

Van Norris

Taking an Appropriate Line

Exploring Representations of Disability within British Mainstream Animation

This article discusses how representations of disability operate within the mainstream animation narratives of the British *Creature Discomfort* series (2007-8). These images are constructed as a response to concerns about broader social perceptions of the physically disabled and once scrutinized it is apparent that they are managed through established notions of comic incongruity. This is a framework that not only aids a less reductive insight into the lives of those restricted in mobility but it provides a comic contrast to the serious messages being imparted about ignorance, stereotyping and access. Through the application of incongruity there emerges a modification of representation here and one that builds upon and subverts extant depictions of physical impairment within previous animated discourses. This reframing refines our understandings around representation within contemporary media and constructs here a hybrid of several extant discourses that services an overall more nuanced conception of day to day life for those who are physically disabled.

Directed by Aardman Studio's in-house animator, Steve Harding-Hill, *Creature Discomforts* are a group of short animations that were released on-line and as print adverts in November 2007 and were shown on UK TV from January 2008. The first batch came with four shorts with a further four released on-line in July 2008. These were initiated by the Leonard Cheshire Disability Charity as part of their public re-launch but primarily were devised to be an open-ended on-going series. Peter Dicken, the Leonard Cheshire Visibility Spokesman, stated in interview that the shorts came in response to extensive market research made by the organisation which suggested that "the public had lost contact with disability as an issue and a cause worthy of note in the same way the public views, say, the environment, cancer or animal welfare" (2008). Through humour and applications of personality animation the mission was to challenge moribund and reductive perceptions around disability and to highlight issues of discrimination, access and representation.

The organization, which was founded in 1948, works across the UK and some 54 other territories, (including a number of developing countries) and it functions under the official mission statement of: "providing day care, skills training and rehabilitation, independent living and residential care...to relieve the consequences of physical and/or mental well-being of disabled people" (N/A, 2007, paras 4-8). And it was after consultations with their advertising agency, Freud, that the idea about using Aardman emerged in 2006 which led in turn to the adaptation of the *Creature Comforts* series and deploying the twist of incorporating disabled characters into the narratives. The results, promoted under the banner, "Change the way you see disability," resulted in the shorts garnering an award in the Disability Category at the Charity Awards in 2008.

Formally *Creature Discomforts* remain identical to the original 1989 template, directed by Nick Park as a one-off narrative and as part of five separate animations for Channel Four's *Lip Synch* series. Constructed as edited segments, this animation presented Claymation animals talking in monologue of their dissatisfactions with life, transposing their zoo-life experiences against the pre-recorded voices of humans bemoaning their own *real*-life environments. Here this is shifted to disabled characters expounding on their treatment from mainstream society. In each setting they express dismay at the misconceptions perpetuated by the general public within daily social life that contains and typecasts them. Since Park's film the concept has experienced a remarkable

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life-span in that it has spawned two series of twenty seven, ten minute episodes for ITV from 2002, a range of advertisements for British Gas and an American derivation of the format funded by CBS in 2007.

Indeed the concept of animating to extant dialogue was hardly new, even by that point. Other examples of this include Faith and John Hubley's *The Cruise* (1966) and *Windy Day* (1968) and, notably, Aardman's own Peter Lord and David Sproxton's, *Animated Conversations* (1978) all of which make use of "grabbed" conversations, animated in cel and stop motion forms after the event. These operate within (as Kevin Macdonald observes when interviewing Park in 1996), Alan Bennett-style celebrations of not only a specific, parochial regional bias but also in the gentle tone and warmth found in the humour (1996, p.66), and this is backed up Paul Wells' assertion that the shorts, "defers to a nostalgic belief in the common but unaddressed aspects of the ordinary" (1998, p.60). The idea of small lives defined by observational details and rendered through direct monologue, which references British comic traditions, here gently burlesquing what Andy Medhurst refers to as, "the performativity of everyday life, the codes that demarcate conventions, the way that the English say things", the shorts are allied to a strain of humour that defines itself as a "comedy of the overlooked and the unfashionable...comedy without sneers" (2007, p. 161).

Assessing the Incongruous

In this instance we are presented with 'Peg the Hedgehog', 'Slim the Stick Insect', 'Flash the Sausage Dog', 'Tim the Tortoise', 'Spud the Slug' 'Sonny the Shrimp', 'Callum the Chameleon' 'Ozzy the Owl', 'Roxy the Rabbit', 'Cath the Cat' and 'Brian the Bull Terrier' who across both series conform to the models who have appeared in previous Aardman narratives and all are manipulated well within the formal boundaries expressed earlier. What is noticeable is that these individual sketches function in relation to familiar comic tropes of incongruity. Not only is this a mode located historically across many forms of comedy but, in the application here, incongruity complements and enhances the discussions of disability presented and deepens the understanding of each situation.

Key texts discussing the incongruous in comic contexts, by authors such as Michael Clark, Roger Scruton and Murray Davis, are built on the analytical platforms offered by Schopenhauer and Locke, which stresses this mode as being tied into assessments of 'wit.' Clark summated incongruity as being the point in perception within a text when: "...the greater is the ludicrous effect which is produced by the contrast. All laughter is occasioned by a paradox, and therefore by unexpected subsumption, whether this is expressed in words or in actions" (1987, p.146). Davis further reasons that the construction of a system of observations moving beyond the simple joke or "a unit of analysis" into more imaginative, absurdist narrative realms was founded on the notion of: "two different ideas suddenly connected to comic effect" (1993, p.21), placed in unexpected combinations. This was, he observed, seemingly demonstrative of creative thought and of an expansive knowledge in terms of subject/language/semantics and, described by Davis, as a comic phenomenon resting on the "shock of agreeable comparison" (1993, p.21).

Michael Billig refers, in turn, to The Third Earl of Shaftsbury's assessment that historically comic incongruity arises from an inherent desire, aesthetic or otherwise, for a "sense of order... and a preference for harmony and due proportion" (2005, p.77). Admittedly implications of a problematic sense of superiority permeate that particular rationale but certainly a kernel of reason resides there, as satirist, Hogarth, shares the belief that incongruity was realized through the subversion of symmetry, which he saw as inspiring a sense of "confidence" within a reader/viewer

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within art or narrative. True comic incongruity was, for him, all about the insertion of dissonances, gaps and contrasts (1955, p.165). It is a mode assembled around destabilizations of expectation and subversions of a desired outcome. Excluding any shifting set of culturally or temporally-defined moral imperatives, what emerges here is that incongruity in any number of settings can be used as a tool to rationalize that which does not conform to the current project of reason (2005, pp. 63-64).

Bearing this in mind Davis opines that comic incongruity only really functions within an established experiential “expectation system... Incongruity is a relational concept: nothing can be incongruous in itself but only by standing out phenomenologically from an otherwise congruous system” (1993, pp.12-14). As all comedy conceits are, of course, dictated by judgment how funny we find a situation depends very much on the balance between the quantity and quality of the incongruities in tandem with our knowledge and connection to the expectation system under attack. Too many in one context will confuse the issue and provide no solid ground for the clashes to operate. The success of the project thus resides in how essential the experience system is to us and how much investment we attach to the system that is being detonated. What emerges from this is that assessing humorous incongruity is as much about determining boundaries and acceptability, which is a prime component in any comic enterprise and undoubtedly serves our purpose here in looking at how representations of disability have been organized within animation forms.

Breaking down system expectations within *Creature Discomforts*

Simply in the interests of remaining within the confines of this paper’s word count I have highlighted just three of these ‘breakdowns’ at work in the context of *Creature Discomforts*. Other notable incongruities are undoubtedly tied to our unquestioning acceptance of this comic universe and they can be traced individually through with each gag or situation ad infinitum, thus incongruities build on incongruities. Each setting includes disparate subjects interacting in the same language, all acknowledging an interviewer that appears to have no issue, ideological, physical or otherwise, with interviewing talking animals, insects etc and this in turn offers a breach that leads us into the concept that that these fully articulate creatures lives all appear to co-exist alongside (unseen) humans. They all, also, adhere to aspects of human lifestyles, behaviour and use specially designed humanised props that are made to measure such as wheelchairs, cups, flasks. A multitude of further incongruities can be traced within the development and execution of each narrative’s comic moments such as with the third short in the first series when Slim the Stick Insect’s crutch reveals itself to be another, (child), stick insect, as a visual punch-line to underscore and complement his message about adapting to new situations. The incongruous rub comes when the expectations offered around an immobile prop are subverted by the moment when the stick grows arms and a face, which not only the expectations around fixed, inanimate objects but deftly and subtly shifts the register from one universal ‘reality’ of expected physical laws to another. This also acknowledges the trope of metamorphosis that stretches back to animation earliest years. However these three observations provide an entry into this concept and demonstrate how this idea informs representation.

1. Subverting documentary form:

Despite mainstream animation today dominated by slick, fast and affordable three-dimensional computer adhering to the stop-motion form, using clay figures has contributed to the *Creature Comforts* series retaining its unique position within the cultural landscape. Significations

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of tradition, whimsy, continuity, stability and craftsmanship are juxtaposed here with attendant suggestions of depth, texture and weight that benefit from using this particular mode of animation. This provides for the viewer a sense of believability and a verisimilitude that extends further than the abstracted (albeit generalised) ‘cartoon-y’ aesthetic offered by ‘cel’ animation. This particular universe works in an ‘immersive’ context. By this I mean that the objects/characters in the frame are articulated within their own totally animated setting, one that is compatible and corresponds to the physical laws laid out within its own stated schema.

If we accept that incongruities are intensified by undermining the documentary form then Ann Pointon’s observations on how narratives around disability within documentary, helps us frame this concept further. Using BBC TV examples Pointon notes that representation tends to be primarily grouped around: “transformation, tragedy, normalisation and spectacle” (1997, p.86). While no transformative journey is detailed in any linear fashion within *Creature Discomforts*, the shorts do project a “hero” in one form but the only lessons imparted towards the audience is that of, arguably, a sense of enlightenment (1997, pp.87-88). The uncomfortable aspects of “voyeuristic intrusion” into disability, deformity or disfigurement, that she identifies, are absent here (1997, p.91). These narratives refute any emphasis on the surrounding network of support, this conforms to Pointon’s fourth statement in that these shorts are actually about, “social skills, personality, powers of acceptance and adaptation of the disabled person themselves”, and most importantly, the denial of victimhood” (1997, p.89). Everyday life is shown as something to be surmounted in a direct, non-sensationalistic fashion, all of which profoundly informs the intent of *Creature Discomforts*.

In terms of incongruity Park had already outlined a profound breakdown of system expectation back in 1989. The original short was inspired by Park’s love of outtakes and blooper reels and the central conceit that develops from this is that the shorts are somehow recording within a given ‘reality’. Thus each short retains the familiar fixed camera position, (or in the sole case of Slim the Stick Insect this is broken by a very slow left to right pan) and the insertion of background noises and sounds that suggest a basic directional recording technique to infer immediacy. Engagement with documentary form depends on a belief within the viewer that what they are watching is ‘real’ or at the very least constructed from recorded events. By shifting those imperatives into a format so rigorously constructed, pre-meditated and mediated as clay animation this of course creates an initial schism within our acceptance systems. The incongruity deepens further here through the implication that a journalist or reporter is not only physically able to interview a range of insects and animals but is then able to penetrate the boundaries of language, space and communication. Incongruities continue when in achieving this they then report that the animal’s experience magically mirrors many of our own anxieties. The extension continues into yet another stage of subversion. In that the fashion by which the information is gathered from ‘real’ people giving testimonies to separate situations and then is placed beneath a constructed, ‘unreal’ animal to tell a different story or highlight a seemingly unrelated plight. The common understanding/expectation of how this information is managed within documentary situations is also shattered here, in a breakdown of trust where such formal devices have been historically used to suggest an unmediated truth or imply a direct, linear reportage.

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2. Undermining expectations around the animated body:

Of the characters within the concept, Brian the Bull Terrier from the fourth short of the first 2007 run, (voiced by 45-year old Spina bifida sufferer Kevin Gillespie), offers the most potent example and overt set of attacks on anticipation. In this case the subversions taking place are those based around preconceptions surrounding the animated body and indeed of physical disability itself.

Brian is rendered as a small, white talking dog and combines the expected anthropomorphic tensions such as human uses of language, gesture and posture along with animalistic attributes such as a dog collar, head and ear shapes etc. He is modelled with thin mobile arms, expressive features that helpfully correlate to human facial signals, offering openness and yet given eyes that sit wide apart and an overbite to create a more ‘cuddly’ ‘Park-ian’ look.¹ The legs are rendered as small, inconsequential, hanging down just below the seat of the wheelchair and tucked in underneath the comically rounded body. This tripartite gesture simultaneously deactivates *and* acknowledges the negative significations of tenacity and aggression normally attached to a dog of this breed and also maintains brand coherence.

Admittedly *Creature Comforts* have always built their pleasures around anthropomorphism. As Kevin Sandler notes, this has long been tool to foster identification within animation that also conveniently negotiates any experiential schism for audiences (1997, p.49-50). This process of transference and recognition of human attributes upon animal models serves the narratives perfectly. But the already incongruous concept of animals conducting very human endeavours is here assigned a deeper layer by presenting a sentient model that refutes expectations around the physically challenged. The idea of a dog engaging in the pursuit of a dangerous sport, i.e. bungee-jumping, functions as a deeper comic tier. The physical state of the animal itself leads us to more clashes that informs the narratives at a profound level and plays with our expectation. In Classical cel animation, where most of our cultural understandings around the body with mainstream animation have been forged, the body is fluid and malleable. Reconstitution and a sense of deathlessness is commonplace as in service to narrative requirements and/or comic effect. For example when Tex Avery’s wolf character in *Little Rural Riding Hood* (MGM, 1949) splits himself into different body parts registering extreme shock he is soon reassembled on *and* off-screen to conveniently allow the next situation to play out. In stop motion this fluidity has been denied more often than continued. Especially when one considers this against the heritage of the rigorously attempted verisimilitudes conjured up by Willis O’Brien and Ray Harryhausen et al or the rigid, staccato continuities offered within George Pal’s 1930s/40s ‘Puppetoon’ films. While Floriane Place-Verghnes notes that such elasticity provides a counterbalance to the sadism (certainly inherent in Avery’s work) and acts as a way of diffusing trauma it also suggests in its rebelliousness a questioning of the boundaries of reality itself: “The very fact that his cartoons are not bound by reality is indeed a mark of their not belonging to the realm of prosaic things” (2006, p.174). A freeform plasticity has certainly informed physical models in the work of Douglass

¹ Despite seen by Nick Park as one of his most “personal films” the short has become the design lynchpin of much the post 1990s Aardman output (1996, p.79). Park himself has noted that the “wide-mouthed, eyes close together” character aesthetic has become dominant amongst a cadre of different animators and has created a sense of an entire studio being typecast by the success of one author’s work. Regular Aardman animation character designer, Michael Salter, adds to this in interview with Lane when he states that, “My style had so many similarities to Nick Park’s but so many jobs came in that wanted ‘the Nick Park look’ that I started doing it even more and now I can’t do anything else now: it’s sort of ingrained.” (2003, p.103). Indeed the very concept of ‘cuteness’ in terms of character design has been discussed at length across a range of literature and in animation contexts it has been discussed predominantly against Disney and Anime settings. Gary Genosko’s survey across a range of animation media asserts that the deployment of ethological definitions of rounded features and body shapes within animation forms function through the presentation of infant-like movements, awkwardness and general demeanour to accent identification, reinforce stability and ultimately serve a commercial intent (2005).

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Smith (through his incarnation as Ivan Stang for the 1978, *Reproduction Cycles Among Unicellular Life Forms*), Will Vinton, (in the ‘hell’ sequence in the 1985 *Adventures of Mark Twain*, for example) and, (notably once more), Sproxtton and Lord’s rather self-explanatory, *Morph* (1977-1995), which arguably shares that conceit. These, (among many other examples to numerous to name here), provide a counter statement that are concerned with pushing the boundaries of the stop-motion body and rejecting any limiting ‘realistic’ index.

Within Harding Hill’s shorts expressive action and movement are not a part of the established grammar – stasis and economy are. Any such articulacy is relegated to facial movement and occasional accompanying hand/paw gestures to illustrate points made by the central speaker with any faster, more dynamic advancement banished to background gags and characters. Thus any distortion possibilities are contained. The conformity of physicality is dictated by the demands of the narrative itself. Although commenting on the un-dead qualities of Wile E. Coyote and the construction of the Anime body, Christian McCrea’s comment about the “dreaded anvil of physicality” bears transposition here (2008, p.19). As in this context the body remains fixed, discrete, breakable, vulnerable and sealed to understood correlative physical movements – albeit those as much framed within human as any animal traits. Thus the body here resides well within Paul Wells’ observations on Park’s initial short as inhabiting a ‘cartoon’ and ‘animation’ anthropomorphic hinterland (1998, p.59). Incongruity is thus located within a massive and inherent irony of an expressive form deployed to offer non-expressivity, a *lack* of transmutation.

3. Challenging Notions of Representation within animation:

Representations of the physically impaired bear the weight of a grim past. Lennard J. Davis posits that physicality has been historically defined against the problematic term of the ‘norm’ – a culturally defined measurement that he observes emerged through modernist French and British medical and statistical discourses. Though never a universal given as such, this troublesome concept of “the average” in time and became embroiled into debates around eugenics, with physical disability as a result being labelled as an “undesirable trait” within a ‘healthy’ society (1997, p.17). Those with disability often found themselves combined with criminality, heightened sexual activity and mental illness as societal ‘others’ with the end result being that the concept of the disabled body became “formulated as a definition excluded from culture, society” (1997, pp.11-21). This is cemented by Paul Longmore’s assertions that disability in cinematic and televisual contexts has been co-opted too often into depictions of monstrosity, villainy, criminality and revenge (2001, pp.1-17). Because of this history of negative stereotyping it is understandable why disability and humour have remained traditionally uneasy bedfellows.

Extending this away from live action forms, certainly representations of disability within animation has been limited at best. In formulating approaches to disability the few examples available to us can be located within three distinct groups to date.

The first model of representation follows an earnest, educational stance. This is animation that can be seen, as Paul Wells summates, as a “democratising” tool in offering up subjective views of a particular condition (1998, pp.123-126). In less mainstream examples, like Stephen Palmer’s *Blindscape* (1994) and Tim Webb’s 1987, *A is for Autism*, issues of perception and subjective personal experience are discussed and the freedom of animation as a form can be utilised to illuminate an experience blocked off to mainstream audiences. Animation, in its formal flexibility, scores over film here through its ability to address areas of perception and to transcend boundaries. As Wells confirms, animation can access states of existence that supersedes any simple recording or transcribing process.

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The second example is a more recent development fed through broader comedic trends that revolves less around any attempt to truly depict the direct experience of those who are physically challenged and is more about the policing of boundaries of taste. This ambivalent paradigm challenges the (problematic) concept of 'political correctness' and seeks to detonate taboo within comedy narratives.

Commercial animation has rarely engaged with disability directly apart from the occasional throwaway set-up for a gag, such as in Bugs Bunny's mock infirmities in Bob Clampett's *The Old Grey Hare* (1946). However several recent examples have materialized. In the controversial BBC/CHX/Moi J'aime La Television production, *Popetown* (2005), disabled children are featured as comedy props to complement the central narrative. In the first episode of the single series, 'The Double', an under-explored sub-plot is detailed of a group of children in wheelchairs who have won a trip to meet the Pope. These figures appear to be comprised of the same pliable material as their wheelchairs which all conform to a tried and tested 'squash and stretch' articulation. The joke being here that the children are far from restricted in movement, (as expected), and in fact they exhibit a deliberately cartoon-y sense of speed and physicality which exists merely to render a range of background sight gags. Through such actions this reinforces a heroic, beatific and admittedly exclusionary depiction that contains them away from the story itself.

More challenging attempts at representation can be found within Canadian animator/cartoonist, John Callahan's Media World production *Quads!* (2001) and in Matt Parker and Trey Stone's Comedy Central programme, *South Park*, (1997- to date). Through over twenty-six half-hour episodes and two syndicated series Callaghan offers up a whole range of disabled characters as a de facto family of minorities, that presents depictions of blindness and amputees, as headed up by quadriplegic Reilly O'Reilly. Each character appears as abusive, conflicted, flawed defiantly hard-drinking and confrontational in some fashion. Parker and Stone's provocative characters 'Timmy' and 'Jimmy Vulmer' too provide an equally potent example of the shifts in contemporary comedy and animation which has resulted in both becoming accepted mainstream figures. Wheel-chair-bound palsied, aphasia sufferer, 'Timmy', (who arrived in the episode, *Tooth Fairy Tats 2000*, April 2000) and crutch-wielding stand-up comedian, 'Jimmy Vulmer', (who first appeared in *Cripple Fight*, June 2001) are along with the constructs in *Quads* typical of this type. In that they are rendered as intelligent, wholly integrated models that admittedly nod towards normalisation but often they are placed into their narratives solely to subvert expectations as much as confirm them.

To present a positivist reading of this the animation form's distance from direct representation and adherence to caricature could arguably be seen to be flattening out depiction into the kind of equal opportunity burlesquing coined by Terry Lindvall and Ben Fraser when discussing the troublesome depictions of race within Classical animation (1998, pp.121-136). In that the comprehensively unflattering character designs in each example suggests a comic animated universe where no-one is privileged and that the physically impaired fare no better or worse than the more able-bodied. Indeed the highly self-conscious limited, flat, minimalist aesthetics displayed in both the Flash animated *Quads* and Parker and Stone's text in particular positively encourage this practice. The removal from a naturalistic design sense cushions the viewer and creates a buffer between representation and offence.

These constructs are emblematic of larger shifts within the mainstream initiated by writer/comedians in live action comedy within cinema and television settings across America and Britain. The likes of The Farrelly Brothers, Larry David, Chris Morris, Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant have all fore-grounded disabled characters and have used them as foils to discuss areas

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of social discomfort and of issues of reduction through alliance to a set of seemingly progressive but in fact often restrictive, loaded narratives of supposed equality. These types of representations are, in truth, more focussed on the able-bodied people around them and their attitudes. Social acceptability is the real agenda here, in tandem with an examination of what is deemed acceptable within the (perceived) post-PC landscape of appropriate interpretation and language. Certainly this is exemplified in series two of BBC TV's *The Office* (2003) which features a recurring wheelchair-bound character, Brenda, (as played by real life disabled actress Julie Fernandez). She is posited to not only reveal central character, David Brent's (Gervais), own inadequacies in social interaction and self-awareness but also she highlights his innately reactionary nature through his misconceptions and misreading of the acceptable terminology and its subsequent applications surrounding the physically impaired.

These concur with Ann Pointon and Chris Davies' point on representation that while these characters are, while well-intentioned, in fact still retain the function of a cathartic device where we are permitted a glance into our innermost fears surrounding disability (1997, p.8). In this case this could potentially mean social limitation, or at worst, exclusion. More generously this address here does use humour to re-conceptualise a laudable social space for the 'marginal'. It also supplies, (an at times dubious) release valve aimed at alleviating tensions around addressing the 'unknown' quantity of minorities as well as nodding to a welcome process of normalisation.


In the Aardman text we have here a third typology that offers a fresh depiction and that builds on incongruity. Murray Davis sees that jokes made at the expense of minorities have been continually popular due to this undermining of multi-incongruous systems and the play with social propriety that sits at the heart of egalitarian ideologies (1993, p.12). Through this there is an inference that this particular comedic space follows similar aspects of the second model, in the demarcation of a processing space for audiences to adjust in approaching potentially difficult subject matter. As the animation medium's plasticity facilitates the negotiation of issues of discomfort and offence for the minority represented and it allows the smuggling in of serious issues under the shell of a form perennially typecast as being in service to the simplistic.

Similarly in line with the formal space that animation tenders, the deployment of anthropomorphism further aids the deactivation of anxiety. It is clear that in the models on offer in both runs all maintain behavioural and articulation in line more with humans than animals, they are active, personable and self-aware. Each sketch relies on placing the characters in 'real world' situations that imply a connection to society and refutes tired notions of disability as linked to isolation. From Flash the sausage dog's inference over a mastery of "the right equipment" when referring to the bicycle wheels he has in place of back legs, Roxy's proclamation of a highly sexualised self, (in itself an animation 'first' arguably in terms of tone and maturity) to Tim the tortoise's matter-of-fact description of his regular journey to the sweet shop for his children the characters are, as demonstrated by the careful placement of setting, located and functioning within a recognisable everyday environment. The narratives present them as self-aware, independent individuals who can express themselves intelligently and can make valid points about their frustration with issues of mobility and their perceived invisibility within society.

This third model also borrows from the two previous ones in that it presents subjective experience while still disputing expectation. In contrast to most narratives the subjects have been brought into the creative process via the charity's own research on the subject of access and they are placed at the very heart of the narratives. While authorship is still contained within the expected channels the shorts refutes positioning of this representation beyond that from acting

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merely as cipher, as a satellite feeders of lines to able-bodied performer and neither is there present here a patronising dialogue of deification. From which approach troublesome dialogues of 'Noble-isation' can thus emerge.²

Thus we have in operation a more subtle gradation in depiction and one which, despite the minimalist setting, uses this framework to provide a more complex, multi-faceted construct. This is one that combines both subjectivity, (through the expression of individual experience), objectivity, (in the manner by which these messages are presented) and a sense of connection that comic animated forms fosters through the processes of identification facilitated by anthropomorphism. Roger Scruton offers a summative point for us here when he suggests that through the collusion of caricature and exaggeration, key determinants in animation, the contrasting of differing surface perceptions in effect can and should be used to present a deeper message: "...it is an incongruity that illustrates a deeper *congruity* between an object and itself" (1987, p.160). The presentations of disability through comedy and using the medium of stop-motion work in the *Creature Discomforts* series leads us away from staid representations and through incongruous discourses allows an access to richer truths – surely the project of any animation? 

Van Norris has been Senior Lecturer in Film and Media Studies at the School of Creative Art Film and Media, University of Portsmouth, England since 2003. He is currently completing a PhD thesis, *Drawing on the British Tradition: The Mapping of Cultural Attitudes and Identity and the intersection with Comedy Modes employed within British Television Animation*. This paper was presented at Animation Unlimited, the 20th annual SAS conference, held at the Art Institute at Bournemouth, 18-20 July, 2007.

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² As Laurie E. Harnick notes, this is a worthy but troublesome and unsatisfying process, which is highlighted within two recent animated releases featuring Victor Hugo's tortured Quasimodo figure, (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* from 1995 for Goodtime productions and from 1996 by Disney). Harnick sees that in both adaptations the darkness of the original text is discarded with the titular figure is ascribed a more heroic set of sympathetic, less ambiguous and saintly connotations (2001, p.92). Though not physically impaired, as such the issues of reduction and stereotyping assigned to his deformity and the resultant societal rejection makes Quasimodo a relevant model here. And this is reinforced through the agenda present in the 1995 film which stresses the mistreatment of the disabled at the hands of the state. This process arguably includes, (as Harvey Deneroff very kindly points out in his on-line column - July 2008), the likes of Long John Silver in *Treasure Planet* (2002).

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Edited by Nichola Dobson