



universität  
wien

# DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

*“The Simpsons”* and Intertextuality – How a cartoon  
initiated a second boom in Prime Time Animation

Verfasserin

Claudia Czernecki

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 20. Dezember 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 343

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Diplomstudium Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Betreuer:

Priv.-Doz. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

E-mail adresse:

a9950364@unet.univie.ac.at



## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction: <i>The Simpsons</i> - Entertainment across generations? .....</b>                   | <b>1</b>  |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>1. <i>The Simpsons</i>' production background - A fresh breeze in a stale media landscape....</b> | <b>4</b>  |
| 1.1. <i>The Simpsons</i> ' potential as an animated series .....                                     | 9         |
| 1.2. <i>The Simpsons</i> emerges as a sophisticated and reflective show .....                        | 16        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>2. Postmodernism – How <i>The Simpsons</i> represents a cultural movement .....</b>               | <b>24</b> |
| 2.1. <i>The Simpsons</i> rejects metanarratives .....  | 26        |
| 2.2. <i>The Simpsons</i> represents a fragmented and plural society .....                            | 33        |
| 2.3. Why is <i>The Simpsons</i> hyperreal?.....  | 36        |
| 2.3.1 <i>Homer the passive television viewer</i> .....   | 38        |
| 2.3.2 <i>Cartoon within a cartoon</i> .....  | 40        |
| 2.4. <i>The Simpsons</i> makes 'high culture' more accessible.....                                   | 41        |
| 2.5. Intertextuality applied within <i>The Simpsons</i> .....  | 43        |
| 2.6. <i>The Simpsons</i> reflects upon its own artificiality .....                                   | 47        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>3. <i>The Simpsons</i>' use of Intertextuality .....</b>  | <b>51</b> |
| 3.1. <i>The Simpsons</i> ' transgresses intertextual boundaries.....                                 | 55        |
| 3.2. Forms of Intertextuality embraced within <i>The Simpsons</i> .....                              | 57        |
| 3.2.1 <i>Vertical Intertextuality- The Simpsons alludes to the real world</i> .....                  | 59        |
| 3.2.2 <i>Horizontal Intertextuality – The Simpsons reuses fictional art forms</i> .....              | 66        |
| 3.3. <i>The Simpsons</i> entertains across generations .....   | 70        |
| 3.3.1 <i>Pastiche</i> .....  | 72        |
| 3.3.2 <i>Homages</i> .....   | 79        |
| 3.3.3 <i>Parody</i> .....  | 85        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Conclusion.....</b>   | <b>92</b> |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>Works Cited.....</b>  | <b>95</b> |
| <i>The Simpsons</i> Episode Guide .....  | 102       |
| List of Films .....  | 103       |
| List of Television Programs .....  | 104       |



## Introduction: *The Simpsons* - Entertainment across generations?

*The Simpsons* premiered on Austrian television on September 27, 1991. Even though I was just 10 years old at the time, I remember these days when I watched the trailers on TV, announcing the new cartoon with a lively family as a TV sensation. Their visual appearance at that time was perceived as something unconventional on television and I waited in anticipation to see more. The yellow family with its bright colors immediately won my heart. I was fascinated by their bright colors, rough drawings, Marge's strange hair style and Lisa's spiky haircut. Every now and then somebody tripped, fell down or got punched. Homer was frequently presented as the clumsy father, who most of the time was at his children's mercy. On top of that, I felt connected to them through the issues they presented that in some way mirrored my own life at that time: school is boring; teachers can be unreasonably demanding, tricking/outwitting authorities and arguing with your parents, who don't always seem to know best.

Twenty three years later somehow new episodes of *The Simpsons* are still finding their way to the small screen. The show proved to be a "shining exemplar of family stability in the come and go world of television" (Carr). *The Simpsons*, who by now are the longest running prime-time animation show, evolved into doubtless identified constituents of contemporary U.S. pop culture that achieved iconic status (Alberti xii). I started wondering how a mere cartoon has the capability to still keep me interested in watching it even as an adult, since people commonly grow up to move on to bigger things. As a child I have also watched other programs on television, like *Alf*, *The Flintstone* and *The Cosby Show*, that nowadays wouldn't get my attention anymore the same way they did twenty one years ago.

But as I grew older something has changed in how I see *The Simpsons*. I watched the show regularly, but when I watch old episodes as an adult, I somehow find them even funnier than before. I recognize things that before passed by unnoticed and it feels like watching an old episode for the first time. So I started wondering how is it that *The Simpsons* are produced in such a way that grants it the capability to entertain across generations.

One of the things that I began to notice is the way they refer to other cultural productions and commodities like movies, ads, books and television in general. Whereas, as a child I found mostly joy in the slapstick humor and its bright and unconventional colors, the references to other sources, also known as intertextuality, caught my attention at an older age. So I assumed that intertextuality as a stylistic device, provided by its creators ensured that an older audience still finds *The Simpsons* interesting. Consequently, within this thesis I want to analyze how intertextuality

incorporated within a cartoon like *The Simpsons* contributes to having a broad base appeal across generations.

In order to approach this task my first chapter intends to provide information on the production background of the show at the time of their initiation. Because mass media like television, radio or the Internet advance over time, it becomes necessary to analyze them against their historical background in order to understand their overall impact (Mack and Ott 8). Because *The Simpsons* was launched during a time when the television landscape underwent certain transformations, it is necessary to place the show within an appropriate context. Providing such a background will help to understand how the show pushed existing television boundaries in order to be regarded as a “media revolution” (Rushkoff 292) at the time of their launch.

Having illustrated what circumstances enabled *The Simpsons* to evolve into a cultural icon, I will proceed to analyze the content as well as the format of the show. *The Simpsons* excessively criticizes and mocks society and various social institutions, providing content that is regarded as unconventional. However, *The Simpsons* could not have remained on air if they had not had the public support and the compliance of advertisers. Therefore, it is my aim to illustrate how criticizing sensitive issues without irritating the broad audience with unconventional content could have sustained on network television.

*The Simpsons* emerged in the late 1980s, at a time in which society subsided in between a new and old paradigm. The late 1980s were a crucial time for society as they found themselves in the midst of a significant cultural change. Society encountered a “cultural shift that rival[ed] the innovations that marked the birth of modernity out of the decay of the Middle Ages” (Grenz qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 24). Cultural forms therefore, were comparatively different from their forerunners. A few TV broadcasts at that time have already willingly embraced the existing anxieties arising among society emanating from living in the Information Age, by embracing new cultural art forms of the new era. But I will try to present what differentiated *The Simpsons* from previous TV shows and will try to illustrate some of the key differences along the lines of their excessive regularity, engagement and focus in the application of new conventions, which willingly expose to accept the shifts taking place at that time, being groundbreaking and innovative (Ott, *Small Screen* 15, 58).

The proliferation of new cultural forms equals and has relied “on the transition to an information society” (Grenz qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 14). The utmost extensively recognized label of the artistic taste that to a greater extent constitutes contemporary cultural forms is known as postmodernism. In short, postmodernism denotes a type of contemporary “culture which corresponds to this world view of [the Information Age]” (Sarup qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 14).

*The Simpsons* has been frequently labeled as “the quintessential postmodern television series” (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 61) by many scholars<sup>1</sup>. But since the term ‘postmodern’ is mainly used by academics, the question that arises is, how classifying the show as postmodern improves further understanding of the show and its provocative content. *The Simpsons* can surely be appreciated even without knowing anything about postmodernism. However, an audience familiar with some basic concepts of postmodernism will acknowledge the screws and turns of the creative plot more thoroughly. For that reason, the second chapter of the thesis aims to illustrate how the show embodies postmodernism. The most distinct features characterizing postmodern art forms are a skeptical attitude towards universal truths, fragmentation, the blurring of the boundaries between what is perceived as real and imagined, the mixing of high and low cultural artifacts, self-reflexivity and finally intertextuality. *The Simpsons* embraces all of these features to some extent, therefore it will be my aim to introduce those concepts and show how the show embodies them.

Having set the appropriate framework for the main analysis of this thesis, which is to analyze how intertextuality succeeds in entertaining across generations, I want to explain the concept of intertextuality and its use within the show in more detail. Generally speaking, intertextuality denotes the recycling of old stylistic devices and art forms in order to generate something indisputably new. In more detail, intertextuality refers to the postmodern practice of texts, regardless of their literary or non-literary form, that refer to each other. *The Simpsons* frequently uses preexisting works of art in order to incorporate them within their plots. Intertextuality however, has come to have ambiguous meanings and denotations as well as varying applications since its coinage in the late 1960s. It will be therefore of utmost importance to filter those theories and their developments which are relevant for the further analysis. Having done that, I will focus on the main forms of intertextuality featured within the show, namely vertical and horizontal intertextuality. The first refers to references towards the real life outside the cartoon, alluding to for example politics or famous people. And the second denotes references that hint at other fictional works like movies, literature and television productions that have been produced to entertain in general. The last section of this chapter will be aimed at examining how particular intertextual references provide entertainment and bridge the gap between an adult audience and a child audience. Three main types of intertextual references will serve as basis for such an examination, namely pastiche, homage and parody. Whereas the first two types are to some extent similar with their basic tenets to imitate a preexisting creation without mocking or ridiculing it,

---

<sup>1</sup> See Arnold xiv; Beard 273; Brook 177; Mittell 15; Tuncel and Rauscher 155.

parody in contrast to them adapts a different approach. Following that, I will conclude with how intertextuality applied within the show is capable of sustaining a broad audience.

## **1. *The Simpsons*' production background - A fresh breeze in a stale media landscape**

As mentioned within the introduction, *The Simpsons* was launched during a time when the media landscape underwent significant and far-reaching changes. Two major facts, which brought about extensive and important consequences on the media landscape at the time of *The Simpsons*' initiation, appear to be worthy of further examination. Firstly, cable TV gradually expanded and represented a major threat to traditional broadcast television and secondly, the rise of Fox Network as a newly launched fourth broadcast network that altered the guidelines of what had been known as acceptable television content up to the mid- 1980s, putting "cultural conservatism" (Ott, *Small Screen* 21) to the test. Therefore, the aim of the following section is to provide an understanding of how these transitions contributed to regard *The Simpsons* as revolutionary at the time of their initiation.

Up to the 1980s, companies from a variety of industries in America were facing a relatively easy entry into business. Numerous risky and unsound projects, standing outside the norms of standards launched their business, a few of which eventually became big, without major obstacles of entering the market. But in contrast to that, television has been always restricted and regulated by the 'Big Three' networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), leaving little room for experimentations. The 'Big Three' had very clear concepts about what sort of programming they expected from their entertainment spheres. All newly written shows and projects needed to be approved by one of the Big Three, since television has always been a commodity of these established companies with their own rules and regulations (Sweatpants). Since the launch of television in the 1950s, up to the 1980s, many TV operating companies tried to challenge the Big Three, however none of these establishments persisted (Worringham).

Even though television has accompanied social changes and experienced technical improvements through its thirty years of existence, television itself as a ground for social change was limited. The Big Three relied on its consistency, since its content needed to comply simultaneously with government directions, sponsors and the majority of the viewing audience (Gordon 4). They had a formula that has been successfully applied since the launch of television, not giving much space for any form of change. As a result of such a firm belief in its model of steadiness, broadcasts were mainly ruled by action, mystery and detective shows, soap operas and family comedies. Dramas, which mostly featured detective and cops shows clearly ended with

virtuous American righteousness. Furthermore, one could be sure that there was a puzzle to be clarified and an enemy to be fought off before the show came to an end (Sweatpants). Sweatpants' observation is shared by Ott, who refers to the situation prevalent at the television landscape during the 1980s as a "cultural conservatism" (*Small Screen* 21) that dominated the media landscape at that time, mostly lacking a kind of creativity. Such a deficiency in creativity was reflected in that scripts were not really imaginative, since the ending could almost always be foreseen. The networks simply copied and recopied the same principles year after year until the airwaves were filled with just a few kinds of shows, only a minority of which could even at all be considered quality programming. The networks acknowledged only slight changes in order to back up certain characters to meet the American public wishes. According to some statistics, during the mid-1980s, ABC, CBS and NBC were introducing, continuing or cancelling about 30 shows each year. Most of them experienced low ratings and what is left of them are just the occasional IMDB pages that prove their existence (Sweatpants).

Family sitcoms represented the fundament of the Big Three. On top of the pile rested *The Cosby Show*. Premiering in 1984, McNeil reports that it became an immediate mega hit and ranked as a number one program for the next four years in a row (qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 107). It was uncommon, because it had a predominantly black cast but it was the prime example for a family sitcom: the wise and witty father, the loyal and caring wife and the bright kids that occasionally don't follow the good advice of their parents but over the course of an episode learn that they should. If someone wanted to watch a family sitcom with caring parents and cute children, or a cop show, he could do so seven days a week. If however, somebody wanted to watch something outside of those narrow restraints, viewers were most likely out of luck. There were a few exceptions, but the majority of the new shows were rigidly similar to the ones that were already on. One or two would take off each year while the rest died quickly, and that was the "wan entertainment landscape" of television, in which "*The Simpsons* planted its flag" (Ortved).

Worringham argues that not only the "volatile nature of television programming [...] and complacency" of the Big Three helped *The Simpsons* to come into being, but also the uncertain financial situation of network television at that time. By 1987 total revenues of the Big Three had dropped significantly and for the first time ever, one of them, namely CBS, even noted a net loss for the first quarter. Due to such deteriorating developments on the broadcasting landscape, all Big Three networks implemented severe measures and consequently cut budgets, laid off personnel and got rid of affiliates. These financial uncertainties came into being throughout the late 1980s, as the television market in the USA started changing. The rise of cable television posed a serious threat for networks since it weakened their position (Worringham). Cable TV, in contrast to

network TV, does not have to face fundamental government restrictions, conformist network censors, joined advertising companies as well as the whole television demographic. Because cable TV viewers pay for its service, each station is capable to zero in on more specific market segments, thus providing more diversity to various audiences without tremor to insult its audience with its less rigid content regulations (Gordon 62).

To the Big Three, the rivalry of the Fox Network could hardly have happened at a worse time. When Fox Network established its basis in 1985, the launch faced disapproving laughter, controversy and confusion due to general tensions and worries (Worringham). Although Fox Network similarly found itself in a precarious financial situation, its founder Murdoch nevertheless held massive programming potential in hand at that time. Keeping in mind the repeated mediocrity of the media landscape, offering new shows that were substantially similar to the ones that were already on, Fox Network's aim was to try out something innovative (Czogalla 22). This innovation had to be based upon the premise to make use of the conditions present at the media landscape resulting in the creation of something successful that differs from the encountered mediocrity. The fairly young Fox Network's objectives, from its outset, were to work against the general trend and remain true to its alternative character. Further, Czogalla argues that the broadcaster's intention didn't lie within imitating the Big Three, but rather dedicating itself to new ideas in order to realize them (22). Furthermore, the new network realized the growing demand for the creation of something that has never been previously broadcasted within an industry in which "everything had been done before" (Cartwright 44) in order to foster its image as executing tasks otherwise and contrary to the already existing broadcasts. "A reputation designed to snare a lost audience that had no home. It was the only card they had to play [...] [in] the uphill battle against the reigning networks" (Cartwright 44).

Fox Network's strategy to appeal to a lost audience, that was bored with the banal television programs, offering an alternative to the already firmly organized Big Three, involved a focus on counter-programming (Worringham). This strategy involved the requirement to differ from the already existing networks, by offering programs that until then were unconventional or regarded as new. Under Murdoch's leadership, the network and all its producers were granted the liberty to assault various establishments and entities, including Fox Network itself, granting its partners autonomy to schedule their own shows without censoring its content. In an interview Mike Scully, one of the writers, affirms:

One of the great things about being involved with *The Simpsons* is that it's a completely unique experience as a writer, because on most shows you have to accept the input of the network and the studio, their notes on the things they want to be changed. Normally, there

would be around twelve people going over your script, telling you what's wrong with it and how to fix it, and we don't have that here. We're completely autonomous. We make all our own creative decisions and so, if the show comes out great, we pat ourselves on the back; if it stinks then we have to blame ourselves. (Sloane 141)

Murdoch's competence and vision enabled the emergence of irreverent programming that was based upon his acceptance to ridicule himself, which gave Fox Network the "edge that other networks lacked" (Gordon 58). The basic principle of the broadcaster concerning their programming, drew in the firm belief that "if it would work on one of the other networks, we [FOX] don't want it" (Hilton-Morrow and McMahan 82), reflecting Fox Network's counter-programming strategy. The broadcaster became aware of the fact that as a newcomer it could not compete with the Big Three with regard to total viewership. Therefore, it needed to be distinctive with regard to its programming strategy in order to attract new viewers and strengthen its position. As a result of such freedom given to its producers, one of the first shows Fox Network broadcasted in 1986 was the *Tracey Ullman Show*. The variety show<sup>2</sup>, produced by James L. Brooks, was shown on prime time propagating adult issues such as death, gambling, addiction, religion and many more sensitive topics.

Fox Network knew that in order to evolve into an influential network, it wasn't enough to only attract new viewers, but also to please advertisers. As Brooks' background comprised the broad experience in counterprogramming, as well as niche-marketing (Gordon 44) which was regarded as the formula for success strived for by Fox Network, his expertise was needed in order to attract the key demographics that advertisers were aiming at. According to Mack and Ott, niche marketing, a strategy aiming at profit maximization by targeting at a specific market segment, has dual financial benefits. First, it allows a media corporation to charge a premium for advertising, if they manage to attract a niche audience that is highly pursued by advertisers. Secondly, niche marketing enables media corporations to appeal and influence formerly unexploited markets. Since the interests of certain viewers run contrary or alongside those of the masses, these viewers were mostly indifferent to the message delivered by the traditional broadcast standard (39).

In 1986 Matt Groening, who previously was already working on a cartoon *Life in Hell*, was asked by Brooks to write 'bumpers'<sup>3</sup> for the *Tracey Ullman Show*. *Life in Hell* was a regular constituent in several alternative magazines and it was "known for its defiance of authority and often contained political barbs and decidedly leftist material" (Sloane 137, 138). Reluctant to risk his precious assets, knowing that Fox Network would own them, Matt Groening came up with *The*

---

<sup>2</sup> A show "consisting of successive unrelated acts, such as songs, dances and comedy skits" (variety show).

<sup>3</sup> In the television industry a 'bumper' is the term used to refer to the time block (usually 15-30 seconds) between a pause in the program and the commercial break.

*Simpsons* characters within 10 minutes on a napkin, naming them after members of his own family, except Bart, who stands as an anagram for “brat” (Gruteser 56). Brooks, who helped Groening create *The Simpsons*, states in an interview that in order “to make it real” (How the Simpsons Has Stayed on Top), they wanted to locate the yellow family in a town that exists across many US states, and they settled for Springfield. That way they ensured a resemblance to any town in the USA, without being specific about its exact location (for a long time<sup>4</sup>). Groening explains in an interview:

I [...] figured out that Springfield was one of the most common names for a city in the U.S. In anticipation of the success of the show, I thought, [t]his will be cool, everyone will think it's their Springfield, [a]nd they do. [...] I don't want to ruin it for people, you know? Whenever people say it's Springfield, Ohio, or Springfield Massachusetts, or Springfield, wherever, I always go – “Yup, that's right”. (De la Roca)

In spring 1987, Groening's dysfunctional family began to be aired as shorts before and after commercial breaks of the *Tracey Ullman Show* (Alberti xi). Due to Fox Network's novelty and its willingness to allow a certain degree of experimentation, with the intent to win over the 18-49 years old demographic group, Groening was allowed a “biting satire on the spiritual hollowness and mindless conformity of suburban Christianity to appear on prime time television (on Sunday night, no less)” (Alberti xi). The awkward depictions however, became so popular that in 1989 Fox Network decided to give *The Simpsons* a show of their own, resulting in a Christmas special that premiered in December 1989.

Based on the information presented so far, we can identify two essential factors that contributed to the launch of *The Simpsons* and its subsequent success. Firstly, the uniformity of the television landscape and the need for “quality television” (Gordon 44) encouraged Fox Network to try broadcasting something that was far from conventional at that time. The requirement to win new audiences, assisted to open the doors for riskier projects, while loosening up the formerly opposed nature of network television, towards new enterprises. Secondly, due the increasing degree of competition, as well as the experienced hardship among networks, Fox Network found itself constrained to attract advertisers, by means of niche-marketing in order to prove its potential in the media landscape. Attracting network advertisers and staying profitable are substantial targets that a network and the broadcasted programs need to fulfill. As *The Simpsons* attracted a fairly young audience, advertisers were willing to pay considerably for an ad interval. Hilton-Morrow and McMahan reported that “by its second season, *The Simpsons* commanded a \$300,000 from

---

<sup>4</sup> Only in May 2012 Groening said that *The Simpsons* Springfield was named after Springfield, Oregon (De la Roca).

national advertisers for a thirty-second slot” (83)<sup>5</sup>. *The Simpsons*’ innovativeness did not only ensure Fox Network’s financial power, but also proved Fox Network’s trendiness. By marketing Fox Network as a “renegade network” (Alberti xxii) and allowing to pick at various social institutions, the network has pushed standard broadcasting boundaries. One could say that the show “emerged at the right place, the right time and simultaneously attracted the right demographic groups” (McAllister). Groening confirms this perception in an interview by stating that: “I spent a good portion of my youth in front of TV wasting my time so I had to justify all those wasted years. I imagined that if I could ever get anything on TV that reflected what I imagined in my mind it would be widely successful. I came along at exactly the right time” (Groening, On the Seventh Day).

### 1.1. *The Simpsons*’ potential as an animated series

In the previous section it was mentioned briefly that *The Simpsons* featured material and exploited content that had not existed previously on television. By excessively criticizing society and mocking various institutions they pushed the boundaries of standard television, in order to truly become a landmark television show. However, *The Simpsons* could not have remained on the airwaves if they had not had the public support and the compliance of advertisers. But for a show to appeal to an audience that goes beyond the ‘quality demographic’<sup>6</sup> niches, it needs a more pluralistic concept. As Caldwell argues: “While prestige televisuality cultivates distinction, it also survives only if it doesn’t alienate other viewers [...] [this] involves loading up different audience appeals within the same program” (qtd. in Brook 179). In other words, a popular show must simultaneously attract the ‘quality’ audience, comprising liberal and sophisticated viewers, and to a large extent the mass audience as well. Being regarded as ‘quality television’ does not imply a lack of progressive elements, “only that, as with all forms of artistic production under capitalism, the progressive elements may be recuperable to an ideology of quality” (Feuer qtd. in Brook 181). Following that, any commodity being created in order to entertain a broad audience, needs to comply with particular fundamental rules of appropriateness. Furthermore, it needs to offer amusement to a diverse and to some extent contrasting audience with regard to their appeal, without disaffecting particular segments of society. Because Groening himself was already known for his leftist content featured within his cartoon *Life in Hell*, progressive elements within his new

---

<sup>5</sup> Estimations show that in the year 2011 advertisers had to pay \$254,000 for a 30second ad time slot during *The Simpsons* broadcasts. In contrast to other competitors, *The Simpsons* ranked on place 6 with regard to highest paid ads (Cultra). In contrast to that the hit series *The Cosby Show* demanded the highest ever advertising prices for a series in television history in the year 1986, namely \$350,000 to \$400,000 (Shiver).

<sup>6</sup> Brook defines ‘quality demographic’ as a young and media savvy audience at the age 18-49 (179).

show were presupposed. Therefore, the following section examines how an “underground-comics sensibility” (Alberti xiv) emerged and sustained itself on network television, without irritating the broad audience with its unconventional content.

The U.S. media landscape at the time of the late 1980s faced a slight, but exceptional transition, because a trend could be observed of underground media becoming accepted by the mainstream (Sloane 137). As Sloane argues, *The Simpsons* also participated in this transition taking place in the media landscape. We know that Brooks decided to hire an alternative artist to ‘decorate’ his show with bumpers. This willingness to follow trends by Fox Network indicates that the audience anticipated some appearance of alternative attitudes and to some extent open confrontation with the prevalent values and social standards at that time. By means of allowing *The Simpsons* to be aired, America signaled its readiness for this type of critical and oppositional television program (Gordon 46). Even though *The Simpsons* did not exactly display the politics of Groening’s cartoon *Life in Hell*, they were not less contemptuous than Groening’s previous works. When Fox Network agreed to take advantage of the situation and grant Groening a show, Groening was confronted with what every artist who is given the chance to expose his/her creation for a broad audience must come up against: how does one exhibit an adverse perspective and in addition to that attract as many viewers as possible (Sloane 138)?

Sloane argues that the perplexity of going ‘mainstream’ is an important issue because it enables us to think seriously about the assumed connection between producers and viewers. Putting it differently, if a producer shifts from a scope of a surface involved in rather low distribution to one of very high circulation, the work of art becomes in so far interesting, as to how an artist bargains his move. Further, he suggests that an artist may try to keep up his adverseness, or retreat in favor of more traditional forms but can even choose to run the middle path. Within a society in which the dominant culture stands against many subcultures, we may say that the ‘mainstream’ media clearly relates to the dominant culture, whereas the ‘alternative’ media stands for the subculture. Therefore, the ‘alternative’ in association with subcultures opposes the ‘mainstream’ and accordingly there is much less tension to maintain the beliefs of the dominant culture within the former. Certainly, as Sloane argues, even these definitions, that serve the needs to distinguish between ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’, are evolving to be much harder to differentiate, due to the rise of television and the resulting immense expansion of distinct media channels. However, according to Sloane, it was a safe assumption that Groening’s exposure and possible impact would gain strength with his move to television (Sloane 138). The argument I want to make here is that the eagerness to stay true to one’s nature that is enduring to be alternative, does not necessarily go hand in hand with the requirement to sustain a large audience. Sustaining a large audience implies

to support the status quo, that is to be profitable. Profitability however, is only guaranteed if advertisers are willing to pay considerably for respective time slots, due to the appeal to the right demographic. Therefore, Groening had to find his personal ‘middle’ way to sustain an already existing audience. Such a middle way had to combine both the capability to remain ‘alternative’ and at the same time to appeal a broad base audience. This however, could only be achieved without alienating particular demographic segments due to *The Simpsons*’ alternative content.

At this point it seems noteworthy to mention, that some previously produced programs, especially within the 70s, have already been pushing the boundaries of television. Gordon argues that in particular the variety show *Saturday Night Live* demonstrated, by means of sketch characters, that the medium of television had the capability to deal with more risky material. At the same time it guaranteed both popularity and the ability to keep up advertisers’ interests. Because it was a variety show, there was no need to revolve around one specific issue. Due to its steady modifications of the set, as well as the characters between the sketches, it could depict a variety of issues and mock them accordingly. The show’s swiftness set up new satirical dimensions and paved the way by creating an exemplar that future shows, in particular *The Simpsons*, could successfully rely on. Another program, that similarly to *Saturday Night Live* pushed to some degree the boundaries of television, was the sitcom *All in the Family*, as it depicted family life in a more realistic way. Although most of the shows did not coincide with *Saturday Night Live* and *All in the Family*, because they followed more traditional sitcom and variety formats, these controversial shows nevertheless influenced the way television passed criticism on society. Furthermore, the triumphs and recognition, achieved by such programs produced within the 70s, among viewers as well as sponsors, prepared the ground for other shows to follow their steps in that direction (Gordon 41, 42).

Any production created by the ‘culture industry’ is always inevitably controlled by the logic of capitalism that is to work under the primary rules of profitability. Sloane argues, that this logic of capitalism has possibly accommodated in so far, in that it reinforces the distribution of anything that asserts to be profitable, even though the commodity’s subject matters challenges its “productive logic” (139). In other words, even those products which similarly to *The Simpsons* openly ridicule and mock the institutions to which they owe their very existence are accepted and welcomed by these establishments as long as they prove profitable. What the producers of *The Simpsons* realized was that in order to remain on the airwaves they had to depend on the existing disposition as well as appreciation of the audience watching it. So what they did in order to attract a broad audience was to take advantage of an approved format and breathe new life into it by means of examining the same issues through different lens. So the show’s producers had to build

upon what earlier writers had achieved and rearrange it by adopting another course, in order to question society's attitudes (Gordon 61).

*The Simpsons* succeeded in remaining alternative, without being harmful to the mainstream by relying on the established sitcom's history and complementing it with the techniques of animation. The sitcom format was still a very popular format (Czogalla 39), but it was animation's potential that empowered the producers to present information that was unconventional in other entertainment spheres at that time. As Rushkoff suggests, "the childlike innocence of *The Simpsons*' narrative form and its widespread popularity allow its creators to release some radical ideas into the cultural mainstream" (Rushkoff 300). Rushkoff further puts cartoon's potential on an equal footing of a 'Trojan Horse' in that it creeps into viewer's houses appearing as something else, before extricating another thing. He believes that by putting sensitive issues in such a context that is done by the producers, they can simply get away with it. As executive producer George Meyers states "if the show weren't a cartoon [...] it would just make people flip", instead they can "push all kinds of buttons that few people could get away with" (How *The Simpsons* Has Stayed on Top). Similarly, Remington remarks that, in contrast to conventional TV families "in *The Simpsons* household, dad Homer walks around in his underwear scratching places a real actor would never be allowed. And on what other show can you hear mom yelling at her son: Bart, quit taking pictures of your butt" (Remington)?

An example of the inclusion of commonly unexceptional material that would otherwise rather irritate its audience is the frequently reoccurring *The Itchy and Scratchy Show*. The cartoon within the cartoon involves a high level of violence, accompanied by the depiction of blood. Such images would most definitely appear as too fierce for the format of live-action shows, but because it is regarded as 'just' a cartoon, the impact on the audience is less intense as it allows perceiving these images as ridiculous. Consequently, statements seem not forthright and direct, but rather subtle, since a cartoon doesn't know any limitations in its realization. The point is to continually tackle tabooed issues in order to make fun of the seriousness that the whole issue is approached with (Gordon 50, 51). As a result of such a harmless context depiction, violence as well as other controversial issues can be discussed without any far-reaching consequences. Mike Reiss, one of the writers asserts: "It's as though we finally found a vehicle for this sensibility, where we can do the kind of humor and the attitudes, yet in a package that more people are willing to embrace. I think if it were a live-action show, it wouldn't be a hit" (Rushkoff 300).

Furthermore, *The Simpsons* is a cartoon clearly meant for adults, occupying a "cultural space between children's television and prime time programming" (Alberti xiii). According to Alberti,

[the] ambiguous cultural space allows producers and writers to take advantage of the resulting uncertainty regarding generic expectations from this mixing of the childlike and the adult, the supposedly trivial and the serious, by being able to treat serious and even controversial issues under the cover of being 'just a cartoon'. (xiii)

Following this, we can say that animation is one of the most essential features of the show, enabling the producers to mock society pointedly, without disturbing its viewers with inclusion of otherwise outraging material. In contrast to live-action shows, in which a certain degree of decency is expected, especially when being broadcasted during prime time, animation's format allowed to downplay the graveness of depicting otherwise sensitive issues. The producers knew that animation's innocence involved the possibility to take more risks in the writing in order to more explicitly ridicule society, ensuring their messages will come across. In this sense, *The Simpsons* pushed beyond boundaries of television in that they provided critical satire while keeping a sense of appropriateness (Gordon 45).

A further capability of animation, which goes beyond any live action format possibilities, is that animation is not confined to restrictions of live action programs. The creators of the show exploit possibilities granted to them due to its animated format that shows with real life people simply could not conduct or carry out, because of financial restraints (Mittell 19). Therefore, the producers of the show are uninhibited as to combine a wide range of stylistic devices that a live action program is simply not capable of, because it would otherwise lose its thread. Such benefits that account for the use of animation lie amongst other things, in the ease of changing locations, enabling *The Simpsons* family to travel everywhere around the globe, giving the characters its freedom to travel to the remotest places on earth. In addition, animation enables its producers to include the involvement of numerous characters. The shows plurality of characters<sup>7</sup> grants the storylines to go into much more depth, which most live action shows are not capable of, since they have a limited amount of actors. The animation format allows *The Simpsons* to examine characters much more acute by disclosing, for instance, what goes on in their minds (Gordon 47). The employment of "voice-overs, flashbacks and even dream sequences" (Gordon 47), can, in contrast to live action shows, be smoothly incorporated within the animation format.

Finally, animated format is unrestricted as to what type of material it can refer to, which allows approaching a certain degree of realism: true to detail ambience, digital elements, the implementation of dramatic devices within the plots, a sense of the real small details of everyday life and a prolific spectrum of figures and places (Trescher 4). Groening reports that some realism

---

<sup>7</sup> Björnsson refers to roughly 1000 characters (10).

does matter, since it can craft an entire universe. As he further states, there are certain rules of drawing, since *The Simpsons* abstains from violating certain codes of realism (Groening, Life in Hell Artist). In more detail this means that the show purposefully ignores particular conventions of animation. As a consequence of such drawing the viewer is not confronted with characters whose “heads [...] get crushed by anvils. Their eyeballs do not pop out of their heads, and their jaws do not drop to the ground” (qtd. in Mittell 20). Elsewhere, Groening reports that “[they] are the only cartoon show where, when people hit the ground they actually get bruised and bloody” (qtd. in Mittell 19). This enables the producers to preserve a touch of reality, tackling certain issues on a much more realistic level despite the animation format.

Based on the ideas presented so far, we can say that *The Simpsons* went beyond the form of traditional sitcoms in that they exploited essential liberties granted by the animated format, while simultaneously complying with Fox Network’s strategy to produce creative and alternative content. The abundant processing of pop cultural incidents and moments, which are constantly satirized within episodes of *The Simpsons*, could not be presented by the mere standards of a traditional sitcom. In order to keep up with such excessive material implementation, a traditional sitcom would have to leave its logical structure (Czogalla 37). What I have tried to convey is that animation brings about the favorable circumstances for producers to penetrate contexts that a live action show could not have succeeded to do. Such a creative freedom, granted the show’s writers infinite potentials to convey satire and humor that otherwise would not have been possible within the format of a traditional sitcom. Through ever-changing sets, multiple characters and a new level of embraced realism, the producers succeeded in a more realistic viewpoint on certain issues.

Prime-time cartoons however, were not brought to life by *The Simpsons* or Fox Network. They benefited from the advances established by animated prime-time series that had debuted decades earlier (Mullen 82). *The Flintstones*, for instance, which were the last successful prime-time animation show before it had been laid off in 1966, was able to win audiences across various generations by facing problems related to (at the time) modern life. Similarly to *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons* had taken advantage of the innate capability of the animated format, using such a vehicle to communicate sarcasm by means of an innocent format (Mullen 82). But the wisdom proposed within these programs was never as fierce or explicative as those frequently blended into the storylines of *The Simpsons*. However, after the decline of *The Flintstones* in 1966, no successor was fit enough to measure up to what they had achieved and the prime time animation era faced a sudden death. As the quality of cartoons declined within the 60s and the 70s, it no longer had appeal for mature audience and it eventually found its place almost exclusively in the

Saturday morning programming<sup>8</sup> (Solomon qtd. in Mittell 19). Various attempts to launch an animated series on prime-time failed, due to the stigmatized image of animation to embrace a childish and superficial character, being for children's eyes only. Such a prevalent assumption among the established broadcast networks is reflected in one of Groening's interviews, in which he expressed the challenges of making the decision to broadcast a cartoon: "network executives were reluctant to target only kids but also assumed that adults would not watch a cartoon" (qtd. in Mittell 21). In order to disprove the childish character of Groening's animated format, what was needed was a portion of courage, innovative thinking and the relentless will to move upstream, as the adult audience sought to be confronted with something that could meet their higher expectations (Czogalla 24). They definitely wanted a commodity, which is not solely targeted at kids, so the expectations to meet were high. However, Fox's peripheral position at that time permitted it to take substantial jeopardies in anticipation of unforeseen paybacks (Mittell 21).

In summary, we can say that *The Simpsons* by integrating features that combined sitcom, variety show and animation, coupled with Fox Network's programming approaches, succeeded in pushing the boundaries of television while generating a revolutionary type of program. Taking advantage of the already established formats with a slightly redefined perspective of the sitcom and the variety show, the producers exploited the established readiness of America's society, lacing it with animation's 'innocent' liberty in order to inspect the peculiarities of society. The result of this new cultural form is the capability to represent and treat various affairs concerning society's anxieties in a manner, which transgresses beyond norms and traditions of previous common television formats (Alberti xiv). Particularly, the affiliation with the sitcom, without which the show could not have persisted, granted the producers the potential to express more rebellious messages that critiques modern life than had ever been produced. The show's animated format gave the writers the liberty „to open the [sitcom] genre outward from the typical domestic setting" (Mittell 18), resulting in a cartoon that is a livelier copy of our society, comparable to only little real equivalents. Animation in that sense is used as a "vehicle through which to reveal contradiction, hypocrisy, banality and the taboo, which may be read, perhaps ironically, as a return to the fundamental anarchy of early cartoons" (Wells qtd. in Czogalla 10). The show "transcended the expectations of the cartoon genre [in that it approached] the broad-based audience more typical for the sitcom" (Mittell 21), attracting people who were bored with conventional television. Consequently, *The Simpsons* evolved not only into a celebrated sitcom as well as cartoon program, but ranges among the most cheeky and fearless "cultural and political satire[s] in television

---

<sup>8</sup> The Saturday morning programming broadcasted cartoons for kids, implying predominantly childlike audience, playful and amusing content, resulting in a questionable social value (Mittell 18).

history” (Alberti xiv) at that time<sup>9</sup>, being a forerunner into new types of programming and a pioneer in reintroducing the prime-time cartoon.

## 1.2. *The Simpsons* emerges as a sophisticated and reflective show

As the previous section of my thesis has tried to show, animation’s potential enabled *The Simpsons* producers to sustain a wide audience, while granting them freedom to convey their alternative message to the mainstream. Although the inclusion of prime time animation, never done since 1966, manifested an adventurous risk, it permitted for all that format’s potential to be taken advantage of. Through the purposefully infiltration in the mainstream, with the help of the mainstream’s popular formats, *The Simpsons* succeeded in functioning as an international “pop-phenomena” (Gruteser, Klein and Rauscher 17). However, the consequences of animation were far more far-reaching than just securing a broad audience in order to satisfy advertisers by providing original content. Animation proved its potential not only in sustaining a wide audience, but simultaneously winning an additional demographic segment, namely kids.

Although, the producers originally targeted the show at an adult audience, they were glad to easily attract children, since they instantly acknowledged the show’s outcome. “My big fear was that adults would not give it a chance - that they would think it was just another kiddie show and never tune in. I knew kids would love it. There was nothing like it on television at the time” (Groening qtd. in Hilton-Morrow and McMahan 81). As a cartoon and the consequently “childlike innocence” (Mullen 81), *The Simpsons* has for all practical reasons attested attractiveness to children. Along the bright colors and laughable portrayals of its characters as well as its slapstick humor, *The Simpsons*, corresponds not only to its predecessors like *The Flintstones* or *The Jetsons*, but also to a large degree appears like “the Saturday morning and after-school programming” (Mullen 81). Through the exceptional composition of witty dialogues and storylines to appeal to adults and the exploitation of animation’s images that fascinate a younger audience, the show becomes multi-layered (Mullen 81). As a result of such multifaceted layers, the show provides viewing fun on multifarious levels. Groening tried to explain the distinct sort of entertainment which the show proposed:

[I]t’s something that’s going to be family entertainment in a new sense. It’s going to offer something for every member of the family, depending upon whatever level they are going to meet the show. The jokes are on different levels. Adults are going to enjoy the witty dialogue and the funny story turns and kids are going to enjoy some of the slid sight gags.

---

<sup>9</sup> Nowadays successors of *The Simpsons*, like *South Park* for example, are much more aggressively attacking various social groups and institutions.

(qtd. in Mittell 21)

In another interview Groening further explains that “[e]veryone loves the physical humor, then the pseudo-intellectuals like some stuff and then there are butt jokes that appeal to my kids” (Groening, *On the Seventh Day*). Remington agrees that Groening succeeded in creating a cartoon, which indeed secured grown-up affections. “Parents can watch it without sacrificing 50 IQ points” (Remington).

*The Simpsons* during its first season might have appeared as a mere entertaining family sitcom, resembling a traditional domestic sitcom with kids, having to face and resolve commonly awkward difficulties every week (Czogalla 8). However they quickly proved to be one of the most world-weary shows to come into sight on television. Over the years, the show has incorporated a huge number of contemplative issues: “nuclear power safety, environmentalism, immigration, gay rights, [and] women in the military” (Cantor “Atomistic Politics” 735), just to name a few. The show has been publicized along with shows such as *Married... with Children* or *Roseanne*, in that it obviously depicted a working class family and therefore provided an exceptional contrast to the stereotypical middle-class TV families, like for instance *The Cosby Show* (Sloane 140). Similarly to *Roseanne* or *Married... with Children* the producers of *The Simpsons* adopted the conventional sitcom setting but mocking various cultural, social as well as political establishments of American life, presented in conventional sitcoms, exposing anything but a consistent political position. Regardless of the producers’ political affiliations, their aim to critique organizations that constitute current life and involving a stance completely different to the workings of the mainstream culture is indisputable. However, the show constantly retreats to acknowledge the bond between its family members (Sloane 140).

By focusing on the family, *The Simpsons* embraces authentic human problems that everybody can identify with. Therefore, the show is perceived “in many respects [to be] less cartoonish than other [comparable] television programs” (Cantor, “Atomistic Politics” 735). Along with other scholars, Cantor considers their cartoon characters to be “more human, more fully rounded, than the supposedly real human beings in many situation comedies” (Cantor, “Atomistic Politics” 735)<sup>10</sup>.

Undoubtedly *The Simpsons* provides a very valuable portrayal of family life in the present-day US culture, namely, a representation of the nuclear family<sup>11</sup>. Cantor explains that over the past,

---

<sup>10</sup> See Mittell 22; Czogalla 8; Pinsky qtd. in Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 59.

<sup>11</sup> The term refers to a family unit consisting of a father, mother and their children, that at one time was to a great extent believed as being the most fundamental and common pattern of a family (nuclear family).

American broadcasts have inclined to attach little prominence to a portrayal of nuclear families, by providing “one-parent families or other non-traditional” (Cantor, “Atomistic Politics” 736) versions alternatively to the nuclear family. He argues that most of US broadcasts have advocated not considering the collapse of traditional nuclear families as a societal catastrophe or an earnest dilemma. Instead, “it should be regarded as a form of liberation from an image of the family that [...] is no longer valid in the 1990s” (Cantor, “Atomistic Politics” 737). Over the years television broadcasts attempted to expose its viewers to tendencies that strived for putting conventional family beliefs to test. Following that, *The Simpsons* should be acknowledged for the declaration it has to make about the nuclear family. Despite its slapstick humor and the ridicule of certain family life issues, it nevertheless presents a positive aspect about the nuclear family and honors it. (Cantor, “Atomistic Politics” 735-737).

However, according to Beard, the members of the Simpsons family are controlled by a mocking utilization of character stereotypes and therefore comply with a specific popular concept of “the American family” (Beard 274). The characters portrayed within the show are inspected in an exceptional way, construing American culture. As Beard puts it to the point:

Homer is a willfully ignorant, lazy, beer-swilling blue-collar worker, in love with junk food and trashy television; Marge is a formalized representation of the suffocating over-anxious, nagging wife, Lisa is the very vision of the precocious and unpopular nerd driven by a desire for scholastic success, Bart is a prototypical problem child, the wise-talking prankster who longs for the glamour of crime, and Maggie, being a baby, does little but suck on a pacifier. (274)

Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction of this section, the Simpsons family stands for any American family, at any given time and anywhere in the US (Kachel 169).

The members of the Simpsons family are meant to mirror the present-day “American lifestyle” (Sohn), and every one of them is considered to represent and “follow [...] the stereotypes and clichés of society” (Sohn). Furthermore, the family appears to convey “almost every facet of American public life” (Sohn). However, as Sohn further argues, being successful can trigger firestorms. Because of such portrayals of the American family, many critics have complained that the members of the Simpsons family seem to be regarded as one of “the representative images of American family life” (Cantor “Atomistic Politics” 735). Further, they argue that the show serves as an offensive “role model [...] for parents as well as children” (Cantor “Atomistic Politics” 735). Consequently, *The Simpsons* has been critiqued by many educators, moral leaders and politicians. Such complaints and hostile reactions towards the cartoon even go so far that parents regard the family as being too real. An educator in one of Ohio’s elementary schools attempted prohibiting

Bart Simpsons T-shirts<sup>12</sup>, while a Canadian broadcasting station was forced to shift the show to be aired later in the evening, because people intensively protested (Remington). On top of that, the most legendary reproach came from no less than President George H. W. Bush. During a meeting of a spiritual broadcaster in 1992, Bush attacked the show with the words: “We need a nation closer to the Waltons<sup>13</sup> than the Simpsons” (Ortved)<sup>14</sup>.

What President Bush and other commentators failed to deduce, was the fact that *The Waltons* of the 1970s, as well as *The Cosby Show* of the 1980s, no longer bore any allegiance for a large part of the viewers. This is so because the storylines, as well as the personalities featured within these programs, have no longer truthfully reproduced reality (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 60). The slightly twisted position of the family allows the cartoon characters to be perceived as more mortal as well as trustworthy than families that are ceaselessly accountable and engaged television reproductions (Czogalla 8). The idealized Cosby household does not remind its viewers of their own families and households any longer. This is reflected in the selling of Simpsons T-shirts saying that “Cosby is the way is supposed to be, *The Simpsons* is the way it really is – that’s life” (qtd. in Mittell 23). Working-class viewers, who are not necessarily confronted with abundant televisual acknowledgement of their kind, at least not on prime time, such an explicit representation provides a seldom opportunity for identification, and as Brook argues, to some degree a flattery. Considering the American inclination to renounce class divisions or to even incorporate “them within an all-encompassing middle class” (Brook 180), the working class viewers are enabled to simultaneously connect with the members of the Simpsons family as well as appear better with regard to themselves.

Following that, we can say that the show capitalized on the substantial need to represent an alternative depiction of families to the ones that prevailed in existing broadcasts. However, it was not only *The Simpsons* that differentiated itself from the rest of the broadcasts at that time by putting conventional standards to test, but Fox Network in general, which according to Ott was a symbol “of a new age in television” (“Postmodern Identity” 59). Hero states, that the young Fox Network as a matter of fact, procured its viewership by providing programming that exactly implied the depictions of such desired and alternative illustrations (qtd. in Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 59). Many viewers that were brought up in a culture that was characterized by an abundance of images and signs were bored with commonplace and overused practices of

---

<sup>12</sup> It says, “Underachiever, and proud of it, man” (Remington).

<sup>13</sup> The Waltons is a conservative family that lives in urban Virginia, at the time of the Great Depression of World War II.

<sup>14</sup> Several other sources point to this event. See Rauscher 121; How The Simpsons Has Stayed on Top; Sohn

television. Programs that abandoned to explicitly confront alternative depictions and challenge their status quo by relying on familiar and monotonous principles were considered to be artificial and stupid. Those programs however, that delighted themselves in their artificiality were considered to be to some extent “more real and sophisticated” (Pinsky qtd. in Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 59). Such a transition of preferences became evident with the simultaneous elevation of *The Simpsons* and the fall of *The Cosby Show* in the beginning of the 1990s, when Fox repositioned its striking show to be aired on Thursday night, at the same time as *The Cosby Show* (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 59).

Considering the negative responses from various sides and the hostility towards the show, such as the prohibition to wear Bart T-Shirts, the situation appears to be paradoxical. Whereas the need to give up such tiresome and stale practices applied by television broadcasts was perceived, *The Simpsons* nevertheless has been attacked to be too real, and criticized for negatively influencing America’s society. Considering the paradoxical outburst, Groening stated that “people don’t get the message. Bart has been labeled an underachiever. He does not aspire to be an underachiever” (Remington). Similarly, Ott argues that the difference “between getting it and not getting it lies at the heart of why *The Simpsons* is such a significant cultural artifact of the 1990s” (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 59). Such a significance does not only lie in the fact that the show provided realistic depictions of family life that most of the viewers could identify with, but could also be attributed to the ongoing social changes at the time of the 1990s. Therefore, *The Simpsons* needs to be examined in the context of such ongoing social alterations.

The 1990s were considered as the pinnacle of a tremendous shift “from the Industrial Age to the Information Age” (Ott, *Small Screen* 20). As Morrow states, “the 1990s have become a transformation boundary between one age and another, between a scheme of things that has disintegrated and another that is taking shape” ( qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 20). In simplest terms, during the 1990s society faced the culmination of a transition that had been going on for almost 50 years already, and which brought about tremendous social alterations. The Information Age can be described with the predominance of mass communication and information technologies in everyday life.

With the rise of mass communication technologies, television became omnipresent, it adapted a more fundamental role in daily life, transforming from an initially center of family relaxation and entertainment, to a main source of news and information. Postman goes so far as to claim that television’s impact and dominance over various social domains was “the most significant American cultural fact of the second half of the twentieth century” (qtd. in Ott *Small Screen*, 10).

If we look back in history, we can say that mass media held a less significant importance in our daily lives than they do nowadays. But over time, the various forms of mass media, including television, have become a commonplace supplement of our everyday life. Educational, familial or religious establishments and organizations have been increasingly losing importance and the mass media took their place. We can say that they represent a constantly growing social mediator. Therefore, the mass media is and will continue to be a noteworthy socializing impulse in present-day society (Mack and Ott 11).

Socialization, as described by Mack and Ott, is “the process by which persons – both individually and collectively – learn, adopt, and internalize the prevailing cultural beliefs, values and norms of a society” (12). In other words, it is the mass media nowadays that influences the way we acquire our knowledge. As the mass media alter through its filters practically every facet of our world, it inevitably frames “what we learn and how we learn” (Mack and Ott 12). Mass media set the standards so to say, of how individuals acquire their knowledge. The content, as well as the form of such filtered messages, are essential for the way in which mass media socialize or in other words influence and form us. It is even taken for granted, that television in a broad sense and especially particular programs condition and shape their audiences to perceive their surrounding and their understanding of self in a consistent manner (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 61).

The increase of mass media communication technologies, did not only lead to the rise of television’s impact on society, but also left people confronted with an “explosion of information” (Ott, *Small Screen* 4). Through the ever increasing importance and presence of various communication technologies and their excessive use in our daily lives, an infinite multitude of new messages is being constantly generated. Such developments, resulting from the flush of information surpassed individuals’ abilities to comprehend the newly arisen surroundings altogether, and made it difficult for human beings to adjust to the new media network. The consequences were mental confusion, uncertainty and existential tremors. Therefore, new approaches were required to handle the arisen uneasiness and tension in the newly arisen environment. As Fredric Jameson clarifies, it is essential for individuals to look for “new cultural forms that allow them to ‘cognitively map’ a sense of place and hence a sense in this new social landscape” (Ott, *Small Screen* 55). Cognitive mapping as a term describes “a process, whereby an individual is trying to link [...] oneself with the world” (Czernecki 24) and attempts to manage the newly arisen environment in order to establish a new perception of the world. Furthermore, this process assists to develop particular systems and orders, which function as a fundament for the enforcement of novel apprehensions, in order to make its own way through the world. What Jameson suggests is that with the coming of the Information Age, and the resulting amount of

media available, society faced radical changes, in that it became difficult for an individual to filter certain aspects suitable for their existent necessities. As a consequence of such an information excess and the contradicting principles offered to us by the information technologies, a deprivation of orientation prevails. Therefore, individuals must acquire new forms of perception and interrelated ways of thinking in order to cope with the excess of information available (Zucker 108).

Without a doubt, our world is to a great extent dominated by television and through it we are grasping an understanding of the surrounding environment (Cantor, *Pop Culture* xxv). Likewise, Ott argues that human beings master their adjustment to drastic change as well as the generated worries “through public discourse” (Ott, *Small Screen*, 55). In other words, certain media like television offer comfort for present-day human beings by “offering an array of symbolic resources, [medicine], for confronting and resolving those anxieties” (qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 55, 56). Individuals turn to certain television broadcasts in order to experience ease in a multimedial environment that is characterized by an abundance of contradicting and ever growing pile of information.

In consideration of the underlying examination of *The Simpsons*, we can indeed say that the show established itself as a mediator or carrier of knowledge, in that it operated with significant information and simply made knowledge easily accessible. In other words, *The Simpsons* as a popular show did not only serve as a platform that possessed information, but simultaneously presented this information to the society. Consequently, the show became capable of criticizing the present societal system in a cheeky and satiric way. Due to the animated format that enables the creators to examine obscure cultural issues, the show provides an opportunity for its viewers through an exaggerated representation to reflect upon certain important social, cultural or political phenomena in more details (Zucker 108, 109).

In that sense, we can agree, that *The Simpsons* is to some extent “influencing and shaping the globalized media culture in [its] own way” (Czernecki 24) in that viewers take over certain possible interpretations in order to adjust them with regard to their own existing necessities. Watching *The Simpsons* however, does not imply that the audience will instantly find solutions to their individual problems, nor will watching the show all of a sudden alter their current state of affairs. Instead, the show rewards its viewers in that they are presented with probable suggestions how to make sense of the surrounding environment. *The Simpsons* as a tool for cognitive mapping therefore supports viewers to handle their personal dilemmas in terms of providing orientation, in that it provides an improvement through presenting interrelated referential issues with regard to

daily routines (Zucker 109). Robert Thompson, director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University, shares a similar opinion

*The Simpsons* could serve for a kid today what *Mad Magazine*<sup>15</sup> did for me. It awakened a political consciousness, made me realize I could read something and have an opinion about it - all the successful intellectual tools you get from reading satire (Anthony).

So what *The Simpsons* offers is the capability to enhance a new and private understanding of various interrelations that are opposed to the existing common sense. Those viewers, who are not satisfied with the status of representation of various programs, will identify *The Simpsons* as a program that challenges such a system in a satirical and critical way. Indeed, *The Simpsons* is not capable of presenting our real world completely. Instead, it narrates and presents facts concerning the actual world, reflecting particular facets of it, in which our private fears and involvements are incorporated and recognized in order to enhance our orientation.

Summing up these ideas, we can say that *The Simpsons* may be considered as having a bad influence on America's society because of its ironic use of pre-existing mass media stereotypes. However, the clichéd personalities featured within the show, do not reflect an external reality, but are purposely used in order to destabilize them (Beard 273). What critics of the show fail to understand is that the employment of such stereotypes is used symbolically by its producers as a "foundation upon which to base its critique of numerous elements of American life" (Beard 274). Furthermore, as Beard argues, the use of these stereotypes functions to criticize such deeply rooted clichés, that evolved into being regarded as stereotypical as well as to weaken the flat and two-dimensional representations dominating "mainstream mass media" (Beard 274). In this sense however, the possibility of satiric devices to serve as such, depends on its audience to recognize them as consciously intended stereotypes. In that sense *The Simpsons* has never intended to support the authoritarian invasion of American beliefs (Beard 274, 290). Similarly, Du Vernay argues that when *The Simpsons* satirizes stereotypes, they are not ridiculing the group being stereotyped, but they are making fun of "those who buy into such stereotypes" (Du Vernay). Further she asserts that intelligent and layered television like *The Simpsons* helps its audience to get smarter. Instead of prohibiting children to watch *The Simpsons*, good parenting according to her, implies viewing the show with children, pausing in order to clarify the references, cultural allusions and its constituents of satire (Du Vernay). So whether viewers consider the Simpsons family as saints or sinners, offensive or enlightening, entirely depends on its viewers approach (Beard 274). Groening asserts in one of his interviews: "The secret thing I'm trying to do, behind

---

<sup>15</sup> "[A] humorous US monthly magazine read especially by teenagers, which is famous for its parodies of recent events, films, famous people etc." (Mad Magazine).

entertainment, is to subvert. And if I can make myself and my friends laugh and can annoy the hell out of a political conservative, I feel like I've done my job" (qtd. in Sloane 138).

Having discussed these ideas, we can say that the show succeeds in providing multi-layered storylines, by appealing adults as well as children, offering viewing fun that links the disparity across various generations. Yet, *The Simpsons* does not only offer entertainment across generations, but has helped to enlighten a generation of fans in that it served to "restore a sense of the need for broad historical and cultural awareness and facility in the cause of cultural critique and subversion" (Alberti xxx). In other words, the show succeeded in reestablishing the need for the pursuit among society to acquire a certain degree of critical thinking and knowledge. Due to their practice of circulating knowledge, concerning the most unrelated issues, they served as a mediator of knowledge and provided education for its viewers. Consequently, the show has altered expectations towards television satires and paved the way for new approaches (Alberti xxx).

At this point one can entirely understand *The Simpsons'* impact when examining it in terms of the social landscape at the time of their launch. As discussed, *The Simpsons* advanced the sitcom format by replacing the moralistic family and making the subversive family widely popular, because viewers expected a different status of representation. Because *The Simpsons* emerged in the late 1980s, times in which society faced radical changes, the need to reflect their lived experiences of present-day issues that gave society troubles with orienting themselves, was enormous. Furthermore, *The Simpsons* emerged as a medium that embraced such a new arising paradigm, displaying a consciousness for the dilemmas arising from an image and information concentrated culture. By recognizing such on-going changes, the show amusingly and often ironically affirmed such existing cultural norms and offered its audience devices and help to face the tensions, which aroused from life in the Information Age (Ott, *Small Screen* 57), acting as a mediator of knowledge. In that sense, the next section aims at a deeper analysis of such on-going cultural as well as social changes and consequently the way in which *The Simpsons* embraces the new paradigm.

## **2. Postmodernism – How *The Simpsons* represents a cultural movement**

"Cartoons don't have messages, Lisa. They're just a bunch of hilarious stuff you know, like people getting hurt and stuff, stuff like that" – Bart Simpsons (Lisa The Vegetarian 3F03)

"Oh Marge, cartoons don't have any deep meaning. They're just stupid drawings that give you a cheap laugh" – Homer Simpson (Mr. Lisa goes to Washington 8F01)

In the previous section of my thesis I already discussed the animated sitcom format and the implications it brings forth with regard to its seriousness. Due to the animated format of *The Simpsons*, viewers at first sight might probably get the impression to be confronted with simpleminded drawings, meant for children. However, as discussed previously, despite the cartoon format, *The Simpsons* evolved into one of the most sophisticated programs, being watched by a broad audience across various generations.

What distinguishes *The Simpsons* from early cartoons is their unconventional content, resulting in its “ability to serve as a platform for sophisticated social and media satire” (Rushkoff 296). *The Simpsons* exposes an exclusive sense of humor and its characters are perceived by viewers as the most emotionally ‘real’ personalities. Without hesitancy or regret, it mocks various institutions of everyday life, e.g. religion, school, politics and TV, just to name a few.

Furthermore, *The Simpsons* are said to be one of the most literate TV shows, which perhaps can be ascribed to the fact that “two thirds of the writers have been Harvard graduates” (Rushkoff 292). It is no wonder that apart from a young viewership that was attracted by its animated format, mainly well-educated, wealthy and up-to-date viewers are particularly attracted to such a TV program. In contrast to other shows on TV at that time, *The Simpsons* served to inspire critique, challenging their viewers to be active in their consumption (Rushkoff 296), instead of blindly believing what is being sold to them by the media.

As I mentioned already within the introduction, *The Simpsons* emerged in the late 1980s at a time during which society found itself in between a new and old paradigm. In more detail, the show debuted at times in which the transition from one era to another reached its peak and society faced challenges that have never existed before to such an extent. Furthermore, I want to reiterate that cultural forms that emerged within this transitional period were labeled as being postmodern and differed from preexisting ones. *The Simpsons* too, has been commonly regarded as being postmodern. For that reason, the following section aims to illustrate how the show embodies postmodernism and features its most distinctive characteristics.

The term postmodern proposes something consecutive to or coming after that which is modern. Before the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the pre-modern era society was dominated by tradition (Hannan). This prevalence of tradition was refused during the Age of Enlightenment, a historical period from the Glorious Revolution (1688) to the French Revolution (1789-1799). This time was characterized as one in which fidelity emerged in the effectiveness of reason and natural science to improve human society. In other words, there was a prevailing belief that with the practice of reason and logic one can bring about a solution to the problems of society. Consequently, modernity is characterized by the rise of modern sciences, people’s belief in progress and reason that will give us the answers to

all questions. Therefore, modernity is interpreted as a condition roughly associated with the era of progress and the Industrial Revolution paired with a strong belief in reason and logic, resulting in a better world for human mankind (Barry 85).

Modernity's quintessence is based on a pursuit of complete and authoritative knowledge, being capable of finding answers to everything. Such authoritative explanations of the world also known as metanarratives, or 'Grand Narratives' are "overarching stories that claim universal validity and are seeking to explain aspects of life" (Hannan) under the pretext of for example Marxism, Science or Christianity. However, rapid technological innovation and revolutions in the sciences as well as the information technology proved that such propagated metanarratives that claimed to offer appropriate solutions for everything, have become obsolete. The complexity that arises with the accumulation of knowledge is that the more we learn, the more we become aware of how little we actually know and therefore, a feeling of insecurity exists (Hannan). Due to rising doubts concerning their well-meaning, authoritarian and universal explanations of the world were being partially or even entirely dismissed. According to Lyotard, metanarratives are an illusion that is not more than myths, merely having the aim to legitimize social and political institutions (Lyotard 20). Following that, the postmodernists foster the rejection of all metanarratives and any truth claim over another. The postmodern movement is most significantly marked by a deep skepticism and/or suspicion towards the foundations and structures of universal and absolute knowledge, considered as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv), that were regarded as having lost their credibility.

## **2.1. *The Simpsons* rejects metanarratives**

The postmodern opposition to authority and aim of rejecting systems that direct towards exercising authority with regard to affirm absolute truth, is one of the show's repeatedly reoccurring themes. As a simple example, antiauthoritarianism is one of Bart's obvious character traits (Björnsson 13). Throughout the seasons he accomplished endless vicious tricks against rector Seymour Skinner, who continuously tries to enforce his maxims and guidelines. Bart, the personification of an anti-hero, whose name is supposed to be "an anagram for 'brat' [symbolizes] youth culture's ironic" (Rushkoff 294) detachment from authoritarian institutions as well as further sacred cultural and ideological paradigms.

Because Bart frequently does not obey his parents, does not show any interest for school, does not clean his room, rebels against the system he represents "every authority figure's nightmare" (Steiger). Since Bart does not directly oppose anything in particular, he embodies rebellion in general (Ott, "Postmodern Identity" 69). Many critics regard Bart as the worst role model provided

by the Simpsons family and are frightened that young boys might want to imitate Bart. What critics of the show however overlook is that Bart's rebelliousness complies with an admirable American archetype, because America's nation was founded on the basis of discourtesy with regard to prerogatives and symbolized an enactment of resistance. "Bart is an American icon, an updated version of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn rolled into one. For all his troublemaking [...] Bart behaves just the way a young boy is supposed to in American mythology" (Cantor, "Atomistic Politics" 738).

In contrast to Bart, his sister Lisa is portrayed as better informed and smarter, and is considered as a young intellectual. She exemplifies *The Simpsons'* implicit aversion to metanarratives. In several instances she has gone to great length to lay open many of the wrongdoings carried out by authorities. With her persistent will to challenge the legitimacy of some brainwashing powers, she often wanders off from popular universal principles. Due to people's blind belief in authoritative powers, Lisa regularly has to position herself against the common beliefs of Springfield's society. Due to her inborn critical disposition, she constantly tries to uncover many of the wrongdoings committed by authorities. However, most of her courageous efforts to expose peoples' blind faith fail, due to the fact that Springfieldian community puts all its trust in authority (Björnsson 15, 16).

One example of Lisa's vicious attempt to persuade society of their ignorance can be illustrated in the episode "Mr. Lisa goes to Washington". Lisa participates in a children's contest, in which participants have to write an essay on what makes America so great. While visiting famous monuments in order to find inspiration, she overhears a corrupt congressman who is taking a bribe to destroy the forest in Springfield. Broken-hearted and disappointed by the deceitfulness of government officials, Lisa tears up her initial essay and writes a more agonizing yet truthful essay, which she reads out during her speech. In her essay she disregards and criticizes the government system, mentioning openly the names of those involved in the bribery. The result is an upheaval among Springfield's citizens and an aggressive reaction from the judges and audience. The message quickly spreads around the capital concerning Lisa's speech and finally the corrupt congressman is arrested. Although Lisa's essay does not win the competition because of its critical content, her faith in the government is more or less being re-established with the arrest of the corrupt congressman.

"Mr. Lisa goes to Washington" gained mostly positive reappraisals and was honored for its satire on American politics (Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington). Paul Cantor states that the show succeeded in assaulting the federal government at its very basis namely "the patriotic myths upon which its legitimacy lies." (Cantor, *Pop Culture* 89). This episode discloses the fact that patriotism

is nothing more than a conditioned superstition that consistently escalates in a form of ceremonial hysteria, but apparently is altogether meaningless (Gruteser 62).

Political satire as presented in the episode “Mr. Lisa goes to Washington” is a frequently appearing theme within various episodes, aiming at putting political myths to test. Political comments partly are explicit and rather rude running through numerous episodes. Such comments do not only appear as a subtext of a respective episode, but are, to a great extent even presented in the foreground. Many political leaders were featured in the show like for example George Bush, Bill Clinton, Richard Nixon, Tony Blair and even Mikhail Gorbachev. Through the systematic overabundance of presenting political myths, *The Simpsons*, though only a cartoon format, manages to illustrate how real political myths and their underlying mechanism function (Tuncel and Rauscher 154, 155). This episode demonstrates Lisa’s intellectualism, and her strong will to take advantage of her intelligence and personal principles in order to fight for American justice and sincerity. Lisa represents America’s good conscience and puts herself undeterred out for making sure that the political system heads in the right direction by revealing abuses. Through Lisa’s personalities and engagement the creators of the show seek to make clear that authorities should not be blindly trusted, since very often they act for their own good driven by their own interests.

Similarly, another episode approaches the underlying mechanisms of myths and their influence on society. Particularly, the force of collective and giving myths and its impact on society is being approached in “Lisa the Iconoclast”. It addresses the roots of the American nation and the consequence of putting them into question. In this episode Lisa needs to write an essay about the founder of Springfield, Jebediah Springfield. In order to get some help, she goes to the Springfield Historical Society. While playing with Jebediah’s flute she discovers a conspiracy initiated by the Society for Springfield’s history that has been faking official forms as well as cheating its community to spread the inaccurate glorification of Springfield’s founder. In this episode Springfield’s fundamental blind faith in Jebediah’s legend is illuminated from the very beginning to the end. Lisa’s attempts to enlighten Springfield’s society about Jebediah’s actual life as a cruel pirate, ends up with furious resistance and malice towards Lisa. Even Marge, who commonly reflects the reasonable and moral antipole of the family, begins shouting at Lisa, telling her that each and every one in Springfield as a matter of fact is aware that Jebediah is considered as a real and genuine American idol.

This episode approaches Lyotard’s notion of questioning hierarchies of knowledge and the distinction between absolute knowledge and unproven knowledge. He is against the idea that only thoughts from designated sources are granted entry into the collective body of knowledge (Lyotard

39). According to Lyotard, metanarratives eliminate the groups of people which are not positioned at the peak of the knowledge hierarchy and question the fundamental nature of the legitimacy of such knowledge. In this case the Springfield Historical Society has already authorized Jebediah's history, so who would actually hear out an eight-year-old girl and her complaint when an authoritative source exists on the matter. Lyotard refutes such authoritarian and absolute knowledge, deriving from only one source and he strives for an alternative arrangement of knowledge, based on a "flat network of areas of inquiry" (Lyotard 39), substituting existing hierarchies, which would "lose their function of speculative legitimation" (Lyotard 39). Following that, absolute and unquestioned knowledge that derives from the top of the knowledge hierarchy serves merely to legalize the very existence of such knowledge hierarchies. Contributions from alternative networks are regarded as being a threat, since they would lead to the weakening of their authority. Consequently, these flat networks, Lyotard refers to, would inevitably comprise inputs from informants like Lisa Simpsons.

This episode is complimented by Brook, since it is a notably meaningful example "of the narrative fissuring and disruptive closure" (187). Further he states that Lisa bravely fought to reveal the accuracy of Jebediah's actual life and stood up for "her findings against a phalanx of authority figures" (Brook 187). The truth she tries to uncover, does not concern just any truth, but one that undoubtedly affects Springfield's most influential patriotic symbol. Brook further argues that it is certainly no coincidence that Jebediah is contrasting George Washington, who embodies the "symbol of honesty, integrity, and courage" (187). In this sense, Jebediah as the founding father of Springfield represents all America's founding fathers, and the episode does not only deconstruct the myth of one single small-town in America, but becomes "a megatext on the myth of the United States as a whole" (Brook 187). Therefore, he argues that Lisa's engagement in some way puts the democratic standards on which the American nation was built on, into test.

Concerning the deconstruction of metanarratives, *The Simpsons* does not only attempt to uncover and put political myths to test, but also touches upon issues, concerning the American nation, like the belief in the 'American Dream'. Homer Simpsons, epitomizing the stupid and clumsy father, is the best example for discrediting the confidence in the American Dream. The American Dream regarded as a unique national spirit of the American culture, is embedded in the United States' Declaration of Independence that states "that all men are created equal, [...] endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Declaration of Independence). The American Dream comprises a set of ideals, endorsing the possibility for fortune and well-being as well as a rising societal progression that can be accomplished through hard work. However, Homer Simpsons has never worked hard;

instead he is either drinking beer or watching TV. Without any university degree he succeeded in getting a wonderful job in a nuclear power plant as a safety supervisor. Furthermore, he married a wonderful wife named Marge who gave him three children and with whom he moved into his own house with a big garden. Although he isn't really trying to, he had the unique possibility to do and get many things like for example travelling around the globe or meeting famous people that other people either reached only through hard work or not at all despite of all the hard work. Consequently, one could conclude that Homer Simpsons made his own individual variant of the American Dream come true, without ever wasting any time on actively pursuing his goals by being selfish or greedy, but actually through mere dreaming (Homer Simpsons and the American Dream).

A further metanarrative that *The Simpsons* constantly approaches throughout the show, concerns religion. Christianity is an additional predominant metanarrative, similar to the 'American Dream', being an important issue not only in Springfield but also for the rest of America. The show cleverly succeeds in presenting two contradicting stereotypes, namely on one hand Homer, who is ignorant towards religion, and Ned Flanders on the other, as the exceedingly polite person who blindly believes in religion. As Beard argues, this serves "to provide a less than subtle critique of both the inconsiderate self-centeredness of Homer and the deceptively intolerant Christian fundamentalism" (Beard 274). Further Beard argues that the symbolically saturated personalities of Homer and Ned Flanders present the show's satiric examination of conflicting representations of American national identity (274). Homer Simpsons bluntly attacks religion on a regular basis. For example, when he is asked about what religion he belongs to, he replies: "You know the one with the well-meaning rules that don't work in real life. Uh, Christianity" (Homerpalooza 3F21).

In contrast to Homer, who openly loathes religion, Ned Flanders epitomizes the faithful believer of his religion for whom it is impossible to distrust any religious authority. His overprotective Christian upbringing of his two sons is limited to the bible's knowledge and what it commands. However, living according to the bible, as Ned Flanders does, is not a guarantee for a secure and carefree life. On the contrary, from all the presented characters within the show, Ned Flanders seems to be taking the hardest tests life manages to bring about. He is frequently pursued by bad luck. In the episode "Hurricane Neddy", Ned's house falls victim to a hurricane, whereas the Simpsons' house although just a few meters away is left spared. His bad luck is not only limited to materialistic and financial issues, but culminates in season 11, when his wife Maude gets

killed in a freak accident<sup>16</sup>. The show's constant mockery of Ned's faith mirrors an opposition to metanarratives. Due to persistent changes in postmodern society as well as the rapid pace of advancements, it is impossible to hold on to totalizing explanations of life, while evading from all the other possibilities (Björnsson 18).

With regard to the generally critical representation of religion, Timothy Lovejoy, the minister of the First Church of Springfield, represents the sort of priest that does not really care about his community of faith. In spite of being a Christian pastor, Lovejoy does not always follow the example of Jesus, and has been regularly shown carrying out activities that would be regarded as sinful. For instance, he uses churchgoers' money for personal needs, disagrees with other priests, animates his dog to contaminate Ned Flanders lawn, by whom he often feels annoyed, or advises Marge to divorce Homer. Furthermore, he is not very enthusiastic about the bible, often criticizing its content and purpose, regarding it as a "200 pages sleeping pill" (She of little Faith DABF02).

The show's frequent opposition to authority and its absolute knowledge is not only found within the members of the Simpsons family itself. The show features characters that are commonly related to authoritarian positions as for instance politician, lawyers, doctors, policemen, teachers and many more. However, these characters are presented by its creators in such a way that they do not conform to usually associated ideals. Instead, the characters employed to embody such authoritative figures within the show are portrayed as "either dangerously incompetent or criminally corrupt" (Björnsson 14). To give an example, Springfield's Chief of Police, Chief Wiggum, mentally resembles a young child. Due to his incompetency he often goes wrong to follow his police duties in a real emergency. Another authoritative character featured in the show is Springfield's mayor Quimby, who is the most frequently reoccurring political leader throughout *The Simpsons*. Privately, he cultivates hemp, but publicly he holds the opinion that drug laws as well as the asylum law should be tightened (Rauscher 117). Furthermore, he is hardly ever seen without actually receiving a bribe or lying to the public (Björnsson 14).

Summing up the presented ideas, we can see that *The Simpsons* distances itself from the culturally connoted tradition of "didactic and saccharine family fare" (Ortved), mostly presented on television. Besides presenting a twisted family picture of a dysfunctional family, *The Simpsons* distances itself from traditional sitcoms in that it doesn't give its audience the feeling of being capable to resolve larger problems concerning America's reality within a twenty three minutes episode. In contrast to that, *The Simpsons* proposes that culture's faults are too deeply embedded as to grant simple solutions and one can stay pleased and sound by existing at a rather skewed

---

<sup>16</sup>Maude, Ned's late wife appears as the only regular character within *The Simpsons* show that loses its life once and for all (Alone Again Natura-Diddly BABF10).

position to that culture. Therefore, *The Simpsons* does not necessarily always abandon the traditionally associated happy ending of sitcoms, but is probably representing the engagement to endure on the margins of the American Dream rather than being wonderfully adjusted to it (Dettmar 88).

As these examples have shown, Springfield is a concentrated reflector of social realities, a yellow microcosm, in which myths are being put to test and societal phenomena are being discussed. *The Simpsons* does not narrate modern fables or affirm daily life illusions; instead it attempts to deconstruct national American everyday life myths within each episode (Kachel 169). At the same time the show illustrates how certain myths operate as well as manipulate its society by disclosing their meaning for society in general. As the executive producer George Meyer in an interview said, if the show has any deeper purpose “[i]t’s to get people to re-examine their world, and specifically the authority figures in their world” (How *The Simpsons* Has Stayed on Top). Similarly, Groening states that “trying to change other people—that is one of the greatest delights in the world. [...] [I can] irritate and change them” (Angell). Due to such extensive mockery the series succeeds in calling attention to the multiple faults and hypocrisies of the American lifestyle and pursues to discover as well as take advantage of the disparity “between the American Dream and contemporary American reality” (Dettmar 88).

Because the show operates with public knowledge, similarly to an encyclopedia they are able to make facts public. In this sense, the show accomplishes to carry out postmodern enlightenment that is endless, following no precise objective, but linking timeless world issues. The usually conventional and straightforward setting of the American standard home merely serves as a starting basis for a dazzling cosmos, in which society’s everyday life is being negotiated on postmodern conditions (Gruteser, Klein, and Rauscher 12). Therefore, *The Simpsons* is not only uncommon due to the historical variety of its cultural and societal references, but it is also extremely up-to-date. In contrast to traditional sitcoms, *The Simpsons* is “pop culture with attitude” (Gruteser, Klein and Rauscher 12) and leaves one of the most lively impression among contemporary fiction.

This section illustrated how *The Simpsons* reflects the postmodern movement’s skeptical attitude towards justifications that assert to be valid for all groups, cultures or races, which derive from an identifiable source. As the distrust towards totalizing explanations becomes omnipresent, consensus among Springfield’s society becomes harder to obtain since the status of existing knowledge is questioned over and over again. Further, Springfield’s society becomes multifaceted and knowledge no longer derives from one source, but is obtained from various distinct sources, like for example Lisa. This kind of shift in the human surroundings leads to “a relatively new

cognitive disorder where one feels cut off from a sense of wholeness because of common exposure to only incomplete parts of things and ideas” (Schenk qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 54). Such a feeling of incompleteness, referred to as fragmentation, is also reflected in Springfield’s society and will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.2. *The Simpsons* represents a fragmented and plural society**

The sense of incompleteness in contemporary society is the result of advances in information technologies. Advances in information technologies brought about new communication media, such as mobile phones, cable TV, computers and Internet, to name just a few. As a result of such advances society has an easier access to information that meets personal demands, resulting in a diversity of knowledge. However, through the immoderate use of such devices that serve to continuously generate new information, also individuals are granted the possibility to take part in the creation of new knowledge. As a result we are surrounded by a multimedia domain that constantly produces new information deriving from a variety of distinct sources. This multimedial surrounding is itself defined by fragmentation, due to the discrete sources and multiple opinions. Consequently, we are to an ever greater extent exposed to a vast selection of newly generated information, which is fragmented, incomplete, contradictory, or isolated from each other, stirring up our deeply rooted thoughts and concepts (Ott, *Small Screen* 54).

The sense of incompleteness however, is not only fostered by the multitude of information generated by these new information applications, but is likewise triggered by the world-wide implications that these technologies imply. The world we live in today is as fragmented as ever, due to global communication and an international economy which puts its society into the atmosphere of pluralism and otherness. Because of travelling, immigration and the ever growing generation of diversified information, human beings perceive a sense of fragmentation, although at the same time they belong to this world-wide community. Whereas individuals previously found unity and the sense of belonging in attractiveness to national identity, one is now exposed to pluralism and variation. Consequently, one’s awareness of self is disunified and broken apart, leading to a divided or fragmented subject (Ott, *Small Screen* 55).

Fragmentation in the postmodern era is considered “to be understood as marking an absolute and irreparable break with the unified subject” (McRobbie qtd. in Björnsson 12), resulting in a fragmented subject. Following that, human beings no longer feel as a whole subject, in harmony with itself, but rather incomplete and consequently fragmented. Such a fragmented subject is reflected within the show by means of featuring a multitude of personalities that stand for a wide range of diverse cultures and people. *The Simpsons* as a postmodern show commits itself to reflect

a modern, heterogeneous and multifarious society. *The Simpsons* grants to encounter the complete array of individuals in Springfield, raising attention to the ever-increasing pluralism of contemporary society (Björnsson 10).

The presentation of the whole scope of society is not only reflected by applying an astonishing amount of characters, but starts off with the personalities itself featured within the Simpsons family. The members of the Simpsons family in a way appear as representatives of possibly contrasting viewers of the show (Alberti xxv). Groening's initial decision not to situate Springfield in any area gives *The Simpsons* timeless as well placeless characteristics. Their daily routines center on traditional 'hot spots' of any American provincial town: Kwik-E-Mart, Springfield Elementary School, the First Community Church or Moe's Tavern, just to name a few, which represent typical American landmarks, therefore The Simpsons family stands for any American family and its members.

The presentation of a multifaceted society however, goes beyond the symbolic personalities of the individual family members. By utilizing an astonishing amount of diverse personalities, the show succeeds in mirroring the pluralism of postmodern society. Only a few shows have succeeded in presenting the entire society in such a way as *The Simpsons* does. Because the creators of the show take the liberty not to confine themselves with regard to certain delicate issues, but expand over various ethnicities, generations and social classes, Springfield can be regarded as a "melting pot [of] all the binary opposites of society together to form the chaotic, diversified town of Springfield" (Björnsson 10).

Although episodes usually center on a member of the Simpsons family, the initial plots drift into interposing stories, inevitably introducing dozens of distinct characters along the way while proving Springfield's diversity and multiplicity. Because the show focuses on various groups of people, those that were typically presented only in the background, if at all, are brought to the forefront in *The Simpsons*. As a consequence, groups of people that previously have been disregarded and neglected are given a voice in order to provide multiple opinions with respect to difference. One example of embracing such a previously neglected group of people is the Indian immigrant Apu Nahasapeemapetilon. Apu does not only frequently reappear in the show, but has even been made the protagonist of particular individual episodes. By doing so the show is able to approach issues of society, such as integration and migration issues, that have mostly been left untouched until the 1990s (Björnsson 11,12). Apu however, is not the only migrant in Springfield. Groundkeeper Willy for example, is known to be from Scotland. Furthermore, Moe's Tavern innkeeper Moe Szyslak, whose origins haven't been entirely exposed, is an immigrant from

Europe. Consequently, *The Simpsons* is regarded as a realistic cartoon copy of contemporary society (Tuncel and Rauscher 162).

By centering on various entities and diverse human beings that formerly were pushed into the background, hardly any facet of society has been left behind. Through the distinct individual personalities represented within the show in order to do justice to mirror a diverse portrayal of Springfieldian society, the viewer is left with an unlimited number of contradicting standpoints or in other words, fragments of particular characters. As the previously perceived subjectivity is withdrawn through the multitude of characters, dissenting individual identifications generate opposition in the program's substance, giving rise to a feeling of objectivity (Björnsson 11). Fragmentation is a vital part of the postmodern heritage, because it serves as a means to highlight the cultural diversity and draw attention to the impossibility of imposing moral authority among its pluralistic postmodern society. Due to the creators presentation of so many distinct characters, Springfield is regarded as a "global local village" (Kachel 170), enabling viewers around the globe to identify with daily life challenges that are being disclosed.

Fragmentation does not only concern the various individual subject matters, but expands over its narrative structure as well. As Björnsson explains, initially ordinary plots evolve into a non-linear digression from the main plot and the viewer is confronted with an erratic structure of storylines. The result is a fragmented and non-linear narrative structure. Furthermore, the show makes frequent use of "plot-drift techniques" (Björnsson 12) and throws in stories which again digress into non-related issues that sometimes it becomes demanding to conclude what a particular episode is mainly about. At other times, the producers split its actually limited time span in order to insert several brief narrations. "The Treehouse of Horror" episodes for example feature such a case, in which the creators present disconnected narratives in contrast to focusing on one single narration that is elaborated more thoroughly. In that sense *The Simpsons* gives the impression to eschew the wholeness and completion commonly associated with traditional stories (Björnsson 12, 13).

To sum up the discussed ideas, the show reflects the postmodern idea of fragmentation in two distinct ways. Firstly, the producers employ a multitude of distinct characters in order to represent a realistic image of the pluralistic society across the US, leaving barely any aspects of society untouched, allowing resulting in fragmented aspects. Secondly, the show's undeniable play with narrative structures, by means of not following the traditional linearity of storytelling, leaves a feeling of incompleteness.

*The Simpsons* as a postmodern show frequently approaches the discrediting of metanarratives that do not stand the test for all classes and ethnicities. By focusing on various groups of people as

well as various social and historical issues, hardly any aspect of life is left untouched and society's pluralism appears on the surface. If the producers of the show touch upon past and present realities concerning real life issues, their contents are embedded within the show's fictional storyline. In that way viewers can instantly discern such actual issues as real, thereby detaching the real life issues from the fictional content of the show within their minds. But as soon as viewers encounter and connect with these realities, that have been modified within the show, viewers get uncertain about how reliable the depiction actually is. It becomes hard to assess which constituents reflect actual reality and which elements are entirely fictional. This illustrates one of the ways through which the fictional parts of Springfield frequently merge with the reality outside the cartoon. This finally leads to the creation of a hyperreality whereby the viewers are disconnected from genuine emotional commitment. Consequently, fake stimulations are the only thing obtainable (Björnsson 25). This typical postmodern characteristic will be examined within the following section.

### **2.3. Why is *The Simpsons* hyperreal?**

Hyperreality in the postmodern understanding is a theory established by Baudrillard that is based on his belief of "the loss of the real" (Barry 87) caused by the increasing influence of mass communication technologies. The new media such as film, TV and advertising increasingly represent our main sources of access to events all around the world. Because the mass media takes a bigger part of our daily lives, we could say that our experience of the world is shaped by various forms of reproduction. For instance, any news report provided by the multitude of competing television channels is filtered by and fitted to the channel's respective political and social agendas. These reports have to undergo the process of framing and editing which leaves the viewer to be confronted with a substitution for any real experience of the events, thus "the copy, comes to replace the 'real'" (Allen 183). The current media relentlessly produce and reproduce various images like love, violence, family (and many more), that can no longer be associated with the external reality. Instead, they happen to be only images of images, which do not derive from an original. What we detect as reality, is something that is partly created by the media we are exposed to (Mack and Ott 11). Therefore, Baudrillard believes that such an extensive influence of concepts presented by various media resulted in "a loss of the distinction between real and imagined, reality and illusion, surface and depth" (Barry 87). This leads to a culture of hyperreal, in which the differentiation between what is real and not real, can't be recognized anymore.

Hyperreality can be understood as an approach of exemplifying what our consciousness describes as real in a world in which the mass media can fundamentally form and filter an original event or experience. Simply said, hyperreality embodies the incapability of our consciousness to

differentiate reality from fantasy. For many theorists the postmodern era seems to be one in which reproduction prevails over authentic production. As hyperreality tricks the consciousness in that it consequently becomes unable to recognize what particular signs initially corresponded to, simulation becomes more important. Consequently, Baudrillard replaces representation for the notion of simulation, which stands for the “reproductions of fundamentally empty appearance[s]” (Hyperreality). Simulations presented by the media do not reflect our world we live in anymore, but they produce a reality which is realer than real (Baudrillard, Norton Anthology 1555). The domination of mass media over our consciousness and thus presenting the simulation of reality are in Baudrillard’s perspective the symptoms of the postmodern era, which shape and construct our understanding of the world we live in.

In addition, to Baudrillard’s notion of the hyperreal, he perceives postmodern culture as being controlled by the simulacrum, which he refers to as an image or sign that substituted actual reality with its representation. In that sense, signs no longer feature any association to any external reality. The simulacrum refers to a copy of a copy and therefore lacks any substance or qualities of the original (real) world. Through the extensive influence from various media, such empty representations or simulacra increasingly substitute our understanding of the real world. Consequently, these simulacra happen to be given much more credibility because they appear to be more real than real (Edgar and Sedgwick 22).

The postmodern era is characterized by an astonishing presence of television in our society that concentrates its life around it. Television evolves into such a crucial, meaningful and at the same time common device in everyday lives, that we have become unable to recognize the impact it has created on us. The result is what Baudrillard calls “dissolution of TV in life, dissolution of life in TV” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 22). In other words, excessive penetration of television and its presentation of contrasting images have resulted in our inability to differentiate what is actually real and what is only created in our mind, because we are being dominated by television. Television is a vehicle through which we can consume reproductions with relative simplicity, consequently we appreciate hyperreal imitations. Principally, Baudrillard suggests that such hyperreal imitations or as he refers to them, simulations are more tempting to us because they bring about fulfillment and happiness, imitating a temporary simulacrum, instead of an actual “interaction with ‘real’ reality” (Hyperreality). In other words, television has converted our world. Due to television our awareness of reality has changed, resulting in modified “relations with each other and the world” (R. Williams 3) around us.

Concerning *The Simpsons*, it was already discussed previously, that in some way the family symbolizes a normal present-day US family. The fact that the TV set is significantly important

within their lives is already reflected within the opening scene. The family members all hurry through their everyday lives, leaving everything behind, in order to as soon as possible arrive at the desired final haven, the couch in front of their TV set, in order to watch *The Simpsons* on television. In this sense, the couch gag makes fun of the show's viewers themselves, through mimicking their own fixation on television and *The Simpsons*. The audience is presented with the fact that the accusable amusement of watching television is a necessary sin, at least in the Information Age (Ott, *Small Screen* 80, 81). Groening confirms in an interview that "*The Simpsons* is [...] about the process of watching TV" (qtd. in Butler and Sepp 361). Such an extensive influence of mass media, particularly television is easily noticed in Homer's obsessive dependence on television.

### 2.3.1 Homer the passive television viewer

"Look Homer, Lisa's taking her first steps." – Marge Simpson

"Are you taping it?" – Homer Simpson

"Yes." – Marge Simpson

"I'll watch it later." – Homer Simpson (Lisa's Pony 8F06)

The omnipresent influence and penetration of the mass media in *The Simpsons* cartoon world is recognizable in Homer's sick fixation with his TV set. Homer represents the ultimate "couch potato" (Björnsson 30), who spends the majority of his time watching television, even more than his son and daughter. Over the years, he has "squeezed a self-conforming groove into the family's couch" (Ott, "Postmodern Identity" 65). Very often he is unable to tell the difference between real life and television's images. Furthermore, he has become the archetype of person, which switches channels in a mechanical manner, zaps through the infinite selection of channels offered by the broadcasting companies. Instead of absorbing the underlying meanings of the broadcasted images, Homer's act of watching television is limited to the passive consumption of shallow images. Furthermore, his habits of watching television surely fit the "vast wasteland" (Dettmar 89) characterization of television. As Homer stands for a former generation, contrasting generation X viewers, who have never known a world without television, he can without difficulty be manipulated by TV ads and publicity tricks. Furthermore he willingly admits that television determines the guidelines of his life. Homer in a way is overinformed by television and embodies uncontrolled and endless consumption (Dettmar 89).

Because mediated messages are regarded as more trustworthy, due to their perceived informational and fun character, Homer puts his absolute faith within his television set. Homer

represents those passive viewers, who let the mass media filter, edit and interpret information for them in order to let them make judgments according to their ideologies, regardless of their deviations. An example of such an instance can be found within the episode “Homer Badman”, in which the impact of the mass media on the public opinion is demonstrated (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 65). Homer is accused of sexual harassment after a babysitter misinterprets a sexual attempt at her, while Homer tries to grab a candy stuck to her pants. Homer becomes Springfield’s number one enemy, due to a wrong TV movie portrayal of him. Homer’s opinion is not given any value, since Springfield’s society puts all its trust into the mass media, in particular to the one version crafted by the media. As described earlier, reality is no longer obtainable, due to the media’s persistent recreation of concepts with no deeper truth to back up their original representations.

Furthermore, Homer starts questioning his own innocence. As he sees the news report on TV, which is accusing him of sexual harassment, he moans: “Oh may be TV is right. TV’s always right” (Homer Badman 2F06). The idea of television as manipulator of society is also portrayed through Bart, as even he does not believe his father’s story. As Homer doubts his innocence, Bart comments: “It’s just hard not to listen to TV, it’s spent so much more time raising us than you have” (Homer Badman 2F06). Instead of giving information on reality, television’s overabundance of portrayals supports, according to Baudrillard’s description, the “loss of scene” (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 65).

We can see that Homer’s character reflects the postmodern dilemma of detaching oneself from the controlling medium of television. He cannot give up television; because his life would appear hollow without the fake simulations it offers (Björnsson 32). His compulsory surrender to his television set and his unwillingness to let anything come between them is illustrated at the end of this episode. Homer takes his television set into his arms and begs humbly “Let’s never fight again” (Homer Badman 2F06).

Apart from dealing with the total interdependence on media’s presentation of attitudes, as well as its socializing influence it has on society, *The Simpsons’* television set also embodies its potential to unite the family as such. According to Williams, television’s power as a medium for social communication is so excessive, that it even influences and changes social relations. Television has unpredicted consequences on some of the dominant processes of everyday life, including family, cultural and social life (3). These changes that Williams is referring to are constantly portrayed within the show. Television is presented as a unifying force on the one hand and a provocateur of families’ lives on the other. It is the medium of television that brings all the age groups together, while watching the broad spectrum of broadcasts in Springfield (Björnsson

28). One of these TV shows that expresses a unification of family members is the frequently occurring *The Itchy and Scratchy Show*, featuring a cartoon within a cartoon.

### 2.3.2 Cartoon within a cartoon

The *Itchy and Scratchy Show* is one of the most frequently re-occurring shows within *The Simpsons*, which is based on the classic cartoon *Tom and Jerry*. The never ending war between a mouse and a cat, who are continuously finding new and more detestable ways to kill each other every episode and the repulsive cartoon world in *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* actually serves a particular and important purpose.

The main objective is to grant the show an extra complex layer of reality. As the complete dullness “of the cat-and-mouse world gives a rounded quality to the world of the Simpsons family, [...] the characters no longer seem quite so cartoonish” (P. A. Cantor, “Greatest TV Show Ever” 34). What Cantor refers to, is the fact that when the Simpsons kids sit in front of their TV in order to watch the violent cartoon, the kids support the belief to consider their universe to be true, contrary to the fictional universe presented by the television’s counterparts. Furthermore, the two kids seem to find more stimulation by being glued to their TV set, than by their personal cartoonish universe. Parallel to that, *The Simpsons’* audience strengthens its interpretation of their environment to be realer than the fictional universe within the show. Our attraction to signs and images, such as the world of *The Simpsons*, derives from the need to separate ourselves from the unreal, aiming to form our world as more real (Björnsson 28).

Although Bart and Lisa are granted a whole world with endless possibilities of adventures, they favor to dwell within the universe offered on television. Bart and Lisa however, give the impression not to realize that basically their corpora are similarly artificial as those of the cartoon characters. Precisely like the mouse’s and cat’s corpora will restore again, so will Bart’s body not experience any harm after Homer has strangled him. In this sense, *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* is in consequence “a simulation of the real world of Springfield - a hyperreality within a hyperreality” (Björnsson 29). Applying a cartoon-within-cartoon is used to tightly differentiate the true from the fictional in the children’s world. The cartoon characters, presenting the mouse’s and the cat’s detached cartoon universe, being absolutely separated from the family’s cartoon universe, are meant to disguise the universe external to the Simpsons’ television, to be unreal as well. This, according to Baudrillard is an effort to form our perception of the surrounding environment as if it is realer. However, the borderline that we believe to support, that according to us persists to distinguish the true and the fantasy is truly a deception. The surrounding environment has ceased

to be realer than the fictional one, due to the relentless generation of media images that actually diffuse such boundaries (Björnsson 28, 29).

As Ott states, there are only a several programs that “are more reflexively fake – self-aware of their status as images and representation for which there is no external reality – then *The Simpsons*” (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 60). In other words, only a handful of programs are consciously aware to be artificial and capable to present an internal reality within the show that does not correspond to an outside reality. After all, the characters featured within *The Simpsons* are cartoons and coarsely drawn ones. Groening explains to have shaded the family members vividly yellow in order to make the audience feel like the TV requires adjustment. In this sense, it is the disclosing of television’s banal and artificial features, of the shows honest deception that has caused critics, to assign the members of the family to be perceived as true human beings. Consequently, *The Simpsons* is hyperreal, because it hints to itself, by means of establishing completeness with their own accuracy and reality (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 60).

*The Simpsons* succeeds in reducing the world’s complexity into a sequence of images that are constantly being presented to contemporary society. On television, as well as in *The Simpsons*, it has become possible to experience the globe and its life through representative copies or simulacra. In most cases, concerning such representations, the imitations are more suitable to hit the bull’s eye than its real and stereotypical counterparts.

*The Simpsons* however, does not limit the blurring of the boundaries only to issues related to what is real and what is fiction. Such an obscurity of boundaries affects its determination to what genre it belongs. As I mentioned in ‘*The Simpsons*’ potential as an animated series’, the show combines forms of the traditional sitcom, the variety show and animation. This way the show creates its own hybrid genre, which makes it difficult to pin it down to common categories associated with genre. Furthermore it relies on various former stylistic devices and techniques which it mixes and recombines within its animated form. On top of that it incorporates various cultural references ranging from pop culture and classical music to esoteric and astrophysics. This grants the producers the capability to address simultaneously the media-savvy audience as well as the intellectuals among its viewers. Such a hybridity in styles, forms and genres results in the flattening of cultural hierarchies of what was once strictly distinguished from each other, namely ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture.

## **2.4. *The Simpsons* makes ‘high culture’ more accessible**

Many academics give different definitions of what is high and what is low or popular culture, but in most simple terms we could say that the distinction between the two has to do with the

people for whom the ‘culture products’ or commodities were intended. For example, an orchestra playing Mozart or Beethoven would qualify as high culture as historically it was produced for the listening pleasure of the elites of the society. In contrast to that, a distinct group and arrangement of instruments, performing at the location with the cheapest beer in town, would not make the cut as being of high culture. It can be said that high culture refers to cultural artifacts that are belonging to some sort of elites, regardless of how elite is defined, either by having a certain status in society, educational level or yet something else. So where the modernists would generally praise and respect the differences in cultural demand of the elites and the common folk and despise the mixing of bad taste qualities, postmodernist would try to blur the needs of the two, by combining and mixing out of various bits and pieces to form something new. Fragmented or open forms, the breaking down of conventions, the obscuring of boundaries as well as the fusion of various distinct genres is what happens in postmodernism (Allen 186).

Whereas, throughout history there has always been a disparity between high and low culture, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural practices confirmed the opposite, not less due to media’s extensive penetration of our lives. Television in particular, seems to be a rich ground for creating new artistic styles and hybrids. Eclecticism, a stylistic device, in which various distinct cultural forms are mixed, blended or recombined, frequently complements high and low artistic styles. Television often draws in the mixing of unusual and dissimilar “camera shots, editing techniques and plot devices” (Ott, *Small Screen* 59) and patchworks various styles. The result of such practices is the fusion of considered high cultural art forms with mass entertainment commodities resulting in a preference “of surface over depth” (Ott, *Small Screen* 60).

The animated format of *The Simpsons* makes it relatively easy to mix various different styles, techniques and genres to result in a mainstream product. Scholars agree that one of the primary causes for the show’s tremendous mainstream prosperity can be ascribed to its potential to offer entertainment for a really diversified viewership (Beard 276; Gruteser 73; Dettmar 91; Brook 180). Through the mixing of various styles, genres and its references to discrete cultural phenomena the producers target not only children and young adults, but are also capable to stimulate intellectual potentials of for example academics.

*The Simpsons* however, does not only offer multi-leveled entertainment, but is capable to enlarge ones horizons. John Alberti argues that the show due to its “popularity as a mass media text” is considered to be “highly influential television” (Alberti xix). Furthermore, its intelligence makes an effort to go beyond mere entertainment aiming to have an effect on society. Because many young people have come to grow up with *The Simpsons*, it acts similar to an American Institution, a “kind of [...] an alternate education system” that many have made use of “as a lesson

in [...] culture” (Alberti qtd. in Swift). It is *The Simpsons* through which a younger viewership gets acquainted with the philosophy of Ayn Rand, Tennessee Williams’ *Streetcar Named Desire*, Allen Ginsberg’s epic poem *Howl*, astrophysicist Stephen Hawking or Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Raven*. Carl Bybee, who is a media professor, considers the show as being a “cultural advertisement that stimulates interest in the original” (qtd. in Swift).

These professors consider the show as a leading example for the flattening of cultural hierarchies that is typical for the postmodern condition. Through the means of blending rough humor with high-minded issues, the boundaries between high and low culture is removed. Bright and approachable creations like *The Simpsons*, to whom Alberti refers to as an introduction into postmodern cultural forms “for dummies” (qtd. in Swift), supports the obscuring of the margins between what is considered to be of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural value. Because many works of art demand a certain degree of cultural literacy, in order to be completely appreciated, *The Simpsons* acquaints its audience with cultural classics by making them less obscure and familiarizes its audience with them in an unconventional way. Consequently, the show makes culture in general more accessible (Swift).

Concerning former styles and forms, the show does not only frequently mix and recombine them in their own individual way, but also very often alludes to such previously established cultural forms. Intertextuality, a further postmodern feature is a stylistic tool in which a production, like for example *The Simpsons* hints at several preexisting cultural texts, by referring to their narrations, characters or plot devices (Ott, *Small Screen* 65).

## **2.5. Intertextuality applied within *The Simpsons***

The modern movement’s creativity gave rise to a flood of distinctive and individual styles, resulting in the exhaustion of modernist invention. To put it differently, within modernism everything has already been invented, things have already been said and done, history has happened. As we cannot come up with new styles any more, we can only reproduce, recycle or copy the existing ones (Allen 185).

In contrast to the modernism’s call to “make it new” (Allen 185), postmodernism is regarded as “a saturatedness of present cultural forms and styles” (Allen 185). John Barth’s essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” approves the exhaustion of certain styles, inevitably leading to the imitation and reproduction of former styles. Similarly, Jameson, who significantly contributed to the postmodern debate, considers the postmodern surrounding as one being characterized by the alteration of individual styles. Whereas the Modernists typically thrived to initiate own unrivalled and exclusive styles, the postmodernists favor to focus on the past in order to exploit and imitate

these former styles. In the postmodern time, these formerly individual and unequalled techniques that were such a central characteristic of art, have been converted into conventional techniques (Allen 183, 184). Instead of relentlessly pursuing the need to make something new, postmodernism practices what we can call the intertextual style.

Intertextuality in a broad sense is related to the practice of adapting styles from different time periods and putting them together in a manner which intends to reflect the historically and socially emerging pluralism. Intertextuality is a noticeable characteristic inherent in numerous postmodern cultural artifacts. Within these cultural artifacts preexisting creations of artwork or literary works regularly “refer to each other” (Bakhtin qtd. in Goltz 41). The term intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva at the end of the 1960s but since then its meaning has been discussed and altered manifoldly, resulting in sometimes contradicting interpretations. Generally when we read a text we are looking for a meaning that lies inside that respective work. Texts have meanings that are interpreted by its readers. However, texts consist of various systems, codes and traditions, which are set up by previous works. Therefore, an understanding of these systems, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture in general are vital for the interpretation of the meaning of texts. Texts regardless of being literary or non-literary are considered as missing any self-sufficient connotations. “They are what theorists now call intertextual” (Allen 1).

The act of extracting a meaning, according to theorists, leads “us into a network of textual relations” (Allen 1). Interpreting a text or revealing its meaning, lies in the act of pursuing those relations. The process of extracting a meaning therefore, evolves into a process of moving between texts. As Allen further explains, meaning is understood as something which happens to be between a text and all the other texts to which it refers, while departing from the autonomous text into a network of textual connections. “The text becomes the intertext” (Allen 1).

In simplest terms intertextuality occurs when a primary text is fused or taken over by a later one. In other words, intertextuality is to be understood as “the representation of text 1 in text 2. Therefore, text 1 is the resulting ‘intertext’ of a previous text” (Czernecki). Because intertextuality involves connections between miscellaneous texts, their significance or message is established by means of some other preexisting text (Lesic-Thomas 3). Furthermore, intertextuality is the extracting of content’s substance by the means of different texts. Kristeva states that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 37). This means that an author can either borrow and alter a prior text or simply refer to it. Intertextual reading results in a plurality of meanings; therefore, intertextual reading inspires its reader to withstand a passive reading. Since there is never a single or correct way to read a text,

because every reader holds distinct expectations, interests, viewpoints and previous reading experiences (Allen 7).

*The Simpsons* frequently absorbs, refers or transforms preexisting (cultural) texts within their narratives, representing a previous text within their text. *The Simpsons*' text thereby becomes the intertext. The familiarity with the original text, from which the show's creators 'borrow' their ideas, influences the meaning crafted by its audience. Because intertextuality constitutes the major part of this thesis, with regard of its functions in serving as a tool for providing entertainment across generations, it is unreasonable at this point to go into a deeper analysis of examples. Instead, I will briefly outline *The Simpsons*' use of intertextual references in order to round up *The Simpsons*' reflection of postmodern features. A detailed discussion of intertextuality, its forms as well as its use to entertain various audiences will be provided subsequently in the chapter '*The Simpsons*' use of Intertextuality'.

Generally, *The Simpsons* regularly incorporates various intertextual references within their storylines, ranging from movies, musicals, cartoons, celebrities, television in general and works of literature. Scholars argue that the producers' integration of various cultural references from the past and the present is one of the primary features that distinguish the show from its predecessors, in terms of their excessive use (Ott, *Small Screen* 58, Mullen 81, Alberti xiv).

In most cases movies are adapted by either focusing on a certain sequence, characters or borrowing a whole plot idea by means of blending it into the show's narrative. In such cases the show relies on certain camera techniques, sound effects or outstanding characters to hint at a certain reference. Some examples of legendary and well known movies that had been incorporated and advertised within the show are among as many as: *Pulp Fiction*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Psycho*, *Speed*, *Star Wars* and *Charlie and the Chocolate factory* among many others.

"The Treehouse of Horror" series, for example, features special episodes, which heavily rely on other movies, novels or television shows adapted from the horror, fantasy or science fiction genre. In these special episodes, as the name already indicates, the producers of the show usually allude to several distinctive intimidating works of art, like *Scream*, *Dracula* or *The Exorcist* within one single episode. The stories are mostly explicitly parodied by means of casting the members of the Simpsons family in order to give the original narration the for *The Simpsons* typical twisted perspective.

*The Simpsons* does not only gesture at particular movies, but also at works of literature. Intertextuality at this point serves as a crucial device for presenting classic works to its audience. Books that *The Simpsons* mainly refer to, feature those which have been passed on from generation to generation, and are taught at school, like for example Golding's *Lord of the Flies* or

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. However, the passing on of classic literary works is not to be taken for granted, because canonical literature, which is considered to be of high cultural value, loses its importance to us. Consequently, *The Simpsons* which incorporates various references to such texts guarantees its broad presence. Intertextuality in that sense holds a very important function, because it flattens the classical discrepancy between high and low culture, in that it makes these texts more accessible (Goltz 17, 18).

Apart from the fictional types of television entertainment, the show frequently alludes to a multitude of celebrities, politicians, rock stars and well known people, that have visited Springfield over the last 23 years. The Beatles, for example are *The Simpsons*' constant companions. Paul McCartney and his late wife Linda frequently hold a jam session together with Apu in his secret roof garden and assert Lisa's decision to become a vegetarian. Ringo Starr is seen to sit in a remote country house being busy with answering each fan letter personally (Rauscher 112). In "Homer's Barbershop Quartet" the producers even went to great length to reconstruct the history of the Beatles by means of providing a Simpsons appropriate version. Homer starts a band with his drinking buddy Barney, principal Skinner and Apu, called the B-Sharps. The history of Homer's band reminds viewers very much of the Beatles' own history. The cover of the B-sharps' first album called *Meet the Be Sharps* very much relates to the Beatles first album known as *Meet the Beatles*. For the disbandment of the group nobody else than Barney's Japanese artist girlfriend is to be blamed for. The last performance of the B-Sharps takes place at the roof of Moe's Tavern, instead of, like in the case of the Beatles on the roof of their record company. While giving their concert, nobody less minor than George Harrison passes by and comments the B-Sharps concert with a simple "It's been done" (Homer Barbershop Quartet 9F21), alluding to the fact, that everything had already happened before in the past. This as we know by now, is principally the postmodern theme, which *The Simpsons* so many times embrace and reflect. Watching *The Simpsons*, one will find it indisputable effortless to recognize the one or other cultural reference, which is cleverly embedded into *The Simpsons*' own storyline in order to fuse with the Springfieldian universe.

Besides the use of intertextual references, which allow *The Simpsons* to familiarize its audience with discrete cultural phenomena, the show includes another form of references, namely self-reflexive references. Self-reflexivity grants fictional texts to reflect upon its own fictionality, accordingly *The Simpsons* viewers are reminded of the characters artificiality. How *The Simpsons* eradicates the appearance of reality, that former shows had worked so hard to produce, will be examined in the following section.

## 2.6. *The Simpsons* reflects upon its own artificiality

Scientific discoveries and steady progress led to the dismissal of any absolute center, resulting in a historical period defined by pluralism and self-questioning. Intensified social and cultural self-consciousness and a more natural cultural interest emerged around the question of “how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world” (Waugh 3). As a result of such self-exploration, forms like well-made plots and chronological or linear narrative structures, gave way to self-reflexivity. In general, self-reflexivity describes the ability of fiction to show an awareness of its own framework. Self-reflexive texts call attention to their fictional character, by destructing “our suspension of disbelief in the magic of the moment” (Campbell and Freed qtd. in Ott and Walter 438).

Basically, self-reflexivity describes the moment in which a medium refers to itself, thus reflects upon its own artificiality. With regard to *The Simpsons*, such references basically occur when its fictional characters display awareness that they are literally fictional protagonists within a particular medium, namely the cartoon. An example for such self-reflexivity is given when Homer tries to put together a barbecue pit. When he fails to do so, he is left with parts stuck in hardened cement. Furiously he shouts: “Damned cartoon cement. Real cement never works that quickly” (Mom and Popart AABF15). A further noteworthy example in the same episode occurs when Marge and Homer visit the Springsonian Museum. In the museum they look at a drawing of Akbar and Jeff, characters from Groening’s sketch *Life in Hell*. As soon as Homer notices the drawing he comments: “Matt Groening? What is he doing in a museum? He can barely draw!” (Mom and Popart AABF15). All of a sudden a huge pencil eraser is getting visible for the viewers and starts wiping out Homer’s head to what Homer immediately responds “Oh no! I’m being erased!” (Mom and Popart AABF15). A further example is featured within the episode “Deep Space Homer”, in which Homer gets stuck in space. Bart comforts the Simpsons family, who is glued to the television set at home, watching the tragedy happening by saying: “Of course he will make it. It’s TV!”<sup>17</sup> (Deep Space Homer 1F13). The joke that the producers of the show create at that point refers to the common perception that television in general does not permit its main protagonists to die.

As the previous examples show, self-reflexive elements supplement a show’s entertainment value, because they play with our expectations. The added level of entertainment strengthens the viewers’ bond with the show and its producers in that it promotes the feeling among its audience to share a joke with its characters. Instead of laughing at characters, viewers laugh with them. Self-

---

<sup>17</sup> See also Ott *Small Screen* 84.

reflexivity rewards its audience for getting the joke, and leaves the viewers aware that they are not watching an old and conventional kind of TV (Ott, *Small Screen* 72).

Instances like the one illustrated above are frequently running throughout the show, in which *The Simpsons* shows instances of alluding to itself as a fictional creation. *The Simpsons* however, does not only allude to itself as a cartoon, but also involves frequent judgments of its own medial environment, referring to the animation format, the sitcom genre and television in general. Because *The Simpsons* approaches the issue of watching television, which was discussed in ‘Why is *The Simpsons* hyperreal’, it appears important to analyze what the show itself has to state about its own medium as well as its own position and conditions as a show that is broadcasted on TV (Savage 202). *The Simpsons* frequently exposes awareness being embedded within a larger system by means of referring to other genres, media, television in general and Fox Network itself, commenting wittily on any one of them.

*The Simpsons* as any cultural commodity is subject to the “fundamental cycle of production, exchange (or distribution), and consumption (or reception)” (Withalm 129). Accordingly, any self-reflexive discussion concerning *The Simpsons* as a commodity must therefore mirror the cycle of production, exchange and consumption. That way, self-reflexive references become intertextual in that the show hints at other commodities in order to “comment[...] on its own cultural status, function, and history, as well as on the conditions of its circulation and reception” (Collins qtd. in Brook 179; Ott and Walter 439). Self-reflexive references act as delicate indications that require a certain awareness of the text’s formation background as well popular reviews and certain media conventions in general, in order to be acknowledged and appreciated as such by its audience (Ott and Walter 439).

Self-reflexivity through which the show hints at conventions of its own medium, namely the cartoon, and the thereby associated modes of cartoon productions is approached several times by the show’s creators. In the episode “The Front”, Bart and Lisa visit the studio in which *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* is being produced, and are being guided around by one of the producers. He explains that instead of going through imaginative hardships of drawing a new background for each respective new cartoon to mainly cut costs, animation’s advantage allows them to simply reuse the existing backgrounds, in order to reduce costs. As he affirms Lisa that this wouldn’t be noticed at all by viewers, they are passing by one and the same openly repeated background of a corridor, in which the same cleaning lady continually mops the floor<sup>18</sup>. In another episode, namely “Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie”, the creators again refer to the conventions concerning their

---

<sup>18</sup> See also Beard 274.

production mode. The episode portrays a group of sweating and exhausted workers that are bent over drawing boards, surrounded by soldiers with bayonets. As Beard comments,

[this] ‘cartoon work-camp’, can be interpreted as referring to the dubious ethical property of the modes of production of American cartoon shows, including *The Simpsons* itself, which is partially animated at Rough Draft Studios in Korea (274).

In this sense the production process of *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* functions as a reflexive reference commenting on the conventions of the cartoon production mode in general. The production of cartoons is frequently mirrored as a dull and paralyzing conveyor belt industry, driven by profit and a lack of enthusiasm for original accomplishments. Cheap labor overseas is exploited; storylines are simply altered and in that way sold to the massive marketing universe in order to extract every dollar out of a show. *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* frequently serves as a very important tool of self-reflexivity in that it displays an attitude towards the circumstances of production in terms of audience reception, economy and culture in general that surround the cartoon medium (Goltz 32).

Another noteworthy example of how the show reflects upon itself as a commodity offers the episode “In Marge we trust”. While Homer, Bart and Lisa plunder through the Springfield City Dump they find an empty box of Mr. Sparkle, a Japanese dishwashing detergent showing a company logo that resembles Homer’s face. What the producers of the show attempt to hint at in this episode, is the reference to the show’s own origins as a cultural commodity. As I illustrated in ‘Intertextuality applied within *The Simpsons*’ one of postmodern culture’s characteristic is to recycle and imitate preexisting cultural conventions in order to generate something ‘new’. Such a practice is also true for *The Simpsons* show, since it is based on the cornerstones of the sitcom, variety show and the animated format, bringing forth a new form of acceptable satire. Furthermore, it makes recourse to already existing plots and images of other television productions like movies, cartoons and television productions in general. In fact, television production and its broadcasts in general are heavily based upon such repetitive and intertextual practices. Instead of taking the associated financial risk of generating novel programming, producers draw on already established narratives and genres that have proved fortunate in the past. Similarly to recycling Homer’s image on a detergent box as a logo of a Japanese company, *The Simpsons* hints at the very fact that the show itself “recycles the trash, the most degraded aspects of televisual culture, into a new and improved commodity product” (Chow 109). Consequently, the show’s self-reflexivity on the one hand imitates television’s conventions while at the same time it elucidates the same conventions “by breaking down the processes of its own production, pointing to its own status as a commodity” (Chow 109).

These examples illustrate that *The Simpsons* emerged as a sophisticated and intelligent show, differentiating itself from most of the other programs broadcasted at the time of their initiation. The show does not only provide entertainment for young and old, but is capable to reflect upon various issues, including themselves and the practices of television in general. Self-reflexive television like *The Simpsons* defies the certainty and definiteness of clichéd and worn out television formulas, of which viewers seemed to be tired.

Recalling the sections main attempt, that is to illustrate how *The Simpsons* reflects and recognizes postmodernism, we see from these elaborate examples, that the show undoubtedly possesses the most fundamental features of the postmodern condition. These inherent characteristics set the show apart from mere simpleminded cartoons, proving their ability to make essential comments on important issues and outpacing the stereotyped childlike features of other cartoons. Firstly, the show does not attempt to lure “us into the hypnotic spell of traditional storyteller[s]” (Rushkoff 296), but motivates its viewers to attentively examine their own situation and further complex political, cultural or social matters. By exposing the invalidity of metanarratives the producers seek to set the viewers’ critical and reflective thinking process going in order to question their universal efficacy as well as cultivate resistance to their forceful and intimidating forces. Instead of dictating its “viewers *what* to think and feel ... [it] tells them *to* think and feel” (Ott, *Small Screen* 99). Groening confirms in an interview that

with ‘*The Simpsons*’ [...] what I’m trying to do in the guise of light entertainment, if this is possible, is nudge people, jostle them a little, wake them up to some of the ways in which we were being manipulated and exploited. And in my amusing little way I try to hit on some of the unspoken rules of our culture. (Groening, Interview by Brian Doherty)

Secondly, the show exemplary presents the ever increasing pluralism of society. With the help of the incorporation of various classes, ethnicities and races, the show focuses on various discrete aspects of everyday life, barely leaving any sensitive issues untouched. Further, *The Simpsons* is perceived as one of the most ‘real’ shows on television, granting its viewers the possibility to identify with their characters, and comfort their anxieties and worries. Thirdly, it discloses a consciousness of the media saturated culture in which “originality and authenticity no longer seem possible” (Ott, *Small Screen* 57), by withdrawing the falsehood to narrate a story for the first time. Instead, it playfully recombines and mixes past styles and formulas in order to amusingly comment on them. By relying on preexisting styles, genres and other texts in order to incorporate them within their narratives, *The Simpsons* as an influential institution educates its audience, by making high culture accessible. Finally, the show reflects upon its own fictionality, being conscious of its own creation and status, to which it constantly refers to and comments. In that way self-reflexivity

established itself as a common stylistic device, entrenching itself in programs that usually were quiet with regard to their artificiality, in order not to break the illusion of reality. As Chris Turner states, “The Simpsons [is] not just a show you watched but a language you spoke, a worldview you adopted [...] the touchstone of its age” (Turner 8, 10). In that sense they succeeded in creating a show that appeals to various distinct viewers, each and every viewer can improve one’s mind.

### 3. *The Simpsons’ use of Intertextuality*

The concept of intertextuality is simultaneously one of the most commonly used terms by contemporary scholars and the most frequently misused. Although intertextuality basically draws upon the connection of one text to other texts, the various theoretical standpoints developed with regard to this phenomena are multiple and sometimes very controversial. Many theorists use the term of intertextuality to address conceivably contradicting instances, resulting in a terminological ambiguity (Allen 2)<sup>19</sup>.

The frequently used term, especially with regard to media studies might make one think that intertextuality is generally uniformly understood and offers a fixed collection of perspectives for interpretation. Far from being a transparent term that can be applied in an obvious way Bloom argues, that the term is “underdetermined in meaning and overdetermined in figuration” (qtd. in Allen 2). William Irwin stresses the fact that the term “has come to have almost as many meanings as users, from those faithful to Kristeva’s original vision to those who simply use it as a stylish way of talking about allusion and influence” (Irwin 227; 228).

Because of the multitude of various manifestations of intertextuality generated over the years, since its coinage towards the end of the 1960s by Kristeva, it is not within the scope of this thesis to provide an overview of all possible theoretical concepts. Instead, I will focus on only those theoretical discussions that I believe are relevant for further examination of intertextuality with regard to its function within *The Simpsons* as a stylistic device to offer entertainment across generations.

Kristeva as the pioneer of defining the first coherent statement of an intertextual theory used M.M. Bakhtin’s work, which focuses on the presence of language within particular social situations. Kristeva’s work on Bakhtin’s theories took place during a period in which modern literary and cultural theory underwent a transitional period. As explained by Allen, this shift is commonly outlined with regard to a move from structuralism to poststructuralism that is characterized “as one in which assertions of objectivity, scientific rigour, methodological stability

---

<sup>19</sup> On the problems related to this matter see also Ott and Walter 429.

and other highly rationalistic-sounding terms are replaced by an emphasis on uncertainty, indeterminacy, incommunicability, subjectivity, desire, pleasure and play” (Allen 3).

Following that, post-structuralism refers to what is known as the ‘decentred universe’, that is a situation in which there no longer exist any referential points, since all concepts that formerly determined a center have been ‘deconstructed’ or weakened. It underlines the difficulty of deriving at fixed knowledge about things, because there are no tangible facts, but only interpretations. Moreover, we cannot take anything for granted, since we are not capable of knowing anything for sure. Consequently, meanings are unstable and subject to changes (Barry 62, 63, 64). Therefore, intertextuality for poststructuralist theorists has been applied in order to dismantle beliefs of a fix meaning and an objective interpretation (Allen 3).

One of the most influential poststructuralist theorists was Roland Barthes, who in his crucial essay *The Death of the Author* announces the infiniteness of meanings, evading from all kinds of textual authority. Rhetorically seen the death of the author is “a way of asserting the independence of the literary text and its immunity to the possibility of being [...] limited by any notion of what the author might have intended or crafted into the work” (Barry 66). In this sense, Barthes declares the complete independence of text, which according to him is not ruled by intention or context. Barthes’ essay constitutes a transition of focus in that previously a creation was regarded to be something generated by its creator, whereas now a creation is considered to be a product designed by the audience. Consequently, readers can never entirely create a steady state of meaning, since the intertextual disposition of texts always guides readers on to new textual relations. Such a situation is regarded by Barthes as deliverance for readers from both, the traditional dominance and authority of the author figure. Barthes’ classification of intertextuality, with regard to the emphasis of plurality and the liberation from restrictions of all readers, is what Allen regards as characteristically poststructuralist (Allen 2, 3).

Because a text happens to be “within an endlessly expanding matrix of intertextual production” (Ott and Walter 431), readers constantly bring new knowledge in order to give a particular text its meaning. Therefore the construction of meaning is always volatile and never complete, since every reader brings along different textual knowledge when reading a text. Similarly to Barthes, Kristeva regards the relation between texts in much the same way in that she doesn’t consider texts to be “self-contained, nor individually authored, [instead] they are endlessly permeated by a social ensemble which is itself a textual ensemble” (Ott and Walter 432). Following that, a text always relies on other texts and has never an independent meaning, but must be interpreted in consideration of other texts.

The poststructuralist approach of intertextuality has very quickly obtained general use among media scholars. However, as Ott and Walter argue, the advance of this theory was introduced and then animated by two to some extent differing impulses. In the 1970s media scholars relied on the critique of the 'Author-God', an approach emphasized among others by Barthes and Kristeva, who, as previously mentioned, began theorizing the idea "of the active audience" (Ott and Walter 429). In this understanding intertextuality worked as a label for the basic process of generating meaning by readers or audiences. Later in the 1980s media critics noticed that movies and television productions in general had to a greater extent started to refer to other popular cultural works of art. Critics aiming to explain such incidents took over the term intertextuality. As a result of such developments, Ott and Walter argue that in current practice intertextuality is used to interpret two highly dissimilar phenomena: one the one hand "an interpretive practice of audiences" (Ott and Walter 429), which focuses on the audience as the one generating meaning within texts, on the other hand "a stylistic device" (Ott and Walter 429), which constitutes an intentional allusion in media accomplished by the producers.

Intertextuality, referring to the process of interpreting meaning by audiences, based upon Barthes' and Kristeva's belief, that consider a text as something always being read by its audience intertextually, therefore constituting an infinite activity of producing textual meanings, is shared by Walter and Ott. In that sense, intertextual reading is considered as a more subconscious and ideological process of meaning production, since each reader brings different textual knowledge and experiences into the reading process, resulting in individualized meanings (Walter and Ott 434, 433, 432). By constituting the audience as the more substantial item in the intertextual reading process, Barthes however, abstains from confronting the difficult question if intertextuality requires being in the author's mind and was initially intended (Goltz 45). At this point the ambiguity that arises with regard to a uniform utilization of the term intertextuality becomes apparent. Whereas both Barthes and Kristeva agree on the crucial role inherent to readers in the process of crafting a text's meaning, they do not approach the question of whether intertextual practices might have been intended while being generated by its authors.

Ott and Walter argue that there are indeed some texts that intentionally position intertextuality as a stylistic device in a way that forms how audiences encounter those texts (Ott and Walter 434). Similarly, Irwin and Lombardo affirm the intended application of intertextuality by emphasizing its discursive potential.

The practical value of allusions is found in their ability to provide links to other works of art. Such links in turn provide a context and a tradition in which a work of art is to be interpreted. Whereas philosophers deal with their predecessors or contemporaries by

criticizing their arguments and offering new, and hopefully better, arguments, artists tend to allude to their predecessors or contemporaries. Artists use allusions in this way to homage, parody, mock, and surpass. (89)

The intention of artists to homage, parody, mock or surpass any predecessors, clearly states the application of intertextuality as an intentionally placed device. In that understanding, intertextual allusions offer the possibility to ‘indirectly’ comment on a predecessor’s accomplishment. Regardless of the initial intention, to critic or homage, it constitutes a device consciously deployed.

To sum up, we can say that in current practice the term intertextuality is used to describe the attentive side of the producer to intentionally employ intertextual references and the likely latent perspective of the ‘active audience’. With regard to the examination of the functions of intertextual references concerning their capability to entertain across generations, I consider, beyond doubt, the focus on intentionally placed intertextual references to be of vital importance. Intertextual references deployed consciously by the creators of the show indicate that they have been involved to bring about a particular outcome, and influence the meaning an individual viewer extracts from it. Such an approach conceives intertextuality to have an inherent potential to form meaning, thus not a general characteristic inherent within every text (Goltz 48). *The Simpsons* however, without a doubt rank among those texts, which intentionally place intertextuality within its narratives in order to form particular meanings among its audience. Regardless of whether audiences realize such embedded references or not, they undoubtedly intend to stimulate particular feelings including at least entertainment, by those who do not recognize them in order to reflect upon them. As mentioned earlier, some examples of these consciously deployed references are to mock or parody predecessors. In that respect, my focus lies within the examination of pastiche, homage and parody. Their usage and functions within *The Simpsons* will be discussed in the chapter ‘*The Simpsons* entertains across generations’.

While examining the functions of intentionally placed references, the features of the interaction between audiences and intertextually marked texts can hardly be left untouched. As I pointed already out in chapter ‘*The Simpsons* emerges as a sophisticated and reflective show’, certain media provide symbolic resources, “mental equipment” (Ott and Walter 440), for facing cultural anxieties and everyday life matters. Ott and Walter suggest that the widespread feelings of alienation and fragmentation are affecting contemporary society, especially the youth culture, and activate feelings of displacement. In that respect, media and intertextually marked programs offer resources for constructing consistent identities. Intertextual references incorporated within postmodern commodities enable the audience to apply unconventional wisdom in order to establish its belonging in a certain group (Ott and Walter 440). In how far *The Simpsons* provides

such a symbolic resource for its audience, will also constitute a part of my analysis in the chapter on entertainment.

The first part of this section intended to give an overview of how intertextuality is currently applied with the prospect to establish a common ground of understanding for further analysis. However, I regard it as necessary to expand the concept of intertextuality and to raise the awareness that intertextuality is not restricted in its utilization to refer to written texts solely.

### 3.1. *The Simpsons*' transgresses intertextual boundaries

As mentioned above, the approaches introduced so far are nearly solely involved with works of literature, therefore referring to intertextuality in terms of texts relations. Keeping in mind the rapidly evolving technological advances described in the section '*The Simpsons* emerges as a sophisticated and reflective show', and the new applications of communication technologies, the written text may prove to be only one narrative technique among many others. As Allen states, the contemporary cultural environment "is much more conclusively a new media environment" (Allen 208), consequently intertextuality is by no means entirely restricted to literary works. As Allen further describes, intertextuality as a label, is not confined to the considerations of the literary arts alone anymore, but rather extends into areas "of cinema, painting, music, architecture, photography and in virtually all cultural and artistic productions" (Allen 174).

*The Simpsons* is a television show that alludes not only to written texts like literary works and comics, but incorporates also sculptures, paintings as well as auditory media like music and mixed forms like movies, television shows and stage productions within their episodes. Programs like *The Simpsons*, especially due to its animated format, that grants a multitude of possibilities to embed various allusions to cultural phenomena, require expanding of the concept of intertextuality.

Going back to the origins of the concepts of an extended intertextuality we have to go back to Barthes. Barthes established an awareness of text as "a tissue, something woven" (Barthes 39) that is not restricted to the written text, instead he states that it can be discovered in "all signifying practices [like for example] the practice of painting pictures, musical practice, filmic practice, etc." (Barthes 41). His approach of what a text constitutes sets up a path to go beyond mere text relations. In seizing this suggestion, the term intermediality has slowly picked its way through since its coinage in 1983. Intermediality was coined by the German scholar Aage A. Hansen-Löve and was coined in analogy to intertextuality in order to take into account references between literature, the visual arts as well as music. Intermediality however, similarly to intertextuality, is not a straightforward term itself, and is often confused with intertextuality. This confusion occurs,

in particular, if ‘text’ is used as an umbrella term embracing all elements of language and systems of communication. If, however, ‘text’ is applied more carefully, implying verbal texts only, the distinction between intertextuality and intermediality is forthright. In that understanding, intertextuality concerns solely relations between written and spoken texts. In contrast to that, intermediality in its all-encompassing meaning is put into use to refer to any transgression of boundaries between media. Indeed, intertextuality and intermediality, as Wolf argues, are rival terms; however, intermediality manifests the to a greater extent interdisciplinary characteristic of the research being carried out in this area of expertise. Further, intermediality is indeed a vital concept for contrasting and examining various works of art and media (Wolf 252, 256).

With the rise of the Internet and new digital media, the concept of intermediality was advanced in the 1990s, in order to extend the concept of intertextuality to utilize it for the examination of new digital, Internet-based textual forms. In other words, intermediality has been defined as intertextuality between distinct media. In that understanding intermediality has been extended to denote textual references between one medium and another. In short, intermediality can be understood as “expanded intertextuality” (Nikunen 113).

In simple terms, we can consider *The Simpsons* itself as a medium in that it acts as an intermediary, intervening entity or an agency that conveys particular messages. Similarly, to letters, newspapers, books, the radio, or the Internet that are also regarded as media that communicate particular messages to its audience *The Simpsons* represents an independent mass communication medium. As such it follows its own agenda by frequently referring to other media of another type, not necessarily being limited to the television medium and therefore transgressing the boundaries between media. Because *The Simpsons* frequently refers to a multitude of discrete works of art, its intertextual use reflects interdisciplinary characteristics. In that understanding intermediality is a crucial concept that needs to be kept in mind when examining *The Simpsons*.

Intermediality plays a further significant role with regard to the advance of the Internet. Intermediality then, refers to the appearance of such relations as audience practices. Nikunen argues that intermediality activates the development of audiences and interpretative communities as well as their interpretive collections. ‘Fan studies’ (Nikunen 113), as Nikunen refers to it, offer noteworthy instances for the examination of intermediality because the diversified applications of media constitute a vital part of such fan cultures (Nikunen 113, 114).

Concerning *The Simpsons*, the show’s fan base participates in extensive online discussions. After each episode fans meet online to exchange their individual observations, providing comments of miscellaneous scenes, messages and characters. The central Simpsons fan base website is known as [www.snpp.com](http://www.snpp.com), which is an immensely cooperatively assembled pool of

information, contributed by fans and consisting of unique perceptions as well as judgments about each episode. Matt Groening once stated that he and his writing team frequently draw on comments generated on the [www.snpp.com](http://www.snpp.com) website. First of all, it supports them in order to keep track of what issues have already been covered throughout its 23 years of production. Secondly, the producers use the website to inform themselves about the feedback and reception, particular episodes received from its fan base. The producers of the show even go one step further in that they ‘respond’ to certain comments provided on the website. Through cleverly hidden messages they retaliate by mocking their fans because of their obsession with *The Simpsons*. In such instances subtle messages are skillfully incorporated into various episodes in a way that they can only be noticed through the freeze-frame technique. In other words, those who record the episodes and watch it several times in order to get all the tiny details, which appear either in the background or in the credits of the show, will get the hidden spoofs. That way, the producers mock the obsession of certain fans and fight back criticism that expresses particular fans’ discontent concerning the show’s lack of creativity (Oakley and Silverman; Knox; Ott, *Small Screen* 87; A. Wolf), while at the same time they still keep the dedicated fans engaged to search for those small details.

Because all sources cited within this thesis refer to *The Simpsons*’ use of references as being intertextual, I will follow that manner in order to avoid misunderstandings. The concept of intermediality as a form of an extended form of intertextuality as such, should nevertheless be kept in mind, because the animated format enables them to refer to various media.

Having set up the appropriate framework for further analysis by providing an outline of what constitutes intertextuality with regard to my analysis I will now discuss the particular forms of intertextuality drawn upon by *The Simpsons*.

### **3.2. Forms of Intertextuality embraced within *The Simpsons***

Due to the animated format of *The Simpsons*, an almost infinite range of possibilities is at the producers’ disposal to combine distinct visual and auditory references to, for instance movies, TV shows, songs, musicals and many more, resulting in creative realizations beating most other media formats (Gruteser, Klein and Rauscher 12). Because animation can be two or three dimensional, it allows the producers not only to enclose real life persons with or without their compliance, but it also endows the creators to visualize thoughts and phantasms. As animation is not restricted to the physical restraints of the human body, it can change colors, shapes, chemical states and even raise the dead (Goltz 86). Furthermore, it can contain any kind of sounds taken from various medial forms. Such countless capabilities allow *The Simpsons* to exchange information and ideas with

their medial surroundings. “As an animated character, Bart can do more than just watch and comment on media iconography. Once a media figure has entered his animated world, Bart can interact with it, satirize it, or even become it” (Rushkoff 294). Finally, animation’s power, concerning its characters, lies within the potentiality to “heap indignities and trauma upon them without making audiences feel bad for the characters, [...] because they are no real people you can exaggerate and make things funnier without feeling any pain” (Salomon qtd. in Mittell 23).

Keeping in mind the huge variety of potential references that can be achieved by the animation format, it is reasonable to prepare the ground for further analysis by breaking down the types of intertextual references *The Simpsons* embraces. Descriptive categories that are being applied in examining intertextuality with regard to organize and examine such allusions, are structured according to distinct systems and on various levels, resulting in an enormous area of possible realizations. As it was already discussed in the introduction of the chapter on intertextuality, intertextuality finds various, often contrasting applications and not uncommonly rests on contradicting meanings. Therefore, the analysis that follows, cannot aim at an all-embracing assessment of the miscellaneous classifications that have been established over decades of theory in the field of intertextuality. Instead, I will apply the classification suggested by John Fiske to outline two distinct types of intertextuality.

In John Fiske’s book *Television Culture*, he distinguishes between two forms of intertextuality which he classifies as vertical and horizontal. Firstly, vertical intertextuality is described as the relationship between a primary text (in this case *The Simpsons*) and “other texts of a different type that refer explicitly to it” (87). In other words, vertical intertextuality is when the producers of the show refer for example to political events, particular historical incidents, celebrities or real life persons. In short, vertical intertextuality embraces allusions to the real world, which happen outside the cartoon world of Springfield.

Secondly, horizontal relationships “are those between a primary text that are more or less explicitly linked, usually along the genre, character or content” (87). Because *The Simpsons* is a generic mix of sitcom, variety show and animation, the determination of genre with regard to the show is an impractical attempt. However, the show unerringly classifies as a work of fiction as well as the format of TV series and shows being broadcasted on TV. Therefore, Fiske’s references to such relations which happen on an identical level occur for instance, when the show alludes to other TV programs, literature or movies. In other words, horizontal intertextual references allude to fictional works and characters as those creations being produced for the purpose of entertainment or television in general.

### 3.2.1 Vertical Intertextuality- *The Simpsons* alludes to the real world

As vertical intertextuality applies to the real world outside the Springfield universe, the producers of the show most frequently include notable personalities from real life that either have a certain reputation or are simply in the spotlight. Regardless of their particular achievements in a given industry, the producers include all kinds of public personalities indiscriminately. Such appearances are referred to as ‘cameo appearances’ and will constitute the first part of an elaborate analysis of vertical intertextuality.

Another frequent allusion to the real world, the producers seem to enjoy relying on, is their constant incorporation of particularly sensitive issues such as politics that holds a significant importance among society. Such references may involve past events or current developments, in either case they grant the show timeless quality, since politics is always a relevant topic. The analysis of such political references will be illustrated within the second part of this section.

#### 3.2.1.1. *Cameo appearances - Celebrities visit Springfield*

Cameo as defined by The Free Dictionary is “[a] brief appearance of a prominent actor, as in a single scene of a motion picture” (cameo). As for *The Simpsons*, such an intertextual reference is applied by means of including the appearance of various celebrities, artists, film directors, and many more, that come into sight shortly as themselves. In the case of actors, such appearances are put into practice, by either letting them perform themselves or by involving a work of art in which they happen to have some distinct importance. In the latter case, actors are being presented in one of their well-known casts, which are regularly embedded into the show’s plot that at least slightly appear like the movie or stage play it originally belongs to. Such intertextual allusions facilitate the references’ potential in that viewers find it relatively effortless to detect relations that are addressing particular creations or entire genres (Goltz 87). Yet, the show does not only feature cameos, but also guest appearances of acclaimed personalities. Cameos should not be mixed up with guest appearances, contrasting in that guest appearances do recognize the actual personalities and approve of what they have achieved and who they actually are. The acknowledgement of such guest appearances is accomplished either through specifically mentioning them or by listing their actual name in *The Simpsons*’ credits.

There is a lengthy list of celebrities that have already signed up to appear on the show, either as themselves or by offering to lend their voice, but animation endows the producers with the potential to also involve people that are either dead or hostile to the show (Goltz 87). The appearance on *The Simpsons* is considered as a status symbol. Psychologist Dr. Brothers is of the opinion that “there are three ne plus ultras in our culture: Being in the *New York Times* crossword

puzzle, being on the cover of *Time*, and being a voice on *The Simpsons*” (qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 82). Keeping the immense amount of existing episodes in mind, one can imagine the multiplicity of references made by and about diverse renowned people throughout the run of the show.

With regard to the appearances of celebrities, *The Simpsons* regularly incorporates a so called ‘screen on the screen’ within their episode. Such a ‘screen on the screen’ technique is applied if it does not appear reasonable to comprise particular celebrities within a respective plot, because otherwise the episode would lose its thread. Instead, the producers familiarize its viewers with what actually appears on The Simpsons family’s own screen. Because the Simpsons family uses to spend hours in front of their TV and even goes regularly to the cinema, the producers enable its viewers to be part of what the members of the Simpsons family watch. By doing so, well-known celebrities, settings and respective entities relating to certain productions appear on the either small Simpsons TV set or on the larger cinema screen (Goltz 87).

Whereas episodes within the first season focused to a large extent on the microcosm of the Simpsons family, at the beginning of the 90’s however, cameos have evolved into an inherent part of the series (Rauscher 106). The first cameos however, served as merely amusing interludes and were positioned at the edge of the actual plot. During these humorous slip in scenes, for example TV host Larry King reported about the intrigues of power plant owner Mr. Burns and the mysteriously resulting three-eyed fishes in the Springfield River (Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish 7F01). In another episode, Ringo Starr, the famous Beatles musician, who made a guest appearance as himself, is mentioned twice shortly within one episode. First, he appears in a flashback scene when Marge remembers having a crush on him as a young woman. His second appearance features him in present times, as a retired Beatles superstar, who is seen to answer Marge’s fan letter she sent years ago, as she had a crush on him (Brush with Greatness 7F18).

Within the first episode of the third season the nature of cameos has changed fundamentally. Instead, casual appearances of celebrities as funny insertions within the universe of Springfield, for the first time the examination of real images of celebrities moved to the foreground. In “Stark Raving Dad” the producers approached the mythology associated with celebrities that evolves around them and brings them to the foreground. The trailer announcing the third season of *The Simpsons* showed that Michael Jackson would visit Springfield. The preview only showed a crowd in front of the Simpsons’ house, waiting in anticipation for the arrival of the superstar. As Rauscher observes, such an announcement allowed the assumption that the episode has to do with the classical case of cross-promotion. At the time, Michael Jackson had just published his first album after a four year break. As the show operates as a vehicle for publicity, Jackson opted for

granting himself an up-to-date image in accordance with the time of the 90's. Jackson's image should have been streamlined, and due to *The Simpsons*' huge success, the show fitted well into the prevailing concept of his commercialization. To Springfield's great disappointment, the guest turned out to be a white millionaire, former resident of Springfield's lunatic asylum that believed to be Michael Jackson (Rauscher 106).

This episode is, as Rauscher argues, a very impressive one in that it skillfully operates with various projections and myths surrounding the superstar Michael Jackson. The various obscure rumors circulating about Jackson's private life at that time are being used by the producers in order to deconstruct them with the help of an overstated affirmation. Instead of complying with Jackson's established image deriving from his music videos and live performances, the producers playfully challenge the range of anecdotes and myths surrounding Michael Jackson. Leon Kompowsky, the white millionaire who believes to be Michael Jackson, appears to embody those musical talents attributed to Michael Jackson, as his voice is lent to him by nobody less important than Michael Jackson himself. While exposing the audience to a white millionaire who sings like Michael Jackson, the producers simultaneously counteract Michael Jackson's features, since he is in fact not white. This way *The Simpsons* skillfully refer to various headlines concerning Michael Jackson's skin that is becoming lighter, discussing issues related to the respective celebrity. In this sense, *The Simpsons* episodes are not totally constructed around the appearance of the guest star, putting the actual celebrity into the spotlight. Instead of ignoring the public discourse concerning a celebrity, they rather prove their potential to embrace the respective public discourse within the show, constituting it on an equal footing with Springfield's universe. The show's best moments are ensured by means of offering elaborated and witty expositions concerning myths surrounding famous people. These examinations are based either on celebrities' fictional role within a movie or their medial everyday life as well as therewith associated phenomena (Rauscher 106-109).

Meanwhile, various forms of cameos and guest appearances have evolved within the show. The characters introduced within the show, to which various celebrities for example entrust their voices, are purposely featured as embodying an exaggerated stereotype of the actual real person. What the producers of the show aim to achieve is parody at the cost of show business. "Figures from the television world are represented as cartoon characters not just to accentuate certain features. [...] These are not simple caricatures, but pop cultural samples, juxtaposed in order to illuminate the way they affect us" (Rushkoff 300). Following that, the creators purposely feature certain celebrities, in order to make its audience aware, of the impact they have on us.

Similarly to the show's potential to undermine metanarratives, the show deconstructs myths concerning particular famous people. By placing them within another, in most cases exaggerated

context, their actual identities are deconstructed, allowing viewers to approach their impact on us more critically. Writers and producers Reiss and Jean explain that the public portrayals of celebrities that they select to imitate, concern actually those that they believe require baring and disapproving (Rushkoff 300). An example of such a purposely exaggerated self-portrayal offers the episode “When you dish upon a star”. To approach the issue of the stereotypical “hard-to-please” (Björnsson 15) celebrities, commonly associated with narcissistic Hollywood stars, the producers feature the caricatures of Alec Baldwin and Kim Basinger. Another episode for example, confronts the rappers of Cypress Hill with such an exaggerated self-projection. As Cypress Hill is commonly associated with marijuana consumption, the producers cannot abstain from approaching this issue within one of their episodes. When at the Hullapalooza-Tour<sup>20</sup> the London Symphonic Orchestra all of a sudden unsolicited appears, the sound technician first of all suspects the hip hoppers to be responsible for this misunderstanding: “Come on people, somebody ordered the London Symphony Orchestra, possible while high. Cypress Hill, I’m looking in your general direction” (Homerpalooza 3F21).

The producers of the show do not narrow down their intertextual references to any particular genre or era; instead they incorporate miscellaneous and multivariate references to attract a broad audience. Through the manifestation of both popular and abstruse allusions, the producers evade a differentiation between the grown up and child viewership, in order to provide joy and amusement across generations. In that sense they cater for all tastes. Furthermore, the show offers not only insights into the current show business, but even provides a time travel through cultural history. Rushkoff argues that the creators of the show “make their points both in the plots of the particular episodes and in the cut-and-paste style of the show. By deconstructing and reframing the images in our media, they allow us to see them more objectively or at least with more ironic distance” (Rushkoff 300). By putting celebrities within a new context, the creators animate their viewers both young and mature, to put into question the ways in which media sells certain images and advocate to realize their viewers’ whimsical and unstable reactions.

### **3.2.1.2. *The Simpsons refers to politics***

As discussed in ‘*The Simpsons rejects metanarratives*’, political allusions constitute an important part of Springfield’s everyday life agenda. The show frequently deconstructs political myths and operates as a political satire. The arguably most notable controversy concerning the real political system, the show owes to George H. W. Bush, who in one of his speeches attacked *The Simpsons* for its lack of social values. The producers of the show reacted to this statement in the episode

---

<sup>20</sup> Refers to the American alternative music festival Lollapalooza.

airing the week to follow George Bush's actual speech (Rauscher 119). In the episode "Stark Raving Dad" the members of The Simpsons family are gathered in their living room to watch television. What appears on their screen is exactly this particular passage of the speech. Whereas Homer is horrified, Bart who does not seem to understand his commotion, answers bewildered: "Hey, we're just like the Waltons. We're praying for an end to the depression, too" (Stark Raving Dad 7F24).

Yet, the dispute didn't remain at a simple verbal exchange, putting an end to the conflict between the Bush family and the Simpsons family. In the episode "Two bad neighbors", the by then ex-president moves into Springfield in order to enjoy his retirement, and as it happens, he moves in into a house opposite the Simpsons. With regard to his retirement and his inner wish to be a private citizen again, his wife Barbara dismissively states that they attempted to "go where nobody cared about politics" (Two Bad Neighbors 3F09). A running battle flares up between Homer and Bush, but Bush and Ned Flanders understand each other exceedingly well. The mutual appreciation between Flanders and the ex-president is not only depicted through their common belief in Christian-conservative merits, but is reflected within their common childlike way of speaking, that frequently exasperates Homer.

However, in the course of the episode, it becomes apparent that Bush and Homer are not that different, since both are quick-tempered, irritable, as well as helpless and lost without their wives (Trescher 106). But Bush's appearance is not limited to this episode only. The producers lose no opportunity to ridicule him. As an example, when Mr. Burns celebrates his birthday, former magnitudes of the American Conservative block are present and only Bush is being rejected by the doorman, stating as a reason "No one-termers" (Rosebud 1F01).

Another Republican president that frequently guests in Springfield is Richard Nixon. Nixon is continuously presented as the rogue without principles. As Groening once stated in an interview, his general attempt would be to set an example against Nixon's rehabilitation. Therefore, he repeatedly lets the Republicans appear as a club of usurpers (Tuncel and Rauscher 156). In one episode, during a meeting concerning the planning of the election campaign of the Republicans, nuclear power plant owner Mr. Burns insidiously comments: "Moving on to new business, what act of unmitigated evil shall the Republican Party undertake this week?" (Brawl in the family DABF01) In addition to Mr. Burns, the insidious meeting is attended by Count Dracula and the Springfieldian action hero Rainer Wolfcastle who is epitomized by Arnold Schwarzenegger, another supporter of the Republicans (Tuncel and Rauscher 156).

Besides Nixon, other presidents are being depicted in the show, reflecting their images as they are being commonly perceived by the public. For instance, Bill Clinton is portrayed as a sex

maniac as he tries to intrusively lure Marge into his garden shed next to the White House (Homer to the Max AABF09). Also the less known interim president Gerald Ford, who stepped in after Nixon's resignation, was featured in one episode. When Bush Sr. moved out from Springfield, it was Gerald Ford who moved in into the vacant house. After Homer's bad experience with Bush Sr., Ford proves to be to Homer's taste. When Homer invites him over to watch a football game, they discover common preferences for drinking beer, eating nachos and being similarly clumsy. As they walk arm in arm, tripping over the edge of the sidewalk, they even heartily declare with a 'D'oh' to be linguistically very similar (Tuncel and Rauscher 156, 157).

In addition to including former US presidents in the show, in 2008 the producers also thematized the American presidential election. By approaching the latest issues, concerning the American nation, the show reflects its potential to be up-to-date. Since the elections in America are an event that is being followed all around the world, *The Simpsons* do not only prove their potential to stay-up-to-date but the ability to tackle issues that have a global impact and are of global interest. That way *The Simpsons* presents certain issues in a critical spotlight that are not only relevant for the American nation, but have a significance outside the US. Within the introductory scene of the "Treehouse of Horror XIX" special, Homer attempts to vote via an electronic voting terminal for the democrat senator, Barack Obama. However, to Homer's surprise, the voting machine is rigged and his vote for Obama actually is registered to Obama's competitor John McCain. Having attempted to vote six times for Obama, Homer tries to leave the voting booth in order to report the disaster: "This machine is rigged! Must warn President McCain! This doesn't happen in America, maybe Ohio, but not America!" (Treehouse of Horror XIX KABF16) Unfortunately, the voting machine sucks him in and shoots him out of the voting booth. Even though one might say that by demonizing the republicans they actually support the Democrats, but they claim that they do not want to take positions in the elections. The executive producer Al Jean stated that the episode "is mostly a comment on what many people [...] believe to be the irregularities in our voting system" (MacIntyre).

Similarly to this scene from 2008, the producers didn't miss out to comment on the 2012 elections. On September 20, 2012 Fox Network aired a special short "Homer votes 2012", in which Homer is again on his way to the voting booth. Weighing upon his choices between Barack Obama and the opponent Mitt Romney he ponders: "Barack Obama, I don't know. I already got one wife telling me to eat healthy. And, plus, he promised me death panels and grandpa is still alive. Mitt Romney? [...] he did invent Obamacare" (Homer votes 2012). But in contrast to 2008, this time Homer decides to vote for the republicans. Moments later the voting booth displays Romney's tax returns for the last five years. Horrified to find out things he was not expected to

know about Romney, he promptly decides to inform the press. However, once again he is being sucked in by the voting booth, and this time is cast off to China, where he finds himself in a factory, making USA flags. Initially he is contempt about it, but moments later when Ned Flanders is put in place next to him on the conveyor belt, he immediately jumps out of the window and falls into suicide prevention net that is installed around the Chinese factory. The subsequent scenes are perhaps just a way of the show's producers to again distant themselves from taking sides in the elections, and finish off the scene by shifting the focus to other issues, like the fact that the USA is constantly increasing outsourcing its manufacturing in Chinese factories with poor working conditions.

Summing up these facts, it is apparent that the Republican Party altogether is not being presented within a favorable light. As mentioned before, Nixon frequently serves as the universal evildoer, but the democrats are also often presented as being incompetent. Many important positions of northwestern civilization are being reflected through the various employed characters. *The Simpsons* takes a stance, mirrors breaches or if nothing else demonstrates the unsteady foundation of the political leaders. Inconclusive attitudes represented by the respective characters point to the unsoundness of their own respectively reflected ideologies (Tuncel and Rauscher and 154).

Overall we can say that the show's bottom line is that presidents in general cannot be trusted. Groening asserts in an interview that the authorities' rules are never in the common people's interests, but rather in their own, even if they intensively make you believe it. What the writers and producers of the show aim to convey is that people should not believe in everything they are being told (Tuncel and Rauscher 157).

As these examples illustrate *The Simpsons* does not preach, but attempts to offer an alternative to the conservatively positioned America. *The Simpsons* proves that an underground attitude is no longer contradictory to a mainstream format. On the contrary, by referring to the media's own images the show engages in taking over the "role as a media literacy primer" (Rushkoff 296). As one of the writers, Reiss admits that "[t]he overarching point is that the media's stupid and manipulative TV is a narcotic, and all big institutions are corrupt and evil" (Rushkoff 299). In that sense, *The Simpsons* offers a counter pole to less transparent programs by propelling to realize how confusing propagated reality is and communicates its attitude openly, in order to sensitize its viewers in a media saturated environment.

Vertical intertextuality used within *The Simpsons*, first of all grants the show in some way a layer close to the real life. By embedding people and events from real life, viewers experience joy in recognizing them, even if their perspectives are a bit twisted and disconnected from the 'real'

presentations on TV. Whereas young viewers have the joy to recognize familiar actors and singers, the political references and plots will catch the witty and mature audience. Secondly, myths and hypes that go along with various celebrities and known people are deconstructed and are inspected under a critical spotlight. This absolutely remains a “so far unique level of parody on television, in which the subjects of parody will gladly contribute an element of their real identity” (Björnsson 20). Finally, once again political myths are being exposed, in a so far unconventional manner, by means of animation that does not have to meet certain expectations of appropriateness. By means of approaching issues that are of great interest, also for the rest of the world, *The Simpsons* ensures their firm position within the mainstream and its ability to make potential comments.

Having discussed constituents of vertical intertextuality, which lace the show with a sense of reality, granting a critical stance towards images sold by media conglomerates, I will now turn to the analysis of horizontal intertextuality that alludes to fictional productions.

### **3.2.2 Horizontal Intertextuality – *The Simpsons* reuses fictional art forms**

Whereas, the previous section focused on the depiction of ‘real life’ as well as ‘real people’ to grant the show a touch of reality, horizontal intertextuality establishes a relationship between two sources “that are more or less explicitly linked, usually along the genre, character or content” (Fiske 87). These references apply to various different genres and formats, as long as the character of these other productions is similar to the one of *The Simpsons*, and that is anything that finds its way on the TV screens, literary canon or anything that is considered fictional.

Due to the animation format, the cost of production does not increase if the producers want to reproduce anything from ambitious imitated settings like the Enterprise’s command bridge to fictional characters like Chewbacca (Goltz 88). There are no boundaries to the constructive transfer of approved cultural and popular notions into the show (Alberti xiii). Furthermore, without a substantial spike in production costs, they can rebuild particular visual effects that emanate from other media’s special ways of productions, like for example black-and-white and modern high-tech color arrangements. Such a visual richness also provides for the depiction of dreams and thoughts, simply speaking, everything that happens inside the character’s minds. By the means of bubbles and tiny angels or devils which come into sight, animation equips its audience with unique understanding of the character’s innermost self (Goltz 88). Finally, even if visual devices of two-dimensional animation are used up, computer-animated three-dimensional animation as well as live action sequences are available for the producers to fulfill the desired references. Whereas the non-animated formats have to spend a lot of time and resources to produce stunning visual effects

that would impress its viewers, the producers of animated shows like *The Simpsons* can usually reproduce these special scenes at the fraction of the cost.

An example of the implementation of live action sequences can be seen in the episode “Treehouse of Horror VI”, in which Homer desperately tries to hide from Marge’s sisters and in his desperation he somehow manages to disappear in the wall. Behind the wall a new world presents itself to Homer, similarly to the movie *Tron*. While being asked by rescuers how the world behind the wall looks like, he explicitly makes references to the movie. Homer is bewildered by his 3D appearance, which makes him aware how overwhelmed he actually is. Later, the Tron-like three dimensional world starts to break down and Homer falls out onto (for us) a real-life street. In this scene Homer is walking along the street, while real-life pedestrians suspiciously eyeball him (Treehouse of Horror VI 3F04).

With regard to the visual horizontal references to other works, a considerable number of more or less valuable realizations are at the producers’ disposal. The simplest as well as most briefly featured references to distinct movies, shows, series or books are provided in the form of posters, billboards and other fixed visual facets that constantly mix with the cartoon universe of Springfield (Goltz 88).

Keeping in mind the vast amount of visual references, it is difficult to think of any sound boundary that could restrain the show’s audible referential competence. Letting the characters refer to book or movie titles is the slightest impressive capacity. Goltz argues, that the producers of the show can, without any greater effort take in music from operas, musicals, songs, films, to name just a few. Whereas, sounds from other audiovisual media are embedded consistently within the rest of the soundtrack, making them at time much more difficult to recognize, compositions including vocals “have a more outstanding quality and [can] more insistently point the audience towards a certain” (Goltz 88) musical production. Furthermore, special sound effects that transgress the usual background sound can aid as additional indicators of inserted references. Typical examples of such references involve the buzzing sound of the laser swords used within the *Star Wars* movies or the warning radar signal used by submarines within *Das Boot*. Finally, at times celebrities’ voices can operate as hints towards a particular creation. Without even the specific body of certain celebrities the producers can endow a character that reminds the audience of a particular celebrity with their voice or let the characters pretend to be a particular narrator from well-known movies (Goltz 88).

Besides visual and audible references being used by the producers to hint at a particular source of inspiration, also quotations from miscellaneous sources can be reconstructed within the show’s episode with the help of such devices. *The Simpsons* characters frequently quote noticeable lines

from poems, novels, plays, movies or TV shows, which not necessarily run in the foreground of the respective episode. Such subtle allusions to other works are embedded within the casual communicative flow and disclose their intertextual force only in connection with the narrative circumstances they are applied in (Goltz 89).

Concerning allusions hinting at live action movies or TV shows, such references often demand profound literacy in order of being recognized, due to celebrated actors appearing with the help of significant camera angles, settings or unusual screen compositions. As Jonathan Gray observes,

*The Simpsons*, [...], is filmed like whatever genre it happens to be mocking, with shots put together under the appropriate genre rules, and so visually almost everything that occurs in *The Simpsons* is potentially parodic, from the crane-cam shots of the opening sequence to a graduated close-up on character's eyes for emotional effect (Gray 66).

A noteworthy instance of applying elaborated camera techniques in the style of *Requiem for a dream* directed by Darren Aronofsky, offers the episode "I'm, spelling as fast as I can". A new Krusty Burger sandwich, namely Ribwich makes it to the *Krusty Burger* in Springfield. After testing the newly arrived sandwich Homer gets addicted. The instance Homer bites into the sandwich and feels its taste, his veins and pupils widen and he becomes short breathed and excited. The camera, similarly to the movie scene, depicts a close up of his widening pupils and the flow of blood cells in his veins that are seen to change their consistency as soon as the 'drug' gets into his veins. Homer consumes a pile of sandwiches, and ends up being ecstatic and hyperactive (I'm spelling as fast as I can EABF07).

Another further possibility applied by the producers to allude to certain works, is the insertion of work titles that occur regularly in written form, usually by means of posters, shop names, billboards and the meaningful *The Itchy and Scratchy Show*'s episode titles (Goltz 89). To give an example, one episode calls attention to shop names labeled "Much do about Muffins", or "Wonderful Knife" (My Sister, my Sitter 4F13). Due to animation's simplicity to allocate anything into the *Simpsons* world, the producers, in addition are able to allude to certain works in printed form. Therefore, animated book covers or pages, newspaper and magazines are most frequently blended into the show. Finally, an extraordinary referential technique, belonging neither to visual or auditory referential devices, includes *The Simpsons*' episode titles themselves. Whereas most of them are evident plays on words to movie or novel titles, some even signify strong references that strongly affect whole episode plots (Goltz 89)<sup>21</sup>.

---

<sup>21</sup>The chapter '*The Simpsons* entertains across generations' provides a detailed analysis on that matter.

Although allusions to previous works concerning the storyline can be gained through the use of visual and auditory indicators, it is also possible that a respective narration simply continues to have an ambiguous sensation about the likeness between, for instance, a plot of an episode and a movie. Sometimes, however, the connections of a storyline to the inspirational works are less noticeable and intertextual hints are generated through the use of various devices such as, character arrangements, a certain order of events, or plainly a common topic (Gray 56). Characters in general, frequently serve to reveal intertextual allusions. Such intended relations are held up by relating to names based on fictional characters to allow the viewers to deduce the development of particular characters traits. An example for this is the character of Charles Montgomery Burns. Those viewers familiar with the movie *Citizen Kane* may probably identify the connection hinting at Charles Foster Kane, the main protagonist in the movie. Such an allusion to similarities with regard to character traits, is not only revealed within the name, but is developed further within a later episode (Goltz 56).

As I pointed out in the previous section on vertical intertextuality, guest appearances in various forms constitute an integral part of the show. Yet, not only short self-ironic cameos appear as themselves, but at times these cameos derive from their casts in previous movies. These cameos do not as such appear as themselves, but in a slight variation of one of their celebrated casts. Such an instance can be observed in the already examined episode “Lisa the Iconoclast” as discussed in ‘*The Simpsons* rejects metanarratives’. In this episode Donald Sutherland as a custodian of the museum assists Lisa to disclose the truth about Springfield’s founder Hans Sprungfeld. Sutherland’s participation in this case manifests grave similarities to his cast as the whistle-blower Mr.X in Oliver Stone’s political thriller *JFK* (Rauscher 108).

Finally, *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* that has been already discussed with regard to the blurring between the boundaries of what is real and imagined, serves another important purpose within the show. This is to function as a platform for various intertextual allusions. Whereas *The Simpsons* follows certain rules of drawing, the cartoon-within-the-cartoon does not abstain from the visual format of traditional cartoons that is exploding bodies or extended extremities and can therefore refer to other cartoons. In such instances *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* educates its viewers by including information on the history of American cartoons, by referring, for example to Walt Disney or the early Warner Bros cartoons (Klein 25, 26).

Similarly to vertical Intertextuality, the show permanently employs horizontal intertextual references that embrace discrete genres, formats as well as time eras to serve various tastes. Especially younger viewers will enjoy detecting familiar patterns and similarities. As Rushkoff states “[t]he show provides a succession of aha moments – those moments when we recognize

which other forms of media are being parodied” (Rushkoff 296). He further explains that viewers are compensated with self-flattering laughter at any time when they figure out a relation between a scene they are following, allowing them to compare it to a respective film, ad or show from which the inspiration originates (Rushkoff 296). In contrast to that, adults may rather notice the subtle allusions deriving from classic movies, which are hinting at similar character traits or names. Following that, the creators of the show employ a multifarious range of dissimilar references to sustain a broad audience, by catering for all tastes. Whereas, a younger audience might not be familiar with ongoing political issues, combined with slapstick humor they will be enjoyed by even the greatest political laymen.

Concerning horizontal intertextuality, Goltz observes that references to movies represent the largest type of references serving as a source of inspiration within *The Simpsons*. This can be explained by the fact that American society regards films as their chief accomplishment and “contribution to the world’s cultural heritage” (18). Further he states, that movies represent the major vehicle for transmitting American beliefs and thoughts. America’s input to the literary heritage, as well as drama, poems and paintings appear to be only of minimal value in contrast to America’s share in the film production. Many reasons grant a movie to position oneself on top of the pile of the massive collection of film productions and stand out of it. Some of them may include ambitious scripts, financial profits, famous celebrities, a demanding book adaption or acknowledgment and respect within a particular genre. Concerning *The Simpsons* that frequently adapt movies within their plotlines, some of these factors may seem related to the main thrive of motivation influencing the makers choice to pick a certain movie while not another in order to incorporate it within the cartoon (Goltz 18). The reasons for choosing to adapt and adjust a movie within the cartoon, while not another will become apparent within the following section that focuses on the show’s potential to entertain across generations. In most cases, the creators decide to rely on a preexisting accomplishment, because it is regarded as a commodity firmly established within the popular culture’s mainstream.

Having presented the two essential types of intertextuality the creators draw on, the following section will take a closer look at the functions of such references and how they are capable of providing entertainment across generations

### **3.3. *The Simpsons* entertains across generations**

It seems that nowadays with the increasing presence of various media channels around us the traditional social interactions have diminished greatly. Kids, teens and even adults increasingly have less social interactions, due to the increasing amount of time spent on TV, videogames,

computers and/or mobile phones with Internet. The reason that these electronic devices are used more and more could be rooted in our need to escape reality, if only for a brief moment, in order to forget unpleasant problems from everyday life. In order to gain some brief moments of happiness, people nowadays do not need to leave their homes (Czogalla 35). They can do all this while sitting in their comfortable couches staring at their ever bigger television screens. As a consequence, TV's main social function is no longer to provide useful information, but to offer entertainment (Postman qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 12).

Many scholars agree that intertextual references have granted *The Simpsons* the possibility to maintain a large diversified audience since its initiation (Broderick 244, Goltz 9, Korte, Mullen 63). Because intertextual comments have the inherent ability to comment in an ironic manner (Ott, *Small Screen* 65), their entertaining value is unquestionable. Another indicator of the undoubtedly inherent entertainment value is the increasing amount of television programs that also tediously have confidence in intertextual allusions, proposing that intertextual references have evolved into a common constituent of television's amusement, at least since the show's huge success. Without surprise, the prosperity of *The Simpsons* has manifested to be exceptionally inspiring in forming television broadcasts, bringing forth many imitators and paving the way for new approaches of animated cartoon series like *South Park*, *King of the Hill*, *Family Guy* or *Futurama* (Ortved). Seth MacFarlane, the creator of *Family Guy* is of the opinion that "*The Simpsons* created an audience for prime-time animation that had not been there for many years. As far as I'm concerned, they basically re-invented the wheel. They created what is in many ways – you could classify it as – a wholly new medium" (Ortved). Similarly, one of the co-producers of *South Park* openly acknowledges that *The Simpsons* influenced their creation. "*The Simpsons* is the bane of our existence. [...] *The Simpsons* has been so influential, it is difficult to find any strain of television comedy that does not contain its DNA" (Ortved).

The attraction of intertextual allusions among various audiences stems no less from the fact, that these references constitute a bonus feature. The producers succeeded in developing enough interest for their audience that they would actively engage in analysis and discussions about the episodes long after they have finished watching an episode. By assembling a puzzle of intertexts and in-jokes, they provide delight among its audience by detecting them as such, by sustaining a satisfactory "balance of familiarity and novelty" (Mullen 73). However, as intertextual references embody only a bonus feature, those who do not discover them, are not barred from the understanding of the respective episode or sequence. As Irwin and Lombardo observe "the writers recognize that not everyone will catch all the allusions, and so they craft them in such a way that

the allusions enhance our enjoyment if they are caught, but do not detract from the enjoyment of the show if they are missed” (88).

Whereas, intertextual references on a first level rather serve as a pillar for entertaining younger audiences, rewarding them and creating a bond between audience and producers, *The Simpsons* offers a very sophisticated second level of entertainment that is certainly directed at the adult audience. In this sense, intertextual allusions provide a possibility for these references to establish a postmodern discourse, which grasps criticism or homage figuratively. Ott and Walter remark that “[d]epending upon how a fragment is juxtaposed with other fragments and the nature of those fragments, the type of commentary that inclusion renders ranges from critique to celebration” (437).

Similarly to Goltz, I share my point of view in that although intertextuality can be entertaining, it does not necessarily have to be funny. Humorous and playful utilizations of intertextual references are evenly essential for the show’s success with regard of guaranteeing broad base appeal (Goltz 103). This will be proven within my elaborated examination of pastiche, which reflects playful intertextual allusions. This will be followed by homages, which represent an extension of pastiche. The final part of my analysis on intertextuality will conclude with an analysis of parody.

### 3.3.1 Pastiche

Jameson, who considerably contributed to the postmodern dispute, describes pastiche as “the imitation of a peculiar or unique style [...] a neutral practice of [...] mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter. [...] [P]astiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor” (Jameson 1849). Pastiche, according to him is a prevalent artistic feature of postmodern cultural art forms. Generally Jameson regards the postmodern situation as “a new kind of flatness, of depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 22). Following that, Jameson considers “pastiche as [a] failure of art” (Ott and Walter 435), arguing that as a result of such a perceived superficiality and depthlessness, pastiche is stripped away from “any critical engagement” (Ott and Walter 435). Jameson’s definition of pastiche however, stating to have lost its sense of humor, reduces intertextuality into a mere compilation of previous styles, failing to take into consideration the manner in which certain texts modify others in order to creatively incorporate them into their entity, how audiences are actively engaged to recognize them and how intertextual inclusions serve to confront or glorify the works they incorporate within their own works. Godwin, who opposes Jameson’s understanding of pastiche, argues that some intertextual allusions cannot be

regarded as a neutral and mere practice of assembling distinct bits and parts from preexisting works (qtd. in Ott and Walter 435). Although some may argue that intertextual references are the “result from a lack of original imagination” (Goltz 107), I believe that *The Simpsons*’ creators do pursue an aim and their pastiche driven impulse represents more than a simpleminded collage that can be ascribed to their lack of originality. First and foremost I believe that they attempt to entertain across generations by means of actively involving the audience and secondly, I believe that the producers give tribute to certain achievements of previous works of art, since they heavily rely on them. Therefore I find that the concept of pastiche needs to be enhanced in order to pave a way for an understanding of how pastiche works within the series and in which manners it is employed, because it takes into consideration the previously mentioned arguments.

In the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Baldick describes pastiche as a literary work that involves imitation of some previous works, adapting or borrowing a distinctive style or theme. Further it states that the term pastiche can be used in a derogatory sense (i.e. indicate lack of originality), but it can also be used more neutrally like when it is deliberately used to refer to previous works in order to acknowledge inspiring work of art (give tribute to other writers). Last but not least, pastiche is different from parody in the sense that the imitation is used to flatter rather than to mock, and also different from plagiarism due to the lack of ‘deceptive intent’ (Baldick 185,186).

As this definition states, pastiche can be used in a playful way to give an imitative tribute to certain works of art or events. This implies that intertextual references do not necessarily have to be funny in order to entertain, but can, through acknowledging previous works of art, be even provocative and thought inspiring. Within *The Simpsons*, there are many cases when a ‘flattering’ form of pastiche is being used; and this creates an additional value for the viewers that are familiar with the art forms or events that are being honored by the writers of *The Simpsons*. In such cases an outstanding or notorious element or sequence of a previously acknowledged storyline is being “compressed [...] and [...] somehow superimposed onto the cartoon world” (Björnsson 24). In other words, the main characters of a respective movie are substituted by characters of the family and a particular element is modified only to fit into the episodes’ storylines comedy. Such instances of pastiche however, do not actually support an episode’s plotline, but are solely meant to add an additional value of entertainment within their episodes, if they are recognized. The creators of *The Simpsons* frequently insert certain elements to be identified within their episodes as a version of previous works of art without creating ridicule at their expenses or mocking them.

As an example of such a playful, yet not mocking employment of pastiche, is featured within the episode “Bart’s Friend falls in Love”, in which the producers use a scene from the Indiana

Jones movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In the opening scene of this episode, Bart carefully tiptoes towards the jar in which Homer stores his small coins. In order not to make any noises that could wake up the family members, Bart cautiously bypasses the toys spread on the floor, in the same manner that Indiana Jones avoids deathly traps. As he finally arrives at the jar, tender sunrays are shining through the window, granting the jar an almost holy glow in the gloomy room. The music setting in the background is very tense, hinting at unexpected danger. Bart looks attentively left and right, halts for a brief moment, then finally gently knocks the jar over with one hand and catches it with the other. While silently sneaking away, the screen begins to shake and Homer in his underpants appears at the doorsill, shouting at Bart in garbled language as he realizes that Bart is holding the precious jar with coins. A lot of viewers can make a connection to the scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in which Indiana Jones enters a relic temple and cautiously avoids triggering deathly traps as he reaches for the holy relict he is looking for. As a last hint for the viewers who have doubted the reference, the famous theme song from the Indiana Jones movies sets in as Bart runs for his life in an action hero manner.

Similarly to Indiana Jones' escape out of the ancient temple, an entertaining chase through the Simpsons' house begins. Homer runs after Bart, stumbles and rolls down the stairs, resembling the massive boulder in the movie that is following Indiana, threatening to crush him. Moments later, Bart avoids the family cat, sways on the ceiling fan, dodges Maggie's arrows shot at him and manages to enter the garage. Suddenly Homer appears running after him, grinding his teeth and cursing silently and then intimidatingly lets the automatic door down that resembles the scene from the movie where a massive stone block is slowly covering the exit of the cave with the treasure. Luckily, Bart is fast enough to glide under the closing garage door, and in the same manner as Indiana, reaches back to grab his cap before the door shuts fully. Finally, instead of hopping on a plane, Bart jumps into the school bus and waves his cap as he leaves the scene, while his father still in his underpants dances wildly on the street and mutters ambiguous sounds, resembling those of the natives who were chasing Indiana (Bart's friend falls in love 8F22). Some of these tiny but elaborately detailed scenes are "running gags" (Rauscher 125) that reappear in the whole Indiana Jones series and contribute to making it entertaining to watch.

Although, neither the jar nor the coins hold any significant importance for the main storyline, the producers went to great length to creatively fuse a whole sequence one by one with *The Simpsons* realm. As such, the sequence is an independent unit that is not embedded within the thread of the narration. The sequence does not contribute to the main plot and can be seen as a slapstick element adding an extra layer of entertainment. After Bart's adventurous Indiana like start of the day, when he goes to school he is confronted with everyday life troubles. His best

friend Milhouse does not have any time for him, since he is in love with the new classmate (Rauscher 125).

Although neither Homer's furiousness, nor Bart's mischief, play any further role within the episode, the producers willingly accept to take on its lengthy reproduction piece by piece. Furthermore, the scene does not evoke any jokes on the original movie, nor does it intend to mock it. Goltz argues that the producers appear to appreciate the capability of reproducing scenes like this from previous works, in order to add general entertainment richness to the respective episode (104).

The scene as such, although based upon a notorious movie taken from the 1980s, reflects timeless quality due to the clever way it was reworked and fused within the Springfield's universe. The issue of tricking adults and mastering a difficult challenge is a timeless element that especially children can always identify with and consequently have great joy watching it. For children such entertaining value lies arguably in the slapstick element, presenting Homer in his usual and most familiar role as the clumsy father who is constantly tricked by his own son Bart, while he always gets away with it. In short, children enjoy and laugh watching clumsy adults (Mullen 76). Furthermore, Bart's heroic adventure allows the young audiences, particularly boys, to identify with Bart. As Hutcheon argues, boys are more probable to perceive an uneasiness about confrontations that are too close to their actual lives, instead they prefer to escape into a "superhero exotic action scenario" (Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation* 115).

Intertextual elements, like those illustrated above, assist to understand why audiences across generations are at one with regard to the show's general entertainment efficacy. Whereas, the previously elaborated scene resembles very much the original movie, the next example however, though sharing some kind of visual similarities, demands more attention and media knowledge.

In "Last Exit to Springfield", Lisa is forced to start wearing braces against her will. While Lisa is at the doctor's office, the doctor attempts to ease Lisa's fears by showing her the devices he will be using, telling her not to be afraid. However, the devices (scraper, poker and gouger) turn out to be frightening since they resemble torturing devices. Lisa gets even more afraid and stares at him with wide opened and horror stricken eyes. Although the doctor tries hard to make a comforting and friendly appearance, he is far from that. His intimidating appearance is emphasized by a gloomy atmosphere in the ordination, conveying the feeling of coldness and suspense. He informs Lisa that he first needs to chisel out some tooth and puts Lisa under anesthesia gas. A fog materializes in front of Lisa's eyes and she flies joyfully through the air above genuinely strange landscape highlighted by flashy colors, resembling the music video of The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* (The Beatles). Suddenly, a submarine appears with all four Beatles in it and Ringo

Starr points at Lisa while exclaiming: “Look, it’s Lisa in the sky”, which is answered by another group member with an unmotivated “No diamonds, though” (Last Exit to Springfield 9F15). Whereas the submarine in the original video is yellow, is colored purple in *The Simpsons*’ version, resembling the poor lighting and gloomy atmosphere in the doctor’s office. As soon as Lisa’s braces are fixed, the first thing she asks for is a mirror in order to see the result. As the dentist reaches for the mirror, Lisa’s shadow is cast all over the wall of the dentist’s room. In the dimly lit room, Lisa’s silhouette with spiky and uncombed hair resembles that of some evil and insane person, in a very similar fashion like Joker’s shadow in the movie *Batman*. When she gets a hold of the mirror and looks at herself, she starts giggling with a creepy tone and high-pitched laughter that inevitably resembles the way the Joker reacts in the *Batman* movie when he sees his new face for the first time after the reconstructive surgery. While Lisa is laughing hysterically, the doctor draws back anxiously and corners himself under her scary shadow. Finally she smashes the mirror, in almost identical manner as the Joker does.

This reference, although not as easy to identify as the one mentioned previously, represents a witty and playful reenactment that will offer entertainment for various viewers. The scene illustrates a clever combination of two contrasting elements. Whereas the doctor’s office appears as frightening, accompanied by tense and heavy tune that accentuates the atmosphere, the Beatles sequence to an extent neutralizes the scene by using jolly and frolic music. The viewers not familiar with the original film will still understand the feelings Lisa must have as she displays the insidious behavior; completely contrasting those of the usually good hearted and lovable character. Her laughter prompts diabolic and evil associations which are usually uncommon for her, but more for Bart, the regular troublemaker. Lisa’s uncommon for her behavior generates disharmony. Such a disharmony is obtained through the use of irony. Irony mostly holds a significant role in crafting disharmony and constitutes one of the most common devices for intertextual humor (Goltz 113). Cuddon describes irony as “the perception or awareness of a discrepancy or incongruity between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between appearance and reality” (430). If viewers are acquainted with the original movie, its character constellations and its plot, particular anticipations concerning the meaning or outcome may be generated. Such expectations however, may be undermined by the alterations that are built-in within the newly established situation (Goltz 113). In Lisa’s case, such subversion occurs, since she does not intend to invade Springfield nor turns into an evil person. On the contrary, as soon as she gets home and her dog runs away from her, Lisa hangs her head in shame, while quietly disappearing in her room. And similarly to the previous example, this scene presents an independent unit that is not embedded within the main thread of a narration, since the Joker theme does not contribute any further to the

storyline, but serves as a nice amusing interlude. Furthermore, the scene can still be enjoyed even without previous knowledge of the episode's plot.

The setting of the scene, which takes place in a closed and small area, activates feelings of uneasiness and fear, because it provides no possibilities to run away. Being entrapped within a room with poor lighting that is full of strange torture like instruments and a suspicious looking doctor, clearly accentuate Lisa's uncomfortable feelings.

Viewers, who are not familiar with the movie, might find the Beatles allusion quite amusing and enjoy comparing the original video within the context of *The Simpsons*. Even if the original music video is not recognized to be the primary source of inspiration, an enormous amount of viewers will undoubtedly notice the Beatles approaching Lisa in their 'purple' submarine. The combination of two contrasting elements, on the one hand the jolly Beatles interlude, on the other hand the intimidating atmosphere in the doctor's office both accentuate the respective scenes, proving a skillfully embedded blend of intertextual references. Moments like this confirm *The Simpsons* ability to fuse intertextual references that cater to audiences across generations.

Scenes like these use popular visual and audio elements and manage relatively easy to activate previous cultural and media knowledge. Others however require greater attention to detail as well as a more extensive general knowledge. In contrast to other programs aimed at adults, that usually bore children with their sophisticated treatises, *The Simpsons* succeeds to creatively and neatly blend contrasting references in order to provide a multi-layered entertainment package. Furthermore, it illustrates how the producers establish a compound and hybrid structure to prompt the audience's incorporation of existing cultural knowledge in order to take part in the meaning making process. Sometimes even the most 'sophisticated' audience might not absorb all of its references, but the show does not sacrifice its entertainment value, and still manages to add an additional layer for those who recognize the obscure references. The following example is not a detailed analysis as my previous one's but attempts to illustrate the show's potential to create a collage of discrete references from various spheres, without alienating the audience.

In the episode "Streetcar Named Marge", which is a reference to the movie *Streetcar Named Desire*, based on William Tennessee's stage play, Marge enrolls Maggie at a day-care facility so that she can participate in an audition for a play. The name of the school where Maggie is enrolled, offers the viewers a first hint for the things to happen. "Ayn Rand School for Tots" is a school rigorously run by Ms. Sinclair. She seizes Maggie's pacifier with a justification based on her radical belief of independence from an early age. Furthermore, the headmistress of the school is seen to be reading the book *Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand, a book that Lisa describes as being "the bible of right wing losers" (Streetcar Named Marge 8F18). The book in this respect, is the second

hint that the producers offer to the viewers, namely the “radical libertarian philosophy” (Irwin and Lombardo 85) of Ayn Rand. Rand’s philosophy is based on the firm belief that one should be taught from an early age onwards not to rely upon somebody or something in order to cultivate a healthy personality. Other references to Ayn Rand can be found in a poster hanging on the school wall that states “Helping is Futile”, a statement linked her non acceptance of altruism. Furthermore, one might notice a sign on the wall that reads “A is A”, reflecting Rand’s concept of identity, which constitutes a major theme in her novel *Atlas Shrugged* (Turner 64, 65). In the course of the episode, Maggie has an attempt to recover all the confiscated pacifiers, accompanied by the music theme of *The Great Escape* and in a way that has similarities to the movie (Warren). Her first attempt however fails, but the next day in her 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt she succeeds to outwit the headmistress and all the babies get their pacifiers back. When Homer arrives at the day-care facility to take Maggie home, he enters the room and is surrounded by hundreds of babies all sucking on their pacifiers. The babies are scattered literally all over the place and the only noise that can be heard is their tiresome and repetitive sucking. Some viewers who have seen Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* may be reminded of a similar scene in the movie, but with birds instead of babies. As Turner states, the atmosphere to which Homer is exposed to conveys forthcoming danger and reflects “threat of the hive-mind posed by many small beings working as one” (qtd. in Goltz 64). This scene is followed by an apparently unintended Alfred Hitchcock appearance, who comes into sight while walking by with two dogs on leashes, similarly to his own cameo in *The Birds* itself (Goltz 52).

This example nicely illustrates how the producers succeed in combining diversified references, in order to come up with a product to appeal a broad and diverse audience. Whereas, the younger viewers will likely enjoy Maggie’s attempts to rescue the pacifiers, the adult audience will appreciate the recognition of the recreated scenes from *The Great Escape*, Hitchcock’s *Birds* and/or the appearance of the Hitchcock’s cartoon double. Furthermore, the producers try to juxtapose two interesting elements. Whereas the headmistress’s concept of education is solely based on the belief of independence from an early age onwards, Maggie proves this notion of independence in her own individual way. Without fear and bravery she sets out to rescue the pacifiers, and in the process forces the headmistress to run away hysterically. As so many times before, the episode doesn’t abandon its common slapstick elements, by allowing a grin when Homer tiptoes over the reluctant babies to get a hold of Maggie. The episode is an exemplarily sample for *The Simpsons*’ typical eclectic mix of skillfully obscured though amusing allusions resulting in a “pastiche-packed” (Mullen 76) multi-level entertainment commodity.

*The Simpsons*' intertextual references are not limited to such short and brief allusions, but frequently encompass essential longer sequences or whole plots that are based on other works of arts. In such instances *The Simpsons*' episodes feature fully developed homages. The Free Dictionary defines homage as a "[s]pecial honor or respect shown or expressed publicly" (homage). With regard to the show, such a public acknowledgment of previous accomplishments can frequently be detected. In such cases the creators of the show attempt to incorporate particular scenes or whole plots and genres that are regarded as outstanding in cinematic history.

### 3.3.2 Homages

As stated earlier, in contrast to pastiche that could be used to mock, homage is generally used to positively acknowledge and give tribute to previously established creations. Homages provide moments of paying tribute to former established creations, which are firmly entrenched within the media culture since they are regarded as among the superior ones of their type. In most cases homages provide inspiration for a whole episode. In other instances however, an episode is entirely based upon a particular genre using its stylistic devices like camera techniques or flashbacks.

According to Goltz, the most undemanding manner to provide intertextual humor with regard to homage is to "re-use a joke that has proved to be funny before" (Goltz 109). In most cases however, such recycled jokes, generate laughable instances if they are altered as to create disharmony. In other words, minor modifications of a familiar content that is being imitated results in "disharmonic tension" (Goltz 109), because it grants the audience to notice the original source on the one hand, but at the same time it highlights these elements that have been altered.

To give an example of such a disharmonic tension, Goltz refers to a scene in which groundkeeper Willie, that is a content Scottish kilt wearer, allows a look under his skirt. However, a look under a person's skirt happens to be rather disgusting and un-erotic, especially if Sharon Stone's seducing leg movements from *Basic Instinct* are being copied by an older man with hairy legs. Because the curiousness of what hides underneath a Scottish kilt has frequently been approached within the comedy genre, "it is only the juxtaposition of one of the most memorable scenes from a successful erotic thriller to one of the coarsest characters ever to appear on *The Simpsons* that initiates a moment of utmost fun" (Goltz 110).

Whereas, the previous example featured a rather undemanding manner of paying tribute to an already established movie, my next example embeds particular short sequences within the cartoon that relate to a particular genre in order to acknowledge a certain preexisting creation. One of the main reasons for the following example, that features shorts taken from Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp*

*Fiction*, may be to pay tribute to an outstanding creation that is regarded as one of the best of its kind.

“22 Short Films about Springfield”<sup>22</sup>, reproduces the genre of episodic films<sup>23</sup> and relies heavily on the *Pulp Fiction* movie (Gruteser, Klein and Rauscher 15). Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction* appears to have had an enormous inspiration for this episode, considering especially its “experimental plot structure of interrelated sub-plots that jump forwards and backwards in time” (Goltz 106). Two scenes of the respective movie incorporated within *The Simpsons* episode seem to publicly honor Tarantino’s innovative style of film-making and showing respect to *Pulp Fiction*’s entrenchment as a cultural classic. The first intertextual reference occurs during an original rewrite of the famous ‘Royal with Cheese Dialogue’ between Vincent and Jules. Only this time it is not the two professional killers Vincent and Jules that are discussing the distinctiveness of McDonald’s products but police chief Wiggum with his two officers Lou and Eddie by means of examining Springfield’s own *Krusty Burger* products. The entertainment value within this sequence evolves from the preproduction of an already renowned dialogue, in that its significance is adverse to the characters speaking – clumsy and childlike police offers in contrast to the sassy professional killers (Goltz 106).

This short sequence prepares the audience for the next short film within the episode which provides its own version of the notorious basement scene taken from *Pulp Fiction*. Chief Wiggum and the criminal Snake as captives are being tied to chairs and gagged with red rubber balls, while being threatened to be abused by the military shop owner in whose basement the action takes place. Unexpectedly, Milhouse and his father come into the room and accidentally knock-out the shop owner. Once more, the composition imitates the setting of the movie, combined with original lighting and camera work, but this time the story is altered to comply with the patterns of a sitcom appropriate for children (Goltz 106).

Although the short film abstains from Tarantino’s violent characteristics found in almost all his movies, the sequence nevertheless applies sufficient similarities to clearly connect the episode to one of the most prominent movies of the 1990s. As Goltz argues, the homage recognizes the influence that Quentin Tarantino’s movies, in particular *Pulp Fiction*, had on film-making. He stresses the matter of fact that the show does not only owe something to many individual works of art, but also to generic developments. One of the main reasons for the obviously perpetual influence and success of *The Simpsons* is that it has constantly been able to adopt groundbreaking innovations and advancing itself accordingly (Goltz 106).

---

<sup>22</sup> The episode title refers to the movie *32 Short Films about Glenn Gould* (Goltz 106).

<sup>23</sup> Movie made up of separate especially loosely connected episodes.

The creators choice to incorporate shorts taken from *Pulp Fiction* clearly shows that the creators do rely on certain previously conventions with regard to film-making. By inserting an already acknowledged cultural commodity that proved successful, due to outstanding techniques, the creators reflect upon its impression it has made on them. Furthermore, they relate to a particular genre in this episode that is aiming to reproduce, namely the style of episodic movies. Viewers who are not familiar with the original movie nevertheless find entertainment due to the slapstick elements that allow the usually anti-heroic Millhouse to overthrow the criminal shop owner.

A further example concerning the imitation of a particular scene, which constitutes a part of the show's narrative and pays tribute to an acknowledged movie, is featured within the episode "Itchy & Scratchy & Marge". Among of the highly appraised and prominent settings in cinematic history, is the shower scene featured in Hitchcock's classic movie *Psycho*. The episode starts off with a traditional sitcom setting in which Marge cooks her famous pork chops. Inspired by Marge's cooking, Homer decides to build a spice rack for her in the garage. While Homer is working in the garage, Maggie unexpectedly appears behind him while holding a hammer in her hands lifted above her head. The camera immediately zooms onto Homer's face, who releases a cry of dismay. Suddenly the violin theme from the original movie sets in, intensifies and before Homer can react, Maggie hits him with the hammer over the head. As he is falling down, he grabs a tablecloth that has an open can of red paint on it. The scene resembles the shower scene in *Psycho* in which Janet Leigh who after being stabbed, tears down the shower curtain while her blood is gushing out. *The Simpsons'* producers had gone to great length to meticulously reproduce the whole scene as close as possible to its original. They used the same sound effects and camera angles to create an animated version of "one of the best-known scenes in all of cinema history" (*Psycho* film).

The reference contributes significantly to the episodes plotline, since it initiates the main theme of the respective episode, namely the issue of violence on television and its negative effects on children. After Marge asks herself were an innocent child would have got the idea to attack her father with a hammer, she places Maggie in front of the television, whereupon she immediately answers her own question. What appears in front of her on the television screen is *The Itchy and Scratchy Show* featuring the two characters hitting each other with hammers, until finally Itchy attacks Scratchy with a knife. Once again the violin theme from the *Psycho* movie swells in, as Maggie is seen to grab a sharp pencil and goes once again towards Homer. The violin theme appears as a very important convention utilized by the producers of the show. Goltz argues that specific soundtrack elements in general serve as essential bearers of additional meaning accentuating an effect sought after. Such elements in most cases do not demand supplementary

methods of revealing its purpose. The violin theme from *Psycho* has evolved into an equivalent for suspense and its indicative potential has happened to be so powerful that it stands on an equal footing with the significance of provided visual material, influencing and forming the formation of recognition (123).

In this instance, the producers of the show not only draw on an already established setting by relying on visual similarities, but accentuate the theme of suspense and danger with the famous violin theme. In this sense the situation's gravity, in particular violence on television is accentuated and the violin theme serves as a main marker. Such a sensitive issue clearly refers to actual social realities outside the show because discussions about not letting children watch certain programs are not new. Such an allusion may even hint at *The Simpsons'* own situation concerning outraged parents and educators who, though not referring to the show's violence, lamented the show's demoralizing effect on children, providing bad role models by featuring exaggerated stereotypes. *The Simpsons* has been attacked for being rude and even accused for being responsible for America's youth deterioration. Similarly to some public discussions, even Marge further in the scene states "So television's responsible" (Itchy & Scratchy & Marge 7F09).

Concerning the entertainment value that this sequence provides, we can say once again that the creators, as so many times, rely on slapstick elements for which the show is appreciated among younger viewers. Homer finds himself yet again within a situation where he seems to be helpless and powerless being at his children's mercy. Especially the utilization of the usually unnoticed and quiet baby Maggie emphasizes the scene's fun factor and piquancy. Viewers acquainted with the classic movies of the master of suspense, will appreciate recognizing the playfully embedded homage. Instances like these prove the influence certain genres and movies had on cinematic history. The decision of the creators to utilize a particular movie while not another proves the importance of particular accomplishments with regard to generate a desired effect and show the creators' dependence on such achievements, paying tribute in an amusing and playful way.

Finally there is yet another level of homage used within *The Simpsons*, in which not only a particular sequence of a movie is adapted into the cartoon world of Springfield, but an entire storyline is based on a respective work of art. In such cases entire episodes rely on a previously accomplished movie, stage play or book as a source of inspiration. The producers of the show imitate most of the original storyline and symbolism "but do not probe this intermedial relation for the additional significance that might arise from the different medial conditions" (Goltz 107). This means that such episodes remain fairly close to the original in that they incorporate the setting, the sequence of events and the approximate character constellations. Because this can be achieved by means of slight modifications with regard to the sitcom cast and background, the plot basically

remains true to both, the original movie as well as *The Simpsons* sitcom setting. Furthermore, it does not affect its context, despite the ironically absurd closings of *The Simpsons* episodes. Consequently, any audience can follow the story and enjoy it regardless of being familiar with the called forth original source or not (Goltz 107).

An example of such a reference, the plot inspiration for most of the episode “Eternal Moonshine of the Simpsons Mind” features Michael Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind*. The basic premise of the movie includes a couple in which actors Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) and Clementine Kruczynski (Kate Winslet) start a relationship during a long train trip. Despite their entirely contrasting personalities they almost immediately feel attracted to each other. In the world of *The Simpsons*, Homer and Marge also represent two differing personalities so perhaps that is where the original idea came from. In the movie, Joel and Clementine initially do not remember that they are in fact former lovers. We then find out that due to an unpleasant dispute, Clementine decided to have all her relationship memories erased in a new start-up company that offers such services. In the meantime, Joel discovers that Clementine has erased her memories and decides to undergo the same process himself. From that moment onwards, most of the movie happens in Joel’s mind. While his memory is being erased, he experiences numerous flashbacks and memories of Clementine in a reverse sequence, being confronted with happy moments in their relationship.

In the show, the reference to the movie starts with Homer waking up outside of his home and not being able to remember the events of last night. Initially he thinks that it must have been the result of heavy drinking as probably it’s not the first time that this is happening to him. When he comes home, he finds the home deserted and then devastated walks to Moe’s tavern for some consolation. There, Moe tells him that he has given him a ‘Forget-Me-Shot’, a special cocktail capable of erasing memory, because Homer wanted to forget some unpleasant memories that had happened within the last 24 hours. Homer then goes back home and questions Grandpa Abe about last night’s events. Grandpa Ape lets him know about a new technology developed by Professor Frink, which aids in sorting out memories. The arguably most amusing moment in this episode is Homer’s expedition into his past memories by means of Professor’s Frink memory machine, the ‘Deja Viewmaster’. The producers of the show skillfully incorporated scene stills from all 400 (at the time) previous episodes to illustrate Homer’s memories he maintained, featuring moments dating back to the first season and going even back to the time before his children were born. In that sense, the producers paid tribute to the already extensively long history of the show itself, preserving a touch of seriousness (Keller).

However, Homer's memory is not restored properly and after the procedure he ends up believing that Marge was cheating on him. Because his life appears useless, he is determined to commit suicide and intends to jump off a bridge. While standing in front of the bridge, considering whether to jump or not, there is yet another noteworthy homage presented to the viewers that fits nicely into the storyline. As he falls into his assumed death, we see 'freeze frames' in which Homer's entire life is reenacted. In these frames he is the centerpiece but the surroundings are rapidly changing based on what he has relieved from the time when he was a baby. The inspiration for the sequence came from a viral *YouTube* video called *Everyday* by a freelance photographer Noah Kalina, in which in 5 minutes we see a chronological sequence of self-portrait photos of Noah that he has been taking every day for six years (Kalina). *The Simpsons* version shows all of the phases of Homer's life starting off with him being a baby, going through school, puberty, meeting Marge, drinking beer, trying out costumes, more beer and it even ends with a screen identical to the *YouTube* related videos feature. The montage is accompanied by the same melancholic and rather depressive piano tune from the original video that accentuates the deepness of emotions expressing the sadness of getting old. As previously discussed, music functions as an amazing trigger of emotions and it does not need any further elements to elaborate its actual meaning. The short video exhibits one of the rarest moments of seriousness within the history of the show and inspires viewers to reflect upon their own lives. The confrontation of one's own life and the achieved accomplishments are an issue that every one of us sooner or later is confronted with.

"Eternal Moonshine of the Simpsons Mind" is not only inspired by the original movie title but takes the basic premise of the movie by means of dedicating the episode to memory problems, relationships and loneliness. This is accomplished through the help of flashbacks, combined with a nonlinear narration and a surreal feeling. The issue of investigating memory's natures has been taken and adjusted to suit *The Simpsons* sitcom conventions. In this respect the episode is not only intelligent and amusing, but also visually demanding. The producers succeed in neatly reenacting the movie's atmosphere, incorporating the melancholic piano tune and emphasizing various aspects of life concerning deepest and honest fears that everyone is confronted with at some point in life. As Keller puts it to the point, the episode blends "humor, romance, and a little bit of science fiction into a tidy little plot [...] [and] the writers gave the show enough of a twist to keep it intriguing for the viewers" (Keller).

With this episode, we see once again how the show proves its potential to adapt various generic conventions in order to stay up-to-date and advances accordingly in order to stay influential and interesting. Although not every single viewer might be familiar with the movie that the episode is

based on, the narration nevertheless makes sense and offers enough amusing elements to maintain couple of grins throughout the episode. Furthermore, the episode is an outstanding example of giving homages, because it pays tribute first and foremost to the show's own achievements and secondly uses another movie's format and conventions to acknowledge its accomplishments. Whereas younger viewers who are still not confronted with serious life issues might simply enjoy Homer's inability to remember previous night's events and the funny situations he gets himself into because of it, adults for a brief moment might contemplate upon their own life and sympathize with Homer. In this sense the homage creates a second level of entertainment, at least for those who recognize the allusion.

The illustrated examples of pastiche, as well as homage, have tried to illustrate that intertextual references hold a significant role of boosting the entertainment value of *The Simpsons*. Although not all of them may have the same effects like the jokes, indignities, foolishness or similar devices usually featured on related comedy programs, they nevertheless directly add an extra layer to *The Simpsons'* witty appeal (Goltz 109). Furthermore, I demonstrated how existing works of art are incorporated into the show's plots, without the intention to mock or ridicule them but adopt them as a flattering or neutral practice of imitation. Instead, the creative re-use of previous material, combined with Springfield's universe serves to offer fun for various viewers by recognizing them as such.

The section 'Pastiche' and 'Homage' focused on instances in which the creators did not intended any kind of critical comments towards previous creations, allowing them to be regarded as rather neutral modes of imitation. Whereas the previously elaborated examples on pastiche and homage to a great extent depended on preexisting creations, by remaining within *The Simpsons'* common conventional setting as well as character constellation, parodies adopt an altered method of imitation and will be analyzed within the following section.

### 3.3.3 Parody

Parody as a term is commonly used to represent a recreation of an existing work, in which certain aspects of the original work are being mocked. Hutcheon, a Canadian academic who has many publications on the topic of the use of parody in postmodernism, does not agree with this general definition and instead defines parody "as an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting and 'trans-contextualizing' previous works of art" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 11). According to this definition parody uses some other commodity's primary characteristics and introduces a twisted and sarcastic variant of the original. She doesn't see parody as having purely ridiculing or mocking intent, since according to her; there is nothing in the

root of the original work that conveys such a comic or ridiculing effect. Instead, the contemporary utilization of parody does not appear to ridicule or demolish, but entails a distance between a previous creation and the newly resulting outcome. Such a distance is commonly indicated through irony, which is more teasing than taunting and therefore more analytical than devastating (Hutcheon, “Parody without Ridicule” 202). Therefore, parody by Hutcheon is considered as a statement with regard to the preexisting creation with a different outcome (Hutcheon, Interview).

Whereas in the past parody generally was associated with a genuine mocking of a preexisting text, parody started to be considered as a rather more earnest and thoughtful. Jameson, who generally regards postmodern imitations as failures of arts, depleted from any kind of crucial stance, regards parody as an “essentially depthless, trivial kitsch” (qtd. in Hutcheon, “Politics” 182), stripped of its potential to effectively provide political critique. Contrary to that belief, Hutcheon regards parody as “mixture of praise and blame [that] makes such parody into a critical act of reassessment and acclimatization” (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 2). In that sense parody goes even beyond a mere reassessment, in that it is a primary expression of texts’ self-reflexivity providing “inter-art-discourse” (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 2).

Following that, contemporary parody cannot be regarded as a simplified and mere value free way to decorate cultural art forms, but educates and commands the awareness that certain vital social and historical realities are discursive. The past as such is included and altered within the new creation, giving it new and dissimilar meaning. Consequently, the most parodic contemporary creations highlight the historical, social and ideological context from which they have originated and remain to exist (Hutcheon, “Politics” 182, 183).

Concerning *The Simpsons*, the critical stance towards various political and social issues has already been discussed in the chapter about postmodernism. However, the frequent undermining of metanarratives goes beyond a simple tackling of important issues concerning everyday life, in order to make people think how sometimes the reality and our perception of it is being distorted. In most cases, when the creators of the show approach to parody a socially or politically important issue they attempt to illustrate hidden ideologies behind the approached issue, and illustrate through difference the consequences of the past. Because parody in most cases draws on preexisting texts, that the audience is familiar with, the creators attempt “challenging the audience to rethink that work and its ideological baggage” (Hutcheon, Interview). Consequently, the creators proclaim their willingness to put such ideologies into question.

An outstanding exemplary episode questioning such ideologies is “MyPods and Boomsticks” first aired in 2008. In this episode the Simpsons go to visit the ‘Mapple’ store which is supposed to be the Springfield version of the real Apple stores. Lisa, who is usually very rational, is ecstatic to

be in the store and is fascinated by the overpriced Mapple products. Untypical of her, she has fallen victim to Mapple's marketing tricks that make consumers feel special about owning one of their products. Since she cannot afford any of their overpriced products, she inquires about purchasing fake white earphones so that she can make people believe that she owns a Mapple product. The store is prepared to serve even such customers with a product called 'MyPhonies', but to Lisa's disappointment, the 'phony' earphones are also overpriced. Up to this point, it is not so obvious if the producers are using a mildly critical tone to illustrate how people become irrational about owning a shiny product or if it's just a display of how one small girl, even though usually rational, is having a child like obsession about owning a shiny gadget. But in case viewers didn't sense the irony, in the next scene it become obvious that the producers are indeed trying to mock the people who are spending a lot of money on the premium priced products.

In the next scene, the store's PA system informs the visitors that there will be a live announcement from 'Steve Mobs' the "founder and chief imaginative officer" of the Mapple company. The crowd becomes delirious about the announcement, ecstatic that they will be addressed by the founder of the company. One person even describes Mobs as being "like a god who knows what we want", which is a polite way for the producers to say that the people who get excited about such things cannot really think for themselves and need somebody else to do it for them. Later, Steve Mobs appears on a large screen in the store and introduces himself as their "insanely great leader" and tells the audience that he has an announcement that "will completely change the way they look at *everything*". At this point, the shop visitors are already delighted and they pull out their wallets (knowing that they will have to purchase an overpriced product again) while waiting to hear more. But before they can hear the rest of Mobs' announcement, the prankster Bart plugs a microphone into the store's multimedia system and starts narrating the rest of the speech. Unbeknown to the store crowd, the prank speech delivered by Bart appears as if it is from Steve Mobs. So instead of hearing the anticipated life changing announcement, they get to hear that they are losers and idiots for purchasing "\$500 telephones with a fruit on them, which cost \$8 to make". But while Steve Mobs is on the big display and his words are replaced by Bart's, Mobs' lip movement is completely in sync with Bart's speech, so even though we know that we hear Bart's prank, the producers made it appear as if Steve Mobs was actually saying exactly the same insulting words the whole time. The crowd gets really emotional and disappointed, and the Comic Book Guy being part of the disappointed crowd, throws a sledgehammer into the big screen which still has Steve Mobs image on it.

This scene is a remake of an old Apple ad called "1984", which itself has George Orwell's novel with the same title as inspiration. The old commercial was created shortly before 1984 to

announce the coming of the new Apple Macintosh computer on the market. The ad features some sort of dystopian society in which emotionless people are sitting in front of a big TV screen, staring and listening to the words of a man who gives them an ideological speech. A young strong girl, wearing a tank top with Apple's logo, is shown running with a sledgehammer in her hands and when she gets close to the screen, she swings the sledgehammer at the screen and breaks it. The message at the end of the ad is that Apple's new product will make sure that the year 1984 will not be like the novel *1984*. The now late Steve Jobs announced this ad as Apple CEO during a keynote speech delivered to Apple employees and investors in Fall, 1983. In his emotionally laden speech, he states that computer sellers "fear an IBM dominated and controlled future" and that they are turning to Apple as "the only force that they can insure their freedom" (1983 Apple Keynote). At the time IBM was the largest computer company and Steve Jobs is trying to portray Apple as the only underdog that can and should oppose IBM's powerful position to control the market and reap greater profits at the expense of the consumers. So the ad symbolically presents IBM as being the 'Big Brother' that is controlling the people and the young girl that takes this control away by throwing the sledgehammer through the screen is supposed to be Apple. The ad has had an amazing reception at the time and even nowadays is considered as being one of the most influential ads of all time. But 23 years later, the creators of *The Simpsons* portray Steve Mobs (Jobs) as being the 'Big Brother' on a large screen who is brainwashing the masses.

At the time the episode aired, Apple was already hugely successful with the iPhone and they had an almost monopoly position to the market segment of mobile computing. A *TechCrunch* article published months before the release of the episode stated that "there are rumors of Apple blocking apps that compete with its core businesses and applications" (Schonfeld). Few months later, the same technology portal reports that Apple is "growing rotten to the core" (Kincaid), in an article as a response to Apple's decision to block an application made by Google. The blocked application (Google Voice) is not even a direct competitor to Apple, but Apple used its power position to block the application that could hurt revenue streams of their partner AT&T. And that is not an isolated incident where Apple coerces its dominant position; another example would be its decision not to include Adobe's popular *Flash Player* on the iPhone, effectively making a lot of websites not usable if they stick to the *Flash* format. Leander Kahney, a former managing editor at *Wired*, in an editorial published before the "MyPods and Boomsticks" has aired, states that Apple "locks consumers into a proprietary ecosystem" and yet to the surprise of competitors like Microsoft or Google, still manages to be insanely popular and profitable, while other companies, especially Microsoft, have been scrutinized heavily about doing similar practices (Kahney). So *The Simpsons* producers are just saying what the *Wired* editor didn't state explicitly, that it is all

the people, in pursuit of shiny overpriced gadgets, that have given Apple such power to reap great profits from them with business practices that are ultimately against their interest.

In a playful, though explicit manner the creators fearlessly convey two obvious messages. Firstly, concerns the advance of certain technologies, particularly information technologies. Although, the advances in information technologies such as the computer and ultimately the Internet proved to have positive effects on human mankind, they nevertheless contributed to the already mentioned overload of generated information that led to a fragmented and disoriented individual. The creators take a critical stance towards technological advances of whatever kind, and try to show its audience that everything, even if meant for human mankind's good always needs to be questioned in order not be misused.

Another important aspect of this parody is the representation of Steve Jobs as 'Big Brother', that poses a question with regard to its unethical business practices. Similarly, to the 'Big Brother' in the movie *1984*, Steve Jobs seems to have abused his powers in the Mobile computing industry by following exactly the same unethical business practices that he had despised more than two decades ago. Furthermore, the scene allows one to question upon which basis a cult status, like the one that surrounded Steve Jobs and ultimately Apple, can be legitimized.

Concerning the entertainment value that this scene provides we can say with certainty that even viewers who do not get the intertextual allusion will have fun watching Bart's prank that seems to top most of his previously conducted ones. Furthermore, Lisa's desperate wish to possess an overpriced gadget that is so unlike her basic world-weary principles allows a younger audience to sympathize with her. Especially among a younger generation, peer group pressure is common and the urge to be 'in' or 'cool' seems to be of vital importance nowadays.

With the previously mentioned examples, we see that pastiche, homage and parody are not just mere decorative elements, deriving from the lack of creativity among the show's creators. Instead, these intertextual references are originally and creatively fused within Springfield's cosmos and prove to be the creation of talented writers. Intertextual references within the show prove to be witty and thoughtfully incorporated into particular scenes or even episodes, in order to create the effect sought after, namely entertainment. As *The Simpsons'* audience comprises viewers from various generations, educational background and classes, the show proves to cater for all tastes by including a wide range of discrete references. The creators of the show are aware of the fact that particular allusions referring to for example science or literature will be noticed by only a few people. However, that doesn't matter, because as the creators explain, the pace of the show, which is so fast, allows the creators to get away with it. If a humorous allusion passes by unnoticed or is not understood, within the seconds to follow Homer is either going to trip, injure himself or fall

down the stairs. Such slapstick elements ensure the general entertainment value, since everyone will notice them (Mirkin and Silverman).

As I already discussed in the opening section on entertainment, intertextual references constitute a bonus feature within the show, which do not exclude the viewers that do not recognize or understand them from enjoying the narration. However, employing intertextual references is considered a strategy that ensures a bond between the creators and their audience. Through the incorporations of such ‘credit spoofs’, based upon information which not everybody owns, the creators and their fans become affiliated in that they “become, in effect, members of a club who know the ‘secret handshake’” (Irwin and Lombardo 86). Because the creators embed an overwhelming amount of such references, the show draws in their viewers in a sort “of quiz, testing viewer knowledge of both high and popular cultural texts” (Ott “Postmodern Identity” 70). Every single episode resembles a game show, in which participants are tested on their knowledge to identify references originating from various discrete fields of knowledge like movies, famous people, literature, television and media in general, providing the potential to animate the viewers to detect them.

Incorporated allusions produce anxiousness in the viewers to discover as many hints as possible in order to identify the original source of inspiration. Instances, in which references show thorough fundamental visual similarities or audible identification, it is relatively easy to prompt such references’ capacities. In other cases, however, in which a broad media literacy and cultural education is required, the insertion of such references creates a bond between producers and audience, who share a common joke.

Matt Groening personally states that “*The Simpsons* is a show that rewards you for paying attention” (qtd. in Irwin and Lombardo 81). Assuming media knowledge on a highest degree among its viewers, the creators provide pleasure in detecting such allusions, because it appoints such viewers as “being culturally conversant and in the know” (Knox). In that sense, hyperconscious television as Ott refers to this particular type of shows, does more than merely considering its audience as media experts, instead they are “reposition[ed] as cultural elites” (Ott, *Small Screen* 96).

Following that, the genre of hyperconscious television brings about a novel concept of hierarchies with regard to knowledge. In contrast to previous knowledge hierarchies, that discriminate particular groups of people to contribute their knowledge, hyperconscious television inspires its viewers to actively engage in the practice of providing their knowledge in online communities. That way hyperconscious television ensures the establishment of “a new cultural hierarchy, in which the interpretive abilities of its viewers are socially valued” (Ott, *Small Screen*

96). Furthermore, hyperconscious television succeeds in resolving the guilt of watching too much television allowing its viewers to feel appreciated. Whereas, before excessive engagement in television watching was conceived as “mind-deadening” (Watts qtd. in Ott, *Small Screen* 96) and labeled those who spent most of their time in front of the television as “couch potatoes, tube heads, and stupid-box junkies” (Ott, *Small Screen* 96), hyperconscious television grants its viewers to flatter themselves, on the newly founded premise that “knowledge equals prestige” (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 71). Because society on a regular basis informs and attacks such immoderate viewers to be lazy and stupid, hyperconscious television rewards them for their enormous acquaintance with media culture (Ott, *Small Screen* 96).

*The Simpsons* fans are not only highly respected and appreciated due to their vast media knowledge, but are granted the ability to signify their belonging to a distinct culture (Ott and Walter 440). Recalling the facts I presented in ‘*The Simpsons* represents a fragmented and plural society’, the consequences of the Information Age left its society alienated, fragmented as well as disconnected from a unified self, struggling to be part in the newly arisen global community. In contrast to conventional pre-modern societies, in which the understanding of the self was generally presupposed, the case as such was without problems. Identity back then was always firmly bound to self-location and “one simply was who one was” (Ott, *Small Screen* 92). However, with the advance of information technologies, the concept of the self was rendered as problematic. Through conflicting messages presented by the mass media, the premise upon which to build a consistent self was greatly weakened. Hyperconscious television, as *The Simpsons*, grants opportunities for approaching this difficulties by proposing “an alternative model of the self – one that views fragmentation not as an unwelcome threat, but as an opportunity for an expanded and adventurous form of self-expression” (Ott, *Small Screen* 93).

In that understanding, fragmentation is not regarded as the ultimate evil, but as a chance to look for different ways of defining ones identity and belonging. In present days the concept of community is based upon joint interests provided by the media culture. Individuals experience and signal a sense of belonging, by sharing particular hobbies and pursuits that are provided by the mass communicational environment. Consequently, “*The Simpsons* has exchange value” (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 70). In other words, the show as a commodity offered by the entertainment economy being part of the enormous international communicational media landscape, offers a fundament to share particular interests. Through the participation of *The Simpsons*’ fans in online discussions after each episode, viewers become members of communities by means of what they know. Being a *Simpsons* fan and contributing in online discussions provides a feeling of community and therefore functions as a signifier of identity (Ott, “Postmodern Identity” 70).

Summing up these facts, we can say that intertextually loaded texts, such as *The Simpsons*, distinguish themselves from less intertextual programs in two significant manners. Firstly, as already mentioned in the chapter on postmodernism, the show grants the ability to orient oneself in the vast landscape of contradicting messages, enabling to develop the ability of taking a critical position. Secondly, intertextual programs enable its audience to develop a sense of belonging and strengthening one's identity. Finally, the show contributes to foster the feeling of self-satisfaction among its audience, because it allows extensive television viewers to distance themselves from the previously held belief that television consumption is a waste of time. Instead, intertextual media proves to be sophisticated, engaging and demanding, and distances itself from former mediocre and monotonous television programs.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to analyze how *The Simpsons* emerged to be a popular culture icon despite of its animation format. With the decline of *The Flintstones* as the last prime time animation show in the 1960s, cartoons were considered as a children's commodity for a long time. Fox Network's willingness to establish itself on the media landscape forced them to reevaluate what viewers want to see on television and they gathered creative people who are ready to challenge the status quo and eventually managed to attract people in front of the small screens to watch their creations. They were fortunate enough to get somebody like Groening working with them who eventually, along with a team of other creative artists, created a show that won the hearts of so many people across all over the world.

It was analyzed how choosing animation as format for a new show wasn't a simple choice. By introducing *The Simpsons* as short cartoons running in addition to an existing show, they could see that adult audiences do not necessarily think of the animated format as something for children only. However, it wasn't a simple task to come with a concept for an animated show that would keep adult audiences engaged for a longer time. They decided to use the already popular format of family sitcoms and to enrich it with the full potential that the animation format provides. Using animated characters gave the producers a unique opportunity to do anything that the imagination allows and to also address sensitive topics without alienating the mainstream. The conscious decision to exploit already existing formats and the established conventions, the creators could get away with presenting critical material in a safe and sound way. Whereas, the sitcom format offers the possibility to approach the presentation of narratives that concern issues from everyday life, animation endows the creators with the liberty to present such facts in a twisted and skewed

perspective, while getting away with it. Consequently, the show proved the cartoon's suitability for prime time, opening up a path for new approaches and followers on television.

The thesis has shown that although the show primarily had adults as target audience, it nevertheless did not alienate children. The skillful blending of distinct references ranging from pop culture to high art, laced with frequent slapstick elements, ensured that children are also interested in watching the show, having a compound effect of being a show that can entertain whole families. In addition to providing entertainment for the whole family, we saw how it also helps viewers enhance their knowledge concerning various topics from everyday life. Without an attempt to preach or instruct its viewers, the show manages to expand viewers' horizons and helps them approach certain issues more critically, like for example the information presented at them by the vast amount of different media channels. This expansion of the horizons is done through the use of two forms of intertextuality, horizontal and vertical. The show offers a balance between seriousness and entertainment by presenting aspects from viewers' real life into the world of Springfield. Especially through parody the creators seem to be able to question certain cults that have arisen around certain important personalities and challenge the viewers to see them more critically.

The focus on incorporating fictional works of art, like movies, offers entertainment for the various and distinct audiences, since they can find amusement to detect similarities between the original and *The Simpsons* version. Concerning books and other artifacts that are regarded as of being of high cultural value, they succeed in familiarizing its audience with great classics in an unconventional way, and they even manage to get the younger generation involved and better informed.

Besides the ability to provide entertainment across generations through the use of intertextuality, the thesis has also shown that the high amount of intertextual references creates a feeling of self-satisfaction among viewers. Detecting such references, especially that most obscure ones, endows viewers to feel as if they belong to a cultural elite. Through intertextuality, the show's creators found a way to reward those that consider themselves as media literate. The intertextual references also contribute to a feeling of belonging in a particular community and restore the lost feelings of the self.

The thesis also illustrated how the show evolved to be influential on the media landscape. The Simpsons proved to have an impact on the media landscape, because they challenged the conventional standards of broadcasts. By openly and amusingly commenting on certain cultural and everyday life phenomena, they contribute to foster an understanding for particular issues. It changed the expectations towards programs in that it triggered a broad cultural awareness and

interest in reflecting everyday life more adequately by presenting a more critical attitude instead of remaining silent about the hypocrisies of certain sacred establishments.

This research has also opened questions in need of further investigation. Further work needs to be done to establish whether intertextuality generally applied within animation shows is a success factor for popularity and sustaining viewership. Because the thesis focused solely on *The Simpsons* to the present how it captured mature and diverse audiences and thus ensuring its prime time programming slot, further research is needed to determine whether other cartoons of the type like *The Simpsons* have had similar outcomes. Keeping in mind that creators of such similar cartoons, like for example South Park and Family Guy, stated that they were inspired by *The Simpsons* for their shows, it can be perhaps assumed that they were also affected in the same way, but never the less further research is required to prove it.

## Works Cited

- "1983 Apple Keynote | Young Vibrant Steve Jobs." 11 Mar 2009. *YouTube*. YouTube. Online video clip. 13 Dec 2012. <<http://youtu.be/ISoWKxKyWhQ>>.
- "'1984' Apple Macintosh Commercial." 27 Aug 2008. *YouTube*. Ridley Scott. Online video clip. Nov 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhsWzJo2sN4>>.
- Alberti, John, ed. *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004.
- Allen, Graham. *Intertextuality*. 2nd. Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011. Kindle e-book.
- Anthony, Ted. "No Sacred Cows for Groening." April 1999. *The Simpsons Archive - Articles*. November 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/articles/sacredcows.html>>.
- Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 2nd. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image Music*. Ed. Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1977. 142-148.
- Barthes, Roland. "Theory of the Text." *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. Ed. Robert Young. Boston; London; Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. 31-47.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Leitch B Vincent. 2nd. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010. 1553-1555.
- . *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Michigan : University of Michigan Press, 1995.
- Beard, Duncan Stuart. "Local Satire with a Global Reach: Ethnic Stereotyping and Cross-Cultural Conflicts in The Simpsons." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 273-291.
- Björnsson, Björn Erlingur Flók. "Postmodernism and The Simpsons." BA Thesis. University of Iceland, 2006. Web. June 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/bf.paper.html>>.
- Broderick, Mick. "Releasing the Hounds: The Simpsons as Anti-Nuclear-Satire." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 244-272.
- Brook, Vincent. "Myth or Consequences: Ideological Fault Lines in The Simpsons." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 172-196.

- Butler, Martin and Arvi Sepp. "The Itchy and Scratchy Show: Beobachtung zur Metaisierung im amerikanischen Fernsehcartoon The Simpsons." *Metaisierung in Literatur und anderen Medien*. Ed. Janine Hauthal, et al. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007. 361-376.
- "Cameo." n.d. *Merriam Webster*. October 2012. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cameo>>.
- Cantor, Paul A. "In Praise of Television: The Greatest TV Show Ever." *The American Enterprise* September-October Vol.8 1997: 34-36.
- . "The Simpsons. Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family." *Political Theory* December Vol. 27 No. 6, 1999: 734-749.
- Cantor, Paul. *Gilligan Unbound: Pop Culture in the Age of Globalization*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
- Carr, David. "Will The Simpsons ever age?" 24 April 2005. *The New York Times*. November 2012. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/24/arts/television/24carr.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/24/arts/television/24carr.html?_r=0)>.
- Cartwright, Nancy. *My Life As a Ten Year-Old Boy*. New York: Hyperion, 2001.
- Chow, Valerie Weilunn. "Homer Erectus: Homer Simpsons as Everyman...and Every Woman." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 107-136.
- Cuddon, John A. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin Books, 1999.
- Cultra, Shane. "Complete List Of 30 Second Ad Cost For All Primetime TV Shows: A \$200,000 Domain Looks Like a Bargain." 7 December 2011. *Domain Shane*. November 2012. <<http://domainshane.com/complete-list-of-30-second-ad-cost-for-all-primetime-tv-shows-a-200000-domain-looks-like-a-bargain/>>.
- Czernecki, Claudia. "The Simpsons - Identifying metatextual elements and their functions." Term Paper. University of Vienna, 2010. Print.
- Czogalla, Michael. *Behind the Laughter. Die Simpsons im Kontext der amerikanischen Populärkultur*. Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2004.
- De La Roca, Claudia. "Matt Groening Reveals the Location of the Real Springfield." May 2012. *Smithsonian Magazine*. November 2012. <<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/Matt-Groening-Reveals-the-Location-of-the-Real-Springfield.html>>.
- Dettmar, J.H. Kevin. "Countercultural Literacy: Learning Irony with The Simpsons." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 85-106.
- Du Vernay, Denise. "The Simpsons: Not a Kids' Show Since 1989." 1 April 2011. *Splitsider*. October 2012. <<http://splitsider.com/2011/04/the-simpsons-not-a-kids-show-since-1989/>>.
- Edgar, Andrew and Peter Sedgwick. *Cultural Theory: The Key Thinkers*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

- Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge, 1987.
- Futurama*. Prods. Matt Groening, David X. Cohen and Ken Keeler. Fox., 1999. Television.
- Ginsberg, Allen. "Howl (1956)." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym. Vol. 2. New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998. 2634-2634.
- Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954.
- Goltz, Wanja Matthias Freiherr von der. "Functions of Intertextuality and Intermediality in The Simpsons." Diss. Universität Duisburg-Essen, 2011. Web. <<http://duepublico.uni-duisburg-essen.de/servlets/DerivateServlet/Derivate-28715/DissGoltz.pdf>>.
- Gordon, Michael E. "The Simpsons: a case study in the limitations of television as a medium for presenting political and social satire." BA Thesis. Haverford College, 2004. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10066/658>>.
- Gray, Jonathan. *Watching with The Simpsons - Television, Parody, and Intertextuality*. New York; London: Routledge, 2006.
- Groening, Matt. "And on the Seventh Day Matt Created Bart." August 1996. *The Simpsons Archive - Interviews*. Loaded Magazine. Web. September 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/interviews/groening96.html>>.
- . "Explaining Groening - One on one with the sultan of fun." Summer 1993. *The Simpsons Archive - Interviews*. Interview by Jamie Angell. November 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/interviews/groening93.html>>.
- . "Interview by Brian Doherty." March 1999. *The Simpsons Archive - Interviews*. Mother Jones. November 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/interviews/groening99e.html>>.
- . "Prime time is heaven for 'Life in Hell' Artist." 16 December 1989. *The Simpsons Archive - Interviews*. Interview by Erik H. Bergman. October 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/interviews/groening89.html>>.
- Gruteser, Michael. "Family Ties." *Subversion zur Prime-Time. Die Simpsons und die Mythen der Gesellschaft*. Ed. Michael Gruteser, Thomas Klein and Andreas Rauscher. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2002. 49-77.
- Gruteser, Michael, Thomas Klein and Andreas Rauscher. "Die gelben Seiten von Springfield: Eine Einführung." *Subversion zur Prime-Time. Die Simpsons und die Mythen der Gesellschaft*. Ed. Michael Gruteser, Thomas Klein and Andreas Rauscher. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2002. 11-17.
- Hannan, Gerard. "Postmodernism And American Animation." 13 November 2012. *Irish Media Man*. November 2012. <<http://irishmediaman.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/postmodernism-and-american-animation/>>.
- Hilton-Morrow, Wendy and David T. McMahan. "The Flintstones to Futurama: Networks and Prime Time Animation." *Prime Time Animation. Television Animation and American Culture*. Ed. Carol A. Stabile and Mark Harrison. New York: Routledge, 2003. 74-88.

- "Homer Simpsons and the American Dream." n.d. *Call of the Simpsons*. August 2012.  
<<http://www.simpsonsonline.com/magazin/referate/homer-simpson-and-the-american-dream/>>.
- "Homer votes 2012." 20 Sep. 2012. *YouTube*. YouTube. Online video clip. Nov. 2012.  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArC7XarwnWI>>.
- "How The Simpsons Has Stayed on Top." March 2002. *ABC News*. November 2012.  
<<http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=123942&page=1#.UMT7Zqyure4>>.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2006.
- . *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*. New York; London: Methuen, 1985.
- . "Interview by Linda Hutcheon by Natasha Taylor." 1 June 2010. *The Parody Blog*. December 2012. <<http://theparodyblog.blogspot.co.at/2010/06/interview-linda-hutcheon.html>>.
- . "Parody Without Ridicule: Observations on Modern Literary Parody." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/ Revue Canadienne de Litterature Comparee* Spring 1978: 201-211.
- . "The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History." *Cultural Critique* Winter No. 5 1986-1987: 197-207.
- "Hyperreality." 27 November 2007. *Art and Popular Culture Encyclopedia*. August 2012.  
<<http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Hyperreality>>.
- Irwin, William. "Against Intertextuality." *Philosophy and Literature* October Vol. 28, No. 2, 2004: 227-242.
- Irwin, William and J.R. Lombardo. "The Simpsons and Allusion: 'Worst Essay Ever'." *The Simpsons and Philosophy - The D'oh! of Homer*. Ed. William Irwin and Mark T. Conrad. Chicago: La Salle: Open Court, 2001. 81-92.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B Leitch. 2nd. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010. 1846-1860.
- Kachel, Jörg C. "Topographia America. There's no Place like Home!" *Subversion zur Prime-Time. Die Simpsons und die Mythen der Gesellschaft*. Ed. Michael Gruteser, Thomas Klein and Andreas Rauscher. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2002. 167-183.
- Kahney, Leander. "How Apple Got Everything Right By Doing Everything Wrong." 18 March 2008. *Wired Magazine*. December 2012. <[http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/16-04/bz\\_apple?currentPage=all](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/it/magazine/16-04/bz_apple?currentPage=all)>.
- Kalina, Noah. "Everyday." 27 Aug. 2006. *YouTube*. YouTube. Online video clip. November 2012.  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6B26asyGKDo>>.

- Keller, Richard. "The Simpsons: Eternal Moonshine of the Simpson Mind." 17 December 2007. *AOL TV*. November 2012. <<http://www.aoltv.com/2007/12/16/the-simpsons-eternal-moonshine-of-the-simpson-mind/>>.
- Kincaid, Jason. "Apple Is Growing Rotten To The Core: Official Google Voice App Blocked From App Store." 27 July 2009. *TechCrunch*. December 2012. <<http://techcrunch.com/2009/07/27/apple-is-growing-rotten-to-the-core-and-its-likely-atts-fault/>>.
- Knox, Simone. "Reading the ungraspable double-codedness of The Simpsons." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 2006: 72-81.
- Korte, Dan. "The Simpsons as Quality Television." November 1997. *The Simpsons Archive - Miscellaneous*. September 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/dk.paper.html>>.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Nous deux" or a (Hi)Story of Intertextuality." *The Romanic Review* 93. 1-2 (2002): 7-13.
- . *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Lesic-Thomas, Andrea. "Behind Bakhtin: Russian Formalism and Kristeva's Intertextuality." *A Journal of Modern Critical Theory* November 2005, 28 (3) ed.: 1-20.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.
- MacIntyre, April. "'The Simpsons' Al Jean interview, new season begins September 28." 25 September 2008. *Monsters and Critics*. December 2012. <[http://www.monstersandcritics.com/smallscreen/features/article\\_1432969.php/The\\_Simpsons\\_Al\\_Jean\\_interview\\_new\\_season\\_begins\\_September\\_28](http://www.monstersandcritics.com/smallscreen/features/article_1432969.php/The_Simpsons_Al_Jean_interview_new_season_begins_September_28)>.
- "Mad Magazine." *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*. n.d. Web. November 2012. <<http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/Mad-Magazine>>.
- Married... with Children*. Prods. Pamela Eells, et al. Fox., 1987-1997. Television.
- McAllister, Matthew P. "The Simpsons. U.S. Cartoon Situation Comedy." n.d. *The Museum of Broadcast Communications*. September 2012. <<http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=simpsonsthe>>.
- Mirkin, David and David Silverman. "D'ohhhhhh!" 20-27 July 1995. *The Simpsons Archive - Interviews*. Interview by Al South. November 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/interviews/mirkin.silverman.html>>.
- Mittell, Jason. "Cartoon Realism: Genre Mixing and the Cultural Life of The Simpsons." *The Velvet Light Trap* 47 (2001): 15-28.
- Morgan, Spencer. "D'oh-tube! Internet Sensation Scores Big Simpsons Moment." 19 December 2007. *New York Observer*. November 2012. <<http://observer.com/2007/12/dohtube-internet-sensation-scores-big-simpsonsi-moment/>>.

- "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington." n.d. *FactualWorld*. September 2012.  
<[http://www.factualworld.com/article/Mr.\\_Lisa\\_Goes\\_to\\_Washington](http://www.factualworld.com/article/Mr._Lisa_Goes_to_Washington)>.
- Mullen, Megan. "The Simpsons and Hanna-Barbera's Animation Legacy." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 63-84.
- Nikunen, Kaarina. "The Intermedial Practises of Fandom." *Nordicom Review* 2007: 111-128.
- "nuclear family (anthropology)." 15 July 2008. *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. December 2012.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/421619/nuclear-family>>.
- Ortved, John. "Simpson Family Values." August 2007. *Vanity Fair*. October 2012.  
<<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2007/08/simpsons200708>>.
- Ott, Brian L. and Robert L. Mack. *Critical Media Studies. An Introduction*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- Ott, Brian and Cameron Walter. "Intertextuality: Interpretive Practice and Textual Strategy." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* December Vol. 17, No.4, 2000: 429-446.
- Ott, Brian L. "I'm Bart Simpsons, who the hell are you?. A Study in Postmodern Identity (Re)Construction." *The Journal of Popular Culture* Vol. 37, No. 1, 2003: 56-79.
- . *The Small Screen. How Television Equips Us to Live*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing , 2007.
- Owen, David. n.d. *The Simpsons Archive - Interviews*.
- Poe, Edgar A. "The Raven (1845)." *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe - Vol. VII*. Ed. James A. Harrison. New York: AMS Press Inc., n.d. 94-100.
- "Psycho (film)." n.d. *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*. Nov. 2012.  
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psycho\\_%28film%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psycho_%28film%29)>.
- Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: New American Library, 1957.
- . *The Fountainhead*. Indianapolis; New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943.
- Rauscher, Andreas. "Method Acting im Kwik-E-Mart. Die Medientheorien der Simpsons." *Subversion zur Prime-Time. Die Simpsons und die Mythen der Gesellschaft*. Ed. Michael Gruteser, Thomas Klein and Andreas Rauscher. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2002. 104-141.
- Remington, Bob. "It's The Simpsons, Man." 26 October 1990. *The Simpsons Archive - Articles*. Web. August 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/articles/itssimpsons.html>>.
- Rushkoff, Douglas. "Bart Simpson: Prince of Irreverence." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 292-302.
- Savage, William J. "So Television's Responsible!: Oppositionality and the Interpretive Logic of Satire and Censorship in The Simpsons and South Park." *Leaving Springfield. The*

*Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 197-224.

Schonfeld, Erick. "Apple's App Store: The New Walled Garden." 28 July 2008. *TechCrunch*. December 2012. <<http://techcrunch.com/2008/07/24/apples-app-store-the-new-walled-garden/>>.

Shiver Jr., Jube. "Cosby Show Asking \$350,000 and Up for Ads." 1 July 1986. *Los Angeles Times*. October 2012. <[http://articles.latimes.com/1986-07-01/business/fi-763\\_1\\_cosby-show](http://articles.latimes.com/1986-07-01/business/fi-763_1_cosby-show)>.

Sloane, Robert. "Who wants Candy? Disenchantment in The Simpsons." *Leaving Springfield. The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture*. Ed. John Alberti. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004. 137-171.

Sohn, John. "Simpson Ethics." 15 May 2000. *The Simpsons Archive - Miscellaneous*. December 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/js.paper.html>>.

Steiger, Gerd. "The Simpsons - Just Funny or More?" 1999. *The Simpsons Archive - Miscellaneous*. Web. September 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/gs.paper.html>>.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Treasure Island*. London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1883.

Sweatpants, Charlie. "2 – The Terrible World of 1980s Television." n.d. *Dead Homer Society*. August 2012. <<http://deadhomersociety.com/zombiesimpsons/zs2/>>.

Swift, Tim. "Taking a cultural odyssey with Homer." 27 July 2007. *The Baltimore Sun*. December 2012. <[http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2007-07-29/news/0707300204\\_1\\_simpsons-culture-homer](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2007-07-29/news/0707300204_1_simpsons-culture-homer)>.

The Beatles. "Yellow Submarine." 5 Aug. 2010. *YouTube*. YouTube. Online video clip. Nov. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wrs5DjHNUOE>>.

"The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription." n.d. *National Archives*. Nov. 2012. <[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html)>.

Trescher, Thomas. "Eye on Springfield. Das subversive Potential der Simpsons." Diploma Thesis. Universität Wien, 2005.

Tuncel, Devrim N. and Andreas Rauscher. "Die Mythen des Springfield-Alltags." *Subversion zur Prime-Time. Die Simpsons und die Mythen der Gesellschaft*. Ed. Michael Gruteser, Thomas Klein and Andreas Rauscher. Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2002. 154-166.

Turner, Chris. *Planet Simpsons - How a Cartoon Masterpiece Defined a Generation*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004.

Van Allen, Eliezer. "The Simpsons: An Imperfect Ideal Family." 12 May 2000. *The Simpsons Archive - Miscellaneous*. Web. November 2012. <<http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/ea.paper.html>>.

"variety show." *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003. 1 December 2012. <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/variety+show>>.

- Warren, Martyn. "A Streetcar Named Marge. Marge takes to the stage. But will it take to her?" 2005. *BBC*. November 2012.  
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/simpsons/episodeguide/season4/page3.shtml>>.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. London: Routledge, 1984.
- Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Ed. Ederyn Williams. 2nd. London: Routledge, 2004. PDF e-book.
- Withalm, Gloria. "The self-reflexive screen: Outlines of a comprehensive model." *Self-Reference in the Media*. Ed. Winfrid Nöth and Nina Bishara. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007. 125-142.
- Wolf, Werner. "Intermediality." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Ed. David Herman, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan. London: Routledge, 2005. 252-256.
- Worringham, Richard. "Fox Broadcasting Company." n.d. *The Museum of Broadcast Communications*. July 2012.  
<<http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=foxbroadcast>>.
- Zucker, Roland. "Die Simpsons als postmoderne Aufklärung. Ansätze für eine anarchistische (Medien)Pädagogik." Diploma Thesis. Universität Wien, 2005.

### ***The Simpsons Episode Guide***

- "22 Short Films about Springfield (3F18)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 14 Apr. 1996. Television.
- "Alone Again Natura-Diddly (BABF10)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 13 Feb. 2000. Television.
- "Bart's Friend Falls in Love (8F22)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 7 May 1992. Television.
- "Brawl in the family (DABF01)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 6 Jan 2002. Television.
- "Brush with Greatness (7F18)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 11 Apr. 1991. Television.
- "Deep Space Homer (1F13)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 24 Feb. 1994. Television.
- "Eternal Moonshine of the Simpson Mind (KABF02)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 16 Dec. 2007. Television.
- "Homer Badman (2F06)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 27 Nov. 1994. Television.
- "Homer to the Max (AABF09)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 7 Feb. 1999. Television.
- "Homerpalooza (3F21)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 19 May 1996. Television.
- "Homer's Barbershop Quartet (9F21)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 30 Sep. 1993. Television.
- "Hurricane Neddy (4F07)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 29 Dec. 1996. Television.
- "I'm spelling as fast as I can (EABF07)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 16 Feb. 2003. Television.
- "In Marge We Trust (4F18)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 27 Apr. 1997. Television.

- "Itchy & Scratchy & Marge (7F09)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 20 Dec. 1990. Television.
- "Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie (9F03)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 3 Nov. 1992. Television.
- "Last Exit to Springfield (9F15)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 11 March 1993. Television.
- "Lisa the Iconoclast (3F13)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 18 Feb 1996. Television.
- "Lisa the Vegetarian (3F03)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 15 Oct. 1995. Television.
- "Lisa's Pony (8F06)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 7 Nov. 1991. Television.
- "Marge on the Lam (1F03)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 4 Nov. 1993. Television.
- "Mom and Pop Art (AABF15)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 11 Apr. 1999. Television.
- "Mr. Lisa goes to Washington (8F01)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 26 Sep. 1991. Television.
- "My Sister, My Sitter (4F13)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 2 March 1997. Television.
- "MyPods and Boomsticks (KABF20)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 30 Nov 2008. Television.
- "Rosebud (1F01)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 21 Oct. 1993. Television.
- "She of Little Faith (DABF02)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 16 Dec. 2001. Television.
- "Stark Raving Dad (7F24)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 19 Sep. 1991. Television.
- "Streetcar Named Marge (8F18)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 1 Oct. 1992. Television.
- "The Front (9F16)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 15 Apr. 1993. Television.
- "Treehouse of Horror VI (3F04)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 30 Oct. 1995. Television.
- "Treehouse of Horror XIX (KABF16)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 2 Nov. 2008. Television.
- "Two Bad Neighbors (3F09)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 14 Jan 1996. Television.
- "Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish (7F01)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 1 Nov. 1990. Television.
- "When you dish upon a star (5F19)." *The Simpsons*. Fox. 8 Nov. 1998. Television.

## List of Films

- 1984*. Dir. Michael Radford. Prod. Simon Perry. 1984. Film.
- 32 Short Films about Glenn Gould*. Dir. Francois Girard. Prod. Niv Fichman. 1993. Film.
- A Streetcar Named Desire*. By Tennessee Williams. Dir. Elia Kazan. 1951. Film.
- Basic Instinct*. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. Prod. Mario Kassar. 1992. Film.
- Batman*. Dir. Tim Burton. Prods. Jon Peters, Peter Gruber and Chris Kenny. 1989. Film.
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Dir. Tim Burton. Prods. Brad Grey and D. Richard Zanuck. 2005. Film.
- Citizen Kane*. Dir. Orson Welles. Prod. Orson Welles. 1941. Film.
- Das Boot*. Dir. Wolfgang Petersen. Prod. Günter Rohrbach. 1981. Film.

*Dracula*. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola. Prod. Francis Ford Coppola. 1992. Film.

*Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind*. Dir. Michael Gondry. Prods. Anthony Bregman and Steve Golin. 2004. Film.

*Gone with the Wind*. Dir. Victor Fleming. Prod. David O. Selznick. 1939. Film.

*Hulk*. Dir. Ang Lee. Prods. Avi Arad, Larry J. Franco and Gale Ann Hurd. 2003. Film.

*JFK*. Dir. Oliver Stone. Prods. P.A. Kitman Ho, Arnon Milchan and Oliver Stone. 1991. Film.

*Psycho*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod. Alfred Hitchcock. 1960. Film.

*Pulp Fiction*. Dir. Quentin Tarantino. Prod. Lawrence Bender. 1994. Film.

*Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Prod. Frank Marshall. 1980. Film.

*Requiem for a Dream*. Dir. Darren Aronofsky. Prods. Eric Watson and Palmer West. 2000. Film.

*Scream*. Dir. Wes Craven. Prods. Wes Craven, Cary Woods and Cathy Konrad. 1996; 1997; 2000. Film.

*Star Wars*. Dir. George Lucas. Prod. Gary Kurtz. 1977. Film.

*The Birds*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Prod. Alfred Hitchcock. 1963. Film.

*The Exorcist*. Dir. William Friedkin. Prod. William Peter Blatty. 1973. Film.

*The Great Escape*. Dir. John Sturges. Prod. John Sturges. 1963. Film.

*Tron*. Dir. Steven Lisberger. Prod. Donald Kushner. 1982. Film.

## **List of Television Programs**

*ALF*. Prod. Paul Fusco. NBC. 1986-1990. Television.

*All in the Family*. Prods. Mort Lachman, et al. CBS. 1971-1979. Television.

*Family Guy*. Prods. Seth MacFarlane, et al. Fox. 1999. Television.

*King of the Hill*. Prods. Mike Judge, et al. Fox. 1997-2009. Television.

*Roseanne*. Prods. Roseanne Barr, Marcy Carsey and Tom Werner. ABC. 1988-1997. Television.

*Saturday Night Live*. Prods. Lorne Michaels, Jean Doumanian and Dick Ebersol. NBC. 1975. Television.

*South Park*. Prods. Trey Parker, Matt Stone and Anne Garefino. Comedy Central. 1997. Television.

*The Cosby Show*. Prods. Bill Cosby, Marcy Carsey and Gordon Gartrelle. NBC. 1984-1992. Television.

*The Flintstones*. Prods. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. ABC. 1960-1966. Television.

*The Jetsons*. Prods. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. ABC. 1962-1987. Television.

*The Waltons*. Prods. Robert L. Jacks, Andy White and Rod Peterson. CBS. 1972-1981. Television.

*Tom & Jerry*. Prods. William Hanna, Joseph Barbera and Rudolf Ising. CBS. 1940-1980. Television.

*Tracey Ullman Show*. Prods. Jerry Belson, James L. Brooks and Ken Estin. Fox. 1987-1990. Television.



Der animierte Cartoon *The Simpsons* wird schon seit 23 Jahren auf unsere Bildschirme übertragen und hat sich zu einem Forschungsgegenstand vieler Disziplinen etabliert. Diese Arbeit hat sich das Ziel gesetzt die von den Schaffern bewusste Verwendung von Intertextualität zu untersuchen, sowie darzustellen wie Intertextualität in der Lage ist, ein breitangelegtes Publikum zu unterhalten. Im ersten Teil wird die Entstehungsgeschichte des animierten Cartoons *The Simpsons*, sowie die zu dieser Zeit vorherrschenden Umstände in der Medienlandschaft dargestellt. Im zweiten Teil wird der animierte Cartoon *The Simpsons* im Zusammenhang der Postmoderne beleuchtet um zu zeigen, wie diese von der Serie wiedergespiegelt wird. Im letzten Teil wird zunächst auf die Definitionsproblematik von Intertextualität eingegangen, um ein Verständnis sowie eine für die folgende Analyse benötigte Grundlage zu schaffen. Weiters werden jene Formen von Intertextualität dargestellt, welche die Schaffer des Cartoons bewusst in den Erzählstrang ihrer Episoden einbauen. Abschließend werden Pastiche, Homage und Parodie als intertextuale Ausprägungen dargestellt, um im Anschluß daran analysiert zu werden, inwiefern diese einen breitgefächerten Unterhaltungsbeitrag leisten, der sowohl Erwachsenen als auch Kindern Unterhaltung bietet.



## **Lebenslauf**

Claudia Czernecki

### **Persönliche Angaben**

Staatsangehörigkeit: Österreich

Geburtsdatum: 13 .3. 1981

Geburtsort: Wien

### **Ausbildung**

1987 – 1991 VS Corneliusgasse, Wien

1991- 1999 BG Amerlingstraße, Wien

Matura am 16. Juni 1999

Oktober 1999: Beginn des Studiums Handelswissenschaften an der WU, Wien

Im Oktober 2002: Wechsel von Handelswissenschaften auf Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Juni 2009: Ausbildung zur DAF/DAZ Trainering

Juli 2009: Ausbildung zur Trainerin in der Erwachsenenbildung

Dezember 2012: Abgabe der Diplomarbeit

### **Sprachkenntnisse:**

Polnisch, Russisch und Englisch