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MASTERS OF DIGITAL ARTS (By Coursework)

RESEARCH REPORT

Television Animation: An exploration of the contemporary, adult-oriented animation series with a specific study of *Drawn Together*.

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ABSTRACT

This research report aims to identify and explore the various aesthetic, narrative and ideological techniques employed by a specific style of contemporary television animation series, through a close case study of the series *Drawn Together*. I shall define this animation as the contemporary adult-oriented style, one which has found particular favour with a young, media savvy adult audience and enjoys a mostly cult success in many parts of the world. This style is one which works just as much as a social commentary on various contemporary issues as it does a comedic animated show. The report will provide a historical exploration of this specific style of television animation series by looking at specific other examples, including *The Simpsons, Beavis and Butthead* and *South Park*,to create a basis of understanding through which to explore the formulation of *Drawn Together*. In discussing *Drawn Together*, the report will also provide a history of *Drawn Together's* broadcast channel, *Comedy Central*, in order to understand the show's entry into commercial markets and the mass media at large.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted towards the degree of Master of Digital Arts by Coursework in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination.

DEAN ANTHONY BARRETT_____

_____day of_____ 2012.

CONTENTS

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
2. CHAPTER TWO: THE AESTHETICS OF PARODY
    - 2.1 DEFINING PARODY
    - 2.2 APPLICATION
    - 2.3 COMPARISONS TO OTHER POSTMODERN TRAITS
    - 2.4 A NEW PARODY?
3. CHAPTER THREE: HISTORIES: THE ADULT-ORIENTED ANIMATED SHOW AND COMEDY CENTRAL
    - 3.1 THE YOUNG ADULT-ORIENTED ANIMATED TELEVISION SHOW
    - 3.2 THE FLINTSTONES
    - 3.3 THE SIMPSONS
    - 3.4 SOUTH PARK
    - 3.5 COMEDY CENTRAL
4. CHAPTER FOUR: DRAWN TOGETHER
    - 4.1 CHARACTERS
    - 4.2 NARRATIVE STRATEGIES
5. CHAPTER FIVE: YOUNG ADULT-ORIENTED ANIMATION AND THE MASS MEDIA
    - 5.1 MASS COMMUNICATION AND MASS MEDIA
    - 5.2 THE EVOLUTION OF BROADCASTING
    - 5.3 VIEWERSHIP
    - 5.4 YOUNG ADULT-ORIENTED ANIMATION IN MASS MEDIA
    - 5.5 NEW TRENDS: ANIMATION VS NARRATIVE
6. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION
7. WORKS CITED LIST

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Though many still think of cartoons as a children's genre – or at least regard animated programming as less than serious – it is nevertheless the case that animated programming has played an extremely important role in American television history."

- M. Keith Booker, 2006, 185

This research paper aims to define and explore a very specific type of animated television programming. It is animated programming which subscribes to a biting and scathing humour asits means of reacting to various elements within contemporary American and global culture. It is animated programming which is targeted at a somewhat niche target market, typically the young adult audience, which is generally found to be a media and technology savvy audience too. It has found massive crossover commercial success through programs such as *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, but has also had its fair share of failure, with shows such as *Clerks* and *Dilbert*.

This report will provide a case study of one particular show which seems to straddle both the successes and failures of this animation movement, *Drawn Together*. This particular show was chosen as it represents the end point of much of the research done in this particular field (with *The Simpsons* and *South Park* dominating most research in this field). It

was cancelled after three seasons in 2007, but *Drawn Together* manages to show the evolution of this specific type of animated programming in its most contemporary manifestation. Lastly, *Drawn Together* was chosen as I am personally fond of the show and I find it uses many interesting crossroads of information and signifiers to create a uniquely postmodern commentary on contemporary society, even with its sometimes obvious shortcomings.

Following this analysis, the paper will explore how this particular brand of television programming has entered into our contemporary and ever-expanding mass media. This chapter will help to establish this form within a pragmatic context. More particularly, it will serve to ground the outlandish nature of many of these shows in relation to the television industry and mass media at large. This will provide a more discernable platform from which to explore this particular movement of animation. The chapter will also allow a more macroscopic view of this movement within its televisual and mass mediated context, allowing for the exploration of its evolution through time and affording us the opportunity to be able to make more calculated predictions as to where this brand of animated programming will move to in the near future.

I will now outline the chapters of this research paper, highlighting briefly what they will undertake to do.

Chapter 2 - The Aesthetics of Parody

This chapter will serve to establish a formal understanding of the different elements of humour found in this particular animation. It will focus mainly on the use of parody, an

element which is crucial in informing many of these shows satirical objectives and has, indeed, been identified as one of the main traits found in many different sources of media and art in the postmodern 21st century. It will extrapolate specifically on Linda Hutcheon's superior model of parody in the hopes that a greater understanding of the formal elements that underlie humour will create a better platform from which to truly appreciate and dissect this humour as it applies to audiences and other meta-narrative entities. Lastly, it will suggest an evolution of parody itself as it applies to contemporary work, specifically the animated programming central to the paper, in order to give the case study later in the paper a more pertinent value.

Chapter 3 – Histories: The 'Adult-Oriented' Animated Show and Comedy Central

This chapter aims to define the specific style of animated programming and uses a term used in M. Keith Booker's work *Drawn To Television*, namely "adult-oriented animated programming" (2006, xii)as the foundation of its definition. It will expand this definition into what I call the 'young adult-oriented animated television series', which will serve as my means of identifying this particular form throughout the paper. This type of animation will be based exclusively on the American model, in which form it has found its greatest successes. The chapter will then provide a history of three of the main shows which have helped to define the genre, namely *The Flintstones*, *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, before exploring a brief history behind the channel which broadcast both *South Park* and *Drawn Together*, Comedy Central.

Chapter 4 – Drawn Together

Here, I will engage in a more in-depth analysis of *Drawn Together*, a contemporary reimagining of the young adult-oriented animated television series, which ran from 2004 to 2007. I will provide a specific character study on all of the main characters involved, as I believe these characters, with their archetypal and stereotypical appearances and personalities, help make *Drawn Together* a unique animated series. I will then explore the narrative strategies employed by the show as well as critique its successes and failures, the latter of which would lead to its ultimate demise.

Chapter 5 – Young Adult-Oriented Animation and the Mass Media

This chapter will explore how this particular brand of animation has manifested itself within the contemporary mass media of today and will determine whether or not it has been a successful venture. I will specifically explore the dimensions of mass communication and mass media to give a greater understanding of how a media product, such as *Drawn Together*, would enter the business of mass media. I will explore the differences between mass and niche target markets in the hopes of highlighting where consumers and enterprises stand in a contemporary, Internet-ruled, society. Lastly, the chapter will look at how elements of young adult-oriented animations may have changed due to changing markets through the last forty years and will specifically explore the evolution of the relationship between animation complexity and narrative strategies in the animated shows through the last four decades.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

This chapter will summarize the various different conclusions reached throughout the paper. It will weigh up the successes and failures of the adult- and young-adult-oriented

animated television series and try to predict where and how the genre or movement will evolve in the coming years, what with ever-increasing cyber communities on the Internet steadily chipping away at television's core audience. It will also suggest the foundation of a South African animated scene of similar, but uniquely South African, properties in the hopes that this scene further ignites and educates a local populace through its strange, irreverent and, ultimately, unique blend of humour and commentary.

Ultimately, this paper will serve as an expository overview of a movement in animation that has become a highly influential player in both television and film globally over the last four decades. It serves as a means of expanding upon current research in the area, particularly into very recent programming but, more importantly, it hopes to spark an interest on the part of the reader to invest in this enriching and incredibly unique genre of animation. While the paper covers many major players within the scene, it only scrapes the surface of the vast and wonderfully varied expanse of shows that exist in the movement. I would hope that this paper serves to stimulate readers to explore the scene for themselves.

Chapter 2: The Aesthetics of Parody

This chapter aims to explore the theoretical components which inform their pragmatic counterparts in many young-adult oriented animated television shows. It will explore these aesthetic choices and techniques through an analysis of postmodern traits, specifically that of parody. While the chapter will explore other traits of the postmodern, including intertextuality, quotation, allusion and satire, for example, I will posit that the main 'weapon' used by the shows that I will explore remains rooted in an ever-growing use of parody. I would also like to emphasize here that this chapter does not actually deal with the mechanics of postmodernist theory in itself, but rather uses it as a platform from which to study many aesthetic and formal techniques which have become synonymous with the postmodern movement. Importantly for the argument here (in relation to postmodern theory), postmodernity was a means of rupture from the modernist movement which preceded it. As Victoria O'Donnell states, "modernist values were seriousness, purity, reason, and individuality" *(2007, 184)*, therefore this 'rupturing' against modernism inherent within postmodernism would logically dictate values to be "nonlinear, playful, and assembled from other forms" *(2007, 184)*. These aspects of postmodernism provide the fundamental stance to my study of the technique of parody, along with various other forms.

Mainly, I aim to explore herein our contemporary fascination with self-reference, or a "mirroring process" (*Hutcheon, L. 1985*, *1)* which dominates not only audio/visual media of today but countless other disciplines, from medicine to architecture. I will identify and define parody through a theoretical model based on the work *A Theory of Parody* by Linda Hutcheon (1985) and then extrapolate this somewhat literary-based definition into a functional and workable visual-based aesthetic as it would apply to the medium of television. This pragmatically grounded definition of parody (amongst other techniques/genres) will serve to provide a foundation for unpacking my case study of *Drawn Together* in an analytical manner.

What I further hope to highlight in this chapter is the ever-oscillating and changing (though not necessarily evolving) nature of parody as it applies to shows such as *Drawn Together*. Linda Hutcheon's superior work on parody affords me the opportunity to explore a type of parody seen in the contemporary that may not have necessarily been referred to as such a few decades ago, as shall be looked at later in the chapter.

2.1 Defining Parody

Hutcheon explores different dictionary definitions as well as root words in her search for a functional definition of parody. She notes that the word parody is rooted etymologically in the Greek word 'parodia' meaning 'counter-song' (*1985, 32)*. Looking at this meaning, 'counter' here means to oppose or go against, where 'song' would mean an original piece of some sort. This gives rise to many of parody's criticisms that have become inherent in its definition over the years. Margaret Rose, in her work *Defining Parody* (1979), notes that parody is both a "symptom and a critical tool of the modernist episteme". Hutcheon also

observes that parody has been referred to by many theorists and artists as both "parasitic and derivative" *(1985, 3)*. This criticism, especially apparent in theorists such as Leavi, stems from a Romanticist ideal which values "genius, originality and individuality" *(1985, 4)*. Parody, on the other hand, values self-reference, mirroring and/or speaking back as a tool to create meaning – a tool wholly disregarded by Romanticist sympathizers.

Such a stigma, although largely refuted by many contemporary theorists (including Hutcheon), seems to persist in many criticisms of contemporary art and media. In his essay entitled *Our Common Cultural Heritage: Classic Novels and English Television*, Len Platt uses parody to describe the "least successful" *(2008, 21)* account of the transformation of the novel into a serialized televisual format, even granting pastiche a superior status. Similarly, Max Beerbohm in his work *Last Theatres* (1970) writes off parody as "the specialty of youth rather than mature wisdom" *(1970, 66).* This 'derivative' status of parody comes, in most part, due to a fundamentally flawed understanding of how parody manifests itself in the contemporary. As Hutcheon insistently shows, parody is not, in fact, a "trans-historical" technique, but is instead subject to constant redefinition through the process of being continuously reworked over time. Detractors of parody, in many senses, seem to cling on to the now inappropriate dictionary definition provided here by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines parody as:

> "A composition in prose or verse in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as to make them appear ridiculous, especially by applying them to ludicrously inappropriate subjects; an imitation of a work more or less closely modelled on the original, but so turned as to produce a ridiculous effect."

Ridiculing imitation is the 'symptom' of parody that is at the centre of many criticisms of the form, and yet is a feature which Hutcheon believes not to be crucial to parody's definition. Rather, she posits that the parodied text can sit beside its counterpart in a "bitextual synthesis" *(1985, 33)* which does not demand any form of ridicule. The original text, in Hutcheon's terms, is established as the 'norm' from which the modern departs *(1985, 5)*. In many ways, parody becomes a fundamental means of coming to grips with texts of the past and reinterpreting them to the contemporary reader or audience. Thomas Greene notes that parody is, in fact, a means of paying an "oblique homage" *(1982, 46)* to works, or 'norms', of the past. It is not, as many claim, crucial that one text fares better while the other suffers, but more the fact that there is a difference between them.

In substantiating this, Hutcheon further explores the etymological roots of parody and finds that 'para' in Greek also means 'beside' *(1985, 32)*. The element of ridiculing is thus an element that can be found in many parodies but is not one which defines parody.

What is crucial in unpacking Hutcheon's model of parody is that it does involve imitation but it is imitation with ironic difference. Thus, "parody is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" *(1985, 6)*. Furthermore, it involves a complex decoding process on the part of the reader/viewer which, in Hutcheon's view, seems to elevate it into being a sophisticated genre of its own *(1985, 33)*. It "requires its audience to know what it mimics or parodies" *(O'Donnell, V. 2007, 185)*. Originality, then, should not always be granted such poise – in fact, Campbell Tatham writes that originality can fall into the trap of being the "hobgoblin of rigid egos" *(1977, 146)*.

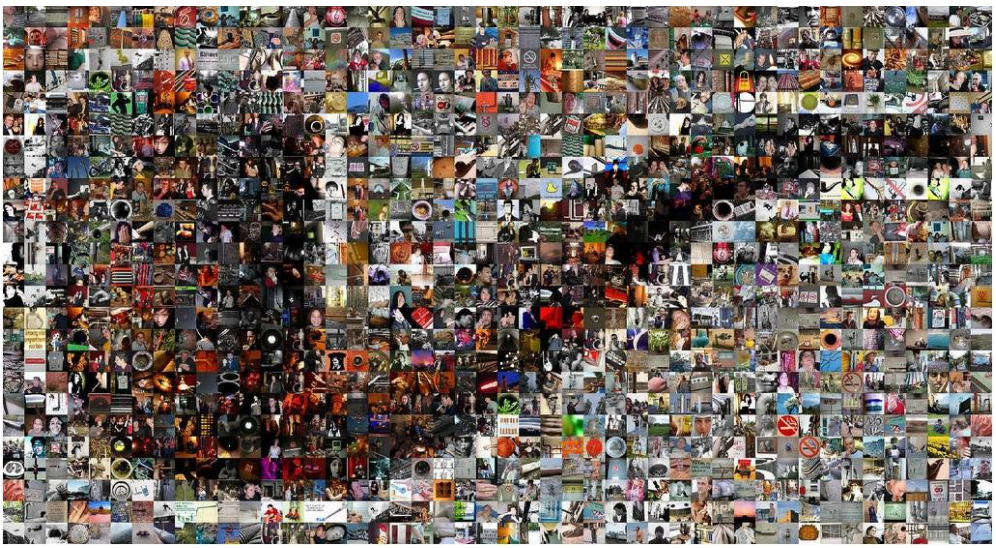
The abovementioned ironic difference, in addition to a bitextual synthesis, is another crucial element of Hutcheon's model of parody. Without this ironic "trans-contextualisation" *(1985, 32)*, parody slips into an imitation of similarity, which is the nature common to pastiche, quotation and burlesque, among other modes. Ironic difference allows parody to have such elements of ridicule or belittlement but, more importantly, it allows parody to be critically constructive or destructive. The modern parody that Hutcheon speaks of utilizes irony in playing with "multiple conventions" *(1985, 7)*. Such an example can be found in David Hlynsky's holograph called *These Are Not The Pipes* which shows various different plumping pipes framed together. This work is modelled ironically on Rene Magritte's now iconic painting *La trahison des images* or *The Treachery of Images* which shows a pipe footnoted with the text "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" or "This is Not a Pipe" *(1929, Painting)*. The original displayed how semiotic iconography can confuse representation, for the painting itself is indeed not a pipe, but material and paint; what the material and paint are made to represent, or signify, is a pipe. In Hlynsky's work, parody is created through an ironic inversion of the original Magritte work – Magritte's painting becomes the 'norm' from which Hlysnky's departs and Hlysnky's work pays its own oblique homage to the original, with neither work coming off worse than the other. Hlynsky's work is further moved into the contemporary due to its holographic nature, this element being privy to irony's playing with "multiple conventions" *(1985, 7)* that Hutcheon spoke of. More recently even, the original Magritte painting has been transformed into a mosaic by Flickr user *krazydad* (uploaded 16 February 2005) of hundreds of tiny photographs which, when viewed all together, form the picture of the famous Magritte pipe. The aptly titled *These are not Pipes* once again uses an ironic inversion of the original in order to speak back to it, as well as pay homage. It also

requires a certain competency on the viewer's part (in this case relating to knowledge of art history or semiotics) to properly decode the photo's intended meaning. Below are pictures of the original Magritte work, and a new inversion by a Flickr user (The Hlynsky version does not have any printed copy):



:

1.1 Magritte's "This Is Not A Pipe"



1.2 Flickr user *krazydad's* adaptation of the original Magritte work as a photo collage.

From the elements of that inform parody which I have highlighted through Hutcheon's model, one can now grasp her more complete definition of parody, as follows:

> *"Parody is repetition, but repetition that includes difference; it is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways. Ironic versions of "trans-contextualization" and inversion are its major formal operatives, and the range of pragmatic ethos is from scornful ridicule to reverential homage." (1985, 37)*

I will now show, through parody's application and comparison to other techniques commonly associated with the postmodern (intertextuality or quotation for example) that this definition of parody does not reduce it to other forms of imitation.

2.2 Application

The application of a parodic text works formally on two levels: "a primary, surface, or foreground; and a secondary, implied or backgrounded one" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 34)*. Meaning is only derived from a recognition (on the part of the viewer/reader/decoder) of the superimposition of the foreground layer upon its background referent *(1985, 34).*

For example, let us look at an episode of the animated television show *South Park* called 'Make Love, Not Warcraft' *(Season 10, Episode 8, 2006)*. In the title of the episode alone, we are confronted with elements which inform parody. With the awareness of the original anti-war slogan of the 1960s American counterculture movement, *Make Love, Not War*, we are now confronted with a title which echoes this original slogan, but has used irony to invert its meaning, thereby trans-contextualizing the meaning to relate to the content of the episode of *South Park.* In this manner, a new meaning is derived from the viewer's knowledge of the

computer company, Blizzard's, MMORPG ("Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game") *(Murphy, S. 2011, 60)* game, *World of Warcraft.* Without any previous knowledge of this computer game, the viewer will not be able to identify the ironic inversion and will thereby "naturalize it, adapting it to the context of the work as a whole" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 34)*. This loss of the effect of the superimposition by an unaware viewer will have the further consequence of eliminating "a significant part of both the form and content of the text" *(1985, 34)*.

The episode itself uses a few different techniques to achieve its commentary on the gaming lifestyle that has become so prevalent in recent years, namely parody, bricolage and intertextuality. Starting off unlike any other *South Park* episode, we are greeted by rich CGI scenery which moves into a town seemingly set in medieval times. Here, we are introduced to our four main protagonists of the show, Stan, Kyle, Cartman and Kenny. However, they are totally unrecognizable save for their familiar voices. The characters we see belong to the boys' avatars in the world of *World of Warcraft* and, as such, range from a knight to a female mage to a dwarf and lastly to a hunter – a far cry from the familiar favourites many audiences know so well. The images of the boys' avatars in *World of Warcraft*, as well as their recognizable 2D selves, are shown below:



1.3 The four boys as they appear in *World of Warcraft.* L-R: Stan, Kyle, Cartman, Kenny.



1.4 The four boys as we normally recognize them. L-R: Cartman, Kyle, Stan, Kenny.

The episode moves between the boys in their avatar, CGI forms within the 'world' and their 'normal' animated selves in school playing the game, as they (and later Stan's father Randy) try to defeat a character in the game (a seemingly unbeatable warrior avatar who is, ironically, an overweight lonesome fellow in real life) who continuously defeats their own avatars with no apparent effort.

These juxtapositions of both characters and entire worlds make for very interesting foreground and backgrounded layers, as discussed previously. They also lead me into my next section of the chapter, which will discuss the differences between parody and other postmodern aesthetics such as intertextuality, bricolage, quotation and satire, to name a few. Furthermore, an example such as this shows parody at a more contemporary crossroads, where its redefinition may be deemed necessary for study in the 21st century.

Returning to this episode's relation to parody in application, it makes an important example of Hutcheon's claim of an ironic 'playing' with multiple conventions. In this sense, parody becomes closely linked with bricolage in that different mediums (2D and 3D animation) are presented together within a single piece (though this remains a very limited version of bricolage, as the entire episode is obviously only shown on one physical medium, television). Interestingly, as Sheila C. Murphy notes in her book *How Television Created New Media* (2011), many of the CGI parts of the episode "were actually shot on location in Azeroth, the virtual world of the *Warcraft* games" *(2011, 63)*, meaning that the CGI world in this episode was not merely imitated, it was purely duplicated.

In terms of the bitextual synthesis between layers, the world in *World of Warcraft* becomes the backgrounded text, with the avatars (representing the four boys) representing the foreground layer in which lies the show's commentary on gaming culture (amongst other pertinent elements). The irony here is one of a ridiculing nature associated with more classic forms of parody, but it is only one instance of the overall commentary of the episode. As Murphy notes, "the *South Park* scribes and animators seem to be both inside of the gaming subculture and simultaneously mocking it" *(2011, 65)*. Essentially, the ironic inversion of the world in *World of Warcraft* provides the difference required to parody the gaming subculture. The episode also moves beyond pure ridicule into the creation of a new, or at least reimagined, forms of media aesthetic – parody here acts as a "constructive principle" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 36)* to this development. Murphy refers to the aesthetic of "machinima" *(2011, 63)* wherein we are confronted with the juxtaposition of CGI characters in a rich 3D world with the voices which we typically associate with paper-cut out 2D characters. As the boys avatars in the world gain experience and become bigger and stronger, so the boys themselves (back in the 2D world of *South Park)* become "obese, sedentary and acne-ridden" *(2011, 64)*. This interesting adaptation of the "machinima" aesthetic, with the use of parodic conventions to propel its ironic inversions, allows the *South Park* creators to praise and speak to gamers "while critiquing their culture at the same time" *(2011, 64).*

2.3 Comparisons to other Postmodern Traits

The reason that I would like to draw comparison to and differentiate parody from other postmodern traits is that many of the shows that I will analyze frequently use an amalgam of these different elements in their visual and narrative strategies. I therefore believe that

these analyses should be rooted in a firm understanding of the principles which will govern their various strategies to better comprehend their pragmatic functions. Furthermore, I would like to, having distinguished parody from these other forms, posit a newer incarnation of parody as it applies to contemporary 21st century art and media forms.

The first comparison I would like to draw is between parody and intertextuality. Hutcheon notes that her definition of parody, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, may lead some to regard it as being in a similar vein to a definition of intertextuality. Hutcheon draws on other theorists of parody and intertextuality, notably Roland Barthes and Michael Riffaterre, in explaining that the technique of the intertext works in a much more formal manner of coding and decoding than the functional nature of parody; it depends on an "implied theory of reading or decoding" *(1985, 23)*. She cites Riffaterre's work in intertextuality thus: "only a reader (or, more generally, a decoder) can activate the intertext" *(1985, 37)*.

Intertextuality, then, becomes "a modality of perception, an act of decoding texts in the light of other texts" *(1985, 37)*. A crucial difference between the two modes becomes the individual's freedom in the decoding process, underlined by his/her own personal culture. Barthes argues that intertextuality grants this freedom to choose specific decoding sites, whereas Riffaterre believes that such texts do provide more specific limitations in their decoding *(Riffaterre, M. 1978, 195)*. Hutcheon builds upon this in stating that parody would provide an even tighter degree of limitation, as its author/s would place very specific constraints in order for the reader/viewer/decoder to correctly understand their intent *(1985, 37)*. Below is an excerpt of Hutcheon on Riffaterre's theory of intertextuality:

> *"In his* (Riffaterre's) *view of intertextuality, the experience of literature involves a text, a reader, and his or her reactions, which take the form of systems of words that are grouped associatively in the reader's mind. But in the case of parody those groupings are carefully controlled – "*
>
> *(1985, 23)*

Once again, parody requires its decoder to have a specific semiotic competence in order to grasp the full meaning of a given piece; failing this will result in the naturalization of the material as discussed earlier. Victoria O'Donnell, in her book *Television Criticism,* further highlights the freedom of (in her case) the viewer "to negotiate or construct various meanings (polysemy) or perhaps no meaning at all" *(2007, 187).* The "recognition of experience" *(2007, 186)* of which she speaks, refers to the broader range of interpretation afforded to any given decoder to make of certain semiotic and signifying processes what they will, usually resulting in a interpretation grounded in a certain pleasure at identifying such signs.

Thus, one may say that parody differentiates from intertextuality in its more pragmatic application (as opposed to intertextuality's formalized approach), its specific and limited decoding boundaries and the required competences of its audiences. Also, intertextuality, in Hutcheon's view, can serve as an element of parody; one may think of parody as a genre with intertextuality being one of its subgenres.

Often cited next to parody as one of the key elements of postmodern aesthetics is that of pastiche. In terms of their respective differences, opinions seem to be divided. On one hand,

pastiche is thought to be a more respectful form of imitation than that of parody, as explained by fictional detective character Ellery Queen below:

> *"A pastiche is a serious and sincere imitation in the exact manner of the original author. But writers of parodies, which are humorous or satirical take-offs, have no such reverent scruples. They usually strive for the weirdest possible distortions, and many ingenious travesties have been conceived."*
>
> (*Dannay, F. and Manfred B. Lee, Web, Accessed 27/12/2011)*

On the other hand, many theorists of the postmodern, seem to adopt a less forgiving concept of pastiche. John Burt Foster extrapolates Fredric Jameson's view of the form thus:

> *"Instead of parody, with its nuanced evaluations of past styles which still function as benchmarks even when the styles are rejected or transformed, we get pastiche. In this practice, the ingrained awareness of cultural history which marks parody has vanished. Instead, Jameson contends, we get "a neutral practice of such mimicry" (17), which undertakes "the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" (18)*
>
> *(Foster, J. 2008, Web)*

What can be deduced from these opposing arguments, from Hutcheon's perspective, is one crucial difference between the two forms: "parody does seek differentiation in its relationship to its model; pastiche operates more by similarity and correspondence" (*1985, 38)*. Additionally, parody, through its processes of trans-contextualization, becomes a transformational form in that its final meaning departs from the original (or backgrounded) text. Pastiche, however, operates on a level of similarity, thus any foreground text remains inherently connected to its background text.

Within its imitation of similarity, pastiche also becomes a limiting form within which to provide artistic critique of any given set of ideologies. As Hutcheon observes, "pastiche usually has to remain within the same genre as its model, whereas parody allows for adaptation" *(1985, 38)*. Its "neutral practice of [*sic*] mimicry" *(Jameson, F. 1991, 16)* leaves it without cause for ulterior motive – the playground of parody. Pastiche can, however, like intertextuality, be incorporated within parody. What I hope to suggest in the upcoming studies of certain animated shows, is that, while parody plays a prominent role in many of them, many have also become aligned with the (sometimes) more respectful form of pastiche by providing imitation by means of similarity as opposed to difference.

Differences between parody and plagiarism occur centrally at acknowledgement. Acknowledgement of one artist to another artist's work is the basis for separating parody from blatant plagiarism. Joe Wortham believes this acknowledgement to be crucial to parody's own critical devices otherwise "the parody doesn't work" *(Web, accessed 05-01-2012)*. Hutcheon believes that this acknowledgment is importantly more so because it "can ease the decoder's interpretive task" *(1985, 38)*. She notes that works of plagiarism also work to conceal the original work in order to deceive the audience into believing a fake authenticity, whereas parody is both fully aware and necessitates acknowledgment of the original in order for its own processes to be initiated by the decoder. An example of when parody and plagiarism can be confused is seen in English progressive rock band *Emerson, Lake and Palmer's* song "The Barbarian". The song, as well as its title, both seem to be very close in content to Bartok's *Allegro Barbaro*. Does this allusion to Bartok's work act as an acknowledgment or a concealment and, thereby, as parody or plagiarism? It would seem more parodic to me in that Keith Emerson's reimagining of Bartok's themes within the song

on Hammond B-3 organs is something that Bartok would recognize only in the melody of the music itself, the actual timbre of sounds becomes a completely different listening experience due to the presence of organs and synthesizers.

Plagiarism, thus, also falls logically into similarity as opposed to difference (though similarity even affords plagiarism more scope than its more accurate description – duplication). In this sense, one could assign its properties to those of pastiche. This is, however, also incorrect as pastiche, like parody, acknowledges its referent; subscribing to the concealment inherent in plagiarism would defeat the purposes of pastiche too.

Plagiarism has gained much of its notoriety through the Romantic idealizations of originality spoken about earlier in the chapter. Its offensiveness stems from, as stated by Hutcheon citing Foucault, a "capitalist ethic that made literature into a commodity to be owned by an individual" *(1985, 4)*. Thus, in the monetary valuing of art for the sake of profit and business enterprise, plagiarism was deemed an untrustworthy tool, one pooled with stealing – an attitude which persists due to this day, manifested in one instance through copyright laws. Parody, in this sense, unfortunately shares a portion of the stigma surrounding plagiarism, even though its acknowledgment of, and departure from, an original text creates a clear difference between itself and plagiarism.

Parody is often related, even cited as the same in many dictionaries, to travesty and burlesque. All three terms remain within a close relationship to each other but parody does distance itself from the other two techniques in certain, subtle ways. Many writers, such as John Jump, believe the three to exist in some sort of hierarchal relationship with one

another where parody is treated as a sort of "high burlesque" *(Jump, J. 1972, 2)*, and on the other hand travesty is seen "as the most primitive of the forms of parody" *(MacDonald, D. 1960, 557-8)*. In this understanding, the three would exist, in order from 'lowest' to 'highest': travesty, burlesque and finally, at the top of this hierarchal system, parody. Hutcheon, however, believes this system to be too "rigid" *(1985, 40)* for a contemporary understanding of such terms and their differences. Such a separation "of form and content" *(1985, 40),* inherent in the abovementioned system of categorization, remains questionable to Hutcheon and other theorists on these different forms. What is important in understanding how parody operates in relation to both burlesque and travesty is that "both burlesque and travesty do necessarily involve ridicule, however; parody does not *(1985, 40)*. One can see from this description how those who acknowledge the dictionary definition of parody (as quoted earlier) as a means of 'ridiculing imitation' would thus be led to subscribe to an unavoidable similarity between parody and forms like burlesque and travesty. The understanding of how parody is defined by Hutcheon therefore allows us to fully comprehend the subtle differences that are indeed present between parody and other forms.

Quotation, basically understood as the act of citation, is also regularly confused with parody. Quotation is often used to add "authority to one's own text" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 41)*. However, quotation's power lies not in its basic citation of other texts, for "citation is not in itself a mark of cultivation" *(1985, 41)*. Rather, quotation uses a 'trans-contextualization' similar to that of parody i.e. texts which are quoted are done so in a completely different context than where they are originally found, leading to an interpretation process which may carry meanings vastly dissimilar to their original counterparts. Parody works with this

repetitious 'trans-contextualization' too as discussed earlier, however what does separate parody from quotation is its critical ironic distance, a necessity in informing parody but not in quotation. Both do share similar pragmatic qualities, therefore, as Hutcheon explains, "quotation becomes a form of parody" *(1985, 41)* in certain scenarios.

With these comparisons, it can be seen that parody is "related to burlesque, travesty, pastiche, plagiarism, quotation and allusion, but remains distinct from them" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 43)*. Hutcheon notes that all these forms, even in their differences in repetition and subsequent ethos, target the intramural, or internal processes activated by their own functions *(1985, 43)*. How then would parody be confused with satire, whose vices are extramural in aim (i.e. having a social or moral objective – objectives which extend beyond the confines of the text to provide a means of social change or, at the very least, criticism)? Many theorists interlink the two terms for want of providing, and opening up, parody to a social and moral dimension, as opposed to "limiting parody to an aesthetic context" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 43)*. Hutcheon herself believes that simply providing parody with a social function is an easy, yet incorrect, means of comparing parody to satire.

Dictionary.com defines satire as "the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice, folly etc." and "a literary composition, in verse or prose, in which human folly and vice are held up to scorn, derision or ridicule" *(Web, 2011)*. Satire has a clearly defined social and/or moral obligation and has been used to describe shows such as *The Simpsons* as "satire on contemporary America" *(O'Donnell, V. 2007, 111)*. The tools of satire, described above, are certainly similar with those used in parody, allowing both techniques to be "often used together" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 43)*. This also allows for either

satire or parody to use the other as a means of achieving its own ends. However, where parody does not necessarily require a ridiculing of one text over another (foreground and background layers), satire uses negative commentary as one of its motives, or as Gilbert Highet notes, "to distort, to belittle, to wound" *(1962, 69)*.

Satire and parody have become increasingly interlinked within contemporary works and it is my aim to use the crossroads between these, and the various other forms mentioned above, to inform my analysis of the young adult-oriented animated television shows. I believe these forms will manifest themselves at many different intersections and will interlink in just as many instances. It is therefore important that they have been defined and compared now in order to fully grasp the mechanics at play in the shows I will study.

2.4 A New Parody?

From Hutcheon's model of parody in a postmodern society, it is understood that no 'trans-historical' definition of parody can exist. Parody in the 21st century may be manifesting itself in new and exciting ways which have not previously been associated with it.

Parody has also been shown to be a "constructive principle in literary history" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 36)* in that it is able, through its movement within other background texts, to rework, redefine and create new forms of meaning and understanding. Hutcheon notes that works which are able to free themselves from their background texts to create these new, autonomous forms show that parody may be a "prototype of the pivotal stage in that gradual process of development of literary forms" *(1985, 35)*.

What I would like to explore in later chapters, specifically in my case study of *Drawn Together*, is that contemporary, 21st century forms of parody are redefining the sense of the word, even in relation to the Hutcheon model. I would posit that parody is becoming more brutish in its insistence of 'trans-contextualizing' backgrounded works, and that it does not place as strict an emphasis on semiotic competence in order to grasp the critiques it may present. In addition to this, the naturalization of content on an unknowing viewer may not occur due to the overwhelming ease of access to information that bombards everyone's lives. Thus, any hierarchal establishment of 'high art' is not the place for contemporary parody, for all information is becoming increasingly readily accessible. I will also explore the dynamics of mass communication in relation to viewership in chapter five that will determine if such a mass audience, with near unlimited access to information, may, at large, be able to enter the decoding process without subscribing to naturalization.

If this brutish new parody, with seemingly limitless texts with which to parody (and potentially massive audiences with which to exploit its critiques upon) were to exist in contemporary works (in my case, young adult-oriented animated television series), a vital question from Hutcheon still exists: "The forms of art change, but do they really evolve or get better in any way?" *(1985, 36)*. I will use this question to ground my case study of *Drawn Together*, for evolution of the form of art is pivotal to its relevance and overall success as a show which uses parody, amongst other forms, as its central device.

Chapter 3: Histories: The 'Adult-Oriented' Animated Show and Comedy Central

This chapter aims to define and explore the premise of the adult (particularly, young adult) oriented animated show in accordance with an American based model; this is due to the fact that America has been the nucleus from which this genre of animated television grew. I will then move onto an expository history on three shows which have helped to define the characteristics of the genre and have also been vehicles for its evolution over time. Thus, I will study what is arguably the first show of this genre, *The Flinstones*, continuing into what has become one of the most successful animated television shows of all time, *The Simpsons*, and finally a look at the contemporary evolution of the form as it manifests itself within the equally successful *South Park*. A study of the history of the genre through an exploration of many of its defining programs shall provide a good starting point to my next chapter, where I shall conduct a case study on an even more recent permutation of the adult-oriented animated television show, *Drawn Together*. In addition to my studies of the defining shows in the genre, I would like to also suggest that there is a dichotomy which exists between animation techniques used in the shows and the narrative strategies employed by them – this will be explored in more depth in Chapter 5.

I will also, throughout these different studies, apply the theoretical values of parody and its various related forms (as analysed in the previous chapter) to show, firstly, their pragmatic function within this genre of animated television and, secondly, how their usages allow these shows to provide the critiques that they do which, ultimately, contributes to the definition of the entire genre of the adult-oriented animated television itself.

In addition to the study of content I shall furthermore provide a brief historical account for the premise of the television channel Comedy Central – the channel which originally broadcast *Drawn Together*. Given both the history and ideological constructs concerning the channel (in addition to more practical concerns such as broadcast times and audiences, itself the study of a later chapter) I would hope that this outlining of the channel will provide a clear understanding as to the broadcast of shows such as *Drawn Together* and *South Park)*.

Ultimately, I want to explore the evolution of the adult (and young adult) oriented animated television show to find out if, as Linda Hutcheon asks, "the forms of art change, but do they really evolve or get better in any way?" *(1985, 36).*

3.1 The Young Adult-Oriented Animated Television Show

Defining this genre or style of animated television is more complex than it would initially purport to be. M. Keith Booker, in his book *Drawn to Television: Prime Time Animation from The Flintstones to Family Guy*, suggests the name "adult-oriented animated programming" in his introduction *(2006, xii)*, which aims to describe any number of animated shows that, unlike the young audience attracted to classic animated television shows such as Warner

Brothers' *Merry Melodies* series, "have been aimed at adults from the start" *(2006, ix)*. Paul Wells, in his book *Understanding Animation* (1998), contends that many theories have developed regarding an audience's reaction to, and interpretation of, filmic texts, but few have studied such aspects with regard to animation "and most particularly, do not take account of the *adult* response to animated films" *(1998, 225)*. He further notes that animated television, beginning in the 1950s, "contains a great deal of adult content" *(1998, 225)*. Many of these early animated television shows, however, would be relegated to Saturday morning viewing, the time slot afforded typically to children's based entertainment. The content, however, was not primarily aimed at such a young audience, though, in fairness, as family-based prime time shows, children were not excluded from the content of the shows either.

Though the definition "adult-oriented animation" may then seem fitting to this genre of animated programming, I would contest that this definition applies more directly to animated shows that have been shown in prime time slots. Surprisingly this is quite a large number of shows, including hits like *The Simpsons* on the FOX Network, *South Park* on Comedy Central (though it is not shown during prime time hours in the South African version of the channel) and *Family Guy* (also on Fox), to name but a few. Even more surprising is that many of these shows do not "adhere to the family sitcom format" *(Booker, K. 2006, xi)* which has become synonymous with prime time content in general. However, the definition "adult-oriented" has become used for these shows which, even with content which may seem somewhat transgressive for prime time, have been afforded the luxuries of mass viewership and exposure. This is not the case with all animations of this sort. Shows like *Drawn Together* have been deemed too edgy even for prime time on Comedy Central

and others, such as the vast array of shows collectively screened on the Adult Swim block (on Cartoon Network internationally and Vuzu in South Africa) “could probably never make it directly onto a network in prime time” *(Booker, K. 2006, xii).* Such shows, therefore, cater to a very niche audience. The argument for niche audiences becomes more complex when approaching it from the point of view of satellite/cable, in which audiences are somewhat niche by default due to their very ownership of these pay channels). The niche audience in the case of shows such as *Drawn Together* and Adult Swim shows is the young adult market. I partially use Erik Erikson’s human development model of the age group which defines the ages between 20 and 40 as being young adult*(2009, Web)*. I limit my definition to an audience between 18 and 30.

This young, tech-savvy audience is equipped with what Hutcheon calls a decoding ability to make sense of the particular brand of “self-referentiality and irony” *(Stabile, C and Harrison, M. 2003, 8)* inherent in these shows. More specifically, as Wells points out, these shows use parodic repetition, which “takes the familiar characteristics of a live-action genre and places them with the animated context” *(1998, 171)*. Not to be confined to the transferral between merely these two mediums, programs which air on Adult Swim, for example, use media trends which are based in online websites, magazines, books and a wealth of other formats which inform youth based memes and lore. A good example of this can be seen in the *South Park* episode “Canada On Strike” (*Season 12, Episode 4, April 2 2008)*. Even though *South Park* is a prime time show, the content and ideology in this episode relate very closely to animated shows which do not run in prime time, and are aimed at a younger adult audience. In this episode, the four main characters of the show, Stan, Kyle, Cartman and Kenny, coax their classmate, the gullible Butters, into making a somewhat silly video in

order for it to go viral on YouTube (thereby, in their minds, earning them a lot of money). When the video does indeed end up going viral, the boys go to the "Colorado Department of Internet Money" to collect their earnings. Here they are met with many other YouTube video 'celebrities' who have had equal success on the site, all waiting in line for their money. It is here that the viewer is exposed to the antics of characters such as "Numa Numa", "Laughing Baby", "Sneezing Panda", and Tay Zonday, to name a few. These personalities are animated parodies of people (and animals) who became famous from uploading content onto YouTube that became a hit with millions of viewers – mostly due to the absurdity and comedic value of their videos. More importantly, the audience which is most familiar with these YouTube 'celebrities' is an audience which was brought up with a literacy in the internet and its subsequent media culture – the young adult audience. The YouTube characters in the room may seem both unfamiliar and frankly ridiculous to an older audience which has no prior knowledge of YouTube culture; such viewers would probably "naturalize" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 34)* the content into a meaning of their own, thus not fully comprehending the intended meaning of the episode.



1.5 The Youtube 'celebrities' in South Park – from left to right: "Laughing Panda", "Numa Numa", "Star Wars Kid", "Afro Ninja", "Tron Guy", Chris Crocker and Tay Zonday.

This transfer between contexts and narratives derived from live-action (and various other mediums), moved into animation is a form of bricolage that has become familiar to this particular audience demographic and much of the humour derived from it has become specifically aimed at this age group. While I may expand such a demographic into both geographic and cultural sites (which would undoubtedly play a significant role in informing niche audiences), for the purposes of this definition I would like to thus define the 'young adult' as aged between approximately 18 and 30, with the specific knowledge of the postmodern transfer of genres and contexts, as well as the parodic and satiric process of mirroring and self-referentiality. It can thus be said that the shows which I will speak of attract both an "adult-oriented" *(Booker, K. 2006, xii)* audience as well as a young adult-oriented audience, as I have shown above. This is rooted in, but not limited to, their broadcast on prime time television and the specifics of their content.

3.2 The Flintstones

The Flintstones was the first animated program that was an actual success on prime time television in the 1960s. Initiated by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera (of Hanna-Barbera fame), originally known as the duo who produced animated shorts for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), notably the *Tom and Jerry* series, *The Flintstones* first aired on then fledgling television network ABC on Friday, September 30, 1960 *(Booker, K. 2006, 1)*. Seen as an "unprecedented programming experiment" (*Booker, K. 2006, 2)* in prime time television, ABC took this risk to try attract viewers from the other bigger networks, CBS and NBC, with a program that was different from anything else on television at the time.

Drawing on the successful formula of the nuclear family sitcom, "a form that had produced some of the biggest hits of the 1950s" *(Booker, K. 2006, 2)*, *The Flintstones* takes its main influence from the "now legendary sitcom" *(Booker, K. 2006, 2)The Honeymooners*. The show became popular in the 1950s due to its relation to the 'everyday' working class American family. As M. Keith Booker explains:

> *"What was special about 'The Honeymooners' – other than the sterling performances by Jackie Gleason and Art Carney as bus driver Ralph Kramden and sewer worker Ed Norton, the predecessors of Fred and Barney – was the extent to which it captured the travails of ordinary working-class Americans in their attempt to come to grips with the radical changes that were transforming American society in the 1950s."*
>
> *(2006, 2)*

Furthermore, as Booker notes, the show was aware of the availability of new technologies to a widespread community of Americans, like the television. This propelled the show into a contemporary, even hip take on the typical family sitcom which, even then, was growing stale in many respects.

The Flintstones incorporated these elements into its own prehistoric setting, using comic imitation to show these, then modern, technological elements within its own context. As such, the Flintstones' house was filled with appliances from vacuum cleaners to garbage disposal machines, albeit with a prehistoric twist: oft times these appliances were 'powered' by different animals, "thus, Wilma's vacuum cleaner is simply a small elephant-like creature that sucks dirt and dust up into its trunk" *(Booker, K. 2006, 3)*. These elements, while comedic by nature to a children's audience, also provided humour for an adult audience,

not to mention a deeper social connection on their half. The adult population of America was thus receptive to a show like *The Flintstones*. In the essay "The Flinstones to Futurama: Networks and Prime Time Animation" by Wendy Hilton-Morrow and David T. McMahan, the authors quote John Javna's finding that a survey of Hanna-Barbera cartoons typically attracted an approximately 65% adult viewership *(2003, 75).The Flintstones* was, by any measure, a show which placed as much focus on adult-oriented humour as any of its live-action counterparts. It also, however, did something more, which was not quite achievable in the medium of live-action television: it transferred the American lifestyle of the 1960s into a prehistoric setting. While it may have seemed more like a ridiculous novelty to some, it did in fact perform a more serious critical function. As M. Keith Booker explains:

> *"By transplanting what is essentially a 1960s American lifestyle into the Stone Age, where its elements seem humourosly out of place, 'The Flintstones' creates a continuous sense of estrangement that allows the show's viewers to see their own society, which they might otherwise simply take for granted as the natural way for a society to be, in new ways, reminding them of how unusual and relatively new their affluent, high-tech way of life really is."*
>
> *(2006, 3)*

This critical commentary based in humorous juxtaposition could be seen to relate to the Hutcheon theory of parody as studied in the previous chapter. Here, the animation becomes the foreground layer, with live-action family sitcoms (and indeed, the American society at large) being the background, parodied layer. The very nature of animation itself becomes an ironic inversion of what is, in this case, a sort of hybridized site of American lifestyle of the 1960s. But it does not imitate it; instead, it differentiates itself (through its medium and

period) to provide a critical distance at which the viewer may reflect inwards upon his/her own current position within the American culture of the 1960s. The realization of this is born through the recognition of the irony inherent in the show, outwardly broadcast as humour. As M. Keith Booker writes, *The Flintstones* was able to provide "an oblique look at contemporary America" where many of its live-action contemporaries weren't*(2006, 4)*.

This idea of "double-coding" *(Farley, R. 2003, 151)* within *The Flintstones* could surely not be the only element responsible for its success. It is, according to Rebecca Farley's essay "From Fred and Wilma to Ren and Stimpy: What Makes a Cartoon Prime Time?", actually a troublesome responsibility to assume a program performs functions of entertainment to both a children- and adult-oriented audience – in many senses it becomes too formal a means of interpretation and may indeed detract from the intension of the show in the first place *(2003, 152)*. Thus, Farley notes, the style of animation also played a critical role in the show's positive reception in addition to its content *(2003, 153)*. She notes that, due to the show being made for television, its animated style became complementary to the medium in which it was broadcast. This style is known as 'limited animation' and it was very popular amongst both avant-garde animators as well as Japanese animators of what would become anime (Osamu Tezuka, creator of *Astro Boy*, being the most well-known progenitor of this particular movement). On a technical level, limited animation refers to the number of drawings being displayed on the television per second. While 25 frames (or pictures) is generally acknowledged as the standard at which pictures do have the smooth appearance of movement (for humans specifically – for certain other species, like birds, it is believed to be a significantly higher number of frames), limited animation reduces the amount of frames per second, sometimes to below 12 *(Furniss, M. 1998, 144-151)*. This results in a

somewhat ‘stocky’ movement, one which, in Disney’s terms, would be called unfinished. However, Farley notes that this style had the practical effect, in that time, of making “the show look good” *(2003, 153)*. Also, in comparison to the black-and-white television which dominated the air at the time, Hanna-Barbera’s “saturated, unmodulated colours” gave the show a distinct appeal and contributed to its relative longevity. As Farley writes, “For Hanna-Barbera in 1960, it was more important to be in prime time than to be smoothly ‘finished’” *(2003, 154)*. In this way, the animation actually drew attention to itself and to the production processes which informed the medium of television at large.

While it made effective use of its medium in animation, it was not exempt from problems of representation, as apparent in many television sitcoms of the time. The main character of *The Flintstones*, Fred Flintstone, was a “loud, overweight, domineering figure” *(Booker, K, 2006, 4)*, whilst his next-door neighbour, Barney Rubble, was a “patient, loyal, and somewhat subservient” *(Booker, K. 2006, 4)* companion. They seem to fit, therefore, into the classic, stereotypical male buddy duo; a Laurel and Hardy of sorts. The two main females, on the other hand, Wilma and Betty (the wives of Fred and Barney respectively), are quite comfortably boxed into the stay-at-home housewife role, typical of many shows of the 1950s and of American society at the time. The men in the show were typically expected to be the breadwinners of their families, whilst the wives “were expected to stay at home” *(Booker, K. 2006, 5)* and prepare the family dinners. The show thus propelled the idea of the nuclear suburban American family of the era, making it open to criticism from many contemporary schools of thought, particularly that of feminism.

The show did, however, incorporate a less stable approach to gender and family roles in its later seasons to accommodate the fact that "gender roles were becoming increasingly inadequate and needed revision in the light of the changes being undergone by American society at the time" *(Booker, K. 2006, 6)*. It was also possibly done as an attempt to regain some of the viewership it had lost since its successful first season. Although outlasting many imitations (broadcast, ironically, by CBS and NBC following the start of *The Flintstones)*, the show steadily lost viewers, and was by 1963 "losing ground against CBS's *The Munsters*" *(Hilton-Morrow, W and McMahan, D. 2003, 76)* as well as being moved from Friday night to Thursday night. Its incorporation of more adult-oriented content was thus an attempt to gain ground in viewership ratings once again. As such, in addition the increasingly changing nature of the females of the show, more serious topics were dealt with which were hoped to resonate with a larger audience. One such example is the beginning of the fourth season, wherein the Rubbles struggle to come to grips with "their inability to bear a child of their own" *(Booker, K. 2006, 6)*. The issue of adoption was just one example of the show's willingness to remain current with contemporary issues of American society of the time.

Continuing on this path, the show began to exploit, in its own manner, the boom of the 1960s pop culture that had arisen not only in America but around the world as libertarian values coupled with an increasingly popular celebrity culture bloomed. The show did this, in keeping with its parodic style spoken about previously, by spoofing many pop culture referents, a style which would be continuously reimagined in many adult- and young-adult oriented animated shows right into the present day. One such example can be found in the episode titled "Alvin Brickrock Presents" *(Season 2, Episode 4, 1961)*: the title itself is a spoof on the then popular series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. In it, Fred and Barney take on the roles

of detectives, trying to solve, in typical Hitchcock fashion, the possible murder (in Fred's mind) of one Agatha Brickrock. Alvin Brickrock himself is modelled to be notoriously similar to Alfred Hitchcock and, indeed, appears at the end of the episode, reminiscent of Hitchcock's shows. These pop culture episodes permeate the latter part of *The Flintstones'* run, including rock 'n roll crazes similar to that of 'Beatlemania' and big budget Hollywood action films. It is also apparent, from these themes which the show explored, that *The Flintstones* was also making a serious attempt at tapping into the young adult market of the time, using much the same basic ideology that shows like *South Park* and *Drawn Together* use today, though perhaps not with as much success.

Ultimately, however, the original run of *The Flintstones* was ended on prime time in 1966 due to its inability to retain viewership (even though it was, up until *The Simpsons* more than 20 years later, the longest-running animated program on prime time television). Although the show did continue for many more years on Saturday morning television, its prime time years, at least on its native broadcast channel, were over. With the removal of *The Flintstones*, prime time animation had become an almost certain thing of the past. As Todd Gitlin noted, "sooner or later, the audience, having gone along with the fad, grows weary, bored, resentful – in its odd way, discriminating. It takes revenge" *(1983, 74)*. *The Flintstones* had gone from being the fresh new thing on television to being a stale replica of an outdated formula. While its premise was based on a sitcom format taken to different, ironic and socially aware levels, it wound up clutching at the straws of viewership. It also became strangled by a time slot which, oddly enough, gave it widespread exposure and critical acclaim which it possibly could've done without. 1966 marked the end of prime time

animation “for twenty three years” *(Hilton-Morrow, W and McMahan, D. 2003, 77)* until a strange yellow family popped up on television screens in 1989.

3.3 The Simpsons

“Animated situation comedy is characterized by parody and satire” *(O’Donnell, V. 2007, 111)*. Where *The Flintstones* worked towards this self-referential model of contemporary humour, the first program to really utilize these aesthetic elements to their full potential was Matt Groening’s animated sitcom, *The Simpsons*. Originally broadcast as ‘bumpers’ “into and out of commercials” *(Booker, K. 2006, 47)* for *The Tracy Ullman Show* (at the time, also on a fledgling network, FOX), the yellow family known as the Simpsons became the most popular part of *The Tracy Ullman Show*.

With the slump in the 80s for prime time animation and, indeed, a time when “the quality of animation had seriously declined” *(Hilton-Morrow, W and McMahan, D. 2003, 78)*, it seemed that the idea of a prime time animated show (like *The Flintstones)* was purely part of history. However, adult and child audiences by the end of the 80s were a lot more familiar with the animated television programs of *The Flintstones* and others that were still receiving widespread exposure on minor time slots and smaller networks. Audiences were thus more ‘television literate’ than the audiences of television’s inception in the 1950s as it was a medium that they grew up with, unlike television’s original audience. As *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening noted: “One of the reasons *The Simpsons* got on the air in the first place was that there were finally some executives who remembered watching *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* and *Jonny Quest* at night as children, so they could conceive of the idea of animation during prime time” *(1997, Web)*.

Thus *The Simpsons* made its debut on FOX Network on Christmas 1989, beginning its first full season on January 14, 1990, to both critical and commercial acclaim. The premise of the show would seem, on paper, similar to that of the average family sitcom. But it isn't. Set in the town of Springfield, "a name that echoes the fictitious town where the ubiquitous Father lived in *Father Knows Best" (Stabile, C. and Harrison, M.2003, 6)* the show features an average American family with characters which seem to be the antithesis of the typical nuclear family in American live-action sitcoms. Rather than the set-in-stone roles which are typically associated with different family members in family sitcoms the members of the Simpsons family invert traditionalisms, allowing the show to function as "an ironic commentary on the family values discourse" *(Stabile, C. and Harrison, M. 2003, 7)*. Thus, arguably the show's main character, Homer, the father figure, is a far cry from the 'breadwinner dads' of the 1950s sitcom (and more obnoxious than even Fred Flintstone was). Rather, as M. Keith Booker notes, Homer is said to be a "fat, bald thirty-something who typically seems more devoted to drinking beer and eating doughnuts than to taking care of his family" *(2006, 49)*. Additionally he works at a nuclear power plant, a possible reference to the nuclear family of the American sitcom. Moreover, Homer only seems to grow more oafish and ridiculous as the seasons continue.

His wife, Marge Simpson, is, according to Booker, "the glue that holds the family together" *(2006, 49)*. With a long tower of blue hair and gravelly voice, Marge may originally be mistaken to be the stay-at-home wife of the same nature to that of Wilma and Betty from *The Flintstones.* She is, however, a lot more active in her role within the show. From political activism to out of home projects, she fulfils the role of a much more relatable female

character in contemporary times and also challenges conventions of a 'typical wife' aesthetic with her appearance and antics.

Their son, Bart, is a very troublesome preteen who consistently torments his family and school with various forms of mischief. He is said, according to Booker, to be the character "whose point of view is closest to that of creator Groening" *(2006, 50)* but is in more ways like his father, Homer, than anyone else. A hit amongst children at the inception of the show, Bart, while not a role model in any sense, portrays (much like the *South Park* boys after him) the mostly innocent mischievous ways of growing children, often providing to the show's more direct sources of humour.

Lisa, Bart's younger sister, is the genius of the family, but, as such, remains largely misunderstood and, indeed, somewhat marginalized by the rest of her family. Both a straight A's student and a brilliant saxophonist, she often manages seemingly unaccomplishable goals like "a variety of civic projects" *(Booker, K. 2006, 50)* which she almost singlehandedly achieves. She is not completely removed from the experience of the rest of her family, however, and is frequently seen watching the same low-brow television programs of her father and brother, perhaps suggesting that "watching such programming does not make one stupid" *(Booker, K. 2006, 50)*. The last member of the family is baby Maggie, "a relatively minor character" *(2006, 50)* who spends most of her time sucking on her pacifier; she does, however, find herself in the middle of many ridiculous situations, her passiveness in such scenarios often in itself being a source of much humour.

The representation of the Simpson family, in addition to all the other characters in the show, also plays a crucial role in the show's ideological outcomes. The family, and most of the characters in the show, being drawn as yellow with large, bubble shaped eyes, links to Maureen Furniss's writings on "independent animation". This characteristic is, according to her:

> *"the use of techniques other than traditional ones, the tendency to alter media, the abstract style, the non-linear narrative, the reflection of alternative lifestyles, the challenge of dominant beliefs, and the tendency to be made by artists from marginalized social groups and reflect their concerns"*
>
> *(1998, 30)*

The absurdity of these characters appearances, all but overlooked by the mainstream, suggests that, while *The Simpsons* is about the life of the typical nuclear family, its surrealist representation of them hints at a more subversive view on family life – a fundamental basis of the show. Groening's colouring of the characters in yellow also, according to Paul Wells, helped to give the show a "conspicuous identity" *(1998, 13)*, making it easy to find when channel surfing, in addition to its critical role as outlined by Furniss.

The program's use of parody and satire is extensive and has come to define it, and indeed the whole genre of television animation, over the years. The use of these elements has allowed the program to have a fully present element of self-referentiality and irony, lacking in many live-action sitcoms, thus allowing the show "to address topics and issues that live-action sitcoms" *(Stabile, C. and Harrison, M. 2003, 9)* could not. Of equal importance in the understanding of much of the content within *The Simpsons*, is "its audience's televisual

literacy" *(Stabile, C. and Harrison, M. 2003, 9),* which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is central to the recognition of the show's intent. By making allusions, references to and parodies of many contemporary and pop culture signifiers, the show assumes its audience comes in with a pre-existing knowledge of these elements and then allows them to complete the picture for themselves. These references and intertexts give the audience a certain pleasure from their own process of decoding the show's intent; this is something equivalent of being 'in' on an inside joke. As Victoria O'Donnell writes, "one source of pleasure is the recognition of references to other television programs or characters or events" *(2007, 79)*.

We are greeted with a parody at the very beginning of each episode: the title sequence. It is parody in the Hutcheon sense of the term in that it functions not to mock the original, but rather to pay an "oblique homage" *(Greene, T. 1982, 46)* to it. In this case, the original title sequence being parodied is that of *The Flintstones*, with Homer's trip home from the factory honouring Fred Flintstone's commute, ending with the family all sitting together in front of the television, as they did in *The Flintstones*.

As in *The Flintstones* before it, *The Simpsons* also makes widespread use of pop culture characters and situations. Many celebrities have been impersonated within the show (often voiced by the celebrities themselves, such as U2's appearance) and many recurring characters have been voiced by celebrities, such as the character Sideshow Bob, voiced by Kelsey Grammar (of *Frasier* fame). All of these characters and situations allow for the show

to make many counterculture attacks on the mainstream, as well as for more lighthearted humour.

The combination of family life and outward society projected by *The Simpsons* has allowed the program to relate subversive ideologies to a widespread audience, thanks to the format of the sitcom. This "combination of commercial and social sanction and subversive expression" *(Tueth, M. 2003, 140)* even connects the program to theories relating to 'carnival' tradition, as appropriated by Mikhail Bahktin. In fact, Robert Stam's study of carnivalesque pitches the intentions of the show (and even more, perhaps those of *South Park)* quite accurately:

> *"Carnival represented an alternative cosmovision characterized by the ludic undermining of all norms. The carnivalesque principle abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes, and creates another life free from conventional rules and restrictions. In carnival, all that is marginalized and excluded – the mad, the scandalous, the aleatory – takes over the center in a liberating explosion of otherness."*
>
> *(1989, 86)*

With this model applied to *The Simpsons*, it is no wonder that it, like *The Flintstones* many years before it, garnered a wider adult audience than children audience, "with viewers above 18 constituting nearly 60 percent of the audience" *(Hilton-Morrow, W. and McMahan, D. 2003, 81)*. Its subversive take on the American family-oriented sitcom gave it a freshness lacking in many live-action contemporaries, similar to the situation of *The Flintstones* in the 1960s. It also birthed many offshoots, few as successful as it was (with notable exceptions such as MTV's *Beavis and Butthead* and FOX's *King of the Hill*). One

show, however, took the formula behind *The Simpsons* success and pushed it to new, even more outrageous, extremes. It was a show about four young boys living in the small Colorado town of South Park.

3.4 South Park

The ushering in of cable television in the mid-90s added a variety of new channels all hoping to gain a dedicated viewership. As seen before, such fledgling networks have often been the catalyst of animated television shows which were able to push the boundaries of conventional television content and rewrite the rule books. The relatively young Comedy Central channel would be the catalyst of one of the most controversial, and yet thought provoking shows in the history of television, *South Park*.

Airing on prime time Comedy Central in 1997, *South Park* used its "inappropriateness as a crucial source of ironic humour, helping to launch a whole new generation of animated programs intended primarily for adult audiences" *(Booker, K. 2006, 125)*. Credited by M. Keith Booker as bringing "tastelessness to the level of an art form" *(2006, 128)*, *South Park*, created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, also has (like *The Flintstones* and *The Simpsons* before it) a relatively simple narrative outline – it follows the lives of four young boys and the events which surround them. The characters are, however, anything from simple. From arguably the protagonist of the show, Stan Marsh, to the marginalized (due to his Jewish heritage) Kyle Broflovski, to the bigoted and foul-tempered Eric Cartman to the impoverished and muted Kenny McCormick, these four young boys present a foul mouthed crudeness previously unheard of in any television show.

The outrageousness of the show's premise may have something to do with its channel's willingness to understand its audience. As Eileen Katz, vice president of Comedy Central's programming unit explains: "the adult audience that was weaned on cartoons and is comfortable with animation is telling us they want a product that just isn't aimed at their kids, and TV is responding" *(Richmond, R. 1996, 40)*. This relates, again, to the impact of the 'changing of the guard' in television viewership as discussed earlier.

The narratives within the show are complex and usually multithreaded within single episodes. Small incidents in the lives of the four boys often end up creating pandemonium on an international level. Oft times, however, it is the boys who stand as the voice of reason when the adults descend into hysteria. In a recent example, "HumancentiPad" *(Season 15, Episode 1, 2011)* the small misjudgement of Kyle Broflovski agreeing to the company Apple's Terms and Conditions disclaimer without reading it before using their iTunes program leads him into a hellish nightmare wherein he is captured by Apple businessmen and forced to be part of a human experiment by a seemingly crazed Apple CEO Steve Jobs. This is because, apparently in the Terms and Conditions, he has unknowingly agreed to being used in such an experiment.

In a linked, but specifically shared narrative, Eric Cartman is horribly upset that he does not own an Apple iPad (though his mother offers him similar alternative tablet computers, he insists on the Apple product). Annoyed with this, Eric Cartman publicly accuses his mother of "fucking" him out of getting his iPad. This is, however, interpreted by members of the public who hear the debacle as case of molestation on the part of Eric's mother.

Meanwhile, Kyle, along with two others, is being kept prisoner at Apple's headquarters, and becomes part of an experiment by Steve Jobs to make what he calls a HumancentiPad (referencing the cult horror film The Human Centipede, released in 2010) wherein one person's mouth is attached to the other's anus, effectively making a 'human centipede' out of the three people. Jobs intends on using the three people to power an iPad which will be able have even more functionality than a standard iPad. However, as Kyle repeatedly signs forms (once again, without reading through the Terms and Conditions first) by the Apple henchmen to free himself from the centipede, Jobs becomes infuriated because his creation "will not read" – a fundamental flaw in the design of the HumancentiPad. Cartman, now on the Dr. Phil show, tells Dr. Phil and the audience how his mother continually "fucks" him (meaning, she will not buy him what he wants) but the audience reacts in horror, believing Cartman to be a victim of molestation. Eventually, he is compensated for his 'trauma' suffered by Dr. Phil who plans to make him the first owner of Apple's new HumancentiPad. Elated, Cartman notes its many functions, most impressed by the fact that it defecates into Kyle's mouth (Cartman has antagonized Kyle since the show's inception, based purely on Cartman's anti-Semitic racism towards Kyle's Jewish heritage). Kyle's dad, Gerald, however comes to his son's rescue, after working out a way with Apple's Genius employees at an iStore to release Kyle from the Terms and Conditions binding him to be part of the HumancentiPad. Frustrated, Steve Jobs orders the centipede to be dismantled and Kyle, relieved, goes home. Cartman, infuriated by his loss, shouts at God who has also apparently "fucked" him before being struck down by a bolt of lightning.

This episode encapsulates many of the elements that have defined *South Park*'s intent over the years. From a critical point of view, it abounds in parodic references, social satire and

complex narrative devices, as well as intentional crudity. It manages to weave multiple contemporary pop culture references together (in this case the Apple company as well as the horror film *The Human Centipede)*, and, possibly more than any other show, requires an absolute knowledge of such references on behalf of its audience to comprehend its intent. In this case, the "naturalization" by an unknowing viewer of the three characters into a 'centipede' would probably come across as a completely outrageous and downright silly show that favours scatological humour as its basis for 'getting laughs'. With a knowledge of the referents, however, the show in fact becomes a parodic (and, in this case, mocking) representation of the ridiculousness of public consumption. It is, in fact, ironically placing itself at odds with a certain outrageousness that has become central to its own public consumption. This is due to content on the show which "privileges violence, profanity, and scatological humour, as well as racial and ethnic slurs" *(Ott, B. 2003, 220)*. The public outrage over the show by many groups seemed only to fuel the fire and *South Park*, after one year, was "the top rated series on cable, seen by some five million people every week" *(Collins, J. 1998, 76)*.

Its visual style also plays into Maureen Furniss's "independent animation" with its very limited style of animation, together with its very direct 2D cut-out aesthetic, has allowed its creators to use such independent animation to become a platform from which they can launch their subversive attacks on many different facets of contemporary society and pop culture. *South Park* will also be a case in point for my exploration of the dichotomy that exists between animation and narrative which I will look at in Chapter 5.

Returning to the episode, it also, like both shows discussed before it, makes frequent use of public icons to aid many of the narratives. The public figures are usually subjected to the same 2D cut-out aesthetic that the main characters in the show are (there are notable exceptions, however, the gigantic 3D monster of Barbara Streisand being a particularly memorable one). In this episode, Steve Jobs (voiced by the creators as opposed to himself), is familiar to us in his blue jeans and black top but his crazed character in the show takes his real-life enigmatic persona and redresses it as a sadistic dictator of a Nazi-like technology company. Elements of extraordinary ridiculousness and frank transgression like this inform what I spoke of at the end of chapter 2 as 'brutish parody', inherent in many contemporary shows, started, in my opinion by *South Park*.

It is parody in that it meets the formal criteria required to be understood as such (double layered, ironic critical distance) but its brashness and unforgiving directness doesn't allow the viewer the time to go through the decoding process, nor does it afford the time to naturalize the content into one's own interpretations. Rather, the bombardment of the content in this brash fashion makes for a hybrid decoding process that seems halfway between formal interpretation and uninformed naturalization. This brutish parody seems a lot closer to the version of parody for the contemporary than Hutcheon's still quite formalized account. It also links with her writings of parody not being "trans-historical" *(1985, 10)*. It is not aimed at an all-knowing elite; rather, any and every person who is exposed to it is greeted with the same mental bashing as the last, therefore allowing its subversive content to reach a wide and varying audience on the same level of interpretation. It is not a critic's parody.

It is therefore also not a show which requires a specific audience demographic and as such has had equal viewership of people under the age of 17 (even, according to Collins, under the age of 11) to people in their late fifties. It has however over the years come to settle with the young-adult audience (18 to 30) because of its pop culture references and ingenious crudity which has become embedded in the collective consciousness of that age group. The show continues into the present day, showcasing its tradition of shock value underpinned by complex critical commentary which has been watched by millions, as well as influenced much of the contemporary animated shows which followed it. The final section of this chapter will be a brief outline of the channel which brought *South Park* to the masses and was also home for my case study, *Drawn Together*.

3.5 Comedy Central

Created by the "merger of two other comedy channels" *(Ott, B. 2003, 220)*, sources differ on the founding date of the American cable channel Comedy Central, though it most probably started airing on April 1, 1991 (a fitting date for a comedy channel). As David Marc writes, Comedy Central initially "experimented with a radio-inspired presentational format in which host figures sampled highly edited stand-up clips, organized by content theme" *(1997, 188)*. It soon digressed from this "vee-jay sampling" *(1997, 188)* theme into more sitcom based comedy shows, initially incorporating many reruns of older shows in addition to original shows of a somewhat offbeat character – an element which would come to define the channel in the coming years.

Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist was the channel's first foray into broadcasting an original animation show, gaining popularity amongst the channel's relatively small viewership. In order to widen its audience, the channel also partly funded the production of some later episodes of the British sitcom, *Absolutely Fabulous*. The channel was still, according to Brian L. Ott, "barely a blip on the televisual landscape and, in fact, many cable systems did not even carry the channel" *(2003, 220)*. This would all change with the premier of *South Park* in 1997.

South Park, airing in 1997, would become "the highest-rated show ever on Comedy Central" *(Carter, B. 1997)*. Parker and Stone chose the network to air *South Park* partly because they liked the content that the channel was willing to air and partly because the show was deemed by many as being too controversial for mainstream television. The popularity of the show was spread largely by word of mouth, and the channel's viewership increased by approximately 50% in *South Park's* first year of broadcast. Other now famous shows like *The Daily Show With Jon Steward* also benefitted from being aired after *South Park* as the animated program helped them secure audience members who tuned in for *South Park* and would end up staying on the channel after the show had ended.

Being home to a show like *South Park* has also made Comedy Central controversial, however. The channel has been lambasted by many religious and conservative groups, particularly the Parents Television Council, which has criticized *South Park's* depiction of God on the show as a small, strange reptilian creature. Furthermore, the channel was forced to censor one of *South Park's* most controversial episodes, simply title "201" on the premise that it would show the Islam Prophet Muhammad's face to the public, an act which would

have insulted Islamic religion at large. *South Park* creators Parker and Stone even received death threats from the radical Muslim website known as "Revolution Muslim".

Despite the controversial nature of content screened on Comedy Central (from *South Park* to *The Daily Show* to *The Colbert Report)* the channel now enjoys a vast viewership which has been expanded into an international audience. South Africa now lists the channel as the latest addition to its DSTV bouquet of services and it enjoys popularity in other countries such as Poland, Germany and New Zealand, to name a few.

The next chapter will provide a case study of *Drawn Together*, a relatively short animated series which originally aired on Comedy Central in America from 2004 to 2007. Following in the footsteps of *South Park*, *Drawn Together* makes controversial statements at every turn and, while relatively cultish in its audience, has enjoyed a certain degree of success, even leading to a full-length feature film in 2010. Thus, the show's original broadcast on Comedy Central fits in with the channel's reputation of showing daring and edgy material at the risk of having widespread controversy.

Chapter 4: Drawn Together

"In fact, I find the program as a whole to be a scathing satire on contemporary morals."

Foxxy Love, Season 2 Finale, March 15, 2006

This chapter consists of a case study of the Comedy Central animated television show, *Drawn Together,* which aired for three seasons between 2004 and 2007. In many ways this show continues in a similar tradition to *The Simpsons, Beavis and Butthead* and *South Park* in terms of its content and background ideology. Its satirical nature employs parody as "a vehicle for ridiculing the vices or follies of humanity" *(Hutcheon, L. 1985, 54)*.It was able to push the boundaries of what was acceptable to put on television, arguably even more so than a show like *South Park*. In another sense it could be argued that the show was not quite as successful as shows like *South Park* in its treatment of content, as it was ultimately cancelled after three seasons. Throughout this chapter I will address the show's successes as well as its shortcomings to determine how it informs a contemporary understanding of the adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television show. Most importantly, I also wish to analyse the show simply because no serious scholarly work has yet been undertaken on it (besides M. Keith Booker touching on it at the end of his book, *Drawn to Television*). I would therefore like to expand the exploration of this genre of animated television into newer

material, as shows like *The Simpsons* and *South Park* have been repeatedly analysed in both a general and scholarly manner.

Finally, I will be doing this particular case study as I find the premise (and much of the execution) behind *Drawn Together* very provocative and interesting and, though not without its flaws, it provides a rather 'fresh' critique on many aspects of society that shows like *South Park* have 'picked on' since their inception.

Conceived by David Jeser and Matt Silverstein (writers of *3rd Rock from the Sun* and *The Cleveland Show* fame), *Drawn Together* is based on the idea of being "the first animated reality show ever" (the show's original tag line). Thus it is based on two popular reality shows of the time, MTV's *Real World* and *Big Brother*. Where *Drawn Together* is different is that its housemates are all cartoon characters who are identifiable by very specific and rather easily recognised drawing styles. They all live together in the *Drawn Together* house "where they must all learn to coexist, despite their very different backgrounds, personalities, and animation styles" *(Booker, K. 2006, 158)*. In the following few pages I will outline each of the eight characters, their specific drawing style and how they manifest themselves within the show. It will also become clear, through these character portfolios, that their personalities and antics throughout the show generally go against how an audience would typically perceive such animated characters (due to their associations with the specific drawing styles and the signifying processes they naturally imply). The characters often end up being parodies of their drawing style but, in other cases, reinforce many underlying stereotypes inherent within them.

4.1 Characters



Though a protagonist is never clearly defined throughout the series, the character who mostly tries to keep the housemates on the (somewhat) straight and narrow is Foxxy Love. Based on the animated character Valerie Brown from the Hanna-Barbera cartoons *Josie and the Pussycats*, Foxxy is an African-American, ex-girl band ('The Foxxy 5') singer with a feisty attitude and a fox's tail. She is typically dressed in an all orange boob-tube and hot pants (and a g-string in plain sight) with a cap; she is presented visually as quite a sultry and voluptuous character, though her sexuality is often shadowed by her quick intellect (though vice versa would be true in certain circumstances too). She also has a noticeable twang in her accent, leading to certain stereotypes associated with Southern State accents such as a perception of low culture.

Foxxy often falls victim to racism throughout the show, most notably from other housemate Princess Clara who, upon meeting her in the first episode, calls her the "servant girl" and asks Foxxy to take her bags to the room (*Season 1, Episode 1, 2004)*. Though offended by the racism of various characters throughout the show (in the second season finale she decides to leave the rest of the cast to come live in South Africa), she often tries to understand where the underlying hatred stems from and handles the problem in her own way. As such, she comes to terms with Princess Clara's inherent racism because she realises that it is a symptom of her racist upbringing. In coming to peace with Clara, Foxxy ends up

having a long and rather eroticised kiss with her, which seems to stem Clara's hatred somewhat (Foxxy also gets her own back in a Disney-like song the two sing wherein Foxxy exclaims "I'm totally Frenching a racist ho").

Foxxy is not, however, an all righteous character. In many episodes she reinforces stereotypes associated with African-Americans and is, indeed, racist in her dealings with other races. In the first episode again, after being called a "servant girl" by Princess Clara, Foxxy replies in the confessional room: "Foxxy ain't a slave to nobody!...Nobody but the rhythm!", before breaking out into a dance for the rest of the shot. In the same episode, Foxxy does the stereotyped "finger wagging" movement with her hand, moving it swiftly from side to side in the "Oh no you didn't" fashion. This action continues through her interactions with the other characters throughout the next few scenes, reinforcing a stereotype typically associated as being an African-American characteristic showing a particularly defensive attitude. She also has an ongoing story about her father who abused her at a young age, but who she hasn't seen in years (21 to be exact). Her racist antics are also varied; in the second season episode entitled "Ghostesses in the Slot Machine" *(Season 2, Episode 6, 2005)* she refers to Native American Indians as "Woo-woos" and often refers to Princess Clara as a "white bitch".



Princess Clara is the next character in the house. She is described by M. Keith Booker as being "a generic fairytale princess from the Disney universe in the

mould of Sleeping Beauty" *(2006, 158)*. Personality-wise, she is "beautiful and musically talented, but bigoted and hopelessly naïve about sex" *(Booker, K. 2006, 158)*. Often breaking out into highly inappropriate songs (she sings sweetly about bullies, for example, to Wooldoor Sockbat in "Requiem For A Reality Show", as being "abused at age 6 and molested at 12"), Princess Clara is bound by racist stereotypes and is highly gullible*(Season 1, Episode 4, 2004)*. For example, Foxxy Love once says Clara will believe anything and, sure enough, the show cuts to Clara listening to Wooldoor reading the Bible, commenting "He died on the cross for our sins you say? Yeah, I can see that"*(Season 1, Episode 2, 2004)*. She then becomes a hardened Christian, often using the religion as a basis for judging and hurting the other housemates (notably Foxxy Love and the homosexual Xandir) – a possible critique by the creators on how religion is exploited in contemporary societies.

Though seemingly suiting the innocence and naivety her character would typically signify, Clara reverses the role of sweet princess in almost every episode by her bigoted and racist innuendos. Her seemingly perfect physical form is also called into question in *"*Clara's Dirty Little Secret" wherein her vagina is revealed to be, in fact, a monstrous octopus-like creature, which Clara refers to as her "octopussoir"*(Season 1, Episode 2, 2004)*. This, she explains, is the reason why she is so naïve about sex. The show here, in a rather controversial application of body politics, spoofs the perfect female form so often employed by Disney and suggests that, in many ways, the perfection of the Disney princesses is really something inhuman. It also parodies the Japanese manga fascination with 'tentacle porn' but, in some strange way, seems to pay homage to it too.



The third female character in the house is Toot Braunstein. A clear parody of the famous 1920s cartoon, Betty Boop, Toot is, unlike Boop, overweight with an insatiable appetite, and has an incredibly violent persona. Appearing in the show in black-and-white (contrasting with the vivid colours of the rest of the housemates), Toot is easily angered and spends most of her time in pursuit of food. Her eating habits also lead her to be at the receiving end of many jokes, for example, in ”The One Wherein There Is A Big Twist”, she is thought by a local tribe at an island to be a beached whale*(Season 2, Episode 1, 2005)*. For this reason they make many human sacrifices to appease her, but, as she grows more monstrous, devouring entire people in one giant gulp, they eventually try to blow her up.

Unlike Boop, Toot is seldom the heroine of the show. From the first episode she makes her villainous intentions quite clear to the viewer and, throughout the series, goes out of her way to hurt (or eat) her housemates. In “Clara’s Dirty Little Secret”, for example, Toot maliciously convinces Princess Clara to have an abortion (even though she isn’t pregnant) and proceeds to push her down multiple flights of stairs (they even enter the ‘M.C. Asher Room’ – based on the artist’s famous surrealist painting of a room of staircases)*(Season 1, Episode 2, 2004)*. Toot does, sometimes, become the unassuming hero of the show. In “The One Wherein There Is A Big Twist, Part 2”, upon being lost on the abovementioned island, she is blown back into the house by the natives of the island. Upon arrival, she eats the

character Strawberry Sweetcakes in a massive gulp. Sweetcakes was the new character who was to take Toot's place as a housemate but turned out to have an inbred hatred of Wooldoor Sockbat's race and was subsequently trying to kill him*(Season 2, Episode 1, 2005)*.



The first male character of the house is called Captain Hero. A parody of the Marvel comic superhero Superman, Captain Hero is an outwardly macho superhero whose "sexuality becomes increasingly ambiguous as the show proceeds" *(Booker, K. 2006, 158)*. Often well intentioned, Captain Hero nevertheless uses his superhero powers to calamitous effect. In "Little Orphan Boy", he finally reunites with his parents after thinking they were dead many years before*(Season 2, Episode 3, 2005)*. He comes to find out that he was born as "the lamest superhero ever" and tries desperately to prove to his parents that he is not lame. After many failed attempts, he decides to blow up his home planet of Zebulon to prove that he is worthy of the title of superhero. Alas, when his parents find out about Zebulon's destruction, they are horrified at the fact that everyone they've ever known or loved is now dead. Captain Hero's intention of gaining acceptance from his parents thus becomes a failed and murderous event.

In accordance with his title of being "the lamest superhero ever", Captain Hero is often found to be emotionally fragile and is often seen crying alone in the shower when feuds break out. He also frequently shouts in a high-pitched, almost feminine, voice when

perturbed by the other housemates. In “The One Wherein There Is A Big Twist, Part 1”, Hero is constantly interrupted by Toot while on the phone before screaming loudly, “I said I’m on the phone!” in a highly falsetto ring*(Season 1, Episode 7, 2004)*. This feminine side of Captain Hero also plays into his growing affection for Xandir, another male character in the house. After taking Xandir to the mall early in the first season, Hero spends an increasing amount of time in the room crying on Xandir’s shoulder about various issues. They are also captured in later episodes engaged in coitus. Captain Hero is thus a mock parody of Superman and other superheroes in his effeminate personality but still does much to reinforce his machismo in scenes like the destruction of Zebulon and various sexual misdemeanours.



Xandir is a video game lookalike, most commonly associated with Link from the game “The Legend of Zelda”. While in constant denial of his homosexuality at the beginning of the first season (he constantly assures the housemates, “I’m on a never ending quest to save my girlfriend!”), Xandir eventually comes out to the housemates mid-season 1. Much like Foxxy Love, Xandir thus becomes the victim of verbal abuse from Clara, in his case due to his homosexuality. In “Gay Bash”, upon his ‘coming out’ to the others, Clara tries to comfort the distressed Xandir, saying “It’s not your place to punish yourself, it’s God’s”*(Season 1, Episode 3, 2006)*. Ling Ling, another character in the house, notes later in the season that “homosexuality is like being born with red hair, or a dead twin”. Xandir

also becomes involved in an odd relationship with Captain Hero, the pair often sharing a great deal of intimacy, only for Captain Hero later to denounce Xandir's homosexual lifestyle.

Needless to say, Xandir is often driven to suicide attempts due to the homophobia of some of the other characters. It is here that his 'format' as a video game character becomes a problem. Returning to "Gay Bash", upon stabbing himself with his own sword, he falls to the ground but, just as he dies, he disappears into a silvery cloud only to 'respawn' standing in his original position. A counter above his head goes from 50 lives to 49 – a parody on early platform games like Super Mario Brothers and Crash Bandicoot wherein players often end up 'earning' multiple lives in order to complete the game.

His video game format also affords him other qualities typically associated with classis video game characters. For example, he often ends up spinning in repetitive circles for minutes on end or occasionally 'powers up' upon the completion of certain tasks that he does. He also has different permutations inherent in his personality. Mostly seen as the sweet and vulnerable of the male characters, he occasionally becomes exceedingly mean to the other characters. In one example, Wooldoor Sockbat is being interrogated by Princess Clara and Xandir. While Clara seems to fulfil the 'good cop' role, Xandir becomes almost sadistic in his role as the 'bad cop' and threatens Sockbat with excessively violent overtones.



Though the show refers to him/it as a "fucking annoying wacky whatchamacallit" in the first episode, M. Keith Booker notes that Wooldoor Sockbat "apparently derived from the children's cartoon character Spongebob Squarepants but with a touch of extreme animation reminiscent of series such as *Ren and Stimpy*" *(2006, 159)*.

Although pivotal in certain episodes, Wooldoor does assume a somewhat secondary character throughout the show (though he is never absent from any episodes). He is often involved in cut scene gags which most times (but not exclusively) inform the main scene. One such example is when he is dressed as a Catholic priest teaching Princess Clara the Bible and Christianity in "Clara's Dirty Little Secret" *(Season 1, Episode 2, 2004)*. As such, Wooldoor becomes a shape-shifting (or rather personality shifting) character throughout the show, appearing as a psychologist, a plastic surgeon and a gun toting madman, to name a few.

Wooldoor does, in a sense, become the victim of arguably the most serious case of racism throughout the show at the hands of Strawberry Sweetcake, a seemingly sweet character who is in fact on a bloodthirsty rampage to rid the world of the last of Wooldoor's race, akin to the Nazi holocaust. In one shot Wooldoor shows a finger with a bow around it to which he says "Never forget"; yet the rather sombre lead-up to the framing of the shot doesn't

allow the viewer to roll over in hysteria as one may originally perceive such a scene to do. In this way, Wooldoor very occasionally embodies a serious self-reflexivity of the show's creators, though outwardly he is possibly the bubbliest of the housemates.



Spanky Ham, the third male character (Wooldoor, though understood as male, is never defined by any gender) is described by M. Keith Booker as "an incredibly uncouth 'Internet download' given to openly masturbating, urinating, and defecating whenever and wherever the mood strikes him" *(2006, 158)*. Most probably based on an Internet Flash animated pig (whose flat 2D appearance and limited animation style echoes many independent and amateur internet animations such as the 'Charlie the Unicorn' YouTube videos), Spanky Ham's character is as straightforward as his animation style.

Without any real investment in the other characters of the house, Spanky is constantly exploiting and pranking others in a very often crude manner. In "Gay Bash", Spanky uses Ling Ling to create sweaters from the new sewing machine won by the housemates and, as the episode progresses, becomes more oppressive towards a now-enslaved Ling Ling in order to make more money. He is also at the forefront of many of the bigoted comments in

the house, never shying away from racist, sexist, anti-religious and homophobic jokes. In one example, Spanky remarks that the biggest mistake he ever made in his life was when he "converted to Islam in 2001" *(Season 1, Episode 6, 2004)*.

In some respects, however, Spanky Ham seems rather savvy. Breaking the 4th wall much more than the other characters (who mainly only do so when in the confessional room), Spanky often makes comments about the show directly to the camera. In this way he evokes the show's sense of self-referentiality and awareness of its own premises. In the first season finale when the housemates are greeted by a character, Bucky Bucks, who looks to be a parody of both Richie Rich and Donald Trump, and are tasked to try start small business operations to avoid being voted out, Spanky asks, quite frankly, if it's "a parody of *The Apprentice?" (Season 1, Episode 7, 2004)*. He also frequently questions the script of the show itself, once remarking "this is so stupid, it's like some third grader wrote this" *(Season 2, Episode 3, 2005)*.



The final character in the show, Ling Ling, is an Asian character animated in the style of Japanese anime and more specifically based on the wildly popular Pokémon character, Pikachu. Although initially of an indeterminate gender (with the housemates frequently referring to Ling Ling as 'it' in the first season), we do

come to learn in the season two episode “Super Nanny” that Ling Ling is in fact a male character.

Ling Ling is mostly sidelined throughout the series, also being subject to extraneous gags in the episodes. The show’s awareness of this is also apparent, however, as in “Captain Hero’s Marriage Pact” where, as an aside to the main narrative of the episode, we see an extended scene of Ling Ling celebrating his birthday at a big birthday table all alone, while the other characters tell the main story*(Season 2, Episode 4, 2005)*.

Speaking in subtitles, Ling Ling’s broken English (with a specific focus on his inability to pronounce words with the letter ‘L’ in them) provides much of the humour behind his character. In “Freaks and Geeks”, Ling Ling goes to visit his sick father (also a Pokémon-like character who, surprisingly, speaks English) who has to actually read the English subtitles to understand Ling Ling*(Season 3, Episode 1, 2006)*. A ‘footer’ advert for the Jon Steward Show comes on over the subtitles and while the audience initially thinks it is just a Comedy Central advertisement for the show, Ling Ling’s father humourously quips “Oh, I like that Jon Stewart fellow.

While a ferocious warrior at heart whose main wish throughout the show is to battle with the other housemates in true kung fu fashion, Ling Ling becomes subjected to much oppression at the hands of the other characters due to his inability to speak English and, it would seem, due to his Asian heritage. Thus, he is often forced to wash the dishes or, as previously mentioned, do slave labour for the other housemates. He also seems to reinforce certain Asian stereotypes, for example, with his never-ending obsession with used

underwear. He does occasionally, however, get his own back. An example of this occurs towards the end of the first episode of season one, where, upon Toot Braunstein uttering what Ling Ling perceives to be a call to battle, he proceeds to brutally murder her (only for her to return unscathed in the next episode, of course).

4.2 Narrative Strategies

As the above description of the housemates in *Drawn Together* indicates, it is apparent that, from a narrative point of view, the show is full of parodic and satirical ideologies and seems somewhat intent on presenting them in the most blatant manner. In this sense I would like to suggest that the narrative strategies employed by *Drawn Together* utilise the same brand of 'brutish parody' that I had previously associated with *South Park*. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to examining the narrative strategies employed by the show to explore how, or if, it continues to bring adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television into new realms of discourse and, equally important, how successfully the show executes what it sets out to do.

Let us firstly examine the premise of a typical episode of *Drawn Together*. In similar fashion to *The Simpsons* and *South Park* before it, *Drawn Together* is based on a relatively simple concept – it is an animated reality show based on MTV's *Real World* and *Big Brother*. It is also designed to be specifically an animated show due to characters and plot ideas that would be virtually impossible to recreate in a live-action scenario. It is also, like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, packed with multiple narrative threads and a wealth of parodied content. Victoria O'Donnell explains that *The Simpsons* requires competence on the viewer's

behalf in properly interpreting the show's typical incorporation of "15-20 allusions to outside events" *(2007, 79)* per episode. Similarly, *Drawn Together* packs a full portion of material which requires an equal amount of audience familiarity with contemporary events and people in order for audiences to fully grasp some of the more obscure humour in the show. As writers David Jeser and Matt Silverstein remark in an interview on the *Drawn Together* movie (released in 2010), the television series was packed with many narrative ideas, "jammed tight, screaming at you, rushing it all" *(Peters, J. 2010)*.

An episode, then, usually contains rather ridiculous events that the housemates partake in, or are forced into by their 'Jew Producer'. It is never quite clear whether the housemates are really fond of living together, with many episodes showing them going out of their way to compromise each other or, in the case of the first season finale, uniting as a group to achieve a common goal. The main narrative threads are interspersed with various cutaways or one-liners which usually allow the writers to make quick and often highly controversial statements. These usually revolve around critiques on religion, racism, homophobia, capitalist greed or the poor state of American television. Religion in particular seems to be at the centre of much of the show's critique, and is given a harsh treatment throughout by the writers. While *The Simpsons* was "quite moderate" *(Booker, K. 2006, 65)* in its treatment of religion in particular, *Drawn Together* blatantly mocks ideologically opposed institutions, and uses its cutaways as brutal 'skits' to demonstrate this. Many cutaways also involve nudity in different forms, from Princess Clara and Foxxy Love's breasts to Spanky Ham's penis; *Drawn Together* joins a select few animated shows where such a large amount of cartoon nudity has been broadcast uncensored.

The cutaways are often made to the confessional room, an interview room similar to those of the *Big Brother* houses, wherein characters speak to the cameras (and therefore the viewers) about personal issues or thoughts. It is in this room that Princess Clara makes one of her most controversial statements in "The One Wherein There Is A Big Twist, Part 1", after learning that Foxxy wishes to threaten the producers of the show by getting all the housemates to merely sit in protest, thereby giving the reality show no real content for television*(Season 1, Episode 7, 2004)*. In retort, she quips "Silly black people, they always think they can accomplish anything by just sitting around". Statements like these are common amongst all the housemates and occur every few minutes within an episode. The episodes end with an occasional 'lesson learned' speech from one of the characters, but more often they are left open ended, usually in a state of chaos.

The pacing of the show provides another interesting execution of the narrative ideologies within it. For the most part, episodes move at a relentless pace, from crude pranks to irreverent comments and parodies which inform its satire of contemporary cultures. This makes the show play into the 'brutish parody' discussed in chapter two wherein the viewer is bombarded with such a large amount of signifying material in such a short space of time that the only means of interpretation of the content becomes a hybridized site blending the competence to decode such signifiers with the Hutcheon theory of 'naturalising' content into one's own, but not necessarily the writer's, understanding. However, *Drawn Together* often halts its furious pacing to the point of using practically no animation and no dialogue to allow certain meanings, or merely jokes, to sink in – almost to the point where it may feel a bit laborious to watch after a minute or so. An example mentioned earlier on was Ling Ling's birthday, where Ling Ling sits at a barren birthday table. Another example of this halt

in the episode shows Foxxy Love standing and watching a clock which counts the days since she had last seen her father*(Season 3, Episode 1, 2006)*. The only actual movement within the frame (for the camera remains stationary too) is of the digits showing the seconds counting. The scene carries through for almost a minute and, in many respects, one is removed from the typical hysterics of the episode up until then and lulled into a much more contemplative state of mind, truly considering Foxxy's dilemma on a more serious level, before being thrown back into the next scene. These 'extended sequences' give *Drawn Together* a different overall pace to other animated shows and, while one certainly couldn't compare the technique to the pacing of, say, Iranian Open-Image cinema, it does certainly provide the viewer with the opportunity to be more completely immersed on both an intellectual and purely visual level in the episode than many other animated television shows.

As has been established (by Foxxy Love herself, in fact) *Drawn Together* is a satirical critique of contemporary culture. Its satire is largely informed by the parodies it makes, which allow viewers to re-evaluate certain norms by approaching known content with ironic inversion. It also utilizes many known stereotypes, mainly the characters themselves and how one would classically perceive them based on their drawing and animation style, but works to both undo and reinforce such models. The show's main source of parody comes from reality television shows and it frequently spoofs many different versions of the genre.

The first season finale involves a parody of *The Apprentice*, aptly noted by Spanky Ham. Entitled "The One With A Big Twist", it parodies the idea of twists that many reality shows exploit to gain a greater viewership. This episode frequently employs bangs and loud

explosions, often with little to no connection to the story and often in the middle of dialogue sequences to highlight the absurdity of reality shows in their quest to be taken seriously and as reality while being based on hyper real situations at best. In the episode, the housemates, in attempt to win a first-place monetary prize (like most reality shows have) meet a supposed billionaire called Bucky Bucks. Seemingly a young boy like Richie Rich, he nevertheless has the identifiable hairstyle of Donald Trump and informs the housemates that they will be taking part in *The Apprentice.* Continuing the show's rampage against religion, Bucky Bucks informs the contestants that they will have to start their own religions to move to the next round, after all, he remarks, "religion is a big business" *(Season 1, Episode 7, 2006)*. As the contestants get voted out, giving Bucky Bucks an orgasmic pleasure in informing them that they are fired, they eventually turn on him in what is purported to be another giant twist in the story which reveals Bucky Bucks to actually be broke. In a further big twist, Bucky Bucks reveals himself to be the Jew Producer. With the housemates willing to leave the house, he hunts them down in a helicopter, only for it to end up blowing up the *Drawn Together* house. The contestants, too, are blown away, but land up on an island at the end of the episode and, thus, the season.

The second season starts with the contestants all on the island, only to be greeted by Jeff Probst (of *Survivor* fame), who arrives riding to them on the backs of two dolphins. Oddly enough, though the contestants are on the tropical island, they still have sessions in the confession room from their now blown up *Drawn Together* house. As they figure out a way off the island, they walk a few paces and find themselves situated in a gigantic island city, where they catch the first aeroplane back to the *Drawn Together* house. This episode thus parodies the 'reality' that *Survivor* purports to having, wherein contestants in the show are

most probably not as badly done by as they are shown to be by the edited clips. Though *Drawn Together* makes it much more farcical, it does touch on the fabrications behind reality TV in both this episode and the season 1 finale.

The show also spoofs the talk show/live studio audience environment in both its second and third season finales. In both these episodes the cast of the show sits on stage with the 'Jew Producer' as they run over highlights of the season. Many of the highlights have nothing to do with the show, however, and the recurring live action clip of a Neanderthal in the forest pops up on several occasions. The 'Fun Facts' of the show are also farcical. Whereas such 'pop-up' tags identify interesting facts about any given show, *Drawn Together* spoofs both these other shows as well as itself by constantly deprecating its own purpose. In the second season finale, 'Fun Fact' tags appear such as "*Drawn Together* – watched by over 500 billion viewers!" and "James Earl Jones originally voiced Ling Ling"*(Season 2, Episode 15, 2006)*. By the third season finale, the final show of *Drawn Together* before it was cancelled, the writers seem intent on drawing the focus of the show to the fact that it has been cancelled, once again highlighting the mirroring process that the show constantly undertakes*(Season 3, Episode 14, 2007)*. Between each character's own song spot (each a parody of many genres and conventions in musical theatre), they are told if they are safe from being voted out of the house or not. These decisions are edited by cuts between the characters and the 'Jew Producer' as the tension mounts at them finding out if they are safe from the vote, a parody of how shows like *Idols* build tension through any means possible, often to the chagrin of the viewer. The 'Fun Facts' continue flashing up on the screen, this time aware of the show's cancellation. They note how "the Fun Facts from last year were much more interesting!" and "This season finale is even worse than last year's!". Lastly, as the 'Jew

Producer' is about to reveal who will ultimately leave the house, and Princess Clara boldly exclaims "We all know we're coming back next year", a 'Fun Fact' tag appears on the bottom of the screen, saying "When this line was written, *Drawn Together* had not yet been cancelled". At the end of the show, after a constantly delayed process of finding out who leaves the house, it is revealed that a small mouse, Munchkin Mouse, will leave – he is then inserted into many well-known shots to viewers of the series, though it is obvious that he has never been on the show before. As the show ends, the entire cast leave through a door marked 'Unemployment' with their heads bowed down.

The show's awareness of its own processes also extends to its medium. That is to say, *Drawn Together* seems steeped in the history of the adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television show. Aside from the characters, who most obviously highlight the show's association with other animations, *Drawn Together* contains many plot devices that allow it to parody other animated forms before it. The most obvious example of this is "The One Wherein There Is A Big Twist, Part 2" where the housemates, upon losing Toot Braunstein on the island which they escaped from, begin a search to find a new housemate to fill her place*(Season 2, Episode 1, 2005)*. Accordingly, they interview a variety of different cartoon characters that are, like them, quite obvious references to other animated shows and animation styles. These characters range from a Speedy Gonzalez type of mouse to a 3D character who seems based in the *Tekken* video game series, to Terry Gilliam's animations from Monty Python (in this case, a big foot which squashes Spanky Ham). The most pointed example comes from their interview with Wilma Flintstone. In it, Wilma notes that she is the "kind of girl who uses a pterodactyl as a record player". This makes reference to the use of prehistoric animals as appliances in *The Flintstones* but, more importantly, it references

scores of other shows which have parodied this particular scene from *The Flintstones* (in which the pterodactyl looks up at the camera, squawks, and then remarks "It's a living"). Both *The Simpsons* and *South Park* make reference to this scene at one point, and *Drawn Together* continues this extended parody within a parody in Wilma's interview.

Ultimately, however, *Drawn Together* would be cancelled at the end of its third season (as the finale blatantly suggests). It does not, then, stand next to *The Simpsons* and *South Park* in its successes on a commercial level (both of those shows still continue to make new material), and critically it has not enjoyed the same reception as the other two shows. Though it has enjoyed a cult success in subsequent years (leading to a full-length feature film in 2010), it has not had the same widespread impact on the mainstream as shows like *South Park* or even *Beavis and Butthead* have. There are various reasons for this.

Firstly, it was never shown during prime time (due to its content's flatly controversial nature – even compared to *South Park*) so, even though it aired straight after *South Park* and used that audience to build its own, it never managed to retain the same number of viewers. It thus became a niche, almost underground, show which catered for viewers with very specific tastes. Its blatant mockery of religion, homosexuality, sexism and different cultural heritages also led to its decreasing viewership (the show seems intent on offending every type of viewer at some point or other). While the same may be said for *South Park*, I believe that it is the way in which the two shows address their controversial commentary which ultimately separates them.

Drawn Together's main flaw, I believe, is its descent into a show which seems more interested in highly controversial one-off gags than developing a truly unique narrative and critical identity. A show like *South Park*, on the other hand, though based in similar crudity, has managed to craft its storytelling devices into quite an eclectic and even original aesthetic. While *South Park* seamlessly weaves multiple narrative threads together in sometimes ingenious ways, *Drawn Together*'s descent into madness, which seems to occur in practically every episode, leaves many narrative threads loose, preferring instead to provide its main source of satirical and parodic content in short sequences and controversial one-liners. This, I believe, is its greatest shortcoming as a continuation of the adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television show. It does not evolve the devices laid out by shows like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*; instead it limits itself to making the gags more blatant and controversial at the expense of creating a greater overarching narrative. In effect, *Drawn Together* is much more in tune with a sort of 'slapstick' aesthetic than a show like *South Park*, whose increasingly complex narrative devices actually afford the viewer more laughs but with an impressive sense of catharsis too.

Is *Drawn Together* a step in the evolution of parody, then, in Hutcheon's terms, or just a continuation of an overused form? I think in many ways it does evolve the form. Its premise of being an animated reality television show is to television what *Gorillaz* are to music – a completely inverted means of addressing its own medium. *Drawn Together*'s use of highly recognizable character stereotypes put together inside a *Big Brother*-like house, constantly forcing the viewer into a re-evaluation of such stereotypes, makes for a concept possibly much more intriguing than both *The Simpsons* and *South Park* before it. But, ultimately, its

self-limiting foundation of humour based in gags and crudity does not afford it the same overall effect that shows like *The Simpsons* and *South Park* have.

The next chapter explores these animated shows as they enter the mass media. How do they manifest themselves within a global model of television? What is their relationship with their viewer? And, more specifically, does the audience influence the content of such shows? Lastly, it will explore the dichotomy of the animation aesthetic and its relation to narrative strategies to provide a sort of look into where this adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television show is heading in the future.

Chapter 5: Young Adult-Oriented Animation and the Mass Media

This chapter will explore how the young adult-oriented animated television series manifests itself within the contemporary mass media. Accordingly, I would like firstly to define and analyse what mass media and mass communication are. I will look at the production system behind the creation of television series to ascertain what objectives production companies have when these shows are commissioned. The television production system is based specifically on the American model, as this was the original model upon which the majority of other television systems were subsequently based. I will therefore also explore how markets and audiences are changing in the 21st century both with the introduction of cable and satellite television as well as the internet. This will lead to a discussion of the importance of niche markets in today's television industry as opposed to the hegemonic rule of the old network giants.

This chapter will also show how certain postmodern aesthetics, as discussed in chapter 2, have manifested themselves within mass media communities. These aesthetics can be seen through the constant barrage of texts, videos and other media formats as they intertwine within the many locations and devices of modern communications and media. This chapter will highlight how these trends ultimately play an important role in the continued success and future of the adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television show.

Lastly, I would like to explore the relationship between the technical aspects of animation and narrative strategies employed by shows over the last 40 or so years to determine how current trends, influenced by these new waves of cultural mass communication, have affected these different values in programs over time. What is more important to these shows' target markets? Do the animation values play as crucial a role in audience reception or are viewership ratings moving towards shows of scathing social content with rather limited animation values?

5.1 Mass Communication and Mass Media

Joseph R. Dominick provides an insightful analysis of both mass communication and mass media in his book, *The Dynamics of Mass Communication*. He stresses that the pace with which mass communication has evolved in the last century is almost overwhelming; that where telegraphs and telephones were once considered to be at the forefront of mass communication, they have been effectively (and incredibly quickly) outdated by many different communication technologies in the past few decades (with telegraphs now completely phased out due to the SMS capabilities of cellular telephones to name but one culprit). Dominick notes that mass communication is but one means of communication between humans, with "interpersonal communication" and "machine assisted interpersonal communication" *(2011, 7)* being the other two major constituents. Interpersonal communication refers to the direct communication between two people, as in a conversation, and machine assisted interpersonal communication refers to a technology assisted communication between two people (or a small, rather tight-knit group of people). Mass communication evolves from both of these scenarios and is defined by Dominick thus:

> "Mass communication refers to the process by which a complex organization with the aid of one or more machines produces and transmits public messages that are directed at large, heterogeneous, and scattered audiences"
>
> *(2011, 9)*

Where interpersonal and, though to a lesser extent, machine-assisted interpersonal communication is based in people's knowledge or contact with each other, mass communication works with incredibly large quantities of people at once, where they may not know of each other, or know that other people are utilizing the same source of mass communication. Examples of this are, classically, the buyers of a newspaper: large quantities of people will buy the same newspaper and be exposed to the same information and communication, but will be unaware of other people reading the same paper. More recently, the Internet functions in much the same way, though it has the flexibility to enter into machine-assisted interpersonal communication by means of social and online chat sites such as Facebook, where people can use the technology housed within the Internet to communicate in a more direct (though still separated by either distance or time) fashion with other people that they know who also utilize the same social communication site.

Media, as a term, is in fact the plural of medium. As such it relates to the platforms or differing mediums through which mass communication is entered into by a group of individuals. Mass media, therefore, "are the channels used for mass communication" *(Dominick, J. 2011, 12)*. Due to the heterogeneity of audiences entering into a space of mass communication, the mass media which provide such sites must create programs which are able to draw large numbers of different individuals into a single experience. It is through this

collective action of a mass usage (or in the case of television, mass viewership) that production companies and broadcasting channels make a profit from a product of mass media.

Mass communication does have specific requirements in order for it to operate successfully. Dominick points out five of the major components which have traditionally defined organizations which produce mass communication. He does state, however, that the Internet provides certain exceptions to these:

1. Media must be "produced by complex and formal organizations" *(2011, 14)*

That is, mass communication must be managed within a business structure which allows it to properly control the flow of money, the coordination of its employees and its responsibilities, to name a few elements.

2. "Organizations have multiple gatekeepers" *(2011, 14)*.

A gatekeeper is "any person (or group) who has control over what material eventually reaches the public" *(2011, 15)*. A broadcast channel, such as Comedy Central, would be an example of a gatekeeper.

3. Mass communication organizations "need a great deal of money to operate" *(2011, 15)*

Traditional television and production companies require large amounts of capital just to become functional, with even more money to produce shows and other operating expenses. This is why advertising on television has always been an expensive investment for any company – television channels use this income as their main source of revenue. With the global economic crisis of the past few years, cheaper operating costs for television shows

have been on the agenda for many broadcasting channels – hence, the mass saturation of reality television shows in today's television market. The Internet has also further shown how entertainment can be profitable on a much lighter budget.

4. Mass communication and mass media organizations “exist to make a profit” *(2011, 15)*.

Aside from government funding in public broadcast networks, privately owned networks rely heavily on advertising as their primary means of income. Advertising agencies will only pay the large costs required to run advertisements on a channel which has both their specific target market as well as a strong viewership. This further places a responsibility on the network's part of ensuring their content meets the demand of their audience so that they can secure advertising investments.

5. Mass communication and mass media organizations “are highly competitive” *(2011, 15)*.

Following from the abovementioned point, gaining a large viewership on a broadcasting channel is of vital importance to that company’s survival. In the days before cable and satellite television, very few channels were accessible (in the U.S.A. the three main channels were NBC, ABC and CBS) and so gaining large audiences was not as gargantuan a task as it is in the present, where literally hundreds of channels are competing for viewership.

How then is mass media used by the individual? Individuals enter into the mass media based on a “uses-and-gratifications-model” *(Dominick, J. 2011, 39)*. Basically put, audiences will be attracted to media which satisfies their personal needs. Dominick notes that this uses-and-

gratifications-model can be split into six categories which help in unpacking what the individual looks for when approaching the mass media.

1. Cognition: This is the individual's need to 'be in the know'. This cognition can be split up into two groups: an individual's need to keep up with current events (such as watching the news) and an individual's curiosity to explore things which may relate or inform their personal experience (e.g. a person with a keen interest in cooking would watch dedicated Food Channels).
2. Diversion: This is mainly an individual's need to relieve boredom, "escape from the pressures and problems of day-to-day existence" *(2011, 39)* or to have an outlet for "pent-up emotions and energy" *(2011, 39)*. Shows which could take a "back-seat" when it comes to being mentally stimulating are central to this idea; thus shows like *Idols* are popular because they are entertaining without putting much mental strain on the viewer.
3. Social Utility: This refers to the use of media by the individual to inform what is known as "conversational currency" *(2011, 41)* or the need of the individual to strengthen ties with friends or family by relating to them through a familiarity of mass media. Thus, conversations such as "Did you watch the final episode of *Lost?"* or even intellectually charged discussions like "Do you think *South Park* makes a scathing satire on contemporary American culture?" inform this belongingness which the mass media provides.
4. Affiliation: This relates to the abovementioned category but has been catapulted by the explosion of the Internet and other social media over the last decade or so. Affiliation is informed by a basic psychological need of humans to belong to some sort of collective of like-minded individuals. Thus, the prevalence of

Facebook, Twitter and other social platforms have generated an explosion in this sort of mass media. Whereas television programs may prompt conversation between individuals, the very nature of these social media to connect individuals and grant them the freedom to communicate about a variety of different topics, moving beyond any specified conversational currency.

5. Expression: The need to express one's individuality has been a need for most humans throughout history (Dominick notes that cave paintings are some of the earliest examples of this phenomenon). The Internet has provided individuals with various platforms on which to create these expressions, whether it be music pieces on Youtube or any variety of blog sites where the writer writes whatever he/she wishes. These sites of expression are usually visited by large quantities of people who would want to associate with a particular person's means of expression.
6. Withdrawal: People use mass media as a means of avoiding certain responsibilities or to be left to themselves. This is most commonly seenin large public spaces (like public transport) where people use media, such as music on an mp3 player, to passively ignore what is going on around them. Media can also be used as an excuse to avoid responsibility for certain things, for example when a child refuses to do chores on the basis that he/she is finishing watching a program.

5.2 The Evolution of Broadcasting

After the first television broadcast in 1939, the medium truly took off in the 1950s when major American broadcast channels, CBS, NBC and ABC were founded. In television's

earliest days, it was already a medium controlled by advertising. Dominick notes that "most prime-time programs were produced by advertising agencies that retained control over their content" *(2011, 230)*. As such, television has been at the forefront of much social criticisms from its inception, with writers such as Muriel and Joel Cantor referring to it as "the result of the capitalist system" *(1992, 83)*.

In these early stages of television, gaining the widest market share with regards to viewership was the top priority for the three major networks. These channels would specifically produce programs which would "appeal to a large number of viewers" *(Cantor, M and Cantor, J. 1992, 85)*. While initially game shows or quiz shows as a large portion of their content, stations began producing shows which became a microcosm of American society at large. By the 1960s, therefore, family-based dramas and sitcoms had become the centrepiece of much of the broadcasting content on television. As shown in *The Flintstones* earlier, many television shows reflected on the various social constructs of the time, a trait which has been carried through television programming through the decades. For example, where 'canned laughter' dominated sitcoms from the 1960s through to the 1990s (as was considered 'trendy' as a feature of the sitcom during these periods), the majority of sitcoms in the present day have no such audible audience, fitting in with the progress made in the American (and indeed worldwide) televisual literacy of today. The viewer has become more attuned to the content within the show due to his/her contemporary, technology-centred upbringing and is able to access the humour in modern sitcoms in a fashion which does not require any 'hint' by the show itself. As Muriel and Joel Cantor explain, "the product of television is culture" *(1992, 51)*.

To return to the programming of the 1960s: the content of these shows was not made purely to reach a large audience, but "as a means of social control to maintain the status quo" *(Cantor, M and Cantor, J. 1992, 84)*. Television became a highly influential means of communicating certain fundamental ideologies pertaining to the classic 'American dream' to increasingly large audiences. By the end of the 1960s, in fact, "more than 95 percent of all American households owned at least one TV set" *(Dominick, J. 2011, 231)*. This, coupled with the fact that the main networks would "control the production process of drama in a variety of ways" *(Cantor, M and Cantor, J. 1992, 53)*, rendered the power of television executives and advertising moguls very substantial, while the audience would remain somewhat powerless in relation to what was shown to them. By the 1970s, content on television had began to slump in its originality, with the main networks holding on to the belief held by mass society critics that commercial programming could be "low-level, sensational, standardised products" *(Cantor, M. and Cantor, J. 1992, 89)* and still make sizeable profits. With the increasing popularity of cable, however, the playing field, and the way we understand broadcasting politics today, was about to change.

Cable television is noted to have "began modestly in the 1950s as a device used to bring conventional television signals to areas that could not otherwise receive them" *(Dominick, J. 2011, 260)*. While having humble beginnings, cable television soon became a worry for the major networks who were concerned that their audiences were being "siphoned off by the imported signals" *(Dominick, J. 2011, 260)*. This competition grew steadily through the 1960s and 1970s, with the space race between America and the then Soviet Union aiding in the launch of various satellites, some of which would become hubs for transmitting television via satellite signal. The first official satellite broadcast was aired on a fledgling

network called HBO which transmitted “Thrilla in Manilla”, the world famous boxing match between Muhammed Ali and Joe Frazier in 1976 *(Dominick, J. 2011, 260)*.

By 1987, the number of households in America using cable had risen to over 50 percent. The monopoly held by the three major networks and their advertising partners had now become rather seriously jeopardised. The introduction of “direct-broadcast satellites (DBS)” *(Dominick, J. 2011, 261)* in the mid-1990s served as competition to both the major networks as well as to cable television. Audiences in America, previously powerless at the hands of the limited content afforded to them, now had a choice of literally hundreds of channels to pick from. The market place had changed from mass audience viewership to smaller, and much more specific, niche markets. The audience had now become an incredibly important factor in the success of failure of broadcasting channels, thus the parameters of power had shifted from the networks to the viewers. On a critical level, one could say that the cultural imperialism practised by networks in the 1960s had become “opposed by an ‘active audience’” *(Bielby, D. and Harrington, C. 2002, 217)*.

In 2007 the amount of American households which had access to cable and/or satellite television had risen to about 66 million *(Dominick, J. 2011, 261)*. With the rise of the Internet in the mid-1990s, audiences had become even more fragmented and, of even more concern to all television institutions, had begun to move away from the traditional means of viewing television. The new Internet community provided a new wave of mass communication and mass media with the individual more centralised to the process. Furthermore, as Hanson Hosein (of the University of Washington) notes in his show, *Media Space*, “it’s this network phenomenon, the Internet, that really allows us to take action and

do so many things in a collective way that would've not been possible 40 years ago" *(2011, 6:50 – 7:00)*. The next section will deal with the constantly changing demographics regarding television's viewership and how it has evolved into the fragmented and niche audiences of today.

5.3 Viewership

While in their book *Prime Time Television: Content and Control* Muriel and Joel Cantor highlight the Marxist belief that the audience is a subservient mass, one which "is helpless to influence program content" *(1992, 83)*, with the rapid changes to the television industry in the last 20 years, writers such as Victoria O'Donnell contend that audiences' influence over networks has become so powerful that "viewer reaction may sometimes 'save' a TV program from cancellation" *(2007, 27)*. One should always remain aware of the fact, however, that the institution of television at its core "is an aspect of the dynamic logic of capitalism" *(Barker, C. 1999, 45)*. The power of the viewer is rather ambiguous as a concept and is a key discussion in the literature mentioned above. Briefly, while viewers may have greater influence over content aired currently, this position of power is still granted by the networks initially, rendering the viewers' influence somewhat powerless.

Regardless of one's stance on this subject, it is undeniable that viewership, ratings and audience influence have definitely gone through a fundamental transition in the last 40 or so years. From the outset of television, a medium reliant on advertising as its base form of income, channelling large audiences (and therefore large commercial buying power) has been crucial to any network's success or failure. In the early years of television the three major networks in America would compete for mass viewership. Prime time evolved as a

result of this, as networks became familiar with the schedules of most American households and scheduled their program times accordingly. Prime time, between 7 and 9 p.m., would be the time slot where networks would put their highest rated shows on, hoping to garner large audiences and, thus, large advertising profits. As O'Donnell notes, "ratings are what determine whether programs get cancelled or continued" *(2007, 27)*. The competing main broadcasting networks would attempt to 'outdo' each others' shows in an attempt to win viewership. Thus, when ABC (at the time the network with the least viewership ratings) aired an animated show, *The Flintstones*, in its prime time slot, it was taking a calculated risk to win viewership by airing an animated show – a move unprecedented in prime time programs at the time. Rivals NBC and CBS followed suit, airing animated shows in their prime time slots for the next two years until the next new prime time craze rolled around (which wasn't, as we have seen previously, rooted in animation).

The business of studying viewership patterns and trends would become very important to networks, which base their livelihood on these factors. For this reason, the practice of monitoring audiences' viewing patterns and channel choices grew into a lucrative industry in itself. The most widely known means of monitoring audiences viewing habits, the system still widely used today, is known as the Nielsen Television Index of NTI, founded by Arthur Nielsen of the Nielsen Media Research company. Originally begun in a rather crude fashion consisting of select households diarising their viewing habits and forwarding these diaries to the company to be compiled into specific data, the NTI now uses an electronic instrument, known as the *People Meter*, to gather information about households' viewing habits *(Dominick, J. 2011, 251)*. Distributed to roughly 37,000 households in the U.S. (2011 estimate), the NTI's *People Meter* tracks about 90 percent usable data which is compiled

into reports handed to the associated networks. The NTI can, today, even track viewing habits on advanced decoders like TiVo (PVR in South Africa), decoders which allow viewers to pause live television and record certain programs to be watched at a later date. Other reports, such as the National Audience Demographics (NAD) and Designated Market Areas (DMA), exist to aid the collection of this data *(O'Donnell, V. 2007, 25)*. These reports are not cheap, and networks "pay millions of dollars annually for the service" *(Dominick, J. 2011, 251)*.

These viewership ratings can now also be calculated using several formulae. The rating of a show determines its popularity with a group of people. More importantly for the networks, "ratings determine how much the advertisers pay for commercials, the larger the desired audience, the higher the cost of commercials" *(O, Donnell, V. 2001, 25)*.

Typically:

$$\text{Rating} = \frac{\text{Number of Households Watching a Program}}{\text{Number of Households in a Given Market Equipped with Television}}$$

Similarly, specific audience shares can be worked out by using slight modifications of this formula.

It is through the Nielsen Index that researchers have been able to see the dramatic decrease in network audiences over the past 40 years due to the introduction of cable and satellite (approximately from a 90% audience share between the main networks to less than 40% share in the present day).

The Nielsen system is not, however, without its detractors. David Lieberman (from *USA Today)*lists five major issues underlying a growing scepticism about Nielsen:

> "1. Nielsen does not count the viewers who watch television away from home, for example, in offices, hotel rooms, on college campuses, or in bars.
>
> 2. Nielsen undercounts children, who often forget to note their activities in the Nielsen diaries or meters.
>
> 3. Surveys include too many older and wealthy viewers, which especially exaggerates the viewers of premium cable channels such as HBO and Showtime.
>
> 4. Nielsen undercounts minority viewers.
>
> 5. Because Nielsen measures local viewing only four times a year, it encourages stations to run contests or sensational programs during Sweeps months to boost their ratings."
>
> *(Lieberman, D. 1996)*

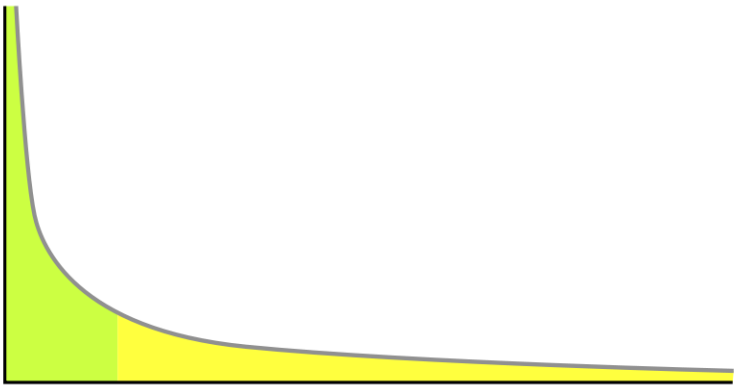
As one can see, the Nielsen Index has, in some ways, fallen into the same trap of disregarding audiences and their influence as the major networks of the 1960s. As such, it fails to fully include many niche audiences, markets which have, in the contemporary broadcasting realm, become crucially important to networks and ratings. As Dominick notes, "media audiences are becoming less 'mass' and more selective" *(2011, 20).*

Many cable and satellite channels cater specifically to certain niche audiences (like Comedy Central), and have arrived at a means of still creating profitable enterprise from relatively (compared to the heyday of viewership ratings in the 1960s) small audiences. To understand how this can be achievable, let us look at the "Long Tail Theory" of Chris Anderson.

Anderson's theory posits that there is a specific relationship between sales and products in a demand model.

The theory can be visualised thus:

Sales



Products

As can be seen, there is a dividing line between the two colours on the left and right hand side of the graph. On the basis of products sold, the left side of the graph is favourable to the highest sales, with the right hand side showing lower sales for more niche products. In an example of music sales, music shops (such as Musica or Look 'n Listen) would aim for the left hand side of this graph, thereby stocking large quantities of high-selling products by the biggest commercial artists in the industry, and stocking smaller quantities of less commercial artists or genres. Stocking large quantities of niche music may damage the profits of the music shops as the customer base for the niche music is comparatively smaller than that of commercial artists, and the shops end up holding onto unnecessary stock for extended periods of time, which they must eventually sell practically at cost price to get rid of the stock.

Online shops like Amazon.com, however, have the advantage of storing media digitally in their catalogues. They can effectively stock a much wider range of products, catering to an array of different markets, commercial and niche, since holding stock digitally has practically no operating costs. Niche music consumers then have the option to buy very select titles and, in the long run, sites like Amazon.com can make around as much profit from various niche markets collectively as they make from their commercial sales.

Broadcasting networks can function in a similar fashion. While they would classically aim for one large mass market, the variety of different channels can now each cater to more select audiences but still make profits from their niche service. With audience fragmentation being the status quo of the present day, no one network could hope to control the entire viewing population of a given area and, therefore, gaining the viewership of a strong niche market could be seen as the most economically viable option in contemporary television broadcasting. Thus, shows with niche content and in niche markets have been allowed the opportunity to develop and gain loyal fan bases, which still enables them to earn their networks lucrative advertising profits. I will now explore the niche market inherent in adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television shows to explore if the dynamics explored in the "Long Tail Theory" are applicable to this market and its audiences.

5.4 Young-Adult-Oriented Animation in Mass Media

Young-adult-oriented animated television series have always favoured specific target markets as well as fledgling networks which are willing to broadcast less commercially based programming in an attempt to secure those markets. When *The Simpsons* aired on Fox Network in the late 1980s, its risqué content found a huge crossover into the mainstream audience, though it never safeguarded its content. *South Park* continued this success, using its edgy, and often scathing, humour combined with an arrestingly simple style of animation to capture massive viewership numbers which, will firmly rooted in the age groups of 18-30, also included both younger and older audiences. It helped secure Comedy Central's status on cable television, and further propelled other shows aired before and after it (like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* for example). It also crossed over into the realm of the Internet successfully, with its cyber community averaging "10,000 visitors a day in 1998" *(Ott, B. 2003, 221)* – a mere year after it had begun (and, indeed, at a time when the Internet was still considered to be in its own infancy).

Not all adult- and young-adult-oriented animation series manage to garner such widespread audiences, nor or many conceived with this particular ambition. While there was a tendency by many production houses to air the next *Simpsons* or *South Park* in the mid-1990s, relatively few of them had any prolonged success with mainstream markets. Even *Beavis and Butthead* (originally aired on MTV), a show which did have crossover success, was eventually moved "into a late-night slot, which probably suited its core audience of young adults better" *(Booker, K. 2006, 128)*. The dominance of *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, while helping this particular brand of animation find a popular audience, also strangled many other shows of similar content airing at the time. *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist* was aired on Comedy Central pre-*South Park* in 1995. Utilizing a "technically inventive" *(Booker, K.*

2006, 106) style of animation "in which characters and foregrounded objects appear in color with constantly wavering outlines, while the roughly drawn black-and-white background remains stable" *(2006, 107)*, the show enjoyed critical and somewhat commercial success and was seen as a pioneering series for animation in the 1990s. The critical and popular acclaim of *South Park*, introduced in 1997, would lead to *Dr. Katz'*s eventual demise, with its cancellation from Comedy Central on 24 December 1999. Many other shows, like *Clerks* (the animated adaptation of the popular Kevin Smith film of the same name) suffered similar fates at the hands of the animated 'giants'.

Drawn Together, aired originally in 2004, seemed to oscillate between mainstream success and inevitable failure. Capturing a niche, but loyal, audience from its inception (helped, in part, due to the familiarity of its characters' animation styles, augmented by their offbeat personalities), *Drawn Together* enjoyed a decent mainstream success, even with its lukewarm critical response. In a *New York Times* article from January 29, 2007, the Nielsen ratings of the show were published, reporting that *Drawn Together* drew an audience between 18-24 of approximately "435 000" viewers *(New York Times, 2007, Web)* per episode. While it was not in the same league as its Comedy Central counterpart *South Park* (which was, by 2007, drawing at least 5 million viewers per episode), it managed to retain a fair portion of *South Park's* audience, as it was aired after *South Park* at 10 p.m. By the third season, the show's audience had dwindled somewhat, and criticism of the show focused on its lack of evolution with narratives and characters, a trait discussed by various online communities. *South Park*, on the other hand, continued to impress audiences and critics with its fresh and relevant content, maintaining its original crude attitude but managing to evolve each of its characters through multiple narrative arcs as well as constantly parodying

many present-day situations (the Steve Jobs and Apple iPad episode comes to mind). *Drawn Together'*s ultimate demise in mid-2007 was, however, due to the fact that its creators Matt Silverstein and Dave Jeser had, according to *thefutoncritic.com*, "signed a two year contract with 20th Century Fox" *(2007, Web)* and had to leave Comedy Central. They would return in 2010 to make *The Drawn Together Movie: The Movie!* with Comedy Central, but this is the last work currently done with the *Drawn Together* franchise.

Besides the big shows like *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, has the adult- and young-adult-oriented animated television show enjoyed profitable successes through the mass media? I would suggest that overall it has. While it has taken time and various experimentations with the format, it does seem in the present day to have found a comfortable and very specific niche market over various different platforms. It has the added bonus of catering to a target market, which is typically the largest consumer market in television and other media. This audience, according to Joseph Dominick, spends approximately "4 hours a day average" *(2011, 275)* watching television as well as about "10-20 minutes a day" *(2011, 275)* watching online video – more than any other audience demographic. Additionally, it is an audience which watches the most late-night television (mostly by college students). This has led to the rise of the popular *Adult Swim* network, which airs on Cartoon Network (and Vuzu in South Africa) in the late night slots (between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m.). *Adult Swim* features a host of young-adult-oriented animation shows from the popular talk show *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast* to more offbeat and, quite frankly strange, shows such as *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* (whose main characters are all fast-food constituents such as a box of fries and a bottle of cold drink). Launched in September 2001 on Cartoon Network in the U.S., *Adult Swim* enjoys continuing success in both America and locally on Vuzu. The fact that the *Adult Swim* block

was imported to an even smaller South African niche market speaks for both brand and market loyalty to this very particular flavour of animation. M. Keith Booker has referred to the *Adult Swim* block as "the true mover and shaker of adult-oriented television animation in the early twenty-first century" *(2006, 166)*. It is now a bona fide space for animations of practically any type of content to be given exposure to an audience which shows loyalty and commitment to such an open experimentation of the form. It has also had crossover success of its own, with shows like *Family Guy* becoming popular with larger audiences as well as many scenes going viral on online video sites such as YouTube.

5.5 New Trends: Animation vs Narrative

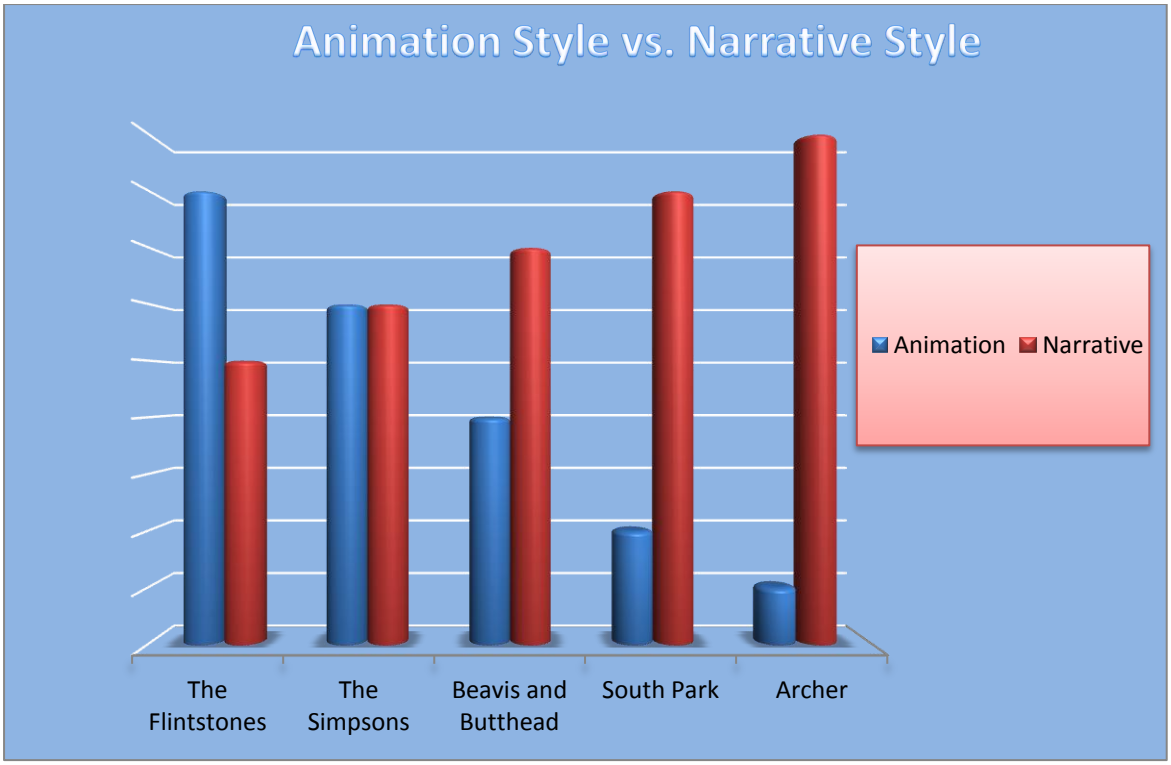
Harking back to what was discussed earlier about television's place as a medium which mirrors the contemporary society it is situated in, young-adult-oriented animation shows are no exception. Speaking to an audience which is generally technology savvy and current with growing cultural trends, young-adult-oriented animated shows are required to be of absolute contemporary relevance to retain any sort of viewership from their niche market.

The most notable trend has been the ever-changing relationship between animation styles and narrative strategies employed by these shows. It is a relationship, it would appear, which seems to work an inversely proportional manner. When *The Flintstones* aired in 1960, though its actual animation (in terms of movement) was limited, its striking visual style of highly contrasting colours and broad clear outlines (echoing the trends in visual art of the time) was perhaps more arresting to the viewer (who was more used to black-and-white live-action sitcoms) than its somewhat simplistic narrative strategies. By contrast, *The*

Simpsons was much more reliant on its biting commentary on American culture of the 1990s and 2000s than its animation (which was still visually appealing in its own unique way).

Shows of the 90s like *South Park* and *Beavis and Butthead* created a further contrast between animation and narrative techniques, where the former's animation consisted of paper cut outs, a handful of different mouth movements and characters literally bouncing through the frame without moving their legs. Its narrative strategies, however, spoke to a young audience which was becoming increasingly exposed to, and critical of, its surrounding social strata. For this reason, the show's irreverent humour took precedence over its extremely limited animation and, effectively, the animation began to become a mere complement to the narrative strategies employed by the show.

In the 2000s, with the growing population of the Internet and of easy-to-use animation programs such as *Adobe Flash*, animation complexity continued towards absolute simplicity, with an audience (becoming an ever-closer community through the exploits of cyber communities) who grew more fascinated with satirical content than Disney-style visual pleasure. Shows have become more and more crude in their visual aesthetic, but it is an aesthetic which has become synonymous with the young adult audience of the present. *Archer*, an animated show about a misogynistic and arrogant spy of the same name, is animated with *Flash* technology and uses very little character movement throughout the series but continues the trend of irreverent humour established by *The Simpsons* and *South Park* to an audience that is very literate and familiar with the aesthetics of *Flash*. The graph below shows how this inversely proportional relationship between animation and narrative has emerged over the last 40 years:



Finally, what trends will emerge in the young-adult-oriented genre of animation in the next five or 10 years? It is a genre which is changing almost annually, as media and communication trends evolve with the fast-paced evolution of technology. With animation as a representation of technology's evolution over time, how will it contend with new forms of media in the next 10 years in order to still be a relevant source of entertainment to a target market which is constantly on the lookout for the 'next big thing'? How will its relationship with platforms like the Internet change, and will target viewing markets need to be relocated away from the traditional television set? It is an interesting crossroads for many forms of media and mass media but, if history can give us any glimpse into the future, the young-adult-oriented animated television series will be entertaining a variety of different audiences for generations to come.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As the mass media, and particularly the medium of animation, heads deeper into the 21st century, what outcomes are predicted or expected from the adult- and young adult-oriented animated television series? More importantly, how does this form of animation manage to stay relevant in the present day, looking to the future?

This paper has hopefully provided a platform from which these questions may begin to be examined through the next few years. It has been an exploration of this specific style of animation, namely the adult- and young-adult-oriented animated series, from a formal basis of theoretical components which inform its aesthetic and ideological choice. It has suggested that this movement of animation may be highly informative in the evolution of the constituents of parody as it is defined today, suggesting that this movement of animation provides what I loosely defined as a 'brutish parody', in accordance with Hutcheon's belief that no form of parody is 'trans-historical'; rather, the form must and will change with global and cultural changes in contemporary society. The study has also undertaken a functional exploration of how the movement is represented in a more contemporary field, with shows such as *Drawn Together*, using the outlines setup by *The Flintstones*, *The Simpsons* and *South Park,* breaking new ground and further broadening the scope of material that this type of animation can attempt to comment on and critique.

Furthermore, it has explored the logistics of how the adult- and young-adult-oriented animated series enters the current global culture, in an age dominated by constantly evolving forms of mass communication, notably the Internet. It has explored the ever-changing consumer environments over the past four decades, from network to cable television and beyond, to determine how programming of often controversial nature has managed to secure a successful commercial viability in a market with a relatively small viewership. It questions the legitimacy of these animated programs in the future within a medium, television, which is rapidly gaining various other forms of competition. While television itself has proven a steadfast opponent to many other forms or platforms of media (seemingly having triumphed over almost all other competition thus far), the digital revolution may prove to be an opponent out to end television's global dominance. How this affects the future of programming, and more specifically this very niche market-based movement of animation, will seemingly unfold in the near future.

The paper's main purpose, however, is to pay a sort of homage to a movement on television (which, by definition, is a highly commercial commodity), which strayed from the safety nets which managed to capture so many live action programs through the decades. This adult- and young-adult-oriented animated movement or genre gained its popularity from being arguably the most refreshingly original programming on television, with its catching visual aesthetic and its scathing, often ingenious narrative strategies (which, at the surface seem often crude and vulgar, but upon further inspection, provide humour of a brilliant and slick postmodern offering). It is a form which stands at a complete odds with the commercialism of most television programming, yet has found a means of crossing over into target markets

which are considerably mainstream. It has also been, rather surprisingly, embraced in a decent variety of academic canonical literature over the past decade. I say surprisingly because animation as a medium has been, according to Carole Stabile and Mark Harrison, a "conventionally devalued" *(2003, 1)* one, one which has garnered very little critical attention compared to its live action counterparts. While this specific style of animation does have this growing critical interest, it does also remain rather miniscule relative to other forms of popular media.

It is my hope that this study, while expository by definition, has expanded the space from which to look at this animation movement and has built upon both its critical and functional discourses with the hopes of increasing the amount of critical writing being done on it. I would further hope that the brashness of much of the content within this movement, as presented in the paper, incites the reader to revaluate this form of animated television and to view such shows with a renewed sense of criticism .

Lastly, I would like to propose the importance of developing a local scene for this movement in animation. I believe it would provide a humorous but critically interesting perspective on the current South African experience. There is a local consumer market in South Africa, with *Adult Swim* having been aired on Vuzu for the last five years, and, though it may be somewhat niche, looking at the successes that current fragmented audiences still bring to commercial enterprise, this may not be an issue with the right creative foundations in place. It is a movement which allows, even champions, offensive confrontation with issues that contemporary societies like to sweep under the rug, but its biting content and visually

arresting aesthetic may just be part of the answer in igniting a populace which seems to be slumping further into social and intellectual doldrums.

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