2 animatedness

In *Moving Pictures: How They Are Made and Worked* (1912), part of a series of volumes with the overall title "Conquests of Science," Frederick A. Talbot announced that "Americans have brought the 'one turn one picture' movement to a high state of perfection, and have produced some astonishing pictures as a result of its application." A technical explanation of "one turn one picture," Talbot's term for stop-motion animation, is offered by the example of the "popular film" *Animated Putty:* "A lump of this material was shown upon a table. Suddenly it was observed to become agitated, and to resolve itself gradually into statues and busts of well-known people, so cleverly wrought as to be instantly identified."[1]

Anticipating the animation technique that would be trademarked decades later in the United States as Claymation, Talbot's film featuring a lump of earthy matter seems a particularly fitting means for explaining stop-motion cinematography, given how primitive this "trick" was perceived to be. Despite the novelty and sophistication associated with special effects in general, the stop-motion technique "brought . . . to a high state of perfection" by

Americans is not only "one of the simplest of trick effects," but "one of the most tedious to perform":

> The lump of material lies on the table. . . . The camera is set up. The modeler advances to the table whilst the shutter is closed and moves the clay slightly towards the desired result. He then steps out of the picture, and the camera handle is turned sufficiently to expose one picture and to cover the lens again. The modeler comes forward once again and advances a little further with his work; after which he retires from the scene, and the second stage is recorded upon the next picture. [. . .] This alternate process of shaping the putty a little at a time, and photographing every separate movement, is continued until the bust is completed.
>
> It is essential that the progress should be very gradual, or else the material would look as if it took shape by spasmodic jumps and the illusion would be destroyed. (*MP,* 236)

Harking back to the familiar medium of still photography, film animation was thus seen as a kind of technological atavism. As Talbot writes, "It will be observed . . . that this magical effect is not produced in accordance with the generally accepted principles governing cinematography. It is merely a series of snap-shots taken at certain intervals, and could be produced just as well by a hand-camera if one had sufficient plates or film" (*MP,* 236). The simultaneously basic yet exceptional character of this special effect is underscored by the ideological fantasy which *Animated Putty* seems to suggest: that of an "agitation" that is quickly stilled, and even seems conveniently to "resolve itself" as the film's lumpen protagonist is transformed into "cleverly-wrought" images of humans of unmistakable social distinction: "a bust of the King, of the American President, or some other illustrious personage" (*MP,* 236).

The fact that such preclassical "trick films" tended to feature scenes of production in the absence of human agents—for instance, a film in which "a stocking [is] knitted before the audience by un-

seen hands," or a "magical carpenter's shop" picture in which "tools are manipulated without hands and where the wood . . . is planed, sawn, chiseled, and fashions itself into a box . . . by an apparently mysterious and invisible force"[2]—suggests a further irony: that films based on a technically "backward" and labor-intensive principle were precisely those that most spectacularly imagined the utopian possibilities of a technology so advanced as to put an end to human labor altogether (*MP,* 238, 237).[3] In contrast to the "vigor and spirit" of the saws and knitting needles "moved to action," humans appear strikingly inert in most of the dimensional animation films cited by Talbot, as in the case of a short depicting a shoeshine man "going to sleep at his task, and the footwear cleaning itself while he dreams, brushes running to and fro to remove the dust, apply the blacking, and to give a vigorous polishing off" (*MP,* 235). From this ambiguous interplay between agitated things and deactivated persons, one could argue that what early animation technology foregrounds most is the increasingly ambiguous status of human agency in a Fordist era. These questions of agency will figure importantly in this chapter as we focus on one of the most basic ways in which affect becomes socially recognizable in the age of mechanical reproducibility: as a kind of "innervation," "agitation," or (the term I prefer) "animatedness." Indeed, the rudimentary aspect of stop-motion technology parallels the way in which the affective state of being "animated" seems to imply the most basic or minimal of all affective conditions: that of being, in one way or another, "moved."

But as we press harder on the affective meanings of animatedness, we shall see how the seemingly neutral state of "being moved" becomes twisted into the image of the overemotional racialized subject, abetting his or her construction as unusually receptive to external control. This surprising interplay between the passionate and the mechanical will be our focus as we move through readings of texts by William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ralph Ellison, and the short-lived but aesthetically

and politically controversial Claymation television show *The PJs* (1998–2001), tracing the affect's transformation into a racializing technology in American cultural contexts ranging from nineteenth-century abolitionist writing to the contemporary cartoon. In order to unpack the ideologeme of racialized animatedness, we will keep returning to the questions of human agency associated with the much more general concept of "animation" that underlies it—with "animation" designating not only a "magical" screen practice, but also a rhetorical figure and the general process of activating or giving life to inert matter. It seems fitting, then, to begin by examining another scenario in which a "lump" plays a key role in dramatizing the process by which an object becomes imbued with life, though this time in a manner that explicitly foregrounds the problematic connections between emotion and race.

"A foul lump started making promises in my voice," notes the speaker in John Yau's poem cycle "Genghis Chan: Private Eye" (1989–1996), giving new "life," "vigor," or "zest" to a cliché or overfamiliar metaphor for one's inability to speak due to undischarged emotion: "a lump in my throat."[4] In fact, the exhausted metaphor could be described as doubly "revitalized," insofar as the inhuman entity obstructing human speech in the original adage is itself brought to "life" in Yau's poem, perversely ventriloquizing the Asian-American speaker. If *Animated Putty* demonstrates the quieting of an agitated lump as it "resolves itself" into the facsimile of a person, in "Genghis Chan" an increasingly vocal lump appears to take *possession* of the person, as if it were the first lump's evil twin. We thus move from a human character who is "all choked up," rendered inarticulate by some undischarged feeling, to a situation in which the "lump" responsible for this rhetorical disempowerment suddenly individuates into an agent capable of speaking *for* the human character—and, more dangerously, in a manner contractually binding him to others without his volition.

For Nietzsche, it is precisely the act of promising that humanizes the subhuman: "To breed an animal *with the right to make prom-*

ises—is this not the paradoxical task that nature has set itself in the case of man?"[5] In a striking echo of this question, the disturbing power of the inhuman entity in "Genghis Chan" to silence *and* contractually obligate the racialized speaker similarly echoes Nietzsche's observation that "something of the terror that formerly attended all promises, pledges, and vows on earth is *still effective*" (*GM,* 61). As Nietzsche notes, "Man himself must first of all have become *calculable, regular, necessary,* even in his own image of himself, if he is able to stand in security for *his own future,* which is what one who promises does!" (*GM,* 58, original italics). We could argue, however, that Yau's lump promises not so much to make a claim for its own humanity, as to force the human whose voice it has appropriated into the social role of this promising—and therefore regular and accountable—subject. If for Nietzsche "the long story of how *responsibility* originated" is that of how "one first *makes* men to a certain degree . . . uniform, like among like . . . , and consequently calculable" (*GM,* 58), the story of the lump who turns Genghis Chan into a pledging individual might be read as an allegory of how the Asian-American becomes forced into the position of model minority—that is, the person "made" uniform, accountable, and therefore safely "disattendable," at the cost of having his or her speech acts controlled by another.[6]

"Genghis Chan: Private Eye" thus offers a genealogy of an American racial stereotype—that of the Asian as silent, inexpressive, and, like Bartleby, emotionally inscrutable—which stands in noticeable contrast to what we might call the exaggeratedly emotional, hyperexpressive, and even "overscrutable" image of most racially or ethnically marked subjects in American culture: from Harriet Beecher Stowe's ebullient Topsy (1852) to Warner Brothers' hyperactive Speedy Gonzales (1950),[7] to the hand-wringing Jews, gesticulating Italians, and hot-tempered Greeks in films ranging from *The Jazz Singer* to *My Big Fat Greek Wedding.* Versions of these excessively "lively" or "agitated" ethnic subjects abound in American literature as well—for example, in Melville's

novel *The Confidence-Man* (1857), where "Irish enthusiasm" is described as "flam[ing] out" and irritating gentleman "of sense and respectability,"[8] and in Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925), where Sara Smolinksky's struggle with what she perceives to be her problematic overemotionality becomes a key part of her trajectory toward cultural assimilation and where nearly every page contains an ejaculative "Ach!" or "God!" Whether marked as Irish, Jewish, Italian, Mexican, or (most prominently in American literature and visual culture) African-American, the kind of exaggerated emotional expressiveness I call animatedness seems to function as a marker of racial or ethnic otherness in general. As Melville's narrator notes about his "Irish" enthusiasts, "To be full of warm, earnest words, and heart-felt protestations, is to create a scene; and well-bred people dislike few things more than that."[9]

And though this exaggerated expressiveness is absent from the racial stereotype whose origins are allegorized in "Genghis Chan," the image of the disturbingly "lively" lump suggests how *much* "animation" still seems required for its production. Insofar as we often regard the cliché as a "dead image"—what Robert Stonum calls a "fossilized" metaphor whose "expired figurative life" is rarely capable of being "restored or reinvented"—the poem's transformation of "a lump in the throat" into one that makes promises might be said to dramatize "giving life" in more ways than one.[10] Moreover, in presenting the transformation of the inanimate "lump" into a living, speaking agent within a series of poems whose title marries the violent Mongol Genghis Khan with the impassive Charlie Chan (the American cinema icon from the 1940s turned into a television cartoon in the 1970s through Hanna-Barbera's *The Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan*), Yau amazingly uses all the definitions of "animate" and "animated" provided by *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* With both terms, we move from references to biological existence ("endowed with life or the qualities of life: ALIVE"), to socially positive emotional qualities ("lively," "full of vigor and spirit," "zest"), and finally to a historically specific

mode of screen representation ("made in the form of an animated cartoon").[11] While all these meanings become spectacularly condensed in Yau's "lump," the already counterintuitive connections in the standard dictionary definition of "animated"—between the organic-vitalistic and the technological-mechanical, and between the technological-mechanical and the emotional—are further complicated by the way in which the orientalized and cartoonish Genghis Chan introduces race into the equation.

With such a surplus of "animations" at work in "Genghis Chan," it is as if Yau's poetic series is suggesting that to be "animated" in American culture is to be racialized in *some* way, even if animation's affective connotations of vivacity or zealousness do not cover every racial or ethnic stereotype. Indeed, "Genghis Chan" shows the extent to which animation remains central to the production of the racially marked subject, *even* when his or her difference is signaled by the pathos of emotional suppression rather than by emotional excess. Yet it is the cultural representation of the African-American that most visibly harnesses the affective qualities of liveliness, effusiveness, spontaneity, and zeal to a disturbing racial epistemology, and makes these variants of "animatedness" function as bodily (hence self-evident) signs of the raced subject's naturalness or authenticity. Here, as epitomized in Stowe's character Topsy, the affective ideologeme of animatedness foregrounds the degree to which emotional qualities seem especially prone to sliding into *corporeal* qualities where the African-American subject is concerned, reinforcing the notion of race as a truth located, quite naturally, in the always obvious, highly visible body.

In abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's preface to the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), we find this connection between the physical and emotional aspects of "being animated" put to work in his testament to the slave narrative's authenticity, one of the genre's standard features. Garrison directs us to the singular authorship and verisimilitude of Douglass' narrative, but also to the text's power to "move" the reader: "He who can peruse

[this narrative] without a tearful eye, a heaving breast, an afflicted spirit,—without *being* . . . *animated* with a determination to seek the immediate overthrow of that execrable system . . .—must have a flinty heart and be qualified to act the part of the trafficker 'in slaves and the souls of men.'"[12] The syntactic parallelism of the list-like construction ("without W, X, Y,—without Z") invites us to read "being animated" as synonymous with the terms that precede it, which indicate an impassioned state betrayed by involuntary movements of the body ("tearful eye," "heaving breast"), but also as the endpoint of an action implicit in the form of the list itself, which, through its presentation of discrete elements separated by commas, might be said to enact a segmentation of the human body into a series of working parts (the eye, whose function is to shed tears; the breast, whose function is to heave). Hence, the anticipated animation of Douglass' reader seems not only to involve an unusual immediacy between emotional experience and bodily movement, but to be the "outcome" of a process by which bodily movement is broken down into phases. At the same time, however, Garrison's "animation" designates the process by which these involuntary corporeal expressions of feeling come to exert a politicizing force, activating the reader's desire to "seek the immediate overthrow" of an entire system. There is an intimate link here, in other words, between "animation" and the "agitation" that subtends our concept of the political agitator. Facilitating the transition from the image of a body whose parts are automatically moved, to the oppositional consciousness required for the making of political movements, what Garrison calls "being animated" also hinges on a particularly immediate relationship to Douglass' language, which is depicted as having a spontaneous and direct impact on both the body and mind of the reader.

Figured as this intensified attunement or hyperreceptiveness to the language of others, the animation of Douglass' reader that Garrison anticipates is strikingly similar to the kind of animatedness Harriet Beecher Stowe assigns to racialized subjects in *Uncle Tom's*

Cabin (1852): "The negro mind, impassioned and imaginative, always attaches itself to hymns and expressions of a vivid and pictorial nature; and as [the hymns were being sung], some laughed and some cried, and some clapped hands, or shook hands rejoicingly with each other."[13] In this passage, animation turns the exaggeratedly expressive body into a spectacle for an ethnographic gaze—a spectacle featuring an African-American subject made to move physically in response to lyrical, poetic, or imagistic language. A similar excessive responsiveness to poetic discourse, but with different effects, is implied in Stowe's description of Uncle Tom himself:

> Nothing could exceed . . . [the] earnestness of his prayer, enriched with the language of Scripture, which seemed so entirely to have wrought itself into his being, as to have become a part of himself, and to drop from his lips unconsciously. . . . And so much did his prayer always work on the devotional feelings of his audiences, that there seemed often a danger that it would be lost altogether in the abundance of the responses which broke out everywhere around him. (*UTC,* 79)

In this case, the animatedness ascribed to Tom, which seems to threaten to animate his audience in turn, takes the form not of bodily movement but of a kind of ventriloquism: language from an outside source that "drop[s] from his lips" without conscious volition. Hence, the animation of the racialized body in this instance involves likening it to an instrument, porous and pliable, for the vocalization of others.

In this function, animation seems closely related also to apostrophe—lyric poetry's signature and, according to Jonathan Culler, most "embarrassing" rhetorical convention, in which absent, dead, or inanimate entities are made present, vital, and human-like in being addressed by a first-person speaker.[14] As Barbara Johnson notes, apostrophe can thus be described as a form of ventriloquism, in which a speaker "throws voice . . . into the addressee, turning its silence into a mute responsiveness."[15] Here one recalls the scene

of Tom's enthrallment (and ventriloquization) by Scripture. This link between apostrophe, animation, and enthrallment can also be found in Garrison's preface:

> This Narrative contains many affecting incidents . . . but I think the most thrilling one of them all is the description Douglass gives of his feelings . . . on the banks of the Chesapeake Bay—viewing the receding vessels as they flew with their white wings before the breeze, *and apostrophizing them as animated by the living spirit of freedom.* Who can read that passage, and be insensible to its pathos and sublimity? ("P," 249, emphasis added)

Just as Tom's prayer "work[s] on the devotional feelings" of his audience, here animation becomes a thrill that seems highly contagious—easily transferred through the animated body to its spectators. This transferability is reinforced by Garrison's use of the oblique conjunction "as," which makes it difficult to distinguish the subject performing the animation from the object being animated. One wonders if Garrison finds this scene "thrilling" because it provides the spectacle of Douglass animating the ships—investing these inanimate objects with the "living spirit of freedom"—or if the thrill comes from witnessing the animation of Douglass himself, either by the same "living spirit of freedom" or through his own expressive act of apostrophizing.

Regardless of where we locate the thrill Garrison describes, it is important to note that both Stowe and Garrison find it necessary to dramatize the animation of racialized bodies for political purposes: in Stowe's case, to demonstrate the intensity of the slave's devotional feeling in order to support a Christian indictment of slavery as a sin; in Garrison's, to signify Douglass' power as a writer and mobilize his readers to the antislavery cause. In both cases, the connection between animation and affectivity is surprisingly fostered through acts resembling the practice of puppeteering, involving either the body's ventriloquism or a physical manipulation of its

parts. Yet the "thinging" of the body in order to construct it, counter-intuitively, as impassioned is deployed by both abolitionists as a strategy of shifting the status of this body from thing to human, as if the racialized, hence already objectified body's reobjectification, in being animated, were paradoxically necessary to emphasize its personhood or subjectivity.

Rey Chow, in her essay "Postmodern Automatons," argues that becoming animated in this objectifying sense—having one's body and voice controlled by an invisible other—is synonymous with becoming automatized, "subjected to [a manipulation] whose origins are beyond one's individual grasp."[16] In a reading of Charlie Chaplin's hyperactive physical movements in *Modern Times* (1936), Chow suggests that film and television, as technologies of mass production, uniquely disclose the fact that "the 'human body' as such is already *a working body automatized,* in the sense that it becomes in the new age an automaton on which social injustice as well as processes of mechanization 'take on a life of their own,' so to speak" ("PA," 62, italics in original). For Chow this automatization of the body, as an effect of subjection to power, coincides with the moment the body is made into the object of a gaze; being animated thus entails "becoming a spectacle whose 'aesthetic' power increases with one's increasing awkwardness and helplessness" ("PA," 61). While Chow describes this simultaneous visualization and technologization as a condition of the modern body in general, she also observes that certain bodies are technologized in more pronounced ways than others. Hence, "the automatized other . . . takes the form either of the ridiculous, the lower class, or of woman" ("PA," 63). From a feminist perspective, this point enables Chow to argue that the main question facing third-world subjects constantly invoked, apostrophized, or ventriloquized by first-world theorists is the question of how to turn automatization into autonomy and independence: "The task that faces 'third world' feminists is thus not simply that of 'animating' the oppressed women of their cultures but of making the automatized and animated condition of

their own voices the conscious point of departure in their interventions" ("PA," 66, 68).

Automatization, in the Fordist or Taylorist sense dramatized by Chaplin (and Chow), becomes a useful, if slightly anachronistic, synonym for the kind of animation already at work in the antebellum writings of Garrison and Stowe; in both situations, the human body is "subjected to [a manipulation] whose origins are beyond one's individual grasp" and becomes "a spectacle whose 'aesthetic' power increases with one's increasing awkwardness and helplessness." What makes the affect of animatedness distinctive, however, is the way in which it oddly synthesizes two kinds of automatism whose meanings run in opposite directions, encompassing the extremely codified, hyperrationalized routines epitomized by the factory worker's repetitive wrenching movements in *Modern Times* but also, as Rosalind Krauss notes, "the kind of liberating release of spontaneity that we associate with . . . the Surrealists' invocation of the word 'automatism' (as in psychic automatism)."[17] As this "peculiar blend" of the spontaneous with the formulaic, the unpremeditated with the predetermined, and the "liberating release" of psychic impulses with "the set of learned, more or less rote conventions *(automatisms)* contained within [a system or traditional medium],"[18] the concept of animatedness not only returns us to the connection between the emotive and the mechanistic but also commingles antithetical notions of physical agency. On one hand, animatedness points to restrictions placed on spontaneous movement and activity; in *Modern Times,* for example, it emerges from the exclusion of all bodily motion apart from the one assigned to the assembly-line worker. On the other hand, the affect can also be read as highlighting the elasticity of the body being animated, as evinced in Sergei Eisenstein's praise of "plasmaticness" in his analysis of Disney cartoons. Just as animatedness integrates the two contrasting meanings of automatism, then, the affect manages to fuse signs of the body's subjection to power with signs of its ostensive freedom—by encompassing not only bodily activity confined to fixed

forms and rigid, specialized routines (Fordist or Taylorist animation), but also a dynamic principle of physical metamorphosis by which the body, according to Eisenstein, seems to "*triumph* over the fetters of form" (what we might call "animistic" animation).[19] It is clear that for the filmmaker, the excessive energy and metamorphic potential of the animated body make it a potentially subversive or powerful body, whereas for Chow, the very qualities that Eisenstein praises as liberatory—"plasmaticness," elasticity, and pliancy—are readable as signs of the body's utter subjection to power, confirming its vulnerability to external manipulation and control. Although in the last instance Chow's pessimistic reading of the animated-technologized body as a Taylorized body seems more persuasive than Eisenstein's optimistic one, the two perspectives point to a crucial ambivalence embedded in the concept of animation—ambivalence that takes on special weight in the case of racialized subjects, for whom objectification, exaggerated corporeality or physical pliancy, and the body-made-spectacle remain doubly freighted issues.

The category of racial difference has thus come to complicate the meanings of animation on television: a visual medium Jane Feuer has described as increasingly governed by an ideology of liveness—that is, "the promise of presence and immediacy made available by video technology's capacity to record and transmit images simultaneously."[20] Recalling the similarly direct and immediate impact of language on the racialized subjects in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* liveness's "promise of presence and immediacy" has thus been particularly crucial to what Sasha Torres calls "the definitionally televisual events" of the 1990s which "have involved, if not centered on, persons of color."[21] As Torres notes, historically significant broadcasting events such as the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, the trial of O. J. Simpson, the videotaped beating of Rodney King, and, more recently, *Court TV*'s coverage of the trial of the New York City police officers indicted for the murder of Amadou Diallo have made it impossible to ignore "the *centrality*

of racial representation to television's representational practices," while also indicating the primacy of "liveness" in informing what race "*look[s]* like on television."[22]

What bearing, then, does the *liveliness* associated with "animation," in all of its various meanings, have on what race "looks like" to viewers in a medium where liveness signifies live action and a simultaneity between event and transmission—principles fundamentally opposed to the stop-motion technology on which contemporary screen animation often depends? While it is the live broadcasting event that has made race central to television, as Torres argues in "King TV," it could be said that animation on television foregrounds the centrality of liveness to the representation of racial difference in a particularly intense way, even though at a certain level the genre runs counter to medium-specific meanings of "liveness," which, as Feuer notes, is less an ontological reality than an ideological one: "As television in fact becomes less and less a 'live' medium, in the sense of an equivalence between time of event and time of transmission, the medium in its practices insists more and more on the live, the immediate, the direct, the spontaneous, the real."[23] Although we have already seen—via the writings of Stowe and Garrison—how a similar ideology informs the relation between animation and racial identity in earlier modes of cultural production, the epistemological inflection linking these attributes to the racialized feeling concepts above (what are vivaciousness, liveliness, and zeal if not affective correlates to "the immediate, the direct, the spontaneous, [and] real"?) makes television an ideal site for examining animation both as screen genre and as a technology for the representation of racial difference.

At the end of the twentieth century, questions related to animation and the politics of racial representation rose to the fore in debates surrounding Fox Television's dimensional animation comedy series, *The PJs* (1998–2000). *The PJs* was the first prime-time program in American television history to feature a completely nonwhite, non-middle-class, and non-live-action cast, as well as the

first to depict its characters in foamation, a three-dimensional, stop-motion animation technique trademarked by Will Vinton Studios (once producer of the infamous California Raisin commercials, which featured anthropomorphized black grapes singing and dancing to a classic Motown hit).[24] Introduced to the network's lineup in the fall of 1998 and featuring multicultural but primarily African-American characters living in an urban housing project, *The PJs* generated controversy several months prior to more widely publicized debates over the "whitewashing" of network television, described by Kweisi Mfume as "the most segregated industry in America" during his July 1999 keynote address to the 90th annual NAACP convention.[25] Starring Eddie Murphy (who was also one of the producers) as Thurgood Stubbs, the superintendent of the fictional Hilton-Jacobs projects, the program was soon the target of criticisms from a number of grassroots organizations, who accused it of carrying an antiblack message. These criticisms came from a variety of directions, including the Black Muslim group Project Islamic Hope, as well as the Coalition against Media Exploitation, headed by African-American writer and activist Earl Ofari Hutchinson. In an interview on the Cable News Network (CNN) in February 1999, Hutchinson voiced his objection to the show: "It does not present an accurate or honest depiction of the African-American community. It does present racially demeaning and offensive stereotypes."[26] A similar criticism came from the director Spike Lee, who described the cartoon as "really hateful, I think, to black people."[27] In spite of his polemicism, the "I think" in Lee's statement reveals a crucial ambivalence over the political and aesthetic aims of *The PJs,* and over the use of animation for the representation of racial minorities in general—an ambivalence I would like to explore by focusing on some of this technology's intended and unintended effects.

The shocking quality that Lee, Hutchinson, and others attribute to *The PJs* points to how the program fundamentally disrupted the "look" of race on mainstream network television, since the tradi-

tional way in which racial minorities have had a presence in this arena has been through live-action representations of upwardly mobile nuclear families—not through animated cartoons featuring the urban poor. In particular, Hutchinson's criticism of the show for failing to present "an accurate and honest depiction of the African-American community" reflects the insistent demand for mimetic realism in the representation of blacks on television—a demand which is both reflected and resisted in the equally insistent call for what Philip Brian Harper terms "simulacral" realism. Based on the premise that representations actively shape, define, and even occasionally usurp social realities, simulacral realism involves the conviction that "an improvement in [the] social status [of African-Americans] can result from their mere depiction in mainstream television programming."[28] In contrast, mimetic realism insists that television faithfully mirror a set of social conditions viewed as constituting "a singular and unitary phenomenon known as '*the* black experience.'"[29] It is this latter demand that Hutchinson sees *The PJs* as betraying, though similar criticism was directed earlier at *The Cosby Show*—a black-produced program that could not be more opposed to *The PJs* in form, content, and tone. This contradiction reinforces Harper's observation that while the tension between mimetic and simulacral realism continues to structure critical discourse on black television, their opposing demands often run "smack up against [each other]."[30] Yet in its three-dimensional animation format, *The PJs* changed the terms of the existing debate. The conflict between simulacral and mimetic realism became a moot issue, since neither demand—that television faithfully mirror "the black experience" or that it aim at bettering the social status of actual African-American subjects—could be properly applied to a show that so insistently foregrounded its own artifice. Calling attention not just to the exaggerated physicality but also to the material composition of its characters—that is, to their existence as dolls with outsized plastic heads and foam latex bodies—*The PJs* pushed the issue of racial representation outside the "two

realisms" binary. Though in doing so it risked the appearance of merely resuscitating a much older style of racial caricature which realism was once summoned by African-American artists to combat, the show actually introduced a new possibility for racial representation in the medium of television: one that ambitiously sought to reclaim the grotesque and/or ugly, as a powerful aesthetic of exaggeration, crudeness, and distortion, which late twentieth-century African-American artists seemed to have become barred from using even for the explicit purpose of antiracist critique.

As the only prime-time comedy to feature residents of subsidized housing since Norman Lear's *Good Times* (1974–1979), and the only animated program featuring nonwhite inner-city dwellers since *Fat Albert* in the early 1970s (the decade of "socially relevant" programming), *The PJs* also produced a shift in the content of network television.[31] As Armond White has noted, every joke on the show "implies a correlated social circumstance,"[32] enabling the program in its first season to address topics such as access to food, health care, public education, and safe and livable housing. Since the show dealt with racism in a larger socioeconomic context rather than as a problem of prejudice between individuals, its targets were frequently government institutions: the welfare system, hospitals, the police, and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The humor becomes most acerbic when Thurgood visits the local HUD office, which he does in nearly every episode. The sign greeting him displays a variety of sardonic messages, ranging from "HUD: Putting a Band-Aid over Poverty for 30 Years!" to "HUD: Keeping You in the Projects since 1965."

The PJs also replaced the traditional sitcom's main social unit, the nuclear family, with the community formed by the project's inhabitants. In one episode, the tenants try to raise money for one elderly resident, Mrs. Avery, when it is discovered she has been secretly subsisting on dog food. Since Mrs. Avery is too proud to "take charity," the only way Thurgood can convince her to accept the food and health care supplies donated by tenants is by dis-

guising them as gift baskets from the state welfare system and Medicaid. The joke here is the illusion that these beleaguered institutions are still efficient—even benevolent—in their intended functions, and that the bitter task of perpetuating the illusion of efficiency, rather than exposing it, becomes the only way of ensuring that services are actually performed.

In another episode, after suffering a near-fatal heart attack, Thurgood is informed that he requires medication he cannot afford. The only solution is for him to participate in an experimental drug program. The problem is that Thurgood's cholesterol level and blood pressure aren't high enough to officially qualify him for the program, so the episode turns on his efforts to jack them up in order to receive the medication he needs to live. Once again, the show's humor finds its basis in the contradictions of an unjust system, targeting the institutional ineptness that translates into actual harm or injury to the bodies of the urban poor. In this manner, *The PJs* insists that racism involves more than the mobilization of stereotypes, that in fact it extends far beyond matters of visual representation. While this is a relatively simple point, it nonetheless invites us to push beyond the prevailing methods in media studies, where a focus on analyzing stereotypes dominates the conversation about race to the extent that racism often becomes inadvertently reduced to bad representation, and antiracist politics are often depicted merely as a struggle over the content of specific images. Yet the struggles depicted on *The PJs* are rarely about imagery; indeed, in a culture where it is impossible to separate racism from class politics, the struggles remain lived and felt primarily in relations of power not visible at all. In this sense, what the show ultimately offers is a Foucauldian rather than a liberal humanist critique of racism; as Armond White notes: "When government workers appear or Thurgood and his wife visit social agencies, conversations take place in a void. Voices of authority are always faceless. . . . Thurgood's trek though a blizzard to retrieve his wife's journal left at a hospital emergency room is interrupted by cops who stay in their

vehicle while announcing their shakedown through a bullhorn: 'Frisk yourself!' This humor puts *The PJs* in league with some of the most daring and derisive agit-pop such as Public Enemy's '911 Is a Joke' and its colorful, comic music video" ("*TPJS,*" 10).

This is not to say, however, that *The PJs* simply bypasses the issue of representing blackness on television in order to foreground other aspects of social inequity. The show also contains the internal references to African-American history and culture that Kristal Brent Zook finds integral to the antiracist identity politics of the first black-produced sitcoms in the early 1990s, which, unlike previous white-produced shows *about* African-Americans, attempted to foreground struggles over the representation of blackness within the black community as a whole.[33] But in contrast to the paintings by Varnette Honeywood featured on the walls of the *Cosby* living room, or the framed photograph of Malcolm X prominently featured on the set of *Roc* (key examples cited in Zook's study), the references to black history and culture in *The PJs* are primarily references to black television culture—pointing to the fraught legacy of African-Americans on television not only in the form of tribute but also in playful, irreverent, and ambivalent ways. For instance, the Hilton-Jacobs housing project is named after Lawrence Hilton-Jacobs, the actor who portrayed Freddie "Boom-Boom" Washington in *Welcome Back Kotter.* The mere reference to the older situation comedy suggests a relationship between tokenism and ghettoization, as well as the failures of liberal cultural progressivism (as reflected in the demands for issue-oriented programs like *Kotter* in the 1970s and early 1980s) to create public policy capable of producing serious changes in the infrastructure of U.S. cities ("*TPJS,*" 10). Also invoking Sherman Helmsley's "apartment in the sky" in the theme song's description of the Hilton-Jacobs as a "low-rent high-rise," and using Janet DuBois, singer and composer of the memorable theme song for *The Jeffersons,* as the voice of Mrs. Avery, *The PJs* constantly "confronts the legacy of the 70s black sitcom—rather than simply joining in" ("*TPJS,*" 10). The show also offered a run-

ning commentary on the cultural legacy of black television in the 1980s and early 1990s. The most genteel character in *The PJs,* for example, is a parole officer named Walter, whose signature trait is an affable chuckle closely resembling the laugh of the expensively clad family doctor on *The Simpsons,* who in turn seems to be a gentle parody of Bill Cosby's Dr. Huxtable.

Yet as a situation comedy based entirely on caricature, *The PJs* is forced to confront the problem of stereotypes directly. Questions concerning caricature and typecasting, moreover, necessarily come to the fore in genres informed by the mode of comedy, which has traditionally relied on the production of what Stanley Cavell calls individualities rather than individuals, or on the presentation of social types: opera's villains and buffos, Shakespeare's clowns and melancholics, Jane Austen's snobs and bores, and the television sitcom's nosy neighbors and meddling mothers-in-law. Although there remains an irreducible difference between types and stereotypes, or between social roles and "individualities that [project] particular *ways* of inhabiting a social role," this difference becomes especially uneasy when it involves certain social roles that have been drastically limited in ways that others have not.[34] Thus, while the overwhelming emphasis on stereotype analysis in liberal media criticism often limits critical intervention to the analysis of the content of specific images or to assessments of the extent to which contemporary images conform to or deviate from previous ones, it remains important to acknowledge the reasons for this emphasis, which clearly underlie the specific criticisms by Hutchinson and Lee. The stakes of traditional stereotype analysis will continue to be high, not only because depictions of raced subjects in the mass media have been so severely limited but also because raced subjects continue to exert less control over how existing images are actually deployed—quite often with symbolically violent effects. Moreover, in conjunction with the continued haunting of black, live-action television comedy by blackface minstrelsy—a legacy that critics such as J. Fred MacDonald, Herman Gray, Robin Means Coleman,

and Kristal Brent Zook have extensively explored—the tradition of viciously racist cartoons in American screen culture ensures that the intersection of comedy with animation in the visual representation of racialized bodies becomes a particularly loaded issue.[35] Thus, while arguments have been made for cel animation's ideologically disruptive properties in its incipience as an early film genre,[36] in products ranging from MGM's *Bosko* series in the 1920s to numerous cartoon features in the following two decades (including Disney's *Alice Hunting in Africa,* Warner Brothers' *Tokio Jokio,* and Walter Lantz's *Jungle Jitters* and *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat*), two-dimensional animation became one of the most culturally prominent technologies for the revitalization of extant racial stereotypes, giving new "life" to caricatures that might otherwise have stood a greater chance of becoming defunct or inactive.[37]

Since the animated subjects in *The PJs* are three-dimensional dolls made of spongy latex fitted over metal armatures, hand-drawn cel animation is not the technology responsible for (what many critics viewed as) the aesthetically disturbing "look" of the television program's characters, or for the disturbing way in which their bodies were made to move. Yet this two-dimensional ancestor, patented in the United States by Earl Hurd and John Bray in 1915, nevertheless haunts the controversial sitcom through the pictorial separation process on which the older technology depends. For as I will discuss in more detail shortly, the stop-motion process used to animate the characters on *The PJs* inadvertently introduced a fragmentation of the body that recalls cel animation's method of "separating portions of a drawing onto different layers to eliminate the necessity for re-drawing the entire composition for each movement phase" (Thompson, "ICAT," 107). As Kristin Thompson notes, the "slash system" developed by Raoul Barré in the mid-1910s provided an easily standardized and therefore industrially amenable method for this breakdown of figures into discrete parts, such that "a drawing of an entire character could be cut apart and traced onto different cels." Oddly anticipated, perhaps, by the activation

of isolated body parts ("tearful eye," "heaving breast") in Garrison's account of the reader "animated" by Douglass' *Narrative,* the slash system's separation of the body, at each stage of its movement, into discrete portions and poses was particularly suited to the kind of animation specific to modern Fordist production—that is, to animation as automatization:

> Using the slash system, the background might be on paper at the lowest level, the characters' trunks on one sheet of clear celluloid, and the moving mouths, arms, and other parts on a top cel. For speech and gestures, only the top cel need be redrawn, while the background and lower cel are simply re-photographed.
>
> This technique not only saves labour time for a single artist, but it also allows specialisation of labour. That is, one person may do the background, while another does certain main poses of the character, and yet another fills in the phases between these major poses. In fact, the animation industry has followed this pattern, with key animators (doing the major poses), "in-betweeners," and "opaquers" (filling in the figures with opaque paint) in addition to those performing the specialised tasks of scripting and planning. The specialisation process and the establishment of the first production companies for animated films took place about 1915–1917—at the same time as the establishment of the Hollywood motion picture system in general (also characterised by greater and greater specialisation of tasks—the "factory" system). (Thompson, "ICAT," 107–108)

If Fordist or Taylorist automatization constitutes a specialized type of animation, as Chow suggests, the celluloid slash system could be described as an animation technology that animated its workers in turn—a functional doubling that not only recalls the anticipated animation of Douglass' readers by the scene of his own animation or by his act of animating, by apostrophizing, the ships, but also

evokes the capacity of Uncle Tom's exaggerated responsiveness to biblical language to animate or enthrall the spectators of his own animation—such that "that there seemed often a danger it would be lost altogether in the abundance of the responses which broke out everywhere around him."

Thus, it is not just the material basis of two-dimensional cel animation or its explicitly racial-comic legacy that comes to haunt *The PJs*' mode of production (which involves the same automatization of labor as its technological predecessor), but the antebellum meanings, both racial and emotional, that already haunt the former. Before launching a more detailed analysis of how the three-dimensional animation technology in *The PJs* operates, in a manner enabling the older racial, emotional, and technological connotations of animation to remain active within it, I'd like to recall a key scene from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in which similar questions converge.

Walking through midtown Manhattan, Ellison's narrator suddenly finds himself part of a larger audience watching a black doll puppeteered by Tod Clifton, a Harlem community leader and activist he has admired:

> I moved into the crowd and pressed to the front where at my feet I saw a square piece of cardboard upon which something was moving with furious action. It was some kind of toy and I glanced at the crowd's fascinated eyes and down again, seeing it clearly this time. . . . A grinning doll of orange-and-black tissue paper with thin flat cardboard disks forming its head and feet and which some mysterious mechanism was causing to move up and down in a loose-jointed, shoulder-shaking, infuriatingly sensuous motion, a dance that was completely detached from the black, mask-like face. It's no jumping-jack, but *what,* I thought, seeing the doll throwing itself about with the fierce defiance of someone performing a degrading act in public, dancing as though it received a perverse pleasure from

> its motions. And beneath the chuckles of the crowd I could hear the swishing of its ruffled paper, while the same out-of-the-corner-of-the-mouth voice continued to spiel:
>
> *Shake it up! Shake it up!*
> *He's Sambo, the dancing doll, ladies and gentlemen.*
> *Shake him, stretch him by the neck and set him down,*
> *—He'll do the rest. Yes!. . . .*
>
> I knew I should get back to the district but I was held by the inanimate, boneless bouncing of the grinning doll and struggled between the desire to join in the laughter and to leap upon it with both feet, when it suddenly collapsed and I saw the tip of the spieler's toe press upon the circular cardboard that formed the feet and a broad black hand come down, its fingers deftly lifting the doll's head and stretching it upward, twice its length, then releasing it to dance again. *And suddenly the voice didn't go with the hand.*[38]

I would like to foreground several aspects of this literary account of the racial body made into comic spectacle, which eventually will prepare us for a closer investigation of how visual format in *The PJs* affects the ideologically complex questions of animatedness as an affective quality, the agency of mechanized or technologized bodies, and the comic representation of racially marked subjects.

We can begin by noting that the narrator is simultaneously attracted and repelled by the sight of the doll being animated. His effort to negotiate responses at odds with one another—a desire to join in the audience's laughter and a desire to destroy the object provoking it—suggests an ambivalence closely related to the contradictory qualities of the object itself: the doll is "grinning" while it dances, as if in empathetic attunement with the enthusiastic, lively response of its spectators, yet it is also described as "fierce" and "defiant"—words suggesting antipathy toward the audience at which it grins. These affective contradictions call attention to the

disjunctive logic informing the total scene, from the way the doll's spasmodic body movements are described as "completely detached" from its immobile, mask-like face, to the image of the animator's voice suddenly "not going with" the animator's hand. Despite the insistent processes of mechanization at work, nothing seems in sync in this scene—though it is precisely the mechanization which makes the disjunctiveness visible. In fact, it is the very moment when Tod Clifton's body is disclosed as the "mysterious mechanism" making the doll move (his toe against the doll's feet, his hand pulling the doll's neck) that this fragmentation and disruption of the synchronized movement takes place. The human agent anthropomorphizes the puppet, as we would expect, but the puppet also mechanizes the human, breaking his organic unity into so many functional parts: pressing toe, stretching hand, commanding voice.[39] Like the slash system's separation of the drawn figure's moving body parts from its immobile ones (and the automatization of human labor this technology fostered), or the animated breast and eye that induce the animation of Douglass' reader, Clifton's manual manipulation of the doll produces an animatedness that boomerangs back onto its human agent, separating his own body into isolated components and movements. The nonliving entity that is animated (or, as Chow would say, automatized) comes to automatize its animator.

The unexpected mechanization of the human animator by the inhuman object he animates, a situation we have already witnessed in the case of Yau's "foul lump" (a repulsive piece of matter invested with "vigor" and "zest" to the extent that it becomes capable of overtaking and commanding the racialized speaker's voice), seems to represent the ultimate form of human subjection. Here the human agent is not only automatized or mechanized but ironically made so through the process by which he mechanizes an inhuman entity; his passive, corporeally fragmented condition is thus engendered by his own animating activity. Yet Ellison's scene of boomeranged animation might also be read as an allegory for how

the "postmodern automaton," Chow's metaphor for the subjected subject in general, might acquire agency within his or her own automatized condition, enabling the mechanized human to politically comment on—if not exert some form of direct resistance to—the forces manipulating him or her. Here we might take a closer look at the sentence with which the passage concludes: "And suddenly the voice didn't go with the hand." If the hand is clearly Clifton's hand and thus belongs to the animating agent's body but the voice no longer corresponds to this body, Ellison's sentence provokes us to ask whose voice is coming out of Clifton's mouth. Regardless of whether the source can be identified, we can pinpoint one of the intended receivers. On one hand, the voice who says, "Shake it up! Shake it up! He's Sambo, the dancing doll, ladies and gentlemen!" is obviously directed at the collective audience enthusiastically witnessing the doll's animation—the "ladies and gentlemen" who are named and addressed. But on the other hand, the voice that in the same breath utters "Shake him, stretch him by the neck and set him down" seems to direct itself at *Clifton,* issuing specific commands about how to move the doll, to which Clifton immediately responds. (We hear the imperatives "stretch him by the neck and set him down," then see Clifton do precisely that). In this sense, the voice emanating from the doll's ventriloquist, or animator, and directed primarily at those witnessing the spectacle of its animation, is directed at the animator as well. But the fact that Clifton is being addressed or hailed by this voice, which is, moreover, a voice that does not correspond with his body, doubly emphasizes that it is a voice not his own. It is as if Clifton is ventriloquizing the doll in order to foreground his own ventriloquization, or animation, by an unidentified external agent.[40] It could even be said that Clifton animates the doll not only to comment polemically on his own animated condition (since what he does to the doll and what the doll does to him indicate something being done to both man and doll simultaneously) but also to contest his own seemingly unequivocal status as the doll's true animator. Yet in putting forth the statement,

"Perhaps *I* am not the true animator in this scene of racial animation," Clifton paradoxically exercises a critical, albeit highly negative, form of agency within the context of his dramatized subjection.

The excessively "lively," racialized doll in *Invisible Man* brings us back to the three-dimensional animation technology at work in *The PJs.* This racial comedy in which all humans are represented as dolls made of metal and latex playfully inverts Henri Bergson's notion that the comic results from our perception of something rigid or mechanical "encrusted on the surface" of the supple or living; in *The PJs,* we have rigid structures "encrusted" with a layer of supple, skin-like material.[41] The animation of these three-dimensional figures takes place at two distinct levels: the body and speech. Like Ellison's representation of Clifton as animated by both "the hand" and "the voice," *The PJs*' dolls are "endowed with the qualities of life" not only by being physically manipulated but also by being ventriloquized by the voices of human actors. So there are actually two animating agents or agencies here: the animator is the technician who moves the dolls' limbs into discrete poses to be photographed, yet the process would be incomplete without the actors' vocalizations.

To create the illusion that the spongy dolls we see are unified and autonomous beings, *The PJs*' stop-motion imaging technology requires that every movement by a character, including the mouth movements (which are choreographed to correspond to the words spoken by the actor assigned to the character), be broken down into discrete positions, adjusted in small increments, and shot one frame at a time, with each shot previewed on a digital video assist before being recaptured on film. But because the movements of the mouth in speaking are much faster, more dynamic, and more complicated than the movements of arms or legs, the animators end up using a set of about forty "replacement mouths" for each character, rather than changing the configuration of a single mouth permanently fixed on the body.[42] We can thus see how the separation principle of

early twentieth-century cel animation is reapplied in the three-dimensional method. Although the body parts are sculpted rather than hand-drawn on layers of celluloid, the concept of detaching mobile from immobile elements remains essentially the same.

Each *PJs* character is thus given his or her own set of independently molded plastic mouths, corresponding to the pronunciation of discrete consonants and vowels. Yet the technique of constantly attaching and reattaching differently shaped mouths poses the difficulty of ensuring that the forms are fitted in the exact location each time; as one of the show's directors informed me, "Sometimes they move a little to the side of the face and we get what is known as 'slippery mouth' syndrome, which is quite painful to watch."[43] What results is an unintended, excess animatedness on top of the intended, functional one, recalling the "spasmodic jumps" Talbot describes as being a threat to the illusion of "liveliness" in *Animated Putty* (*MP,* 236). With every word spoken by the character, the mouth slides a bit from its initial position; the longer a character speaks, the more his mouth gives the impression, when viewed on our television screens, of threatening to fly off the body completely. The mouths of *The PJs*' characters could thus be described as just a little *too* animated, particularly if we view the mouth as "subjected to [a manipulation] whose origins are beyond one's individual grasp" at two distinct levels already (Chow, "PA," 61): through vocalization by an actor and through bodily arrangement by the animator. And the characters are perhaps even "subjected to external manipulation" on a third front, given the fact that the mouth functions as a symbolically overdetermined feature in racist constructions of blackness, in the same way that eyes become overdetermined, synecdochic sites of racial specificity in representations of Asianness.

Like the corner-of-the-mouth voice emanating from Clifton, the unintended slippery-mouth effect in *The PJs* produces a disjunctiveness that in turn facilitates animation's uncanny redoubling: the mouths create surplus movement apart from those originally scripted for them, assuming a liveliness that is distinct from the

"life" given to them by the animators and that exceeds their design and control. In this sense, the very sign of the racialized body's automatization functions as the source of an unsuspected autonomy. It might be said that the excess liveliness produced by this particular body part suggests something like the racialized, animated subject's "revenge," produced not by transcending the principles of mechanization from above but, as in the case of Chaplin's factory worker, by obeying them too well.[44]

In the consistency of their bodies, then, the characters in *The PJs* call attention to the uncomfortable proximity between social types and stereotypes in a material yet highly metaphoric fashion: by embodying the contradiction between the rigidity we typically associate with social roles and the elasticity or "plasmaticness" hyperbolized by screen animation, which produces the visual effect of characters constantly threatening their own bodily limits.[45] In this manner, *The PJs* reminds us that there can be ways of inhabiting a social role that actually distort its boundaries, changing the status of "role" from that which purely confines or constricts to the site at which new possibilities for human agency might be explored. Recalling the distinction between rigidity and elasticity central to Bergson's theory of laughter, animatedness in *The PJs* depends on something literally elastic "encrusted on the surface" of the mechanical. This elasticity is the sign of the body's automatization (since the pliancy of an object suggests its heightened vulnerability to external manipulation), but functions also as the source of an unaccounted-for autonomy. As the slippery-mouth effect demonstrates, the animation of the raced body seems capable of producing an excess that undermines the technology's power to constitute that body *as* raced.

While the scene of Clifton's doll provided my first example of how the racialized body might produce this surplus animatedness, or a "lifelike movement" exceeding the control and intention of its would-be manipulators, the redoubling of animation in this scene is explicitly figured as violent. Emanating from Clifton's mouth

and addressed to the mob around him, the invitation to "stretch" the doll's neck, with its allusion to lynching, invokes a fantasy of inflicting harm or injury to animated objects in which the narrator himself becomes implicated, though his initial desire to "leap upon it with both feet" is replaced by the slightly less violent act of spitting on it instead: "I looked at the doll and felt my throat constrict. There was a flash of whiteness and a splatter like heavy rain striking a newspaper and I saw the doll go over backwards, wilting into a dripping rage of frilled tissue, the hateful head upturned on its outstretched neck still grinning toward the sky" (Ellison, *IM,* 423). A fantasy of aggression against the doll invoked by its very own animator ("stretch him by his neck") thus leads to an act of real aggression that strips it of its human qualities and agency, turning the dancing figure into a pile of wet paper. More horrifically, the violence inflicted on this animated body culminates in violence toward the human who animates it, since the aftermath of Ellison's dancing-doll episode is Clifton's murder by the police. This murder is described as if in slow motion: the narrator sees Clifton's body "suddenly crumpling" with "a huge wetness growing on his shirt," such that his death explicitly mirrors the doll "wilted" by the narrator's wet spit (*IM,* 426). The link between animation and violence cannot be dismissed here, and it is a link that reinforces the disturbing likeness between human animator and animated object: Clifton's "crumpled body" and the wilted body of the doll.

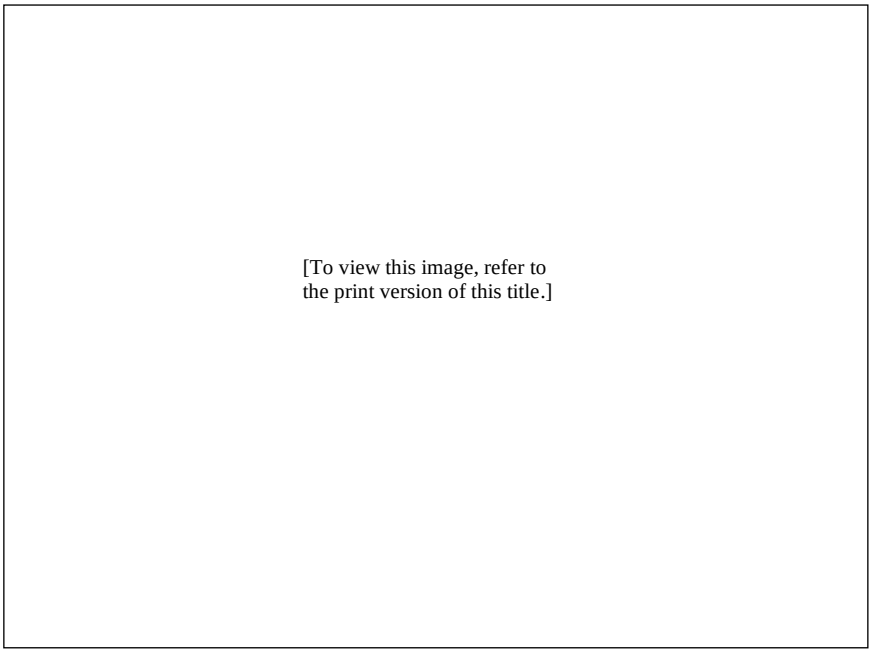
Here the act of animation begins to look inherently and irredeemably violent. If this is in fact the case, the idea of an animated object "animating its animator in turn" can only have negative implications. Yet when the narrator later raises the possibility that his aggressive behavior toward the puppet may have been indirectly responsible for the murder of its puppeteer, Ellison's text suggests that the violence at stake here lies less in the doll's animation than in its deanimation. What results in both cases is the cessation of movement. Seeing Clifton's body crumple, the narrator describes himself as unable to "set [his] foot down" in the process of climbing

a curb, just as crumpling the doll with his spit replaced his act of lifting his foot to crush it (*IM,* 426). The image of the narrator arrested in action, with his foot in the air each time, suggests that the deanimation of the doll (its fantasized and real disfiguration and reconversion into dead matter) leads not only to the death of its human operator but also to the deanimation of its human witness, freezing him in his attempt to destroy the object as if to foreground his complicity. Violence here takes the symbolic form of the body's arrested motion, as opposed to its mobilization; moreover, it is aggression toward the animated object that results directly in bodily harm and injury, and not, however symbolically disturbing it may have been, the object's animation itself. Once the narrator confronts the possibility that this aggression might have been misplaced, the deanimated doll, as an ambiguous symbol of both life and death, oppression and survival, becomes a burden he feels compelled to protect and safeguard, carried in his briefcase along with a chain-link given to him by former slave Brother Tarp.

Without losing sight of the seriousness of this scene from Ellison's novel, I would like to conclude by interrogating the possibility of foreclosing comic animation altogether as a strategy for representing nonwhite characters. One *Village Voice* critic argues for such a possibility in his *PJs* review: "While I don't believe that any technique should be rejected out of hand, I might make an exception for claymation . . . whose golliwog aspects come unpleasantly front and center when used to depict nonwhites, as here."[46] This argument for rejecting animation entirely in the depiction of racially marked characters hinges on a reference to the technique's propensity for the grotesque, an aesthetic based on crudeness and distortion. Yet in the last *PJs* episode aired by Fox prior to the show's cancellation and its subsequent move to the currently "more black" Warner Brothers network, the show's writers seemed to offer a direct response to this critical position, in a moment I think of as the episode's "lump" scene. In this episode (a "Christmas Special" broadcast on December 17, 1999), two of the Hilton-Jacobs resi-

dents, Thurgood's Latino chess partner Sanchez and his Korean brother-in-law Jimmy, rummage in the basement to find makeshift supplies for the project's annual Christmas pageant. Since they lack a baby-Jesus doll for the nativity scene, Sanchez hunts for a substitute and pulls a lumpy, crudely anthropomorphized object out of a box. The object resembles a Mr. Potato Head toy but on closer inspection seems to be an actual potato, or, rather, a Claymation or foamation replica of an actual potato, with eyes, nose, and lips loosely arranged on its surface to resemble a face. Sanchez suggests using the potato to represent the baby Jesus. Jimmy skeptically responds, "I don't know—this thing is pretty freaky. It might scare children!" At the same time, we see Thurgood's head appear in the right background, symmetrically juxtaposed with the potato in the left foreground. The parallel between the show's star and the clay blob is reinforced by the manner in which the camera lingers on this shot. The shot further contrasts its ensemble of "bad" or crudely animated characters (Jimmy + Thurgood + potato) with the statue of the black Wise Man propped up in the opposite corner—a "good" realist representation of a human that is, ironically, the only truly inanimate figure in a scene where dolls debate the aesthetic properties of dolls. Or, more specifically, a scene in which dolls representing humans engage in a debate about whether a lump looks human enough to *qualify* as a doll.

Recalling the invisible man's repeated description of Clifton's puppet as "obscene" (*IM,* 428), the description of the clay-like, crudely humanized object as "pretty freaky" seems pointedly aimed at the show's detractors, implicitly equating charges of the program's antiblack characterization with a fearful overreaction to crudely anthropomorphized objects in general, regardless of the social identity assigned to them. This comment is reinforced by a later moment in the same episode—one as crudely deconstructive as the lump seems crudely animated—which highlights the same principles of disjunction and detachability at work in the scene of animation from *Invisible Man.* In a moment of distress which com-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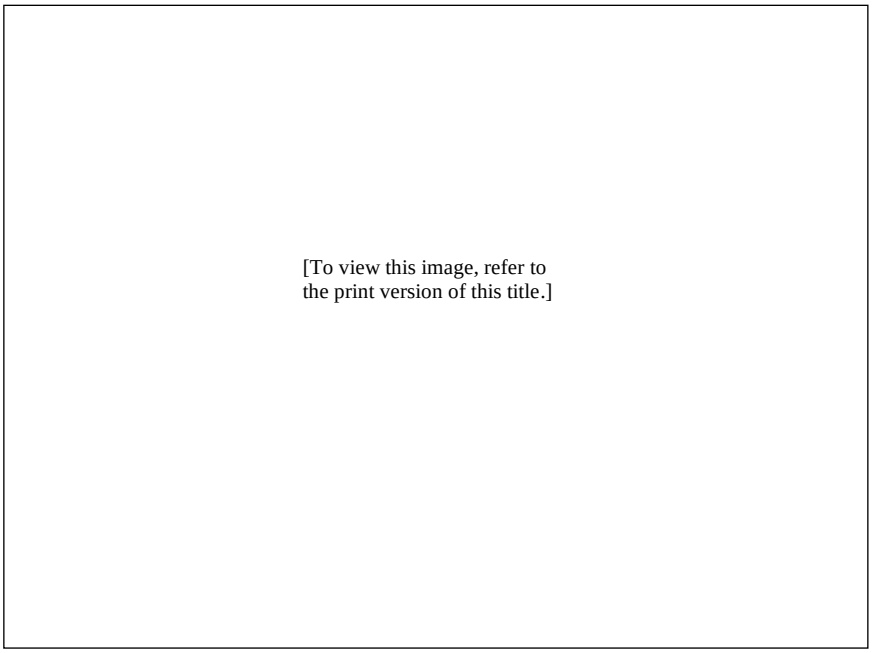
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FIGURE 3

pels Thurgood to pray to the Hilton-Jacobs' baby-Jesus substitute (the potato), he anticlimactically discovers that he has to reattach and rearrange its facial features first, since all of these parts have slid off the lumpy object onto the floor. Slippery-mouth syndrome, once again. Thus, the last Fox *PJs* episode offered its audience a little *mise en abyme* of its own mode of production, in which the crudeness and distortion attributed to its foamation characters became hyperbolized in a very poorly animated potato.

We have returned full circle to the "foul lump" in "Genghis Chan: Private Eye." Yau's relatively unusual format—a series of twenty-eight numbered poems each bearing the same title, published over a span of eight years and across three collections of his writing—demands that each poem's relationship to the name "Genghis Chan" be reconsidered as the sequence unfolds, like a succession of identically captioned but visually different pictures or cartoon panels. The aesthetic of mechanical reproduction suggested by this serial format reinforces the link between Yau's poems and modern screen practices, as already implied by the title's reference to the animated cartoon and live-action versions of Charlie Chan. At first, the name in the titles clearly seems to designate the poem's first-person speaker, an "I" whose overtly stylized, hard-boiled language suggests a subjectivity that is always already character or type—perhaps even a cartoonish type produced not just by a particular filmic or televisual genre but by a filmic or televisual medium: "I am just another particle cloud gliding on the screen / . . . / I am the owner of one pockmarked tongue / I park it on the hedge between sure bets and bad business" (Yau, *RS,* 194). Like a projected mass of photons, the "I" described as "just another particle cloud gliding on the screen" inhabits a landscape marked by Yau's typically surreal imagery, which persistently disrupts and transforms the topoi of 1930s and 1940s crime fiction: "I was floating through a cross section / with my dusty wine glass when she entered."

It was late
and we were getting jammed in deep.
I was on the other side, staring at
the snow covered moon pasted above the park.
A foul lump started making promises in my voice. (*RS,* 189)

The very first poem in the "Genghis Chan" series thus ends by perpetuating a confusion between human subjects and inhuman objects: Is the last line foregrounding the lumpishness of the speaker, or the speakerliness of lumps? In contrast to the Romantic lyric tradition, in which animation conventionally takes the form of apostrophe, animation here depends on an inversion of the Romantic rhetorical device: instead of a subject throwing voice into an inhuman entity in order to anthropomorphize it, or turn this object into another subject who can be addressed ("O Rose!"), we have a nonhuman object that becomes animated by usurping the human speaker's voice from a position inside the human's body. Yet the result of this ambiguous moment of animation is another slippery-mouth effect. For in appropriating the "I"'s voice and agency, the lump immediately questions the connection between the proper name "Genghis Chan" and the poem's first-person speaker: Perhaps it is not Genghis who is speaking in all the poems that follow but, instead, the foul entity residing in his throat? It is key that this theft of the "I"'s voice takes place in the first poem. As the series progresses, moreover, the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the speaker becomes increasingly pronounced. In the last poem that appears in *Radiant Silhouette,* the "I" vanishes completely and is replaced by the second-person "You" in a series of commands: "You will grasp someone's tongue with your teeth and pull / You will prefer the one that bleeds on the carpet / to the one that drools on your sleeve" (Yau, *RS,* 195). By the conclusion of the series, we can no longer be certain who is speaking in the poem or what is being referred to by its title. (Who is "Genghis Chan"? Is Genghis Chan

a who or a what?) We can be sure, however, of the gap that opens between the human speaker and his own voice and body. Hence, if the proper name in the series title stands for neither person nor thing but for a specific relationship—the discontinuity introduced between the speaker and his voice, between a body and its tongue, between a poem and its title—"Genghis Chan" could be described as a term that designates animation's ability to undermine its own traditional status as a technology producing unified racialized subjects. And since this relation of discontinuity intensifies as Yau's sequence progresses, what it seems to offer in its totality is less a portrait of someone named Genghis Chan than a flickerbook-like demonstration of the technique of Genghis Channing.

Like the unintended surplus animation in *The PJs,* which resulted when a racialized body part became increasingly detached from its fixed position the more it was made to speak, the "Genghis Chan: Private Eye" series in *Radiant Silhouette* culminates in two disembodied sites of vocalization: a tongue parked on a hedge, another bleeding on the carpet or (less preferably) drooling on a sleeve. While undeniably grotesque, Yau's reanimation of the always already animated, racialized body ultimately pits a kind of material elasticity against the conceptual rigidity of racial stereotypes, recalling the "sponge," a blob-like object similar to the tongue and particle cloud to which the speaker earlier likens himself. Given this combination of elasticity and self-discontinuity, "Genghis Channing" might be described as a practice of threatening one's own limits (or the roles in which one is captured and defined) not by transcending these limits from above but by inventing new ways of inhabiting them.

Like the scene from *Invisible Man* and *The PJs,* Yau's series suggests that racial stereotypes and clichés, cultural images that are perversely both dead and alive, can be critically countered not just by making the images *more* "dead" (say, by attempting to stop their circulation), but also, though in a more equivocal fashion, by *reanimating* them. Thus, while animatedness and its affective cousins

(liveliness, vigor, zest) remain ugly categories of feeling reinforcing the historically tenacious construction of racialized subjects as excessively emotional, bodily subjects, they might also be thought of as categories of feeling that highlight animation's status as a nexus of contradictions with the capacity to generate unanticipated social meanings and effects—as when the routine manipulation of raced bodies on screen results in an unsuspected liveliness undermining animation's traditional role in constituting bodies *as* raced. Thus, as an affective spectacle that Garrison finds "thrilling," Stowe "impassioning," and Ellison's narrator "obscene," animation calls for new ways of understanding the technologization of the racialized body as well as the uneasy differential between types and stereotypes—if only through a slippery-mouth method riskily situated, like Genghis Chan's parked tongue, in the uncertain territory between "sure bets and bad business."