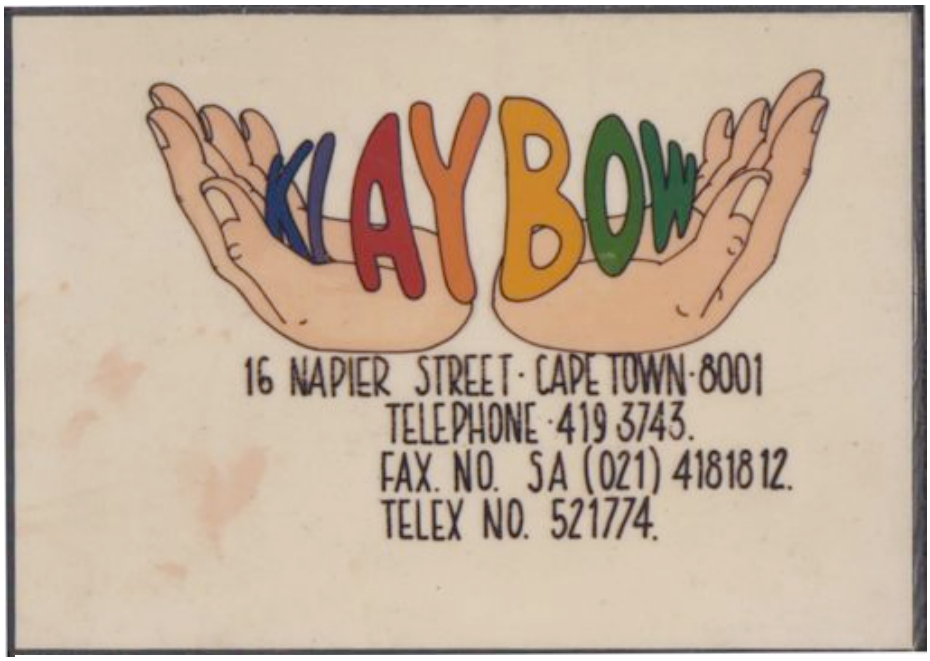
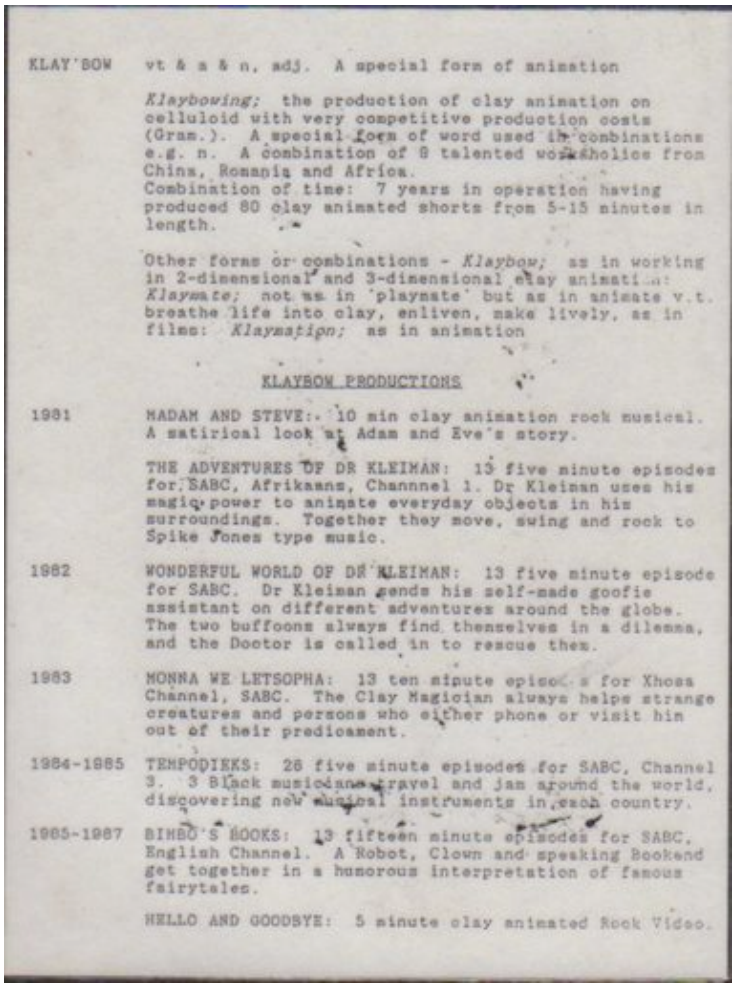



***Figure 41: Front page of Klaybow Films' promotional booklet***



KLAY'BOW vt & a & n, adj. A special form of animation

*Klaybowing;* the production of clay animation on celluloid with very competitive production costs (Gram.). A special form of word used in combinations e.g. n. A combination of 8 talented workaholics from China, Romania and Africa.
Combination of time: 7 years in operation having produced 80 clay animated shorts from 5-15 minutes in length.

Other forms or combinations - *Klaybow;* as in working in 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional clay animation: *Klaymate;* not as in 'playmate' but as in animate v.t. breathe life into clay, enliven, make lively, as in films: *Klaymation;* as in animation

KLAYBOW PRODUCTIONS

1981 MADAM AND STEVE:- 10 min clay animation rock musical. A satirical look at Adam and Eve's story.

THE ADVENTURES OF DR KLEIMAN: 13 five minute episodes for SABC, Afrikaans, Channnel 1. Dr Kleiman uses his magic power to animate everyday objects in his surroundings. Together they move, swing and rock to Spike Jones type music.

1982 WONDERFUL WORLD OF DR KLEIMAN: 13 five minute episode for SABC. Dr Kleiman sends his self-made goofie assistant on different adventures around the globe. The two buffoons always find themselves in a dilemma, and the Doctor is called in to rescue them.

1983 MONNA WE LETSOPHA: 13 ten minute episodes for Xhosa Channel, SABC. The Clay Magician always helps strange creatures and persons who either phone or visit him out of their predicament.

1984-1985 TEMPODIEKS: 26 five minute episodes for SABC, Channel 3. 3 Black musicians travel and jam around the world, discovering new musical instruments in each country.

1985-1987 BINGO'S BOOKS: 13 fifteen minute episodes for SABC, English Channel. A Robot, Clown and speaking Bookend get together in a humorous interpretation of famous fairytales.

HELLO AND GOODBYE: 5 minute clay animated Rock Video.

***Figure 42: Page two of Klaybow booklet with a list of their productions***

## 5.3 Dr Kleiman and the growth of the studio: 1981-1982

That same year Berenson made a loose partnership with the South African filmmaker and producer Dirk de Villiers[v] who helped fund and produce a one-minute pilot for a children's clay animated television series. After viewing the pilot, the SABC commissioned Berenson to produce the series, entitled *The Adventures of Dr Kleiman (1981)*. This was Klaybow's first major production and the series was made up of thirteen, five-minute episodes in which "Dr Kleiman uses his magic powers to animate everyday objects in his surroundings. Together they move, swing and rock to Spike Jonze type music" *(Klaybow Films)*. The following year, Berenson was commissioned to produce another thirteen episodes for a second series, *The Wonderful World of Dr Kleiman (1982)* in which "Dr Kleiman sends his self-made goofie assistant on different adventures around the globe. The two buffoons always find themselves in a dilemma and the Doctor is called in to rescue them" *(Klaybow Films).* Talking about the two Dr Kleiman series Berenson says ". What was great

about it was that even though I was in South Africa I didn't feel any compromise in terms of having to say what a beautiful place it is, when it wasn't that beautiful. I was comfortable with that. And the studio grew from that" *(Berenson)*. Over the next three years Klaybow Films went through a period of research and growth.

During the production of the two *Dr Kleiman* series Berenson realised he needed a larger team and began to expand the studio. However, at this time in South Africa there were no institutions with specialized animation training courses. Berenson began looking for artists he could train and work with. In a newspaper article from this time, Berenson praises the skill and talent of South African artists, but explains that, "they have nowhere to go once they leave art school, other than an ad agency" *(Coetzer)*. Klaybow Films provided an opportunity for some South African artists to learn about animation when there were no opportunities to receive such training. These artists included Philip Marcus, Gary Kachelhoffer, Brett Shuman, and Lindsay van Blerk. Several of these would be involved in the South African animation industry in the nineties.

Berenson organised film screenings for Klaybow's new trainees, using 16mm prints borrowed from the Cape Provincial library, which had a large archive of live-action and animated films. These included a large selection of stop-motion provided by the National Film Board of Canada despite the boycotts against South Africa at this time. The purpose of these screenings was firstly to expose the trainees to a large variety of animated films from around the world, such as work produced by Co Hoederman, Jiri Trnka, Norman McLaren and Will Vinton. Secondly, Berenson was teaching his trainees about movement. Not only animated movement, but the concept and theory of movement in motion pictures. These screenings not only enabled the trainees to study and understand the basic principles of creating animated movement, but also to understand the use of film as a language to communicate visually. This reveals the importance of animators such as Will Vinton and Jiri Trnka, as their work clearly influenced the work produced by Klaybow Films, as well as of the artists that were being trained there.

Berenson was also concerned with developing the studio's infrastructure during this period. Although he had a background in puppet theatre and live-action filmmaking,

he had a limited knowledge about the production of 3D stop-motion. Together with his trainees, he began studying anatomy and skeleton structure in order to improve their sculpting capabilities with plasticine. They were also attempting to improve the technology they were using to create their films. They had to learn for themselves how to make armatures and puppets, experimenting with different types in the search to find which type worked best. They eventually found an engineering firm in Cape Town that was able to produce a ball and socket armature kit from which they could construct puppets of various sizes.

Berenson explains that his primary concern during this period was experimenting with and developing ways to move the camera in stop-motion filmmaking *(Berenson)*. This technical experimentation and development stop-motion craft skills were the main factors that drove the work they were creating. Berenson developed and constructed his own manually operated mechanical rigs to use during production. In practice, these were very time consuming devices, requiring a great deal of planning, concentration and note taking. In 1987 they were able to buy a state of the art motion control device that had been custom built by an animation studio in Johannesburg *(Berenson)*. The motion control device opened up possibilities for the studio that were previously unattainable, as the control the computer provided, provided support in moving both the characters and the camera, allowing them to create more fluid movements. One of the studio's trainees, Lindsay van Blerk, states that another significant technological development, which gave them greater creative control and flexibility, was the introduction of video assist technology, which allowed them to view the previously captured frame and compare it to the frame they were currently working on.

## 5.4 Limitations of working with the SABC

Although the studio clearly faced significant technological limitations, the most significant issue involving animation and television production in South Africa at this time was that studios had to work with the SABC. The broadcaster allocated small budgets and at times would also dictate content. Berenson states that although he was interested in producing animated content for the channels servicing South Africa's black population, this wasn't possible. "If you watched the television shows coming

out of Johannesburg in the 80s you'd think black people were living in Dallas. They were all driving fancy cars and eating in fancy restaurants. It was a total distortion of reality" *(Berenson)*.

Despite these limitations, the studio attempted to produce two shows for an African audience after the *Dr Kleiman* series. They produced thirteen ten-minute episodes of a series called *Monna we Letsopha (1983)* for the Xhosa channel, in which a "clay magician always helps strange creatures and persons who either phone or visit him out of their predicament" *(Klaybow Films).* After this came another series made up of twenty-six five-minute episodes, produced for Channel 3[vi], entitled *Tempodieks (1984-1985)* in which "three black musicians travel and jam around the world discovering new musical instruments in each country" *(Klaybow Films).*

The SABC was very strict in terms of the content that they commissioned for broadcast and Berenson found dealing with them to be a very frustrating experience, particularly with *Tempodieks.* "The people running the channels were extremely rightwing people. It was a very bizarre situation, but I sensed that the guy commissioning us didn't like black people and I found it amazing that he was in charge of commissioning programs for black South Africans at the time" *(Berenson)*. Berenson was told that because he was Romanian, he didn't understand black people who didn't like any other type of music besides their own.

This event seems to have revealed to Berenson the reality of political and social life in South Africa during the eighties. He states that at the time he wanted to quit what he was doing and leave South Africa. "But I couldn't quit. I had a studio and was committed to too many people. It was a situation where you wished you didn't have a studio and could just walk away" *(Berenson)*.

## 5.5 Bimbo's Books: 1985-1987

Despite these frustrations, Klaybow Films had grown into a fairly large studio, and by 1985 employed a total of ten full-time people as well as hiring freelance artists during pre-production. By 1985, the studio was made up of a diverse and highly talented crew working in specific roles such as character design, set design, and construction.

The studio also had a core group of animators. With the technological advantages of video assist and the only motion control rig in the country, the studio now had a reliable and dedicated infrastructure in place, which allowed them to produce their most successful and important work, *Bimbo's Books (1985-1987).* The series was made up of thirteen fifteen minute episodes for the SABC's English channel, in which "a robot, a clown and a speaking Bookend get together in a humorous interpretation of famous fairytales" *(Klaybow Films).* The series was a multimedia mix of three-dimensional clay animation and two-dimensional cel and cutout animation, created by the recent addition to the studio, Min Cha Lin, an animator from Taiwan.

The show had three main recurring characters: Bimbo, a mute music box clown; Robert the Robot; and Professor Sigmund, a bookend. In each episode, Professor Sigmund begins telling Bimbo and Robert a classic and well-known fairytale. The beginning of the show was done completely with 3D animation, however when the Professor began telling the story, a clay book with two-dimensional pictures would open and come to life, through 2D drawn animation. The professor would eventually fall asleep while he was telling the story, at which point the drawn characters would burst out of the book into three-dimensional clay versions of themselves and act out a "a distorted version of the fairytale" *(Berenson).*



***Figure 43: Cel animation in "Bimbo's Books - Little Red Riding Hood"***



***Figure 44: Still from "Bimbo's Books" -***

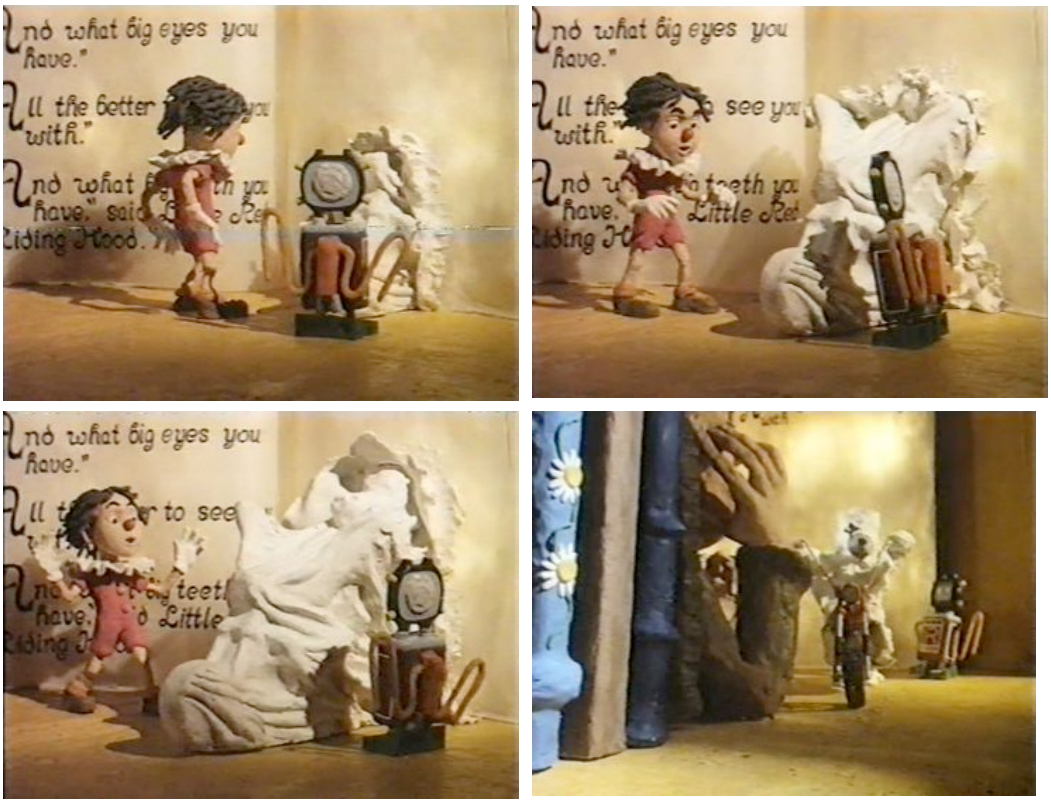


***Figure 45: Still Sequence from "Bimbo's Books" - The wolf breaks out of the book***

The show was a musical and these alternative clay versions of the classic fairytale characters would usually sing and dance. The show also caricatured well-known international celebrities, such as Woody Allen as Ali Baba. The series featured a lot of South African talent and celebrities. Jonathan Shapiro[vii] designed Robert the Robot, while artists such as Tully McCully[viii], David Kramer[ix] and Lesley Rae Dowling[x] contributed music, songs and voice talents.

The show appears to have been very well received and successful in South Africa. Berenson states that although *Bimbo's Books* provided the studio with a lot of exposure, it was not a financial success. The money they earned from the show was just enough to keep the studio running *(Berenson)*. Unlike other broadcasters, the SABC controlled all the ownership rights of the work they commissioned, which has been a major hindrance for independent producers like Berenson, who had invested a lot of his own money in the production of *Bimbo's Books*. Berenson realized that to continue to work with the SABC was pointless, firstly because as an animation studio working with the SABC, Klaybow Films was limited in terms of the content of the work they were producing, as they had seen during the production of *Tempodieks* and, secondly, the budgets that were allocated to the animations they commissioned were relatively small and would not allow the studio to grow any further *(Berenson)*.



***Figure 46: Ted Berenson standing in front of sets for "Bimbo's Books" Source: Article in Die Kat***

## 5.6 The intensification of economic sanctions

Berenson began looking to develop other projects and began looking to the international market for potential clients and investors, as this was the only possible way he could continue to both support and grow the studio. He travelled overseas with a showreel of the work Klaybow had produced, and received considerable interest from overseas animation producers. The studio was commissioned by the

American production company HBO to produce *Hello and Goodbye (1985),* a clay animated music video. Overseas animation studios and producers were impressed by the high quality work Klaybow Films was able to produce with budgets that were significantly lower than those in America and Europe.

Berenson states that because of the attractive production costs in South Africa, local film studios were supported by a lot of work commissioned by American clients during the 80s *(Berenson)*. This effectively came to an end when the American Congress passed the *Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (1986)* and the *Budget Reconciliation Act (1987),* which stopped Americans doing business with South African companies by imposing fines on companies that did business with South Africans. Berenson explains that this was a very hard time for filmmakers in South Africa, since they were limited by the restrictive SABC and suffered from a lack of support from overseas clients *(Berenson)*.

## 5.7 Billybudd Films and The Star Child: 1987-1989

Despite the sanctions and boycotts against South Africa, Berenson continued to search for potential overseas clients and travelled to New York to meet Frank Moynihan of Billy Budd films, who had previously been making short clay animation films with Will Vinton. Moynihan was looking for another studio to produce clay adaptations of classical literature. Berenson showed Klaybow's showreel to Moynihan who expressed interest in producing a short film with the studio. However, because of the sanctions and boycotts, Moynihan would not do business with the studio if it remained in South Africa *(Berenson)*.

Berenson moved the studio to England in 1987, including the five recruits he had trained and their families. They were commissioned by Billy Budd films to produce a short clay animation adaptation of *The Star Child*, written by Oscar Wilde. Production on the film began in 1988 and was completed in 1989. Berenson explains that the he had invested a lot of his own personal money in the project but Moynihan was unable to refund him until the film started to sell.
Berenson claims that this became a problem, since the voices were recorded in South Africa and festival organizers in England, recognized the South African accents in the

film and refused to play it. Klaybow Films was forced to close down as a result of this financial trouble. Although Berenson formed another studio called Animated Productions, he was unable to support the staff that had previously worked at Klaybow, which by this time had risen to approximately eighteen people.



***Figure 47: Crew standing in front of new Klaybow Films studio in London. Left to Right: Peter Kossew, Gary Kachelhoffer, Brett Schuman, Rupert (?), Marcel Berenson, Philip Marcus, and Ted Berenson***
***Photo courtesy of Lindsay van Blerk***



***Figure 48: Still from "The Star Child"***









***Figure 49 - 51: Talking Bookends in "Bimbo's Books"***

**5.8 Aesthetic analysis of Bimbo's Books**

Although it is difficult to discuss the aesthetics of the clay animation produced by Klaybow Films due to the difficulties[xi] in acquiring examples of their work, it is possible to arrive at some conclusions from their showreel ***(See DVD - Disk 01)***. The most striking characteristic in *Bimbo's Books* is the use of elements found in Vinton's Clay Animation style, particularly in the use of the clay on clay aesthetic in the clay animation scenes. All of the 3D spaces and characters were constructed from plasticine. The quality of sculpture is generally very good, and in some instances excellent, especially that of the actual bookcase. The show also features bust sculptures coming to life ***(figures 49- 51)*** and clearly refers to some of the very first clay-animated films, which employed the same technique. The style of the sculpture is very similar to Vinton's earlier work such as *Rip Van Winkle,* in which the forms have exaggerated heads and the general treatment of plasticine has a slight crudeness to it.

Berenson states that Klaybow Films was very much influenced by the clay animation work produced by Will Vinton. However, he states that Vinton's work was merely used as a reference point, and says that the work produced by Klaybow was far less regimentally structured than Vinton's. In particular, what distinguishes Klaybow's work is the use of mixed media and clay special effects. This points to one of the fundamental aspects of the work produced by Klaybow. While the forms are somewhat unrefined and the animation tends to be very crude, the films display an impressive use of clay metamorphosis, special effects, and 2D clay animation. This shows that Berenson was perhaps more interested in the use of technology and special effects in three-dimensional animation than in the development of character animation.

This sounds plausible when one considers that after Klaybow closed down, Berenson started a new studio, which specialised in 3D animation effects using motion control cameras. The narrative and style of *Bimbo's Books* are also significant and in some ways unique. The basic principle of each episode was to set up a well-known traditional fairy tale, which would then be subverted and twisted, presenting the audience with an alternative version of the story, using stylistic elements from the

musical genre with the characters singing and dancing. This is evident in a segment from an episode which parodied *Little Red Riding Hood,* where the wolf, wearing jeans and a leather jacket, rides a motorcycle and sings, "Now chimpanzees like bananas, and elephants feed they on hay, squirrels go for nuts, and goats will eat what comes they way, but for me the best thing is when I'm digesting a tasty granny, hey, hey, hey". This demonstrates the subversion of traditional moralistic fairy tales through a modern interpretation of the story.



***Figure 52: Still from "Bimbo's Books" - The Big Bad Wolf sings***

Shapurjee states that South African animation from this period was generally characterized as being "wholesome" and "didactic" *(57),* and clearly *Bimbo's Books,* with its fairly "tongue in cheek" approach inherent in the fairy tale adaptations, goes against the predominant form of animation being created in South Africa at this time. However, while very innovative, and in some ways unique compared to other clay animation being produced at this time, Klaybow Films produced work which was intended to appeal to a general audience and has no cultural specificity. This is evident in the Western narrative and design choices evident in their work.



***Figure 53: Still from "Bimbo's Books" - Cinderella***

## 5.9 Concluding thoughts on Klaybow Films

Cleary Klaybow Film's history reveals some significant aspects of the South African animation industry at this time. It reveals the distorted nature of broadcasting under the SABC and the apartheid government, which clearly hindered the development of the animation industry in South Africa by not only dictating and restricting the content of what was produced, but also through the boycotts and economic sanctions that were imposed internationally. Berenson's involvement in the South Africa animation industry also reveals the lack of animation courses and training institutions in South Africa during this time. Clearly, Berenson, although not trained as an animator, brought his knowledge of puppetry and film from Eastern Europe to South Africa. Through his training of young South African artists such as Lindsay van Blerk, he had a direct and significant involvement in the development of the animation industry in South Africa, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

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[i] The earliest South African animated film was the *Artist's Dream/The Artist's Inspiration* produced by African Film Productions in 1915.
[ii] The eighties were a turbulent period in South Africa and were the final years of apartheid and oppressive white minority rule in South. This period was characterized by increased social unrest and political violence, and several states of emergency were declared by South Africa's president at this time, P.W. Botha.
[iii] This school is now part of the Bazalel Academy of Art and Design
[iv] Because of the difficulty in acquiring copies of the work produced by Klaybow Films the description of these works is taken from a promotional document produced by the studio in 1987.
[v] Dirk de Villiers is regarded as South Africa's most prolific filmmaker, having made a total of 25 feature length films and 12 documentaries.
[vi] TV3 was a channel specifically broadcasted for Zulu and Xhosa speaking South Africans. During Apartheid black South African's were restricted to living in various areas based on language groups. Following this policy of ethnic segregation, the SABC broadcasted separate signals and channels to these areas.
[vii] Jonathan Shapiro is one of South Africa's leading cartoon satirists. He draws under the name Zapiro.
[viii] Tully McCully is a famous South African rock musician and together with his brother was formed the band McCully's Workshop.
[ix] David Kramer is a famous South African musician who began his career in 1970 and has primarily written Afrikaans songs.
[x] Lesley Ray Dowling was a South African pop artist who produced the well-known song *The Spaniard*.
[xi] My sole source was a VHS copy of Klaybow Film's showreel.

## 6. South Africa 1989-2005: Lindsay van Blerk and XYZoo

This chapter focuses on the South African animator and director, Lindsay van Blerk, and documents the history of his studio, XYZoo Animations between the years 1990 and 2005. Van Blerk was one of the artists who was hired and trained by Ted Berenson at Klaybow Films. Van Blerk went with the studio to London in 1987. However, he was forced to return to South Africa in 1989 after the studio closed down. He initially intended to return to London but events in South Africa in 1990 convinced him that democratic change was inevitable and he decided to stay and set up his own animation studio, XYZoo Animation.

The studio mainly focused on the production of clay animation. Over the years the studio has produced a large body of television commercials for South African television. However, the studio's most significant work are the short clay animated films they produced for Billy Budd Films. This large body of work shows that Van Blerk is not only a talented stop-motion animator, but also reveals him to be one of South Africa's top animation directors and displays his masterful understanding of performance, storytelling and his use of cinematic language for narrative purposes.

### 6.1 The South African animation industry: 1990-1996

The early nineties were a dramatic and pivotal period in South African history, during which the country went through significant political, social and economic change. In 1990, the newly elected president, FW de Klerk, made a famous speech during his opening address to parliament during which he announced the lifting of the ban on political parties such as the African National Congress, the release of Nelson Mandela from jail, and his intention to lift the state of emergency declared ten years earlier by PW Botha. This was followed by a period of political reform and negotiations between the ruling National Party and the African National Congress that eventually led to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

These political and social changes had an impact on the South African television and animation industry. Shapurjee states that this period ushered in a "new era in South African broadcast history" and saw the restructuring of the SABC, which developed a

new policy regarding "the viability of the public broadcaster, local content, and cross-media ownership and control" *(81).* Shapurjee states that the political change in South Africa saw the emergence of "animation training initiatives" across Africa "in an attempt to empower Africans with new media skills" *(82).* The end of apartheid was significant, because it was responsible for the emergence of a new animation industry in South Africa during the early nineties. There was a decrease in the number of local stop-motion animations commissioned by the broadcaster, and Collins explains that the broadcaster began buying American television animation, which was cheaper than commissioning local animation productions *(31).* This saw a shift in the South African animation industry from being primarily focused on the production of television content for children, to the production of television advertising. This period also saw the lifting of international sanctions and boycotts, allowing South African studios to once again do business with international clients, which provided new business opportunities for local studios. Collins states that small animation studios "appearing and disappearing" characterized the South African animation industry in the 90s as a result of a relatively small competitive industry and market *(32).* XYZoo was one of these small studios. However, they were able to survive in this climate as a result of a niche they had created for themselves in the market.

## 6.2 Lindsay van Blerk and Klaybow Films: 1983-1989

Lindsay van Blerk grew up in the Eastern Cape in East London, where, after high school, he began a fine art diploma. He moved to Cape Town at the age of nineteen and completed his studies at the Cape Tech. He practised painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, and printmaking during this period. He found his first job at Klaybow Films, where he started working as a character designer, puppet builder and storyboard artist. He says that it was not long before he started doing little bits of animation and a latent desire to be a performer was revealed. He felt naturally drawn to performance animation and quickly grasped the concepts of timing and staging.

However, South Africa had a compulsory two-year military service at this time, and his career in animation was interrupted when he was conscripted in June 1983. He joined the navy and was based at the naval base at Simon's Town, where he worked in the media department because of his art and film background. The media

department in the naval base was responsible for making training videos for new sailors and Lindsay recalls that they had access to military vehicles, soldiers who could be used as extras and quite a lot of film equipment. He says that they had a lot of fun making these videos and recalls making one training film called *Urban Counter-Insurgency Observation Posts,* which, he jokes, they tried to make in imitation of "Apocalypse Now" *(Van Blerk Interview).* He explains that, after his basic training, he was still able to do freelance work during his conscription, since Simon's Town is relatively close to Cape Town. During this time he did a lot of character designs and animation for Klaybow Films. He also participated in Berenson's training and screening sessions, which would have an important impact on the young filmmaker. Van Blerk explains, "For the first time I saw Jiri Trnka, Co Hoederman, Starewicz and early work by Will Vinton. I was hooked" *(Van Blerk Forum).* This reveals the significance of both Klaybow Films and important stop-motion animators from North America and Europe to Van Blerk's work.

When his period of conscription was over, he began working full-time at Klaybow Films in June 1985. At this time the studio began production of the series *Bimbo's Books,* during which Van Blerk evolved to the position of lead animator. Van Blerk explains that everyone at Klaybow Films was fairly inexperienced and the animation they were producing was very rough. "It was moving, but they weren't being animated in my opinion" *(Van Blerk Interview).* Van Blerk attributes this crudeness of animation to the limitations of the technology that they were using at the time.

The technology to remove character support rigs fairly cheaply was not yet available, so they had to use hidden frame rigs. In addition, the studio didn't have any video assist technology and animators were working blind. Van Blerk states that creating stop-motion without these two technological supports results in a "lottery" and a lack of control that leads to work that is mostly fairly crude *(Van Blerk Interview).* Towards the end of the production of *Bimbo's Books,* the studio began using more sophisticated technology, such as the MX 10 Panasonic frame-storing device, which allowed the studio to compare the previous frames with the current one. Van Blerk stresses the importance of technological advances in allowing stop-motion techniques to rise to the level of commercial popularity they enjoy today. He had begun to feel that he had reached a dead end with clay animation, but with the introduction of video

assist technology, the animator "could do with a puppet what anyone could do with a drawing" *(Van Blerk Interview).*

Despite these limitations, Van Blerk stresses that his time at Klaybow Films was invaluable as it provided him with an environment where he was able to learn and develop as a young animator *(Van Blerk Interview)*. Van Blerk was one of the animators who moved to London with the studio in 1987 to work on the short film *The Star Child.* His responsibility as lead animator increased and he animated a large part of the film. He continued to grow in skill and confidence as an animator. After the failure of T*he Star Child*, Van Blerk decided that he no longer wanted to remain at Klaybow Films. Because his work permit restricted him to working with Klaybow Films while he was in London, he had no choice but to return to South Africa in 1989.

## 6.3 Miros productions: 1990-1991

Van Blerk returned to South Africa with the intention of going back overseas eventually and pursuing a career in animation. He explains that he felt uncomfortable in South Africa, where although he had finished his compulsory military service, he was still expected to attend compulsory weekend military camps *(Van Blerk).* However, an important event in South African history would ensure that he remained in South Africa. He explains that in 1990, FW de Klerk, then the president of South Africa, made his famous speech in which he announced that all previously banned political parties, including the ANC, would be legalised and that Nelson Mandela was to be released from jail *(Van Blerk).*

Van Blerk decided to remain in South Africa and continue producing clay animation but he lacked the necessary film equipment. Miros Productions had the equipment he needed and he began working for the studio in 1990 as their animation director. During this period he produced several clay animation commercials, which include *Simba Chipniks (1990), Alcolin Glue (1990),* and *I&J Stir Fry (1990).* The *Simba Chipniks* ***(Figures 55 - 58)*** commercial was clearly inspired by Will Vinton's *California Raisins* and followed the same idea, though instead of using raisins, the band members were Chipniks chips made out of plasticine. He used pixilation in the *I&J Stir Fry* commercial, in which he animated food ***(Figures 59 - 60)***.



***Figure 54: The Directors - Miros Productions***
***Left to Right: Jorge Rubia, Volker Miros, Lindsay van Blerk, and Paul Miros.***



***Figure 55: Production still from "Simba Chipniks" - van Blerk animating***
***Photos courtesy of Lindsay van Blerk***





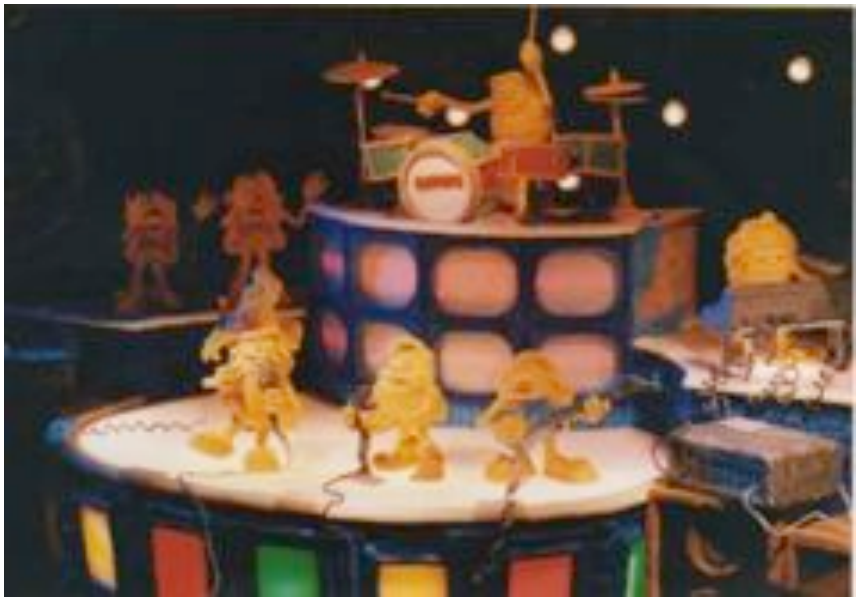


***Figure 56 - 58:***
***Production stills from***
***"Simba Chipniks"***
***Photo courtesy of***
***Lindsay van Blerk***



***Figure 59 - 60: Productions stills from "InJ" - van Blerk animating***
***Photo courtesy of Lindsay van Blerk***

During the production of this commercial Van Blerk met Jacquie Trowell, who worked for the art department at Miros Productions. Trowell became interested in the animation process, and continued to work with Van Blerk on several other commercials as a set designer and builder.

## 6.4 The formation of XYZoo Animation

It was around this time that he was contacted by Frank Moynihan from Billy Budd films. Moynihan had noticed Van Blerk's strong contribution as lead animator during the production of *The Star Child* where the two had met for the first time (Van Blerk*).* Moynihan was interested in producing an eight-minute clay animated short called *The Prodigal Son* with Van Blerk in South Africa. Moynihan wanted to take advantage of the lower productions costs Van Blerk was able to offer him from South Africa, especially now that South Africa was on its way to becoming a democracy, and he therefore would not be restricted by economic sanctions and boycotts. However, he had lost money on *The Star Child* and told Van Blerk that he would get in touch with him when he had raised the capital to produce the film.

While Moynihan raised the capital, Van Blerk left Miros productions to begin producing commercials independently. He set up a studio in Paarden Island. His first independent job was a series of commercials produced for *National Air Conditioners (1991).* He began recruiting crewmembers to help him deal with the workload. During the production of the *National Air Conditioner* commercials, Van Blerk got in touch

with Trowell and asked her to come and help him construct sets. Brett Schuman, who Van Blerk had worked with at Klaybow Films, had returned to South Africa that year and began working with Van Blerk and Trowell.



***Figure 61: Still from "National Air Conditioners"***
***Courtesy of Lindsay van Blerk***

Van Blerk, like Berenson, needed to develop the studio so that he could undertake larger productions. During 1990 and 1991 the studio produced at least ten commercials. Van Blerk used this money to develop the studio's shooting capabilities. When Trowell wasn't busy building sets, Van Blerk trained her to animate, and assigned her small roles in some of the studio's productions. He also showed her the same stop-motion films he had seen from the Cape Provincial Library. In 1992 Trowell animated her first commercial entirely by herself, *Pipers Sweet Milk Cheese* ***(See DVD - Disk 02)***.



***Figure 62: Photo - Lindsay van Blerk and Jacquie Trowell.***
***Photo courtesy of Lindsay van Blerk***



***Figure 63: Trowell building clay puppet for "Pipers Sweet Milk Cheese"***
***Photo courtesy of Lindsay van Blerk***





***Figure 64-65***
***Stills from "Pipers Sweet Milk Cheese".***

Van Blerk then bought two Mitchell cameras and was now able to shoot two productions simultaneously. Between 1992 and 1993 the studio produced *The Prodigal Son* for Billy Budd Films. He was still able to support the studio with the money they earned from their commercial work. This was possible because of the two cameras he had bought. While Van Blerk was animating *The Prodigal Son (**See DVD - Disk 02)**,* Trowell would handle the commercial work coming into the studio. The film was well received, and over the next ten years, XYZoo Animations would produce four twenty-four minute long films for Billy Budd *(Van Blerk)*.



***Figure 66: Mitchell Camera used by XYZoo***



***Figure 67: Still from "The Prodigal Son"***

In the years following *The Prodigal Son*, XYZoo would continue to produce clay animated commercials, as well as four short clay animated films for Billy Budd Films. During this period, Van Blerk was able to slowly build up and improve the character animation skills of the studio. He hired a small crew of five people including Brett Schuman, Gary Kachelhoffer, Philip Marcus with whom he had worked at Klaybow, and Ian Bold. Also at this time, Jacquie Trowell broke away from XYZoo Animation to form her own stop-motion animation studio, Triggerfish.

## 6.5 Stop-motion television commercials: 1995-2004

XYZoo's predominant source of income was from commercial productions, and between 1995 and 2004 the studio produced twenty-two stop-motion commercials. These include commercials produced for *SABC Radio (1995), VW Citi Golf (1997), Wellington VO Brandy (2001-2002),* and *Sanlam (2004)* ***(See DVD - Disk 01)***. The commercial for *SABC Radio,* while displaying an innovative use of clay animation, *shows* the use of the imagery of the African veld and wildlife. This imagery is also apparent in the two commercials produced for *Sanlam*, in which animals are interviewed in their natural environment, which was obviously inspired by Aardman's *Creature Comforts.*

The *VW Citi Golf* commercial shows innovative use of pixilation. The use of a black actor is significant because it shows the social and economic changes that South Africa was experiencing and the emergence of a black middle class. The series of clay animation commercials produced for *Wellington VO Brandy* show the innovative use of clay animation techniques to create "cartoony" effects that are usually found in 2D animation. These commercials are unusual, as they show the use of animation in a way usually associated with children's productions, to advertise alcohol. Van Blerk explains that, with the exception of the *Wellington VO Brandy* commercials, he generally doesn't enjoy working on commercials but explains that they allowed XYZoo to survive financially, which enabled him to produce the short clay animation films for Billy Budd Films. Van Blerk states that "he will do anything to tell a story", which shows that the filmmaker is primarily interested in character animation.



***Figure 68: Still from "SABC Radio"***



***Figure 69: Still from "Sanlam" commercial***



***Figure 70: Still from "VW Citi Golf"***



***Figure 71: Still from Wellington VO Brandy - Dragon" (2002) commercial***

## 6.6 Billybudd Films and the Clay Classics

Following *The Prodigal Son,* XYZoo produced four twenty-minute clay animated films for Billy Budd. These were *Michael The Visitor (1995), The First Christmas (1998), The Chimes (2000)* and *The Velveteen Rabbit (2003).* Van Blerk explains that these films were made "intensively and continuously for a long period of time" and that because of this, he was able to develop the level of character animation the studio was able to produce with clay animation *(Van Blerk).* He further explains that because of the limited budget he faced in comparison with overseas companies, he knew he could not compete with them in terms of the scale of production and technology and so he chose to focus on performance *(Van Blerk).* Although this was not profitable, he was able to set a high standard, which allowed the quality of the work to be noticed *(Van Blerk Email)* and he was still able to produce a large number of commercials both locally and internationally. These films show the development of Van Blerk's skill as a character animator and director of animation.

*Michael the Visitor* ***(see DVD 02)*** is a short twenty-four minute film based on the short story *Truths We Live By* written by Tolstoy. Van Blerk feels that the film marks an important point of growth in his development and that the animation had a degree of sophistication in the performances. He further says that some aspects of character animation "blossomed" during the production of the film *(Van Blerk Interview).*



***Figure 72: Still from "Michael the Visitor"***

*The First Christmas* ***(see DVD 03)*** is an adaptation of the nativity story from the Christian Bible. Van Blerk explains it was a "tough" experience for the studio because they had to complete the film in twelve months. Furthermore, because the story was religious in nature, it was more difficult than adapting a novel as the story could not be changed due to the risk of offending Christian sensitivities *(Van Blerk Forum)*. However, there are some additions to the story in order to add some comedic elements, such as the addition of a scene in which a Roman Centurion supervises two workers putting up a notice announcing that a census is taking place. In the original story in the Bible, the census is merely used as an exposition to explain why Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem.



***Figure 73: Armatures from "The Prodigal***



***Figure 74: Still from "The The first Christmas" - Wise men***



***Figure 75: Still from "The First Christmas" - Roman Centurion***

*The Chimes* ***(See DVD - Disk 03)*** is an adaptation of the short story of the same name written by Charles Dickens. By this time the studio had grown to a contingent of five people. Van Blerk says it was a difficult production, because it required sophisticated character performance. He explains: "The main character, Toby Veck, had to carry the entire story and needed to show a great variety of emotions and subtlety to tell the story effectively" *(Van Blerk Forum).*



***Figure 76: Still from "The Chimes"***

*The Velveteen Rabbit* ***(See DVD - Disk 03)*** is an adaptation of the classic children's story of the same name by Margaret Williams. This story was suited to the medium of clay animation and Van Blerk explains that the clay allowed the warmth of the story to come through *(Van Blerk).* In some ways this could be considered to be the best of the short films XYZoo produced, as it features flawless clay sculpture and animation.



***Figure 77: Still from "The Velveteen***

These short clay-animated films have been highly acclaimed and won numerous international awards[i]. They are now part of the Billy Budd "Clay Classic" series of DVDs, which include works that were produced by Will Vinton in partnership with Frank Moynihan. Vinton and Aardman have been key influences on Van Blerk and this is evident in the short clay animated films produced by XYZoo.

## 6.7 Aesthetic analysis of The Chimes

However, the clay animation produced by Van Blerk has its own distinctive style that is different from the work produced by either Vinton or Aardman. The films feature the dynamic use of lighting, camera and multiple shots to support and express these narratives and their themes. The films mostly use the "full clay" aesthetic developed by Vinton, and all buildings, clothes and props were constructed with plasticine.

Van Blerk's treatment of characters is more similar to the character in Aardman's *Going Equipped.* The characters are sculpted with normal body proportions and are very naturalistic, unlike the figures sculpted by Will Vinton Productions, which are characterised by large heads. Vinton's work, such as *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Star Child,* is characterised by fantasy and non-realism achieved through the dynamic use of clay metamorphosis, while the narratives of XYZoo's clay films are adaptations of classical stories, which focus mainly on moralistic and social problems. What is unusual about XYZoo's Films is that they are animated dramas. This is not commonly seen in clay animated films, which generally use the comedy genre. The narratives in

XYZoo's clay films therefore use a far more subtle and naturalistic performance. In some ways this can be very difficult, as animation lends itself to highly stylised movements, such as those seen in Aardman's *Wallace and Gromit* films.
The performances of Van Blerk's characters are similar to the naturalistic performances found in Aardman's earlier work. However, the range of emotions and expressions explored by Van Blerk is far larger and more impressive. The films clearly demonstrate Van Blerk's skill and confidence in sculpting with plasticine, which enables him to sculpt and re-shape his figures while he animates. He generally does not use replacement clay parts in his films. Clearly Van Blerk has developed a clay animation style.

*The Chimes* ***(See DVD - Disk 03)*** is by far the most impressive of the clay animated films produced by XYZoo and is also the one of which Van Blerk is the most proud. The story is set in London in the 1890s and comments on the inequality that existed between the rich and the poor in London at this time. The film features a large range of high quality sets constructed by XYZoo in order to create the environmental setting of nineteenth century London. The story has a relatively large cast of characters in comparison to other films produced by XYZoo, which proved to be the biggest challenge in this production.

The story mainly follows the poor, eccentric old man, Toby Veck, who through the course of film loses his optimistic outlook on life as a result of the dismissive statements and actions of several of the films wealthy characters. He becomes despondent at the hopelessness and poverty he sees around him. Van Blerk successfully characterises Toby Veck and captures this emotional journey through his animated performance. What is so impressive about the performances in this film is that Van Blerk successfully creates distinctive performances for each character. There is no sense of the "sameness" that Frierson *(151)* states is characteristic of the characters and performances in Vinton's early clay animated films. This is best seen at the beginning of the film when two wealthy, upper class characters come out of a church and confront Toby Veck and his daughter. Each character is distinctively characterised by performance and gestures that create individual personalities. The wealthy characters are characterised by flamboyant gestures and body language that shows their assumed superiority and contempt for Toby Veck and his daughter, who

in contrast, are characterised by submissive performances that also show the dismay and hurt that they feel as a result of the confrontation. The story is told with masterful use of lighting and camera, which clearly shows Van Blerk's skill as a director.





***Figure 78 - 79: Production stills from "The Chimes" - Set Building.***



***Figure 80: Production stills from "The Chimes" - Set Building***



*Figure 81: Production stills from "The Chimes" - Characters*



*Figure 82: Production stills from "The Chimes" - van Blerk with Characters*





***Figure 83 - 84: Still from "The Chimes".***
***Wealthy characters show contempt for Toby and his***



***Figure 85: Still from "The Chimes".***
***Toby reacts to insult***



***Figure 86: Production stills from "The Chimes" - Brett Schuman animating a scene.***



***Figure 87: Production stills from "The Chimes" -Cinematographer Dave Aenmey lighting a scene.***

## 6.8 Concluding thoughts on XYZoo Animation

In the context of this research, which seeks to identify a unique South African stop-motion aesthetic, the biggest criticism of the short films produced by XYZoo for Billybudd Films is that they were films produced by a South African studio for a Christian American audience. The films lack any distinctive South African elements in the narratives or visual designs. Clearly Van Blerk was restricted from developing a South African style in his work as a result of this.

However, this should rather be seen as the fault of local broadcasters in South Africa, which were not commissioning any animation in the short film format. From 1990 to 2000 most South African animation studios were producing television commercials, and the films produced by Van Blerk during this time are impressive compared to these unimaginative commercials. The production of four twenty-minute clay animated films between 1995 and 2003 is an exceptional and unique achievement in the history of South African animation.

Clearly Van Blerk and XYZoo have played an important role in the development of South Africa's animation industry. Trowell, who had not only learnt animation from Van Blerk but had also been exposed to alternative stop-motion animated films from the Cape Provincial Library, went on to form her own studio in 1996. In particular, the culturally specific work from Czechoslovakia would have a great influence on her and the development of a distinctive South African stop-motion aesthetic.




***Figure 88: Preproduction on "The Chimes" - Rough Thumbnail Sketches Courtesy of Lindsay van Blerk***




***Figure 89: Preproduction on "The Chimes" - Storyboards.***
***Courtesy Lindsay van Blerk.***

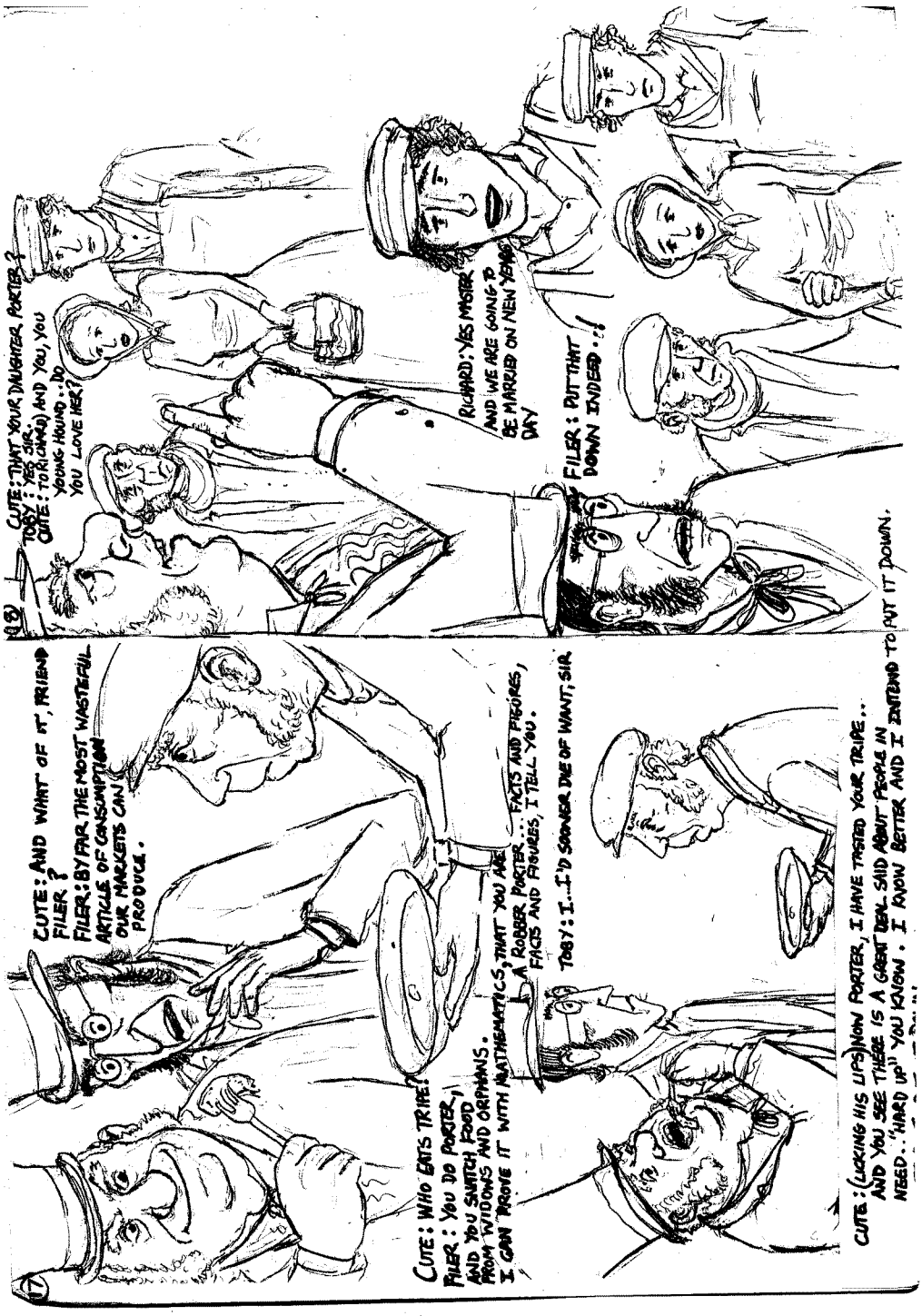



***Figure 90: Preproduction on "The Chimes" - Storyboards.***

***Courtesy Lindsay van Blerk***

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[i] *The First Christmas* was awarded The Andrew Carnegie Medal. *Michael The Visitor* was awarded the CINE Golden Eagle. *The Chimes* was awarded the CINE Special Jury Award. *The Velveteen Rabbit*received an award from the American Library Association as a Notable Children's Video.

## 7. South Africa 1996-2005: Jaqcuie Trowell, Emma Kaye and Triggerfish

After the first democratic elections in 1994, the South African film industry saw the emergence of a cinema characterised by the "emergence of new voices and a diversification of themes" and audiences were exposed to previously unseen and neglected communities and cultures *(Botha 19-47).* One of the most important and recurring themes in South African film from this period was the search for identity *(Verster 112).* In some ways the stop-motion animation produced by Triggerfish between the years 1996 and 2005 reflects these trends in South African motion picture production and can be regarded as part of this search for a South African identity, aesthetic, and the representation of the suppressed cultural and artistic practices in South Africa.

This chapter documents the history of the South African animation studio Triggerfish, between the years 1996 and 2005. Jacquie Trowell and Emma Kaye formed the studio in 1996 and developed it into one of South Africa's most successful and well-known animation studios. The studio was responsible for creating the first local animation content for South African television audiences as well as many innovative commercials. Their most important work was the stop-motion film they produced for Sesame Street and Takalani Sesame, as this allowed them to develop a distinctive South African puppet animation style inspired by local street art. Trowell and Kaye would also play an important role in developing the South African animation industry.

### 7.1 Jacquie Trowell and XYZoo Animation: 1990-1996

Jacquie Trowell briefly attended the Michealis Art School in Cape Town, but did not complete her studies there, deciding rather to travel abroad. Upon her return to South Africa she began working in the live-action film industry *(Trowell).* She eventually found a job working in the art department for Miros productions, where she met Lindsay van Blerk on the set of the commercial shoot for *I&J Stir Fry.* She became interested in the stop-motion animation process, and continued working with Van Blerk on various commercial productions. When Van Blerk left Miros productions and asked Trowell to come and help him build sets, she eagerly went to work with him not only because of her growing interest in stop-motion, but also because of a

growing frustration she was feeling as a result of working in the live-action industry, which she describes as being dominated by "egos" and status *(Trowell)*.

During this period, Van Blerk began to teach her the technique of stop-motion animation, allowing her to animate small sequences and background characters in certain animations. In 1992, she animated her first commercial entirely by herself, *Pipers Sweet Milk Cheese.* While Van Blerk was animating the *The Prodigal Son* and *Michael the Visitor* for Billy Budd Films, Trowell would handle any commercial work that came in to XYZoo Animation. However, by 1996, she had begun to feel frustrated and limited by the work she was producing at XYZoo. Van Blerk had taught her the technique of stop-motion animation and had also exposed her to alternative animation she had not previously seen, such as animation produced by Jiri Trnka, Jan Svankmajer, the Brothers Quay and Norman McLaren. She was impressed by the work produced by these filmmakers and she explains that while working at XYZoo, she began experimenting with other materials and techniques such as cutout and pixilation *(Trowell Interview)*.

Van Blerk was very focused on producing clay animation and was developing XYZoo as a studio specialising in storytelling animation through the work he was producing for Billy Budd Films. Trowell states that she found the religiously driven narratives prescribed by Billy Budd to be limiting and in 1996 she decided to leave XYZoo to start her own studio in order to continue to work with the alternative stop-motion techniques she was discovering. She approached a friend of hers working in the live-action industry, Emma Kaye, and asked her if she would be interested in forming an animation studio.

## 7.2 Emma Kaye and the formation of Triggerfish

Kaye, born in Zimbabwe, moved to England where she studied programming and business at Oxford University. She developed a good background in business from managing work she took in to earn extra income. She returned to Zimbabwe after her studies and eventually moved to South Africa, where she changed track completely and began working in the live-action film industry. When Trowell asked her to form an animation company with her, she had been working for a long time in live-action

and had begun to feel frustrated with the egos in the industry. She saw animation as a potential alternative. “So when Jacquie approached me to set up Triggerfish with her it kind of made perfect sense because I love the process of filmmaking. Animation production was different to live-action production, which was the part of filmmaking that was frustrating me, and it employed all my skills around business and being able to put structures together. So we were a great fit, she was the creative component to it and I had the business background to add to it.” *(Kaye)*.

## 7.3 The South African animation industry: 1996-2001

By 1996, a very small and limited industry had developed in South Africa. Theresa Collins collected data on the South African animation industry by means of a survey of the South African animation studios in 2001[i]. This data is useful as it reveals significant aspects of the industry in post-apartheid South Africa. She identifies four obstacles that have restricted the development of the animation industry in South Africa: the lack of funding; the lack of animation training courses at institutions; the influence of American animation; and politics within the South African industry *(Collins 30-34)*.

Broadcasters preferred to buy American animation for television, as this was cheaper than commissioning local animation. This resulted in the development of a small industry, relying on the advertising agencies, which generally dictated content and style that was characteristically unimaginative, to survive. This limited market resulted in an unstable market which was characterised by a lack of cooperation between studios, which were fighting for survival in this climate. Animation produced in South Africa was strongly influenced by American animation, and studios tended to use American animation techniques and styles and had no interest in developing alternative methods *(31-32)*. Although there had been an increase in the amount of animation training courses, these primarily focused on software training, and had no theory or history components *(Collins 32-33)*.

Kaye describes South African animation in the nineties as a “nascent” industry that was fractured, with companies that were unwilling to take risks, and states, “that there was an enormous scope to start a new company and to look at how we could break

new ground in the market" *(Kaye)*. Trowell had shown Kaye the stop-motion animation techniques she was interested in producing, and Kaye was particularly impressed by the culturally specific work from Eastern Europe such as the work produce by Jiri Trnka. Combining their skills, they began to draw up a business plan and strategy in order to develop an animation studio. Kaye explains this lack of imaginative or culturally specific content that characterised the South African industry as being largely due to the market's ignorance and lack of understanding of animation as a creative technique. The market's knowledge of animation was also limited to American animation and was unaware of the long history of stop-motion animation and the innovative work created by animators such as Norman McLaren, Jiri Trnka, Jan Svankmajer, Co Hoederman and the Brothers Quay.

## 7.4 Early work and studio growth: 1996-1999

Kaye explains that one of the fundamental parts of their business plan was to educate the market about stop-motion animation in order to create work for their studio *(Kaye)*. They developed an Animation Showreel with examples of Trowell's work, and began making appointments for animation screenings with advertising agencies and potential financiers. They put together a reel of their work as well as examples of alternative stop-motion animation. This included work by Trnka, Svankmajer and other important stop-motion animators from Canada and England. In this way they were able to educate the market about the potential of stop-motion animation techniques and to demonstrate their ability to create animation with similar techniques *(Kaye)*.

They set up their first studio in a three-metre space in Trowell's house in the Cape Town suburb of Observatory. Trowell explains that along with the intense heat generated by the lights in such a small space, it was difficult to work in because it also had wooden floorboards *(Trowell)*. Their first project was *The Paraffin Safety Campaign (1997)* for which they created two twenty-five second long educational clay animations for the Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa ***(See DVD - Disk 01)***.




***Figure 91: Still from "Paraffin Safety Campaign". Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa.***

Paraffin is used in over half of all South African homes and accidents involving paraffin occur regularly[ii] *(Paraffin Safety Association).* The two educational shorts were created to inform people of the dangers of paraffin and represent a significant point in South African animation history, as they featured the first animated black South African family. Both Trowell and Kaye felt strongly about localizing content and creating animation that could communicate with South Africans using characters and relevant contexts with which South African audiences could relate *(Kaye).*

During this period they produced animations with various stop-motion techniques and styles that had never been used before in South Africa. They created several popular and well-known commercials ***(See DVD - Disk 01)*** such as: *Soviet Clothing (1997), Plascon Woodcare (1998), Royco Potato Bake (1999), I-Net Bridge (1999), Slo-Jo (1999),* as well as a second clay animation for the Paraffin Safety Association of South Africa, *Paraffin Safety Campaign (1999).* They also created a short ninety second insert, *Huapango De Los Volcanos (1997),* for a short film from Mexico as well as a pilot for a feature length stop-motion film, *One Hot Day in Africa (1998).* Triggerfish was using techniques and styles rarely seen in South Africa, such as pixilation in the *Soviet Clothing* commercial, and solid wooden puppets[iii] in the *Plascon Woodcare* commercial ***(See DVD - Disk 01)***. They also began using clay animation in innovative ways in the *Slo-Jo* commercial as well as in *Huapango De Los Volcanos* ***(See DVD - Disk 01)***. Clay animation had been mostly used in South Africa to depict recognisable characters, such as those used by Van Blerk in his short clay films. Triggerfish began using far more stylised clay characters. In this way

Triggerfish developed a reputation as an innovative and distinctive South African animation studio. The use of stop-motion techniques contrasted with the majority of other animation studios, who were primarily producing 3D and 2D computer animation, and in this way they were able to stand out. During this period the studio expanded in size, hiring several people to help build sets, and moved to an office space in the suburb of Woodstock, that had concrete floors and a blacked out shooting space sectioned off. Kaye feels that what made the work they produced so special was the crew itself. She states that at Triggerfish they saw animation as an art form, and hired people with fine art degrees, such as Jane Applebee, who contributed significantly to the development of the studio's distinctive style.



***Figure 92: Still from "Plascon Woodcare".***



***Figure 93: Still from "Royco Potato Bake".***




***Figure 94: Still from "Slo-jo".***



***Figure 95: Still from "Huapango De Los Volcanos".***

## 7.5 The Children's Television Workshop and Takalani Sesame

By 1999, Triggerfish's reputation attracted the attention of The Children's Television Workshop, which was looking to outsource cheaper animation from countries like South Africa for the American edutainment show Sesame Street. Triggerfish was commissioned to produce twenty stop-motion animations between twenty and thirty seconds in length. Trowell explains that they used this as an opportunity to

experiment and produce stop-motion with a distinctly South African feel and began designing puppets influenced by South African culture. ***(See figure 96)***

The following year the Children's Television Workshop released a South African version of the edutainment show *Sesame Street* called *Takalani Sesame*. Impressed with the distinctive style of the shorts, the Children's Television Workshop once again commissioned Triggerfish to produce another set of stop-motion shorts in collaboration with The Video Lab, Cape Town. Trowell explains that they were beginning to create puppets that were based on the craft art that was sold on South African streets and craft markets, developing a style of puppet that was distinctly South African *(Trowell)*. Trowell explains that the design of these puppets grew in sophistication and scope over the years. "To begin with we looked at traditional sculpture and animated traditional Zulu dolls and stuff. Then we looked at the amazing street art around us – it was more modern, accessible and recognizable to the younger generation. Wire constructed objects were just starting to flood the streets and plastic chickens – those were the two we used the most. In an effort to support street artist we often bought or commissioned them to make characters for us, especially the chickens. We'd have to make adjustments to armatures and additional bits and pieces for animation" *(Trowell)*.

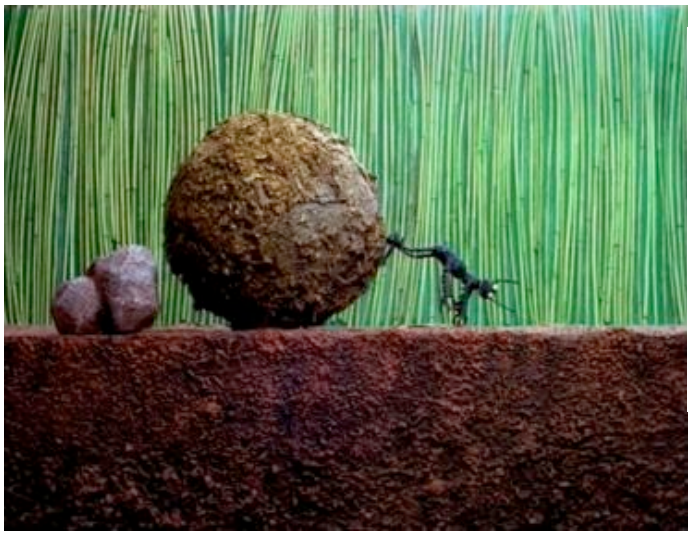


***Figure 96: Still from "Dung Beetle" - Children's Television Workshop, (1999-2004).***
***Stories and Design drawn from South African environment.***

They developed characters that were popular and used in all of the subsequent animation they produced for future series of Takalani Sesame. These included a group of plastic chickens, a wire farmer, sculpted wooden birds, and a wire chameleon ***(See***

***Figures 97 - 100)***. The most popular characters were the plastic chickens, which were used to create a total of ten shorts, as well as a clay animated character called Red ***See Figure 101)***, which was also Trowell's favourite character. By this stage, Trowell had stepped back from animating to play the role of director. However, Red was a character she had designed and she continued to animate him herself.



***Figure 97: Plastic chickens in "Chickens in a Tangle" Children's Television Workshop (1999-2004)***



***Figure 98: Wire Farmer and Cow in "Season Surprises" Children's Television Workshop (1999-2004)***



***Figure 99 - Chameleon in "Dancing Chameleon" - Children's Television Workshop (1999-2004)***



***Figure 100: Wooden bird puppets in "Bird Doctor" - Children's Television Workshop (1999-2004).***



***Figure 101: Red in "Red Sneezes" - Children's Television Workshop, (1999-2004)***

## 7.6 Takalani Sesame season two: 2001

By 2001, Triggerfish was producing a steady amount of commercials as well as the animation for Takalani Sesame. The studio had grown to a size that eventually made it necessary to move to a larger space. The new studio was situated in Woodstock in an old beer brewery. It had two huge offices. One was used for pre-production and had a sectioned off area for set building. When the studio was at its busiest, they worked with a crew of fifteen people that consisted of a permanent production manager, set and puppet builders, three animators, as well as freelancers to supplement the core crew.

Triggerfish's success climaxed in 2001, when the studio was commissioned to produce forty minutes of animation for the second season of Takalani Sesame. This was the largest single international animation commission ever received by a studio in South Africa. It was impossible for Triggerfish to complete all of the forty minutes of animation and they sub-contracted other South African studios to produce animation

for the series. This project was the largest collaboration of animation studios in South Africa and is a significant moment in the development of the South African animation industry.

## 7.7 The South African animation industry: 2001-2005

Kaye explains that before the collaborative project on Takalani in 2001, the South African industry was stagnant. Following this project, the industry started to grow exponentially *(Kaye)*. Before the Takalani Sesame project, it was believed that it was impossible to produce forty minutes of animation on the scale and in the time frame allowed for the collaborative project *(Kaye)*.

Out of the success of this collaboration, there grew a new animation industry and the formation of new studios. Kaye says this helped develop competition in the market, which she says was healthy for the industry *(Kaye)*. The growth in studios was accompanied by an increase in the number of schools and courses training animators. More importantly, it showed that the animation industry in South Africa was capable of producing high quality animated work in a large quantity *(Kaye)*. Apparently the collaboration was so successful that the Children's Television Workshop asked Kaye to put together a blueprint from a business perspective of how Triggerfish was able to achieve it. She was flown out to present the blueprint to the team, which was producing a new branch of the show in Bangladesh. ***(See DVD - Disk 01** for Takalani Sesame animations)*.

## 7.8 The decline of stop-motion in South Africa: 2001-2005

Over the next few years Triggerfish continued producing commercials as well as several more series of stop-motion animation for Sesame Street. During this time Kaye and Trowell were also involved in the formation of groups such as Animation SA and Animation Exchange. However, in 2005, Trowell and Kaye decided to step back from Triggerfish and pursue new opportunities, and they sold the Triggerfish brand to Stuart Forrest, one of the animators working at the studio. Kaye explains that they had developed Triggerfish from very little into a very significant business and had also helped to develop animation in South Africa by educating and changing

perspectives in the industry. However, by 2005, from a business perspective, she felt that the studio had "hit a glass ceiling" *(Kaye).* As a result of obstacles involving financial, broadcasting, and distribution perspectives, she explains that she felt that she was unable to contribute to the development of the animation industry any more by working at Triggerfish, and decided to pursue other opportunities in the digital field *(Kaye).*

Trowell explains, "Stop-frame was enjoying much less attention and advertising budgets were dropping. Even the most recent season of Takalani couldn't afford us" *(Trowell Email).* Stuart Forrest had worked at the studio as an animator. Together with a partner he bought into the studio in an effort to keep it running. However, without Kaye providing direction as producer it was difficult to maintain the studio, and Trowell left the studio shortly after this. They sold their stakes in the studio to Forrest, who began to gradually change the primary focus of the studio from stop-motion to 3D CGI *(Trowell Email).*

The stop-motion animation produced by Triggerfish is significant, as it represents a milestone in the history of stop-motion in South Africa. Inspired by local street art, this was the first stop-motion produced in South Africa with a distinctly South African feel in terms of its content and style. In the following chapter the aesthetics of these animations will be examined in more detail.

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[i] This was part of Collins' research for her Masters research report, Beyond Cartoons: An Exploration of Alternative forms of Animation.

[ii] The majority of domestic paraffin accidents involve children, as they are more likely to mistake it for water or cooldrink. This is a major problem in South Africa, and in particular in the South African townships, where poorer South African families rely on paraffin as an affordable fuel source. It is estimated that 80 000 children ingest paraffin every year in South Africa. This figure is based on national surveys and hospital records between 1996 and 2001 *(Paraffin Safety Association)*.

## 8. Case Study: Triggerfish stop-motion produced for Takalani Sesame

This chapter is a discussion of the aesthetics of the stop-motion shorts created by Triggerfish for Takalani Sesame between the years 2000 and 2005. These animations were very short, ranging from twenty to sixty seconds in length, and because of this, the discussion will not focus on one particular animation, but rather discuss several of the episodes and the recurring characters produced for the series during these years. Using the parameters outlined in the previous section on stop-motion aesthetics, these films will be discussed in terms of production context, narrative and structure, three-dimensional forms, three-dimensional spaces, sound design and animation. This will then be followed by a concluding discussion on whether a case can be made that these films display a uniquely South African stop-motion aesthetic. The films discussed in this chapter can be found on the attached **DVD - Disk 01**. It is suggested that the reader should watch these films while reading this chapter.

### 8.1 Production context

*Takalani Sesame* is the South African version of the American Sesame Street television show. The show was launched in 2000, and is broadcast in multiple languages on weekday mornings on SABC 1 and 2 *(Mbogo 12).* The Children's Television Workshop based in New York sets up franchises of the show in various countries in the world. Although the international versions of the show still remain under strict guidelines put in place by the American creators, they work collaboratively with local writers, filmmakers, artists and animators in an effort to ensure that the show is culturally relevant to the country in which it is created and broadcast *(Mbogo 12).*

The show was a co-production between the South African Department of Education, the SABC, local South African production companies, and the New York based Children's Television Workshop *(Mbogo 12).* The show is made up of scenarios ranging from five to ten minutes in length that feature *Muppet*[i] characters and human actors. The target market of the show are children between the ages of two and seven years old, whom easily lose concentration. In order to address this, short animated

segments are inserted between these scenes with the purpose of re-engaging the audience members before moving on to the next Muppet scene.

Triggerfish produced the stop-motion with a budget of fifty thousand rand per minute. The series was produced at the Triggerfish Animation studio, situated at the Old Castle Brewery in Woodstock, which was made up of two spaces, one of which was used for pre-production and the other for shooting *(Trowell)*. At its busiest, the studio employed fifteen people. The core team was made up of three animators, a production manager and a group of character/set designers and builders *(Trowell)*.

The animated shorts were shot with a 35mm Mitchell camera, as well as a digital camera, and the studio had its own lights and edit suit *(Trowell)*. Working with a document that outlined the learning curriculum in each episode, Trowell would create written concepts of animated shorts that matched the learning objectives in each episode and then send these to the storyboard artist, Jane Appleby, who would create the storyboards, which were then sent with the concepts to the head Sesame Street office in New York *(Trowell)*. Once approved, character and set would be designed visually, and then constructed. The set building team was made up of three people and the animators were expected to build their own puppets. The animator, understanding the expectations of the scene would be able to design and construct a puppet based on these expectations. Trowell explains that this kept the process efficient by minimising the amount of problems occurring during production *(Trowell)*. Generally, the studio would shoot two shorts simultaneously with one or two animators working on each *(Trowell)*.

The stop-motion animation was created to support the show and, therefore, should be seen in the South African context in which the show was produced. “Takalani Sesame has been crafted in a way that not only represents the diversity in race and culture of the various social groups in South Africa but also seeks to create an understanding that is crucial for a spirit of co-existence” *(Mbogo 24)*. Takalani Sesame was thus “shaped” to address South Africa’s past and the effects that the apartheid policy, that enforced segregation and inequality had on children growing up during and after that time *(Mbogo 14-15)*. Thus the show was crafted in such a way as to embrace the New South African ideology, where all races and languages in South Africa are represented

and respected. However, as Mbogo points out, this is a daunting task considering that South Africa is made up of many different cultures and has eleven official languages. In order to deal with this problem, the show uses a multilingual and cultural approach, with characters who are from various cultural backgrounds and speak different South African languages *(21-23).* The same episode is also broadcast in different languages throughout the week in order to address this problem. It is clear from this that the issue of language, culture and representation are problematic when creating content for South African children. Animation provides significant strategies for dealing with these issues, which will be discussed in the following discussion on aesthetics.

## 8.2 Narrative and structure

The genre of the show is edutainment, and its aim is to use entertainment to educate South African children between the ages of two and seven in a culturally relevant manner. The content of the show is controlled by the Children's Television Workshop in New York, who provide all involved in the Takalalani Sesame project with an extensive documents that states and motivates their educational objectives and provides strict guidelines for creating content *(Trowell Email).* Thus scripts and concepts for the show and animations must support the teaching curriculum and education goals prescribed by the Children's Television Workshop.

Based on a "Piagetiant[ii] perspective of child development" Sesame Street describes their target audience of two to seven year olds thus: "While their ability to infer or abstract is limited, they can be quite analytical. Given the former, however, it means that for the most part they need to see, touch or experience things in order to learn. The use of concrete examples, real things, or pictures, therefore becomes vital" *(Baxen 54).* However, the curriculum also takes into account the context of South Africa, in which children are "found in both rural and urban settings that are linguistically, socially, culturally and economically diverse" *(Baxen 54).* The content of the show incorporates the economic, cultural and social diversity of South African children and in particular places emphasis on disadvantaged South African children by incorporating the "contextual realities of children in a South African environment" who are faced with factors that hinder their access to education such as disease, malnutrition and social barriers *(Baxen 13).* Thus, the narratives and structure of the

stop-motion animation being discussed must be understood with these parameters in mind.

The animations are structured linearly and are made up of events that follow sequences of cause and effect. An episode of Takalani Sesame focuses on specific competencies and educational goals, which are divided into three categories: "literacy, numeracy and life skills" *(Baxen 17).* The animations were scripted so as to support specific episodes with specific themes, as well as incorporate cultural specificity. Generally, the stop-motion animations feature recurring characters such as Red, the wire farmer, the beetles, and the chickens. Sometimes, an animation may just demonstrate a basic concept. This is demonstrated in *Red Brushes his Hair, Red brushing his teeth,* and *Red Goes Swimming.* They show the character Red performing everyday actions, and are aimed at encouraging life skills such as looking after one's body by practising healthy living and taking necessary safety precautions.



***Figure 102: Red in "Red Brushes Teeth", lifeskills narrative - Children's Television Workshop***

The wire farmer is a recurring character that is general shown in animations that deal with rural, and environmental themes. *Elements of Nature* and *Season Surprises* demonstrate the ability of animation to communicate biological concepts and cycles in a manner that is easily understood. *Elements of Nature* also teaches the cycle of plant growth and where food comes from. The farmer digs a hole and plants a seed. Later it rains and a plant grows. *Season Surprises* shows the cycle of the seasons and the physical attributes associated with each season. These animations teach the importance of nature and encourage the audience to look after the environment and animals.

The beetles are often used to demonstrate learning themes that deal with friendship. *Entering Social Groups* aims to encourage friendship and cooperation. The animation opens on six green beetles gathered in a circle. They communicate to each other by singing with sounds created by flapping their wings and twitching their antennae. A different and larger red beetle enters the frame and communicates to the green beetles in the same way but with a different set of sounds. The green beetles pull away and huddle closer together, startled by the different beetle at whom they stare silently. Feeling rejected, the red beetle sags sadly and turns away to leave. The green beetles suddenly move towards him and bring him into their group. In a circle they sing together and their different sounds provide point and counter point, creating a new song. The episode encourages making new friends, cooperation, and tolerance and respect for diversity.





***Figure 103: Beetles in "Entering Social Groups", - Friendship and Diversity - Symbol of dancing in circle used to create metaphor for friendship and diversity in South Africa - Children's Television Workshop***

The chickens are also used to deal with themes of friendship. *Chicken Recycle* encourages caring for the environment by means of recycling waste material. Three chickens inspect a garbage pile made up of cardboard boxes and paper. They work together to pull the boxes and other materials way from the pile and build a stack of boxes as homes for themselves, and use the streamers of paper to make nests. The episode encourages the recycling of paper-based materials, as well as showing the importance of working together to achieve goals.



***Figure 105: Chicken recycling discarded material in "Chicken Recycle" - Caring for the Environment and Playing - Children's Television Workshop***

## 8.3 Three-dimensional forms

The films  feature both clay and puppet animation. The designs and constructions of these forms are to a large extent influenced by African themes, culture and tourist craft art.

The puppet forms that are used in these animations are created from a variety of materials. Those under discussion include the wire farmer, beetles, chickens and another character, a chameleon. They are all inspired by South African street art and curio sculptures made with wire, beads, plastic bags and tins cans. This type of sculpture was first made in the townships and rural areas of South Africa, where "small African boys" made toys from galvanized wire, which could be found in abundance *(Rankin 71).* As South Africans became urbanized, toys were created from

a new range of materials that could now be found in abundance in the new environment, like wire and discarded soft drink cans. Rankin explains that these innovative items attracted the attention of tourists, who bought them and the craft eventually spread to the city streets and urban craft markets in South Africa, where adults now produce these items as novelties and souvenirs for tourists *(Rankin 71).*



***Figure 106: Street Art - Masimba Dombo,a bead and* wire artists works and displays his crafts on the street. *Johannesburg.***

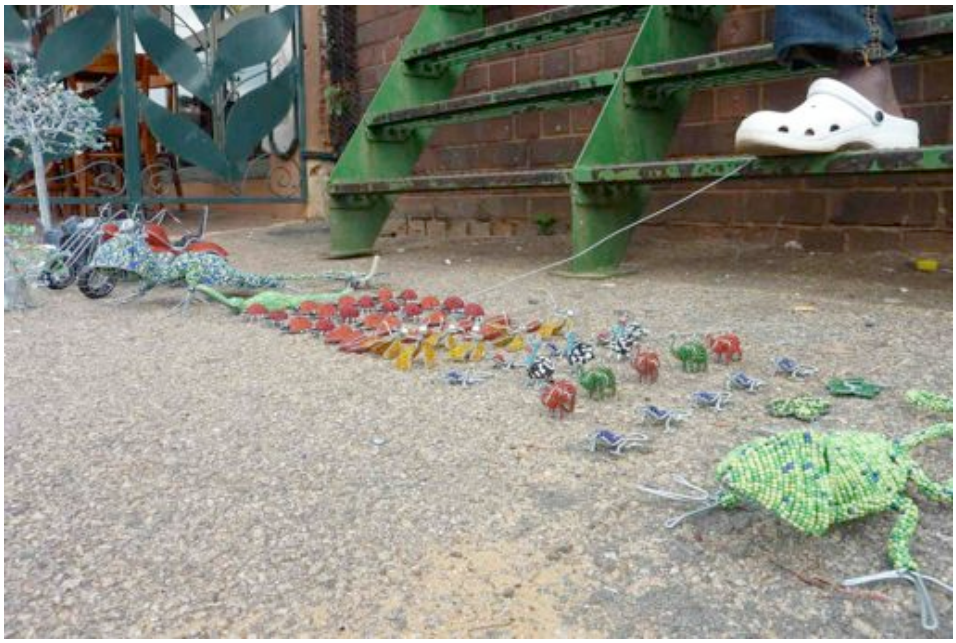


***Figure 107.1: Street Art - Bead and wire curios. Masimba Dombo. Johannesburg.***



***Figure 108: Street Art - Bead and wire curios made by Masimba Dombo. Johannesburg.***



***Figure 109: Chameleon made with telephone wire in "Chameleon Dancing". Children's Television Workshop***



***Figure 110: Wire and Bead Chameleons. Artist - Munyaradzi Alfred. Johannesburg.***

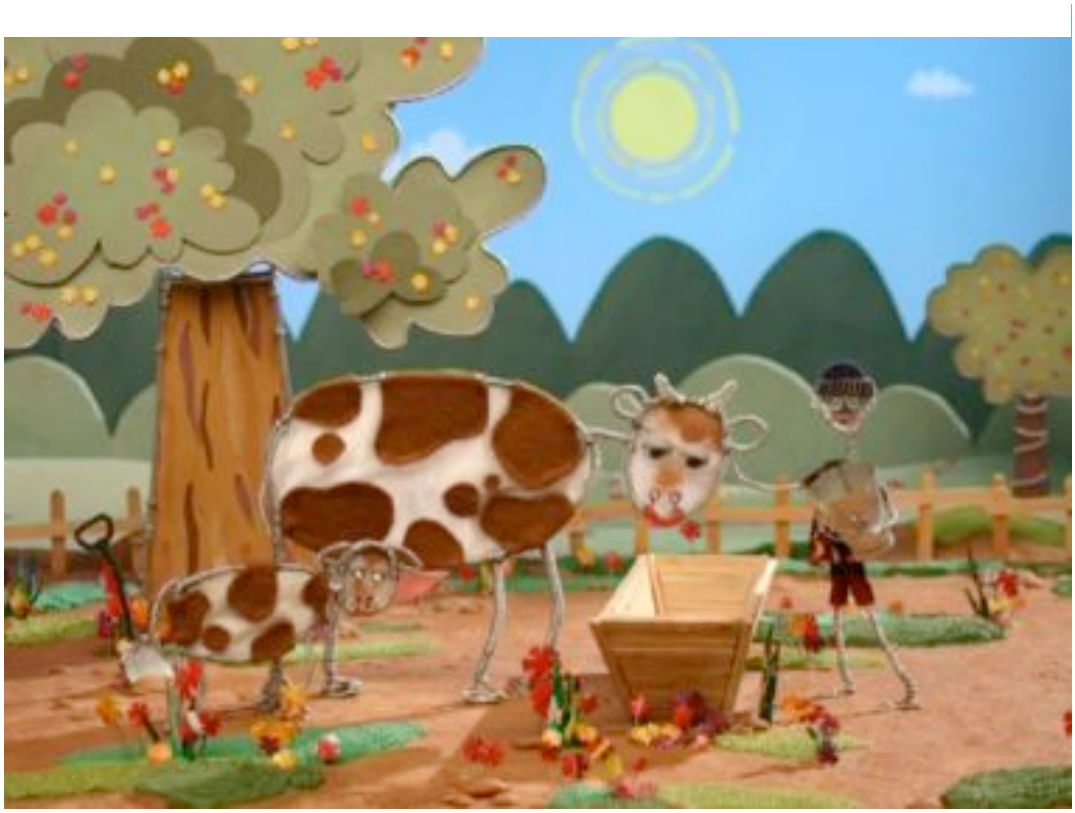


***Figure 111: Wire Farmer and Cow in "Season Surprises". Children's Television Workshop***

All of the puppets are constructed using a basic wire frame and armature, which remains part of the overall aesthetic design. Using this basic frame, other materials are then added to create various puppets. The Wire Farmer is a simple two dimensional wire outline, and fabric is stitched onto his wire frame to create clothes. The beetles in *Entering Social Groups* and *Finding a Button,* are constructed with a similar basic wire frame, which is covered with strands of colourful wire. The wings are created from cuttings from discarded tin cans. The Chameleon in *Dancing Chameleon* is constructed in a similar manner, using a basic wire frame, which is covered in colourful telephone wire. The chickens are created using discarded plastic bags. The bags are cut into strips and then built up around the basic wire frame to create the shape and body of the chickens. Red plasticine is used to create other elements such as the beak, while simple cardboard of different colours is used for the eyes.



**Figure 112: Beetles made with tin cans and wire in "Beetles find a**



***Figure 113: Street Art: guitars made out of tin cans. Artist - Munyaradzi Alfred***



***Figure 114: Street Art: giraffes made out of tin cans. Artist Kenneth Taruvinga.***



***Figure 115: Plastic Chickens in "Chicken Tangle". Children's Television Workshop***

All these puppets are constructed out of easily found material, and usually consist of discarded urban debris. In this way the puppets clearly are similar to those constructed by the Brothers Quay, who also used discarded elements to create the forms of their animations. The puppets are photorealistic examples of semi-abstract South African curio art, which is commonly found in both urban and rural areas of the country. They are, therefore, well suited to the purpose of edutainment, as they are objects that a South African child would easily identify and recognise, since they originate from

their "contextual realities". These objects are like toys, which have magically come to life However, they are not used to create any uncanny effects[iii] but rather to create an object, which any South African child will be able to identify from his or her environment.

The clay form of Red is in some way also more similar to African sculpture than it is to the Western sculptural tradition. Like Jay Clay, Red is more abstract in his design, especially in comparison to the very naturalistic clay forms sculpted by Van Blerk. Red is made up of a single colour, and sculpted into a very basic, almost geometric shape. For facial details, Trowell has sculpted simple holes for the eyes and mouth. Although not the artist's intention, this design clearly bears some resemblance to traditional African mask sculpture.



***Figure 116: Still from "Red Brushes his Hair". Children's Television Workshop***

However, in some ways Red is a very general character and this highlights another significant aspect of the puppets. Red was "a genderless, one clay character that could represent any cultural group. Although he was not particularly African, he embraced the idea that we are a multi-cultural (society) and he had an enormous appeal" *(Trowell).* Although the curio art objects are products of black informal South African artists, they also do not represent any specific race or gender. They are colourful collages of found materials, and the diversity of their materials is symbolic of the cultural diversity of South Africa and, therefore, all of these forms encourage the ideals of the New South Africa and act against the inequality and segregation, which were characteristic of apartheid South Africa.

## 8.4 Three-dimensional spaces

The environments clearly incorporate South African craft and design elements into the aesthetic of the spaces. In *Chicken Recycle,* a flat wall serves as a background on which a traditional Ndebele two-dimensional design has been placed. The sets constructed to create the environments are clearly not realistic spaces at all and tend to be highly stylised environments that can be recognised as constructed sets. A common aesthetic aspect in most of these stop-motion shorts is the combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional spatial elements.

In *Beetles Find a Button,* as well as all the *wire farmer* animations, simple flat sheets of coloured cardboard have been cut out to represent background elements such as grass, or mountains. The environments, like the puppets, are commonly constructed out of refuse material, as well as South African curio art objects. The sets in *Elements of Nature* are constructed from a wide variety of materials and different styles. The ground is created out of plasticine, while the blades of grass are created from tin cans. Cardboard is cut out and painted to create the form of hills and the sun. The cloud is created from bent wire, and filled with blue beads that represent rain. These two-dimensional elements are stuck against a flat surface that has been painted blue to act as the background and even cast shadows. Strands of different colours of string are used to create a rainbow.




***Figure 117: African set design. Still from "Chicken Recycle". Children's Television Workshop***



***Figure 118: Mixed materials in set design create 2D and 3D spaces. Still from "Elements of Nature". Children's Television Workshop.***

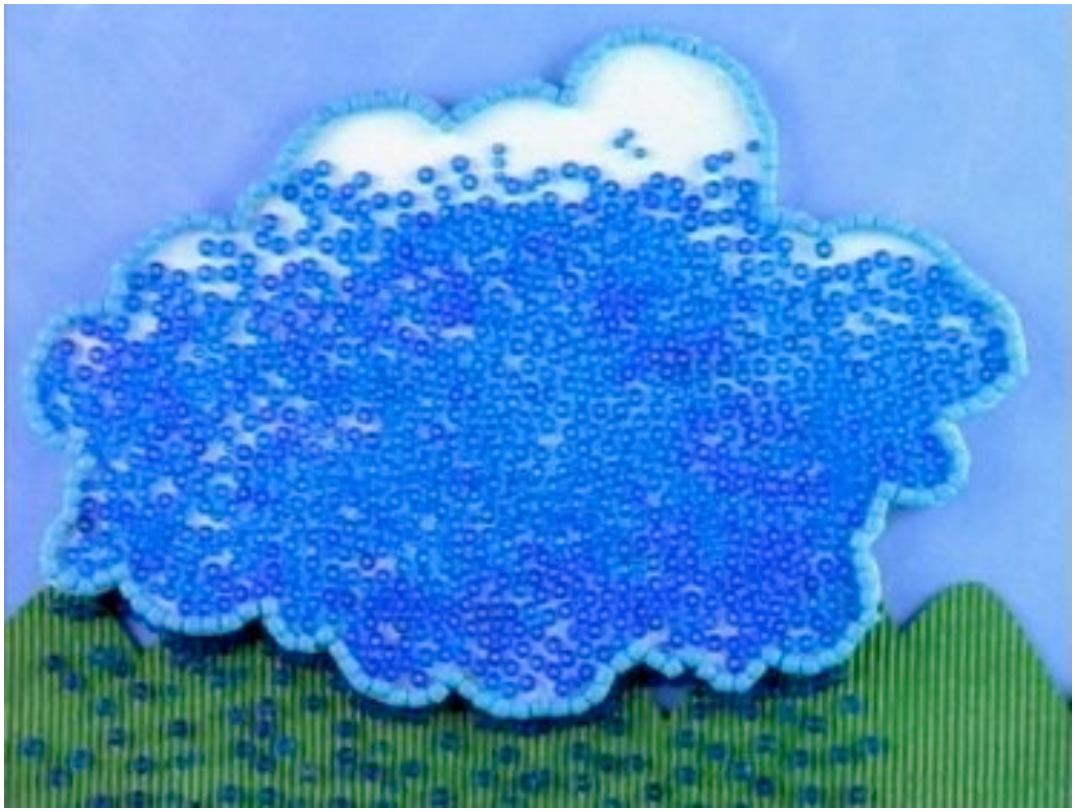


***Figure 119: Rain cloud made with blue beads. Still from "Elements of Nature". Children's Television Workshop.***

In *Entering Social Groups,* wire flowers, a very common South African curio art object, are placed in the environment. This mixture of curio art objects, refuse material and two-dimensional elements to construct sets creates a similar effect as found in *Gumby* or *Jay Clay.* An environment is created that appeals to the imagination and fantasy worlds of three to seven year old children. Children may also recognise the elements used to construct the set and therefore they may be encouraged to decode the film's construction. The learning process is more effective by using these types of cultural forms



***Figure 120: Mixing materials. Wire flowers, rocks and sand used in set. Beetles in "Entering Social Groups". Children's Television Workshop***

## 8.5 Sound and animation

It is important to discuss the use of sound and animation in the stop-motion animated shorts together. As mentioned previously, South Africa is a country with eleven official languages, and this becomes problematic when creating film or animated content for South African audiences. Takalani Sesame was created for all South

African cultural groups and the use of sound in the stop-motion animations created by Triggerfish demonstrates how animation is suited to overcome this obstacle. There is no dialogue used in the animations and the animations rely on what Wells calls "the dynamic of musicality" *(Wells 46).* The animations all use music, which has an Afro-centric sound and feel and no dialogue is ever used. This is demonstrated in *Entering Social Groups,* which relies on the use of the narrative strategy identified by Wells and called "choreography". The animation is timed and planned to music to create dance like sequences. By using this strategy, the symbol of the dancing group of beetles and contrasting musical themes becomes a metaphor for cooperation and tolerance between the diverse cultural groups of South Africa.

The puppets in all three of the animated sequences are also made from solid materials and therefore, like the puppets made in the Czech style, are limited in terms of their ability to create facial expressions. As a result, the animation relies more on the use of posture, posing, and timing to communicate personality, thought process and emotions. However, these puppet performances generally lack any depth in terms of character, and the movements are characterised by sameness, especially when compared to the sophisticated use of performance displayed by Van Blerk in *The Chimes.* This is evident in the animated sequences, which feature the Chickens. There is no variation between the performances of the chickens, with the exception of the baby chicken, which is animated with quicker and more relaxed movements in contrast to the older chickens.



***Figure 121: Baby chicken. "Chicken Soccer". Children's Television Workshop.***

However, this is not so in the clay animation sequences with Red and Bugley. Timing, posing and performance are used in these sequences to create distinctive characters with their own personalities and reactions. However, the performance and movements are highly stylised and relatively simple in comparison with the sophisticated performances created by Van Blerk in his short films. In a sense this stylisation of performance is imposed by the structural requirements of the animated sequences, which are required to be short and simple in order to communicate effectively with the target audience of three to seven year olds.

## 8.6 A unique South African stop-motion aesthetic?

The content and aesthetic elements of these animations are largely culturally specific to South Africa and this is especially apparent in the puppet design and construction that was used in these animations. However, it is necessary to examine these forms more closely and discuss what exactly it is that makes them uniquely South African.

Like Jiri Trnka, Trowell and Kaye placed value on traditional culture and art in order to create a specifically relevant type of animation. However, Jiri Trnka created a puppet aesthetic that was based on Czechoslovakia's long history and tradition of puppet theatre, while the South African tourist craft art that Triggerfish drew inspiration from is a relatively new artistic development in South Africa.

Traditional "authentic" African art was originally "intended to function in a traditional social or religious way" but as a result of European colonialism, this original function has been distorted by the European view of the function of art as primarily being economic and decorative *(Collet 15-16)*. This has resulted in the mutation of African art into tourist art, the creation of which is defined by how the tourist views Africa, and it therefore lacks integrity, since the art is constructed for the preconceived notions of tourists *(Collet 28-29)*. Curio art can be seen as an extension of how the foreigner sees South Africa, rather than as an accurate expression of how these craft artists see themselves.

Trowell herself explained that she found the use of these craft objects interesting as it dealt with the question of how the tourist views South Africa or rather how South

Africa is depicted through a lens *(Trowell Interview),* and which she expresses in the film *Souvenir (2005).* The film follows a tourist through a South African craft market. He is filming everything around him, and through the camera he sees a table full of these curio type objects come to life.



***Figure 122: Curio objects come to life. Still from Souvenir.***



***Figure 122: Curio objects come to life. Still from Souvenir.***

Therefore, the animation of these curio objects could be seen as the fulfilment of the foreigner's naïve and idyllic view of African culture and life. However, this view and argument was taken from Collet's Master's Research report, "Re-imagining African Tourist Art: a case study of the Rosebank Craft Market", and is problematic in some ways since it focuses primarily on paintings and wooden sculptures, which can be seen as having originated from traditional African art before the arrival of European colonialists.

The development of crafts created out of wire and urban materials, however, is a much more recent development, which as explained above, was a consequence of the urbanisation of the black South African population during the twentieth century. Manaka explains that artists are shaped by their surroundings and "in the past, African artists have demonstrated their exploitation of the natural habitat with the marriage of technical skill and artistic expression" *(9).* This is evident in the use of organic materials such rock and wood.

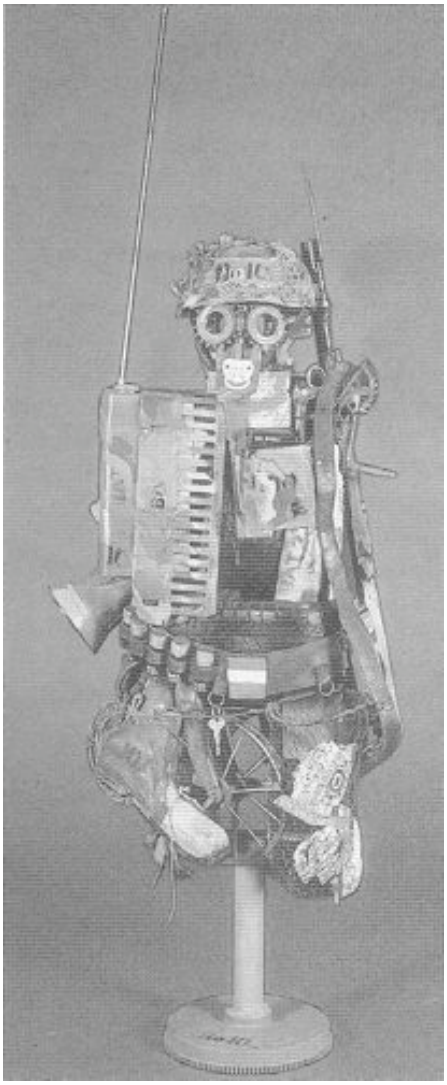


***Figure 123: The Soldier by Willie Bester (Rankin 90)***

The establishment of the mining industry by white settlers in South Africa, who passed laws that dispossessed the land belonging to black South African's "saw the dawn of an industrial epoch" and this urbanisation of the black population destroyed their culture and sense of community *(Manaka 9).* In some ways, works created by South African sculptors in the nineties share similarities with this craft art. Willie Bester used found "urban debris", such as barbed wire, cans and other scrap metals to create *The Soldier* in 1990, a heavily armed and dehumanized robot-like automaton, to comment on the police force at the time in South Africa *(Rankin 90).* Walter Oltmann created *An African Group* in 1985, a series of intricate and organic wire sculptures that are "iconic" and suggest the spiritual *(Rankin 161-162).*

This use of urban materials in some way arose out of economic limitations. South African sculptor, Vincent Baloyi, originally began working with wooden materials. However, when he moved to Johannesburg, he began creating sculpture with sheets of scrap metal, which he would weld together. Rankin explains that this arose from the

difficulty of obtaining wood in "Johannesburg, where scrap metal is more readily available" *(85)*. Urbanisation imposed economic limitations on black South Africans by forcing them into low paying jobs and informal settlements created out of scrap metal and urban debris. Thus, readily available urban materials like wire and tin were used to construct toys, and later this evolved into the construction of craft objects, which craftsmen with limited access to materials would build in order to make a living. These curio art objects are popular because they demonstrate a highly innovative use of scrap materials to create intricate works of three-dimensional sculpture.

Thus, while not "traditional African art", these curio sculptures made from garbage are products of South Africa's history, and allow the representation and expression of a previously marginalised and oppressed South African cultural group. The use of refuse to construct puppets and sets is a distinctively South African aesthetic.

Thus, the stop-motion animations created by Triggerfish display a unique South African stop-motion aesthetic. Not only do they utilise puppet, set and sound design elements that are distinctly South African, but they are also defined by the use of narratives and scenarios that were written specifically for South Africa. *Chicken Recycle* shows chickens made out of recycled plastic bags, working together to use boxes and garbage to build houses for themselves, and is clearly drawn in reference to the large number of South Africans who live in informal settlements which consist of shacks built out of recycled urban debris. These animations are very much influenced by a style and aesthetic that is South African, as well as dealing with the contemporary South African issues of reconciliation, multiculturalism and tolerance. In contrast to the stop-motion created by Klaybow Films and XYZoo, these animations were created for South African audiences and use a distinctive South African style. Therefore, the stop-motion animated films created by Triggerfish clearly represent the development of a uniquely South African stop-motion aesthetic.



***Figure 124: Chicken building houses from discarded materials in "Chicken Recycle. Children's Television Workshop***

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[i] Muppets are puppet characters used in Sesame Street. They controlled by a human puppeteer in real time and filmed live.

[ii] Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist. He proposed that humans go through four stages of cognitive development *(Bexen 7).*

[iii] Freud states that "the uncanny" can arise when we become uncertain whether an object is lifeless because it becomes animate *(Freud 135).* The Brothers Quay create moments of the uncanny by taking old toys and animating them in unfamiliar and threatening context.

## 9. Conclusions and speculations

Furniss states that three-dimensional stop-motion animation has never been as commercially successful or as widely practiced as 2D cel animation and tends to rise to the top in certain places and at certain times *(Furniss 155)*. When I first began this research, I identified that South Africa, between 1990 and 2005, was one such place and time and I assumed that the work produced by XYZoo and Triggerfish, represented an apex in stop-motion animation production in South Africa.

Examining the filmographies of stop-motion animation produced in South Africa between 1980 and 2005 reveals that this assumption is somewhat flawed. Between 1981 and 1987, Klaybow Films produced approximately 595 minutes of clay animation, most of which was commissioned by the SABC, while between 1990 and 2005, XYZoo produced approximately 121 minutes of stop-motion animation and between 1996 and 2005, Triggerfish produced approximately 60 minutes of stop-motion animation. However, all three of these studios made significant contributions to the development of stop-motion as well as to the South African animation industry. The history of these studios and the work they produced must be understood in terms of the contextual factors that may have influenced them.

### 9.1 The Evolution of South African animation

Through this research, I have been able to identify different phases in the South African animation industry. Before television was introduced in South Africa in 1976, the animation industry was centred in Johannesburg and was primarily concerned with the production of 2D advertising, as well special effects and titles in live-action films for cinema display. Following the introduction of television broadcasting and the SABC, new opportunities arose and there was a significant shift towards the production of television animation for children. The end of the apartheid era resulted in the restructuring of the SABC, and during the 90s the broadcaster commissioned very few local animation productions. The result of this was that between 1990 and 2000, animation in South Africa was focused primarily on the production of television commercials. During this period, Cape Town developed as the main centre for the industry. Between 2000 and 2005, the animation industry began to grow substantially

and South African studios became increasingly involved in the production of animation for international clients. South African animation has generally followed American trends, and has been dominated by 2D cel, and later 2D and 3D CGI in the 90s. This can be attributed to the lack of animation training, as well as a general ignorance of alternative animation production techniques apart from those dominant in America.

## 9.2 The development of stop-motion animation techniques

3D stop-motion techniques do not lend themselves to the division of labour techniques or the principles of Taylorism. For this reason, 2D studio animation became the dominant mode of animation production in the first half of the twentieth century, while puppet and clay animation only saw significant development after the Second World War at the hands of talented individuals and small studios.

Puppet animation developed in countries with a history of puppet theatre, such as Eastern Europe. In the 1950s, Czech animator Jiri Trnka drew on his country's puppet theatre tradition to create his distinctive puppet animation, which inspired future generations of puppet animators throughout the world, such as Co Hoedeman in Canada and Khachiro Kawamoto in Japan. They were inspired by Trnka's emphasis on cultural traditions and developed puppet animated films which were specifically relevant to Canadian and Japanese traditional puppet and storytelling traditions. The puppets are characterised by fixed facial expressions, and rely on gesture and posing to communicate story and emotion, rather than on dialogue or changing facial expressions. This is clearly why puppet animation techniques largely remained an alternative animation technique, as they were not able to follow the conventions of commercial animation. However, with advances in technology, animators like Henry Selick have been able to create puppet-animated films with popular appeal that have enjoyed widespread commercial success.

Clay animation developed significantly in America, and Will Vinton can be regarded as the most important figure in the history of this technique. In the 1970s he originated modern clay animation techniques and developed a distinctive style that

showed that clay animation was able equal the appeal of 2D cel animation. He showed that clay animation could be sculpted and reshaped to create sophisticated character animation that had mass appeal. The rise in popularity of clay animation in the 80s and 90s is a result of his efforts, though today this contribution seems to have been forgotten. However, it was really Aardman Animation in Britain, which developed clay animation with a global appeal with the *Wallace and Gromit* films. Like puppet animation, the development of clay animation as a popular and commercially successful technique is largely due to technological advances.

## 9.3 The evolution of South African stop-motion

Berenson started the first South African animation studio dedicated to the production of clay animation, Klaybow Films, in 1981 and began to hire and train local artists. Berenson was part of a trend in South African animation during this period, which was characterised by the lack of any animation schools or courses. Shapurjee states that in the 1940s and the following decades, American and Western European professionals worked in South African studios, where they trained South African animators and, as a result, "American and (western) European modes of animation production" greatly influenced South African animation *(37).* These include animators such as, Dennis Purchase from Britain, and Glen Coppens from Belgium.

However, Berenson was from Romania and obviously influenced by Eastern European puppet theatre and animation traditions. Vinton was also clearly an influence on Berenson, who started Klaybow seven years after Vinton had won the Oscar for his film *Closed Mondays*. Berenson's decision to open a clay animation studio was influenced by his Eastern European background, as well as Vinton and the emergence of the new medium of clay animation.

The Cape Provincial Library is also very significant as it had an impressive archive of stop-motion that included animation by Starevich, Trnka, Svankmajer, Vinton, McLaren and Hoedeman. Although Klaybow Films eventually had to close down, its contribution to South African stop-motion is significant. The South Africans who worked at Klaybow were obviously influenced by Berenson and these animation screenings, and several of them are currently working in the South African animation

industry. The most important of these was Van Blerk. He carried on the Vinton tradition, and it is significant that he worked with Billy Budd Films to carry on producing the Clay Classics. However, what was significant about XYZoo and Van Blerk, was that he continued the tradition of training animators started by Berenson. Not only did he pass on the stop-motion skills he had learned while working at Klaybow, but also exposed Trowell to the stop-motion films at the Cape Provincial library. This was significant as it inspired Trowell to experiment with alternative stop-motion techniques and start Triggerfish with Emma Kaye. They continued the tradition of exposing others to alternative stop-motion animation, by showing this work to advertising agencies and potential financiers in order to educate the market and create new opportunities within the South African industry. These films would also be very influential in the work they produced for Takalani Sesame.

It is clear that the production of stop-motion animation in South Africa developed as a result of the work of individuals who were inspired by the stop-motion produced by the likes of Vinton and Trnka. The role of the Cape Provincial Library is also significant and during this research I was unable to ascertain how the library came to assemble such an extensive and impressive collection of stop-motion animation. The history of the archive as well as the influence it may have had on other South African artists and animators would be valuable future research.

## 9.4 South African Stop-Motion Aesthetics

The work produced by Klaybow and XYZoo lacked any relevance to South Africa, and for this reason it could be easy to view this work as less valuable than the work produced by Triggerfish. However, it is important to understand that the content and aesthetics of these films must be discussed in terms of the contextual factors influencing the South African animation and live-action industry.

During the 80s, animation in South Africa was predominantly created for the SABC. However, as the history of Klaybow reveals, it was impossible to create any content that had credibility or was representative of South Africa, as the SABC was involved in the distortion of the truth. The SABC also allocated low budgets and kept the ownership rights of the content they commissioned. This made it impossible to

develop a sustainable animation studio. Klaybow produced *Bimbo's Books* during this period. This series clearly lacked any South African significance, was inspired by Western story telling traditions and popular American culture. Klaybow produced this series primarily as a showreel piece in order to market themselves to international clients, as this was the only way the studio could survive financially. *Bimbo's Books* was impressive in terms of the quality and context of its production. It is also unusual in comparison to other animation content produced in South Africa during this period. Animation produced during the 80s was generally wholesome content for young children. *Bimbo's Books* was a parody of wholesome fairytale animation for children, and combined clay animation with popular music to create a show that was clearly innovative for its place and time.

In the nineties, the SABC rarely commissioned any animation and if they did, they offered only low budgets. During this time, animation studios primarily produced television commercials to survive, and the Billy Budd Films were a unique opportunity for a South African studio. Van Blerk's strategy to survive in this limited market was to develop a small studio that produced commercials as well as the short films for Billy Budd Films. In this context, although produced for an American audience, the short films produced by XYZoo for Billy Budd Films are an impressive achievement. His strategy enabled him to develop his own skills as a character animator and director. This is evident in the films, which show his ability to create distinctive performances, as well as use camera and lighting in a sophisticated way. These films are now part of Billy Budd Film's Clay Classics series, which could be considered as a separate genre of clay animation, and are a valuable addition to the history of clay animation production worldwide.

Triggerfish was characterised by the producer/director relationship between Trowell and Kaye. Kaye's understanding of business and Trowell's knowledge of animation techniques was the core of Triggerfish's success. Their strategy was characterised by educating the market and developing the industry in order to create work for their studio. The stop-motion they produced is highly innovative and was an important factor in their success, as it allowed them to develop a reputation. But it was the development of Takalani Sesame in South Africa, which allowed them to develop their distinctive South African style of stop-motion. They created stop-motion puppets

that were based on street art, made from wire, plastic, beads and tin cans. The sets were also characterised by this mix of materials and styles. The sets, puppets, music and content of these stop-motion films were created specifically for a South African audience, and largely dealt with themes relevant to the context of South Africa. Triggerfish's "trash" aesthetic characterised by a mixture of urban debris, styles and curio puppets, is representative of the diversity and multiculturalism of the New South Africa.

## 9,5 Final thoughts

The use of stop-motion animation in South Africa saw a serious decline in use from 2005 onwards. Kaye explains that this is largely the result of the emergence of 3D CGI as the dominant form of animation production in South Africa. She explains that stop-motion is generally regarded as being out of date in comparison with the slick aesthetic created by 3D CGI, as well as being slower and more expensive to produce *(Kaye)*. Despite this decrease in the production of stop-motion in South Africa, since 2001, the animation industry in South Africa has developed significantly and "service work continues to account for the bulk of work". Local broadcasters still do not provide enough financial support for animation production. This research has shown that the SABC has continually restricted the development of animation in South Africa through a lack of financial support. Their practice of retaining the ownership rights of the content they commission also severely restricts animation production. In this environment it is impossible to develop stop-motion animation that is relevant to South Africa

There are some similarities between Triggerfish's "trash" aesthetic and the Zimbabwean stop-motion film *The Legend of The Sky Kingdom (2004)*. In this film, puppets were made out of junk collected from a rubbish dump. The film is regarded as the first "junkmation" film *(Vickers)*. By using junk, the budget of the film was lowered considerably and in some ways this is suited to animation production in Africa, where broadcasters allocate insufficient budgets for animation production. The "trash" aesthetic and "junkmation" technique are very similar to pixilation techniques in the sense that they incorporate ready-mades to produce animation.

This research has revealed the significant role of Triggerfish in creating a uniquely South African stop-motion aesthetic as well as in helping to develop South Africa's animation industry. The development of this South African "trash" aesthetic by Triggerfish, represents the culmination of almost twenty years of stop-motion animation development in South Africa, which can be traced back through Lindsay Van Blerk to Ted Berenson and thus Eastern Europe. Klaybow Films, XYZoo and Triggerfish are unusual because they were involved in the production of 3D stop-motion, however they are clearly three of the most important studios in South African animation history. Triggerfish made significant contributions to the development of the South African industry through its involvement in the 2001 Takalani collaborative project, as well as its involvement in the formation of groups such as Animation SA and Animation Exchange. This research has thus revealed that 3D stop-motion animation, although a marginal and neglected form in most parts of the world, has played a vital role in the evolution of South African animation.

Trowell and Kaye were like Trnka in the sense that they embraced traditional culture and placed importance on creating specifically relevant content. The unique stop-motion aesthetic developed by Triggerfish is a landmark in stop-motion history in South Africa. However, one feels that they have only scratched the surface of possibilities in terms of South African stop-motion. Like Trnka's work, Triggerfish's "trash" aesthetic can be regarded as the start of a stop-motion tradition on which to build future work. Considering that South African traditional art is predominantly three-dimensional, stop-motion animation would be specially suited to creating other uniquely South African animation aesthetics. There is still a wide range of three-dimensional African sculpture in wood and metal that can serve as future references for stop-motion material that would be unique to South Africa and highly innovative in terms of stop-motion created in other parts of the world. Future research into African sculpture, craft and storytelling traditions and how these could be incorporated into 3D stop-motion would be valuable future research.

## Appendix A: South African Stop-Motion Timeline: 1980-2005

| | |
|---|---|
| **1980** | Ted and Marcel Berrenson move to South Africa. |
| **1981** | Ted and Marcel Berrenson form Klaybow Films in Cape Town.<br>Klaybow Films produces ***Madam and Steve***.<br>Klayow Films produces ***The Adventures of Dr. Kleiman*** for SABC. |
| **1982** | Klaybow Films produces ***The Wonderful World of Dr. Kleiman*** for SABC.<br>Lindsay Van Blerk begins working at Klaybow, however he is conscripted and can only work part-time at the studio. |
| **1983** | Klaybow Films produces ***Monna We Letsopha*** for SABC, Xhosa Channel. |
| **1984** | Klaybow Films produces ***Tempodieks*** for SABC, Xhosa Channel. |
| **1985** | Lindsay Van Blerk begins working full time at Klaybow Films.<br>Studio moves to larger premises in Napier Street and begins production on ***Bimbo's Books***.<br>President P.W. Botha declares State of Emergency. |
| **1986** | Comprehensive Anti Apartheid Act Passed in the United States of America. |
| **1987** | Klaybow Films finishes ***Bimbo's Books*** for SABC after three years of production.<br>Budgett Reconcilliation Act Passed in the United States of America.<br>Frank Moynihan of Billybudd Films commissions Klaybow Films to produce a twenty minute clay animation on condition that the studio is moved out of South Africa.<br>Klaybow Films Moves to London. |
| **1989** | Klaybow Films finishes ***The Star Child*** for Billybudd films. The film finishes behind schedule and over budget. Film is a economic failure.<br>Klaybow Films is forced to close.<br>Lindsay Van Blerk moves back to South Africa.<br>FW de Klerk becomes president of South Africa. |
| **1990** | FW De Klerk unbanns ANC and releases Nelson Mandela from prison.<br>Van Blerk finds job at Miros Productions directing animation commercials***.***<br>Lindsay Van Blerk meets Jacquie Trowell at Miros productions. They begin working together.<br>Van Blerk leaves Miros and begins producing commercials independently under the name of XYZoo Animations. He hires Jacquie Trowell as a set builder, and simultaneously trains her to animate. |
| **1991** | Van Blerk continues producing animation commercials independently. |
| **1992** | XYZoo Animations is officially formed by Lindsay Van Blerk, Jacquie Trowell, and Brett Schuman.<br>XYZoo begins production on ***The Prodigal Son***. |
| **1993** | XYZoo finishing producing ***The Prodigal Son*** for Billybudd Films. |
| **1994** | First Democratic Elections in South Africa. |
| **1995** | XYZoo produces ***Michael The Visitor*** for Billybudd Films. |
| **1996** | Jacquie Trowell leaves XYZoo and forms Triggerfish with Emma Kaye. |
| **1997** | Triggerfish produces ***Parrafin Saftey Campaign***. |
| **1998** | XYZoo produces ***The First Christmas*** for Billybudd Films. |
| **1999** | Triggerfish produces ***Second Parrafin Saftey Campaign***.<br>Triggerfish produces 12 twenty second short animation for Sesane Street. |
| **2000** | Triggerfish produces stop-motion animation for Takalani Sesame season 1<br>XYZoo produces ***The Chimes*** for Billybudd Films. |
| **2001** | XYZoo begins producing Wellington VO Brandy Commercials for next two years. |
| **2002** | Triggerfish produces stop-motion animation for Takalani Sesame season 2 |
| **2003** | Triggerfish produces stop-motion animation for Takalani Sesame season 3.<br>XYZoo produces ***The Velveteen Rabbit*** for Billybudd films. |
| **2004** | Triggerfish produces stop-motion animation for Takalani Sesame season 4. |
| **2005** | Jacquie Trowell and Emma Kaye sell Triggerfish to Stuart Forrester. |

## Appendix B: South African Stop-Motion Filmography 1981-2005

### Klaybow Films

*Madam and Steve (1981)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
10 Minutes Clay Animation Music Video

*The Adventures of Dr Kleiman (1981)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
13 Five Minute Episodes
for SABC
Clay Animation

*The Wonderful World of Dr Kleiman (1982)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
13 Five Minute Episodes
for SABC
Clay Animation

*Monna We Letsopha (1983)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
13 Ten Minute Episodes
for SABC
Clay Animation

*Tempodieks (1984-1985)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
26 Five Minute Episodes
for SABC
Clay Animation

*Bimbo's Books (1985-1987)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
13 Fifteen Minute Episodes
for SABC
Clay Animation and Mixed Media

*Hello and Goodbye (1985-1987)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
Five Minute Clay Animation Music Video

*Rainbow Chicken (1986)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
30 second Commercial
for Young and Rubicam
Clay Animation

*Koo Jam (1987)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
40 second Commercial
for Berry Bush
Clay Animation

*Mayo Mayonnaise (1987)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
30 second Commercial
for Berry Bush
Clay Animation

*The Star Child (1988-1989)*
Director: Ted Berenson
Klaybow Films
24 Minute Film
for Billy Budd Films

**Miros Productions**

*Simba Chipnicks (1990)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
Miros Productions
40 second commercial
for Wilsenach
Clay Animation and Live-actions

*Alcolin Glue (1990)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
Miros Productions
30 second commercial
for Young and Rubican
Pixilation

*I&J Stir Fry (1990)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
Miros Productions
40 second commercial
for Bates Wells
Pixilation

**XYZoo Animation**

*National Air Conditioners "Seaside" (1990)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Lawrence Flack
Clay Animation

*National Air Conditioners "Blues" (1990)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Lawrence Flack
Clay Animation

*National Air Conditioners "Opera" (1991)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Lawrence Flack
Clay Animation

*Everfresh Milk (1991)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Lintas
Clay Animation

*Magic Diaper Babies (1991)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Young and Rubicam
Clay Animation

*Tutti Frutti Trolls (1991)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Young and Rubicam
Clay Animation

*Magic Diaper Pets (1991)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
15 second commercial
for Young and Rubicam
Clay Animation

*PPAC (Professional Pharmacy Association) "Skin Care" (1992)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for SBBW
Clay Animation

*PPAC (Professional Pharmacy Association) "Heart" (1992)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for SBBW
Clay Animation

*Piper's Sweetmilk Cheese (1992)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk and Jacquie Trowell
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for SBBW
Clay Animation

*The Prodigal Son (1992-1993)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
8 minute Film
for Billy Budd Films
Clay Animation

*MNET/KTV (1993)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second ident.
for Caplan Wilkie
Mixed Media

*Ivory Cream (1993)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Cream Advertising
Cutout

*Michael The Visitor (1994-1995)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
24 Minute commercial
for Billy Budd Films
Clay Animation

*SABC Radio (1995)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk and Jacquie Trowell
XYZoo Animation
60 second commercial
for TBWA
Clay Animation

*Clover Cheese "Mice" (1995)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk and Jacquie Trowell
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for TBWA
Clay Animation

*Clover Cheese "Ants" (1995)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk and Jacquie Trowell
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for TBWA
Clay Animation

*MNET Summer Festival (1996)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 Second Ident.
for MNET TV
Clay Animation

*Beacon Easter Eggs # 1 (1996)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for TBWA
Clay Animation

*Beacon Easter Eggs # 2 (1996)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for TBWA
Clay Animation

*Visa Electron "Elephant" (1997)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
50 second commercial
for Young and Rubicam
Clay Animation

*Pork Board "Chicken For Pork" (1997)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Leo Burnett
Clay Animation

*Pork Board "Fish for Pork" (1997)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Leo Burnett
Clay Animation

*Natal Building Society Parrot (1997)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Berry Bush BBDO
Clay Animation

*VW Citi Golf (1997)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
60 second commercial
for Leo Burnett
Pixilation

*The First Christmas (1997-1998)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
23 minute film
for Billy Budd Films
Clay Animation

*The Chimes (1999-2000)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
23 minute film
for Billy Budd Films
Clay Animation

*Wellington VO Brandy "French Rooster" (2001)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Silverhammer
Clay Animation

*Wellington VO Brandy "Kiwi" (2001)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Silverhammer
Clay Animation

*Wellington VO Brandy "Wallaby" (2001)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Silverhammer
Clay Animation

*Wellington VO Brandy "Bulldog" (2001)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Silverhammer
Clay Animation

*Wellington VO Brandy "Dragon" (2002)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Silverhammer
Clay Animation

*Wellington VO Brandy "Burning Bird" (2002)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Silverhammer
Clay Animation

*Wellington VO Brandy "Party Animals" (2002)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
30 second commercial
for Silverhammer
Clay Animation

*The Velveteen Rabbit (2002-2003)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
23 minute film
for Billy Budd Films
Clay Animation

*Sanlam Plover ENGLISH (2004)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
60 second commercial
for BBDO
Puppet Animation

*Sanlam "Guinea Fowl" ENGLISH (2004)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
60 second commercial
for BBDO
Puppet Animation

*La Vache "Puzzle" (2005)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
15 second commercial
for Saatchi and Saatchi
Clay Animation

*La Vache "Weightlifter" (2005)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
15 second commercial
for Saatchi and Saatchi
Clay Animation

*La Vache "Eyesight" (2005)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
15 second commercial
for Saatchi and Saatchi
Clay Animation

*La Vache "Report Card" (2005)*
Director: Lindsay van Blerk
XYZoo Animation
15 second commercial
for Saatchi and Saatchi
Clay Animation

**Triggerfish Animation**

*Paraffin Safety Campaign (1997)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
2 x 25 second Television Spot
for Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa
Clay Animation

*Soviet Clothing (1997)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
20 second Cinema Advertising
for Dinergy
Pixilation

*Huapango De Los Volcanos (1997)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
90 second insert
for Mexican Short Film (dir. Felipe Fernandez)
Clay Animation

*Plascon Woodcare (1998)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for Sonnenburg Murphy Leo Burnett
Puppet Animation

*One Day in Africa (1998)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
60 pilot for 27 minute feature
for Chilile Productions
Clay Animation

*Royco Potato Bake (1999)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
2 x 30 second commercial
for Ogilvy Mather
Clay Animation

*Paraffin Saftey Campaign (1999)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
35 Television Spot
for Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa
Clay Animation

*I-Net Bridge (1999)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for Sonnenburg Murphy Leo Burnett
Puppet Animation

*Slo Jo (1999)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for Young and Y&R Gitam
Puppet Animation

*Sesame Street (1999)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
12 x 20-60 second Edutainment
for CTW New York
Mixed Media

*MNET Africa (2000)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
3 x 30 second commercial
for Ogilvy Mather
Pixilation

*Camlait (2000)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for McCann Erikson Cameroun
Pixilation

*Royco Potato Wedges (2000)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for Ogilvy Mather
Clay Animation

*Takalani Sesame Street (2000)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
3 x 45-65 second edutainment
for Kwasukusela/Times Media/CTW New York
Mixed Media

*Oros (2000)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for Lindsay Smithers FCB
Clay Animation

*Sesame Street (2000-2001)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
8 x 30-80 second Edutainment
for CTW New York
Mixed Media

*Glen Tea (2002)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
2 x 30 second commercial
for JWT
Pixilation

*Takalani Sesame (2002-2003)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
40 minute Edutainment
for Sesame Workshop New York
Mixed Media

*Shoprite Checkers Easter (2003)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
20 second commercial
for Berry Bush BBDO
Clay Animation

*Glen Tea (2003)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for JWT
Pixilation

*Salticrax (2003)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
30 second commercial
for Miros Productions
Pixilation

*Sabat (2004)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Triggerfish Animation
20 second commercial
for Pie Street
Clay Animation

**Jacquie Trowell - Freelance**

*Sesame Street (2004)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Freelance
6 min second Edutainment
for Triggerfish
Mixed Media

*Souvenir (2005)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Freelance
90 second Advertising
for Film South Africa
Puppet Animation

*Ocean Basket (2005)*
Director: Jacquie Trowell
Freelance
6 x 15 second commercials
for Joe Public
Stop-Motion

*Sesame Street (2005)*
Consultant: Jacquie Trowell
Freelance
3 min second Edutainment
for Triggerfish
Mixed Media

*Der Tag (2005)*
Animation supervisor: Jacquie Trowell
Freelance
3 minute Music Video
for Cyclone Films
Stop-Motion

**Appendix C: Description of attached DVDs**

There are three DVDs that have been included with this document. Some of the films discussed in this research report have been placed on these DVDs. If a film is on one of these DVDs it will be indicated with: ***(See DVD - Disk #i)***. The following is an outline of the three DVDs. In the research report it will be indicated with

These DVDs are region free and should play on any DVD player in the world, as well as on computers with DVD players software installed.

## Disk 01

Disk 01 has Klaybow Films' showreel, various commercials by XYZoo and Triggerfish and the stop-motion animation produced for Takalani Sesame discussed in chapter 08.

**Klaybow Films**

- Klaybow Showreel (1987) - *Includes clips from Bimbo's Books,* the entire *Hello and Goodbye Music video,* and the television commercials produced for *Rainbow Chicken (1986) and Mayo Mayonnaise (1987).*

**XYZoo** (Television commercials)

- XYZoo Showreel (1990-1992)
- Everfresh Milk *(1991)*
- *Magic Diaper Babies (1991)*
- *Piper's Sweetmilk Cheese (1992)*
- *KTV (1993)*
- *SABC Radio (1995)*
- *VW Citi Golf (1997)*
- *Wellington VO Brandy "Rooster" (2001)*
- *Wellington VO Brandy "Kiwi" (2001)*
- *Wellington VO Brandy "Dragon" (2002)*
- *Wellington VO Brandy "Wallaby" (2002)*
- *Wellington VO Brandy "Burning Bird (2002)*
- *Wellington VO Brandy "Party Animals (2002)*
- *Sanlam "Plover" (2004)*
- *Sanlam Guinea Fowl" (2004)*

*(Disk 01contents continued on next page)*

**Triggerfish (***1997-1999)*

- *Paraffin Safety Campaign (1997)*
- *Huapango De Los Volcanos (1997)*
- *Royco Potato Bake (1999)*

Takalani Sesame (1999 - 2004)

- *Red's Hair*
- *Red Sneezes*
- *Red Goes Swimming*
- *Red Brushes his Teeth*
- *Red Piecing it together*
- *Wire Farmer Helps Cow*
- *Wire Farmer Elements of Nature*
- *Wire Farer Season Surprises*
- *Beetle's Entering Social Groups*
- *Beetle's Find a Button*
- *Chicken Soccer*
- *Chicken Recycle*
- *Chicken Tangle*
- *Dancing Chameleon*
- *Dung Beetle*
- *Bugley and Peach*
- *Bird Doctor*

## Disk 02 (Billy Budd Films)

Disk 02 has the short clay animations produced for Billy Budd Films.

**Klaybow Films**

- *The Star Child (1989)*

**XYZoo**

- *The Prodigal Son (1993)*
- *Michael the Visitor (1995)*

## Disk 03 (Billy Budd Films)

Disk 03 has three short clay animations produced by XYZoo for Billy Budd Films.

**XYZoo**

- *The First Christmas (1998)*
- *The Chimes (2000)*
- *The Velveteen Rabbit (2003)*

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[i] '#' Indicates number. This would either be 01, 02, or 03.

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