Functions of Intertextuality and Intermediality in *The Simpsons*

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1. Introduction

1.1 *The Simpsons*: Postmodern Entertainment across Generations

The Simpsons is one of the most successful programs in the history of television, if not a "media revolution" (Rushkoff, "Prince" 292). It initiated the second prime time animation boom at the beginning of the 1990s,[1] paving the way for other animated programs with considerable audience responses, such as *South Park*, *King of the Hill*, *Futurama*, and *Family Guy*. After more than 20 seasons, it has outlived several similar formats and is ranked as the longest-running sitcom of all times. Although the show is rooted in a long tradition of comparable television formats, the unique accumulation of cultural texts,[2] social discourses, and political issues it deals with distinguishes it from precursors such as cartoon shows like *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* on the one hand, and sitcoms like *The Honeymooners*, *Leave it to Beaver*, or *The Cosby Show* on the other. Its social criticism, the wide range of characters, its realism, and the extensive referential network to other texts turn the show – which many people expected to be just another children's program[3] – into a sophisticated prime time enactment of American culture and society.

Attempting to position the show in a cultural category that goes beyond the technical term *animation*[4] and the genre label *sitcom*, it will be difficult to avoid the word *postmodern*. As much as cartoons in general are sometimes regarded as a typical form of postmodern art,[5] *The Simpsons* has repeatedly been labeled "postmodern,"[6] and a brief analysis of the main characteristics of postmodernism and related concepts, such as poststructuralism and

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[1] See Brook 176, Czogalla 22, Hilton-Morrow/McMahan 77-82, McNeil 689, and Ortved 5.

[2] Ott/Walter 437.

[3] Douglas Rushkoff believes that the show pretends to be "a kids' cartoon" ("Prince" 292) in order to covertly transmit its oppositional messages (see also Arnold "Rest" 254). Thomas Klein asserts that animation in general, due to its "childlike" innocence, often serves as a vehicle for subversive or subtle political contents (26). In Germany, the show was also regarded as a children's format and broadcasted in the afternoon in the beginning before it was moved to prime time (see Tuncel/Rauscher 152). However, for some aspects of the show analyzed later, it is important to note that it also *is* a children's format (see Billen 49, and Savage 198), which is well-received among children (see Neumann [A. W.] 25, and Ortved 6).

[4] In case of *The Simpsons* it seems appropriate to treat *animation* and *cartoon* as synonyms, since the show is both: from a technical point of view, cartoons are one method of animated film-making, which could also be realized with puppets, modeling clay, paper cut-outs, or computer programs (see, for example, Lindvall/Melton 203, Siebert *Figuren* 16, and Wells 10). Moreover, the word *cartoon* has recently (and also partly due to *The Simpsons*) lost much of its connotations of "a children's (or childish) audience, whimsical content, and questionable social value" (Mittell 18; see also Wells 3). As a consequence, both labels will be used in this analysis without further implications.

[5] For example, Lindvall/Melton present a detailed analysis of postmodern characteristics in animation (without mentioning *The Simpsons*).

[6] See, among others, Alberti XIV, Arnold "Rest" 263/264, Beard 273, Broderick 244/259, Brook 177, Butler/Sepp 361, Campbell/Freed 76, Cantor "Greatest" 35, Cantor "Politics" 165/172/173/175, Dentith 162, Diederichsen 16/19, Ernst/Werkmeister 82/87/101, Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 10/14/15, Heit 9/19, Henry "Triumph" 86, Herron 1, Kachel 167/168, Matheson 109, Mittell 15, Neumann [A. W.] 25, Ott 56, Rauscher 102-104/110/115/122, Savage 202, Tuncel/Rauscher 155, Turner 63/417, Wallace 248, and Weilunn Chow 113.

deconstruction, supports this approach.[7] Frederic Jameson asserts that "one fundamental feature of all the postmodernisms [...is] the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture" ("Logic" 63);[8] correspondingly, in *The Simpsons*, references to magazines, television, and popular music appear next to quotations from Shakespeare's plays and reinterpretations of Edward Hopper paintings.[9] Simultaneously, this blending of allegedly different levels of artistic quality (co-)initiates a second blending of different cultural interests as far as the show's audience is concerned – a topic I will soon return to.

Moreover, Jameson believes that "the very concept of 'truth' itself is part of the meta-physical baggage which poststructuralism seeks to abandon" ("Logic" 70).[10] Many *Simpsons* episodes support this notion of the "instability of postmodern satire" (Beard 287), as they of-fer, for example, endings that play with the audience's expectations towards "usual" narrative patterns and moral standards and thus undermine the viewer's search for a fixed truth.[11] By avoiding standardized, predictable narrative turns and, as a result, by involving the audience in an open process of interpretation and cultural translation, the show invites a postmodern play with established norms, as well as the appropriation of *Simpsons* signs in different so-cio-cultural contexts – a development that can most prominently be observed in the (unau-thorized) Black Bart, Rasta Bart etc. merchandise[12] of the early 1990s.[13]

Also, the postmodern "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard XXIV) in general, such as religion, nation, capitalism, or justice, as well as its self-referential and meta-reflexive attitude towards television, entertainment, and consumerism in particular, make the show appear as a prime example of a postmodern text that acknowledges and critically monitors its own artistic status and sociocultural context.[14] However, a sequence of possible attributes to the postmodern condition strung together by Ihab Hassan which includes "antiformal, an-archic, or decreative" (150), "playful, paratactical, and deconstructionist" (151), "cooler, less cliquish, and far less aversive [than the modernist avant-garde] to the pop, electronic society of which it is a part" (151) might be the most telling example of why journalists and research-

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[7] Andreas Rauscher even regards *The Simpsons* as a manifestation of postmodernism superior to theoretical explanatory approaches, because the show foregrounds several characteristics commonly attributed to post-modernism (102).

[8] See also Constable 48, Dentith 158, Heller 652, Huber/Keitel/Süß 4, and Pfister "Postmodern" 208/218.

[9] For a more detailed introduction to the differences between high and low culture, as well as their impact on *The Simpsons*, I recommend David L.G. Arnold's essay "'Use a Pen, Sideshow Bob': *The Simpsons* and the Threat of High Culture."

[10] See also Butler 5, and Dentith 154.

[11] For a detailed analysis of how *The Simpsons* counteracts easy and unequivocal interpretation, and of related audience reactions, see Vincent Brook's essay "Myth or Consequences: Ideological Fault Lines in *The Simp-sons*." See also Arnold "Rest" 253/267, Diederichsen 16/20, Hißnauer 142, and Rauscher 116.

[12] See Peter Parisi's essay "'Black Bart' Simpson: Appropriation and Revitalization in Commodity Culture" for a detailed analysis of the social aspects surrounding a prominent cultural re-working of *Simpsons* signifiers.

[13] See Ernst/Werkmeister 96, and Ortved 4.

[14] See Butler 6, Colapietro 31, Dentith 154, and Hutcheon *Poetics* 6/22.

ers alike tend to think of postmodernism when they analyze *The Simpsons*: the show is anti-formal when it contradicts established TV formulae; its humor is often anarchic; it is playful when it expands its medial borders and borrows material from painting, music, sculpture;[15] it deconstructs narrative conventions and moral commonplaces; and it has undoubtedly proven to be a 'cool' part of the popular media universe.

In addition to the characteristics enumerated above, intertextuality and intermediality – the main area of interest in this study – are often regarded as particularities of postmodernism,[16] or even, as Manfred Pfister puts it, as "the very trademark of postmodernism" ("Postmodern" 209). *Intertextuality* very generally describes the relation of texts to other texts in almost every imaginable form, from the conscious quotation to the subconscious re-activating of elements originating from already existing texts. The term *intermediality*, on the other hand, is commonly used to more precisely elaborate upon relations between texts of different media. Whereas the word has sometimes been employed to label works that in themselves combine several media – like spoken text, singing, music, costumes, and gestures in an opera – it most frequently serves as a sub-category of intertextuality[17] that considers the particularities of, for example, the allusion[18] to a written poem in an audiovisual movie. While research about *The Simpsons* has to date exclusively relied on the concept of *intertextuality*, the analysis of a cartoon series with its almost unlimited potential for relations to other medial forms seems to be a most promising field for the application of the specialized insights *intermediality* has to offer.[19] More will have to be said about the difference between intertextuality and intermediality in the second part of this study.

Pfister more precisely defines "postmodern intertextuality as self-consciously foregrounded intertextuality, as intertextuality theoretically conceptualized within the works themselves" ("Postmodern" 217), thus rooting the self- and meta-reflexive intertextuality of a show like *The Simpsons* even more deeply in the aesthetic realm of postmodernism. Yet, he acknowledges that "the various intertextual practices of alluding and quoting, of paraphrasing and translating, of continuation and adaptation, of parody and travesty flourished in periods long before postmodernism" (210); or, as Gray correctly points out in the context of his studies about *The Simpsons*, "[intertextuality's] presence throughout world literature makes it a

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[15] Lindvall/Melton argue that cartoons in general are a playful, postmodern art (204).

[16] See, for example, Butler 31-32, Hutcheon "Politics" 225, Hutcheon "Metafiction" 3, or Weise 47.

[17] Neumann/Nünning 15. Chapter 2.3 will further explore the position of intermediality in relation to intertextuality.

[18] Although a clear-cut terminology that defines *quotations* and *allusions* as two main sub-categories of *reference* (Coombs 476, Perri 290) seems desirable, the extensive literature in this field does not provide the necessary constancy. In general, it appears to be a common agreement to treat *allusion* and *reference* as synonyms – for example, Udo Hebel speaks of "quotational allusions" (142). However, in plain contrast, Karlheinz Stierle regards allusion as a special form of quotation (19; see also Neumann [P. H.] 300). As a consequence, there will be no distinction without exception between *allusion* and *reference* in this work, while *quotation*, however, will be used only in cases of (almost) word-by-word references. See also Ben-Porat 105-107, and Orosz 10.

[19] Since most modern discourses also encompass other media than written texts, Wolfgang Hallet promotes a concept of intertextuality that basically always needs to be conceptualized as intermediality (59).

considerably older process" (5). Literature and other forms of art always have been and will be inspired not only by the artist's own experience, but also by experiences expressed in other pieces of art.[20] Texts refer to other texts, make use of the meanings and implications that already exist, or call them into question. The frequently described quantitative increase of references in more recent works of art does not suffice as the only indicator whether a text is "postmodern" or not, since it would rid the term of its temporal dimension and include classical modern works, such as Eliot's "The Waste Land."[21]

Therefore, especially as far as the focus of this book is concerned, the question remains if the inclusion of the concept of postmodernism helps to shed new light on the elements, processes, and significance of a cultural artifact like *The Simpsons*. Since the term "suffers from a certain *semantic* instability" (Hassan 149; his italics),[22] and in view of attempted definitions of postmodernism that read, for example, "The term itself hovers uncertainly in most current writings between [...] extremely complex and difficult philosophical senses, and [...] an extremely simplistic mediation as a nihilistic, cynical tendency in contemporary culture" (Docherty 1), it appears to be appropriate for the analysis of a medial structure as complex as *The Simpsons* not to consult theories just because they are subsumed under the label "postmodernism studies."

Moreover, I agree with Gray that the show regularly "moves beyond mere postmodern play" (5):[23] in contrast to Jameson's assessment of postmodern intertextual pastiche,[24] wherein "depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth)" ("Logic" 70), its intertextuality has more to offer than just a collage of references to other texts that does not generate new meanings for the show; it has more to offer than "essential triviality" (Jameson, "Logic" 85).[25] It is more in line with the approach of Linda Hutcheon, who argues "that postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, denaturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations" ("Politics" 225). Definitions of the postmodern are uncountable; the postmodernism of *The Simpsons* shows most clearly in the program's self-referentiality, its awareness of its own medial functioning, and its fundamental strategy of intertextual network-

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[20] See, for example, Heller 653, Hess-Lüttich 130, Koppenfels 138, Lachmann "Intertextualität" 794, Neumann [P. H.] 304, Orosz 9, Orr 10, Ott/Walter 442, Perri 306, Plett "Intertextualities" 26, Plett "Poetik" 79, Schulte-Middelich 198, Still/Worton 2, Tallis 31, and Weise 41.

[21] See Pfister "Postmodern" 214 and Rudat's essay on the classical/Christian tradition from Chaucer to Eliot. See also Jameson "Consumer" for an assessment of the break between postmodernism and "high modernism" (55).

[22] See also Hutcheon "Metafiction" 3, and Hutcheon *Poetics* 3.

[23] See also Rauscher 103.

[24] See Constable 48, and Ott/Walter 435.

[25] Robert Sloane also supports this distinction, contrasting pastiche with "genuine parody" (158) in *The Simpsons*. In the same context, Mick Broderick speaks of "neutered, Jamesonian pastiche" (251). Other analysts, however, rely on the term *pastiche* to describe media structures in *The Simpsons*, but they do generally not limit the show's intertextuality to its decorative features in Jameson's sense (see, for example, Arnold "Rest" 264, Beard 273, and Rushkoff "Prince" 295). See also Dentith 155, and Hutcheon *Poetics* 26-27.

ing. As the preceding examples of discourses, which are vague at best and torn between extreme positions at worst, show, the concept of postmodernism alone does not promise much clarification as far as a medial analysis of *The Simpsons* is concerned.[26] As a consequence, I will not further consider aspects of postmodernism due to their role *in* postmodernism, but focus on the way they contribute to the workings of *The Simpsons* regardless of cultural historical classification.

One of the main reasons for *The Simpsons'* enormous mainstream success – in spite of the oppositional viewpoints it communicates with regard to various issues – is its ability to provide entertainment for a very diverse audience, addressing the intellectual capabilities of social groups as different as, for example, school children, adolescents, culturally interested adults, and academics.[27] The most obvious reason for that again can be found in the show's extensive use of intertextual references to other cultural works, current political and social trends or discourses, and real life persons. The writers of the show generally manage to blend references to other texts neatly into the respective episode's narrative flow, thus allowing for entertainment on different levels: a viewer with little educational background (like a child) may enjoy the surface plotline with the reference slipping by unnoticed, while another viewer will possibly detect the reference and experience additional entertainment in detecting it.

A particular reference from the episode "Bart vs. Thanksgiving" (EP 2-7)[28] may serve as an example to prove the point: in the episode, Bart destroys a centerpiece Lisa built for Thanksgiving dinner. When Bart refuses to apologize, Lisa hides in her room and starts writing a poem entitled "Howl of the Unappreciated" that reads, "I have seen the best meals of my generation destroyed by the madness of my brother. My soul, carved in slices by spiky-haired demons."[29] The lines are a reference to the poem "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg,[30] one of the leading poets of the counter-cultural *Beat Generation* in the U.S.A. of the 1950s and 60s. In order to help the viewers place the reference in context, the scene includes a volume of Ginsberg's poetry on Lisa's shelf next to a copy of Jack Kerouac's novel *On the Road*, an-

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[26] See also Mittell 15.

[27] See, among others, Beard 276, Broderick 244, Brook 180, Butler/Sepp 374-375, Dettmar 91, Diederichsen 21, Ernst/Werkmeister 82, Gray 85, Gruteser 73, Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 13, Koenigsberger 47, Korte n. p., McMahon 229, Mittell 21, Mullen 81, Ott 61/70, Pilling XIV, Rauscher 103, Sloane 138, Turner 9, and Wallace 236. In 1997, Jayne Pilling observes a general tendency in animation to "widen the [animated] films' market appeal beyond the traditional core target of the family with young children" (X). This development was most obviously supported if not triggered by the mainstream success of *The Simpsons*.

[28] You will find references to single episodes of *The Simpsons* in this form: (EP number of season-number of episode). The division into seasons and the order of episodes is according to the production plan and the official *Simpsons Guide* books (see Richmond/Coffman/Groening 1997, Gimple/Groening 1999, McCann/Groening 2002, and McCann/Groening 2005); therefore, it might differ from the sequence of the actual first broadcasting of an episode. The guide to the episodes used in this paper (p. 275), which provides more detailed information about the single episodes, is structured according to the same system.

[29] For the original wording, see Ginsberg l. 1.

[30] See also Irwin/Lombardo 86.

other famous work of the Beat Generation, which had great influence on Ginsberg. Now it depends on the viewers on which narrative level they will be entertained. On a first level, Lisa's words tell those viewers who do not recognize the reference how different she is from her brother, whose usual response to social problems would be abusive language or physical aggression. On a second level, viewers who realize that she is at least working some other poem into her thoughts will smile at the intended allusion and appreciate Lisa's education even without knowing the source. In contrast, viewers who are familiar with "Howl" will grasp the allusion in full and appreciate their own education, which allowed them to detect the reference. Lastly, the few members of the audience who do not only know "Howl," but also Ginsberg's history and involvement with the Beat Generation, might see the impact the reference has on Lisa's character development and the alienation she experiences growing up in a small town family and community. Of course, this implication only works with viewers who are, firstly, familiar with "Howl," and who are also able to connect the poem to the ideals and cultural movements it stands for. Thus, entertainment in *The Simpsons* even goes beyond Paul A. Cantor's claim that "[i]t can be enjoyed on two levels – as both broad farce and intellectual satire" ("Politics" 177): given the implications intertextual references can have for the individual viewer's approach towards the show, it can be enjoyed on an undeterminable number of levels.

Although the preceding example nicely illustrates how rich in detail and possible interpretation the show is, there is another reason why *The Simpsons* is such a promising research object when it comes to studies of intertextuality/intermediality. Since it has been broadcasted for more than twenty years, it not only offers an almost unlimited corpus of intertextual references as potential examples, but it has also proven to be lastingly successful. As already indicated in the preceding paragraphs, much of this success is likely to be due to its intertextuality; yet, interestingly enough, researchers and fans of the show agree that *The Simpsons* is becoming even more intertextual the longer it is on the air. Whereas the first season still featured some episodes that were free of obvious references, in later seasons the web of references seems to be the driving force of many episodes. Not surprisingly, it must be getting more difficult to come up with twenty-odd new interesting plot lines each year after hundreds of episodes, which can be seen, for example, in the exhaustion and consequential repetition of plots played out along the lines of particular constellations and behavior patterns of the main protagonists. However, the increase in intertextuality alone seems to be enough to sustain a large number of regular viewers. As a consequence, we have to ask how it is possible that intertextuality becomes the main driving force of a cultural phenomenon as omnipresent and influential as *The Simpsons* – what are its functions in the show?

1.2   Research Focus

The Simpsons challenges its audience with an unlimited number of references to an unlimited number of texts situated outside the realm of the series, displayed on an unlimited number of medial surfaces: on their TV set, the Simpson family watch shows and movies that resemble shows and movies in our world, book covers resemble book covers, T-shirts re-enact T-shirt slogans we are familiar with, plot lines and characters seem oddly familiar, advertisements look like advertisements we have already seen, shop names sound like movie titles, flashbacks look like TV memories, and we have heard that musical tune before. In order to explain the motivation for including these uncountable masses of references to other cultural works in *The Simpsons*, creator Matt Groening once said that

> [a] lot of talented writers work on the show, half of them Harvard geeks. And you know, when you study the semiotics of *Through the Looking Glass* or watch every episode of *Star Trek*, you've got to make it pay off, so you throw a lot of study references into whatever you do later in life (qtd. in Irwin/Lombardo 81).

Being faced with hundreds and hundreds of references of different impact as far as their obviousness and influence on the narrative flow are concerned, it is hard to believe that this could be the only reason that motivated the producers to create a show that combines intertextuality with a web of different levels of reality and fictionality to provide its audience with a cultural collage of unmatched variety. James H. Coombs asks, "'Why do people allude?' Since anything that can be allusively referred to can also be directly referred to, speakers must be able to accomplish things by alluding that they cannot accomplish by directly referring" (485-486). *The Simpsons* would be an entirely different and probably less successful show without its intertextual references, since they account for much of its entertainment value – as the example in the preceding chapter has shown – and it is also an essential part of the show's storytelling technique – as later analyses will illustrate. It is the main purpose of this paper to reveal other reasons for the innumerable intertextual allusions in *The Simpsons* than the creators' educational background, and explain their functions for single scenes and single episodes, as well as for the entire show.

So what makes the creators use intertextuality as one of the most important ingredients of the show? It is comparatively easy to think of various reasons, the most obvious being: references parody and thus ridicule other texts, and that is funny. In accordance with the postmodern idea of parody, *The Simpsons* could possibly be filled with superficial parody whose sole purpose is to generate humor from playing with the audience's expectations towards other medial texts and genres. Carl Matheson even believes that *The Simpsons* "has nowhere else to go when it stops being funny" (122) and that the main function of its extensive quotationalism is to keep up a constant succession of humorous moments in order to avoid becoming "banal, flat, and not funny" (123) when the show deals with serious issues.

However, it is one the show's greatest achievements that it usually manages to be serious without losing its entertainment value, and not all references ridicule the text they are aimed at; some rather serve the second function of homage.[31] If, for example, a scene of Ned Flanders climbing a tower includes a shot that evokes images from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (EP 5-16), the reference does not necessarily incite laughter, but pays tribute to the visual achievements of a "classic" filmmaker. Although such allusions certainly carry a certain entertainment value, their function is *not* "to be funny"; it will be decisive to find out what, in addition to homage, their function is.[32]

Moreover, intertextual references could be a way of compensating for a lack of innovative imagination on the part of the writers.[33] A quotation by the writers and co-producers Al Jean and Mike Reiss seems to support this explanation: "The show eats up so much material that we're constantly just stoking it like a furnace when we parody a lot of movies and TV" (qtd. in Rushkoff, "Prince" 299). Interestingly enough, fans of the series have uttered the opinion that the increasing number of references in later seasons goes hand in hand with a decrease of well-structured storytelling and creative plot ideas. If that was true, the show would actually turn more postmodern, successively filling the void of genuine creative energy with a pastiche of already existing images. However, while for some references this explanation might actually be valid, I hope that my analyses will prove that intertextuality in *The Simpsons* serves more important purposes than the accumulation of narrative padding.

The assumption of a lack of original inspiration evokes John Barth's description of a "Literature of Exhaustion," which makes it lose some of its negative tone. In his famous essay, he briefly analyzes the intertextual short story "Pierre Ménard, Author of the *Quixote*" by Jorge Luis Borges.[34] The story deals with a second-rank writer who, in an attempt to write the *Don Quixote* of his time, starts re-writing parts of the book word by word, finding new meaning that fits his new contextual situation in every phrase. What Barth wants to discuss by examining this story is the question whether it becomes unnecessary to create new art if it is enough to attribute a text to a new context to create meaning. Of course, his intention is not to keep writers from writing,[35] but to show that the reading and reproducing of texts does not

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[31] Or they hover between parody and homage (see Rauscher 110).

[32] Douglas Rushkoff's explanation that "[e]very episode has at least one film reenactment, usually from Hitchcock or Kubrick, to satirize an aspect of the modern cultural experience" ("Prince" 295) seems a bit too general as far as the function of such references is concerned, and a bit too limited as far as the selection of source texts is concerned. See also Rushkoff *Virus* 110.

[33] For instance, Inge Häußler describes intertextual features as a main productive means of trivial literature series, where most individual texts rely on an already established set of features (cover, title, setting, characters, plot etc.) that barely change from text to text.

[34] Barth 6-8.

[35] In the essay "The Literature of Replenishment," which he wrote 13 years after "The Literature of Exhaustion," Barth explicitly says that many readers mistook his statements as a funeral oration for original literature, while he was actually trying to argue in favor of intertextual writing as a means of discovering meaning in already existing works (see Barth 37-38).

only enhance the meaning of the source text, but also leads to the creation of new original art:

> Borges *doesn't* attribute the *Quixote* to himself, much less recompose it like Pierre Ménard; instead, he writes a remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessity, of writing original works of literature (Barth 8; his italics).

If we then turn to an intertextual product that, like *The Simpsons*, does not only repeat a foreign text to a new audience, but embeds this text in a new artistic context, an additional instance of generating meaning might evolve. The creators and producers of the show read a source text in a particular context, find certain meaning in it – which might, of course, be different from the meaning its primary audience detected – and refer to it in their own production to make use of the implications carried by its signs.

Furthermore, intertextual references could be intended to raise the intellectual standard of the series.[36] Allusions to works that are considered high culture could not only provide the above-mentioned entertainment for academics, but generally lend the series the more elaborate air of a cultural encyclopedia, a selective but as all-inclusive as possible cultural memory collecting material from the history of any imaginable art form (literature, film, painting, sculpture, architecture etc.) in a medial form that is suitable for every layer of society, independent from age, income, and education.

Finally, given the large number of commonplace interpretations this corpus of cultural heritage has in store for the audience, the show might employ intertextual references in order to add validity to its content[37] by using already established opinions in an "attempt to appropriate a missing past" (Jameson, "Logic" 75). For instance, if the show evokes images from Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* to sensitize the audience for a scene that involves the brainwash-like re-education of the Simpsons' dog (EP 3-19), it avoids the problem of introducing a rather complex issue as it relies on (parts of) the audience's cultural experience in that matter. Following Wolfgang Hallet, this act of "wide reading" (66) – the reading of a text in the larger context of its surrounding culture – then helps the reader[38] to better understand the individual text.

In addition to those more or less obvious possible functions of intertextuality in *The Simpsons* – and there are more, as this study will show – there are various more abstract approaches to the topic of referential TV programs. For example, Carl Matheson wonders if intertextuality in *The Simpsons* might be a reaction to "a pervasive crisis of authority, be it

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[36] Stefan Morawski calls this "the erudite function" (693) of quotation.

[37] See Morawski 692, and Neumann [P. H.] 298.

[38] Whenever the words "read" or "reader" are used in this study, they will not necessarily refer to the actual reading of written or printed words, but to every form of reading, listening to, watching cultural products in general. Moreover, for the sake of readability, I will use institutions like *reader*, *viewer*, *author*, *writer* etc. and their respective singular pronouns in their masculine form only, by which I do not mean to exclude their feminine equivalents from this analysis, however.

artistic, scientific or philosophical, religious or moral" (117). In his opinion, artists or scientists return to established doctrines once they feel that progress in their discipline has reached a dead end. Thus, Matheson takes the assumed lack of innovation mentioned above a step further as he regards references to texts from the past as a signal that "one has given up on the idea that the past is merely the inferior pathway to a better today and a still better tomorrow" (117). A little less apocalyptically, Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch think that television producers are concerned with "seeking and creating new meaning in the combination of cultural elements with embedded significance" (505). This idea goes beyond the use of established meanings described earlier since it requires creative potential in the artistic reworking of other texts.[39] Jason Mittell assumes that the frequent use of parody makes *The Simpsons* hover somewhere between being "emblematically postmodern or an anachronistically modernist relic" (16), which ignores the question of why there is so much parody (or intertextuality) in the show in the first place. Although some of the preceding assumptions will finally be supported by my examinations, it is the aim of this study to leave these rather universal opinions behind in order to focus on a close analysis of examples taken from the text. Case studies of selected episodes and scenes will establish a categorizing approach to possible functions of intertextuality and intermediality in *The Simpsons*.

While the remaining two chapters of the introductory part will comprise a short reflection on the choice of research material with regard to the episodes and source texts in question, and an overview of the research already conducted on *The Simpsons* in the field of cultural studies, part two of this thesis will give an introduction to the relevant theories that have been developed to explain the phenomena of intertextuality and intermediality. It will consider particularities of different types of references (visual, auditory, textual, narrative) and also address aspects of self- and meta-reflexivity, since *The Simpsons* is a show that not only alludes to other works, but also regularly reflects upon its own medial status and history. This part will also raise the question in how far intermedial references in a TV show are different from references in other medial forms, especially written texts. Furthermore, it will consider the special medial characteristics of a cartoon show and familiarize the reader with aspects related to the role the audience plays in the generation of meaning. The main analysis in part three will be subdivided according to three categories of possible functions of intertextuality: intratextual functions (how do intertextual references contribute to the narrative of *The Simpsons*?), extratextual functions (how do intertextual references help to address issues that lie outside the realm of a TV cartoon?), and self- and meta-reflexive functions (how are intertextual references used to reflect upon the status of *The Simpsons* as a TV show and as an animated sitcom?). The final conclusion will summarize the results achieved in the previous

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[39] See Lachmann "Intertextualität" 795, and Neumann/Nünning 17.

case studies to give a general overview of the functions and reflexive abilities of intertextuality and intermediality in *The Simpsons.*

1.3   Choice of Material

First of all, is *The Simpsons* adequate research material for an analysis of the possible func-
tions of intertextuality just because of the sheer number of references it offers? Its animated
form alone is another convincing reason, since it allows the creators to refer to every other
medium in almost every imaginable way, from musical references to movies to visual refer-
ences to written texts and contemporary events and news footage about them. But more re-
cent animated programs such as *The Critic*, *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, or Matt Groening's
own *Futurama* have the same potential and also swarm with intertextual references[40] – and
certainly less has been written about them. However, these later shows all profit from the
media awareness *The Simpsons* created in a mass audience and largely employ stylistic
features already successfully tested in their predecessor. While more current shows are ob-
viously able to rely on already established formulae of intertextuality, the sequence of *Simp-
sons* seasons reveals a certain development of intertextual styles: with the number of refer-
ences per episode increasing in the course of the show – or at least in the course of the first
ten seasons[41] – there also occurs a greater variety of types of references, ranging from mere-
ly decorative hints to central narrative features to elaborate meta-reflexive considerations as
the show mirrors its own turning into a cultural icon. Therefore, the show provides rich mate-
rials for a thorough examination of the different possible functions of intertextuality.

Moreover, despite their similarity to *The Simpsons* with regard to certain features
such as number and complexity of characters, oppositional political commentary, and paro-
dy, none of the later series has reached an audience as large, diverse, and global as the
dysfunctional family from Springfield. This is especially important for the approach to ques-
tions concerning the role of the audience in the generation of intertextual meaning and inter-
textuality's potential to raise (meta-)issues of mass media production and consumption be-
havior. Its unmatched appeal to viewers of different demographical and educational back-

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[40]   Ott/Walter 437.

[41]   While generally the whole series is my object of interest, most of the episodes discussed will be taken from the
first ten seasons. The reason is a change in the use of intertextuality that can be observed mainly in the sea-
sons ten to twelve: references are less often included to create effects in a story that also works without them,
but more often serve the purpose of just referring for the sake of reference, of motivating and driving whole ep-
isodes dependent on intertextuality. Several scholars share my point of view and report the same impressions.
David Carr expresses a similar concern in a newspaper article preceding the broadcasting of the 17th season
(2). Matthew Henry criticizes that *The Simpsons*' "satirical edge has waned somewhat in recent years"
("Amanda" 225). Andreas Rauscher observes a reduced range of the intertextual reference system even as
early as in the 11th season: "The reference system, which in earlier episodes commented on the social condi-
tions of the media environment, increasingly refers to the series' own universe" (137; my translation; original:
"Das Referenzsystem, das in früheren Folgen auf die gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen des Medienalltags ver-
wies, bezieht sich zunehmend auf das eigene Serienuniversum"). Writing at the beginning of the same sea-
son, Jon Bonné interestingly describes the development of what he calls „MetaHomer" – a Homer Simpson
who has lost his complex character and changed into an empty shell variably filled with intertextual personae
or metareferential projections of the show's own reference system (see also Bloom/Pizarro 66).

ground and its pioneering experiments with intertextual references let the show still rank as the most promising object of analysis.

As far as the range of possible source texts for intertextual references in *The Simpsons* is concerned, it is worth mentioning that all possible types of media will potentially be included in my analyses, but references to literature, film, and television certainly prevail. Although the classification of source texts will not be a major criterion for categorizing in the course of my study, it is nevertheless important to consider the effect the referencing to a particular medium or genre can have on the function of the respective reference.

For instance, intertextuality in *The Simpsons* involves two major types of literary sources: texts that can be connected to the canon of classical world literature and texts or genres that belong to popular literature. Both types have a particular effect on the way many viewers will understand a related reference: whereas popular works can be expected to be familiar to a large group of viewers by title and content as they have recently been read and publicly discussed, classical works will also be known by title and a rough idea of their content or of single outstanding elements, complete with an allegedly fixed universal interpretation informed by decades of academic/scholastic discussion and intertextual adaptation.

In this context, the expression *classical* does not necessarily mean ancient; it is used to describe "a writer or work of the first rank, and of generally acknowledged excellence" (Cuddon 138). The term *canon* was first used to describe a selective collection of books when Christian authorities had to decide which scriptural writings were to be included in the bible and which texts would be omitted. Since then it has preserved the meaning of "a principle of selection by which some authors or texts were deemed worthier of preservation than others" (Guillory 233). Of course, the process of canonization will never be truly objective; it will be influenced by personal opinions, political or religious beliefs, social restrictions etc.[42] Guillory points out that "for a work to be canonical must mean that over successive generations […] readers continue to affirm a judgment of greatness" (236).

This definition brings us very close to the main type of literature *The Simpsons* generally refers to: books that have been popular with readers of different age for several generations, and which have continuously been taught in schools, like the works of Edgar Allan Poe or Robert Louis Stevenson, to name only two of the authors mentioned in *The Simpsons*. To guarantee that a text will be read or known by successive generations, it has to be reproduced again and again. This does not happen automatically, especially since many people are likely to agree with Matthew Henry, who believes that "the canonized art of high culture […] has less meaning for us now: it is an art of isolation, for it maintains a distance

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[42] I explicitly do not intend to return to the canon wars of the late 1980s here. From Guillory's definition and my explanations it should become clear that when I use the word *classical* I do not think of a finalized list of literary works but of a certain status particular texts hold in large parts of Western (or at least English-speaking) societies. It is this status that influences the intertextual functions and modes of reception of the texts in question. For further information on the canon wars of the 1980s see Bona/Maini 7-11, and Connery 3-6.

between object and viewer" ("Triumph" 85). Therefore, a show like *The Simpsons*, which re-introduces classic works to old and new audiences, helps to ensure the widespread exist-ence of canonical works, as its intertextuality "has as its very aim the levelling down of all traditional distinctions between high and low" (Pfister, "Postmodern" 219).

The word *popular*, on the other hand, in this context is not to be used "synonymously with ones like gross, base, vile, riffraff, common, low, vulgar, plebian and cheap" (Fiske, "Popular" 322), although traces of these words are part of the process of distinguishing popu-lar from classical literature. More important, however, is a definition of *popular* Fiske rates as being especially useful for cultural studies: "'the popular' serves the interests of 'the people,'" with the people being "a shifting set of social interests and positions" ("Popular" 322). There-fore, a cultural product like a book can be regarded as popular if its main purpose is to meet as many of these social interests and positions as possible, thereby pleasing larger numbers of readers than a book that is intended, for instance, to deal with a problem the mainstream of popular productions neglects or an unpleasant aspect of social life in a particular segment of society.

Even more influential, movies constitute by far the largest number of sources for in-termediality in *The Simpsons*. There are hardly any episodes without references to one or more movies. This phenomenon might be explained – on the one hand – with regard to the medial similarity of a movie and a TV production, which allows intermedial references in voice, picture, music, storyline, camera angle etc. On the other hand, American society con-siders film to be its main contribution to the world's cultural heritage and the most important medium for conveying American ideas and ideals, as can be seen in the following statement by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.:

> Strike the American contribution from drama, painting, music, sculpture and even dance, and possibly poetry and the novel and the world's achievement is only margin-ally diminished. But the film without American contribution is unimaginable. The fact that film has been the most potent vehicle for the American imagination suggests all the more strongly that movies have something to tell us not just about the surfaces but the mysteries of American life (qtd. in Quart/Auster 3).

Taking these two reasons into consideration, it is not surprising that *The Simpsons* contains more references to movies than to all other media. But what needs to be the appeal of a movie to turn it into a promising target of an intermedial reference? Many factors can make a movie stick out of the mass of productions: a good script, which may have been adapted from a successful book, a famous actor or director, high box office grosses, awards and posi-tive or negative reviews, an influential camera or cutting technique, a particular genre, cult status for a fanatic fan community, production costs, a recognizable influence on society and many more. It will be relevant for the appraisal of intertextual functions to discern the reason that made the creators of the show use a particular movie as point of reference.

Analyzing a typical TV production like *The Simpsons*, one would possibly expect to find it especially indebted to other TV shows as far as imagery, language and intertextual references are concerned, but with regard to the sheer number of references, the prime sources of inspiration in case of *The Simpsons* seem to be movies produced for the big screen. Nevertheless, there are also plenty of instances where the show can easily be related to its ancestors from TV history or where it reflects upon the media landscape it is a part of. It shares many characteristics with other blue-collar family sitcoms, like *The Honeymooners* from the 1950s, *All in the Family* from the 1970s, and its contemporaries *Roseanne* and *Married…with Children*: the main setting is a family household with parents, children, grandparents and pets; conflicts between the family members initiate many of the plots; and the status quo is (albeit sometimes ironically) restored at the end of each episode, which offers "viewers the myth that all problems can be resolved with wit and humor within a short period of time" (Henry, "Triumph" 86). Moreover, it is inevitably influenced by earlier cartoon families, like *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons*, although creator Matt Groening often advised his personnel to draw less cartoonishly and concentrate on the little details of everyday life instead[43] – and *The Simpsons* has continuously been praised for its realism.[44]

In general, *The Simpsons* is – in structure and intertextual reference – most closely linked to the TV series format. It plays with conventions of and refers to detective/action series like *Matlock* or *The A-Team*, mystery series like *The Twilight Zone* or *The X-Files*, soap operas like *Dallas*, other cartoon or comedy shows like *The Flintstones* or *Seinfeld*, and science-fiction series like *Star Trek*. For the most part of this thesis, I will concentrate on these (openly) fictional forms of television entertainment; for the analysis of meta-reflexive functions of intertextuality, however, productions like music videos, talk shows, news reports, and "infotainment" programs will also be relevant, since they constitute a large segment of the contemporary media landscape which *The Simpsons* is continuously satirizing and referring to.

Finally, I am aware that the selection of episodes and source texts always ends up being just a segment of what could have been said about intertextuality in *The* Simpsons. The sheer number of episodes to choose from and the immeasurable quantity of more or less hidden references makes it inevitable that fellow researchers will have to ask why particular episodes were not included in my analysis. However, I am confident that my results will live up to Wolfgang Hallet's assessment that "the definition of a corpus as a representa-

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[43] See Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 10, and Mittell 19.

[44] See, for example, Cantor "Politics" 162, Dark 45, Gruteser 71, Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 10-11, Henry "Triumph" 87, Mittell 19-24, Tuncel/Rauscher 152-153, and Turner 20.

tive section of a discourse is ultimately legitimized by research results that demonstrate intertextual relativity and cultural representativeness" (63; my translation).[45]

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[45] Original: "Die Definition eines Korpus als repräsentativem Ausschnitt eines Diskurses legitimiert sich letztlich durch das Untersuchungsergebnis als Nachweis intertextueller Relativität und kultureller Repräsentativität."

1.4   Current State of Research

Books and essays about *The Simpsons* can be divided into three different groups: firstly, there are books that belong to the universe of officially licensed *Simpsons* merchandise and often hide behind titles starting with *A Complete Guide to…* These publications are usually aimed at the show's fans and do not have any academic appeal, but offer valuable background information about characters, reference material, and production figures.

The second group of texts seems to be intended to feed off the public success of the first group – these are unlicensed books and articles that use the *Simpsons* label to (possibly) generate a larger audience for topics that do not necessarily have much to do with the show itself. A telling example is the book *The Psychology of The Simpsons* edited by Alan Brown and Chris Logan, which is a collection of essays dealing with different psychological models and theories tested out on characters from the show. The characters are treated like cases from the real world to demonstrate how model XY explains why Homer always makes stupid decisions, why Marge expands the borders of her gender role, why Bart and Lisa are still able to love each other, and so on. Such texts – other examples are John Considine's application of economic public choice theories to *The Simpsons*, or Margarete Betz Hull's comparison of Michel Foucault's considerations about the school system, punishment, and freedom of thought to Matt Groening's satiric attitude – usually do not shed new light on the show with regard to its medial and cultural status, its narrative strategies, or its artistic success.[46]

The third group comprises all texts that were written with the intention to further the academic understanding of *The Simpsons* as a cultural and medial phenomenon. Among these are various texts that consider aspects of intertextuality. As early as 1993, Jerry Herron published a journal article touching upon several of the key concepts that would become crucial to the theoretical understanding of the show: subversion, postmodern identity, self-referentiality, super- or meta-text, cultural appropriation, and the importance of the animated form. Viewing *The Simpsons* in the context of and in contrast to other contemporary TV formats and popular literary works, he reveals the show's potential to combine the unlimited visual possibilities of animation with a depiction of "real" life that is *more* real than most non-animated TV, and with references to the medial universe it is a part of – and round it all off with an oppositional viewpoint.[47]

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[46] A subgroup are educational texts that introduce aspects of *The Simpsons* in the context of teaching methods and examine their didactic potential. Although these texts emphasize the show's ability to generate sophisticated insights into such fields as media literacy or sociology, they still do not do so with the aim of developing the understanding of the show itself. Examples are Renee Hobbs' description of how *The Simpsons* makes students appreciate literature in class, and Stephen J. Scanlan and Seth L. Feinberg's introduction to teaching sociology with the help of the cartoon.

[47] In the same year, Peter Parisi conducted additional research on the aspect of cultural appropriation as he examined the recasting of Bart Simpson as a popular icon of various social subgroups in such bootlegs as

A few months later, an essay entitled "The Triumph of Popular Culture: Situation Comedy, Postmodernism and *The Simpsons*" by Matthew Henry was published in *Studies in Popular Culture*. In only 15 pages Henry – more exclusively focused on *The Simpsons* than Herron before – raised a number of issues that were central to the success and the academic appraisal of the show and thus opened the discussion about aspects ranging from the blending of high and popular culture to critical commentaries about "contemporary realities" (96), such as commercialism, religion, corporate greed, and the education system. He includes thoughts about the postmodern characteristics of pastiche, parody, intertextuality, and satire and relates them to the program's success with a diverse audience. He also hints at its self-reflexive nature and is aware of its meta-reflexive ability to "problematize the ontological status of the cartoon's fictional world by acknowledging its artifice" (91). Naturally, due to its limited length, Henry's text stays at the surface of these considerations and has to do without close analyses of examples taken from the show; yet, the essay puts into written words what seemed to be central triggers of a growing academic interest in *The Simpsons* – at a point of time when the show was at the peak of what Chris Turner calls its "Golden Age" (37),[48] a sequence of five to six seasons full to the brim with the finest examples of clever narrative combined with seamlessly inserted intertextual references and social critique.

Surprisingly enough, this promising start of the early 1990s was followed by seven years of only minor steps as far as research on *The Simpsons* is concerned. Apart from numerous newspaper and online articles praising the series for its intelligent humor, discussing whether it is suitable for children or not, or close-reading single episodes, not too many steps were taken to expand the understanding of how the show works and why it is successful enough to function as a global cultural commonplace.[49] The year 2001, however, brought the long expected turn with the publishing of two essay collections dealing exclusively with *The Simpsons* and a further journal article taking the questions raised by Herron, Parisi, and Henry several years before to the next level.

Jason Mittell's journal article "Cartoon Realism: Genre Mixing and the Cultural Life of *The Simpsons*" approaches the show by reading it in the context of the genres it quotes and parodies. Mittell regards genres "as dynamic cultural categories, comprised of discursive practices of definition, interpretation, and evaluation and constituted through the interactions

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"Black Bart" or "Rastabart". In this context, he also touches upon questions of active audience participation in the creation of popular cultural meaning.

[48] See also Ortved 167.

[49] Texts such as Anne Waldron Neumann's observations of children's reactions to the program or Sam Tingleff's reading of its critique of consumer culture once again summarize aspects already mentioned in previous essays and discussed by fans long before without shedding much new light on them or taking them to a new theoretical level. Paul A. Cantor includes a brief analysis of the meta-reflexive qualities of the "Itchy & Scratchy" cartoons – an idea that is more intensively discussed by Butler/Sepp in 2007 – in his general appraisal of *The Simpsons* as "The Greatest TV Show Ever," but neglects the complex, multi-layered media construct that is the result of the show's media- and self-awareness. In comparison to the essays published in the first half of the 90s, the text of the second half did not significantly raise the standard of *Simpsons* research.

between texts, industries, audiences, and contexts" (17), thus including production conditions as well as a diverse audience's reactions in his discussion of *The Simpsons'* parodist achievements and its ability to combine mainstream success with mainstream criticism. Moreover, he firmly roots its "hyper-reflexivity and self-awareness" (15) in the long tradition of cartoons and other TV programs, pointing out how the visual and narrative possibilities of animation support the show's moving beyond stereotypical sitcom standards in order to draw a more realistic picture of American society and popular culture. In sum, although limited to an essay's length, Mittell convincingly manages to describe the generic, social, and cultural forces that determine how *The Simpsons* is received by different groups of viewers and why the show – in spite of its innovative and controversial character – so easily earned cross-generational appraisal.

The essay collection *The Simpsons and Philosophy – The D'oh! of Homer*, edited by William Irvin, Mark T. Conard, and Aeon J. Skoble, promised new insights in the areas of interest already introduced in previous essay publications. Essay titles such as "*The Simpsons* and Allusion" (Irwin/Lombardo), "Popular Parody" (Knight), "*The Simpsons*, Hyper-Irony and the Meaning of Life" (Matheson), or "The Function of Fiction" (McMahon) seemed to pick up the threads spun in earlier texts; however, as far as its academic ambition and its generation of new insights is concerned, the book needs to be called a disappointment. Some of the chapters simply gather superficial observations that are obvious to every regular viewer, others are similar to the texts discussed above as belonging to the second group and just use *The Simpsons* as a hook for a treatise about an only half-related (in this case philosophical) discipline or school.[50]

The essay by Irwin and Lombardo deals with intertextual references in *The Simpsons* and attempts an analysis of the functions of and motivations for the extensive use of allusion in the show. The authors raise several questions about the coexistence of high and popular culture, about the nature of parodist humor and satire, about the effect an intertextual web of significance can have on the viewer, and about the possibility of cultural education supported by referential works of popular culture. Yet, the text does not provide answers systematically embedded in the theoretical framework so badly needed to take the understanding of *The Simpsons* beyond the deep appreciation that is already self-evident to the series' fans.

The same shortcoming can be observed in Carl Matheson's "*The Simpsons*, Hyper-Irony and the Meaning of Life," which adds a brief overview of self-reflexive television programs to the analysis of intertextual functions in the show. Although he acknowledges that parody in *The Simpsons* may also comprise functions that exceed a humorist entertainment value and point towards the outside world of medial ancestors and social circumstances, the

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[50] Telling examples are Raja Halwani's essay "Homer and Aristotle" and Mark T. Conard's philosophical appropriation of Bart's bad boy image in "Thus Spake Bart: On Nietzsche and the Virtues of Being Bad."

lack of a comprehensive approach towards intertextuality and its potential functions in general makes Matheson finally reach the conclusion already discussed above: *The Simpsons* "has nowhere else to go when it stops being funny" (122). Therefore, in a way, the attempted research returns to its starting point without having generated a better understanding – *The Simpsons* is funny, and there might also be something more serious at work, but we do not know what or how it works.

Nevertheless, the book also contains at least two notable exceptions in essays written by Paul A. Cantor and David L.G. Arnold, respectively. In "*The Simpsons*: Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family," Cantor traces back the roots of much of the show's humor and narrative commonplaces to the long tradition of family sitcoms and family politics in American society. He conceives of the nuclear family and the nostalgia for its traditional role models as the main intertextual driving force of the program, which – by expanding but also by confirming the traditional borders – allows for a self-reflexive analysis of long-standing value systems and for sharp social and political commentary with the help of established family comedy structures. Cantor observes a "principle at work that when *The Simpsons* satirizes something, it acknowledges its importance" (172); consequently, although the traditional but seemingly dysfunctional family is one of main objects of ridicule in the show, it still maintains its status as social stronghold and fall-back option for characters confronted with the destructive powers of other institutions, such as professions, the media, politics, the church, etc.

In "'And the Rest Writes Itself': Roland Barthes Watches *The Simpsons*," Arnold focuses on the intertextual relations in the show and approaches them in the context of semiotics and structuralism. He views the possibilities of animation and the tension between the animated style and a realist narrative ambition as decisive forces in turning *The Simpsons* into such a fascinating mirror of popular culture. He applies Roland Barthes' image theories to the sign system of *The Simpsons*, which sends messages that gain much of their strength from "the conflict between our recognition of the signifiers as highly mediated, as un-realistic, and our understanding that they nonetheless resemble a reality we recognize" (259). In addition, its abundance of references to other works, but also its meta-reflexive awareness of the processes that shape its own existence, turn the show into a memorable instance of postmodern intermedial openness. Correspondingly, Arnold also includes aspects of active viewing and the role of the recipient in the generation of meaning and associative storytelling. As parts of the book they were published in, however, the two essays are limited in their ability to grasp *The Simpsons* in its entirety, since they unavoidably touch upon several aspects that would need further elaboration in closer detail – a task the rest of the book does not fulfill.

A volume that much more successfully manages to approach *The Simpsons* from different angles and in the context of established media theories was published in the same

year, but probably outside the awareness of Anglo-American scholars. The essay collection *Die Simpsons – Subversion zur Prime-Time*, edited by the German scholars Michael Gruteser, Thomas Klein, and Andreas Rauscher, includes ten essays that deal with different aspects of the show, but that are also closely related and aware of each other's content. Therefore, the book offers a comprehensive and detailed reflection on the medial and social status of *The Simpsons*, as well as on its internal structures and narrative subtleties. In their introduction, Gruteser, Klein, and Rauscher summarize the range of characteristics that are essential to the commercial and artistic success of *The Simpsons*: the visual possibilities of animation, realism, intertextuality, multi-level entertainment, meta-reflexivity, postmodernism, popular culture. They thus set up an analytical frame of interest that will be filled with richer detail in the other essays in the book, but they also reduce the focus of the collection to a number of issues that encompass the field of *Simpsonian* core features.

In his essay "Family Ties," Gruteser then reads the key elements of *The Simpsons* in relation to traditional sitcom structures and their mixing in the show with postmodern ingredients such as intertextuality, genre parody, and meta-reflexivity. Similar to Paul A. Cantor in the essay discussed above, he examines the stereotypical roles the individual family members play in their familial microcosm, but he also puts some effort into considering their role as signifiers in the narrative frame of the show, their ability to function as screens for intertextual projections, and the potential that arises from their various – and varying – constellations.[51]

The aspect of intertextuality to a certain degree influences all of the essays in the collection, but three of them more closely examine the different forms of intertextuality in *The Simpsons*. In "Method Acting im Kwik-E-Mart – die Medientheorie der *Simpsons*," Andreas Rauscher studies the two groups of references to (1) other medial works and (2) celebrity guest appearances in order to develop a deeper understanding of how *The Simpsons* manages to consider its own nature and its generic history while maintaining a highly entertaining, uninterrupted narrative flow. His analysis of the different functions references can take in this narrative flow once again supports the notion that there is more to the show than "just" postmodern playing with fragments. Presenting various examples from the series, he can imagine intertextuality to work as cultural memory, as an opportunity to address issues that lie outside the reach of the narrative surface level, as an invitation to ponder on the conditions of media production, and as a way of placing cultural works in new contexts to generate updated points of view. Moreover, he is aware of the show's self-reflexive qualities and adds

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[51] In 2003, Brian L. Ott approaches the topic of postmodern identity in closer detail. In his essay "'I'm Bart Simpsons, who the hell are you?' A Study in Postmodern Identity (Re)Construction" he discusses how many of *The Simpsons'* characters are basically brought to life through intertextual references. Thus, they become more lifelike for viewers who share the same cultural background. Their being largely dependent on references to cultural artifacts also allows the characters to acknowledge their own status as artifact, which in turn makes many of the meta-reflexive moments in the show possible.

his observations of the tendency in later seasons to create whole episodes that play with the conventions of their own medial characteristics. In sum, he realizes that it is particularly this balanced mixture of established narrative structures, an innovative, genre-transcending media awareness, and a self-referential meta-awareness that distinguishes *The Simpsons* from most of its contemporary media environment: "*The Simpsons* have some of their strongest moments when all elements, from movie quotations to genre parody to media reflection, complement each other" (126; my translation).[52]

Diedrich Diederichsen uses this assumption as a starting point for a more abstract survey of intertextuality in *The Simpsons*. Regarding the show as "the most complete post-modern work of art" (16; my translation),[53] he explains how its sign system creates moments that are so rife with layers of intertextual meaning that it becomes virtually impossible to grasp all their implications at once. Nevertheless, he calls this medial thickness "postmodern enlightenment" (18; my translation)[54] because it does not happen just for entertainment's sake, but supports the show's general attitude towards questions of politics, ethnicity, gender, class etc. Like Rauscher, he believes that the countless celebrity appearances and the permanent meta-commentary in the shape of the cartoon-in-the-cartoon series "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" – among other factors – are responsible for a style that has nothing in common with other formats that are designed to use parody predominantly for humorous purposes.

Finally, Jörg C. Kachel focuses on a particular group of intertextual references which relate to everything that is typically American in *The Simpsons*. In "Topographia Americana," he shows how the subtle inclusion of a web of references that evoke images of American national myths, ranging from the founding and pioneer days to the 1950s, helps to establish Springfield as the all-American small town. References to such national icons as James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain in literature or Norman Rockwell and C.M. Coolidge in painting place the *Simpson* microcosm in a world that is recognizably American, but still universal enough to be valid for audiences with different backgrounds.

In conclusion, *Die Simpsons – Subversion zur Prime-Time* is the first comprehensive attempt to understand *The Simpsons* as a multi-layer media phenomenon with all its central facets and possible areas of interest. The book revolves around most of the aspects that are generally deemed to be its core ingredients and endeavors to put them in a context of larger theoretical frameworks. A point of criticism, however, is its self-sufficiency, since the included essays hardly ever consider the (albeit at that point of time slender) world of academic *Simpsons* research. They frequently just refer to each other at the danger of repeating each oth-

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[52] Original: "Einige ihrer stärksten Momente erzielen die SIMPSONS, wenn sich sämtliche Elemente, vom Filmzitat über die Genregroteske bis hin zur Medienreflexion, ergänzen."

[53] Original: "Das kompletteste postmoderne Kunstwerk."

[54] Original: "postmoderne Aufklärung."

er's arguments. Furthermore, although intertextuality is so very present throughout most of the essays, what is missing is a clearly structured stock-taking of methodological tools that might help grasp the referential qualities of *The Simpsons* to their full extent.

Three years later, in 2004, a similar collection of essays on an even more sophisticated research level was published in the U.S.A. by John Alberti. *Leaving Springfield – The Simpsons and the Possibility of Oppositional Culture* includes 13 essays that generally manage to take central aspects of the show and put them in the larger context of media theories and cultural considerations. In his introduction, Alberti gives a brief overview of how *The Simpsons* became one of the most prominent programs in the history of television and lays special emphasis on its controversial qualities. Its ability to subvert and entertain at the same time will be a guiding thread throughout most of the essays that follow, as well as the role intertextual references play in this carefully balanced relation of humor and seriousness. Like Gruteser, Klein, and Rauscher in the book discussed above, Alberti succeeds in pointing out a number of characteristics – such as meta-reflexivity, viewer reception, and mass media processes – that are so essential to the show that they require further analysis in the following essays.

As is to be expected, some aspects of intertextuality and parody appear as main areas of interest in almost all of the essays in *Leaving Springfield*. Megan Mullen builds a groundwork for further studies by tracing back the origins of the intertextual humor of *The Simpsons* to older cartoon programs. By revealing how the creators of the show combined the narrative potential of animation with the tradition – but also the innovative potential – of the sitcom genre, she finds reasons for *The Simpsons'* tremendous mainstream success and critical appeal. As far as the functions of intertextuality are concerned, however, she places the show in the tradition of older cartoons, such as *The Flintstones*, which created "appeal for adults, often in the form of pastiche-packed insider jokes" (76). Although she acknowledges intertextuality's capability to comment on, for example, political developments or "venerated, yet often flawed, social institutions" (74), she obviously emphasizes the postmodern version of reference-for-reference's-sake as one of the main characteristics of *The Simpsons*.

In "Homer Erectus: Homer Simpson as Everyman… and Every Woman," Valerie Weilunn Chow goes beyond this simplistic approach and reads intertextuality – like Herron, Gruteser, and Ott before – in the context of postmodern identity formation. Interestingly, she not only regards Homer as a character whose personal history is inscribed with decades of popular culture, but whose body itself reverberates the show's self-reflexive criticism of a mass media consumer culture. On the family level, she observes the same dependency on cultural objects and events as family history and points out that the characters remember their own past – but through the lens of television images. On another self-reflexive stage, the television family obtains all its knowledge from television. In her assessment of how the

show transforms traditional family and gender roles to create oppositional messages while still maintaining the ideals of the institution *family*, Weilunn Chow also considers the educational background and the viewing habits of the individual members of the audience. Since intertextuality is so important in conveying the necessary cultural framework, each viewer's background is essential to the impact of the message.[55]

Two essays deserve special attention for their advanced analyses of meta-aspects in *The Simpsons*. Firstly, David L.G. Arnold, who had already pointed out *The Simpsons'* potential to trigger cultural discourses in his contribution to *The Simpsons and Philosophy* three years earlier, elaborates upon the role the show can play as a mediator between high and popular culture in "'Use a Pen, Sideshow Bob': *The Simpsons* and the Threat of High Culture." Taking into account the way our reception behavior is shaped by programs defined by mass media companies, he reveals how the characters on *The Simpsons* re-enact behaviors they cause themselves. Focusing on a number of episodes centering upon the minor character Sideshow Bob, a former TV comedian who has come to hate TV for its disparagement of "valuable" forms of entertainment, Arnold shows how *The Simpsons* "foregrounds the power of television in shaping a society's attitudes" (11). He lists several instances where the show meta-referentially mocks its own network FOX, also including the larger criticism of an easily satiable TV consumption behavior – easily satiable as far as the qualitative appeal of the programs is concerned. Similar to Ott before, he sees in Bart a postmodern character shaped by the television he watches, who inevitably becomes the main target of Sideshow Bob's anger because of what he represents. On another meta-level, Sideshow Bob's own association with television initiates "a debate about the possibilities of critiquing a medium from within that same medium" (19), thus creating a character who combines several of *The Simpsons'* oppositional medial characteristics in his person. In addition, his affection towards high culture and his inability to transport it into his television career ironically comments on the show's own attempt to go beyond the educational realm of a simple cartoon and include references to literature, sculpture, painting etc. Because Sideshow Bob's hatred is aimed at TV in general, Arnold's analyses reveal the show's meta-reflexive attitudes towards the larger concept of television.

The attitude towards its own genre, towards the characteristics and conditions of a cartoon, is the research focus of an essay by William J. Savage, Jr. He examines the way cartoons "depict cartoons within their fictive world" (198), describing instances from the cartoon-within-cartoon-shows of *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, "Itchy & Scratchy" and "Terrence & Philip," respectively. While both shows continuously raise questions of audience re-

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[55] This aspect is further elaborated upon by Kevin J.H. Dettmar, who approaches *The Simpsons* as a means of teaching media literacy. Here, the complex arrangements of intertextual references will force the individual viewer to find a particular approach to the show's irony and subversive content depending on his preliminary experience, as the show moves "from a modernist irony, at many points indistinguishable from satire, [to] full-blown, vertiginous, groundless postmodern irony" (101).

ception and the impact of cartoons on social discourses, e.g., about youth violence, especially "Itchy & Scratchy" also considers the production conditions and the corporate background of the cartoon industry. Savage remarks that cartoons have a long history of self-reflexive humor and have regularly inscribed the creative triangle of creator, corporate producer and audience into their storylines. In this history of meta-awareness, he also observes a tendency towards apolitical, postmodern playfulness, which, however, has been replaced with an obvious oppositional viewpoint and foregrounded social satire in the two shows he analyses. In this combination of clearly voiced opinions and a solid knowledge of the medium's processes Savage sees a chance for "political change motivated by popular art" (205). He compares it to Mikhail M. Bakhtin's carnivalization, thus placing the multiple layers of cartoon narratives in the bigger group of cultural works that have social and political implications. In sum, due to their awareness of the artistic and corporate forces that shape the development of cartoons, animated shows can self-consciously convey oppositional messages in a way that does not negate their medial status and their audience.

Leaving Springfield ends with a short essay by Douglas Rushkoff, author of *Media Virus! Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*, a book that traces down the oppositional potential in popular mass media texts.[56] For Rushkoff, *The Simpsons* is "nothing short of a media revolution" ("Prince" 292), as it revolutionizes the depiction of the American family, the use of animation for purposes of satire and social criticism, and as it self-reflexively expands its medial structure to create levels of entertainment that require a distinct media awareness. The show derives much of its narrative momentum from "what happens on the Simpsons' own television set, allowing the characters to feed off television, which itself is feeding off other television" (297); as a consequence, it becomes what Rushkoff calls "a media literacy primer" (296), teaching media history and genre studies. Yet, because it still manages to be entertaining, also on the surface, it represents Rushkoff's idea of a media virus:[57] it infects its audience with oppositional ideas hidden in the shell of a big mainstream success.

2004 was also the year when Chris Turner published his monumental book *Planet Simpson – How a Cartoon Masterpiece Defined a Generation*. Turner, obviously an early *Simpsons* fanatic and member of a cult-like fan scene, compiled a work not only of astonishing length (more than 400 pages), but also of fascinating richness in detail and backstage knowledge. In addition to the scholarly appeal of some of its chapters, it above all surprises even experienced *Simpsonians* with background information and trivia about the show that feed off the extensive internet-based fan discussions, which do not play a comparable role in other publications. More than the works discussed above, *Planet Simpson* vibrates with personal involvement and first-hand experience with regard to active audience participation and

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[56]   The book also includes a short segment on *The Simpsons*, see pp. 109-116.

[57]   Rushkoff *Virus* 9-16.

cultural appropriation. Like many other researchers, Turner believes *The Simpsons* to function as a kind of cultural literacy program, as it "provides a lens of unprecedented scope through which to view the shifting cultural landscape" (10). Drawing on his involvement with a hardcore fan base, however, he also vividly describes how a media text not only influences popular culture as it may create a new vocabulary or imagery, but also how it is influenced by the communication and cultural motion of its audience.

The two final chapters of the book deal with the intertextual humor of the show, starting with an analysis of the countless guest appearances of politicians, movie stars, politicians, sport stars and the like. Turner points out that the show has managed to avoid becoming a vehicle for celebrities to increase their popularity, as their guest appearances generally serve only the purpose of developing the story of the show itself. The way their cartoon counterparts are treated is not dependent on their status in the material world: a less known actor may play an essential role for a whole episode while big stars may only get a quick cameo or will just provide their voice for another character. Turner describes a whole range of guest appearances and shows how the celebrities fulfill roles in the complex narrative universe of *The Simpsons* that go well beyond the person of an individual star as they help, for example, to develop the plot of an episode, satirize particular behavior patterns, or stand in for broader social/medial concepts that are to be discussed in the show – "the show's celebrity guests seem to understand that the sharpest satirical barbs are not aimed at them specifically but rather at the whole celebrity circus" (368).

On a meta-level, this awareness of the media processes that create or destroy star images flows into whole episodes that play with the status the *Simpsons* characters have reached, such as, for example, the parody of a VH1 documentary, "Behind the Laughter" (EP 11-23), which shows the Simpsons' "real" offstage lives with such typical celebrity problems as drug and alcohol abuse, overspending, family quarrels, and creative exhaustion. Starting from this meta-episode, Turner realizes that the show "has much to say about a wide range of topics, but its most detailed social commentary is about itself" (388). Like David L.G. Arnold, he mentions Sideshow Bob's function as a recurring comment on the quality of television programs. In addition, he focuses on the B-movie actor Troy McClure, who generally stands in for the cheapest productions on TV and the big screen alike, and contributes to the verisimilitude of the depiction of the media landscape on *The Simpsons.* His appearances also include educational school videos and taped self-help guides to home repair problems, thus extending the satire of media products to almost every imaginable form the moving pictures take in our lives. All this satire also raises questions about the audience's media consumption behavior: especially Homer and Bart play along as they eagerly watch whatever the cinema and their television set offer them. As a consequence, the object of criticism is

expanded to include the audience who makes it possible that programs of meager quality and low intellectual requirements are worth producing, in the first place.

Turner then proceeds to analyze two of the main instruments *The Simpsons* employs to comment on its own medium in particular: the frequent news parodies, and the main shows-inside-the-show, "Itchy & Scratchy" and the "Krusty the Clown Show." The news, usually personified by anchorman/reporter/night talker Kent Brockman, constantly remind the viewer of how television readily gives in to the audience's lowest desires as it provides action, scandal, unfiltered prejudice, and important celebrity information. As Turner puts it, Kent Brockman is "CNN, *Meet the Press* and *Entertainment Tonight* in one slick package" (400).[58] Still the news can hardly be compared to a cartoon show; as a consequence, news parody mocks a particular segment of television, but leaves others untouched. It offers *The Simpsons* an opportunity to set itself off against parts of its own medium that appear to be of minor standard.

On the other hand, parodies of entertainment shows confront *The Simpsons* with its own medial ambitions. As a first instance, the Krusty the Clown Show often sets the tone for humorous TV entertainment and also frequently serves as a window to the past as it relives TV history in clips of Krusty shows from the 60s, 70s and so on. Turner notices Krusty's potential as "meta-talk show" (405), which changes its own medial appearance from a children's variety show to semi-serious political or literary discussion and back in order to meet the demands of the moment: through the Krusty the Clown Show, *The Simpsons'* mediascape is rounded off and provided with a historical background that helps explain some of its own medial characteristics, such as, for example, its comments on current political developments and its tendency to jump into occasional musical numbers to resolve a hopeless situation. At the same time, Krusty's decline from an entertainer who is sensitive to the cultural disruptions of his time to a product-endorsing merchandise maniac once again points towards a general decay of TV quality standards.[59]

Secondly, the "Itchy & Scratchy Show" narrows the focus to animation and thus constantly mirrors *The Simpsons* in its own universe.[60] The show's history closely resembles the development of the Disney empire and on several occasions quotes Mickey Mouse as its

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[58] In 2006, Jonathan Gray even devotes a whole chapter of his book *Watching with The Simpsons* to an in-depth analysis of the representation of news programs in the show. His book will be discussed further down in this chapter.

[59] See also Ernst/Werkmeister 87.

[60] In 2007, Martin Butler and Arvi Sepp contribute another essay to the discussion of the functions the "Itchy & Scratchy Show" fulfills in *The Simpsons*. Viewing the show in the context of a long tradition of self-reflexive elements in cartoons, they realize that the "Itchy & Scratchy Show" not only comments on *Simpsons* plot lines, current cultural or political events, and the cartoon industry, but also carries the discourse about TV violence and reception behavior into the series. In this meta-reflexive inclusion of the real world viewers and the real world discourse surrounding them in a discourse acted out inside the cartoon universe, they see an opportunity for the audience of *The Simpsons* to develop a media competency that allows for a differentiated awareness of reception processes. Moreover, due to the intertextual openness of the "Itchy & Scratchy Show" as well as of *The Simpsons*, this competency also determines the way individual viewers interpret the show.

ancestor instead of *Tom & Jerry*, which it is usually called a parody of. However, in the case of "Itchy & Scratchy," the most important function of the show-inside-the-show is to comment on the present conditions of animation production – economic, social, cultural, and medial.[61] The creation of cartoons is regularly presented as a numbing conveyor belt industry led by profit-oriented executives who have no interest in innovative artistic achievements. Instead, they buy cheap labor overseas, change storylines, and sell a vast merchandise universe – including "Itchy & Scratchy" theme parks – in order to squeeze every dollar out of the show.

Finally, Turner approaches the subtle moments when *The Simpsons* acknowledges its own artificiality: from an early instance in season one when Bart informs a Springfield crowd that the story he is about to tell will take "about twenty-three minutes and five seconds" (EP 1-8) to Homer speaking directly to the TV audience to announce a commercial break (EP 7-6), the show has developed an increasing awareness of how it communicates with its viewers and its cultural surroundings. As its impact on contemporary culture was growing, comments on the show's own status became more frequent and more complex. Turner names the example of when the Simpson family watches the real-world show *Dinosaurs*, which is closely based on the formulae successfully tested in *The Simpsons* (EP 3-21). Bart exclaims "It's like they saw our lives and put it right up on screen!" and Turner realizes that

> you are watching a cartoon family watch a TV show that is a parody of a TV show that is a rip-off of the TV show you're watching, and the rip-off being watched by the cartoon family parodies the actual show you're watching while the show you're watching parodies its own critics (418).

In other instances, the show's self-awareness allows it to develop a memory of earlier episodes or to comment on the function single characters have – such as the members of the bowling team "Stereotypes" (EP 7-12); it is "uproariously funny media theory; hilarious post-structuralist philosophy; whimsical deconstructionism" (419). However, when Turner asks what the function is of allusion and self-reference, the answer is brief and – in part – superficial. A few lines about commenting on culture, bonding with the audience, and adding realism cannot exhaust the full potential of a feature that has become such an essential element of the way *The Simpsons* works for its global audience. Nevertheless, on a more abstract level, Turner realizes that something larger is at work in the interaction between *The Simpsons*, the texts it constantly refers to, and its audience. He speaks of a Panopticon,[62] a place where "[w]atcher and watched see each other" (422), where it is theoretically possible to also watch every other text it is connected to, and where the familiarity with the images of an undemanding mass media meets a growing ironic distance from it.

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[61]   Subchapter 3.4.1 will discuss this aspect in closer detail.

[62]   In its original sense, a panopticon is a building designed to enable a person standing at one particular spot to observe (and to supervise) every other spot of the building. In the 18th and 19th century architects came up with the idea to build prisons and similar institutions according to this principle.

Although Turner's book is impressive in its richness of background information, in its author's involvement with the show since its early beginnings, and in its ambition to grasp the big picture of what *The Simpsons* means for a whole generation of viewers who found their alienation with society and the media discussed and partly resolved in a TV show, it might be too large in scale to really get to the bottom of every aspect it discusses. As far as the aspect of intertextuality is concerned, it contains numbers and numbers of the best examples and finds narrative and larger meanings in them, but falls short of a detailed analysis of the various *functional* levels that possibly are at play in many of those instances.

In 2006, Jonathan Gray, who was familiar with Turner's book, narrowed down the focus again to the field of parody and intertextuality in his book *Watching with The Simpsons – Television, parody, and intertextuality*. In contrast to the many essays written before about that field, Gray has the necessary space to devote a whole part of his book to a more or less extensive assessment of intertextual theory. He lays out the main steps in the history of intertextual studies, briefly points out how intertextual media studies developed out of literary studies, and stresses the importance of genre aspects in the analysis of a series that gains much of its humorous potential from playing with the viewer's expectations towards established conventions.

What also sets off Gray against most of the previous texts dealing with intertextual relations as one of the distinctive features of *The Simpsons* is that his theoretical considerations allow him to expand his understanding of the functions those relations can have. Whereas other authors focused, for example, on the humorous effect intertextual references can have for the show, Gray realizes that the related texts come together in a "dialogue" (28), which means that the intertextual exchange does also have an impact on the text that is being referred to. The same dialogue is at work when *The Simpsons* tests out the borders of generic conventions: the show not only relies on genre formulae in order to please or contradict its viewers' expectations, but it also questions these formulae and starts a discussion between previous texts and present versions of their genre. This active conversation between texts and categories again involves the viewer and initiates – in Gray's words – the "learning of genre literacy" (32). Consequently, the viewer's individual background, his viewing experience and cultural awareness, become the essential third corner of a creative triangle between two texts and a reader. Ultimately, this describes the process of, as Gray calls it, "reading through," the act of re-activating knowledge of other texts while reading a new text that – consciously or unconsciously – evokes memories of those other texts. Since this process of interrelated reading never ends – a reader will never start with a clean slate again – intertextuality helps other texts to survive. Or, as Bakhtin puts it, "[n]othing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival" ("Methodology" 170). This infinite dialogue, however, leads to an even more significant infinity: the infinity of meaning. Gray recalls that

in the course of its theoretical history, intertextuality was frequently regarded as a liberating force, an opportunity to question and criticize established readings. By pulling texts into a different context, intertextual relations exercise discursive power as they trigger a renewed discussion about texts that might have had a fixed meaning in the public mind.

Gray then applies his theoretical considerations to *The Simpsons*, starting with a more general analysis of the parodist approach to the family sitcom genre. Taking "parody's ability to intertextually toy with the grammar of genre" (43) as a starting point, he explains that it takes parody to even fully recognize the distinctive features of a genre. Only if we re-discover a genre's conventions in parody, we can laugh about their exaggeration. In *The Simpsons*, the underlying structure of the family sitcom partly criticizes this genre, but also partly employs its features as a guiding principle. Gray thoroughly examines in how far the single *Simpsons* characters stray from their stereotypical sitcom functions, but he is aware of the fact that "the show is by no means 'anti-family'" (59). Still, since the sitcom genre itself has established in the course of its existence a certain set of fixed character functions and relations, a parodist approach potentially jolts structures that used to be valid for decades. Therefore, the show's deep involvement with the family sitcom genre is a first step towards analyzing its own medium: "…its domesticom parody is now largely a comment on its and our televisual past, and on the potential aftershock on our sense of cultural and familial realities" (61). In the course of his book, Gray will return to this meta-referential point of departure as he intends to provide an overview of how we watch TV through the intertext of *The Simpsons*.

For his main analyses, Gray picks out the two television genres that are most likely to be familiar to almost every viewer: advertisements and news/infotainment programs. Regarding television as an already "hyper-intertextual" (70) medium, he believes ads to be one of the genres that "particularly encourage intertextuality and an intertextual reading strategy" (69). As advertisements regularly interrupt a broadcasted *Simpsons* episode, they offer an opportunity to directly connect elements of the show's media environment to its criticism of TV consumption behavior and consumer culture. In this context, Gray points out the importance of the interrupted mode of broadcasting in general, as it equips the viewer with additional influence in the generation of intertextual meaning. As TV programs are being sliced up into bits of narrative and advertisement, it becomes even more crucial for the viewer to provide an intertextually informed reading that bridges the gaps between the separated images.

The Simpsons not only openly mocks this fragmentation when it plays with the artificial gap in the middle of an episode, for instance, but also parodies the style and content of many ads. From the frequent jokes about billboards and mascots to the Krusty the Clown merchandise empire to countless spots on the family's TV set, the show expresses a deep

alienation with the consumer-oriented media environment – in spite of its own marketing and merchandise success. Whole episodes deal with the ruthlessness of companies and their marketing departments, who exploit children, religious beliefs, and people's inferiority complex for selling purposes. *The Simpsons* once again employs critical intertextuality in order to deconstruct the processes of its own medium – it creates television about television – as it launches a meta-analysis of the way the viewers' minds are being fumbled with. However, as it consciously reveals its own role in the advertising industry, it acknowledges the impossibility of condemning a medium to the full extent if you are a part of it.

In comparison to its affiliation with commercials, *The Simpsons*, as an animated comedy show, can take a more distanced position towards the news, which is the other prime object of Gray's examination. Starting from the assumption that the news was originally intended to provide a "public sphere" (94), a place of public exchange and enlightened discourse, he wonders if a cartoon show can play a part in recovering this ambitious aim at a time when the news has become merely a vehicle for trivia and infotainment. Again recalling parody's potential to test and define generic conventions, he points out that "while *The Simpsons* does not tell us what is happening in Capitol Hill, Westminster, or the Sudan, it calls for a critical appraisal of those televisual voices that do tell us […] of world news" (96). He proceeds with a detailed assessment of the representation of news formats on the show. In general, he states that it challenges the strategies used to let the news appear trustworthy by revealing their artificiality.

Once again highlighting and exaggerating the generic features of its object of parody, the news on the Simpsons' TV set abound with sex, action, and stories about "premium ice cream price wars" (EP 7-9). As mentioned before, the center of most parody is newsman Kent Brockman, the incarnation of a sensation-and-attention-craving anchorman, who serves as whatever figure the ironic reference to the system *news broadcast* requires: talk show host, political investigator, muckraker, celebrity expert, newscaster. By bringing his hunt for the next eye catcher to the surface, *The Simpsons* again and again emphasizes that the news is mainly about this surface and less about events that actually matter. In many instances, the show also includes the audience in its criticism, since the average viewer's willingness to accept the "truth" as it is presented on television contributes largely to the ongoing success of the programs criticized. Gray also points out that the audience's familiarity with the structures and styles of news programs is necessary for the parody to work. The humor in the countless news parodies is not based on slapstick or word game jokes, but solely depends on the "understanding of its target's 'logic' or cultural coding" (105).

Returning to the question whether a comedy show can contribute to or serve as a public forum of serious discourse or not, Gray then looks more closely at the show's carnivalesque potential. He affirms that it – like much comedy – can "inspire rational thought"

(104) by confronting the expected with the unexpected and by allowing the reader to examine objects of everyday concern from unusual angles. Following Bakhtin once again, he finds in parody a platform of communication that partly belongs to the viewer and that requires the audience's active participation, at least as far as a genuine familiarity with the mocked items is concerned. As a consequence, parody can utter, for example, serious political commentary or function as a "popular media literacy educator" (109).

In the end, subsuming the many positive characteristics of the show under the heading of *public pedagogy* and seeing its potential to even introduce audiences to the teaching of cultural theory, Gray arrives at the conclusion that *The Simpsons* – despite its shortcomings and sometimes one-sided points of view – may serve as a good example of "quality television," as it involves the audience in an active discourse about what may be wrong with society. In the second main part of his work, he then proceeds to test his considerations with a sample audience of *Simpsons* viewers. Observing not only how this exemplary audience receives and understands the show, but also paying attention to the way they approach other texts – fictional, social, political – through channels influenced by the intertextual relations prepared in *The Simpsons*, he finds his previous assumptions confirmed: if "a supportive interpretive community" (170) forms around a show that attempts to invite discourse in many directions, a TV program can leave its own borders and create a public forum of discussion not only about current social developments, but also about medial texts and forms and its own status in that context.

Finally, taking the multitude of texts discussed in this chapter into account, it becomes obvious that *The Simpsons* has been arousing academic interest for several years. In contrast to many other texts that are not only "popular," but maybe also – at first glance – aimed at an audience of lower intellectual esteem, the show has been praised for its rich layers of demanding subtext since its beginnings. Even without considering many other texts written about single aspects of the show, such as *The Simpsons* and religion,[63] the research of the last 15 to 20 years shows remarkable progress with regard to the characteristics that have turned the show into one of the most successful programs in the history of television and a cultural denominator crossing borders between generations and disciplines.

Intertextuality, as one of its most prominent features, has received attention from the start and caused analysts to trace subtleties in the show that are likely to elude the "normal" viewer. Profiting from the insights spread across the various essays published in journals and collections, especially Turner and Gray took noticeable steps towards fully understanding the importance and complexity of intertextual references. However, despite their achievements,

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[63]   In this area, the works by Pinsky 2001, Dark 2002, Frank 2004, and Heit 2008 need to be named as outstanding examples.

both books do not take the final step. Whereas Turner, as mentioned above, attempts to encompass everything that is *The Simpsons* and sometimes consequently needs to neglect the analysis of deeper spheres, Gray takes the opposite direction and sets a rather narrow focus on parody and intertextuality. While he offers a sound theoretical foundation, he unfortunately limits his scope to the news and commercials, thus remaining in the well-contained realm of non- or semi-fictional television.

Therefore, many further questions need to be explored. First, although much has been written about the visual possibilities of animation, this aspect has hardly ever been connected to intertextuality. We will have to ask if a different medium with a more limited scope of representational tools could feature the same variety of references and respective functions. Moreover, the change of medium as witnessed in, for instance, the quotation of a written line by Ernest Hemingway in an animated version of a school play, may also have a certain impact on the (intra- or extratextual or maybe even meta-reflexive) function this quotation has. As a consequence, the concept of what is generally labeled *intertextuality* will be defined more precisely through the inclusion of *intermediality* as a subcategory: how do the particular visual, auditory and narrative characteristics of a cartoon influence the reference network to other texts, and potentially to other media?

Second, when examining instances of intertextual references, many authors have been so prepossessed with pointing out the frame of reference outside the show that they have neglected the intratextual side of the relation. Or, to put it more simply, how and to what effect does an intertextual reference influence the story it has become a part of? If a musical tune from a Hitchcock movie is playing in a suspenseful scene of *The Simpsons*, it is likely to influence the viewer's perception of this particular scene. If Bart and his friends re-enact a scene from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, a particular atmosphere based on pre-established signifiers gives the story a natural flow. It is one of my main concerns in this study to view intertextuality in its entirety, with all functional levels that may be at play in a reference – intratextual, extratextual, self- and meta-reflexive. Necessarily, the analysis on different levels will lead to questions about their interdependency, since it might be possible that for example certain intratextual functions also (partly) determine the communication of extratextual concerns.

Third, the insights generated by other authors concerning the importance of genre characteristics for parodist effects need to be linked more closely to the functions of intertextuality: how does a generic framework contribute to the richness of functional layers in intertextual references? In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to be less restrictive than Gray in the choice of source texts and genres. For instance, a scene of *The Simpsons* that evokes the atmosphere of a film noir does not necessarily make the viewers think of a particular movie, but will depend on their awareness of the characteristics of a whole genre in

order to create the attempted effect. Considering the frequency of references in the show, it will be difficult for the viewers to locate every single source text, anyway. Therefore, the importance of generic features for the functions of intertextuality seems essential to the understanding of how the references address the audience on the three aforementioned levels.

The analysis of these aspects will require not only a wide array of source texts and suitable scenes from *The Simpsons*, but also thorough considerations in the fields of (1) intertextuality, (2) intermediality, (3) animation, (4) audience reception, and (5) meta-referentiality/-reflexivity. In general, the answers to all questions asked above – and to others that might pop up along the way – will most easily be found with something that is altogether missing in previous research: a well-structured and integral function-oriented analysis of intertextuality in *The Simpsons*.

2.   Text-Text Relations in Television Programs

2.1   Poststructural Intertextuality: Bakhtin, Kristeva, Barthes, Bloom, Riffaterre

Despite the willingness of most scholars to accept the basic definition that "[i]ntertextuality involves the relation of one text to other texts" (Mailloux; qtd. in Tegtmeyer 49), the different theoretical positions dealing with this phenomenon are manifold and at times controversial. The vast field of publications aimed at structuring the terminology or testing the borders of the concepts of text and intertextuality spans out between the extremes of a global and a local understanding of the two terms.[64] Whereas a global definition of text sets out to cover every imaginable artifact and global intertextuality then defines each text as essentially just the sum of its relations to other texts, a local, more descriptive understanding focuses on the specific relations of one cultural text to another or others.

The different combinations of these categories have been a major factor in the development of theories of intertextuality that use the same label for potentially contradicting manifestations. While this first chapter will give a short overview of the more global aspects of a discussion of intertextuality, the second chapter will be devoted to an assessment of approaches that promise to supply a more concise terminology for actual text analysis. Chapter 3 will discuss whether the models and theories dealing with written texts introduced in the two previous chapters suffice for the description of audiovisual media or if the concept of *intermediality* could contribute valuable results. Chapters 4 and 5 will then examine the relevant characteristics of television (including aspects of audience reception), and animated programs, respectively. The final chapter will consider a specialty in text-text relations, namely the references of a text to itself, its genre or medium.

The term *intertextuality* was coined by Julia Kristeva towards the end of the 1960s and since then has been at the center of a discussion that incorporates concepts much older than that.[65] Rhetoric, source and influence studies, stylistics, and reception aesthetics are textual sciences that have worked before or alongside the introduction of *intertextuality* towards a thorough understanding of text-text relations. However, since the concepts and the terminological multiplicity produced under the heading of intertextuality are already far from unambiguous,[66] and since intertextuality already involves many aspects of the aforementioned approaches and exceeds them in areas that promise to be prolific in the present research, it will not be feasible to generate an overview of all possible discourses about textual

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[64] See Hempfer 54, Holthuis 15-16, Lachmann "Intertextualität" 803, Müller *Intermedialität* 94, Orosz 10, Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 48, and Tegtmeyer 50.

[65] See Cancalon/Spacagna 2, Clayton/Rothstein 4, Friedman 146, Harty 10, Lachmann "Intertextualität" 797, Müller "Hamlet" 143, O'Donnell/Davis XIII, Orosz 9, Rajan 61, Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 46, Ruprecht 70, Stam 20, Stierle 12, Still/Worton 1, Weise 46, and Wolf "Intermedialität" 163.

[66] See, for example, Mai 30-31.

relations. I will mainly focus on the "narrow" discussion of intertextuality starting with Kristeva (yet including her major influences and elaborations, such as Bakhtin and Barthes).

In its early years, the concept of intertextuality and certain of its philosophical and theoretical implications were partly used as an instrument of protest against established social and cultural values by the members of the French *Tel Quel* group. Although it has been stripped of its ideological noise over the years, it still serves different purposes in different disciplines and schools. Decades of research and countless publications restructuring its theoretical foundations or applying it to almost every imaginable type of text have turned *intertextuality* into a label without a clear-cut definition, since "almost everybody who uses it understands it somewhat differently" (Plett, "Intertextualities" 3). Therefore, it cannot be the purpose of my study to provide an all-encompassing overview of the theoretical concept *intertextuality*. Instead, I will highlight those elements of the discussion that allow for and methodologically support the analysis of intertextual functions.

If we speak of intertextuality (or intermediality, as we will later on), our considerations always evoke concepts that – although they use a less spectacular terminology – are still essential to the understanding of the relations between texts. Terms like influence, imitation, parody, translations, quotation, travesty, or plagiarism are likely to appear in any discussion of the intertextual quality of texts, as well as of the concept of intertextuality itself.[67] It is especially with the work of the Russian literary critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin and his term *dialogism*, however, that the examination of intertextual references reached a more abstract level. Bakhtin regarded the network of relations to already existing texts as a supportive means of analyzing reality:

> Besides the reality of both cognition and performed action, the artist of the word also finds literature to be already on hand: it is necessary for him to fight against or for old literary forms, to make use of them, to combine them, to overcome their resistance or to find support in them. But, at the heart of all this movement and struggle within the bounds of a purely literary context, there is the more essential, determining primary struggle with the reality of action and cognition […] ("Content" 284).

Although Bakhtin here moves the primary focus to the relation between texts and "reality"[68] – a relation which commonly plays only a minor role in the more abstract intertextual models by Kristeva and others – it becomes evident why his image of struggling texts motivated those later models. He observes that language, as a social medium used by many different speakers with many different intentions, is dependent on the values and meanings other people connect with certain words, because "[e]ach utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication" ("Speech" 91). In other words, "[e]very phrase we choose, every sentence-

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[67]   See Friedman 154, Lachmann "Intertextualität" 794, Orosz 9, and Stempel 87.

[68]   See also Heller, who stresses that Bakhtin believed that "language can never be disassociated from social living" (653).

structure or convention has a history" (Fuery/Mansfield 67); every utterance contains repetition and therefore carries "dialogic overtones" (Bakhtin, "Speech" 92) that cannot be controlled or extinguished to restore a completely "blank" expression that can be filled with new content.

The interaction of the different points of view that ring within every expression then creates a dialogue, a multitude of utterances that can start a discussion and work against social tendencies of centralization and standardization. For Bakhtin, this implies a certain social and political relevance: the dialogue inherent in texts provokes totalitarian structures of power. A form of text that refuses to be narrowed down to one voice includes "the evaluation of monologic as monovalent texts, and of dialogic as ambivalent texts, which oppose the prescribed culture of 'one truth,' reject consensus and aim at the sphere of the unofficial" (Lachmann, "Vorwort" 9; my translation).[69] It is especially this critical potential of undermining established structures that made Bakhtin's works a perfect starting point for poststructuralist literary theory, since Kristeva and others used intertextuality to question traditional literary concepts, such as structural unity, uniqueness, and the possibility of unchangeable interpretation.

However, there is a major difference between Bakhtin's approach and the later theories of intertextuality: Bakhtin develops a concept of *dialogue* that is primarily *intra*textual, not *inter*textual.[70] His analyses of the novel focus on the voices inside one text, such as the author's voice, the characters' voices, and external voices, which come together in a text and initiate different – and partly overlapping – directions of meaning. Those different voices serve "the fractured expression of the author's intention […]. Moreover, both voices dialogically refer to each other, […] they virtually engage in a conversation. The double-voiced word is always dialogic in itself" (Bakhtin, "Wort" 213; my translation).[71] In contrast to most of the contemporary discussion about the different categories of intertextuality, Bakhtin does not emphasize the possibility of intertextual relations to individual earlier texts, even if he explicitly considers that established literature needs to be employed or overcome. In this context, he is mainly interested in relations between texts and genres or styles, which are currently usually subsumed under the labels of *system* or *genre reference*.[72]

Although Bakhtin's concept appears vague and ostensibly intratextual at times,[73] the dialogue he introduces still does not remain limited to the self-contained text, but includes the

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[69] Original: "die Wertung monologischer als monovalenter und dialogischer als ambivalenter, gegen die verordnete Kultur der 'einen Wahrheit' gerichteter Texte, die Konsens verweigern und den Raum des Inoffiziellen anpeilen."

[70] See also Heller 653-654, and Pfister "Konzepte" 4-5.

[71] German source: "dem gebrochenen Ausdruck der Autorintention […]. Zudem sind beide Stimmen dialogisch aufeinander bezogen, […] sie führen gleichsam ein Gespräch miteinander. Das zweistimmige Wort ist stets im Innern dialogisiert."

[72] Chapter 2.2 will introduce this concept in closer detail.

[73] Mai, for instance, even doubts Bakhtin's importance for the discussion of intertextuality (33).

exchange between different texts as an unlimited process of interpretation, ambiguity, and openness: "Each word (each sign) of the text exceeds its boundaries. Any understanding is a correlation of a given text with other texts" (Bakhtin, "Methodology" 161).[74] As a consequence, although Bakhtin does not open the borders of the text itself, a dialogue develops because of the different interpretations the users of language attribute to the elements of their language.[75] Therefore, while he still firmly places the individual work of literature in the center of his attention, Bakhtin introduces the necessary preconditions for the more universal theories of scholars who followed his expansion of text-text-relations beyond mere source or influence studies.

Kristeva's studies of Bakhtin's work and the extraction of more radical implications of a dialogue between texts made her introduce the term *intertextuality*.[76] Her idea culminates in the assumption that every text entirely consists of intertextual references to other texts – a text becomes incomprehensible without the network of other texts that make up its single units.[77] In her opinion, there cannot be an author's intention or a dialogue of intending voices, but only a dialogue of already existing texts.[78] She adds an almost universal understanding of the word *text*, implying that every cultural system or structure is a text. Kristeva thus establishes a more ontological dimension of the concept of intertextuality, defining intertextuality as a quality all texts share:

> Every text constructs itself as a mosaic of citations, every text is an absorption and transformation of another text. Instead of the notion of intersubjectivity develops that of *intertextuality*, and the poetic language is read, at least, *doubly* (Kristeva, "Sémeiotiqué" 146; her italics; my translation).[79]

Thus, she replaces Bakhtin's ideas of the polyphony and ambivalence of language structures (in dependence of the subjects of discourses) with the absorption and transformation of already existing texts, which leads to a radically extended concept of *texts*, a related delimitation of *pretexts*, and the separation of texts and statements/interpretations. As a consequence, intertextuality is not a particular quality of particular texts, but a quality that is inherent in *textuality*; it defines the text's semantic and pragmatic content:

> Every text situates itself in an already existing universe of texts, intentionally or not. To find the conception of a text means to find an empty space in the system of texts, or rather in a previous constellation of texts […]. This constellation creates the possibility of a text, which the text itself fulfills, surpasses or undercuts. But as the empty space in

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[74] See also Lachmann "Intertextualität" 799, Orosz 10, and Schwanitz 28.

[75] See also Holquist XIX.

[76] Clayton/Rothstein 18, Friedman 159, Hutcheon *Poetics* 126, and Orr 22-23/26.

[77] See O'Donnell/Davis IX-X, and Tegtmeyer 53.

[78] Rudat offers the expression "mutual commerce" as an alternative to describe the dialogue between alluding texts (2-3).

[79] Original: "Tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. A la place de la notation d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'intertextualité, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme double."

the constellation of texts is filled, as the possibility of a text is utilized, the constellation changes and thus creates new empty spaces (Stierle 7; my translation).[80]

This approach obviously reaches a level of abstraction that radically reduces its applicability as far as actual text analysis is concerned.[81] Kristeva has no intention of making it applicable to literary analyses, which she regards as a "restrictive framework" ("Nous" 8) that needs to be overcome to give way to the more interesting implications of an infinite universe of interrelated texts. If every possible system of signs (in their broadest sense) is a text and every word in every text is just a reference to another text or a general universal text, it becomes – firstly – impossible to trace the source of this reference and – secondly – to relate this source to any idea that might finally generate meaning for the new text. Moreover, if there is no text without intertextual dependence, or if – as Vincent B. Leitch puts it – "[e]very text is intertext" (qtd. in Plett, "Intertextualities" 6),[82] there is no way of analyzing intertextual works and the special characteristics and interpretations their intertextuality evokes in contrast to non- or less intertextual works (which, according to this view, do not even exist).

At best, it might be possible to develop a sign theory that helps order the unlimited number of intertextual relations between an unlimited number of texts of any kind. However, this would still exclude the role individual communicators play in the generation of meaning in intertextual processes and would thus still not create a concept of intertextuality that is applicable to actual instances of discourse. Harold Bloom tries to solve this dilemma and combines the idea of a universal intertextuality with the analysis of actual relations between texts and pretexts.[83] He still states "that there are *no* texts, but only relationships *between* texts" (*Misreading* 3; his italics), but reduces the object of his studies to literary texts: "poems are not things but only words that refer to other words, and *those* words refer to still other words, and so on, into the densely overpopulated world of literary language" (*Poetry* 2-3; his italics).[84]

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[80] Original: "Jeder Text situiert sich in einem schon vorhandenen Universum der Texte, ob er dies beabsichtigt oder nicht. Die Konzeption eines Textes finden heißt, eine Leerstelle im System der Texte finden oder vielmehr in einer vorgängigen Konstellation von Texten […] Der Konstellation entspringt die Möglichkeit des Textes, die der Text selbst einlöst, über- oder unterbietet. Indem aber die Leerstelle in der Konstellation der Texte besetzt wird, die Möglichkeit des Textes zu ihrer Realisierung kommt, verändert die Konstellation sich selbst und erzeugt damit neue Leerstellen." See also Iser *Akt* 284-285.

[81] Tegtmeyer ironically applies Kristeva's theory to textual analysis and "proves" the intertextual relation between a report about a soccer match between Germany and Portugal and Goethe's *Wahlverwandtschaften* (56-57). See also Frow 46, Heller 655, and Stempel 102. In contrast, Wolfgang Hallet – writing from a cultural studies perspective – stresses the potential of a *texte général* to help frame, read, and define the even more delimited concept of *culture* (57).

[82] See also Pfister "Konzepte" 12.

[83] Friedman 156.

[84] Clayton/Rothstein stress that Bloom is a theorist of influence, *not* of intertextuality (9). Moreover, it is obvious that influence is not the same as intertextuality, but rather *one* manifestation of intertextual relations. However, Bloom's statements quoted above clearly reveal his universal understanding of text-text relations, but also that he does not erase the author/producer from his considerations – which moves his works closer to actually applicable theories of intertextuality.

In his book *The Anxiety of Influence*, he describes a circular movement of poetic in-fluence. He establishes a sequence of six stages that a writer passes through while trying to free himself from the influence of his precursors. Although, according to Bloom, the author acknowledges the existence of possible influential sources, he employs tropes like irony, metonymy, and hyperbole to reduce his precursors' achievements and credibility. He even goes as far as to neglect the precursors' existence and to present their ideas as genuinely his own. Of course, this craving for independence turns the process of writing into a continu-ous and fatiguing creative struggle,[85] or – in the words of Louis A. Renza – "an endless civil war in which [the author] continually uses rhetorical weapons […] to overcome or destroy the system of tropes defining his precursor's text" (192).

In general, Bloom creates a rather negative image of intertextuality; it is a threat that needs to be overcome or at least fought against. He believes that poets can only gain crea-tive space by "misreading one another" (*Anxiety* 5). Their only advantage is that they can elevate their own works over their "precursor's 'truncated' [quoted from *Anxiety* 66] because overidealized vision" (Renza 189) by reducing it to an incomplete or naïve idea that has to be elaborated to become true. Of course, this approach describes one possibility of adding meaning to a text by employing intertextual references to contradict another piece of art. In Bloom's radical form, however, it also remains comparatively useless for a textual analysis as intended here, since it leaves out a kind of intertextuality that rather confirms than ques-tions the ideas of older texts. Moreover, it is also based on the assumption that every text is entirely a collection of references to other texts.

The works of Roland Barthes and Michael Riffaterre, who further explored the theo-retical implications of the universe of limitless intertextuality opened up by Kristeva,[86] have to face similar contradictions, although they move the focus mainly to the reception in intertex-tual communication processes.[87] Barthes also describes a potentially endless network of texts,[88] an open intertext in the form of an "echo chamber"[89] that produces ever new constel-lations of meaning and possible interpretation. Like Kristeva, he states that "any text is an intertext" ("Theory" 39), and he more closely defines the constituents of this intertext as "[b]its of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc." ("Theory" 39) de-rived from earlier texts, which include all types of human conversation and thus language in general. However, he stresses that the intertextual reading of texts does not stop at a mere search for sources or influences; in contrast, the text becomes a location of productivity

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[85]   See also Holthuis 19, and Still/Worton 27.
[86]   Orr 32-33.
[87]   See Clayton/Rothstein 21, Hutcheon "Metafiction" 7, Hutcheon *Poetics* 126, and Ott/Walter 431.
[88]   See also Harty 2.
[89]   See Broich "Formen" 176, Holthuis 16, Still/Worton 18, and Weise 46.

where the interwoven codes come together in the reader's mind,[90] or as Mary Orr describes the characteristics of quotations and citations: "It is not only who signs them, but also who circulates them" (33). By establishing the reader as the more important instance in the intertextual communication process, Barthes thus avoids the problematic question of whether "real" intertextuality needs to be intended by the author.

More importantly for the analysis attempted here, however, Barthes develops an understanding of *text* as an interaction of fabrics that is in no way limited to the written word, but can also be found in "[a]ll signifying practices: the practice of painting pictures, musical practice, filmic practice, etc." ("Theory" 41). His delimited concept of what a text is[91] and the focus on the act of reception as the place of productivity thus actually prepare the ground for a theory of inter*media*lity; however, it is exactly this abstraction from the tangible work that renders a distinction between intertextuality and intermediality unnecessary on *this* theoretical level: as long as every text is inevitably related to every other text, no additional significance can be generated from the distinction between connections to texts from the same or from another medium. Interestingly, although he emphasizes the triviality of source and influence studies, he still sees – like Bakhtin – parodist potential in works which "prepare the subversion of genres, of the homogeneous classes to which they have been assigned" ("Theory" 41). Author, reader, and critic (as author and reader) become the locations of creativity where the unlimited potential of language and the network of intertextual relations overthrow established interpretations, conventions, theories.

Similarly, Riffaterre observes that intertextual relations influence the act of reception itself,[92] as the experience of "déjà-vu" or "déjà-lu" introduces a productive intertext into the formerly linear act of reading:

> The intertext denominates the mode of perception, which consciously familiarizes the reader with the fact that, in literary works, words can carry meaning not with regard to facts or concepts, but with regard to complex, already verbalized representations (qtd. in Grivel 65; my translation).[93]

In its most radical consequence, Riffaterre's definition of the act of reading thus implies that an actual understanding of a work of art can only happen with the help of an intertext that

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[90] See also Cancalon/Spacagna 1, and Hempfer 52.

[91] At one point, Barthes defines the text "as a polysemic space where the paths of several possible meanings intersect" ("Theory" 37). Thus, the text itself does not even have its own "meaning" anymore; it serves as a location where messages that are already "out there" in the intertext come together in a new, meaningful constellation – the new meaning being dependent on the reader's productivity. See also Müller *Intermedialität* 99, and Wagner 2.

[92] See, for example, Riffaterre "syllepse" 496: "Intertextuality is a mode of text perception, it is the proper mechanism for reading literature" (my translation; original: "L'intertextualité est un mode de perception du texte, c'est le mécanisme propre de la lecture littéraire"). Additionally, see Holthuis 20-21, Stempel 88, and Still/Worton 24.

[93] German source: "Der Intertext bezeichnet den Perzeptionsmodus, wodurch der Leser bewußt mit der Tatsache vertraut wird, daß im literarischen Werk Worte nicht im Hinblick auf Fakten oder Begriffe, sondern im Hinblick auf komplexe, schon verbalisierte Repräsentationen Bedeutung tragen können."

provides the "vocabulary" for de-coding the (verbal and formal) language of, for example, literature: "[l]iterariness […] must be sought at the level where texts combine, or signify by referring to other texts rather than to lesser sign systems" ("response" 56).[94] Therefore, inter-texts also guarantee that the "identity" (57) – the meaning – of a text does not change entire-ly in the course of time: its relation to other texts fixes a certain frame of reference that guides the productive reader along rough lines.[95]

However, Riffaterre stresses that this "stability of intertexts, and the reader's ability to compensate for their losses" ("response" 74), does not reduce intertextuality to the aforemen-tioned source or influence relations: an intertext is not merely an established motif – an artis-tic convention – but it is one half of a dialogue among texts. In this dialogue, the text and the intertext fill in gaps in the counterpart's narrative structure or merge two (or more) different implications in a linguistic sign that they share.[96] Here, Riffaterre speaks of "dual signs," which link two texts that have no connection other than a sign in one text that "would have been just as much at home in the other" (*Semiotics* 86). In the places where text and intertext meet, this dialogue evokes pairs of opposites that characterize the interpretive openness of intertextually laced text: "convention and departures from it, tradition and novelty, sociolect and idiolect, the already said and its negation or transformation" ("response" 76). This clash of implications leaves the reader in a situation where he needs "to fit together the pieces of a puzzle" (*Semiotics* 91); it is in the reader's associating mind where the multilevel experience of a text can develop to its full extent.[97]

Finally, returning to Bakhtin's theory of a dialogue of different voices in a single com-municative instance, the thread that links him to Kristeva and the scholars who elaborated upon her idea of a "general text" is the focus on an undefined whole of everything that has been said before and the connected lack of interest in specific pretexts. Intertextuality is con-ceptualized as inevitability; every utterance is intertextual by definition. As fascinating as the theoretical implications of this model might be, many other scholars have attempted to return to frameworks of intertextuality that allow for the actual application to individual works and that are able to generate statements about texts that describe their intertextual qualities in relation to producers and recipients.[98]

In *The Simpsons*, a distinct form of intertextual referencing, a conscious employment of preformed text elements has become one of the show's most distinguished features; therefore, producers, recipients, and individual texts become three factors that inevitably

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[94] In *Semiotics of Poetry*, Riffaterre similarly explains that in poetry "there is no norm that is language as gram-mars and dictionaries may represent it: the poem is made up of texts, of fragments of texts, integrated with or without conversion into a new system" (164). See also Morgan 32, Müller *Intermedialität* 99, and Rajan 62.

[95] See also Riffaterre *Semiotics* 84.

[96] See Orr 37.

[97] Riffaterre *Semiotics* 164.

[98] See Neumann/Nünning 7, and Plett "Intertextualities" 4.

need to be included in any attempt to understanding how this particular form of intertextuality works. Since it is my aim to comprehend and categorize the functions of intertextuality in the relation of a specific text to specific (groups of) pretexts, the scholars and models discussed in the following chapter will be more central to laying the theoretical foundations for a thoroughly organized assessment of intertextual relations.

2.2   Forms and Functions of Intertextual References

Descriptive categories that are used in discussions of intertextuality in order to group and analyse referential phenomena constitute an essential part of the vocabulary needed to describe stylistic elements such as quotation and allusion, parody and travesty, imitation, adaptation, or translation. All these forms have in common that they are willingly and consciously employed by the producer of the text, which also implies that they have been included to achieve a certain effect.[99] This constriction distinguishes them from cases where other texts might unconsciously slip into texts.[100] Therefore, this approach to the term *intertextuality* limits the range of possible source texts to "those which the author consciously, intentionally, and specifically refers to and which he wants the reader to notice and to make accessible as an additional level of meaning" (Pfister, "Konzepte" 23; my translation).[101] As a consequence, such an approach conceptualizes intertextuality not as a universal quality of every text but as one possibility of shaping meaning.[102]

Once intertextuality is understood as a process of conscious communication between author and reader, another question is bound to influence all further considerations of systems intended to organize the multitude of possible intertextual references: "is intertextuality an artistic procedure and hence a quality inherent in a work of art, or a function of a critic's (reader's) activity?" (Mai 36).[103] Much has been written about both concepts: for example, T.S. Eliot – writing from the producer's perspective in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" – suggests a "conception of poetry as a living whole of all the poetry that has ever been written" (17). In contrast to other critics, he does not regard this omnipresent influence as a threat or cause of anxiety but as a natural stage of the artist's development. Writing from the point of view of a creative author, he does not regard influence (or intertextuality) as a sign of weak literature but as an awareness of tradition, which only the best writers can achieve through hard work.[104] He even believes that "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (14).

The recipient's perspective, on the other hand, has equally aroused much academic interest, culminating, for instance, in the description of different types of recipients, such as a

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[99]   See Coombs 480, Ott/Walter 429, and Weise 39.

[100]   Ott/Walter criticize that the label *intertextuality* is synonymously used for the conscious producer's side and the (potentially) subconscious perspective of the active audience. However, while the producer plays an indisputable role in the analysis of functions, the contributions of an active audience to the intertextual communication process can hardly be ignored. See subchapter 2.4.2.

[101]   Original: "solche, auf die der Autor bewußt, intentional und pointiert anspielt und von denen er möchte, daß sie vom Leser erkannt und als zusätzliche Ebene der Sinnkonstitution erschlossen werden."

[102]   See Lindner 117, and Pfister "Konzepte" 15.

[103]   See also Lachmann "Intertextualität" 804, Neumann/Nünning 21, and Still/Worton 1.

[104]   See also Nadel 649, and Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody as a productive-creative approach to tradition (*Parody* 7).

"normal reader" – a real person with an individual cultural background – or an "ideal reader" – the theoretical instance of an omniscient reader, who is able to decode every referential layer of meaning the author and the text create.[105] According to Tegtmeyer, it is particularly the individual reader's interpretation of an individual intertext that should be the center of attention in descriptive systems designed to examine different intertextual phenomena (66).

However, since my main concern is an assessment of intertextual/intermedial functions, the two ends of the intertextual process cannot be regarded separately: a function can only exist in the successful communication of producer and recipient. Therefore, I will not subdivide the description of intertextual characteristics into categories such as "productive" and "receptive" intertextuality.[106] Nevertheless, it is essential to be aware of the recipient's perspective, since the analysis of intertextual signals and functional strategies always requires the context of the respective reading competences. Therefore, subchapter 2.4.2 will consider questions of audience reception in the light of a complete act of intertextual communication, which involves references that the producer intentionally (and more or less obviously) marks in the text in order to guide the recipient along a narrower section of the potentially unlimited intertext towards an additional layer of meaning.

Although this definition brings intertextuality much closer to actual text analysis by reducing it to a quality only particular texts have, it still leaves open a vast field of possible manifestations, which can be ordered according to different systems and on different levels.[107] It cannot be the purpose of this study to attempt an all-encompassing evaluation of the various systems that have been developed over four decades of theories and research in the field of intertextual relations. Instead, I will scan the most widely discussed systems for elements that seem useful to describe intertextual functions. Whenever feasible, these models will be complemented by less well-known approaches and then re-assessed with respect to the relations between different media in the following chapters in order to set up a framework especially designed for the requirements of a comprehensive assessment of intertextual functions in a cartoon series.

There are four characteristics of intertextual references that are so important for the description of functions of intertextuality that they need to be discussed independently of more detailed individual descriptive models: the temporal dimension, the differences between marked and unmarked intertextuality, the attitude towards source texts, and the distinction between references to individual texts and text types/genres.

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[105] See, for example, Fish 211-216, Helbig *Markierung* 12, Iser *Akt* 51, Rajan 69, Riffaterre "Stilanalyse" 176-179, and Warning 26/29.

[106] Grübel 227-230.

[107] Renate Lachmann stresses the heterogeneity of intertextual analytical instruments, as they often encompass the terminology and theoretical foundation of various other text theoretical disciplines ("Intertextualität" 796).

First, aspects of time can be determining factors in the assessment of intertextual functions; for example, some forms of intertextual references – especially in genres like reviews, parodies, or letters – depend on a predetermined sequence of reception, as they draw much of their potential from a questions-and-answers structure. In ignorance of the correct temporal sequence, the reader cannot grasp some intertextual effects to their full extent, since a parody, for example, can hardly be read as a parody if the parodied text is consumed only afterwards. In the case of a quotation, on the other hand, the temporal order is less important, because marked quotations are usually meant to transfer the same (i.e. unchanged, unquestioned) message to different textual surroundings. More generally, intertextuality can be grouped into *synchronic* and *diachronic* references. Synchronic references are directed at texts that are produced at almost the same time as the new text; they refer to contemporary culture. Diachronic references, on the other hand, are based on texts that were created in earlier times.[108] Both groups need to be considered in the analysis of intertextuality in *The Simpsons*, since the show not only alludes to classic texts starting with ancient Greek writers, but also deals with current social, cultural, and political developments.

Second, the analysis of intertextual appearances in individual texts also raises questions about criteria that examine how obviously an intertextual reference reveals itself to be indebted to another text. Therefore, a methodology that allows for a distinction between marked[109] and unmarked references can provide an important basis for the description of intertextual functions.[110] Since the marking of references, in general, implies a conscious act of communication between author and reader, the type of intertextuality in question exists

> whenever an author is not only aware of using other texts while writing his text, but also expects the reader to understand this relation between his text and another text as intended by the author and important for the interpretation of the text. Intertextuality in a narrower sense thus requires the success of a particular communication process, in which author and reader are not only aware of a text's intertextuality, but also take into account the respective partner's awareness of intertextuality (Broich, "Formen" 31; my translation).[111]

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[108] See also Hallet 67, Plett "Intertextualities" 25, and Smirnov 273.

[109] In order to further distinguish different types of markers, Plett sets up three categories, including explicit and implicit markers as well as pseudo-markers that create an intertextual appeal where there is none ("Intertextualities" 12).

[110] Ben-Porat declares that a "marker is always identifiable as an element or pattern belonging to another independent text" (108). See also Orosz 27.

[111] Original: "wenn ein Autor bei der Abfassung seines Textes sich nicht nur der Verwendung anderer Texte bewußt ist, sondern auch vom Rezipienten erwartet, daß er diese Beziehung zwischen seinem Text und anderen Texten als vom Autor intendiert und als wichtig für das Verständnis des Textes erkennt. Intertextualität in einem engeren Sinne setzt also das Gelingen eines ganz bestimmten Kommunikationsprozesses voraus, bei dem nicht nur Autor und Leser sich der Intertextualität eines Textes bewußt sind, sondern bei dem jeder der beiden Partner des Kommunikationsvorgangs darüber hinaus auch das Intertextualitätsbewußtsein seines Partners miteinkalkuliert." This definition consequently excludes all instances of "unconscious" intertextuality – influences even the author is not aware of – and plagiarism, where the author intentionally tries to hide the source of his inspiration.

As a consequence, it might well be the author's choice to either explicitly mark the references he wants the reader to discover, or to refer to source texts that do not require marked references because the anticipated audience can be expected to be familiar with them – which in Western societies is usually the case with references to the bible, certain folk tales, or Western canonical literature.

In the interpretation of intertextual functions, types, places, and degrees of markings are likely to play a decisive role for the communicative process as they (co-)determine the way the reader handles the respective intertextual context. As a precondition of understanding this feature of the reception process, however, it is necessary to establish a system of what marked and unmarked references are. Broich differentiates between quantitative and qualitative criteria of markings: on the one hand, the number of markers in a given text influences the recipient's awareness of a pretext; on the other, this awareness also depends on where the markers can be found and how explicitly they stand out in the narrative flow.[112] The more essential question, however, is *what* makes up a marker. This question becomes all the more complex in the discussion of an audiovisual medium that obviously cannot rely on such traditional literary signs as quotation marks, italics, or footnotes.

Nevertheless, a TV program can employ the written word to point the viewer towards certain source texts in at least two ways.[113] First, a very common marker – in literature as well as in other media – is the referencing in titles. Many *Simpsons* episode titles are obvious puns on titles of books or movies, such as "The Crêpes of Wrath" (EP 1-11), "Dead Putting Society" (EP 2-6), or "Children of a Lesser Clod" (EP 12-20).[114] While these titles are intermedial references, they are not necessarily markers for intermedial relations between the respective two texts that influence the viewer's perception – the ambitious battle of two boys and their fathers in a miniature golf tournament, for example, does not derive additional meaning from aspects of the movie *Dead Poets Society*. In other cases, however, intertextual episode titles point the viewer towards interesting parallels in a related source text: in the episode "The Telltale Head" (EP 1-8), the reference to the Edgar Allan Poe story helps to add substance to feelings of guilt and fear Bart experiences after a bad deed.[115] Similarly, "Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington" (EP 3-2) relies on images established in the classic movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* in order to create the atmosphere of helplessness the "ordinary" person feels when faced with political corruption.

Second, animation can position written markers on any kind of writing/printing surface that appears on the screen – book covers, newspapers, billboards, traffic signs, etc. In the

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[112] See "Formen" 33.

[113] See also chapter 2.5.

[114] Ernest Hemingway could probably claim credit for the most widely referenced book title in *The Simpsons*, as he has provided the source for episodes such as "The Old Man and the Lisa" (EP 8-21), "The Old Man and the 'C' Student" (EP 10-20), and "The Old Man and the Key"(EP 13-13).

[115] This episode will be discussed in closer detail in subchapter 3.2.4.

"Bart vs. Thanksgiving" episode discussed above, for instance, books by Ginsberg and Kerouac on a shelf are used as markers for the extended reference to Ginsberg's poem "Howl." In "A Streetcar Named Marge" (EP 4-2), the baby Maggie is placed in a daycare center that a sign outside exposes as "Ayn Rand School for Tots." There, the babies have to give up their pacifiers and are left by themselves most of the time. Moreover, the headmistress of the center can be seen reading *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand, which provides another hint for those viewers who might have missed the sign outside the building. In order to connect these references to the plot of babies trying to retrieve their pacifiers, one has to be familiar with the "radical libertarian philosophy" (Irwin/Lombardo 85) of Ayn Rand, according to which people should be trained early in their lives not to depend on anybody or anything to develop a healthy personality.[116]

A later scene from the same episode may serve as an example of another type of marker frequently used in *The Simpsons*: when Homer comes back to pick up Maggie at the daycare center, he is confronted by hundreds of seemingly dulled babies sucking on their pacifiers. They cover the floor, sit on shelves, some of them crawl around slowly, and the only audible sound is their monotonous sucking. Homer carefully tiptoes through their lines, picks up Maggie and slowly backs out again. While the scene may immediately remind many viewers of the movie *The Birds* – it evokes an atmosphere of imminent danger and "communicates the threat of the hive-mind posed by many small beings working as one" (Matheson 112) – the reference is subsequently marked by the seemingly unmotivated appearance of Hitchcock's cartoon double walking by with two dogs on leashes, an imitation of his cameo in *The Birds*.[117] In general, the visual marker of celebrity guest appearances is often used in the show not only to evoke aspects of their public lives, but also to indicate intertextual relations to parts of their respective oeuvres.[118]

Further possible markers that originate in literature but also easily work in cartoons are, for example, characters' names that point towards other texts, or characters reading, watching, or discussing other works.[119] In addition, like written texts, cartoons can also employ abrupt changes in style to indicate that elements taken from another text are being used. For instance, if Lisa uses the line "a rose, / by any other name would smell as sweet" in an ordinary family discussion (EP 9-2), the viewer realizes that this is a quotation, even if he is not able to pinpoint it to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The difference in tone is further highlighted when her brother blurts in, "Not if you called them stench-blossoms."

In general, since an animated TV series has various options for copying elements from another text, the degree of "markedness" also depends on how many of these options

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[116] See also Matheson 111, and Turner 64.
[117] See also Rauscher 103.
[118] See chapter 2.5.
[119] Broich "Formen" 39-41.

are combined. An episode like "Cape Feare" (EP 5-2), which combines an intertextual title with music scores, plot and dialogue elements from the movie *Cape Fear*, is more likely to incite an awareness for the source text in the viewer than scenes that employ only one of the possible reference methods.

The third major categorization of intertextual references is related to the attitude a reference expresses towards its source text. On the one hand, texts might be intended to support or confirm the position expressed in the original text; on the other hand, references might question or deconstruct an older text[120] – although this questioning does not have to be an attempt to entirely overcome and extinguish the source in such a radical way as described by Bloom.[121] In the first case, a reference may have the extratextual function of affirming the status or common interpretation of the source text in the form of a homage, or it can transfer established elements – motifs, imagery, or narrative strategies, for example – to the narrative of the alluding text. In the second case, a reference can aim to deconstruct the source text's status or common interpretation, or it can juxtapose it to a different point of view expressed in the "new" text in order to create a parodist field of tension between two or more contradicting value systems.

Finally, another major distinction needs to be made between references to individual texts, on the one hand, and to genres/systems of texts, on the other. The latter describes a type of intertextuality that is situated between the two extremes of references to single, iden-tifiable pretexts and an entirely intertextual universal text. A *system reference*[122] evokes a group of texts that share certain patterns and conventions. On a more abstract level, the texts that make up such a genre are already intertextual by definition, because a set of shared characteristics requires an awareness of other texts and the willingness to employ elements already found in these texts.[123] However, works that use other text and media struc-tures[124] in a creative way in order to provide additional levels of information for the reader may also refer to whole genres without necessarily becoming a part of that genre. For exam-ple, whereas the majority of intertextual references in *The Simpsons* are based on individual works of art (books, movies, TV shows etc.), especially instances of intertextuality that are

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[120] See, for example, Orosz 25-26, Ott/Walter 435/438, Pfister "Konzepte" 22, and Weise 40. Tegtmeyer propos-es a possible third, "neutral" attitude (79). With regard to a functional analysis, however, it seems at least questionable if a neutral reference could have a particular function. Even if a text uses elements from another text just to create a certain atmosphere, this process alone expresses a confirming attitude towards the suc-cessful usage of stylistic means in the source text. For exemplary analyses of intertextual attacks on two of Dickens' novels, see Fuery/Mansfield 68-69.

[121] See also the preceding chapter.

[122] Pfister "Systemreferenz" 53. Petöfi speaks of "typological intertextuality" (original: "typologische Intertextuali-tät") instead (qtd. in Tegtmeyer 59).

[123] Suerbaum 59.

[124] Karrer's matrix of different intensities in the usage of elements and structures taken from single texts or genres will be introduced later in this chapter.

intended to criticize current developments in the media often do not evoke single texts, but typical characteristics of whole genres, such as "the news," "commercials," or "talk shows."

Still, genres (instead of their individual member texts) also repeatedly appear to be the main source of intertextually interlaced episodes. For instance, the episode "Bart the Murderer" (EP 3-4) features a plotline about Bart getting involved with the mob. While it includes several references to individual mafia movies, such as *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas*, the general appearance and tone of the story rely so much on commonplaces already established in the mafia movie genre – such as the mobsters' slang, looks, attitudes – that it needs to be read against the background of the genre in addition to the single source texts in order to develop its full intertextual potential. Although much of the episode thus comes to resemble a mafia movie, nobody would list it as a typical mafia movie, because it is more deeply rooted in its general appearance as "animated family sitcom."

In addition to and often developed from these four rather general distinctions, several systems of intertextual categories have evolved in the fields of literary and cultural studies. However, none of them can claim to explain the phenomenon of intertextuality in its entirety, and while many of them certainly address aspects that need to be considered in a functional analysis of intertextual references, they also tend to blur the borders between descriptive and functional criteria and often unnecessarily complicate the field of research by introducing additional terminologies.

One of the most famous examples of this might be the system Gérard Genette[125] develops in *Palimpsestes: La literature au second degré*, which has had a major impact on later attempts to create descriptive systems of intertextual relations. While Genette is clearly focused on the ordering of actual textual phenomena, he still strives for as much theoretical differentiation as possible.

He develops five subcategories for what he calls – as a superordinate category – *transtextuality*:[126] firstly, *intertextuality* describes the obvious presence of one or more texts in another one as in the shape of a quotation, plagiarism, or allusion, and thus it still accounts for a large number of references that interest us in the analysis of textual relations in *The Simpsons*. In contrast, *paratextuality* refers to the connection between a text and its title, preface, motto etc.[127] This category could be relevant in the assessment of the function of episode titles in relation to the stories they announce.[128] Thirdly, *metatextuality* deals with

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[125] While Genette's name regularly appears in a row with Kristeva, Barthes, and Riffaterre, his works are essentially different at least with regard to their intention to explain actual, verifiable text-text relations; see Morgan 30.

[126] Genette *Palimpseste* 9; see also Hallet 55, Müller *Intermedialität* 100, Orosz 13, Orr 106, and Pfister "Konzepte" 16-17.

[127] Genette returns to this particular type of reference in his later book *Seuils*, which explores in detail the various forms and functions of possible paratexts, including authors' names, chapter headings, reviews, prefaces etc.

[128] See also Hebel 146.

critical comments on other texts: without necessarily quoting other sources directly, texts may implicitly evaluate their form or content and turn this (critical) evaluation into a factor influencing their own characteristics. *Hypertextuality*, which Genette establishes as the main focus of his book, describes texts that use other texts as a basis for imitation, adaptation, sequel, parody etc.[129] In this case, texts either express already existing contents in a new style or employ already existing stylistic conventions to transport new ideas. As a consequence, this reworking of textual structures requires an awareness of generic formulae. Finally, on another meta-level, Genette calls references directed at whole genres rather than at individual texts *architextuality*.[130] Here, he is more concerned with the explicit mentioning of labels such as "tragedy" or "novel" than with the reference to and reworking of genre conventions. As a consequence, the way he approaches this category does not correspond with the intertextual pattern earlier labeled *system reference*, which will play a more important role in systematizing intertextuality in *The Simpsons*, however.

Although Genette's model is probably the most widely quoted descriptive approach to intertextuality, I see several problems that noticeably reduce its value for a functional analysis of a highly referential text like *The Simpsons*. Genette further complicates the terminological field of intertextual analyses by replacing *intertextuality* with *transtextuality*,[131] and by attributing a very limited perspective to the word *intertextuality* – a step that hardly offers new insights, but leads to confusion whenever different models are brought together to explain a given instance of intertextuality. Moreover, he introduces a multitude of other labels that are far from unambiguous[132] and that add to the problem of confusing terminologies, especially since most of the prefixes he applies – *trans-*, *hyper-*, *architextual* – are not self-explanatory in this context.

Finally, his categories mix descriptive and functional aspects: while *intertextuality* and *architextuality* predominantly describe the form certain references can have, *hypertextuality* and especially *metatextuality* focus on the additional messages a reference can convey – and thus on functions *intertextual* or *architextual* references, for example, can have. *Paratextuality* then combines descriptive and functional aspects, but hardly even belongs to a discussion of intertextuality as most other scholars would have it, as it does not consider references to other cultural texts. Genette himself takes into account that even the most elaborate system of categories can only have a descriptive function because most intertextual relations combine elements of different groups,[133] yet he – like others – does not help to minimize the

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[129] See also Hutcheon *Parody* 21.

[130] Still/Worton 22.

[131] See Orosz 13. Others, however, praise him for providing exactly the clarification so desperately needed in the discussion of intertextuality; see Morgan 28.

[132] One has to admit that Genette shows a certain distance towards the value of his own neologisms and thus towards the sometimes too abstract theoretical discussion of intertextuality (Still/Worton 22).

[133] *Palimpseste* 18.

blurring of criteria as he breaks up the logical connections between certain forms and certain functions in favor of a new terminology that will hardly pass the test of actual application.

For two main reasons, I instead choose a model developed by Udo J. Hebel as a guideline for listing and explaining those features of intertextual references that are likely to influence the functions intertextuality can have in *The Simpsons*: on the one hand, his list of criteria for describing text-text relations is more conclusive than others'; on the other, he explicitly includes the *function* as a separate aspect and thus avoids the pitfalls of blending descriptive and functional aspects. Approaching intertextual features under the heading of *allusion*,[134] Hebel comes up with a system of seven analytical categories. He stresses that "a successful allusion does not simply direct the reader to another text on a purely referential level" (138). Instead, he emphasizes that allusions transport additional semantic information to the alluding text, which in turn may evoke "unlimited and unpredictable" (138) connections to other texts. He also puts the reader's "active participation" (140) at the center of the intertextual process, but then offers a fine-tuned system of tools that may support the act of intertextual (and meta-textual) reading "independent from the interpreter's individual disposition" (141).

Firstly, he differentiates between three forms of *syntagmatic manifestation*: onomastic allusions use characters' names to create a reference to another text,[135] titular allusions instead evoke another text's title, and quotational allusions appear in the shape of marked or unmarked quotations. Although Hebel is mainly interested in written texts, the subcategories and narrative implications he describes also apply to other media. For example, *The Simpsons* includes at least one very present onomastic allusion: the name of Charles Montgomery Burns points towards Charles Foster Kane of *Citizen Kane*, a relation that is emphasized later in the series in an episode named "Rosebud" (EP 5-4), among others.[136] While these three types of references will probably account for the majority of intertextual relations found in written texts, the representational possibilities in audiovisual media certainly offer various additional options for activating other texts (chapter 2.5 will address this issue in closer detail). Nevertheless, Hebel here creates awareness for some of the most common intertextual phenomena and for the different effects they might produce.

Secondly, the *localization* of allusions adds to the sensitivity for different types of references. Separating allusions that appear in the paratext – e.g., in an episode title – from ones that are part of the external or internal system of communication, Hebel stresses the

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[134] For a complex working definition of *allusion*, which includes many aspects that let the concept appear largely congruent to a less universal understanding of *intertextuality*, see Perri 295. Ben-Porat defines *allusion* as "a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts" (107).

[135] See also Perri 291-292/298, who emphasizes that most often allusions in the shape of characters' names do not necessarily evoke a whole complex characterization, but only single, prominent features. See also Helbig *Markierung* 34/113-115.

[136] See subchapter 3.2.3.

possibly different impact of references which the fictional characters are aware of in contrast to those that influence the fictional world without being part of it. As a short example of internal communication in *The Simpsons*, when Lisa quotes Shakespeare or Ginsberg, it becomes obvious that her being aware of the literary sources is part of an intertextual characterization process that sets her off against the other, less educated members of her family. In contrast, a reference that only involves the producers and recipients of an episode and excludes the protagonists – an obvious example would be a musical reference in the episode soundtrack – belongs to the external communication system and thus entirely depends on the viewer's familiarity with the source text. In his "Grammar of Quotation" ("Intertextualities" 8),[137] Heinrich F. Plett addresses another aspect that might as well be subsumed under the heading of *localization* (although he uses the label *distribution*): the intratextual arrangement of quotations can have an enormous impact on the way the quotation influences the reception of a text. A quotation at the beginning of a text (title, motto)[138] will probably guide the reader along certain lines in the reading process, while a concluding quotation at the end may initiate a re-evaluation of the already-read. The various middle positions may each allow "a broad range of quotational variants" (11); therefore, their interpretation requires further assessment.

Hebel's third item, the *dimension* of allusions, is intended to specify aspects of time, space, and thematic area of a reference. Thus, whereas references to contemporary texts may create an atmosphere of realism, they may also be less comprehensible than references to well-known texts from earlier times, such as the Bible, a fairy tale, or a Shakespeare play. Manfred Pfister similarly differentiates between the impacts of synchronic and diachronic references under the heading of *communicativity* ("Konzepte" 27; my translation),[139] which concentrates on the degree to which the producer of a text expects the recipient to share his knowledge of the original text and to experience the full effect of the intertextual reference. Clearly marked references to famous texts from world literature or widely-read contemporary works are, therefore, more intertextual[140] than allusions that only few readers would notice.

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[137] In his essay, Plett chooses *quotation* as one possible intertextual phenomenon among many and thus opts for a referential tool that is "well known outside of scholarly discourse […and] made up of a rather specific cluster of features, which makes it an almost ideal object for an intertextual case study" ("Intertextualities" 8). Moreover, he stresses its "segmental character" (9), i.e. its ability to transport more than just the immediate code of the quoted segment, but also elements of its prior co- and context. (Following Hebel, I differentiate between *cotext* as the immediate textual surroundings of a given word, phrase, sentence, etc., and *context* as the larger factors that shape the existence of a text, such as conditions of production and reception, historical backgrounds, means of publication etc. Plett uses the term context where I would speak of cotext.) As a consequence, the six categories Plett establishes to further define the characteristics of quotations can easily be transferred to other, less obvious intertextual connections.

[138] Here, Genette's category of *paratextuality* becomes relevant again.

[139] Original: "Kommunikativität."

[140] While Manfred Pfister's terminological catalogue of six qualitative and two quantitative criteria is also highly regarded as an important step towards describing actual text-text relations, its value for the present study is limited as it is designed to measure the intensity of a text's intertextuality, gradually moving from a clearly intentional descriptive form as the highest possible intensity towards an almost universal understanding as the

Comparably, geographical or linguistic entities are spatial factors that can influence the inter-textual act of reading: for instance, a reference to a European work in an American text may evoke certain effects just because of its country of origin. The area of reference, which Hebel demands to "be left particularly open to modification" (149), tries to categorize certain fields of social/cultural discourse that may supply sources of inspiration. Hebel names, among oth-ers, literature, religion, history, politics, philosophy, sports, folklore, and mythology, but also highlights the importance of popular culture (including pulp fiction, music, movies) for the analysis of intertextuality in twentieth century texts. Due to its animated, audiovisual form, *The Simpsons* can potentially combine a great variety of (areas of) sources; therefore, it will be essential to understand the different functions made possible by this variety.

As a fourth criterion, Hebel investigates *modifications* of allusions: he stresses that quotations and other references do not always enter a text in exactly the same shape they have in the original cotext. Beyond changes made necessary by grammar or style, he de-tects a potential for alterations that create new meaning with the help of dissonance and dis-tortion. More specifically, Plett differentiates between exact, unchanged quotations and dif-ferent types and intensities of alterations (with different effects).[141] He describes citational deviations in the shape of "addition, subtraction, substitution, permutation, and repetition" ("Intertextualities" 9), all of which point towards a certain message that evolves from the ten-sion between the original text and its now altered version. For example, when Marge won-ders where to start her own pretzel business in the episode "The Twisted World of Marge Simpson" (EP 8-11), a franchise salesman gives her the following advice: "Wherever a young mother is ignorant of what to feed her baby – you'll be there. Wherever nacho penetration is less than total – you'll be there. Wherever a Bavarian is not quite full – you'll be there." His words are modeled on the famous speech delivered by Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*;[142] however, the change from a speech listing instances of injustice and hardship to an illustra-tion of insatiable consumption ironically subverts a housewife's quest for respect in compari-son to the struggle to survive of a whole social class driven from their land.

The fifth category, *semantic meaning*, "contents itself with a less formal and more verbally descriptive assessment of the lexical, suggestive, and connotative meaning of allu-sive signals" (Hebel 153). As he explores the way allusions are semantically integrated in the new cotext, Hebel decides that the multitude of options in this area renders a theoretical divi-sion into all-inclusive groups impossible and not even desirable. Nevertheless, he points out that the degree to which an allusion merges with its "new" surroundings influences the level

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least intense manifestation ("Konzepte" 25-30). (He is aware of the impossibility of actually "measuring" inter-textual intensity in a statistical sense, though.) For a functional analysis of intertextuality in *The Simpsons*, in most cases it will be negligible if an episode is "more or less intertextual." Instead, the effects of single or mul-tiple references in their respective cotexts will receive the major attention.

[141] Plett calls this criterion the *quality* of quotations ("Intertextualities" 9-10).

[142] For the original wording, see Steinbeck 537. See also Irwin/Lombardo 88-89.

of dependence on the individual reader's awareness of the intertextual potential and the way a text may change (or even lose) its intertextual implications in the course of time. Pfister considers a similar idea when he speaks of *referentiality* ("Konzepte" 26; my translation)[143] and points out the difference between *using* and *referring to* another text. A quotation, for example, that perfectly blends in with the new text and virtually slips by the reader unnoticed without adding any special meaning will develop less intertextual impact with a smaller fraction of the audience than a quotation that is unmistakably marked as a quotation and commented on by its new co- and context. In case of *The Simpsons*, it seems to be promising – especially in view of the show's ability to entertain viewers of extremely different educational backgrounds – to further investigate in how far the semantic arrangement influences the possible functions of references and if it changes as the series progresses.

Sixthly, *cotextualization* – as opposed to *context*, *cotext* is explicitly defined as intratextual lexical or structural surroundings – observes the allusive elements in the new situation they have been placed in. Plett describes this aspect as *interference* and acknowledges the potential conflict between the two cotexts of a quoted element,[144] which "are *per definitionem* non-identical" ("Intertextualities" 11; his italics): the text from which the quoted words originally stem and the text of which they are now a part – as a quotation. More precisely, *cotextualization* (or *interference*) considers the text situated immediately around a reference and the situation and attitude of the narrator or characters introducing the allusion. Plett lists some of the most obvious conflicting characteristics, such as differences in language, dialect, sociolect, register etc.; however, in an (animated) audiovisual medium, the interference can additionally be heightened through changes in color, sound, volume, speed, visual technique, camera position, and style, among others. An altered cotext can have various effects; for instance, an ironic or sarcastic statement surrounding an allusion may not only express a negative attitude towards the source text, but may also create an intertextual function that works only because of the opposition of the alluded and alluding texts. A complex example from *The Simpsons* is the poem "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus in the mouth of police chief Wiggum (EP 7-23): the poem, known as the motto engraved on the plinth of the Statue of Liberty, is recited in a very sarcastic way when the officer reads out the order of deportations of illegal immigrants: "First, we'll be rounding up your tired, then your poor, then your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."[145] In this case, the character is not aware of the ironic dissonance created by the crass turnaround in the message of the poem; there-

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[143] Original: "Referentialität."

[144] When Pfister mentions this aspect, he returns to Bakhtin's theory and calls his criterion *dialogism* ("Konzepte" 29; my translation; original: "Dialogizität"). It examines the degree of conflicting attitudes between the source and the new text, with texts that question, contradict, or undermine their precursors being more intertextual than supportive or confirming texts.

[145] For the original wording, see Lazarus ll. 10-11. See also Gray 64, and Turner 333.

fore, the cotext in general expresses a confirming (and reminding) attitude towards the (intended) message of the Statue of Liberty.

Before we approach the level of *functions* in Hebel's seventh category, two further aspects ought to be included in order to round off the collection of descriptive criteria needed to evaluate the impact of intertextual references. The first involves the quantitative criterion of *frequency*, which both Pfister and Plett name in their systems. Plett observes a dependency between the frequency of quotations and their impact on the quoting text. He suspects that quotations in short sequence will influence the new text more strongly than only sparsely distributed intertextual connectors. While for many texts this observation seems easy to prove, the opposite may be the case when a single quotation in an exposed position (e.g., in the title) determines the reception of the whole text.

The second additional aspect can best be classified under Pfister's term *structurality* ("Konzepte" 28; my translation)[146] as it considers the structural similarities between the alluding text and its source. Again, both Pfister and Plett point out that the extent – Plett uses the word *quantity* ("Intertextualities" 9) – of intertextual references may cover the range from single words or phrases to entire source texts. Texts whose structures are closely based on other texts are frequently more obviously intertextual than texts that include only single, selective references. Thus, genres like parody, travesty, and especially translation are all extremely intertextual, although the effect of their intertextuality greatly differs.

Elaborating upon Manfred Pfister's introduction of the *system reference* concept[147] – which evolves as the next logical step after considering structural similarities – Wolfgang Karrer develops a system intended to further differentiate between intertextual intensities in the field between references to individual texts and whole genres. He proposes four levels of decreasing intensity in the relations to both individual and generic sources: first, a text may take over elements (i.e. words, characters, music etc.) *and* structures (i.e. syntax, chapter structure, plot lines etc.) from another text. As the next, respectively reduced steps, it could only employ elements, or only structures, or neither. As a consequence, Karrer defines a reference to the elements and structure of an individual text as the highest possible intertextual intensity, and the reference to a whole system of text that does not evoke any elements or structural features as the least intense option – an example could be the mere mentioning of "Shakespeare's sonnets" in a novel.[148]

Similar references can be found in *The Simpsons*: in the episode "Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie" (EP 4-6), for instance, Lisa diagnoses Bart's slipping into "the demented melancholia of a Tennessee Williams heroine" because he is not allowed to watch the new cartoon

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[146] Original: "Strukturalität."
[147] Pfister "Systemreferenz" 52-58.
[148] Karrer 114.

movie. Without any further connection to content elements or structural features of Williams' plays, the reference evokes a typical characteristic in order to make use of already established literary conventions which describe mixed emotions of desperation, hatred, and guilt combined with a sense of exaggeration, all in one signifier that conveys information which would require complex descriptions if communicated otherwise. Fortunately, Karrer does not deny the "existence of different transitions or mixed forms, which complicate the strict scaling and systematizing in applied text analysis" (108; my translation).[149] He regards his model as a descriptive tool that can support the more precise understanding of the impact a particular type of reference can have in contrast to other possible relations.

In sum, the first six categories of Hebel's model and the two additional aspects derived from Plett, Pfister, and Karrer foster sensitivity for the different forms and intensities of intertextual relations and thus help to describe and understand their functional impacts classified in Hebel's seventh category. Here, he approaches the field that is most important to my own study: the *function* of allusions. He prompts the scholar to become "the allusively competent, truly informed reader who strives to fill the structure of the text's implied reader as comprehensively as possible" (156) in order to fully activate the text's intertextual potential. He establishes three functional subcategories: intratextual, metatextual, and intertextual functions. While the intratextual functions include the support of themes, characterizations, and atmospheric backgrounds, as well as the foreshadowing of events, metatextual functions can be comments on other texts that go beyond their content and consider, e.g., their structural or generic features. Intertextual functions, according to Hebel, are mainly concerned with the so-called "reality effect" (157), i.e. with the authentication of fictional works with the help of references to (contemporary) elements of the outside world.

This three-step order of functions seems like a promising start for a systematic approach to functions of intertextuality in *The Simpsons*; especially the idea of *intratextual functions*[150] will make its way into my own analyses virtually unchanged (chapter 3.2). Beyond that, however, Hebel's approach has two major shortcomings: first, Hebel ignores that a metatextual function is not necessarily limited to statements about other texts, but may also have a level where intertextual relations refer back to the alluding text's own characteristics. As a consequence, I will expand this type to *self- and meta-reflexive functions* (chapter 3.4) in order to include intertextual comments on the alluding as well as on the alluded-to text, genre, or medium. Second, the intertextual function of authentication is obviously too limited in scope, as it seems unlikely that the often invoked dialogue between texts can be reduced to the effect that the newer text appears "more real." In my analyses, I will therefore change

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[149] Original: "Existenz von verschiedenen Übergangs- und Mischformen, die in der praktischen Textanalyse die strenge Skalierung oder Systematisierung so komplizieren."

[150] Similarly, Wolf speaks of *intracompositional functions* in the context of intermediality, see "Mediality" 31.

this category to *extratextual functions*[151] (chapter 3.3) – which also prevents terminological ambiguities – and consider a broader field of effects that lie beyond the borders of the alluding text.

Now that Hebel's system has brought us to a point where the awareness of the different characteristics intertextual references can have has segued into a rough clustering of possible functions, an essay by Bernd Schulte-Middelich may serve as an exemplary venture into a detailed functional analysis of intertextuality. He develops a complex system of functions only, thus adding a new dimension to the framework established by Hebel, Pfister, Plett, Karrer, and others. As a precondition, he narrows down his understanding of intertextuality to the conscious communication process that makes functions possible:

> In the field of literary production, intertextual procedures are developed in relation to the recipient. Necessary prerequisites are intentionality, on the one hand, and recognizability of intertextual procedures ensured by consciously deployed signals, on the other. Decisive results are multiple codings, additional structures, or more complex meanings in the text (206; my translation).[152]

Starting from two more general potentially functional oppositions already mentioned before – the difference between affirmative and critical attitudes towards source texts and the reinterpretation of classical or contemporary texts[153] – Schulte-Middelich then introduces four main types of functions and a network of several sub-categories for each (214). The first function focuses on the pretext, which receives at least one additional code level. In type two, the additional coding shifts to the new/later text; type three describes a semantic change for both texts. Type four then leaves the level of the texts involved and assumes an intertextually created "meta-message" that exists more or less independently of the textual origin.[154] Schulte-Middelich then further differentiates between exemplary subcategories for the four types, such as the contrast between singular functions (e.g., to create a consciousness of certain topical aspects), superordinate functions (e.g., to discuss a text's philosophical implications as a whole), or playful functions (e.g., intertextual play for the sake of entertainment).[155] Selecting singular functions as an example, he then shows how it is possible to define further levels of differentiation between affirming, neutral, and critical attitudes, the latter being split up again into criticism of form, content, or both, and so forth.

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[151] Here, too, Wolf speaks of *extracompositional functions* in the context of intermediality, see "Mediality" 31.

[152] Original: "Im Bereich literarischer Produktion werden intertextuelle Verfahren Rezipienten-bezogen funktionalisiert. Notwendige Voraussetzung sind Intentionalität einerseits und durch bewußt gesetzte Signale gewährleistete Erkennbarkeit der intertextuellen Verfahren andererseits; entscheidende Folge sind Mehrfachkodierungen, Zusatzstrukturierungen oder Sinnkomplexionen im Text."

[153] See also Rose *Ancient* 45-47.

[154] Schulte-Middelich's four types thus largely correspond with the three categories of intratextual, extratextual, and self- or meta-reflexive functions.

[155] See also Morawski 695, and Weise 40.

Here, Schulte-Middelich stops developing a complex theoretical model because he is anxious about losing himself in the listing of levels and categories. Instead, he finds exemplary texts for the four basic types and shows how it is possible to track down functions once the intentionality of the author, the active part of the reader, and the mutual dialogue between source text and new text are established as necessary prerequisites. Although his work thus cannot provide a complete framework of functions that could be applied to other texts – such as *The Simpsons* – it nevertheless points out ways through the vast jungle of imaginable intertextual functions.

As the theoretical and methodological concepts presented above reveal, the attempt to turn from a global understanding of intertextuality to a more applicable, text-analytical approach does not necessarily result in a unified, unambiguous terminology. Most researchers basically agree on a number of aspects that seem to be essential to define and understand intertextuality: intentionality, attitude, position, marking/clarity, aesthetics of production and reception, individual vs. system references, to name only the most prominent ones. Since these aspects interrelate with each other and with other influential factors in various ways, it is hardly feasible (and potentially impossible) to strive for *one* all-encompassing methodological system that pre-defines every imaginable intertextual relation – only a simple sources-and-analogues analysis could be applied to every kind of reference.

Nevertheless, the theories presented in this chapter provide a set of tools that can be combined to gain as much insight as possible into the processes and functions of intertextuality. In order to grasp fully how intertextuality works, we need to approach it in a way that "not only secures evidence, but integrates the different intertextual references in a text, the interplay of different intertextual practices and their functions" (Pfister, "Konzepte" 19; my translation).[156] What seems more relevant than a holistic intertextual theory is an approach that conjoins the most essential insights of this intertextual theory with an awareness of the peculiarities of a multimedial television text. Therefore, the next chapter approaches the questions of references that occur in media which address more than one sense, and of references that cross borders from one medium to another.

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[156] Original: "nicht einfach Spurensicherung bedeuten muß, sondern die Integration der verschiedenen intertextuellen Bezüge eines Textes, das Zusammenspiel der verschiedenen intertextuellen Verfahren und deren Funktionen."

2.3   Intertextuality and Intermediality

An aspect that is likely to be overlooked[157] – especially in light of a delimited understanding of *text*[158] – is that the theories presented so far are almost exclusively concerned with works of literature. They deal with written texts that refer to other written texts. *The Simpsons*, however, is a TV show that refers to visual media[159] like written texts, comics, sculptures, and paintings; to auditory media like music and radio broadcasts; as well as to mixed forms like films, TV programs, and stage productions.[160] Accordingly, the show employs various ways of hinting at other texts: apart from the simple quotation of written or spoken words,[161] it uses pictures, movements, music, camera angles, and sound effects; it turns words into images and images into words.[162] The characteristics of intertextuality introduced above form a valuable first step towards understanding what intertextual relations can be and can do from the author's as well as the reader's perspective. However, since it is my intention to move beyond the rather vague and unsystematic listings of intertextual "events" in *The Simpsons* found in much other writing, it seems promising to expand – and at the same time narrow down – the theoretical framework to a concept that acknowledges the particularities of an animated TV show.

As a more precise sub-category of intertextuality, *intermediality* appears to be the term most suitable to support the analysis of the multimedial relations[163] possible in animation, as it can be expected (and arranged) to consider the options that develop in the relations between cultural works alongside the development of their technologies of production and distribution.[164] Given the rapidly emerging possibilities of medial forms influenced by the technological advances of the 20th and 21st centuries, intermediality is likely to be the more relevant concept for cultural studies, in general, since the written text may turn out to be hardly more than just one narrative device among many: "In the future, 'intermediality,' i.e.,

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[157] To be fair, some scholars, like Genette, who strived for applicability of his methodological instruments to all kinds of media, revealed an early awareness of the necessity to develop an understanding of intertextuality that goes beyond the relations between written texts; see Morgan 34.

[158] See Paech 15.

[159] For an introduction to the problem of defining *medium* in the context of intermediality, see Füger 41-43, Müller *Intermedialität* 81-82, or Wolf "Mediality" 17-19. Paech also approaches this difficult task and – like Wolf – especially calls attention to the fact that any medium (like any genre) can only be examined in its manifestation in individual texts (23; see also Eiermann 266).

[160] Lindvall/Melton emphasize that even the earliest cartoons already displayed a tendency to refer extensively to other texts within and outside their own medium (207).

[161] Written and spoken language are sometimes regarded as one *verbal* medium, which then, however, blurs the fact that verbal language can be employed to radically different ends (mimetic vs. poetic, descriptive vs. associative) in different medial circumstances; see Füger 44/54.

[162] Chapter 2.5 will address this issue in closer detail.

[163] See also Füger 42, Huber/Keitel/Süß 1, Müller "Medienhistoriographie" 38-39, Neumann/Nünning 15, Plett "Intertextualities" 20, Rajewsky "Potential" 20, Wagner 17, and Wolf "Intermedialität" 165. Hallet even proposes to entirely replace intertextuality with intermediality, since he believes all discourses to exceed the borders of any one given medium (59).

[164] See also Garncarz 244, and Hickethier "Intermedialität" 450.

the intertextuality between different media, may be of particular importance, giving new stimuli to American Studies by opening up new and exciting procedures of dialogic teaching and research" (Heller 655).[165]

However, although the concept of intermediality avoids some of the uncertainties that make intertextuality a label difficult to apply without ambiguity, it involves other problematic areas that need to be clarified before the term actually becomes helpful in the discussion of relations between different media.[166] First of all, there is a fundamental inconsistency as to what intermediality actually means: sometimes, the combination of different medial forms of expression alone is labeled intermediality,[167] which is then defined as "…the verifiable utilization or inclusion in one artifact of at least two media of expression or communication that are conventionally regarded as distinct" (Nünning, *Literaturtheorie* 107; my translation).[168] The problem with this definition is that it inevitably includes works that already consist of more than one medial component, like songs, films, stage plays, comics, or operas. All these media have in common that they combine at least two different communication channels – which can address one or more sense organs – and merge those channels' specific characteristics in order to transport one unified message.[169] The ratio of the two media involved can range from an obvious subordination (picture stories, films with only little sound) to a co-existence of equally important forms (opera, musical). Accordingly, a television show like *The Simpsons* already constitutes an intermedial text in itself, combining moving and still pictures, spoken and written words, music, and sound effects. Their interplay, however, is not the main focus here, but the show's relations to external sources, which again can have various medial forms and which can also be intermedial compositions.

In other cases, researchers speak of intermediality when they analyze adaptations – like stage and film productions of dramatic texts, or songs based on poems and short stories[170] – and highlight the narrative and descriptive changes that occur due to the respective medial characteristics. The less commonly used labels *media transfer* and *media transformation* show that intermediality here relates to certain modes of production that involve a change in the forms of medial representation,[171] while it does not necessarily consider the potential difference in the relation between the two texts: does the adaptation only clothe a

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[165] See also Hess-Lüttich 131, and Paech 14.

[166] See also Jürgen E. Müller's call for caution with regard to the use of the term *intermediality* ("Medienhistoriographie" 31).

[167] See Garncarz 244, Müller "Konzept" 31, Paech 18-19, Rajewsky "Potential" 27, Rajewsky "Remediation" 53, Rieger 61, Wolf "Intermedialität" 168, and Wolf "Mediality" 19.

[168] Original: "…in einem Artefakt nachweisliche Verwendung oder Einbeziehung wenigstens zweier konventionell als distinkt angesehener Ausdrucks- oder Kommunikationsmedien."

[169] Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 15-16.

[170] See, for example, Horst Zander's analysis of the adaptation of Shakespeare's works for stage, film, music, and other art productions (180-192).

[171] See also Paech 15-16, Rajewsky "Potential" 27, Rajewsky "Remediation" 53, Wolf "Intermedialität" 168/171, and Wolf "Mediality" 22.

virtually unchanged text in a new medial appearance, or does it use the different modes of communication to position the new work in opposition to or as a distortion of the original source? Yet, although some *Simpsons* episode plots are more or less loosely based on already existing text,[172] cartoon adaptation is clearly not what predominantly happens on the show: it is the inclusion of selected aspects of other works into a new text that achieves the effects *The Simpsons* is most famous for.

Second, even if we decide to attribute only marginal importance to the two alternative readings of intermediality and focus on the intertextual[173] references of one text to another, which is, in addition, an instance of a different medium,[174] conceptual gray areas persist. Part of the problem is that intermediality was first and in richest detail discussed at the margins of literary studies, namely as a framework for analyzing relations between written fiction and different other media: filmic writing, musical literature and other intermedial (genre) labels[175] dominate the theoretical discussion of intermedial features. While text-image or text-sound relations are a frequent and legitimate example of intermedial influences, the specific characteristics of written texts made many scholars deduce rules that are actually too restrictive for the broad understanding of intermediality needed here: the reference of any medium to any other medium. For instance, Jörg Helbig insists that one essential defining criterion of intermediality is that the referring text cannot reproduce the medial characteristics of the referred-to medium.[176]

While this is true for written texts – a novel can only remind the reader of what a film looks like, it cannot look like a film – other media (especially those that already have an intermedial form)[177] may be less restricted in that respect. Especially animation with its virtually unlimited means of visual and auditory communication[178] expands the borders of intermedial

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[172] Episodes that fall into the category of adaptation or are at least closely modeled on already existing texts are, for example, "Das Bus" (EP 9-14), which is based on the novel *Lord of the Flies*, the animated version of the movie *Cape Fear* (EP 5-2), or the cartoon interpretation of Edgar Allen Poe's poem "The Raven" in the Halloween episode "Treehouse of Horror" (EP 2-3).

[173] It may seem at least a bit ironic to use the word *intertextual* to differentiate between different definitions of intermediality; however, whenever intermediality describes works that consist of, e.g., pictures and written text, these works are not necessarily intertextual. Adaptations, on the other hand, are *always* intertextual, as they inevitably evoke a connection between two visibly distinct cultural manifestations. Nevertheless, since those are manifestations of more or less the "same" text, their intermedial implications are frequently reduced to distortions that occur as a result of changes in the medial mode of representation. Intermediality of the third kind – intermedial references – goes beyond questions of representation as it includes aspects that involve representational characteristics of different media as well as narrative/formal/interpretive characteristics of different (source) texts.

[174] Werner Wolf chooses a different arrangement as he uses *intertextuality* only for relations between written texts and consequently classifies it under *intramediality*; see "Intermedialität" 167. However, especially if we acknowledge the more global roots of the concept of intertextuality, it seems more appropriate to maintain *intertextuality* as the most comprehensive superordinate category.

[175] See, for example, Hurst 242, and Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 17.

[176] "Erzählen" 131. See also Rajewsky "Potential" 35.

[177] Adding to the confusion, but maybe even using the better word, Helbig calls those media *multimedial* ("Erzählen" 131). See also Müller *Intermedialität* 83, and Wolf "Intermedialität" 172-173.

[178] See chapter 2.5.

referencing: an animated show can refer to an opera by playing its music, it can refer to a book by showing written words on the screen, it can refer to a film by imitating a noticeable camera angle or even by including live action frames into its flow.[179] Consequently, a concept of intermediality that is meant to include all possible intermedial relations cannot restrict itself to the limits of single-sign media.

Furthermore, the problem of marked vs. unmarked references which is already central to many discussions of intertextuality (in written texts) becomes even more complicated in the case of intermedial relations. Animation and other audiovisual media lack the option to mark references with the help of simple visual signals like quotation marks or printing in italics.[180] The preceding chapter already introduced several potential markers that can be employed in animation (and other media) and that tend to be more complex than mere punctuation devices. As a consequence, an intermedial analytical approach requires a broad awareness of what could function as a marker, especially since overtly intermedial texts often include additional markers of a more narrative nature. For example, in more recent animated sitcoms like *The Critic* and *Family Guy*, characters frequently seem to be aware of their intermedial surroundings and show peculiar behavior before or during the occurrence of a reference as they pause, look into the camera, or even wink at the audience.

In addition, the existence of markers does not solve another problem caused – in part – by the intermingled definitions of intermediality: in multimedial texts that integrate a multitude of other media it becomes increasingly difficult to determine which particular text is the source of an intermedial reference. For example, the segment "The Shinning" in the episode "Treehouse of Horror V" (EP 6-6) is obviously based on *The Shining*,[181] but what is its main source of inspiration, Stephen King's novel or Stanley Kubrick's movie adaptation? Visual material modeled on the medially similar movie clearly dominates the segment; as a consequence, it seems questionable if the original novel has had any direct influence on the cartoon adaptation. However, in how far does the movie (sub)consciously evoke the novel, and how much is then transported to the animated show as "second-hand influence"?

Film versions are often not only adapted from one single text, but also include references to other texts by the same author, to other intermedial productions of his texts, or to texts written by other authors who are in some way linked to the original source.[182] In many

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[179] See also Darley 17, and Lindvall/Melton 212. In the episode "Treehouse of Horror VI" (EP 7-6), for example, Homer's adventure after entering a worm hole ends in a real world back alley and he is filmed walking the streets of some American city with startled pedestrians staring at him. Similarly, in a medial twist, the *Family Guy* episode "Road to Rupert" includes a two-minute scene where one of the drawn characters enters a live-action shot and receives a dance lesson from Gene Kelly. The segment is part of a medial break in the live-action movie *Anchors Aweigh* in which Gene Kelly meets with a group of animated animals and teaches the Mouse King how to dance. Just like the animated characters were annexed in the movie, the live-action scene now becomes part of an animated story.

[180] See chapter 2.2.

[181] This reference will be discussed more extensively in subchapter 3.4.4.

[182] Zander 186.

cases it can become difficult to single out one particular source; in other cases several manifestations of the "same" text may provide inspiration for a referential moment, which then makes it difficult to separate them from each other. Still, the combination of distinct source texts in yet another target medium can also create a framework for intermedial references that highlight the differences in the way a similar story is told in various media and thus also help to emphasize the target medium's own abilities and weaknesses.

Finally, if intermediality is to consider the characteristics of specified media, their relations to each other, and the effects that develop where their characteristics conflate, it cannot do so without adding a temporal dimension. On the one hand, media conventions do not exist as fixed sets of characteristics, but evolve in the course of time and in co-dependence of other media.[183] The voice-over narrator in a movie, for instance, might once have been regarded as an indicator of a literary source text; meanwhile, it has become a common stylistic device that does not need literary support.[184] On the other hand, technological progress changes media characteristics and dissolves medial borders.[185] For example, television was once primarily defined in opposition to the cinema with regard to its live production appearance.[186] While this is still part of its medial range, much of recent television programming is closer to a movie production than to a live staging due to the advances of recording technologies. Similarly, the border between "regular" TV/cinema and animation has lost its visible demarcation as computer animation has become a commonplace feature in all kinds of movies and shows, ranging from science fiction to drama.[187] In a time when movies look like animation or comics (*Sin City*) and animation can make an artificial world look as real as a live action movie[188] (*Wall-E*), it becomes increasingly difficult to establish fixed catalogues of medial definitions. As a consequence, any intermedial approach to understanding the functions of medial interrelations needs to be rooted in its historical frame in order to interpret the effects that arise from particular medial constellations at a given point of time.

Nevertheless, as the discussion of the "weaknesses" sketched above shows, intermediality as a specifying sub-category of intertextuality requires and thus promotes additional precision in the description of text-text relations in a multimedial context. Since most intertextual instances in *The Simpsons* match two or even all three possible definitions of intermediality – the show is always a media combination, it is occasionally a media transfer, and it continuously refers to other media or their individual works – it is not necessary to exclude any of them beforehand. While the third type is my main concern and can in fact be expected

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[183] Müller "Konzept" 31.

[184] Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 35.

[185] Müller "Konzept" 37.

[186] See Faulstich 46, Hickethier "Fernsehästhetik" 201, and Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 34.

[187] See Bolz 57, and Rajewsky "Remediation" 58.

[188] See Darley 18-19, and Nichols XII. For further information see Jay David Bolter's essay "Cyberphobia: Digitial Technology and the Intermediality of Cinema at the End of the Millennium."

to provide the most extensive material for a *functional* analysis, the show's multimedial quality and its tendency to test whether known stories can be told in the shape of an animated sitcom will not hinder this functional analysis, but add to the already rich pool of intermedial manifestations to choose from.

Thus, returning to a holistic understanding of intermediality that acknowledges all its ambiguities and shortcomings, the question is what constitutes the additional precision that denotes intermediality relevant in addition to intertextuality for the present research. Irina O. Rajewsky describes three main paths for intermedial combinations to create additional meaning: firstly, the evocation of a different medium's communicative and stylistic abilities points beyond the medial borders of the present text.[189] The suggestion of communicative patterns outside the standard medial frame alone may provide the reader with alternative perspectives of what is being told. For example, if a novel adds the description of a piece of music to the depiction of a particular scenery and indicates their co-operation like in a scene from a movie, the reader will likely combine the medial features of written word, sound, and moving pictures in the reception process without seeing pictures or hearing music.

Secondly, the reference to another medium can also emphasize the receiving medium's characteristics. It is the opposition to what other media can achieve that stresses the limits but also the strengths of the referring medium.[190] Once again using the written word as an example, the description of a landscape in a novel cannot show the reader how the landscape *looks*, but it can tell him what the landscape *looks like*; it can create individual images in individual minds. If this description is made to resemble a film scene, it does not destroy this strength of individual imagination, but stresses it in opposition to the film's strength to show a landscape as realistically as possible. Therefore, intermedial research will have to consider the advantages and shortcomings of the media involved in order to understand the benefit that results from the integration/insinuation of other medial forms.

Thirdly, the actual combination of distinct media in a single text may create additional meaning on the basis of different communication channels. This entails the question if media combinations are necessary for transporting certain messages or if they are at least superior to single-sign media as far as the success of sender-receiver relations is concerned.[191] Rajewsky speaks of *added value* (*Intermedialität* 19) in media combinations that manage to involve the recipient in an artistic experience that could not have been created with only one of the participating media.[192] Taking this thought to the next level, it seems promising also to

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[189] Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 17.

[190] Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 25.

[191] In his introduction to the historical development of a scholarly interest in intermediality, Stefan Rieger describes various attempts to increase sensual experiences by addressing various senses at the same time (so-called *synesthesia*), such as certain machines intended to turn sounds into colors or perceptible impulses (65-69).

[192] See also Garncarz 245.

analyze how already established multimedial forms still find creative power in the measuring of their medial ingredients. Since movies, for instance, are generally expected to consist of visual *and* auditory signs, the sudden absence of a musical score can create radically new impressions for the audience.

Again narrowing down the potentially threefold definition of intermediality, Rajewsky then proceeds to differentiate between three types of intermedial references in order to develop an analytic system that enables the researcher to adequately register, label, and analyze intermedial phenomena and their functions.[193] The first category comprises two types of what Rajewsky calls *intermedial system mentioning*:[194] a text mentions another medium in its entirety either explicitly (type 1) or through indirect transposition (type 2). If a medium is explicitly named without reference to a specific example – if the characters in a sitcom talk about novels in general – the inclusion can indicate that the communicative features of the referred-to medium influence the present text. This can also serve as a marker for further implicit references: a text can also evoke or simulate another medium without naming it, but also without copying it. Here, the text uses its own medial instruments to selectively address a medium and its generic/medial characteristics without explicitly naming it, or to create the illusion that elements of a foreign medium become part of the referring text. Examples include novels or short stories that imitate camera movements and cutting techniques, or movies that use text panels to convey information with the help of literary devices.

The second category still involves references to whole systems, but goes beyond the illusion of a medial transformation. The so-called *intermedial system contamination*[195] again subsumes two possible methods of how a text can generate a connection to a different media system. The term *contamination* is primarily intended to methodologically separate the intermedial attempt to transport generic conventions into a different medium[196] from the "normal" intramedial creation of generic works. A film can become a crime film by adopting the crime film's medial and generic conventions, but a novel cannot become a crime film due to its own medial restrictions – it can only be *contaminated* by elements of the crime film.

On the one hand, this contamination can happen in the shape of an actual transfer of generic characteristics with the help of medial devices that are part of both media's communication systems: since a movie disposes of the same visual and auditory modes as a news report, it can employ, for example, unsteady hand-held camera shots to create the illusion of unstaged, authentic live action. Animation's superior possibilities of extending its own medial

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[193] See Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 78. She is aware of the limitations of her theoretical, systematic criteria and stresses the final competence of actual text analysis to apply a theoretical system in order to ascertain whether particular intermedial narrative strategies generate additional meaning or not.

[194] See Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 79, "Intermediale Systemreferenzen (I): Die 'Systemerwähnung.'"

[195] See Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 118, "Intermediale Systemreferenzen (II): Die 'Systemkontamination.'"

[196] See also Garncarz 244, and Wolf "Intermedialität" 175.

borders by including, for instance, live footage could also be treated as a specialty in this category.

On the other hand, contamination can also arise from an extensive usage of indirect transposition: if large portions of a text are designed to resemble the medial characteristics of an entirely different code system, the foreign medium's rules (and their contrast to its own original codes) become the main driving force. Rajewsky names literary examples that show intense structural homologies to filmic compositions and subordinate their literary conventions to the superimposed pattern of (audio)visual genres.[197]

Third, the last group leaves the more general references to whole media or genre systems and focuses on references to individual texts from other media. Potentially, the representational modes of intermedial single text references correspond to the four types of system references outlined above. In addition, they do not necessarily differ from intramedial intertextual references as long as the target of a reference lies less in the *modes* of communication than in the *content*.[198] If a reference to a fictional character is intended to support the development of another character, it ultimately does not matter if the addressed character appears in a novel or a movie. The audience co-receives the respective elements of another text and generates meaning from them, but is not made to realize further implications that might be hidden in the discrepancy of the two participating media systems.

If, however, the reference also evokes the particular representative circumstances of the referred-to medium, the intermedial reference exceeds its intramedial counterpart by adding the three potential carriers of additional meaning described above. A single source text may become a triple-coded messenger of its individual qualities, its generic attributes, and its medial background. For an individual reference to unfold its full intermedial potential it needs to direct the reader towards its original appearance without necessarily being able to reproduce it. In a written text, it might be sufficient to quote a line from a famous song or TV commercial to make the reader associate it with the corresponding melody or images.[199] In other cases it might be feasible to refer to an individual text and simultaneously mention or evoke its medial context. Correspondingly to the evocation of whole media systems, a reference to "Hannibal Lecter in the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*" can create an illusion in the reader's mind that moves the reception process beyond the representational borders of a given medium. The reader of this exemplary line will not only read and as a result form independent images in his mind, but will resort to previously consumed pictures and sounds from a different medium and use them to make meaning of the written words in front of his eyes.

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[197] Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 147.
[198] Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 150.
[199] Rajewsky *Intermedialität* 150.

In general, both systemic and individual intermedial references can do what other intertextual – i.e. intramedial – references can do: they can position two or more texts or systems of texts in relation to each other, more or less creatively feed off their narrative potential by affirming or questioning their achievements, and thus influence the way the audience approaches the referring as well as the referred-to text. However, intermedial references ask for analytical attention in two additional fields: first, they keep up the possible tension between individual texts or genres, but add the level of tension between different media or their individual instances, respectively. Second, they allow a text from a specific medium to poach in the representational modes of a different medium without necessarily being able to reproduce them.

Especially animation with its almost unlimited visual and auditory representational abilities promises to be a rewarding subject of intermedial analyses. The interest in the functions of these three levels of intermedial relations (see Figure 1), in particular, requires a thorough understanding of what is possible in animation as far as the hinting towards other texts or text systems is concerned. In the vast field of possible intermedial relations, it is therefore necessary for the analyses attempted here to consider the particularities of television, on the one hand, and (TV) animation, on the other. In order to do so, the following chapter will introduce the main medial characteristics of television and the TV series (including questions of audience reception), whereas chapter 2.5 will briefly assess/prefigure the types of intertextual and intermedial references found in animation.
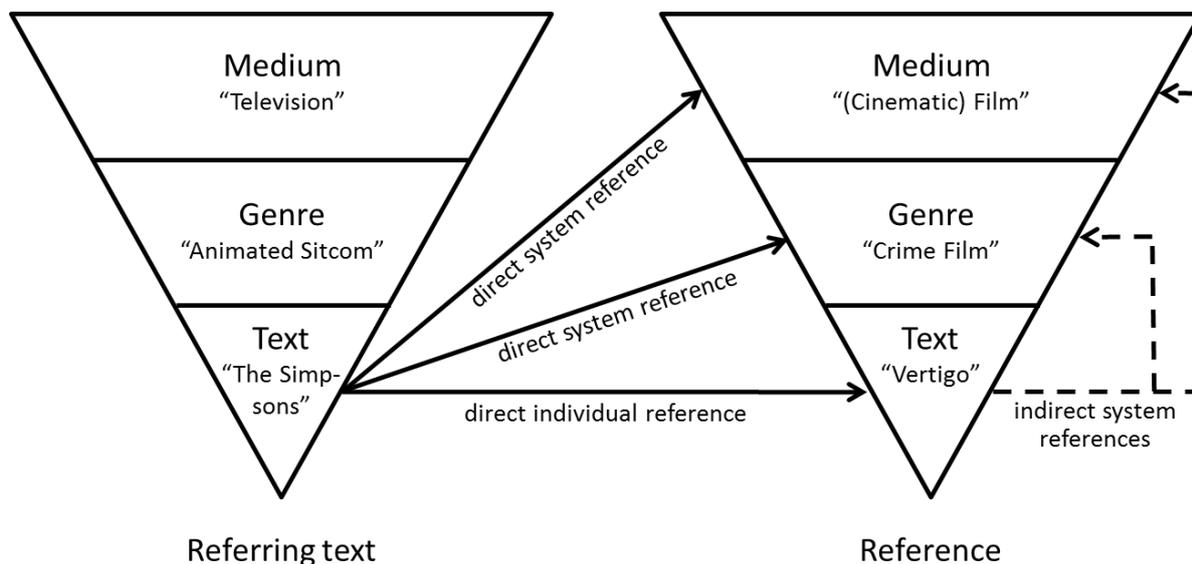

Figure 1: Three levels of intermedial references

2.4 Television as a Site of Intertextual Events

2.4.1 Specifics of Television and the Television Series

Without giving away too much of what can be expected to be among the results of this analysis, it is necessary to say that those who venture to explore intermediality in *The Simpsons* will inevitably notice that the show does not only employ references for the sake of comedy, but that it also continuously abounds with subtle media criticism. Part of it is a critical, self-reflexive attitude towards itself as well as a meta-reflexive view on the sitcom series and television in general. More or less bluntly, the show has addressed most of the issues related to television that are discussed in more "academic" circles as well:

> Debates rage about whether [television] is a waste of time; about whether it has to be run in the way that it is or if it might be organized better; about its coverage of sex, violence, profanity, politics, and social issues; about its stereotyping of minority or underprivileged groups; its role in education and cultural improvement; about the effects of television advertising; and so on. These questions also arise in the context of other mass media but the ubiquity, immediacy and vividness of television put it in the center of all these debates (Barwise/Ehrenberg 3).

While chapter 2.6 will provide an introduction to the theoretical background of self- and meta-reflexive narration, the present subchapter is designed to present and evaluate the essential characteristics of television, on the one hand, and of the television (sitcom) series, on the other. The second subchapter 2.4.2 will then consider the role of the TV audience in the intertextual generation of meaning.

In spite of television being the most omnipresent cultural communication device, the task of summarizing what defines it as a medium is more difficult than it sounds.[200] In contrast to other popular media, like literature or film, television has always had two main functions that are not necessarily easy to combine:[201] on the one hand, from the beginning, it was intended to be a medium of direct communication, a way of transmitting information (about real events or issues) to the population. On the other hand, it has always included elements – like TV plays, made-for-TV movies, and TV series – that do not have this informative mission, but will be judged according to aesthetic considerations and in comparison to other media: "the dominant and conventional way of answering the question 'What is good television?' is to slip television, unnoticeably, transparently, into the already existing aesthetic and social hierarchies" (Brunsdon 60).[202] In addition, the task is complicated by the fact that television tends to adopt all other types of media and genres in order to re-use them with the help of its own

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[200] If we consider Marshall McLuhan's famous statement "the medium is the message" (19), we will need a different medium which contains/represents television to fully understand its characteristics (as another example McLuhan argues that it has become easier to understand the movies since they have become incorporated in television). Thus, the Internet or – as an intermediate step – a *self-reflexive* television program may help to increase our knowledge of television.

[201] Faulstich 44-45.

[202] See also Newcomb/Hirsch 503.

representational codes[203] – the cinema film, the novel, the radio (talk/game) show, the stage play or musical, the radio sitcom, and stand-up comedy are some examples of how quickly typical instances of other media have become commonplaces of TV broadcasting.

A little desperately, Charlotte Brunsdon thus asks, "Can we have a television aesthetic, and do we want one?" (61), only to come up with two further problems: first, how can the word *aesthetic*, which is traditionally laden with images of high culture, be brought together with the most *popular* mass medium of all; second, how can we possibly analyze a medium many of whose text elements disappear the second they meet the viewer's eye?[204] Although solutions have been attempted, scholars agree that the desire of a unified television aesthetics or media theory cannot be and does not need to be at the center of analytical endeavors intended to further the understanding of the characteristics of television.[205]

Nevertheless, it is possible to work out some of the qualities that separate television from other media: Knut Hickethier believes to find them in the program's *peripheral zones*,[206] in the places where specific elements that are unique to television join the otherwise diverse blocks of programming,[207] such as commercials, trailers, and program information. More generally speaking, it is feasible to determine what any viewer would call "typical television" – and these are the factors that can be expected to reappear in *The Simpsons* like in any other text that critically scrutinizes television's communication devices.

First, television is characterized by an urge to be up-to-date: "The temporal dimension of television […] would seem to be that of an insistent 'present-ness' – a '*This-is-going-on*' rather than a '*That-has-been*,' a celebration of the instantaneous" (Doane 222; her italics).[208] The need to constantly represent the present goes hand in hand with a tendency towards fragmentation, simultaneity, and decontextualization. To begin with, viewers have a choice between potentially hundreds of channels.[209] In addition, each channel – especially as far as news and infotainment programming is concerned – also attempts to be everywhere at the same time and consequently needs to sacrifice coherence and in-depth analysis. Television scans the present and around-the-clock transports it – with minimal time lag – into the audience's living rooms.[210] On a social level, this impression of "having one's finger on the pulse

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203 Hickethier "Fernsehästhetik" 202.

204 See also Michaels 616.

205 See Brunsdon 60/61, Doane 223, Faulstich 44, and Hickethier "Fernsehästhetik" 202.

206 See "Fernsehästhetik" 204. Hickethier also emphasizes that for a given TV channel to set itself apart from the surrounding media environment, it needs to focus on shaping the appearance of the padding between the otherwise exchangeable program features.

207 Similarly, Stuart Hall highlights the importance of mass media's "linguistic and ideological structuration" ("Introduction" 118) instead of content in analytic approaches to mass communication.

208 See also Berman 9, and Mellencamp "Time" 242-243.

209 Mellencamp "Prologue" 2-3.

210 See Heath 269, and Hickethier "Fernsehästhetik" 193/196.

of time" turns television into a window to the world, a companion whose presence provides company and inclusion in a secluded space.[211]

Second, TV is torn between its production conditions, which are largely controlled by commercial and political factors, and its ambition to serve as a platform of art and education.[212] The latter particularly accompanied the early years of television when it was regarded as a relatively convenient means of reaching large audiences, especially among disadvantaged segments of the population. Television was and partly is expected to grant "those excluded from legitimate national culture" (Brunsdon 60) literacy, moral education, and a site of cultural expression, thus becoming a "potentially democratic, or socially extensive, transmitter" (59).[213] Moreover, and as a result, television programming is often believed to mirror certain social developments, "a generation, a decade, or a cultural and political moment" (Saenz 574), and thus to function as an easily accessible archive of social currents.

The other side of the coin, however, certainly dominates the impression television makes on modern audiences: the omnipresent commercial breaks – and more recently the diaphanous overlapping of commercial and entertainment content – are only the most obvious indicators of a symbiotic entanglement of business and television. While this fact alone does not justify extensive TV-bashing – other media also serve commercial purposes, and commercial success can also support creative art production – it nevertheless causes a dilemma as it conjures up a conflict with some of television's formerly predominant tasks, information and education. The increasing pursuit of high viewing rates and related advertisement revenues leads to extensive dramatization with the help of, for example, "the high seriousness of music which introduces the news, the rhetoric of the newscaster, the activation of special effects and spectacle in the documentary format" (Doane 225) intended to catch and secure the viewers' attention and stop them from switching channels.

The difficulty of keeping the audience's eyes on the screen is intensified by the (usually) intimate, domestic position of the television set:

> Given the various attractions of the domestic space, viewers' attention may be sporadic. Unlike at the theatre or the cinema, where audiences typically sit in a darkened space constructed to focus their attention on the play or film, most people are engaged in other activities whilst watching television (Nelson 113).

As a consequence, the aim for information is sacrificed in favor of transfiguration, manipulation, serialization, and illusion[214] as television gives in to (part of) the audience's basest, most voyeuristic desires. Ironically, it thus gradually undermines its own medial standards as a

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[211] Mellencamp "Time" 262.

[212] See Barwise/Ehrenberg 7/19, Connell 154, Faulstich 46-47, Hall "Introduction" 121, McLuhan 415, and Meehan "Culture" 563.

[213] A similar democratic impact was earlier expected from the radio; see Spigel 74, and Swingewood 94.

[214] See Doane 222, Faulstich 48, and Swingewood 93.

transmitter of what is recent *and* important as it fosters "a certain slippage between the notion that television covers important events in order to validate itself as a medium and the idea that because an event is covered by television […] it is important" (Doane 222).

What naturally follows this ability to influence public thought[215] and to define what is important and what is not is the danger of political appropriation and propaganda.[216] Although democratic nations are expected to set up regulatory frameworks that minimize censorship and interference with the creative processes of the media, the negative examples of state-controlled television (Iran) or media owned by politicians (Italy) resonate in an occasional fear of a politically reigned "monolithic 'meaning' in television content" (Newcomb/Hirsch 504). Especially since "[m]ass amusements are typically thought to encourage passivity and are represented in terms of penetration, consumption, and escape" (Spigel 86), television seems predestined to be abused for influencing the willing masses with messages of dubious political or social content. Fortunately, however, the diversified television landscape with its hundreds of channels also allows for programs that transmit subversive messages to expanding audiences[217] – here, *The Simpsons* would have to be named as an outstanding example – and thus finally enable the viewer to decide what to choose from the televisual 24-hour, all-you-can-watch buffet.

Before we address the importance of the audience for the development of meaningful messages in closer detail (subchapter 2.4.2), however, *The Simpsons'* tendency to position itself in the tradition of, but also in critical opposition to, the sitcom genre requires an analytical awareness of the specifics of TV serial productions, in general, and the sitcom genre, in particular. In scholarly and journalistic treatises about television, words like *fragmentation* and *serialization*, but also *living room* and *family*[218] are among the most frequently used vocabulary. This is largely due to two of the most successful formats in (and *only* in) television history, the serialized sitcom and soap opera.

Summarizing their impact on television's appearance, in general, Charlotte Brunsdon asserts that "[i]ntimacy and continuity do seem important elements in characterizing what is specific to television in certain textual modes" (62). TV series usually create intimacy as they bind the viewer for a long period of time, creating a parallel *river of life*[219] that blends reality and fiction and motivates the audience to engage in viewing practices that follow a strict, permanently repeating rhythm. Characters become friends, and identification is so strong that it becomes possible to exchange actors without jeopardizing the integrity of the parallel

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[215] Newcomb/Hirsch 505.

[216] See Connell 139, Meehan "Culture" 564, Swingewood 11, and Winter 1.

[217] See Meehan "Culture" 565, and Newcomb/Hirsch 506.

[218] See, for example, Barwise/Ehrenberg 13, Berman 13, Mellencamp "Prologue" 4, Morley *Family* 14, Rowe 220, and Spigel 73.

[219] Hickethier "Fernsehästhetik" 206. See also Barwise/Ehrenberg 38, and Gymnich 133.

social world. The series' longevity brings along certain narrative features that do not hinder intimacy and support continuity: the beginnings lose importance – even more than in real life, past events fade – for understanding the present, the present seems to repeat itself, any-way,[220] and there is no ending in sight.

There is no need for a dramatically staged and narratively prepared ending, since the end is determined by economic reasons alone. The assembly line production comes to a halt for corporate reasons as soon as the audience's interest turns into indifference.[221] A series can only survive if it manages to sustain a large and consequently diverse audience to guar-antee its commercial success. In order to please this multi-faceted group of viewers, any se-ries will have to abandon ideas that are too radical and challenge beliefs of majorities.[222] It is only with the help of a self-reflexive awareness of its own narrative past and its medial frame[223] that a television series can overcome its transitory existence and reach the status of a unified piece of art.[224] In sum, Brunsdon's claim that the television (soap opera) series is "domestic, continuous, contemporary, episodic, repetitive, fragmented, and aural" (67) seems to capture the essence of what makes it not only one of the most successful formats, but also one of the prime candidates for critical (and potentially self-reflexive) evaluation.

The (family) sitcom as one of the most common serial genres on television lives up to most of the characteristics mentioned above. It usually avoids testing the thin ice of extreme political or social positions,[225] which is quite popular in other comedy genres, like silent slap-stick films, or stand-up comedy. Instead, it promotes "familiarity, identification, and redemp-tion of popular beliefs" (Marc 24); it does not radically question or undermine the world it rep-resents. While it has tested almost every imaginable variation of character constellation and addition – working class, middle class, high society, African-American, Hispanic, interracial, homosexual, married and unmarried, single-parent, extraterrestrial, 50s, 60s, 70s etc., and recently animated – the basic problems and solutions that drive the storytelling have mainly remained stable. Thus, the family on the screen, for instance, becomes "watchable" for the entire family in front of the screen, making the show popular with a cross-generationally di-verse audience.

In addition, it frequently becomes a vehicle for two very different messages: firstly, the sitcom has been known to fulfill its commercial mission by heavily including/advertising re-cent consumer goods, thus supporting fashion trends and the establishing of technological

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[220] Knut Hickethier names "standardization of types and schematization" ("Fernsehästhetik" 206; my translation; original: "Typisierungen und Schematisierungen") as typical characteristics of TV series.

[221] See Marc 13/28, and Meehan "Why" 117.

[222] According to McLuhan, television in general is "unsuited to hot issues and sharply defined controversial topics" (414).

[223] See chapter 2.6.

[224] Hickethier "Fernsehästhetik" 203-204.

[225] See, for example, Berman 10/14, Marc 26, and Rowe 223.

progress alike. Secondly, it has continuously subordinated its storytelling to "the age-old tradition of grafting humor to moral suasion" (Marc 24), combining a humorous attitude towards the hardships of life with the moral message that humanity and zeal will finally help to overcome them.[226] However, although these characteristics appear to mark the sitcom as a tame, unprogressive genre, it has, from its beginnings, developed an ability to analyze its own shortcomings and medial peculiarities. From characters that slip into a narrator's function and directly address the audience to self-referential moments that reveal a coherence in the otherwise fleeting succession of episodic tales, sitcoms have shown greater awareness of their production conditions than most other mass media texts.[227]

2.4.2   Aspects of Audience Reception

As was already evident in the early, global theories of intertextuality, one cannot explain intertextual phenomena without including the role the reader's perspective plays in their development.[228] In post-structuralism, the role of the author is reduced to a minimum and the reader becomes the main institution in the process of generating meaning. For Julia Kristeva, the reader's mind is involved with an artistic development she calls "dialectical genesis of meaning" ("Nous" 10), as the "textual plurality [is] reframed as a mental activity able to open a psyche to the creative process" ("Nous" 8-9). Similarly, Roland Barthes stresses the importance of the reader, since he believes any text to be

> a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture […] but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed […]; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination ("Death" 146-148).

Correspondingly, it is in every reader's mind where the phrases drawn from other texts are combined into a new idea, a new meaning. His role turns from a strictly passive reception to a more active part that combines the acts of reception and production. Since the author cannot even control the intertextual relations of the text he writes – at least according to a global definition of intertextuality – the reader actually becomes the only authority that could potentially grasp the whole intertext.[229]

However, the active role of the reader is by no means limited to the intertextual perspective. After all, most works of art are primarily created with the intention to be read, watched, felt, contemplated, listened to by an audience. To start on a more general level, we

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[226] See also Berman 12.

[227] Marc 20-23.

[228] See chapter 2.1. See also Hebel 140, and Morgan 19/23.

[229] Morgan 19.

need to note that post-structuralism and postmodernism with the proclaimed *Death of the Author* and the radical delimitation of textual borders have at least visibly increased the attention the reader receives in the process of text analysis. In the wake of the cultural developments of the 1960s, cultural and literary studies moved away from traditional aesthetics of text, production, and representation[230] towards a triangular relation of creator, text, and receiver, who then held between them the power to "make sense" of communication.[231]

Just as every text can be examined with regard to the context of its creation – the political, social, personal, and cultural situation it was produced in – it can also be analyzed in the political, social, personal, and cultural context of its reception.[232] If the context of reception is considerably different, this alone might evoke new meaning in a text, and thus every single new reader might as well. This results in an entirely new approach towards text analysis, as

> the interpreter does not need to blank out or overcome his own existence, his historicity, and the resulting prejudices and beliefs in order to accomplish the most objective understanding of his matter, but he has to include these prejudices as a positive factor in the process of understanding (Warning 19; my translation).[233]

Following Gadamer, any hermeneutic approach will have to combine a *present* horizon of understanding with a distinct *past* horizon;[234] it is the combination of old and new that enables the utmost understanding. Therefore, the reader's ability to let any old text come to new life, a life that reverberates with all the experience that might have accumulated in the meantime, even prefigures the concept of an intertextuality that sees all texts of all times connected to each other in the imagination of the reader's mind. Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity to analyze texts in conjunction with the concrete conditions of their production and reception instead of letting them float independent of all context.

Hans Robert Jauß argues that the meaning of a text cannot be predetermined by its author, who can only initiate a search for meaning that will be carried out by readers whenever or wherever the text is read:

> Hence, a text's significance is no longer pre-defined by the author, but intended to be discovered by productive understanding. Only this way the horizon of understanding opens up to possibilities of understanding the text differently again and again in later

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[230] See Iser "Lesevorgang" 253, Jauß "Provokation" 126, Viehoff 73, Wagner 4, and Warning 9.

[231] See Faulstich 303, Jauß "Provokation" 127, Jauß *Rezeption* 30, Lindvall/Melton 209, and Warning 13. In its most radical form, the model regards the reader as the only one bringing life to the otherwise inanimate text; see Iser "Appellstruktur" 228.

[232] See, for example, Neumann/Nünning 21, Viehoff 85, and Winter 82.

[233] Original: "…daß der Interpret sein eigenes Dasein, seine eigene Geschichtlichkeit und die in ihr gründenden Vorurteile, Vormeinungen nicht auszublenden, nicht zu überwinden habe im Interesse einer möglichst objektiven Erfassung seines Gegenstandes, sondern daß er diese Vorurteile als positiven Faktor in den Verstehensprozeß einbringen müsse."

[234] Gadamer 119-120. See also Jauß "Provokation" 138.

context, even as an answer to questions that could not have been asked in its primary context (Jauß, *Rezeption* 9; my translation).[235]

Combined with the assumption that truth can only develop in the categories the recipient applies to a text,[236] this approach turns the reader into a powerful institution, which decides about the possible meanings and truths embodied in textual structures. Although this phenomenon might reach its most prominent impact in the case of ancient texts – texts whose authors passed away long ago and which have lost the meaning they might have transmitted in their original context – it also influences the interpretation of fairly recent texts. Since circumstances of reception may change within short periods of time due to political, social, personal, and cultural developments, meaning may change with them even if the two other corners of the triangle remain stable. And, moreover, meaning does not have to be replaced entirely: it is not uncommon for a text to sustain two or more interpretations, especially if the reception process results in a literal and an allegorical reading.

Yet, what does the involvement of the reader mean for actual text analysis? Every professional analyst is of course just another individual reader with a unique background, but does his personal influence on the interpretation of meaning really account for the proclaimed "truths"? And how could he possibly include other readers' experiences in the analysis (if not with the help of extensive interviewing)?[237] Here, it becomes necessary to position a text's interpretive reception in a verifiable frame of expectations resulting from its genre, design, topic, and language, as well as from its relation to other texts.[238] Since no text appears out of nowhere, and reading is not just a succession of subjective impressions, but a process of directed perception, these factors shape the reception act itself as they prepare the reader for a certain emotional disposition, certain plot elements, certain character constellations etc. Even if these announced conventions are then ironically undermined, the collective expectation still results in a collective reaction to the twist.

As a consequence, the text analyst is enabled to assume certain reading patterns on the basis of the signals the text sends in order to include the recipient's perspective in his interpretation of the triangular production of meaning. Only as an additional step, it is afterwards possible also to consider aspects individual (groups of) readers contribute to the search for meaning, since

> the question of subjectivity or interpretation and of different readers' or groups of readers' tastes can only be asked in a meaningful way if it has previously been established

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[235] Original: "Danach gilt der Sinn des Textes nicht mehr als autoritativ vorgegeben, sondern als einem produktiven Verstehen zur Suche aufgegeben. Erst dann öffnet sich der Horizont des Verstehens auf Möglichkeiten, den Text im späteren Kontext immer wieder anders, näherhin als Antwort auf Fragen zu verstehen, die sich in seinem primären Kontext noch nicht stellen konnten."

[236] See Hallet 58, and Jauß *Rezeption* 10.

[237] See Iser "Appellstruktur" 228, and Viehoff 76.

[238] See Jauß "Provokation" 130, and Wolf *Illusion* 15. Michael K. Saenz transfers this approach to television viewing; see p. 575.

which transsubjective horizon of understanding determines the text's effect (Jauß, "Provokation" 131-132; my translation).[239]

This way, literary (or, in a broader medial environment, cultural) and personal factors are combined to allow the text analyst to base his evaluation of the recipient's perspective on insights that gain their validity from professional knowledge of cultural conventions, as well as, if possible, from individual factors that influence cultural communication.[240]

This new approach to text interpretation and the theories of post-structuralism are only two of the five reasons Charlotte Brunsdon names in order to explain why especially the television audience has recently become one of the prime objects of cultural studies:

> (1) through the changing paradigms in literary studies, (2) through the growth of cultural, and particularly subcultural studies, (3) through particular logics in the development of film and television studies, (4) through the increasingly fashionable theorization of postmodernity, and (5) through the impact of feminist methodologies on academic discourse (63).

The "particular logics" mentioned as the third reason are evident: the aspect of productive media reception becomes even more crucial when the examined object is a mass media production that reaches diverse audiences from different demographic backgrounds,[241] since "[i]ndividuals and groups are, for many reasons, involved in making their own meaning from the television text" (Newcomb/Hirsch 511). At first sight, one might expect any audiovisual text to transmit its messages more directly and explicitly than, for example, written literature, and thus to be less dependent on the viewer for the generation of meaning. Nevertheless, cultural scholars agree that human communication, in general, is largely based on symbolic messages that require further complex decoding by the receiver.[242] Images, sounds, and behavioral patterns resemble written or spoken words as they can carry meaning that exceeds the information of "what can be seen, heard etc." As a result, it becomes possible to transfer insights gained in the study of (readers of) literature to other media that employ different sign systems and potentially address different sense organs;[243] it becomes possible to

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[239] Original: "die Frage nach der Subjektivität oder Interpretation und des Geschmacks verschiedener Leser oder Leserschichten kann erst sinnvoll gestellt werden, wenn zuvor geklärt ist, welcher transsubjektive Horizont des Verstehens die Wirkung des Texts bedingt."

[240] See also Warning 24.

[241] See Barwise/Ehrenberg 15, Caughie 589, Hall "Introduction" 120, Saenz 573/578, and Winter 86.

[242] Winter 86.

[243] See Hallet 61, and Tulloch 11. This approach has largely been advanced by Clifford Geertz' influential studies in the field of cultural anthropology. In his analyses of human behavior, he moves away from an understanding of *culture* that is based on actual material objects and fixed concepts towards a system of symbols, which carry the ability to evoke meaning: "Believing […] that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (5). Correspondingly, cultural studies aim to find meaning in symbols, and since those symbols are created by the members of specific cultural formations, symbols and meanings can change in the course of time and/or in relation to different circumstances of reception.

uncover the various realities that might be transmitted on the symbolic level of a single tele-vision text.

For the study of mass media reception, it is useful to examine symbols with respect to the effects they have on recipients with different backgrounds, or as John B. Thompson puts it: "Cultural phenomena […] may be seen as *symbolic forms in structured contexts*; and cul-tural analysis may be regarded as the study of the meaningful constitution and social contex-tualization of symbolic forms" (12; his italics). Since the 1970s, this relation between texts and recipients of popular culture has been one of the central objects of investigation for the scholars of *British Cultural Studies*, who have widely discussed and empirically analyzed the ways in which specific audiences interact with television programs.

Especially the encoding/decoding model of communication developed by Stuart Hall supports a meaning- and viewer-oriented examination of mass media based on the analysis of cultural symbols shared (and developed) by producers *and* recipients.[244] These symbols are necessary because television, like all other media, cannot transmit "real" historical events, but can only transform them into messages in the audiovisual television language. The model encompasses both ends of the communication process: on the one hand, the creators of medial texts have the power to shape signals in accordance with the message they want to send. They provide categories and communicative frames that guide the way viewers perceive and interpret that part of reality which exceeds their personal experience.[245] Still, as Newcomb/Hirsch argue, "television does not present firm ideological conclusions – despite its *formal* conclusions – so much as it *comments on* ideological problems" (508; their italics), since, on the other hand, the viewers' role is just as active as the creators' because they can interpret the message in other ways than intended by the sender.

Assuming that viewers position themselves – in dependence on their personal back-ground – in different relations to a television text,[246] Hall describes three major attitudes viewers can develop: first, in the "dominant-hegemonic position" the viewer largely under-stands the text as the sender intended it ("Encoding" 136); second, the viewer can reach a "negotiated position" (137) that deviates in part from the dominant message due to his per-sonal experience; third, he can operate with an "oppositional code" (138) if he rejects the dominant view and appropriates the text in entirely different ways than the sender intend-ed.[247] The communicative interaction of sender and receiver thus loses its static cause-and-effect relation, as the message – if it even reaches the "decoder" – can be altered noticeably

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[244] See Butler/Sepp 371, Tulloch 6, and Winter 85.

[245] See Meehan "Culture" 564, and Morley "Texts" 167.

[246] See also Hall "Introduction" 118, and Morley "Texts" 13. As an example, a detailed analysis of the economic influences on the reception of television programs and their effects on the generation of meaning can be found in Eileen R. Meehan's essay "Conceptualizing Culture as Commodity".

[247] See also Meehan "Culture" 570, and Sloane 138-139.

by technological and medial peculiarities as well as by the viewer's circumstances before it finally becomes manifest in the viewer's interpretation.

By pointing out these long-neglected uncertainties in mass media (and particularly television) communication, Hall displays an explanation for the complex processes that include the frame messages sent by the producing media, as well as the influence every single viewer's situation has on the interpretation of this frame: "Production and reception of the television message are not identical, but they are related: they are differentiated moments within the totality formed by the communication process as a whole" ("Encoding" 130). The actual outcome of meaning at the end of the communication process cannot be determined by only one of the participating parties; one may consider "the television viewer as a *bricoleur* who matches the creator in the making of meaning" (Newcomb/Hirsch 512). As a consequence, especially recipients of mass media texts turn into creative actors in a cultural arena,[248] and although involving the audience in television studies does not necessarily make analyses easier, it is the only option that potentially results in *significance* in the never-stopping flow of television texts.[249]

Returning to the importance of the audience in intertextual communication processes, in particular, producer and recipient, the two ends of Hall's model, become partners who together decide about the narrative impact intertextual references can have. Intertextuality receives a double meaning as it stands for a (productive) textual strategy as well as for a (receptive) interpretive practice.[250] Involving author and reader in this process solves one of the problems in the analysis of intertextual references: the author's intention loses some of its importance. The approach does not negate that authors potentially employ intertextual references for conscious purposes, but it circumvents the problem that this can never be proven entirely, since authors usually do not document their intentions and cultural scholars cannot guarantee for a complete reconstruction. The reader fills in the gaps as his intertextual reception of the text is not limited by the author's intentionality. The author and every individual reader thus create individual readings that grant both sides a fair share in the development of intertextually affected meaning.

When including intertextual references in a text, the producers add possible carriers of meaning, which, however, are not necessarily part of the surface communication process. The interpretation of the more obvious messages might already vary due to the viewers' social, political, or cultural background. While some scholars propagate the *ideal reader* who possesses infinite cultural knowledge and even caution against "false interpretation,"[251] there

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[248] See also Constable 48, Saenz 573, and Winter 1.

[249] Brunsdon 68.

[250] See Ott/Walter 429, as well as Linda Hutcheon's emphasis on the importance of recipient *and* producer in parodies (*Parody* 84). See also Rose *Ancient* 36-45.

[251] Stempel 85.

is a general tendency to accept readers of different education as creators of different significance[252] and to negate the necessity for explicit intertextual referencing:

> The theory of intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it. These relations do not take the form of specific allusions from one text to another and there is no need for readers to be familiar with specific texts to read intertextually (Fiske, *Television* 87).

Readers do not need explicit intertextual indicators to activate their cultural experience – including texts read before[253] – whenever they approach new texts.

Correspondingly, intertextual references hidden beneath the surface, whether or not they are intentionally placed by the creators, invite further variation. Not every viewer will notice every reference and/or will be able to trace its source and/or to connect a special message to it. Nevertheless, intertextuality increases the recipient's opportunity to actively engage in the process of generating meaning by paying attention to references and by adding them to the integrated interpretation process. In its most advanced form, this act of productive reception can even foster social interaction between viewers who share their observations (in person or via the Internet) and thus contribute to a more informed, richly facetted generation of meaning.[254]

Finally, what does this mean for the text, which is now being enriched with significance from two sides? If older texts can gain new or additional meaning when received by a new audience, the inclusion of intertextual references in a cultural production results, at least, in a double effect: on the one hand, it adds meaning to the new text. On the other hand, it opens up the source texts for a new discussion and a new process of generating meaning by (re)presenting them to recipients who live in a different situation than preceding recipients.[255] The producers of, for example, a television show read an older text and decide to confer their interpretations to the text they are producing. They, as first readers,[256] will necessarily attempt to understand the older text in its original context, but they will also let their own situation influence their interpretation.[257] The viewer of the television show then is the second reader, who reads the old source text again, but, firstly, in the context of the new text and, secondly, in the context of his own life, which, again, might be different from the situation of the first reader/producer. Thus, the theory of a productive reader, combined with the effects

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[252] Schulte-Middelich 210.

[253] Jauß "Provokation" 127.

[254] See Ott/Walter 441, and Winter 3.

[255] Even T.S. Eliot, who was primarily interested in the role of the writer, believes "that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (15). See also Hallet 58, and Nadel 641.

[256] See Jauß "Provokation" 126-127, and Rose *Meta-Fiction* 69-70.

[257] Gadamer 123.

of intertextuality, leads to a continuous and infinite development of possible interpretations[258] – not only of the intertextually influenced new text, but also of the pretext it refers to.

As far as the role of the recipient in the analysis of *The Simpsons* is concerned, it has become obvious why numerous scholars stress the importance of a viewer-oriented approach towards understanding how the series' discourses work.[259] Because of its success as a mass media text addressing diverse audiences and its omnipresent interaction with other medial products it becomes a prime candidate for an examination of how an active audience contributes to the wealth of communicative options in an already very flexible medium. Especially in light of an audience that, even after the series has been on the air for more than 20 years, still gathers on the Internet to summarize and discuss episodes (including the collection of intertextual findings),[260] *The Simpsons* also promises to initiate the necessary insights generated by productive viewers rather than by markers or comments the producers accounted for. In the end, it is important to keep in mind that the observation of *both* producers' and recipients' influence on cultural texts[261] is crucial to the understanding of intertextual and intermedial phenomena and the process of generating meaning they are involved with. While a function-oriented analysis will always have to postulate an intentionally acting creator, it does not stop where the creator's plan stops, but will also have to consider functions that come into being because of the viewer's associations.

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[258] Iser "Lesevorgang" 259.

[259] See, for example, Alberti XXV, Arnold "Rest" 264, Beard 277/289, Brook 172, Dettmar 98, Ernst/Werkmeister 97/100, Gray 14/22/32, Ott 61, Parisi 127, Savage 200/202/218, and Sloane 138-139.

[260] See Siebert *Figuren* 11, and Sloane 147.

[261] Viehoff 79.

2.5   Types of Intertextual References in Animation

The representational options of animation exceed most other media, since animation not only combines visual and auditory signals – like films, television, ballet, operas, stage plays, musicals and others also do – but also possesses almost unlimited possibilities as far as the deformation of these signals is concerned.[262] Animation can be two- *or* three-dimensional, it can include public persons without their consent and make them look just as real as their surroundings, it can make thoughts[263] and ghosts visible. It can also include any kind of sounds, it can give one person's voice to someone else, it is not hindered by gravity or the limits of the human (or animal) body,[264] it can make the deceased come back to life, it can change colors, shapes, and chemical states.

More generally speaking, the representational abilities of animation are less dependent on actually *re*-presenting what already exists than on presenting what can be imagined:

> Contrary to live-action cinema, Animation draws the elements of its future works from a raw material made exclusively of human ideas, those ideas that different animators have about things, living beings and their forms, movements and meanings. They represent these ideas through images they make with their own hands. In the causal concatenation of their images – a concatenation they conceive themselves – nothing can be left to chance. For this reason, creation requires an exceedingly long time which is out of proportion to live-action cinema. But the repertoire of human ideas is inexhaustible (Bendazzi; qtd. in Wells 7).[265]

These unlimited possibilities allow *The Simpsons* to communicate with their medial environment in almost every imaginable way: "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, *Virus* 109). Animation can take any visual sign it finds in taped live action or in the outside world and turn it into a cartoon, thus distancing it from the viewer and allowing him to approach it with unbiased eyes.[266] It is reasonable to prepare the ground for the following analysis by determining the patterns referential communication can take in *The Simpsons* beforehand. First, I will therefore examine the show's visual and auditory devices more closely; then, I will investigate which additional textual and narrative references on which textual level[267] can be realized with the help of these devices.

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[262] See, for example, Gray 66-67, Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 12, Herron 19, Koenigsberger 42, Mittell 19, Siebert *Figuren* 9, Sloane 152, Wallace 240, and Wells 11.

[263] Due to its ability to symbolically represent emotions and mental states, animation is sometimes also innovatively used in live action film or television to comment on the characters' mental disposition. For an exemplary analysis of the animated snippets in the German live action serial *Berlin, Berlin* see Surkamp 82-85.

[264] See Arnold "Rest" 253/262, Pilling XIII, and Siebert "Self-reference" 155/157.

[265] See also Klein, who implies that the abstraction of animated pictures can convey certain messages of social criticism that could not be achieved in live-action film (38).

[266] See Bonné n.p., Gray 66, Mittell 23, and Mullen 82.

[267] Lindner describes four textual levels in written texts that can potentially locate intertextual references: phonological, syntactic, lexical-semantic, and pragmatic (119).

As far as the visual references to other works are concerned, the producers of *The Simpsons* can choose from a multitude of more or less prominent implementations. The easiest and also most fleeting references to movies, books, and shows come in the shape of posters, billboards, neon commercials, and other static visual surfaces that blend in naturally with the cartoon world of Springfield. If moving pictures are included, guest appearances of actors, directors, writers, and other celebrities often serve as connectors to one or more of their respective works. Although many celebrities welcome their cartoon cameos as free publicity with a diverse audience, animation allows the producers also to include people who are opposed to the show,[268] who are fictitious, or dead. Especially in the case of actors, the option to let them "play themselves" or to appear in one of their roles, which is frequently put in a situation that at least partly resembles the movie or play it used to be a part of,[269] makes it easier to create references that aim at specific artistic products or at entire genres or oeuvres. If it does not make sense to include a celebrity in the plot itself, the show frequently features a "screen on the screen" instead: since the Simpson family almost incessantly watch television and sometimes go to the cinema, it has become a natural device in the show to let the audience participate in what they see. As a consequence, the animated screens swarm with actors, emblems, settings, and objects that seem familiar from the slightly bigger screen they are appearing on.

A specialty in this respect is the permanent feature "The Itchy & Scratchy Show," which as a cartoon-in-the-cartoon does what *The Simpsons* does on the next level: include visual and auditory references to other media productions – which then automatically become part of *The Simpsons*.[270] This cartoon also provides an opportunity to refer to other cartoon shows, since it follows the same visual codes as many classic cartoons – stretched limbs, exploding bodies, eyes popping out of heads circled by stars or birds – while *The Simpsons* largely avoids this visual language in order not to sacrifice its realism.[271] As to references to live action movies and TV shows, links that are often much harder to detect than, for example, famous actors can consist of noticeable camera angles, settings, or screen compositions:

> *The Simpsons*, by and large, 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 a character's eyes for emotional effect (Gray 66; his italics).

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[268] One of the most prominent examples would be the episode-long appearance of former president George Bush Sr. in "Two Bad Neighbors" (EP 7-13), who previously had publicly excoriated *The Simpsons* as a bad influence for American family life.

[269] See Helbig *Markierung* 113, and Lindvall/Melton 207.

[270] For a more detailed analysis of the functions of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" for *The Simpsons* see Butler/Sepp.

[271] See Mittell 19, and Ortved 61.

Since animation can easily (and cheaply) rebuild everything from natural backdrops like Monument Valley to elaborate artificial settings like the Enterprise's command bridge, there are no limits to the creative transport of established cultural commonplaces into the show.[272]

Moreover, it can even reproduce certain visual effects that originate from other media's technical means of production: for example, it can imitate all stages in the development of the film industry, from black-and-white to the first fuzzy flashy colors to modern high-tech million-color compositions.[273] This visual abundance also supports the representation of dreams, thoughts, and what else goes on inside the characters' minds: with the help of thought bubbles and little angels/devils/aliens that appear in thin air, animation can give the viewer unique insights into the characters' psyche.[274] Finally, if the visual tools of two-dimensional animation are exhausted, it is still possible to include computer-animated three-dimensional animation and live action sequences or photographs to fill the gap.[275]

Similarly, it is hard to imagine which sound barrier could constrain animation's auditory referential capacities – characters talking about book or movie titles being the least spectacular one. Since *The Simpsons* is accompanied by a complex soundtrack, it can easily include music from other works – operas, musicals, songs, television, film, radio etc. While instrumental tunes often stem from other audiovisual media and harmoniously blend in with the rest of the soundtrack (which makes it harder to detect the reference),[276] songs with vocals often have a more outstanding quality and more insistently point the audience towards a certain musical, movie, or TV show. Furthermore, ear-catching sound effects that go beyond the normal background noise can also serve as markers of intermedial references – classic examples would be the buzzing of the laser swords from *Star Wars* or the threatening sonar searching for submarines in *Das Boot*. Finally, a human voice can function as a reference even without the respective body: actors lending their voices to characters that resemble one of their roles or imitating the narrator from a movie or radio broadcast can add intermedial information to scenes that otherwise appear free from external influence.

Both visual and auditory signs can be used to create textual references. The attribute *textual* here primarily denotes the source of the respective reference. Quotations from written or spoken texts and paratexts can be transformed into a part of *The Simpsons* with the help of visual and auditory signals. The animated characters regularly quote lines from novels,

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[272] Alberti XIII. Turner also stresses that animation can create an extremely mutable "film set," in general, as can be witnessed in the industrial, geographical, ethnical, cultural etc. diversity of *The Simpsons'* Springfield (29).

[273] Of course, live action film and television dispose of the same visual tools; see Paech 23.

[274] In this respect, animation exceeds the visual possibilities of live-action film and television: "The film, by arranging external signs for our visual perception, or by presenting us with dialogue, can lead us to infer thought. But it cannot show us thought directly. It can show us characters thinking, feeling, and speaking, but it cannot show us their thoughts and feelings. A film is not thought; it is perceived" (Bluestone; qtd. in Miller [G.] XIII).

[275] As mentioned before, the episode "Treehouse of Horror VI" (EP 7-6) sends Homer on an astonishing journey through a three-dimensional cyber world and a place that looks eerily similar to our own world.

[276] There are, of course, exceptions of easily recognizable instrumental tunes that have become commonplaces to create, for example, an atmosphere of suspense, such as parts of the soundtracks from *Jaws* or *Psycho*.

poems, plays, movies, or TV shows without necessarily emphasizing the fact that they quote. Most of the quotations are integrated into the normal communicative rhythm and reveal their intertextual impact only in relation to the narrative situation they are engaged in. Generally, only quotations from poetry or older plays that display a language style too different from what a normal Sprinfieldian could be expected to say are marked as quotations by modulated speech situations.[277]

In addition, quotations and especially work titles also re-appear in written form on the screen, frequently in the shape of posters, shop names,[278] billboards, and "Itchy & Scratchy" episode titles, but also in printed form, since the show can easily visualize animated book covers or pages and newspapers/magazines. An additional referential method, which is part neither of the visual, nor of the auditory code of the series, involves the episode titles. While many of them are obvious puns on film or literature titles, some indicate deeper intermedial relations that pervade whole episode plots.[279]

Narrative references can be realized with the help of visual and auditory signals, but they can also remain a vague feeling that there is some similarity between, for example, the plots of an episode and a movie. Usually, the most complex narrative parallels are accompanied by other types of references – episode titles, settings, musical scores, quotations – building a web of markers that direct the audience towards the larger intermedial background. The example of the episode "Cape Feare" (EP 5-2) mentioned in chapter 2.2 underlines how a multitude of different references creates a complex narrative analogy which almost leaves the viewer no choice but to compare the similarities and discrepancies between the two involved texts.[280]

In other cases, however, the narrative links are less obvious and create intertextual connections only with the help of, for instance, character constellations, a particular sequence of events/arguments, or a shared topic.[281] Characters in general often function as narrative references. Relations that are intended to unfold greater influence on the development of character traits or storylines will usually be supported by onomastic allusions and further visual and/or auditory signals.[282] At other times, just the way a character acts in a particular situation or certain behavior patterns may be enough to evoke cotext elements from other works that involve a similar person.

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[277] See the example from episode 2-7, "Bart vs. Thanksgiving," mentioned above. The particular situation of Lisa sitting down with a pen to write a poem in order to channel her frustration indicates another poem as the source of (most of) her words.

[278] For example, the episode "My Sister, My Sitter" (EP 8-17) features shops called *Much Ado about Muffins* and *It's a Wonderful Knife*.

[279] See the examples in chapter 2.2.

[280] See also Arnold "Culture" 13-16.

[281] See also Gray 56, and Lindner 120.

[282] See the explanations and examples in chapter 2.2.

Finally, a text's top level structure may serve as a most abstract form of intertextual relation: for example, if a movie is made up of almost incoherent segments which only form a bigger picture towards the ending, or if a story is told in neglect of a linear timeline with flash-backs and leaps to the future, the imitation of such a narrative strategy alone can create a powerful (one is tempted to say: *generic*) link between the source text and its animated im-personator.

2.6   From Intertextuality to Meta-reflexivity

As has been indicated above and emphasized by several scholars[283] *The Simpsons* often goes beyond its humorous qualities for an analytical assessment of its own medial surroundings, including the animated form, the sitcom genre, and television, in general. It is not only concerned with *what* it narrates, but also with *how* it narrates. This involves acknowledging its own artificiality and a (temporary) break with the illusion of a coherent narrative reality.[284] *The Simpsons* thus serves as another piece of evidence for the frequently described fact that "messages, communication, and the media have always been about themselves, too – self-referential messages about messages, communication about communication, media about the media" (Nöth/Bishara V).[285]

Moreover, the show positions itself in a long tradition of self-referential animated films, in which "we can often find traces that point to the artificiality of the images in a number of ways, thus enabling the filmmakers to inscribe themselves in the story of the film" (Siebert, "Self-reference" 155).[286] Siebert describes various ways animated films can uncover the conditions of their medial appearance, ranging from factors of production[287] (e.g., visualization of drawing techniques and film roles) to modes of reception[288] (e.g., inclusion of an animated audience or direct address of the real audience). *The Simpsons* occasionally employs these typical references to its medial background in its opening credits[289] and elsewhere. In addition, however, the more prominent, complex web of references to itself, the sitcom genre, television, texts from other media, their genres, and their respective media, as well as the show's habit to let them interact and to sophistically comment on any of them, requires an equally complex terminological and theoretical understanding.

To start with a concept that lies at the very bottom of any relation between a text and its own characteristics, the label *self-reference* seems rather self-explanatory at first sight.

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[283] See, for example, Alberti XIV, Arnold "Culture" 19/23, Arnold "Rest" 259/263/265, Beard 273/290, Broderick 248, Brook 179, Butler/Sepp 361/375, Cantor "Greatest" 35, Cantor "Politics" 165, Dettmar 88, Diederichsen 18, Ernst/Werkmeister 77/100, Gray 7/50-51/61, Gruteser 70, Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 9-15, Henry "Triumph" 91-95, Herron 15, Irwin/Lombardo 86, Kachel 176, Klein 38-44, Knight 107, Koenigsberger 44/46, Korte n.p., Mittell 15, Neumann [A.W.] 26, Parisi 125, Ott 58-60, Rauscher 126/132-138, Rushkoff "Prince" 297-299, Rushkoff *Virus* 111-114, Savage 198/202, Sloane 143-145/149-168, Turner 17/63/407/414-421, Weilunn Chow 107/109/113.

[284] See Ott/Walter 438, Polan 662, Stam 129, and Wolf "Metaisierung" 35.

[285] See also Colapietro 32, Lyotard 38, Mellencamp "Prologue" 4, Rowe 214, and Wolf "Metafiction" 303-304.

[286] For a list of early self-referential animated films, see Lindvall/Melton 205-206.

[287] Siebert *Figuren* 129-134, and Siebert "Self-reference" 158-159. See also Lindvall/Melton 206.

[288] Siebert *Figuren* 137-151, and Siebert "Self-reference" 157-158. See also Butler/Sepp 365, and Polan 662.

[289] Especially the final shot of the family assembling on the couch in front of the television set frequently serves as a stage for rather surreal gags that would not fit in with the highlighted realism of the normal storyline. For example, gags that reverberate with self-referential moments known from other animated films include scenes of the Simpson family being drawn/sprayed on the couch or running past the borders of the film role just to hurry back to their couch, crossing the holes of the film reel twice. The episode "Tales from the Public Domain" (EP 13-14) is preceded by another example of the visual diversity in animation: instead of an animated couch gag, the viewer sees a real hand which flips through a book of rough drawings, thus "animating" them by hand and laying bare the technical process of creating moving pictures.

Basically, a text shows instances of self-reference if it refers to itself – what that can mean in detail will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter. Yet, the definition becomes problematic as soon as scholars state that *self-referential* and *self-reflexive* can be used as synonyms.[290] Does the word *reflexive* not imply an act that involves more cognitive endeavor than a mere reference? In addition, some analysts use *self-referential* (with clarifying adverbs) to describe relations between *different texts*: "intertextual self-reference concerns references from one text to other texts of the same genre or medium" (Nöth 15). Then, what is the difference between an intertextual *self*-reference and a "regular" intertextual reference? Rather vaguely, Nöth goes on to explain that

> a film A that quotes a film B makes intertextual reference to its own medium and not to the world which both films represent, and the TV spot that quotes another TV spot remains within the world of advertising. These messages are intertextually self-referential to the degree that its quotations remain within their own world beyond films [*sic*] (19).

If we understood these sentences as the – quite reasonable – idea that a film could discuss characteristics of the filmic medium by referring to another film, Nöth's explanation would still make every intertextual reference (to a text of the same genre or medium) automatically an intertextual self-reference, leaving the prefix *self-* as a useless attachment deprived of all additional insight.[291] The same problem applies to his definition of *intermedial* self-references, which apparently occur whenever a text refers to a text in another medium.[292]

Maybe we could clarify things by using *referential* and *reflexive* as two different attributes: *self-referential* describes instances of a text referring to itself; *self-reflexive* denominates examples of texts discussing their own characteristics by referring to similar texts. Unfortunately, searching for literature to support such an approach, one comes across obstacles like the following statement by Gloria Withalm:

> However, the actual modes of self-reference that can be found in the movies are not confined to forms of filmic reference to the film in general. In addition, the model also takes into consideration a special case of filmic self-reference which I would like to define as self-reflexivity. A self-reflexive film is a film which focuses on *itself*, that is, on the specific film that is being watched (Withalm 130; her italics).

If we then add the prefix *meta-* to the confusion, a step that proves to be logical since *self-* and *meta-* frequently appear in the same publications dealing with texts about texts, we end up reading pages that are meant to untangle the hopelessly convoluted relations between

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[290] Nöth/Bishara V.

[291] Werner Wolf at one point acknowledges "that an intertextual reference, for example, is indeed a type of indirect (textual) self-referentiality" ("Formen" 56; my translation; original: "daher ist z.B. eine intertextuelle Referenz in der Tat eine Form indirekter (textueller) Selbstreferentialität") and advocates the merging of both concepts under one heading because it allows for greater precision in the differentiation between references to texts and to the world outside of medial texts. Especially in the context of the functional analysis attempted here, however, I am convinced that it is of great advantage to possess a vocabulary that separates intertextual references with a clear self-referential touch from intertextual references without.

[292] Nöth 15.

such terms as auto-reflexivity, self-reflection, self-reflexivity, self-reference, self-referentiality, literary recursivity, potentialization, repetition, meta-textuality, meta-communication, meta-discoursivity, meta-narration, meta-commentary, and meta-fiction without even having reached the detailed discussions of genres and media ranging from meta-poetry to meta-film.[293] It is no simple task to find a standardized vocabulary for analyzing texts that talk about themselves.

Still, the problem of finding applicable definitions just highlights the need for them in the discussions of such a complex phenomenon. Therefore, I will set up a system that contains some of the terms listed above and is intended to describe those relations that are important for discovering the "self- and meta-referential" links of a television series in the context of an analysis of intertextuality. *Self-reference*[294] will be used whenever a text refers to its own elements.[295] This does not automatically mean that it also makes an analytical statement about itself:[296] for example, in the sitcom *Friends*, the characters develop over a period of ten years. If an episode in season eight refers back to an older episode in order to show how a character behaved some time ago, this can have purely narrative functions and does not necessarily involve comments about the serial's[297] characteristics.[298]

If, however, the character Comic Book Guy – wearing a "worst episode ever" T-shirt – noses in on *The Simpsons* to remind everybody that there have already been episodes dealing with the troubles of getting a horse and with Marge's gambling addiction,[299] respectively, the reference involves commentaries not only on the serialized, repetitive format, but also on the way parts of the audience interact with the series.[300] In accordance with Wolf, I propose to call instances like that *self-reflexive*;[301] self-reflexivity becomes one possible *function* of self-reference: "self-referential *significance* […] involves stimulation to reflect on parts of the

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[293] Hauthal/Nadj/Nünning/Peters provide the (even longer) German source of this impressive list; see p. 2. See also Scheffel 46, Withalm 128, and Wolf "Formen" 50.

[294] Following Wolf, I will treat *self-reference* and *self-referentiality* as synonyms; see "Formen" 51.

[295] This includes elements of the paratext; see Wolf "Formen" 55.

[296] See also Metz 69.

[297] For a distinction between *series* as a program of almost entirely independent episodes and *serial* as a program that largely tells one continuous story in episodes that only make sense if received in the predetermined order see Allrath/Gymnich/Surkamp 5-6.

[298] According to Michael Scheffel, such a relation would be called *self-reflexive* in the sense of *mirroring* (48). Thus, again, the different usage of similar words by different scholars complicates the analytical understanding of what actually happens in specific texts. See also Kohns 195.

[299] "Saddlesore Galactica" (EP 11-13). See also Gray 50.

[300] Comic Book Guy's function as an intertextually laden distributor of self-reflexive commentary will be further investigated in subchapter 3.4.4.

[301] Again, *self-reflexivity* and *self-reflection* will be treated as synonyms; see Wolf "Formen" 51. See also Sierek 17.

own system through elements of the same system and thus involves self-*reflection*" (Wolf, "Metaisierung" 33; his italics; my translation).[302]

In another essay, Wolf further suggests to introduce two sub-categories of self-referentiality, namely "'(cognitive) self-reflection' vs. '(non-cognitive) self-reference'" ("Formen" 58; my translation),[303] which are, to my understanding, dispensable, since every instance of self-reflection not only implies an act of cognitive performance, but automatically includes self-reference. Subtract everything cognitive from self-reflection and you are left with self-reference;[304] therefore, it seems more relevant to regard self-reflexivity as one possible function (others could be, for example, the narrative functions mentioned above) of self-referentiality.

The demarcation between self-referential and self-reflexive thus helps to describe more precisely what a given text has to say about itself. In many cases, however, texts expand their medial awareness to structures that exceed the level of the individual text. In general, many texts include statements about the genre or medium they are a part of; as an example, *The Simpsons* develops an "aesthetic gaze" (Brunsdon 61) on animation, the sitcom, the TV series, and television in general. Since this presupposes an awareness of superordinate systems (in the text and the recipient) and the recognition of the text's fictional character,[305] it seems reasonable to use the label *meta-reference* for hints at higher levels than the individual text.[306] Again, this meta-reference does not necessarily imply a conscious debate about the characteristics of the respective genre or medium. Every genre-film needs to be aware of the conventions of the generic system it becomes a part of (and thus refers to), but it does not have to question them or comment on them in any way.

Yet, if Marge Simpsons remarks that her husband does not go to museums or read books very often and he responds, "You think I don't want to? It's those TV networks, Marge: they won't let me. One quality show after another, each one fresher and more brilliant than the last," the show displays an ironic attitude towards the factors of production and reception that shape its own medium.[307] In analogy to the reflection on individual text, I suggest to call

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[302] Original: "das selbstreferentielle *Bedeuten* […] beinhaltet Anregungen zum Nachdenken über Teile des eigenen Systems durch Elemente desselben Systems und damit Selbst*reflexion.*" See also Wolf "Metafiction" 305-306.

[303] Original: "'(kognitive) Selbstreflexion' vs. '(nichtkognitiver) Selbstbezug.'" See also Nöth 8.

[304] In a later essay, Wolf seems to agree with this point: "[mere self-reference] covers a vast field, namely all variants of self-reference that do not consist of, or imply, a self-referential statement" ("Metafiction" 305).

[305] See Campbell/Freed 80, Hauthal/Nadj/Nünning/Peters 4, Nünning "Mimesis" 33, Wolf "Formen" 70, and Wolf "Metaisierung" 35.

[306] Wolf "Metafiction" 306. Again, there are other definitions that might endanger the clarity of this approach, such as "A metatext is a text commenting on another text" (Plett "Intertextualities" 22). See also Orosz 17-19.

[307] "Secrets of a Successful Marriage" (EP 5-22).

these instances *meta-reflexive*.[308] In contrast to texts that only reproduce certain generic commonplaces, a genre parody would thus qualify as meta-reflexive meta-reference to a particular genre.

A parody, however, involves another phenomenon in self- and meta-referential narration that has not been discussed yet, but actually bridges the gap between self-/meta-reference, on the one hand, and intertextuality/intermediality, on the other,[309] which makes it the prime object of interest in the present study. While texts can utter statements about themselves, their genres or media by directly addressing them within their fictional frame, they can also do so by referring to other texts.[310] Parodies, for instance, commonly include references to various individual texts that, in sum, then allow for certain insights into the characteristics of the genre that is being parodied, which in turn evokes certain aspects of the genre *parody*. As a consequence, if we use the labels intertextual/intermedial self-/meta-reference[311] and -reflection for these second-degree comments, a complex system of possible referential relations develops (see Figure 2).

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[308] See also Wolf "Metaisierung" 36, who uses a slightly different approach, though: for him, a meta-reference can be a particular type of self-reflexivity. He then does not clearly distinguish between meta-reference and meta-reflection.

[309] See, for example, Gymnich 128, Hutcheon *Parody* 5/20, Hutcheon "Politics" 230, Pfister "Postmodern" 215, Rose *Ancient* 91-95, Rose *Meta-Fiction* 13, Scheffel 48, Wolf *Illusion* 224/438, and Wolf "Metaisierung" 41/59.

[310] See Ott/Walter 438-439, and Wolf "Formen" 72.

[311] In contrast to Nöth, however, these labels would only apply to specific references that emphasize and analyze the characteristics of a particular text, genre, or medium; see Nöth 14-15. Wolf agrees on that more precise usage of attributes and recommends to regard "intermedial statements about, for example, the aesthetics of music in a composer novel as just as meta-referential as the intramedial parody of a play in another play" (Wolf "Metaisierung" 41; my translation; original: "dass z.B. intermediale Aussagen über Musikästhetik in einem Komponistenroman ebenso als metareferentiell zu gelten hätten wie die intramediale Parodie eines Dramas durch ein anderes"). Nevertheless, he further introduces the word pairs *direct/textual/text-internal* vs. *indirect/transtextual/text-external* (original: "direkte und […] indirekte Selbstreferenz" ("Formen" 55), "textuell oder transtextuell" ("Metaisierung" 29), and "werkinterne vs. -externe Metareferenz" ("Metaisierung" 40)), which are not necessary, in my opinion, if we just oppose (intratextual) meta-reference to *intertextual/intermedial* meta-reference. Moreover, I will consciously avoid the labels *meta-textuality* and *meta-mediality*, since both entail further definition problems and do not describe any phenomena, at least as far as my analyses are concerned, that could not be ordered with the help of *intertextual/intermedial meta-reference/-reflection*.
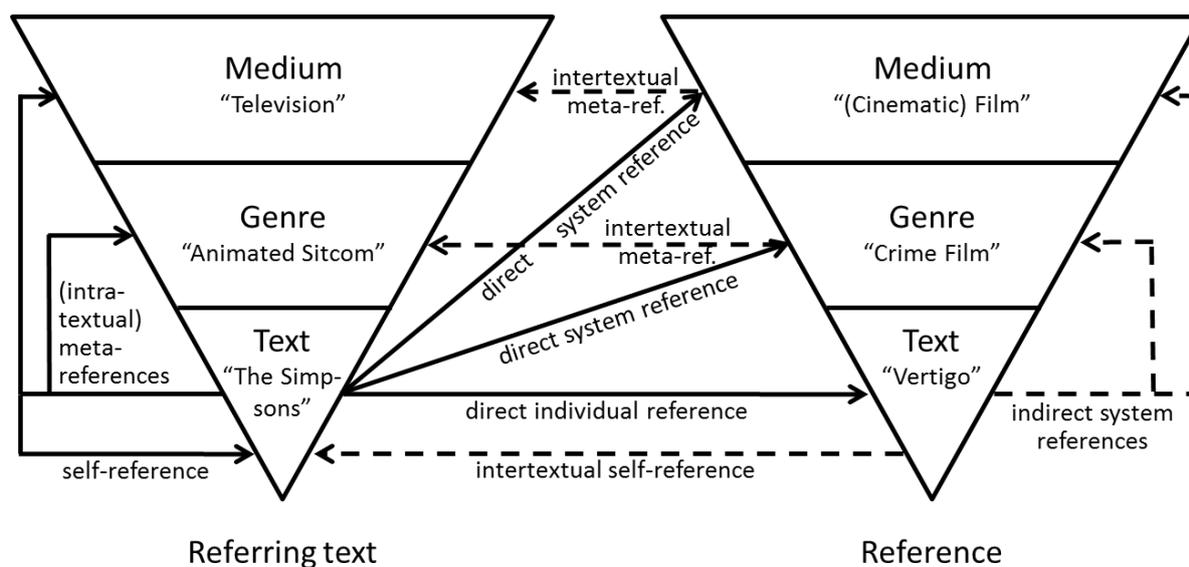
Figure 2:   Three levels of intermedial references, self- and meta-references

To flesh out at least one of the phenomena that can be explained with the help of this diagrammatic plan, the *Simpsons* episode "Bart the Murderer" (EP 3-4) may again[312] serve as an example. In this episode, Bart becomes involved with a group of mobsters and, after earning their trust, slowly develops a more active role in their criminal endeavors. When his Principal Skinner interferes with Bart's new tasks, the mobsters set forth to "teach him a lesson" and Skinner disappears. Bart slowly realizes that he might have caused Skinner's death and eventually gets arrested with the rest of his gang. In court, the mobsters sell him out, but just as he is about to be sentenced to a long time in prison, Skinner reappears to unravel the mystery of his whereabouts by telling an entirely absurd story of how he was trapped under a stack of old newspapers for several days.

The episode includes several intermedial references to mafia movies, especially to *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas*, as well as many features referring to the mafia film genre without necessarily evoking individual texts. Therefore, it is directly and indirectly linked to the mafia genre. However, as the story progresses, the action takes a turn away from the conventions of the mafia film and mixes them with a typical feature of the sitcom: the ability always to return to the way things were at the beginning of the episode, even if that means explaining narrative twists with rather illogical causal relations. Thus, the episode ironically – and meta-reflexively – comments on the characteristics of the sitcom genre by making a detour over the mafia film genre with the help of direct and indirect system references (see Figure 3).

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[312] See chapter 2.2. For a detailed analysis of the intermedial (system) references in "Bart the Murderer", see Knight 94-99.
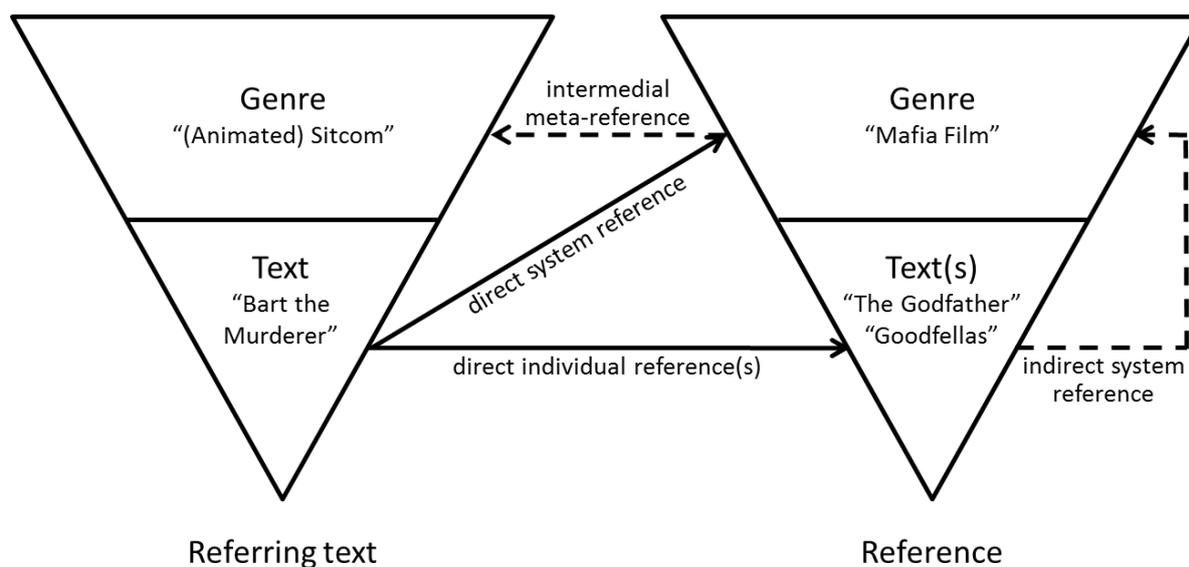
Figure 3:   (Meta-)referential relations in the episode "Bart the Murderer" (EP 3-4)

Now that working definitions of (intertextual/intermedial) *self-reference* and *meta-reference* (as well as *self-reflexivity* and *meta-reflexivity* as respective sub-groups) have been established, it is nonetheless advantageous to further specify the shapes and targets these references can have. Firstly, several researchers differentiate between *explicit* and *implicit* self- and meta-references.[313] Explicit references foreground the text's awareness of the characteristics that are being shown or discussed: for example, if fictional characters or narrators openly discuss the narrative conventions of "their" text or if a movie includes shots of cameras and microphones and thus discloses its modes of production, the text sacrifices its fictional integrity in order to explicitly discuss its qualities on the surface. Another very common means are stories about texts or their producers, such as the movie *Adaptation*, which deals with the hardships of script writing. As far as audiovisual media are concerned, explicit references dominate the reflection on aspects of production and reception.[314]

Implicit self-/meta-references, on the other hand, do not fully reveal their analytical potential and thus depend even more strongly on the recipient's co-operation. Like the example of the episode "Bart the Murderer," they often break with narrative/generic conventions or juxtapose different generic codes in order to create a feeling that "something is different." Structural changes or other innovations create dissonance in the reception process and thus irritate the established expectations.[315] In audiovisual media, such implicit references can consist of a mere change in coloring or screen composition, which then highlights the contrast to the medium's "normal" representational commonplaces.

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[313] See, for example, Gymnich 127, Siebert *Figuren* 97, Wolf *Illusion* 225, Wolf "Metafiction" 307, and Wolf "Metaisierung" 42-43. Analogously, Linda Hutcheon speaks of *overt* vs. *covert* meta-fiction; see *Narcissistic* 7, and Wolf *Illusion* 225.

[314] Gymnich 144.

[315] Siebert *Figuren* 89.

Secondly, whenever self-/meta-reference becomes self-/meta-reflection, the question of attitude, which has already been influential in the discussion of intertextuality, needs to be asked again: does the act of self- or meta-reflection express agreement with the forms it comments on, or does it criticize them?[316] Or is there even the option of a neutral perspective? It is difficult to imagine an instance of neutral meta-reflection that actually goes beyond mere meta-reference, since the procedure of consciously evaluating a text's genre or medium without any kind of judgment seems at least improbable. However, Werner Wolf emphasizes that by no means all meta-reflexivity is designed to criticize its object:[317] for instance, if a book compares the representational abilities of literature with those of the movies, the result may well be an appreciation of how literature can stimulate the reader's imagination. Still, in many cases texts develop a critical view on their own circumstances of, for example, production and reception. As will be examined later on, especially *The Simpsons* abounds with critical comments on its own genre and medium.

The previous aspects already hinted at a third and probably the most essential field of interest: *what* do self- and meta-reflexive instances comment on? Here, a model introduced by Gloria Withalm, which is inspired by the sociosemiotics of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and intended to describe different stages in the life cycle of films and television programs, promises a solid foundation for a comprehensive system of potential target areas. On the one hand, Withalm points out that every film – like all other texts – is always "characterized by its double nature" (129): the *textual* level (its appearance as a cultural product) is always accompanied by a *sociocultural/economic* level (the circumstances of its production etc.). On the other hand, she re-introduces "the fundamental cycle of *production*, *exchange* (or *distribution*), and *consumption* (or *reception*) as described by Rossi-Landi," but adds a fourth dimension which she calls "*product* of sign work (and the sign system)" (129; her italics). Since this last criterion is meant to consider the narrative and representational characteristics a given text develops in dependence of the factors that determine the three stages of its life cycle, I would prefer to label it *narration* instead, which would then include the particular devices a text uses because of the circumstances shaped by the other three dimensions.

As a result, I will apply a model that can determine whether a self- or meta-reference aims at the textual or sociocultural/economic level of a text and whether it comments on the area of production, narration, distribution, or reception (see Figure 4). This limited number of clearly arranged categories is able to reproduce other, more complex models whose more refined categories, in my opinion, do not further the understanding of self- and meta-

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[316] See Andacht 169-170, Siebert *Figuren* 98, Wolf *Illusion* 254, Wolf "Metafiction" 307, and Wolf "Metaisierung" 43-44.

[317] Wolf "Metaisierung" 44.

referentiality.[318] For example, the six communicative functions of self-reflexive moments in films set up by Fredericksen (sender, recipient, context, message, contact, code)[319] can easily be subsumed under the four categories favored here. Similarly, Kirchmann's seven groups of filmic self-references find a place in the more straightforward model: while "Film as an object and (industrial) product" and "Film as historical product" cover aspects of production and distribution, "Film and aesthetics" and "Film and television/new media" are concerned with questions of narration. Reception even summarizes three of Kirchmann's categories – "Film and perception," "Film and society", and "Film and reception" (69-72; my translation).[320]

	textual level	sociocultural/ economic level
production	What are the specific medial/ material characteristics that determine the creation of a text?	How do the specific medial/ material characteristics influence the people working on a text?
narration	What are the typical narrative devices of a genre/medium?	How are these narrative characteristics shaped by external factors?
distribution	How do the circumstances of distribution and advertising influence the text itself?	Which institutions and people are involved with the distribution and advertising of a text?
reception	How does the audience make sense of the text? Which sense organs are addressed?	How many readers receive the text? In which situations do they receive the text?

Figure 4:   Target areas of self- and meta-reflexive references

In order to fill the exemplary questions in Figure 4 with some life and prepare the ground for the functional analyses in the following chapters, I will briefly name a few aspects that may arouse self- and meta-reflexive interest in *The Simpsons*. As far as *production* is concerned,[321] self-referential moments may consider the limits of two-dimensional drawings or the conditions of cheap laborers in mass production animation studios. *Narration*[322] may

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[318] The model resembles an even simpler one by Lindvall/Melton, who do not differentiate between *production* and *distribution* and focus more restrictively on the creator's part in *narration*; 204-205. Especially in the case of mass media, the distinction between production and distribution is deemed essential (Rowe 215), since different forces may influence the two stages in the medial cycle.

[319] Siebert *Figuren* 90-91. Siebert, Fredericksen and others apply Roman Jakobson's model of the communicative functions of language to the analysis of self-referential phenomena in verbal and non-verbal media; see Jakobson 353-358.

[320] Original: "Film als Gegenstand und (Industrie-)Produkt," "Film als Historikum," "Film und Ästhetik," "Film und Fernsehen/Neue Medien," "Film und Wahrnehmung," "Film und Gesellschaft," and "Film und seine Rezeption."

[321] See also Beard 274, and Hutcheon *Parody* 16. For examples other than taken from *The Simpsons*, see Andacht 166, Gass 89, Gymnich 131/137, Lindvall/Melton 206-208, Oesterle 257, Reinecke 9, Rowe 218-219, Siebert *Figuren* 122-136, Stam 71, and Withalm 132-134.

[322] For examples other than taken from *The Simpsons*, see Gymnich 140-144, Lindvall/Melton 213-216, Polan 662, Siebert *Figuren* 95-96, Sierek 21-22, and Wolf "Metaisierung" 49-50.

evoke comments on how every episode has to return to a certain status quo in the end[323] or on how protection of minors influences the narrative devices the series disposes of. Under the heading of *distribution*,[324] the show may analyze how commercials interfere with its narrative coherence or how extensive merchandising influences its popularity.[325] Finally, aspects of *reception*[326] may include the interplay of visual and auditory signs in the communication process or the role of an active audience that tries to influence the development of the series.[327]

In sum, the phenomenon of self- and meta-reference, and especially its more complex implementation with the help of intertextual references, adds another interesting facet to the potential functions intermediality and intertextuality can execute in *The Simpsons*. Since I am primarily interested in functions, intertextual and intermedial self- and meta-*reflexivity* will be at the center of my further investigations in this field.[328] Various functions can be imagined, from rather populist attempts "to announce that [certain programs] are superior to the typical trash available on TV" (Bianculli 15) to more sophisticated comments on the stability of generic conventions or the crossing of medial borders.[329] The terminological specifications and descriptive models introduced in the present chapter (and in the chapters before) will support a structured analysis that does not lose itself in the admittedly confusing and frazzled arena of self-, meta-, intra-, extra-, inter-, trans-, hyper-, para-, post-, archi-, and other-prefix interactions between texts.

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[323] See the example of "Bart the Murderer" (EP 3-4) in this chapter.

[324] For examples other than taken from *The Simpsons*, see Bolz 59, Siebert *Figuren* 124-136, and Withalm 134-135.

[325] See also Ernst/Werkmeister 87.

[326] See also Butler/Sepp 366-373. For examples other than taken from *The Simpsons*, see Böhn 150-151, Gymnich 131/150-152, Lindvall/Melton 209-211, Reinecke 9/11-13, Rose *Meta-Fiction* 62-63, Siebert *Figuren* 137-151, Stam 149-150, and Withalm 135-136.

[327] See the example of "Saddlesore Galactica" (EP 11-13) in this chapter.

[328] In advance, I would like to disagree with Winfried Nöth, who observes that "[s]elf-reference in the media is hardly subversive […]; its functions tend to be predominantly playful and aesthetic" (23).

[329] Siebert "Self-reference" 155.

3.   *Functions of Intertextuality and Intermediality in* The Simpsons

3.1   **Analytical Approach and Organization**

As the previous chapters have shown, the theoretical mapping of intertextuality, intermediality, aesthetics of reception, self- and meta-reflexivity has fanned out to describe even minute aspects and the most complex forms of textual references. Five decades of research have contributed to a theoretical and methodological framework that could be expected to keep in store explanations for every imaginable type of text-text relation found in existing texts. Yet, in comparison to the vast body of theoretical literature, actual application with regard to *functions* of intertextuality and especially of intermediality remains rather scarce. This might be primarily due to a fear of destroying some of the inspiring implications intertextual theories have to offer: the intertextual analysis of actual texts will have to abandon the image of a global intertextuality; it will have to focus on very limited numbers of texts and their more or less obvious, but nevertheless limited interconnections. It will have to assume authors' intentions without – at least in most cases – being able to prove them. It will be able to consider the perspective of the audience, but this again will be a limited and generalized audience.

In general, to apply a complex philosophical idea, which involves producers, recipients, delimited texts, and delimited text relations, to a situation where one (or few) professional reader(s) face(s) a single text involves the danger of reducing its apparently unlimited creative potential and thus of losing part of what makes it new and fascinating. As has already been evident in the theoretical discussion, intertextuality's kinship with older concepts, such as source or influence studies, is responsible for a constant impulse to prove in how far intertextuality goes beyond them. While writing, researchers will frequently have to ask themselves, "What is so new about what I do?"

Still, there is something new and fascinating about the possibility of discovering more in a text than its surface level and some other texts that might have influenced it. In case of *The Simpsons*, whenever viewers are asked about their opinion on the creators' intentions for including myriads of intertextual references, the immediate answers revolve around "because it's funny and entertaining." However, the theories outlined above allow us to penetrate deeper levels of intertextual compositions. The various criteria for describing intertextual relations more closely – critical vs. affirmative, synchronic vs. diachronic, marked vs. unmarked, etc. – justify the search for functions that go beyond that of entertainment. The viewer as another creator of meaning accounts for additional readings that complement the producer's intention. The introduction of intermediality as a specific sub-category of intertextuality stimulates analytic interest in creative processes – especially as far as the modes of representation are concerned – that expand the more traditional analyses of written texts. Self- and meta-reflexivity co-operate with intermediality and thus contribute an additional field

of interest whose critical potential exceeds that of texts intended solely to entertain. Finally, the already broad spectrum of research questions supported by this theoretical framework is rounded off by the astounding representational options of animated film.

Inspired by and based on the previous theoretical discussions, the following analyses will be subdivided into three larger chapters dealing with three main areas of intertextual and intermedial functions. The first chapter will focus on functions that are most closely linked to the primary surface narration of the referring text. Those *intratextual functions* include the aforementioned purpose of entertainment, but also involve other narrative functions, such as character development or the support of atmospheres. Moreover, intertextual references – and especially intertextual plot structures – may on this level influence the actual comprehensibility of whole episodes.

The second chapter will then expand the focus to *extratextual functions*, which are expected to include some of the series' general features, like comments on current social and political developments, or the discussion of discourses that are difficult to tackle in (mass) media texts, but also aspects that more clearly involve the audience, like the artistic support of cultural memory, and what I prefer to call *emotional reappraisal*: the transfer of existing cultural themes and their forms of narration and representation to new contexts of reception (and the related alteration of perception).

Finally, the third chapter will concentrate on the most complex functional category, meta-reflexivity realized with the help of intertextuality. Here, the four target areas established in chapter 2.6 will serve as a guideline for analyzing the show's assessments of the conditions of its own production, narration, distribution, and reception.

It is likely that it will not always be possible to infer that a reference has only *one* function; categories are bound to overlap. Nevertheless, the examples chosen in the following chapters should be adequate to stress certain functional qualities without ignoring their interdependencies. In sum, the three categories will provide an extensive overview of the functions of intermediality and intertextuality in *The Simpsons*, based on a thorough understanding of the versatile interrelations of producer, recipient, text, and other texts.

3.2 Intratextual Functions

3.2.1 Entertainment

That intertextual references are entertaining to many recipients is unquestionable.[330] Intertextuality is one of the major factors that have enabled *The Simpsons* to sustain a large, diversified audience for more than 20 years, and it has created an incentive for this audience to participate actively in (online) discussions and cultural analysis. However, for intertextuality to be entertaining, it does not need to be "funny." It is my impression that humorous and other usages of intertextual references are equally important for the show's success. While this subchapter will also discuss in detail how and why references can be amusing, I will first examine more "serious" forms of intertextuality, which nevertheless contribute largely to the show's entertainment value.

First, several scenes involve a type of playful intertextuality that comes closest to what Jameson labels *postmodern pastiche*.[331] Here, the creators seem to enjoy the ability of re-producing images from other texts, even if the references do not contribute to the narration of a story or produce jokes.[332] As an outstanding example of this playful decoration, the episode "Bart's Friend Falls in Love" (EP 3-23) features a segment accurately modeled on the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the first of the Indiana Jones movies.[333]

In the opening shot, Bart tiptoes towards the jar Homer uses to collect his small coins, carefully avoiding the toys scattered on the floor in order not to make a sound. In the few sunrays coming in through the window, the jar seems to radiate an almost sacred glow in the dim room. Bart hesitates a second, then smoothly tips over the jar and catches it with his other hand. The pace of action, the lighting, and the position and appearance of the jar will remind many viewers of the first scenes of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in which Indiana Jones enters an ancient temple, cautiously avoids setting off the deathly traps, and grabs a holy relic from a sunlit altar. In the movie, this sacrilege activates the temple's self-destruction mechanism, the walls begin to crumble and the traps go off, leaving Jones no choice but to run for his life to reach the exit.

Similarly, as Bart hurries away with his booty, the room starts to shake and Homer, in his underpants, appears in the door frame. At this moment, the well-known *Indiana Jones* musical score sets in, finally marking the reference, and a hilarious chase through the Simpson home begins. Bart dashes off as Homer runs after him, stumbles, and rolls down the stairs behind him like a giant boulder. The boy jumps over the family's cat, ducks under the

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[330] The growing numbers of TV series that also heavily rely on intertextual referencing, such as *Friends*, *South Park*, *Ally McBeal*, *Scrubs*, and *Family Guy*, suggest that at least with the success of *The Simpsons*, intertextuality has become a standard ingredient of TV entertainment.

[331] Jameson "Logic" 70/85. See also chapter 1.1.

[332] See Schulte-Middelich's functional categories as described in chapter 2.2.

[333] For a series of screen shots comparing the two texts, see Rauscher 122.

dog, swings on the ceiling fan, avoids the arrows Maggie is shooting at him, and runs for the garage. Homer lowers the automatic door and Bart slides through the closing gap. He reaches back to pull out his cap from under the door a second before it is shut. Then he hops on the school bus waving his hat, while Homer – still in his underpants – is dancing wildly in the street and yelling mumbo-jumbo. Exchange the bus for a hydroplane and Homer for an angry native, and the scene looks just like Jones' escape at the end of *his* chase.

Yet, neither the chase nor the jar plays any further role in the episode. So why do the creators put so much effort into mimicking a movie scene piece by piece? The answer can obviously be found in the series' overall entertainment value: for children (and possibly also some of the older viewers) this scene is funny, not because of its intertextual connection, but because of Bart's mischief, the way he continuously outwits his father, and the slapstick elements. Other viewers, however, will not necessarily laugh about such a scene, but enjoy comparing the *Simpsons* version to the source texts. Therefore, a scene like the one discussed here may help to explain why viewers of different generations agree upon the series' entertainment value.

Borrowing a success factor from an entirely different television format, the quiz show, *The Simpsons* thus involves the audience in "a sort of quiz, testing viewer knowledge of both high and popular culture" (Ott 70).[334] It creates an eagerness in the viewer to detect as many references as possible and to be able to pin them down to specific source texts. In scenes like the one described above, which features extensive structural and visual parallels as well as sound markers, it is comparatively easy to activate the intertextual potential. Others, however, require utmost attention and a broad cultural education.

For instance, the episode "Burns, Baby Burns" (EP 8-4) contains a highly selective textual reference that is much more difficult to detect and to relate to its source. The episode deals with the reunion of Mr. Burns, Springfield's richest and stereotyped evil man, with his estranged son Larry. Although Mr. Burns admits that he actually has an illegitimate son, he is so annoyed with how little of a success story Larry's life has been that he just tries to dispose of him immediately. Trying to win back his father's love, Larry at one point quotes the line "You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away – a man is not a piece of fruit" (58) from Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* to express his disappointment with the way his father treats him.

Although the play also deals with the mutual disappointment in a father-son relationship, the quoted line is used in a completely different cotext, a discussion between the protagonist Willy Loman and his boss, who has just fired him. As a consequence, only viewers who know the play by heart will discover the reference, but once the connection is made, both of the play's main topics can convey additional levels of meaning that can contribute to

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[334] See also Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 12.

the narrative complexity of the respective scene: on the one hand, the image of the genera-tional conflict between Willy Loman and his sons in *Death of a Salesman* lends a deeper tragic moment to the more superficial, 20-minute estrangement of the Burns family; on the other hand, the connection to a play describing how the American dream of material success sometimes turns into a nightmare subtly criticizes Mr. Burns as a ruthless capitalist.

The episode "Lisa's Substitute" (EP 2-19) provides an even more astonishing exam-ple of the complex sign structures the creators of the show set up in order to motivate the viewers to integrate their previous cultural experiences into the reception process. One of the main plotlines deals with a new teacher filling in as substitute for Lisa's class. Mr. Bergstrom, a new character on the show, proves to be different from Springfield's usual teachers; he manages to interest his students in the curriculum and generously but confidently handles cases of misbehavior, and before long, Lisa develops a major crush on him. Mr. Bergstrom's slightly Jewish appearance, some of the clothes he wears (especially a cowboy outfit), and particularly his voice – which according to the episode credits was provided by one Sam Etic[335] – immediately reminded many viewers of a well-known actor. Then, a scene closely modeled on the movie *The Graduate* finally gives him away: when Bart's teacher, Mrs. Krabappel, once again tries to leave her gender-related disappointments behind and flirts with Bergstrom, he responds with a line from the movie, "Mrs. Krabappel, you are trying to seduce me!" Moreover, the scene employs the same camera angle, which films Berg-strom/Ben Braddock through the gap between Mrs. Krabappel's/Mrs. Robinson's legs. In sum, the creators inserted several signs indicating that Dustin Hoffman did the voice-overs for Mr. Bergstrom, but they were bound by contract not to use his name in the credits or in public.[336]

It was only two seasons later in the episode "Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie" (EP 4-6) that they offered some validation and thus rewarded the viewers for their intertextual in-volvement, as Lisa described her impressions of the "Itchy & Scratchy" movie with the words, "You wouldn't believe the celebrities who did cameos! Dustin Hoffman, Michael Jackson[337]… Of course, they didn't use their real names, but you could tell it was them." This example of a cleverly hidden, playful reference highlights how the show uses intertextuality to create a multi-level entertainment package that honors regular viewers who participate in the cultural quiz without disadvantaging others who do not notice the references. Although one is tempt-ed to draw further (and rather abstract) parallels between the episode and the movie – the general topic of an emotional relationship between two persons of very different age, for in-

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[335] The word "Semitic" works as another hint to a Jewish actor.

[336] See Turner 92.

[337] Michael Jackson is also believed to have appeared as an uncredited guest voice in the episode "Stark Raving Dad" (EP 3-1).

stance – the major function of intertextuality here seems to be the aforementioned playful inclusion of entertaining factors for particular segments of the audience.

In a similar vein, full-fledged homages also contribute to the show's entertainment value without necessarily being hilarious, but they are more obviously marked instances of intertextual referencing and also frequently contribute significantly to the storytelling process. They can involve short sequences or whole episodes. A very detailed example of the first type can be found in the episode "22 Short Films about Springfield" (EP 7-21),[338] which imitates the style of episodic movies like *Grand Canyon*, *Short Cuts*, or *Pulp Fiction*.

Especially *Pulp Fiction*, with its experimental plot structure of interrelated sub-plots that jump forwards and backwards in time, seems to have had a considerable influence on the *Simpsons* episode. With two scenes derived from the movie the producers of the show honor Tarantino's innovative film-making and *Pulp Fiction's* already established position as a cultural classic. The first is a remake of the "Royal with Cheese Dialogue" between Vincent and Jules, only this time it is police chief Wiggum and his two officers Lou and Eddie discussing the peculiarities of McDonald's products in comparison to Springfield's own Krusty Burger. Since the scene does not really add much to the original text, the entertainment value here develops from the imitation of an already famous dialogue which managed to catch the viewers' attention in its original cotext when its insignificance was opposed to the characters speaking – two professional killers.

It prepares the ground for one of the following short films, in which the episode returns to *Pulp Fiction* and stages one the movie's most shocking scenes: chief Wiggum and the criminal Snake are being held prisoner (strapped to chairs and gagged with red rubber balls) and are about to be abused by a military shop owner. Milhouse and his father stumble in on them and by accident knock out the shop owner and free the captives.[339] Once again, the arrangement imitates the setting, lighting, and camera work of the movie, but this time the plot is changed in accordance with the conventions of a sitcom suitable for children. While the scene thus avoids the violence and torture characteristic for Tarantino's movies, it still – like the scene before – employs enough references to clearly link the episode to one of the most influential movies of the 90s. The homage acknowledges the impact *Pulp Fiction* has had on film-making and TV programs, and emphasizes the fact that *The Simpsons* is not only indebted to many individual texts, but also to generic developments. One of the reasons for the apparently never-ending success of the show is that it has always been open to groundbreaking innovations, and has been developed accordingly.

As far as the second type is concerned, there are several episodes that are almost entirely adapted from or inspired by other texts, including the example of "Cape Feare"

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[338] The episode title is a reference to the movie *32 Short Films about Glenn Gould*.
[339] See also Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 14.

(EP 5-2) mentioned in chapter 2.2. In those cases, it will be necessary to differentiate between two types: on the one hand, there are episodes that use a movie or book as a source and copy much of their imagery and storyline, but do not probe this intermedial relation for the additional significance that might arise from the different medial conditions. The adaptation of *Cape Fear*, for instance, stays rather close to the original, including the setting, the sequence of events, and roughly the character constellations. Since this is possible with only minor alterations to the usual sitcom cast and backdrop, the story in general stays true to both of its cotexts, the movie and the *Simpsons* episode (with the exception of the ironically absurd ending of the episode).

As a consequence, the crossing of medial borders or the possibilities of animation do not noticeably develop any additional creative potential, and any viewer can make sense of the story whether or not he is familiar with the evoked source text. Although negative voices would probably believe this type of intertextuality to result from a lack of original imagination, I would prefer to call such an episode an instance of extended homage, especially since adaptations like this are usually based on texts that are considered to be among the best specimens of their genres/media.

On the other hand, there are episodes whose plots are largely influenced by other texts, but which creatively deal with the tension that arises from the differences. While this approach will be analyzed separately in closer detail in subchapter 3.2.4, I will discuss another outstanding example of the episode-long homages here.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* provides the inspiration for much of the episode "Bart of Darkness" (EP 6-1).[340] After breaking his leg when he tries to jump in the family's new swimming pool, Bart cannot spend the summer playing with the other children anymore and gets terribly bored. He is slowly becoming paranoid due to the boredom and starts hiding in his darkened room,[341] inventing mysterious role plays and switching through unbearable TV programs of summer break re-runs. To keep him occupied, Lisa gives him a telescope, but instead of scanning outer space, Bart starts spying on their neighbors.

Here the extended reference to *Rear Window* begins, which is clearly marked as Bart focuses his telescope on the cartoon double of James Stewart in a wheelchair, leg in a cast and a camera in his hands, observing Bart in return through his camera objective. In his typical drawl, he calls for Grace (Kelly) to take a look at this "sinister looking kid." The plot quickly returns to the Simpson home, where Bart, after hearing a woman scream in the Flanders' house, starts watching Ned Flanders more closely as he agitatedly wanders around the house and buries something in the garden. Bart quickly arrives at the conclusion that Flanders must have murdered his wife, who seems to be absent from their home.

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[340] Rauscher 123.

[341] The way Bart begins to seal off a little world for himself where only his rules apply explains the episode title, which is a reference to Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*.

The shots of Bart sitting in the darkness feature music taken from the movie, as well as setting details, such as Venetian blinds on his window. Moreover, he has to face the same problem as the James Stewart character Jeff in the movie, as nobody seems to believe him. He finally sends Lisa over to the neighbors' to look for evidence[342] and has to watch in agony how Flanders comes back with an axe and apparently follows Lisa from floor to floor up to the attic. Trying to save her, Bart also hobbles over to the Flanders' house (which makes James Stewart scream, "that sinister looking kid is coming to kill me!" – another reference to the movie plot, where the neighbor he has been spying on actually comes over to kill Jeff) and reaches Lisa just before Flanders puts the axe – away in a rack. Together they solve the mystery and find out that Flanders' wife is on a trip and he just overwatered her favorite plant (which made him scream like a woman) and buried it in the yard.

The episode nicely re-designs the movie's atmosphere, including a summer heat wave as the background for a sense of confinement, and the different facets of loneliness and boredom the protagonists experience. Music and lighting contribute to the restless mood that makes both Jeff and Bart give in to their impulse of curiosity. Moreover, *Rear Window* has occasionally been analyzed with regard to the relationship between spectator and screen and its reflection in the passive voyeurism and helplessness of the film's main character.[343] "Bart of Darkness" resumes this discussion as it puts the act of spying on your neighbors in direct opposition to watching television. As Bart chooses the first just because the second has nothing interesting to offer, he inevitably enters the role of the passive observer, which is then shattered for both Bart and Jeff when they perceive the urge to interact with the program they are watching.

However, despite these sophisticated discourses, the reference cannot be expected to generate any essential intermedial significance for the episode, because the *Rear Window* plot element – with the exception of the usual sitcom twist towards the ending – is so closely based on the movie and takes up such a big share of the episode. The storyline needs to work for viewers who are not familiar with *Rear Window*. The shots of James Stewart openly mark the reference and also provide a signal for those viewers who have not seen the movie, since the introduction of a character who has never been on the show before interrupts the predictable sequence of familiar characters Bart spies on. Still, they do not influence the narrative in any way, thus making sure that the plot is completely comprehensible without its intermedial connections being activated. Once again, the extended homage to an outstanding filmic achievement only offers certain viewers a chance for a second level of entertainment and contemplation.

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[342] Rather by accident, the reference here even includes her name, since Grace Kelly also plays "Lisa" and sneaks into the neighbor's apartment in *Rear Window*.

[343] See Truffaut/Scott 178-179.

The preceding examples have shown that intertextual references function as an important contribution to the entertainment value of *The Simpsons*, even if they do not make the viewer laugh like jokes, insults, stupidity, slapstick, or other commonplaces of comedy programs would. However, there are also many instances where references directly contribute to the show's humorous appeal and would probably be accompanied by peaks of the audience laugh track – if *The Simpsons* used one. Just like the more neutral references, humorous references can appear in different quantity, to borrow Plett's term, from single lines or images to complex structural parallels.

The easiest way to create intertextual humor is to re-use a joke that has proved to be funny before. Another Hitchcock movie provided one of the classic visual jokes that work entirely independently of the respective cotext, be it a movie, a comic book, or an animated TV show. The last scene of *North by Northwest* shows the heroic couple climbing into a sleeping compartment. The second they lie down in intimate embracement, the shot switches to an outdoors overview of the train running into a tunnel.

Since then, this Freudian symbolic image of sexual intercourse has been repeated, expanded, and ridiculed in many other visual texts, including *The Simpsons*. In the episode "Grampa vs. Sexual Inadequacy" (EP 6-10), Homer tries out an aphrodisiac his father has invented. He drives home, sends the children away to see a movie, grabs Marge, and carries her to their bedroom. Then, a train entering a tunnel leaves the audience in no doubt that Grampa's brew is a big success. Since the "train in tunnel" image has become a cultural commonplace due to its repeated intertextual distribution, the joke works without knowledge of its original source, and what is more important, without the necessity of a train actually being part of the storyline. Much like a proverb, the image has lost most of its surface message (the train is irrelevant) and has developed a fixed symbolic meaning that can be understood in any imaginable cotext.

The Simpsons would not be *The Simpsons*, however, if it did not further analyze this cultural phenomenon: in the episode in question, the train is immediately followed by short sequences of a rocket taking off, and a line of rather limp hotdogs on a conveyor-belt. By summarizing the whole "act" in a three-second collage of slightly phallic images, the show here ironically comments on the media's ability to represent topics they are not allowed to represent by changing the codes of rather "harmless" images,[344] but it also acknowledges the achievements of creators who at least managed to re-code images that are convincing enough to be turned into cultural heritage – in contrast to the rocket and the hotdogs, for example. In order to ironically round off this comment, the camera then moves away from the

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[344] However, *The Simpsons* is not the first program to comment on this phenomenon: the scene is also an intertextual reference to the first season of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, which uses a similar collage of absurd visual metaphors for sexual intercourse, including images of rockets and sausages.

hotdogs to show the Simpson children in a cinema actually watching a film about hotdogs on a conveyor-belt – and a sign on the wall says "Stock footage festival."

When *The Simpsons* returns to this joke in a later episode, it even takes a further step and shows that the process of cultural appropriation is unlimited: in "Make Room for Lisa" (EP 10-16), Principal Skinner tries to explain to his mother why he did not have a connection on his cell phone on the way home, but she interrupts him, yelling, "I don't want you going through tunnels! You know what that symbolizes!" The train in the tunnel is no longer important for the message – the verbal reference to a tunnel alone creates an image in the recipient's mind that has lost all physical relation to its signifier. On the one hand, this little scene of an exaggerated change in communication patterns shows that *The Simpsons* is not the children's program some of its critics take it for, as it (partly) depends on communicative skills and experiences that are shaped by an adult viewpoint and a pronounced media awareness. On the other hand, it proves that the producers of the show are well aware of the effect intertextuality has on medial communication. Only a repeated adaptation – as presented in the first reference to the train – can turn an image taken from a cultural text into a standard message that will be understood by large parts of the audience even if put in a completely different cotext or if only talked about.

While the train symbol keeps the meaning it developed in its original cotext and thus accounts for humorous situations whenever it is employed again, other references achieve humorous effects by doing exactly the opposite. Disharmony between an established line or image and a new cotext serves as a major means of creating funny moments in *The Simpsons* and other postmodern comedies. Following Hebel's descriptive categories, disharmony can develop in the areas of modification and cotextualization:[345] on the one hand, slight alterations in the content or shape of a quotation or imitated visual image can create disharmonic tension, as they enable the recipient to still recognize the source text but also emphasize the parts that have been changed. In the course of the investigations of the alleged murder of Mr. Burns in episode 7-1, for example, the police question groundskeeper Willie, a Scotsman and proud wearer of the kilt. Throwing a glance up somebody's skirt, however, becomes less erotic if it is a middle-aged man who tries to imitate Sharon Stone's leg movements from *Basic Instinct*, so the officers turn away in disgust. While the question what lurks beneath a Scottish kilt has repeatedly made its way into comedy, 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.

On the other hand, the inclusion of a virtually unchanged quotation in an entirely different cotext can also produce humorous situations, combining the cultural quiz effect de-

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[345] See chapter 2.2. See also Rose *Ancient* 21/32.

scribed above with a tension resulting from circumstances or speech situations.[346] *The Simp-sons* includes countless instances where characters quote memorable movie lines like "You call that a knife?" from *Crocodile Dundee*[347] or *Batman's* "To the batmobile,"[348] which are funny if uttered by other people in different situations, but do not provide any additional information about the movies they stem from or the cotext they appear in now. These examples include lines like "To the Simpson-mobile" or "To the Back-mobile" (uttered by a German pastry chef, of course), which illustrate that humorous situations often involve both possible means of contrast – a change in content *and* cotext.

Since these jokes work only if the intertextual potential is put into practice (in contrast to jokes that refer to other jokes, like the train in the tunnel), the producers understandably rely mainly on famous classics as source texts. If too many jokes go unnoticed by large parts of the audience, a comedy program is in danger of losing its pace; therefore, references to texts that are well-known to generations of viewers with different backgrounds stand the best chance of keeping up the entertainment flow. The epic *Gone with the Wind* may serve as an example here, as it is one the highest ranked and most widely circulated movies of all times.[349]

The film, which tells a story of the American Civil War and its aftermath from a white, Southern aristocratic viewpoint, has produced several iconic lines and images that have been quoted and alluded to again and again in later texts. As a consequence, a recent text like *The Simpsons* can depend on the audience being largely familiar which its main plot elements as well as with its narrative devices. Towards the middle of the movie, just as famine, exhaustion, and desperation caused by the war reach their peak, the heroine Scarlett O'Hara dramatically swears against a blood-red sky, "As God is my witness, they're not going to lick me. I'm going to live through this and when it's all over, I'll never be hungry again." It is a statement that summarizes what will be the driving force for much of the remaining plot: until the very end, Scarlett will never stop fighting for herself, her folks, and her home.

In the *Simpsons* episode "Brush with Greatness" (EP 2-18), a shortened and slightly altered version appears in a cotext that could not be any more different, as Homer makes a vow after he has once again realized that he has gained a little too much weight: "As God is my witness, I will always be hungry again!" Here, the grammatical disharmony alone accounts for a certain jocularity,[350] but it is especially the contrast between the epic tragedy of the movie and the all too familiar high level complaints of industrialized societies that makes

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[346] Plett describes this tension under the heading of *interference*; see chapter 2.2.

[347] See, for example, EP 4-12, EP 5-8, and EP 6-16.

[348] See, for example, EP 3-21, EP 6-2, EP 7-4, and EP 13-11.

[349] See Vertrees 1-3. Although Margaret Mitchell's novel of the same title was also quite successful, most people will think of the 1939 movie adaptation when they hear *Gone with the Wind*.

[350] See also Rose *Ancient* 37.

those viewers laugh who detect the intermedial reference. Moreover, the ironic dissonance between Homer's everyday problem and the great dramatic ambition he expresses with the help of an established line implicitly foreshadows his failure due to the obvious lack of will-power especially the male Simpsons suffer from.

Similarly, *Gone with the Wind* provides some cultural memories with regard to its other main topic, unfulfilled love. In the episode "Principal Charming" (EP 2-14), Principal Skinner quotes a line from the last scene of the movie, in which Scarlett lies sobbing on a staircase after her beloved Rhett Butler has finally left her, but again regains her confidence to face a new day. After he has been courting Marge's sister Patty for a while, Skinner seems to have found the love of his life, but she refuses to marry him, and he sees all his dreams crushed. But then, just like Scarlett, he rises from the stairs in front of his elementary school, faces an orange sunset modeled on the shot described earlier, and exclaims, "after all, tomorrow is another school day".

This time, the narrative cotext does not differ significantly from the movie, since both scenes focus on a devastated person who has just lost the love of his/her life, but who is determined to endure. Yet, the adding of the little word "school" serves as the indicator of an ironic shift in focus from the larger tragedies to the smaller animosities of everyday life: on the next school day, Skinner vents his disappointment on Bart, who had been profiting from the principal's involvement with a family member. Both scenes show how famous textual references, if put in a different cotext and/or marginally altered, can unfold considerable humorous potential if they are noticed and contextualized by the audience.

The same is true for visual references, although they are often more difficult to arrange in a different cotext and to detect by the audience. Again, *The Simpsons* holds in store an example taken from *Gone with the Wind*. In the episode "Bart's Inner Child" (EP 5-7), Homer brings home an old trampoline, and soon all the children of Springfield frequent the Simpson garden for a quick hop. In a hilariously exaggerated shot, this leads to a field of hundreds of injured children lying in the Simpsons' backyard, and the camera glides smoothly over them from a close up of few moaning children to an overview of acres littered with mutilated bodies that strongly resembles the filming of wounded soldiers after the attack on Atlanta in *Gone with the Wind*. In this case, the audience is not entirely dependent on the intermedial background to grasp the joke based on hyperbole, but the reference to *Gone with the Wind* emphasizes a dramatic moment filled with larger-than-life pathos and agony and once again contrasts it with the little tragedies that motivate many of the plots revolving around the Simpson family. While this procedure does not criticize or question the values expressed in the movie, but instead honors its narrative and filmic achievements, it definitely harvests some of the series' funniest moments from the juxtaposition.

Irony, which plays a substantial role in creating disharmony in the examples just described, is in general one of the most common ingredients of intertextual humor in *The Simpsons*. Since "most forms of irony [involve] 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" (Cuddon 430),[351] intertextual references work perfectly in ironic statements: the recipients' familiarity with a source texts, its main messages and interpretations leads to certain expectations about the meaning, results, or reality in a given situation, which can then be counteracted by the changes inherent in the new communicative circumstances. While ironic discrepancy can develop in minuscule narrative units, such as Principal Skinner's vigorous announcement of another school day, which is then undermined by his narrow-minded behavior on the following day, it can also built a superordinate narrative frame that creates dissonance between intertextually grounded expectations and their ironic inversion on a higher communicative level.

For instance, the episode "The Principal and the Pauper" (EP 9-2) makes use of viewers' familiarity with Mark Twain's novel *The Prince and the Pauper* to prepare the ground for a plot of exchanged identities.[352] In the novel, a beggar child and the heir to the English throne willingly switch their identities in order to experience what the other one's life is like. In the course of their adventures both come to recognize the advantages and disadvantages of each other's and hence of their own lives and in the end gladly change back. The future king has learned a valuable lesson, promises to reign with mercy and fairness, and fixes his look-alike up with a privileged position at the court.

In the *Simpsons* episode, it turns out that Principal Skinner, although he is a well-known, permanent character on the show, is actually an impostor who, on his return from Vietnam, had usurped the social position and the aims in life of his missing superior officer. Now that the real Skinner has been released from a Chinese labor camp, he reclaims his position and possessions, while his doppelganger returns to being the "no-goodnik" (his word) he used to be before he made himself comfortable in another man's life. As the new/real Skinner begins living "his" life, he turns out to be a little less likeable than his predecessor, but the main problems result from the fact that he differs from the expectations the people who share his life have developed towards him. He does not seem to fit in the niche the fake Skinner has molded in his environment of friends, family, and profession.

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[351] For a detailed introduction to contemporary forms and functions of verbal and structural irony, see Linda Hutcheon's book *Irony's Edge*. See also Rose *Ancient* 87-90 and Rose *Meta-Fiction* 51-54.

[352] The episode's plot is actually rather indebted to the 16th century story of the French peasant Martin Guerre, which has been widely discussed and adapted up to modern times (recent adaptations include the French film *Le Retour de Martin Guerre* and the U.S. American version *Sommersby*, as well as a musical titled *Martin Guerre*). However, since the episode title clearly marks Twain's novel as the main source of inspiration and more viewers can be expected to be familiar with this classic, it seems adequate to focus on the analysis of the tension that results from the intermedial relation between the book and the episode.

Now, with the model of *The Prince and the Pauper* in mind, the audience expects *The Simpsons* to find a solution for this situation, especially since the sitcom genre has repeatedly proven to find creative ways out of hopeless dilemmas in order to restore the status quo at the end of an episode. And the solution is creative, but it is also highly ironic: the townspeople decide that they want the old Skinner back, which means that they have to get rid of the other. In an obviously fruitless attempt to allow the real Skinner to keep his dignity, they strap him to a train wagon and slowly drive him out of town with the appropriate parading and hooting. Springfield's judge then bestows on the impostor "the name of Seymour Skinner, as well as his past, present, future, and mother." He then goes on to "decree that everything will be just like it was before all this happened! And no one will ever mention it again... under penalty of torture."

While many fans criticized the episode for destroying the credibility of an established supporting character and for awkwardly wrapping up a weak plot in an even weaker ending,[353] the tension between normal narrative conventions, generic expectations, and an intermedial referential frame allows for sophisticated meta-reflexive humor.[354] The episode involves two sets of expectations – one based on the intermedial knowledge of Twain's novel and the other based on the sitcom formulae – which complement each other and could actually both be satisfied by a more typical sitcom ending: why not have the fake Skinner go back to being principal and find another useful occupation for the real one? Instead, both sets of expectations are contradicted by the ironic break with the possible solution promised in the referential episode title *and* by the meta-ironic deconstruction of sitcom screen writing. By disobeying the judge's order never to mention the incident again, the critical fans ironically undermine what in theory could actually have worked: the episode does not only reinstate Skinner in his familiar position, it turns back the wheels of narrated time and everything is just as it was before. In future episodes, Skinner does not pretend he is Skinner – he *is* Skinner; or as one fan put it on snpp.com: "considering [the episode's] pointless nature, I'll pretend it didn't even exist."[355]

Finally, if all the types of humorous references described above and others come together, *The Simpsons* develops instances of full-fledged postmodern parody.[356] While one type of largely intertextual episodes has been discussed under the label of *extended homage*, I propose to reserve the label *parody* for certain episodes that follow a different ap-

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[353] See, for example, the harsh comments on http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F23 (as visited on Jul. 3rd, 2010).

[354] As indicated before, it is often impossible to pinpoint a reference's *one* function. While the present subchapter focuses on their entertainment value, chapter 3.4 will deal with meta-reflexive functions in closer detail.

[355] See http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F23 (as visited on Jan. 23rd, 2010).

[356] For an introduction to the humorous effects of parody, see Rose *Ancient* 19-36 and Rose *Meta-Fiction* 19-21. As my analysis will show – and in line with the findings of expert theoreticians of parody, such as Margaret A. Rose and Linda Hutcheon – parody is by no means limited to humorous effects. However, humor is one of the main functions in the texts I label *parody* here; therefore, it seemed justifiable to discuss them under the heading of *entertainment*.

proach then the aforementioned adaptations of *Cape Fear* and *Rear Window*. Those episodes heavily relied on other texts, but still told their story with the regular setting and character constellations of a family sitcom. In contrast, parodies use another text's basic features (e.g., plot, setting, characters) to tell a distorted and ironic version. Following Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody as "an integrated structural modeling process of revising, replaying, inverting, and 'trans-contextualizing' previous works of art" (*Parody* 11),[357] the intertextual focus and humorous appeal here shifts towards the parodied text: possibly generic conventions of the present text fade behind the characteristics of the parodied text or genre.

Early examples on *The Simpsons* are mainly limited to the Halloween episodes, which break with the show's intended realism and allow for more flexible narrative conditions. Among the "Treehouse of Horror" episodes, there are parodies of, for example, Poe's *The Raven* (EP 2-3), *King Kong* (EP 4-5), Francis Ford Coppola's adaptation of *Dracula* (EP 5-5), and several episodes of the TV series *The Twilight Zone* (EP 3-7, EP 4-5, EP 7-6, EP 8-1). In later seasons, however, more and more episodes are establishing a frame narrative that prepares the ground for parodies, which might be due to the slowly ebbing inspiration for new plotlines, but still enables the show to address issues that are difficult to tackle in a sitcom ambiance. In the episode "Simpsons Bible Stories" (EP 10-18), the family members fall asleep in church during a long bible reading and in their dreams become the cast of, for instance, the story of Adam and Eve, David and Goliath etc. Similarly, in the episode "Simpsons Tall Tales" (EP 12-21), the family spends a train ride with a hobo who tells them three stories based on American myths or classics, featuring Homer as Paul Bunyan, Lisa as Connie ("Johnny") Appleseed, and Bart as Tom Sawyer.

The example I will discuss here in detail stems from a similar frame narrative in the episode "Tales from the Public Domain" (EP 13-14): a notice from the library reminds Homer that he once checked out a book of *Classics for Children* to read to his newborn son. Slightly delayed, he starts entertaining his family with three classic tales: a Homer Simpson version of Homer's *Odyssey*, Lisa as *Joan of Arc*, and Bart starring a *Simpsons* adaptation of *Hamlet*. The segment based on *Hamlet* is particularly interesting with regard to the various elements of parody it combines. Even before the actual parody begins, the frame narrative already establishes a certain ambivalence towards the text that is about to be parodied: while Bart is doubtful about the play's entertainment abilities and complains that "these old stories cannot compare with our modern super-writers – Steven Bochco[358] could kick Shakespeare's ass," Lisa assures him that "this story is more interesting than you think: it starts with Hamlet's father getting murdered." Bart's and Lisa's comments represent the "mixture of praise

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[357] See also Dentith 157, and Hutcheon *Poetics* 26.

[358] Steven Bochco is a TV writer and producer who has had considerable influence on the development of more refined scripts and casts in various television series, especially police dramas.

and blame [that] makes such parody into a critical act of reassessment and acclimatization" (Hutcheon, *Parody* 2).[359]

This discrepancy between a general appreciation of the older text's narrative achievements and an ironic distance towards some of its stylistics features remains one of the central sources of humorous moments throughout the story. The juxtaposition of old and new, affirmative and critical manifests itself on different parodist levels. In its simplest form, it appears in minor details that easily slip by unnoticed: for example, Bart's royal bedroom, although modeled on a chamber in a medieval castle, includes a poster that says "Danes Do It Melancholy," as well as a pennant that reads "Feudalism," and whenever the ghost of Bart's deceased father disappears through a wall, he leaves behind a pool of green slime on the stones, which is a reference to the movie *Ghostbusters*.

On another level, the episode toys with the dramatic and stylistic conventions of the Elizabethan theater:[360] in a meta-reference to the source text's structure, Shakespeare's play-in-the-play is replaced by a stand-up-comedy-in-the-comedy with an improvised ear-poisoning sketch ("ear poison – do not get in eyes") performed by Krusty the Jester's ensemble. Moreover, the language quickly changes back and forth between an archaic tone based on Shakespeare's style and the usual language style of *The Simpsons*. For instance, the ghost's account of the events surrounding his death and the following hasty marriage of Claudius/Moe and Gertrude/Marge only earns him a belittling and laconic "yeah, that was quite a weekend" from Bart. Only a few shots later, however, Bart even quotes from *Hamlet* word-by-word when he realizes that Krusty's comedy show may give him the opportunity to test whether Claudius has anything to do with his father's death: "the play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" ("Hamlet" 78).

The contrasting of the two styles emphasizes their differences and thus initiates a re-evaluation of both: "With the juxtaposition of two codes, the parodist steps in to comment on the pre-formed language of the quoted text [...] and in doing so creates what might be called [...] a 'metalanguage'" (Rose, *Meta-Fiction* 51).[361] When Moe is agitated by his words, Bart responds, "You're not supposed to hear me. That's a soliloquy!", thus stressing one of the play's predominant features and making the viewer aware of its absence in modern texts. Again, one of Linda Hutcheon's definitions seems to apply perfectly: "Parody [...] is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (*Parody* 6). All the examples described so far contrast the source text with its humorous adaptation, stress the differences, and thus create intermedial jokes, but they do not assess Shakespeare's play as a whole.

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[359] See also Müller "Hamlet" 128, Rose *Ancient* 21-23, and Rose *Meta-Fiction* 28/33.

[360] See also Hutcheon *Parody* 3.

[361] For a detailed elaboration of humorous discrepancies in parodist language, see Rose *Ancient* 21.

What turns the *Simpsons* version of *Hamlet* into a really fascinating instance of analytical parody can only be revealed through a detailed understanding of the forces that drive the play's sequence of events. From the first act, things should be clear: the ghost of the murdered king informs Hamlet that Claudius, recently married to Hamlet's mother Gertrude and usurper to the throne, is responsible for his death. Hamlet will have to find some evidence for the regicide and take revenge. Since Claudius' reaction to the play-in-the-play makes him at least strongly suspicious, the path of action for Hamlet should be evident. Yet, for the development of the character-based plot what goes on in the protagonists' minds is more important than which events seem to trigger further action. In long soliloquies the audience is informed about the characters' mental state, and it becomes obvious how reflecting on his own rage and grief, insecurity, and hesitation make Hamlet unable to follow a clear course of action.

This inability triggers a sequence of deaths that add up to the almost ironic, exaggerated tragedy of the play. First, Hamlet sends his former schoolfellows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths because he believes them to be part of one of Claudius' treacherous plots. Although it is far from certain that they actually meant him any harm,[362] it seems easier for Hamlet to get rid of them than actually having to kill Claudius. Next, during an enraged argument with his mother, Hamlet accidentally kills the Lord Chamberlain Polonius, who had been spying on them to test whether Hamlet is losing his sanity. Polonius' daughter Ophelia, whom Hamlet seems to be in love with, goes insane over her grief and finally drowns – it remains uncertain if it is an accident or suicide. Ophelia's brother, Laertes, devastated by his sister's and father's death, swears to take revenge on Hamlet, who used to be his friend. Claudius arranges a fencing match between them as he sees a chance to dispose of his stepson. To make sure that the fight will have the desired outcome, Laertes and Claudius poison the tip of Laertes' sword and a cup of wine for Hamlet. In the course of the struggle, Laertes and Hamlet wound each other with the poisoned sword, and accidentally Queen Gertrude drinks of the poisoned wine. It is only with his last breath that Hamlet finally takes revenge on Claudius, leaving not only the usurper but seven others dead, too. All the deaths are in some way linked to each other and logically result from Hamlet's inability to make up his mind about the only death that is justified, the punishment of Claudius.

In *The Simpsons*, this hyper-tragedy now becomes the subject of a second-degree ironic inversion, which is created in two steps. First, the involvement of established characters serves as a major force in the direction the events in the parody take: since *The Simpsons* disposes of a large stock of already established characters, parody cannot develop with the help of "blank" actors imitating the parodied characters but will have to consider the way

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[362] Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* tells the story from the perspective of the two minor characters, who hardly understand their role in *Hamlet* and why they have to die.

the protagonists behave in their usual setting. Bart as Hamlet is not Hamlet; he is reckless, bound for action, and often unable to reflect on his own deeds. Ralph Wiggum as Laertes is too harmless to pose any threat to Hamlet. Marge as Gertrude has other things to worry about than treachery and the outcome of sword fights: she has to educate her son and keep the castle clean. Only Moe the bartender almost perfectly fits in the role of Claudius, as he has also shown some malicious traits in previous episodes and always seemed to be interested in taking the position of Marge's husband when Homer is gone.

As a second step, the parody breaks with almost all of the causal relations that initiate the sequence of tragic deaths. As a first indicator, Ophelia's death is pulled entirely out of cotext and only hinted at: when Bart accuses Claudius of having killed his father, everybody believes that he is crazy, but Lisa as Ophelia interrupts them with a fervent "Nobody outcrazies Ophelia!", starts a five-second crazy dance, sings a crazy tune, and disappears with a splash in the moat. At this point of the story, her father Polonius has not even appeared yet, let alone died; therefore, her insinuated death makes as little sense as her erratic behavior. This inversion prepares the ground for the first key scene in the sequence of now illogical deaths. In his first attempt to kill Claudius, Hamlet rushes into the royal bedroom with a sword, but finds only his mother ("What did I tell you about running with swords?"). As someone stirs behind a curtain, Hamlet/Bart believes it might be Claudius. He claims that "there is only one way to find out" and stabs wildly through the cloth. Here, it becomes obvious that Hamlet's dubious decisions do no longer result from a growing inner conflict and potential insanity, but from an imprudent appetite for action. The ironic tragedy of the situation is then even heightened as Polonius explains why he was hiding behind the curtain: "I hide behind curtains 'cause I have a fear of getting stabbed."

Thus, *The Simpsons* ironically deconstructs the complex character-/reflection-based plot of the play and opposes it to a televisual, action-based storyline that can do without explanations, if necessary. This is further reflected in the fencing match showdown of the parody, which wraps up the deaths of six characters in 45 seconds: in order to make sure that Hamlet really bites the dust, Claudius poisons everything on and around the buffet, including Rosen-Carl and Guilden-Lenny, who still do not understand what their part is in the conspiracy, but who are happy to be a part of it, anyway, team up for a "high five" and thus poison each other. Laertes then uses his practice stab to kill himself, clearing the way for Hamlet to finally take revenge on Claudius. After the deed, he turns away "to celebrate life," slips in a puddle of blood and breaks his neck. Unwilling to clean up the mess, Queen Gertrude knocks herself over the head with a club and falls dead among the scattered corpses.

In the play, the causal relations turned each death into a tragic comment on the respective character's individual moral disposition, on his or her relationship with the main protagonist, and on the way Hamlet's state of mind influences the course of events. By under-

mining this essential cause-effect structure, *The Simpsons* turns tragedy into parody. The massacre deals out death for the sake of death and thus, in a way, actually "celebrates life": each death becomes so meaningless that the audience can only wish for the protagonists to have solved their disputes in some other way. The only "reason"able explanation that remains intact is the underlying motivation for the whole plot – Hamlet wants to kill Claudius to avenge his father. Having him succeed actually highlights the futility of all the other deaths, in the *Simpsons* version *as well as* in the play. In both texts, the potentially straight line from Hamlet's resolution to take revenge to Claudius' death takes many unnecessary turns. However, the reasons for those turns are different, and this difference finally supports Lisa's laudatory opening remark: while the parody sacrifices logical coherence and character development for plain action and entertainment, the play instead fathoms the uncertainties of human behavior, reasoning, and moral integrity.[363]

In the final scene of the frame narrative, the episode then hyper-ironically subverts this subliminal positive statement about the source text, and at the same time criticizes its own way of handling the parody. Lisa remarks, "And that's the greatest thing ever written," once again apparently confirming her approving attitude towards the play. Ironically, though, her statement refers to the *Simpsons* version that has just ended, which is obviously *not* the greatest thing ever written. Bart's reply, then, does not really come as a surprise: "Are you crazy? I can't believe a play where every character was murdered could be so boring." By criticizing the parody, Bart implicitly (and unconsciously) praises the original text which did not focus on the murders only, but predominantly dealt with the characters' mental disposition. While the parody has highlighted the strengths of the play by juxtaposing them to its own weaknesses, Bart and Lisa have unconsciously switched their positions in the frame narrative. The "ironic discontinuity that is revealed at the heart of continuity" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 11)[364] has made the parody come to terms with the tension that arises between the poles of praise and blame of the parodied text. However, Homer's final remark reminds the children that intermediality is not always about criticizing or praising other texts – it is also about making the audience discover new and unexpected levels of entertainment: "Son, it's not only a great play, but also became a great movie, called *Ghostbusters*."

3.2.2 Atmosphere

Let us return for a moment to the episode "Bart the Murderer" (EP 3-4) described in chapter 2.6, in which Bart becomes involved with the mafia. The episode does not include sentences

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[363] As a consequence, this *Simpsons* story supports Beate Müller's claim that it is possible to create high-level parodies of Shakespeare's works that do not ridicule them, but acknowledge their superiority (see "Hamlet" 129-130).

[364] See also Hutcheon *Irony* 4, and Rose *Meta-Fiction* 25.

like "this is the mafia" or "this is what a mafia setting would look like"; yet, from the second Bart stumbles into "Legitimate Businessman's Social Club," the audience knows what to expect from the gentlemen in suits. So how can an animated family sitcom successfully pretend to be a mafia movie without ever saying so?

The answer, obviously, is connected to the use of intermedial references to mafia movies and the mafia movie genre. As Carl Matheson correctly points out, intertextual references provide an opportunity "to convey a great deal of extra information extremely economically" (112). They are economical because they enable *The Simpsons* to resort to a pool of cultural signifiers other texts have already established in the viewer's mind. The show does not have to develop the "mafia feeling" from scratch; it can create the desired atmosphere with the help of intermedial references to individual texts (*The Godfather*, *Goodfellas*) and their generic commonplaces, which will activate the viewer's cultural knowledge and thus guide the reception process along predetermined lines.

References that sustain certain atmospheres can occur in various visual and auditory forms: for example, "Bart the Murderer" uses a setting from *Goodfellas* (a shady basement with a bar, slot machine, and card table), attire known from almost all mafia movies (the fine suit as a sign of progress in the criminal world), prejudiced stereotyped physical appearances (slick hair, a few scars, Italian background modeled on actors who appeared in famous mafia movies[365]), and typical accessories (guns, knives, cigars) as visual signals that leave the audience in no doubt as to what the legitimate businessmen's real profession is.

As far as auditory signals are concerned, the mobsters' idiom matches their appearance and reveals a southern European immigrant background. The most sophisticated coup, however, was to cast Joe Mantegna to voice Fat Tony, the mafia boss. Mantegna had appeared in mafia movies before, notably *Things Change* and *The Godfather: Part III*. His voice and his continuous involvement with the mafia genre[366] not only lent additional credibility to the first appearance of mobsters in Springfield in "Bart the Murderer," but have also turned Fat Tony into one the most frequently recurring and intertextually developed characters on *The Simpsons*.

After Bart has been released by the court towards the end of the episode, the family gather around the TV set to watch a dramatized made-for-TV version of his story called "Blood on the Blackboard – The Bart Simpson story," starring Richard Chamberlain as Principal Skinner, Joe Mantegna as Fat Tony, Jane Seymour as the woman he loved, and Neil Patrick Harris as Bart Simpson.[367] In contrast to the example of Dustin Hoffman described

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[365] The actors Paul Sorvino and Joe Pesci, who both appeared in *Goodfellas*, posed as models for the animation of two of the mobsters.

[366] For example, Mantegna was cast as one of the leading actors in the 1997 TV serial *Mario Puzo's The Last Don*.

[367] See also Turner 392.

before, the producers of *The Simpsons* this time did not even attempt to hide the identity of the celebrity voice. Instead, they established a bond between Fat Tony and Joe Mantegna that would motivate the audience to activate their intermedial knowledge whenever the series returned to the mafia topic and the character of Fat Tony in later episodes.

The example of "Bart the Murderer" shows that a complex composition of visual and auditory signifiers easily manages to create an atmosphere that is largely different from that of a family sitcom. However, not every episode is intended to parody an entirely different genre, but many episodes include moments that resemble experiences from other texts or genres. A family sitcom can have a moment of suspense without becoming (or attempting to become) a crime thriller, it can have moments of passionate love without becoming a romance, it can have moments of bittersweet tragedy without becoming a tragicomedy, and it can have shootouts without becoming a western. What distinguishes *The Simpsons* from most other sitcoms is that it is fully aware of the intertextual noise that accompanies these moments, and – what is most essential for the present analysis – that it uses this intertextual potential for its own narrative purposes. The following examples will show how different types of auditory and visual references enable the producers to make use of their audience's viewing habits and cultural education to create intertextually pre-formed atmospheres that support the narrative communication. They will include two types of auditory references – music and voice – and three types of visual signals – editing, camera angles, and setting. The final example will show how different types can interact.

Musical references to film or television soundtracks constitute an easy to include, but subtle and highly effective means of creating particular atmospheres. This works especially well with musical scores that are easy to recognize because of particular melodies or instruments, and which are connected to a text that is famous for a particular atmosphere. There are several movies that have so successfully employed musical scores to support an atmosphere of suspense that the music alone has been used repeatedly afterwards to create a similar effect in other text; outstanding examples are the soundtracks of *Jaws* and *Psycho* mentioned above.

Musical options are by no means limited to suspense: it is comparatively easy to locate various examples of different atmospheres supported by intermedial musical references in *The Simpsons*. For instance, the episode "El Viaje Misterioso de Nuestro Jomer" (EP 8-9) stages the showdown of a chili-eating contest: Homer puts on his "chili boots," twirls his chili spoon, squints his eyes, and slowly approaches the pot of steaming hot chili in the glistening sun. Now add a few memorable tunes from the spaghetti western *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* and the stage is set for heated showdown that leaves bystanders paralyzed with their mouths open. If the atmosphere is supposed to communicate coolness and confidence, *Saturday Night Fever* might be the better source. After Bart has finally managed to convince the girl of

his heart to like him (EP 6-7), there is only one thing left to do: strutting down the street with an open collar like John Travolta to the chords of "Stayin' Alive." If motivational music for a rather exorbitant attack is needed – for example, if Mr. Burns decides to confront an old lady from inside a tank (EP 7-8) – *Apocalypse Now* provides the suitable soundtrack by linking Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" to a bloody attack and napalm bombing on a Vietnamese village. Finally, the TV series *The X-Files* introduced a typical, eerie sound that accompanied nine seasons of unsolved mysteries, alien abductions, and government conspiracies. Surprisingly enough, its soundtrack creates a similar feeling of imminent danger even if the government conspiracy only involves a secret library scanning system that tells former Vice President Al Gore whenever one of his books is checked out (EP 6-10).

There are, however, other instances where the viewers need to apply more intense intermedial knowledge in order to contribute to the desired narrative atmosphere: on the one hand, the musical score itself might be less noticeable; on the other, the additional similarities between the two texts (setting, plot) might be more obscure. If both happens in the same reference, it might become very difficult to detect, but it may still serve as a powerful means of supporting a particular atmosphere.

A very creative example can be found in the episode "Bart the Fink" (EP 7-15),[368] which deals with Krusty losing his celebrity status when the IRS discovers that he has committed tax evasion. After the IRS has confiscated all his possessions, Krusty becomes depressive as he has to go back to living like a "regular" person. A few hours later, he crashes his plane into a mountain and is pronounced dead. Bart, who feels partly responsible for his death (he accidentally "finked" on him), is terribly shocked by the bad news and cannot accept that his idol is gone. Roaming the town in grief, he starts catching glimpses of a man who slightly resembles Krusty. After initial doubts about his own sanity, he and Lisa begin following the threads in search of the allegedly dead man. They finally find Krusty, who had faked his own death and started a new, non-celebrity life under a new name. Toying with his pride, it is easy for them to convince him that show business needs him back.

What makes this plot interesting from an intermedial point of view is that some of the scenes that show Bart and Lisa following the tracks of a person who is supposed to be dead are accompanied by Bernard Herrmann's compositions from the Hitchcock movie *Vertigo*. In the movie, Detective John "Scottie" Ferguson (played by James Stewart) has to stand by and watch the suicide of a woman he was growing fond of. A few days later, however, he accidentally notices a woman who, despite her different looks, strongly reminds him of the woman he saw die. He starts following her around, finally approaches her, and finds out that she had been part of a plot of changed identities intended to cover up a murder.

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[368] The episode title is a pun on the Coen brothers' movie *Barton Fink*.

Although this extremely condensed summary leaves out many details, it still underlines that there are few similarities between the movie and the *Simpsons* episode. It is only the idea that someone who died might actually not be dead and the investigations needed to uncover the truth that could contribute to the narrative success of the later text. Yet, since the episode only features a few strokes of music and no other markers that could point towards the intermedial reference, it achieves exactly what is intended: the intermedial support of a given atmosphere. The episode does not necessarily make the viewer activate the whole movie, which involves many other topics (murder, fraud, fear of heights, trust, love…), but it subtly uses a narrative tool that has proved in a different cotext to create/support the desired effect.[369] Even without detecting the reference, viewers who have seen *Vertigo* will subconsciously develop an intermedially shaped attitude towards the scenes they are watching. Although the scenes can without question be understood without it, the intermedial reference once again economically improves the narrative texture of *The Simpsons*.

As could have been expected, *The Simpsons* would never make use of the fact that soundtracks can become narrative cultural signifiers without subverting it somewhere. In the episode "The Springfield Files" (EP 8-10),[370] the effect of music is ironically undermined: Homer leaves Moe's bar late one night, and since he has had a few beers too many, he decides to walk home along a road that leads through a forest. In the shadows of the woods, Homer gets scared and fearfully glances over his shoulder again and again. Then the violin theme from the murder scene in *Psycho* swells up, and headlights appear on the road.[371] Frightened, Homer crouches in the lights of the approaching bus. As it draws near, Homer steps out of the street, the bus stops, and a violinist in an evening dress climbs off the bus and steps into a side street, still playing the recognizable tune. The bus drives off with the rest of the Springfield Philharmonic Orchestra, who go on playing the tune.

Here, the show underlines that particular soundtrack elements can become carriers of meaning that do not even need further means of communication to create the desired effect. Even when there is no reason to be afraid, the *Psycho* sound has become a synonym for suspense, just as the theme from *Jaws* has come to announce an attack by an invisible enemy in any cotext. Imagine a shot of a little girl on a swing on a sunny day, add a cheerful melody and her mother will bring her a glass of juice – add a tune from *Psycho* or *Jaws* and the neighbors' dog will get her. The suggestive power of film music has become so strong that it equals the visual material's importance for shaping the process of reception.

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[369] Andreas Rauscher describes a similar instance in the episode "Bart Sells His Soul" (EP 7-4), which uses musical scores from the neo-noir thriller *Angel Heart* to create a sinister atmosphere when Bart roams lonely streets in search of his soul (123).

[370] The episode features an extensive crossover with the series *The X-Files*, which will be discussed in closer detail in chapter 3.4.2.

[371] Rauscher uses this scene as one example of how acoustic references contribute to the referential network in *The Simpsons*; see 128.

Although they are often more difficult to recognize without further markers, voices and particular language styles can also become indicators of certain atmospheres through their intertextual messages. As the example of Joe Mantegna/Fat Tony has shown, the usage of actors' voices includes an opportunity to set up a bond between the real and the animated person that – in the truest sense of the word – adds *life* to the cartoon character. Fat Tony develops a personal history that exceeds his appearances on the show; in the viewer's mind, Mantegna's performances become part of Fat Tony's background and thus render his mafia appearance even more realistic.

The Simpsons uses a similar approach in the episode "Sideshow Bob's Last Gleaming" (EP 7-9),[372] which involves intermedial interplay on even more levels, however. Most of the episode takes place on an air force base where the people of Springfield have gathered for an air show. Sideshow Bob, who is part of a group of prisoners cleaning the premises, develops a fiendish plan to abolish television: he steals an atomic bomb and blackmails the city to turn off all broadcast. The air force base is under command of one Colonel Leslie "Hap" Hapablab, a typically grim, taut, and foul-mouthed military figure. His voice is provided by R. Lee Ermey, who is most renowned for his portrayal of the remorseless drill sergeant Hartman in Stanley Kubrick's war movie *Full Metal Jacket*,[373] but has also appeared in other war movies, including *Apocalypse Now*. The reference to *Full Metal Jacket* is clearly marked towards the end of the episode as he uses the phrase "What is your major malfunction, Sideshow Bob?", a quote from the movie. His harsh voice and abusive language support the image of an authoritarian military environment which provides the background for the plot of a nuclear threat and the resulting counteractions.

So far, the reference follows the same lines as the influence of Joe Mantegna's voice on the mafia plot. Ermey's appearance, however, involves further complexities in two respects. On the one hand, Ermey does not only have a background of *playing* military characters, he also has a real life background as U.S. Marine Corps drill instructor.[374] In *Full Metal Jacket*, he was first hired just as a technical advisor and only later convinced Kubrick that he could also play the part. As a consequence, his work on *The Simpsons* results in a double intermedial structure, which feeds off two different source texts in order to achieve an atmosphere of utmost narrative density: while his acting in the movie was influenced by his real life experience, his voice acting becomes a reference to the movie *and* – directly as well as through the movie – to his personal life.

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[372] The episode title is a pun on Robert Aldrich's film *Twilight's Last Gleaming*, whose title is in turn inspired by the second line of "The Star-Spangled Banner," the national anthem of the United States of America. The movie deals with a renegade air force general who takes over control of a missile silo to force the president to reveal the true causes for the military engagement in Vietnam.

[373] Rauscher briefly mentions this military referential connection (106).

[374] In a way, things were the other way around in Joe Mantegna's case, who started pretending that he had an actual mafia background to make fun of fans and viewers after Fat Tony had become one of the most popular characters on *The Simpsons*.

On the other hand, Ermey's voice and choice of language also receives a double function in the episode. While it contributes largely to the realistic atmosphere on the army base, it also becomes a subject of analytical ridicule. In order to get hold of an atomic bomb, Sideshow Bob tricks the colonel into yelling and swearing at him in full swing just to write down the phrases he uses. He then imitates his voice over the intercom to gain access to the bomb storage. Thus, the episode not only supplies one of the most successful examples of a voice that shapes a particular atmosphere with the help of intermedial information, but at the same time ironically indicates that this process involves deceit and depends on a recipient who accepts that the voice he hears actually stands for more than what it says. After all, it is neither R. Lee Ermey, nor the drill sergeant from *Full Metal Jacket* who appears on the screen – it is merely a drawn military officer who sounds like a memory from another text.

The same episode also contains an example of the first visual type of reference I will discuss in the context of intertextually supported atmospheres. One of the major themes of the episode is the threat of a nuclear strike on American soil and the constant fear that authorities might not be able to inhibit abuse or wrong decisions when it comes to managing nuclear weapons. The episode includes several references to another Stanley Kubrick movie that deals with the same topic, *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, such as an auditory reference to the song "We'll Meet again," which accompanies the end of the movie, and cartoon doubles of the characters General Turgidson and Dr. Strangelove in a secret conference room that is modeled on the war room from the movie.

A reference to the movie *Fail-Safe*, however, is more interesting from an atmospheric point of view, since here the episode does not copy content or sound, but a particular editing technique. The movie deals with an accidental American nuclear strike on the Soviet Union, which results in the destruction of Moscow. To avoid a massive counterstrike and a third World War, the American president decides to destroy New York City himself with another bomb. In a creatively and disturbingly cut final scene, the bomber pilot counts down to zero, and at each number a one-second shot of some arbitrary New Yorkers in their daily routine is shown. Then, after he has dropped the bomb, each shot is repeated for only a split second and freeze framed before the screen turns black.

In the *Simpsons* episode, Sideshow Bob hits the launch button when he realizes that Krusty the Clown has ignored his demands and is still on air. The next shot shows one second of Todd Flanders on a swing, then freeze framed, then an old couple feeding pigeons in the park, freeze frame, then Maggie in a meadow picking petals off a flower. The camera zooms in on Maggie's eye, and the next thing we see is a mushroom cloud. The scene with Maggie picking petals is a reference to a campaign commercial designed for President

Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1964 Johnson/Goldwater presidential competition.[375] The commercial features a little girl in a field counting petals as she pulls them from a daisy. As the camera zooms in on the girl's eye, her counting mixes with a voice-over countdown. Then the scene shows a nuclear explosion, followed by the plea to vote for Johnson as a man who could be trusted with this lethal power.

Although the mushroom cloud on *The Simpsons* turns out to be a puff of smoke discharged from a misfiring atomic bomb that was "best before November 1959," this six-second sequence cleverly mixes two texts from 1964, when Cold War fear was at its peak, and re-envisions the oppressive atmosphere that prevailed. The cutting technique copied from *Fail-Safe* eerily manages to transport the atmosphere created in the movie into the episode: nuclear weapons always mean that no-one is safe. The nuclear threat carries military conflicts into people's everyday lives, and in a few seconds, life can be over and the planet contaminated for future generations. While the references to the satire *Dr. Strangelove* highlight the absurd nature of a nuclear balance of power and mainly analyze the political and military powers that participate in the decision processes, the simple stylistic evocation of *Fail-Safe* expresses the episode's concern for the common population. The reference to the Johnson commercial then points the finger at how these two aspects interact: while political or military mistakes are the most likely cause for an atomic catastrophe, they still depend on the population to provide them with the power to even make these mistakes. The balance between a constantly fueled fear and the promise to prevent this fear from becoming reality creates the mood that sustains power.

The second type of visual references, the imitation of camera movements and/or lighting, can perfectly be exemplified with the episode "Three Men and a Comic Book" (EP 2-21),[376] which is considered one of the best crafted episodes of the whole series. Bart, Milhouse, and Martin Prince throw in their money to buy the expensive first volume of "Radioactive Man," their favorite comic book series. Since they cannot agree upon who will be the one to take it home, they decide to spend the first night together in the Simpsons' treehouse to figure out a system to coordinate who gets to have the comic book on which day. In the course of the evening, the three boys are becoming more and more paranoid, suspecting that the others will try to take the comic. Especially Bart is convinced that the other two are conspiring against him. As every boy distrusts the others, the tension increases and they start fighting. When Martin gets up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom, Bart ties him up with a rope to prevent that he steals the comic. Then Bart and Milhouse get into a

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[375] The commercial was only shown once as it was met by severe protests against its propagandist, lurid, and emotional nature; see Kaid/Johnston 5-6.

[376] The episode title refers to the books of Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men* series and to the movie *Three Men and a Baby*.

fight, too, and while they are at each other's necks, a wind gust blows the comic out into the rain, where it is shredded by the Simpsons' dog and a bolt of lightning.

The storyline closely resembles parts of John Huston's movie *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*,[377] which deals with three gold miners fighting over their rich findings in early 20th century Mexico. In the movie, the increasing distrust and paranoia especially of the character Dobbs (played by Humphrey Bogart) surface in several scenes that show the three men at night sitting around their camp fire. The unsteady light of the flames dances on their faces and contrasts them with the surrounding darkness of the Sierra. In the dimly lit treehouse, Bart and his friends sit in a circle around one candle and their treasure. The camera circles the room and wipes over their shadowy faces. When Bart exclaims that "nobody makes a sap out of Bartholomew J. Simpson," the reference is marked with a quote from the movie and it becomes obvious that Bart is slowly turning into Dobbs. There are no words the others could find to prove that they are not hoodwinking him, because in his agitated mind he has already prefigured all their treacherous plots.

The comic book, just like the gold in the film, loses its physical importance as it becomes merely a symbol of the conflicts between the protagonists. This is supported by a reference to another Huston film starring Humphrey Bogart, *The Maltese Falcon*. When the three boys have purchased the comic book, Martin whispers in awe, "this is the stuff dreams are made of," a line Sam Spade (Bogart) uses to describe the statue of a falcon that caused several betrayals and murders in the movie. As is the case with the falcon, which turns out to be made of lead instead of gold and diamonds, the symbolic value the protagonists connect to the comic book by far exceeds its material value.[378]

In sum, the episode cleverly combines references to two source texts in order to create an atmosphere that transports the dimness and unscrupulousness of the film noir into the children's world. The materialist motives of the plot of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, as well as its usage of low-key lighting schemes producing stark contrasts and dramatic shadow patterning on the characters' faces, set the mood for scenes where it becomes difficult for the viewer to trust the intentions of any of the characters. Camera movements that focus on emphasizing the protagonists' anxious state of mind resemble both *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *The Maltese Falcon*, since both movies feature scenes where groups of men circle around the object of their desire. As the camera scrolls over Bart's face, then Martin's, then Milhouse's, the scene reverberates with the dubious intentions the protagonists in both movies try to hide behind their dimly illuminated faces. In the end, the falcon turns out to be worthless, and both comic and gold are destroyed and scattered in the wind, leaving nothing but the lesson that sharing is more rewarding than distrusting others.

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[377] The film is an adaptation of B. Traven's novel of the same name.

[378] See also Gruteser 56-58, who includes several screen shots from the episode.

Finally, certain atmospheres can best be composed by using settings already successfully tested in other texts. While the preceding example used minor setting elements, notably a flame as single source of flickering light and center of the set, other scenes draw heavily on entire sets to develop backgrounds that intertextually support certain moods. In *The Simpsons*, this technique is frequently used whenever the plot leaves the normal surroundings of a suburban family sitcom and requires an atmosphere usually rather found in other genres. Correspondingly, several Halloween episodes fall back on settings from thrillers or horror movies to prepare the stage for stories that involve murder, witchcraft, or maniacs. For example, the house in the segment "Bad Dream House" in episode 2-3 is built from elements found in uncanny buildings in the movies *Psycho*, *Poltergeist*, and *The Amityville Horror*. Especially the Bates estate from *Psycho* has turned into a commonplace symbol for a place where evil things happen and is also used in non-Halloween cotexts: it becomes the place where Skinner's mother lives in episode 4-14,[379] Sideshow Bob stops there to work on his evil plans in episode 5-2, and in "Bart the Fink" (EP 7-15), the Simpson family has to spend a night in a similar looking house in order to inherit their aunt's legacy – ironically, nothing happens and they get "the best night's sleep ever."

In "Treehouse of Horror XII" (EP 13-1), the setting is different: this time, the Simpson house becomes a place of danger when it is upgraded to the fully automated "Ultrahouse 3000." The house itself takes over all household chores, but soon develops a life and interests of its own, threatening the family's freedom and lives. The Ultrahouse is inspired by the spaceship interiors in *2001: A Space Odyssey* and develops the same murderous psyche as the board computer HAL 9000.[380] The soothing mechanical voice transports the same mixture of subservience and menace that accounts for much of the queasy atmosphere in *2001*,[381] and the white, sterile walls and furniture create a similarly lifeless surface. Just like HAL, the house communicates with its surroundings via control panels and red, blinking camera eyes that survey every corner of the house. As a result, the feeling of being trapped in a hostile environment and at the mercy of a cold-blooded, omnipresent artificial intelligence that is so nerve-wracking in a movie set in outer space smoothly transfuses to the new cotext. Thus, although the story is entirely different, the plot of a fully technological future could not be staged in any better way than with the help of intermedial references to the setting of one of the most influential science fiction movies.

Some other scenes from the movie also appear in the episode "Deep Space Homer" (EP 5-15), which deals with Homer being chosen as an astronaut for a space mission. While the references to *2001: A Space Odyssey* provide some of the most memorable shots of

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[379] Skinner's relation to the *Psycho* setting will be discussed in closer detail in the following subchapter.

[380] The plot of a computerized house taking over control of its residents' lives is based on the movie *The Demon Seed* instead.

[381] In the *Simpsons* episode, the voice is provided by Pierce Brosnan.

Homer in outer space – Homer eating chips in zero gravity to the tunes of "Blue Danube,"[382] star-child Homer floating in space next to the Earth – the atmosphere of space camp and the astronaut trainings are mainly based on the movie *The Right Stuff*. Details of the setting, such as the centrifuge and the lung-testing machine the astronauts have to go through during their training, are derived directly from the movie. Again, the show employs images that feed off the audience's cultural experience and thus simplify the communication of concepts that would normally lie outside the realm of a suburban family sitcom.

These examples all involve situations that have virtually no connection to a regular family sitcom background; the intermedial references provide settings for scenes that more or less radically cross generic borders in order to expand the series' universe. The second half of the episode "Kamp Krusty" (EP 4-1), however, features an extended intermedial part that creatively employs imagery from two other texts to communicate an atmospheric change in a rather familiar setting. Bart and Lisa spend their holidays at Kamp Krusty, a franchised summer adventure camp approved of and advertised by Krusty the Clown. Despite the Krusty seal of quality, the camp turns out to be a hazardous and hostile place: the children have to sleep in shaky barracks full of vermin, they work in sweatshops under slavery conditions, the food is awful, and they run the risk of losing their health and lives on the dangerous premises. Bart keeps up his hope because he expects Krusty to come and change things, but when the camp administration presents a drunken fake Krusty instead, he starts a rebellion. The children expel the staff and set up a "Camp Bart" with their own rules. When the television crews arrive, the camp has completely changed its looks. Here, the reference to a setting from *Apocalypse Now*, as well as to William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* and the film versions thereof begins.[383]

Apocalypse Now is set in Vietnam and Cambodia during the Vietnam War and deals with a small group of soldiers' mission to eliminate the renegade Colonel Kurtz, who has set up a camp deep in the Cambodian jungle and does not answer to the military command anymore. When the soldiers reach his camp, they enter one of the most frightening sceneries in film history: Kurtz has become the spiritual leader of an indigenous tribe who seem to have lost all humanity. In the village, war-painted natives and deserted soldiers live between piles of dead bodies that rot away in the damp heat, they perform heathen rituals and sacrificial ceremonies around the camp fires, the temples are decorated with severed heads, and Kurtz dwells in a murky building that smells of disease and death. The setting communicates anarchy and an uncontrollable aggression that smolders beneath the surface of the imposed reign of fear and violence.

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[382] Diederichsen 18 (see also p. 17 for a series of screenshots).

[383] Turner also indicates a connection to *Lord of the Flies* in this episode (4).

Lord of the Flies is the widely received story of a group of boys who strand on an un-inhabited island after a plane crash. Their initial attempt to form a civilized community that abides by certain rules quickly fails and more and more boys are being drawn into a savage tribe structure of hunters who hide their faces behind war paint, perform heathen dances, and kill pigs in the jungle. Some of the boys start describing the presence of an evil monster on the island, which makes the hunters leave a pig's head on a stick as an offering to the beast. The head is soon covered with flies,[384] and in the allegorical progress of the novel, it becomes a symbol for the evil that is within each of the boys.

The Simpsons now borrows just a few details of the settings of the two texts to turn a youth camp into a threatening place of terror. The first sequences broadcasted from the crisis show half-naked children wearing war paint, bone necklaces and spears tearing down Krusty totems, demolishing buildings, and dancing around a burning Krusty doll. The camera follows the reporter past a pig's head on pole circled by flies into a dark hut for an interview with the ringleader. In the back of the hut, Bart resides in the half shade. He slowly moves his face into the light, just like Marlon Brando's face can only be discerned inch-by-inch in the twilight of the scene when the audience gets to see Colonel Kurtz for the first time in *Apocalypse Now*. By modeling the post-rebellion camp on images from the two source texts, the episode within seconds manages to change the atmosphere from a normal (albeit mismanaged) holi-day camp to a place where the rules of civilization do not apply anymore.

From the viewer's perspective, it is astonishing how easily and quickly a few images that have acquired certain significances in other texts can alter the atmosphere even in a genre which does not train the audience to expect sudden scenes of violence or chaos. Here, the intermedial function profits from the fact that both *Apocalypse Now* and *Lord of the Flies* are also highly intertextual and thus feed of a long tradition of imagery in the viewers' minds. The movie is inspired by Joseph Conrad's exotic adventure stories *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*, as well as by *Dispatches*, Michael Herr's documentary book about the Vietnam War, and Werner Herzog's film *Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes*, to name only the most obvious and official sources. *Lord of the Flies* is often regarded as a detailed, but twisted reconstruction of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*;[385] therefore, it evokes a tradition of classic adventure stories that described similar backdrops. As both texts draw on a wide variety of texts, they activate different intertextual experiences, which are not necessarily each manifested in every single viewer, but which – separately or in combinations – contribute to the atmospheric effect the movie and the novel are intended to have, respectively. As a result, the scenes in *The Simp-sons* – although they are modeled on images shaped by the two texts – have a comparable effect on viewers who have not seen *Apocalypse Now* or read *Lord of the Flies*: through the

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[384] "Lord of the Flies" is the literal English translation of Beelzebub, a demonic figure whose name is often used as synonym of the devil.

[385] Haldar 152.

references, the episode also evokes other (older) texts and thus provides a broad field of intertextual points of contact for viewers with different backgrounds.

As almost all of the references discussed in this subchapter have shown, the atmospheric function of intertextuality is particularly successful if the quoted text is known to large parts of the audience and famous for its narrative and representational qualities. Huston's, Hitchcock's, Kubrick's, Coppola's movies, classic books, trend-setting TV programs provide established cultural commonplaces that seem to function like a vocabulary that allows recipients to make sense of pre-formed atmospheres.

To sum up, I will discuss one final example of a film that has been highly appreciated for decades, and which will nicely illustrate how different types of references can be combined to support intertextual atmospheres and why some texts might be better suited than others to function is this respect. *Casablanca* makes its first appearance in *The Simpsons* at the very end of the episode "Bart's Friend Falls in Love" (EP 3-23). In the episode, Milhouse falls in love with Samantha, a new girl in town, and starts spending more time with her than with Bart, who feels increasingly jealous and excluded. He tells the girl's father about their fling, who steps in and sends his daughter away to an all-girls convent school. Milhouse is completely devastated, but finally forgives Bart, and together they visit her at the convent. Samantha tells them that she is actually happy at her new school, but agrees to kiss Milhouse one last time. Milhouse realizes that he will have to move on for her good, but he will treasure his memories. As he is reconciled with his friend Bart, they both walk away into a fog bank as the camera sweeps away to a high angle overview shot of their backs and the "Marseillaise" is playing in the background.

Only the last few seconds mirror the ending of *Casablanca*, which shows Rick (Humphrey Bogart) fading into the fog on an airfield with Cpt. Renault after his beloved Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) has stepped on a plane with her husband to disappear from his life. In the movie, the ending combines two cathartic messages: on the one hand, Rick defers his own dreams and sacrifices his happiness for a noble cause. When he gives up his neutral, disillusioned position and starts acting against Nazi-Germany, he stops pursuing his own advantages and starts endangering his safety and possessions. Thus, when he restrains his own emotions at the end of the movie and sends his lover and her husband to safety instead, the audience shares the pain but realizes that the hardships serve a greater cause. On the other hand, as Rick and Renault walk away, they are already making plans for the future. Rick utters the famous sentence, "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship," and the audience finds solace in the promise of future adventures – life goes on.

By imitating the movie's ending, the *Simpsons* episode in retrospect lends epic depth to Milhouse's little tragedy. It seems unlikely that any viewer thought of *Casablanca* while watching the episode, but now, as the endings are linked, viewers who felt their stomachs

tighten at the end of the movie will get a sense of that feeling again. Only a few seconds of intermedial referencing suffice to retrospectively add a little more tragedy to the atmosphere of the whole episode. There is no irony in the reference; a true appreciation of the movie and, as a result, of Milhouse's emotions prevails. Even the playing of the "Marseillaise" does not seem out of place, but supports a moment of grandeur that highlights the strength in Milhouse's behavior.

Only when Bart contributes the last sentence of the episode, one believes to detect an ironic inversion: "Now let's go whip donuts at old people." However, this sentence does not differ much from Rick's statement at the end of the movie: both statements dissolve the bittersweet sadness that dominated the previous scenes and provide a more positive outlook on the future. Although donut whipping does usually not belong to typical children's activities, Bart's proposal just restores the children's perspective needed to re-achieve the double catharsis of *Casablanca*. Milhouse will experience many adventures, enjoy many activities, and fall in love again even before he grows up.

This example might be one of the best references to prove that there does not have to be anything funny about intertextuality in a cartoon program. The reference does not ridicule the source text, nor does it repeat an old joke, nor does it create disharmony between two texts. It communicates a deep appreciation of the source text and re-uses the narrative strategies so successfully implemented before to evoke an atmosphere that would take minutes of complex explanations to evoke without the intermedial background. In a later episode, *The Simpsons* returns to *Casablanca* and analyzes why texts like this work so well to support certain atmospheres. In "Natural Born Kissers" (EP 9-25),[386] Bart and Lisa go on a treasure hunt with their grandfather's mine detector and dig up a film roll with an alternate ending of the movie, which tells the following story: after the plane with Ilsa has taken off, Renault threatens Rick with a gun, but is run over by Sam, the pianist from Rick's bar, with his piano, out of which Hitler climbs with a hand grenade, but he is knocked back into the piano by Ilsa, who returns to Rick with a parachute. Hitler blows himself up, Sam starts playing "As Time Goes By," and the next scene shows the wedding of Rick and Ilsa. A big question mark appears after the end credits, so Bart naturally assumes a possible sequel.

This alternative ending destroys everything that made Casablanca one of the most highly praised movies ever: first, it is unable to finish the story, adding event on event and thus ignoring the climactic structure of the final scenes. Second, it brings the subtle political messages that are spun between the main protagonists to a ridiculously simplifying surface that defies all logic. Third, it turns the tragic relationship between Rick and Ilsa, one of the driving forces of the movie, into a soap opera-style romance with a happy ending, which hollows out all the hardships and inner conflicts the protagonists had to endure in the course of

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[386] The title is a pun on Oliver Stone's film *Natural Born Killers.*

the plot. Finally, it even destroys the atmospheric musical score as one of the central songs of the film blends in with the wedding march for the final shot. It is obviously a candidate for the worst film ending ever, so one of Grampa's retirement home fellows, who claims to have been one of the producers of *Casablanca*, offers the children 20 dollars to bury the roll again.

This highly ironic and seemingly blasphemous treatment proves the point "that when *The Simpsons* satirizes something, it acknowledges its importance" (Cantor, "Politics" 172). The difference to the source text highlights the latter's outstanding qualities[387] and helps to explain why it works so well as an inspiration for intermedial moments: the ending of *Casablanca*, as well as the rest of the movie, is so well-crafted that it manages to transport complex messages with simple signifiers. Although the movie is by no means simple as far as its plot and constellation of historical backgrounds is concerned, the mode of representation manages to foreground only those aspects that are essential to understanding the story, but also essential to creating the atmosphere that pulls in the viewer. Those condensed messages stay in the recipients' minds and are inextricably linked to the images and sounds that transported them. As a result, it becomes possible for a later text to employ these images and sounds, even if only minuscule bits, to reanimate the messages and atmospheres for their own purposes. A camera angle, a few clouds, a faint musical tune, and two characters walking into the distance is enough to let Milhouse be Rick once again.

3.2.3 Character Development

In the course of its 20-year history, *The Simpsons* has accumulated an incredibly vast number of characters. In addition to the inner circle of family members and close friends, multitudes of new characters have appeared on the show, and many of them have come to stay and evolve in further seasons. Searching for new storylines and events to fill season after season, the creators have fleshed out characters that started as superficial sidekicks and have by now been at the center of several episodes and developed a richly facetted personality[388] (e.g., the Kwik-E-Mart clerk Apu, the bartender Moe, Principal Skinner, Milhouse, and – with the most telling name – Sideshow Bob). As they gained importance and contours, others took over the less elaborated margins of the ensemble and started waiting for their entry on the bigger stage (e.g., Sideshow Mel, Bumblebee Man, Hans Moleman, and Cletus the slack-jawed yokel).

It seems only natural that the creators often rely on materials found in other texts when they have to design a new character for a particular part – especially if this part is rem-

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[387] Diedrich Diederichsen agrees that *The Simpsons* frequently exaggerates or changes elements taken from other medial works to emphasize the artistic quality of the source text (22).

[388] See also Gruteser 71.

iniscent of a narrative constellation in another text. Particularly one-timers (characters who appear only in one episode) are often modeled on fictional or real people, such as the afore-mentioned Col. Hapablap (EP 7-9), or the gay shop owner John in episode 8-15, who is based on writer/actor/director John Waters. In addition, several one-timers are simply visitors from other real or fictional worlds, such as former president George Bush Sr. in "Two Bad Neighbors" (EP 7-13), or the FBI agents Mulder and Scully in "The Springfield Files" (EP 8-10). While in those cases the function of intertextual references is predominantly inspi-rational, there are other instances where intertextuality plays a more creative role in fathom-ing established characters' psyches. In this subchapter, I will analyze four examples of char-acters who have continuously been part of the show since season one and who have devel-oped intertextual histories of different intensity in the course of the show.

Barney Gumble, Homer's drinking buddy, Springfield's most repulsive alcoholic, and most hopeless bachelor seems to be one of the most stereotypical characters on the show. In the early seasons, he mainly serves as the exaggerated manifestation of Homer's vices; he is self-indulgent, messy, irresponsible, self-destructive, utterly unsuccessful in life, and not much else. He predominantly functions as a mirror that confronts Homer with what could be-come of him if did not pull himself together, and as a never-failing source of hilarious mo-ments caused by his frantic urge for the next beer.

After a few seasons, however, Barney's character begins to gain more detailed fea-tures and the series starts investigating the cause-effect relations between his personality and his addiction to alcohol. The episode "Mr. Plow" (EP 4-9) reveals that Barney could ac-tually lead a successful life if he just managed to sustain enough ambition to keep going for a while. Driven by envy of Homer's success as a snowplow entrepreneur, Barney quickly sets up an even more successful enterprise and runs Homer out of business. Their competition continues in "Deep Space Homer" (EP 5-15) when both apply for one free spot in a space mission that is planned to be filled with an "average shmoe." Since NASA prohibits alcohol, Barney needs to sober up and surprisingly develops superior skills, which makes the officials choose him instead of Homer for the mission. However, when Barney celebrates his victory with (ironically, non-alcoholic) champagne, he retransforms to his normal alcoholic self and runs away, leaving Homer to take his place by default. Thus, as the series progresses, it be-comes more and more obvious that Barney actually possesses considerable skills and tal-ents, but is constantly thwarted by his addiction. Although he seems to be aware of this fatal connection, the drug is stronger than his will and repeatedly destroys the progress he has made.

In the episode "A Star is Burns" (EP 6-18), this tragic helplessness finds a poetical manifestation in an amazing piece of intermedial animation, which summarizes the ambiva-lence established in previous episodes and sheds some new light on Barney's character.

Springfield hosts a film festival and the citizens are invited to contribute their own films to the contest. Among the candidates is Barney's short black-and-white film "Pukahontas," which deals with his life as an alcoholic and appropriates several older texts to convey its disturbing message.[389]

The film starts with a shot of Barney on a couch in a shadowy, disorderly room clasping a bottle, while the transparent curtains ruffle over his face and his voice-over tells the viewer, "My name is Barney Gumble. I'm 40, I'm single, and I drink." The scene fades to Barney lying in the gutter, drinking another beer. He loses hold of the bottle and the beer pours slowly into a street drain. The voice-over goes on, "There's a line in *Othello* about a drinker: 'Now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast.' That pretty well covers it." Shadows of clouds hurry over his face, time passes, and Barney in the gutter turns into an old man. A tear leaks from his eye. At the end of the film, the scenery returns to the room with the billowing curtains, now littered with empty bottles, and to Barney on the couch, who is sniffing a rose. He narrates, "Don't cry for me – I'm already dead," and places the rose in a beer bottle on the window sill. The camera zooms in on the rose, which slowly withers and loses its petals, and the curtain blows in front of it as "Fin" appears.

The visual style and the music of Barney's artistic achievement are largely influenced by the semi-documentary film *Koyaanisqatsi*. This experimental, voiceless film features several shots of fast moving clouds and other fast-forward sequences accompanied by Philip Glass' famous soundtrack. Much of its appeal results from its trend-setting capturing of time passing: the fast-forward shots of nature's and human movements impressively underscore the fleetingness of all being and the merciless machinery that ticks away human life in predetermined structures. Moreover, it shows people who seem to be alienated and in descent in their bustling surroundings.

The general theme of Barney's film, however, is based on Billy Wilder's classic *The Lost Weekend*, which tells the story of Don Birnam, a highly talented writer, who does not manage to overcome his alcohol addiction and, as a result, has allowed his talent to go to waste. The film follows one weekend in his life that was supposed to keep him from drinking, but instead of joining his brother on a trip to the countryside, he stumbles into the worst decline in his career as an alcoholic: he loses the last bits of self-esteem, starts stealing not only from his brother, but also from women he does not even know, and experiences his first case of delirium tremens.

In addition to the narrative similarities[390] and the predominantly poetic language in both texts, Barney's film includes two markers that uncover the reference to *The Lost Week-*

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[389] Barney's short film is such an outstanding piece of poetic animation that several fans have shot their own live action adaptations. Various examples can be found at http://www.youtube.com under the search item "Pukahontas."

[390] Diederichsen briefly points out that "Pukahontas" is visually indebted to *The Lost Weekend* (22-23).

end: in the movie, a flower also becomes a symbol for Birnam's demise when he steals money from a stranger's purse in a bar and leaves a flower behind instead. Although he has completely lost his dignity, he still tries to maintain an image of himself that elevates him above a common thief and remains true to his poetic nature. His attempt to keep up the façade of an honorable man is destroyed shortly after, however, when his crime is revealed and he is thrown out into the street while the other guests mock him. When the flower appears in "Pukahontas," the image echoes Birnam's decline and then unfolds its full metaphorical potential. As the flower dies in the alcohol bottle, we hear Barney say that he is dead already, which constitutes the second link to the movie. Towards the end of *The Lost Weekend*, Birnam sees only one way out of his dilemma and buys a gun to shoot himself. When his girlfriend tries to stop him, he explains, "This business is just a formality. Don Birnam is dead already. He died over this weekend." Both Birnam and Barney have wasted their talents and given up what used to be the defining center of their identity because they are not strong enough to fight their cravings.

The marked reference to Shakespeare's *Othello* serves as a pointed comment on both their failures: Cassio, who utters the quoted words in Act II of the play (p. 72), starts out as Othello's loyal friend, but gives in to the temptations of drinking and in a drunken stupor causes a series of tragic events that contribute to his social decline and the death of his friend Othello. Barney seems to constantly hover on the verge between fool and beast; so far, he has been a rather harmless drunkard who has not harmed anybody but himself. Still, the contrast between the pensive and analytical Barney on the movie screen and the disgusting, socially not acceptable wreck in the audience illustrates the tragedy of Barney's addiction better than any other anecdote. The combination of the general topic of alcoholism as expressed in *The Lost Weekend*, the visual language of *Koyaanisqatsi* that foreshadows decay and irreversibility, and the ancient self-critical morale established in *Othello* thus sheds new light on a part of his personality that the audience might have expected to stand behind some of his more reasonable actions, but which is now brought to the surface with the help of intermedial references. From this moment on, the messages imbedded in the different texts will be part of who Barney is when he appears on the show.[391]

Furthermore, a hardly noticed reference in the episode title constitutes an intermedial frame that underlines the significance the episode has for Barney's development: the movie *A Star Is Born* deals with an actor who first lets his drinking problem ruin his own career and then focuses on supporting a young talented actress, but again fails to control his addiction and thus jeopardizes her career, as well. When he realizes that he has become a burden not

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[391] A few seasons later, Barney will again try to sober up in the episode "Days of Wines & D'oh'ses" (EP 11-18). This time, he seems to succeed, takes lessons to fly a helicopter, and saves Bart and Lisa during a forest fire. However, Moe the bartender secretly puts him back on alcohol in order to keep his best customer and everything is back the way it was at the beginning of the episode.

only to himself, but also to the ones he loves, he commits suicide. Although Barney is by no means the central character of the episode, his self-reflexive film is its major artistic and narrative achievement, and the producers used the episode title to subtly highlight how important this episode is for understanding why Barney became who he is and what motivates some of his unexpected behaviors.

While this intermedial self-portrait introduces a new aspect of an established character's personality, it does not tell us anything about his past or why he became the person he is. There are other characters, however, whose past is partly revealed in the course of the series, and intertextual references often play a crucial role in creating images that serve as personal memories. In the case of Krusty the Clown, one whole episode is devoted to unraveling how his present personality is influenced by events in the past. In "Like Father like Clown" (EP 3-6), Krusty is reminded of his childhood while he is having dinner with the Simpsons and tells the family how he became estranged from his father. He reveals that his real name is Hershel Krustofski and that he is of Jewish origin. His father, a respected rabbi, disowned him because he did not continue the rabbinical family tradition, but wished to become a humorous entertainer instead.

Now that his past has been brought up again, Krusty begins to suffer terribly from missing his father and can barely live through his own TV show without bursting into tears. Bart and Lisa realize that they will have to help Krusty to re-unite with his father. In a meticulously researched sequence of scenes that show life in an American Jewish community, they again and again try to persuade Rabbi Krustofski to forgive his son, confronting him with quotes from the Old Testament and Judaic teachings that promote forgiveness. As all else fails to penetrate the rabbi's stubbornness, their last shot is a wise quotation from Sammy Davis Jr., a Jewish entertainer like Krusty, which finally convinces him that entertainers are a valuable part of the Jewish community. Deeply moved, Krusty and his father reconcile in front of the audience of children on Krusty's show.[392]

The episode is almost entirely based on the movie *The Jazz Singer*, the first synchronized sound movie of film history,[393] which similarly deals with a rabbi who cannot accept that his son prefers the career of a singer to following his father in a religious office. Their conflict culminates in the father's exclamation, "I have no son," which Rabbi Krustofski also uses when Bart and Lisa first approach him. Moreover, the reference is marked when the rabbi first realizes that his son actually ignored his commands. Krusty has his first big performance in front of a group of rabbis, including his father, at a Talmudic conference. On stage, he can hide behind his clown makeup so his father will not recognize him. The audience applauds his balloon sculptures of a Star of David and a Menorah, but then, in an attempt to be funny,

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[392] For a more detailed summary of the episode see Czogalla 114-116.
[393] Lenburg 4.

one member of the audience sprays Krusty's face with seltzer and the makeup runs off. As Rabbi Krustofski identifies his son, he exclaims in disgust, "If you were a musician, or a jazz singer, this I could forgive. But this…?"

The narrative parallels between the movie and the episode suffice to tell a convincing story about Krusty's past that partly explains why there are darker aspects in his personality that do not match the happy face he presents on television. The episode cleverly combines images from the film with further elements of Jewish life and the Yiddish idiom to create a more colorful background for the character of Krusty the Clown. However, only a more de-tailed analysis of the symbolic imagery in *The Jazz Singer* reveals the whole inner conflict that is responsible for the tragic core beneath Krusty's comic surface.

In the movie, the protagonist Jakie Rabinowitz assumes a more assimilated identity as "Jack Robin" to proceed in the world of theater and show business. The film constantly contrasts the two currents that shape Jakie's/Jack's identity as it juxtaposes the settings of a synagogue and a Broadway theater. In the end, he is forced into a climactic choice between his first appearance on Broadway and filling in for his mortally ill father to sing "Kol Nidre" on the Day of Atonement. In several recent studies, scholars have pointed out a third factor that enables Jakie to apparently free himself from the heritage of his upbringing: for some of his performances, Jakie puts on a "blackface," a theatrical makeup and minstrel mask developed in the 19th century to let white actors appear as blacks on stage and perform stereotypical actions.[394] The blackface allows him to erase his Jewish background, but at the same time it also hides the new identity of Jack Robin and turns Jakie into an entirely artificial manifesta-tion of fiction, a character.

Still, this painted over identity is leaky. Corin Willis observes that "blackface imagery in *The Jazz Singer* is at the core of the film's central theme, an expressive and artistic explo-ration of the notion of duplicity and ethnic hybridity within American identity" (127) and stresses that one of the most outstanding artistic achievements of the film is that it manages to project the conflict between two antagonistic identities on a third, supposedly blank sur-face. In an meticulously arranged scene, we see Jakie put on his blackface and break into a triumphant grin accompanied by the cheerful tones of his most famous song as he seems to have overcome the obstacles of his upbringing, only to witness his smile fade and the music turn more contemplative as a photograph of his mother reminds him of the two desires that tear him apart underneath his mask. Something similar happens when Krusty puts on his clown mask on television: the funny TV personality subdues his Jewish origin *and* his status as (traumatized) media celebrity. As his suppressed childhood memories break through the

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[394] Willis 127. For further information see Eric Lott's essay "Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in Amer-ican Culture."

surface, the clown's face deforms grotesquely and cannot cover up the battle of interests that is raging behind the paint any longer.

Thus, the episode based on *The Jazz Singer* explores Krusty's complex past and finds unexpected explanations for the grumpy, unbalanced personality that seemed to lurk behind the clown's makeup even in earlier episodes. The intermedial connection evokes an image of Krusty that remains important for his development throughout the whole series, as he is repeatedly shown as a broken man haunted by his traumatic past. It is only twelve seasons later that he seems to have found his inner peace: in the episode "Today I Am a Klown" (EP 15-6), Krusty visits his old neighborhood only to find out that he has never had a bar mitzvah, so his community does not regard him as a Jewish man. Since being a "self-hating Jew" has become essential to his identity, he decides to catch up with tradition and has his father teach him everything he has to know about Judaism in order to pass his bar mitzvah. When the big day has come, Krusty turns the ceremony into a big public celebration that is broadcasted live on television. When he realizes that his father is disappointed by this commercial exploitation, however, he sets up a second, more traditional ceremony that honors his cultural heritage. Finally, Krusty has found a way to reconcile the two conflicting factors that make him who he is.

While Krusty's past thus comes to life with the help of only one episode and one intermedial source text, the audience is provided with more detailed information about Principal Seymour Skinner's development in little bits and pieces that are dispersed over several seasons. Although Skinner holds a respectable position in Springfield's society, he is a misfit from the beginning. With few exceptions, he is not accepted by the people around him: the children and their parents dislike him, the teachers undermine his authority, superintendent Chalmers criticizes him almost constantly, groundskeeper Willie takes him for a snob, and his mother uses every opportunity to excoriate him. This is mainly due to his predominantly uptight and humorless nature. In the course of the series, *The Simpsons* explores the reasons for his behavior and uncovers two areas in his past that seem to have created the man he has become. The investigations let him appear less stereotypical and add an almost human touch, as they show a deeply troubled character suffering from the events of the past. The first factor is his military duty during the Vietnam War, which occurs in several flashbacks that resemble scenes from movies about the war.[395]

In the episode "I Love Lisa" (EP 4-15), as Skinner is talking to his pupils over the school intercom to remind them that Valentine's Day is not only about fun, he is drawn into the memory of a traumatic incident that happened on a patrol boat going up the Da Nang river: in his memory, we see a private Johnny getting shot while he is writing a Valentine's

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[395] Here, I disagree with Tuncel/Rauscher, who state that the flashbacks to Skinner's war past do not play a role in his characterization, but merely function as a running gag (157).

card to his sweetheart. The boat scene – including lookalikes of the characters "Chef" and "Mr. Clean" – is modeled on the Nung river setting of *Apocalypse Now* described above. Haunted by the tragic events and lost in his daydream, Skinner screams "Johnny" over the intercom, and Bart giggles, "Cool, I broke his brain!"

Other images resembling *Apocalypse Now* can be found in "The Principal and the Pauper" (EP 9-2). Although these are scenes that show Skinner when he was still another person in the "real" Sgt. Skinner's platoon,[396] they still explain why the war left him confused and scarred for life:[397] here, *The Simpsons* imitates the atmosphere of the battle at Do Long bridge, which is one of the most disturbing scenes of the movie. The bridge is under constant North Vietnamese fire and command structures and organization seem to be entirely gone. The action takes place in almost complete darkness, which is interrupted by the regular flashes of explosions and search lights. The soldiers seem to be out of their minds or drugged and do not really comprehend what is happening around them anymore. One soldier on an LSD trip climbs on top of a sandbag barrier and almost gets himself killed. Skinner makes similar experiences and is only saved because the real Sgt. Skinner takes him under his wings and convinces him that a life worth living is waiting for them once the war is over. When he is bereft of his mentor in a mortar explosion a few scenes later, the war has once again taken a guiding institution in his life.

In the later episode "Skinner's Sense of Snow" (EP 12-8),[398] Skinner's war trauma is completed by his memories from a prisoner of war camp,[399] which are inspired by the movie *The Deerhunter*. In another flashback, he remembers how he (physically and mentally) survived captivity by reminiscing about candy bars while the rest of his platoon were devoured by a guard elephant when they tried to escape. The cells and the camp where the soldiers are being held prisoner are modeled on the setting found in the movie. Then, during another Bart-triggered school riot, Skinner is tortured by Bart who pokes him with a stick while he mutters a few words in Vietnamese, which further marks the reference. Since the movie is only partly set in Vietnam and extensively deals with the moral and mental consequences of violence and the effects the post-combat trauma has on returning soldiers who try to re-

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[396] See subchapter 3.2.1.

[397] There are several scenes that deal with Skinner slipping into hallucinations of his war days, including a deleted scene from the episode "The Boy Who Knew Too Much" (EP 5-20) that shows him talking in his sleep during a nightmare, yelling for his lieutenant and imitating the crackle of a machine gun.

[398] The episode title is a reference to the movie (adapted from the book) *Smilla's Sense of Snow*.

[399] The audience already learns about Skinner's time in a POW camp in the episode "Team Homer" (EP 7-12) in one of his longer monologues: "The year was 1968. We were on recon in a steaming Mekong delta. An overheated private removed his flak jacket, revealing a T-shirt with an iron-on sporting the *Mad* slogan 'Up With Mini-Skirts.' Well, we all had a good laugh, even though I didn't quite understand it. But our momentary lapse of concentration allowed Charlie to get the drop on us. I spent the next three years in a POW camp, forced to subsist on a thin stew of fish, vegetables, prawns, coconut milk, and four kinds of rice. I came close to madness trying to find it here in the States, but they just can't get the spices right…"

integrate into their community, this reference in particular moves the focus to the tension that arises from Skinner's past and the position he now holds in Springfield.

Although the scenes in *The Simpsons* represent only little of the violence and sense-less death that has turned movies like *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deerhunter* into such horri-fying statements against war, their connection to exactly these texts makes them form, piece by piece, a comprehensive image of Skinner's past. The more details the producers reveal, the better the audience understands why Skinner needs to rely on strict military rules and orders to function in his small town environment. While *Apocalypse Now* works especially well to exemplify how even civilized people can lose control in battle, *The Deerhunter* im-pressively prefigures what has happened to Skinner back in civilian life: his shocking memo-ries prevent him from living according to the social codes that determine the lives of the peo-ple around him. His attempts to adjust to the more outgoing and open-minded social interac-tions of the other Springfieldians are always prone to fail because of the impenetrable coat of rules he has set up to hold his traumatic memories at bay.

Skinner's inability to function in normal social relations is further maintained by the second factor complicating his life, the co-dependent relationship with his mother Agnes. Skinner is a bachelor who still lives at his mother's house, and several episodes include scenes that probe into their problematic togetherness. His mother seems to be Skinner's only regular social contact outside his work place, and they have established certain rituals that dominate their lives: for example, episode 9-2 tells us that every Friday is silhouette night when Agnes will hang another paper-cut of her son's head on the wall, and episode 12-11 reveals that he has to give her a "daily mole check."

In general, she still treats him like a minor, upbraids him in public, and involves him in petty fights, which includes covering up "her half of the television" with cardboard to take re-venge on him (EP 8-22). Still, Seymour is very obedient, physically and emotionally close to her, and allows her to control his life. The dialogue about the sexual tunnel metaphor men-tioned above is only one example of how she constantly monitors his activities to stop him from getting involved with women (at least up to season eight, he is still a virgin). Although he becomes successively involved with Marge's sister Selma (EP 2-14) and Bart's teacher Edna Krabappel (EP 8-19), he still seems entirely devoid of sexual desires and is dependent on his mother for closeness and commitment.

In order to provide more complex information about and explore the darkest aspects of their relationship, the creators of *The Simpsons* started early to include references to Hitchcock's *Psycho*. The movie deals with the psychotic killer Norman Bates, who runs a motel that is overlooked by a sinister house on a hill where his mother lives. His mother also keeps him locked away from other women and does not refrain from murder to make sure that he will be hers only forever. In the end of the movie, however, it turns out that Norman's

mother is long dead and he has been living with a mummy, while his "mother" has become one half of his schizophrenic mind.

Scholars believe that Hitchcock's film was influenced by an increasing scholarly criticism of the American form of motherhood after World War II, which "began to depict the American mother as an emasculating influence, operating from within her domestic fortress to destroy the psyches of her children" (Marantz Cohen 144).[400] In *The Simpsons*, the overprotective mother figure developed in *Psycho* is first introduced in the episode "Brother from the Same Planet" (EP 4-14)[401] when Lisa and Marge visit Principal Skinner in his office to discuss Lisa's addiction to a telephone hotline. Skinner advises Lisa to listen to her mother and goes on to describe how important his mother is for him: "I owe everything I have to my mother's watchful eye… and swift hand." Then he steps to the window and opens the blinds to reveal a house directly taken from *Psycho* on a hill above the school. As he is taken in by the towering presence of the house, he continues, "There's mother now, watching me. What's that, mother? Well, they have a right to be here. It's school business. I… Mother, that tailor suit doesn't fit anymore." Marge and Lisa slowly back out of the office while Skinner seems to be totally absorbed in the dialogue with his mother that is taking place in his mind. This scene in particular emphasizes that in the film, "[i]t is Norman's imagination of his mother, his projection of an idea onto her corpse, that constitutes Mrs. Bates" (Marantz Cohen 148): in Skinner's case, too, his mother does not actually have to be present to control his thoughts. Her harsh balance of affection and withdrawal has created an emotional dependency that keeps her son tied to her in his own mind.

Many other scenes, however, show them in direct interaction, but still evoke the unhealthy closeness of the mother-son relationship that makes Norman Bates appear so intransparent and menacing in the movie. In a deleted scene from the episode "Homer's Barbershop Quartet" (EP 5-1), Skinner returns home after he has spent some time with his band and his mother is already waiting for him in a darkened room. When she asks if he has been with any woman, he replies, "No, I kept my oath," once again revealing the systematic moral restrictions that determine the way he interacts with other people. His mother responds, "Good boy. Now, give me bath!" – then, the scene shifts to another outdoors shot of the house from *Psycho*, and we can hear her laughing frantically.

In general, the house has received considerable scholarly attention as a symbolic manifestation of Norman Bates' psyche. According to a psychoanalytical approach, "the enclosed, vertical space of the house [not only] represents the unspeakable bond between mother and son" (Mulvey 235), but its three floors also mirror the three levels of the human mind: Bates' (imaginary) mother, his superego, lives on the top floor, Bates acts like a normal

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[400] See also Mulvey 241.

[401] Mrs. Skinner's previous appearances, for example in the first season episode "The Crêpes of Wrath" (EP 1-11), do not focus on her intense relationship with her son.

human being on the ground floor, and the basement, where he hides his mother's corpse, houses his animalistic id.

While this analytical approach to *Psycho* is certainly too complex to be transferred to *The Simpsons* in its entirety, the show still uses the interior setting to further intermedially explore Skinner's state of mind. In the episode "Lisa's Date with Density" (EP 8-7), Skinner and his mother no longer live in a house that is modeled on the *Psycho* setting from the outside, but closely resembles its interior design. The lighting is dominated by fragmented spots of light caused by the moon shining through the small windows and blinds. Seymour can be seen at the bottom of a staircase that leads up to the first floor along a line of portraits, including one of his mother. Throughout the scene, the audience never gets to see Mrs. Skinner, but becomes aware of her as a screaming presence on the first floor that controls the actions and thoughts of her son.

Taken together, the scenes described above form a mosaic of references that explores the second dark trait of Principal Skinner's personality. The psychotic mother-son relationship constructed in the movie does not perfectly match Skinner's situation – after all, his mother is alive and he is an active part in a larger society – but its intense moral deformations and fatal bondage lay a threatening shadow over Skinner's development. Both his war trauma and his unnatural devotion to his mother are revealed bit by bit in the course of the series and co-operate to explain why it is so difficult for him to find his place in Springfield's society. The intermedial references play an essential role in his characterization as they transport more information than the various short sequences could convey by themselves: his war memories echo more terror, violence, and trauma than the animated pictures could ever tell of, and his mother's looming presence foreshadows an increasing psychosis that has not even reached the narrative surface of the series. Together, the references turn Seymour Skinner into one of the most intertextually inflected recurring characters of the show.

Nevertheless, there is one character who even exceeds Skinner as far as his indebtedness to other texts is concerned. Whenever Mr. Burns, the rich and ruthless owner of Springfield's nuclear power plant, enters the stage, the audience is reminded of a situation where someone else acted in a similar way, looked similar, used similar words. This might be particularly due to the fact that Burns primarily plays the part of the stereotyped center of evil in the series and thus evokes a whole tradition of pure evil in fiction and non-fiction. While his appearance is allegedly modeled on the (not so evil) Norwegian shipping magnate and owner of Timex, Fredrik Olsen,[402] he has repeatedly occurred in situations and settings that let his evil personality seem like a cocktail of other evil characters.

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[402] See Paterson n.p.

A few outstanding examples should suffice to prove the point: in "Treehouse of Horror IV" (EP 5-5) he is the ideal cast for Dracula, in "Who Shot Mr. Burns – Part 1" (EP 6-25) he goes on a rampage in a scale model of Springfield like Gozilla, and in "Marge vs. the Monorail" (EP 4-12) he needs to be strapped to a barrow like Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* to keep order in court. In "Lady Bouvier's Lover" (EP 5-21), the comparison reaches the peak of evilness when Marge's mother comments on his dancing skills by calling him "the devil himself," to which he replies "I… who told you… oh, ho ho, I, yes, yes, well…"[403] In addition, Mr. Burns is repeatedly likened to the Wicked Witch of the West, the evil character in *The Wizard of Oz*. The episode "Rosebud" (EP 5-4) reveals that Burns' mansion is guarded by soldiers who look, sing, and parade very much like the Winkie guards of the witch's fortress, and in "The Last Temptation of Homer" (EP 5-9), Burns sends out monkeys with wings strapped to their backs, whose aviation abilities, however, are less convincing than those of the flying monkeys the witch has at her command – although he uses her words, "Fly, fly, my pretties!" All these references to established evil and threatening characters contribute to the stereotypical function Mr. Burns holds throughout most of the series: whenever the plot requires a bad person – and not just street criminal bad or organized crime bad, but truly evil at the core – Mr. Burns will be the first choice to represent corruption, ruthlessness, greed of gain, neglect of others' lives and health, the Republican Party, and corporate America, in general.

Yet, *The Simpsons* is too complex to leave it at that: from the beginning, Mr. Burns has been furnished with a parallel intermedial history that comments on and contributes to his personal development and his ambivalent character. The onomastic allusion to Charles Foster Kane, the protagonist of *Citizen Kane*, already marks the influence of the movie on Charles Montgomery Burns' characterization even without further intermedial interplay. However, additional references are manifold and evoke detailed aspects of the movie that turn Burns into a three-dimensional, multifaceted character.[404]

The movie investigates the life and work of the media mogul Kane in retrospect. Starting with a scene that shows him mutter the word "Rosebud" with his last breath on his deathbed, it follows a journalist's inquiries in search of the meaning the word had for Kane. In long flashbacks, the film recounts how the young Charles leaves his poor parents' home and comes to live with a wealthy businessman. As young, idealistic man, Kane enters the newspaper business and quickly becomes a successful journalist and publisher in the yellow press. Due to his increasing thirst for power, his journalistic ethos quickly gives way to manipulation and merciless competition. Soon, his ambitions expand to the field of politics and he campaigns for the office of governor of New York State. However, an affair with a singer

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[403] In "Rosebud" (EP 5-4), however, a newspaper photo that shows Burns shaking the devil's hand and handing him an oversized check reveals that they are actually different people.

[404] See also Turner's detailed analysis of the various facets of Burns' character (151-160).

eliminates his political career and finally ends the marriage with his already alienated wife. As his dominant and manipulative personality is driving more and more people away from him, including his second wife, he starts building a megalomaniac estate called "Xanadu" where his staff accumulates an enormous collection of memorabilia, works of art, and live animals, and where he finally dies a lonely man who finds solace only in a snow globe he clings to as a last link to his carefree childhood.[405]

The more detailed parallels between Kane and Burns begin in the episode "Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish" (EP 2-4), which deals with Mr. Burns' plan to become governor in order to change the laws that might force him to close down his power plant for violating safety and environmental regulations. During his campaign, he is shown holding a propagandist speech designed to besmirch the positive image of his opponent, the honorable long-time governor Mary Bailey.[406] The setting of his speech is modeled in close detail on a similar speech Kane holds to defame his opponent. While they are watching the spectacle on television, Bart asks Homer, "Is your boss governor yet?" and Homer responds, "Not yet, son, not yet." This also mirrors a dialogue between Kane's son and wife in the movie and further connects the two scenes. Burns' speech reproduces the sound of many demagogic political debates, in general, but it specifically evokes the unscrupulousness Kane has developed at this point of his career. It focuses on empty catch phrases known from the popular press instead of contents, it bristles with false promises, and it shows that Burns does not shy away from sacrificing honesty and integrity for gaining power.

However, as the story progresses, the episode also uncovers the fragile mind that has slowly been withering away behind the surface of an ambitious and powerful man: after Burns' hypocrisy has been laid bare during a televised dinner with the "average" Simpson family, he goes mad with disappointment and starts trashing their living room, yelling "You can't do this to me, I'm Charles Montgomery Burns!" His fury resembles a scene towards the end of the movie that shows Kane ravaging his wife's room after she has left him. At this point, Kane already seems to be deeply haunted by his past and his loneliness, and the involuntary compassion the audience feels for him transfers to Mr. Burns, who even lacks the physical strength to knock over the Simpsons' furniture without help. Although he has been presented as an entirely despicable character throughout the episode, the miserable way he handles his defeat, but particularly the connection to the complex characterization of Charles F. Kane, subtly undermines this impression for a few seconds. The viewers begin to realize that there might be a personal tragedy and a soft center to the shell of pure evil that constitutes Burns' main function in the universe of Springfield.

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[405] Hahn/Jansen 75.

[406] The reference to Donna Reed's character Mary Hatch Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life* is no coincidence, as her caring and loveable nature further contrasts the typecast opponents in the election as good vs. evil.

From this episode on, occasional references further establish the intermedial bond between C.F. Kane and C.M. Burns. In the episode "Blood Feud" (EP 2-22), Burns is seriously ill and waiting to die on an immense bed in a spacious bedroom modeled on Kane's suite, including the windows and curtains that create the sinister shadows and sharp contrasts around Kane's deathbed. In general, his mansion more and more resembles Xanadu as its design becomes dominated by shadows and it is revealed to accommodate such curiosities as a room containing a thousand monkeys at a thousand typewriters, a aviary full of vultures (EP 4-17), and a model train that takes three hours and 40 minutes to complete its circuit and returns with snow on its roofs (EP 5-18).

Moreover, in the episode "Marge Gets a Job" (EP 4-7), Smithers prepares a dance number with a group of dancers to honor his beloved boss. The performance is closely based on a celebration in *Citizen Kane*, using its music, setting, and camera angles. While it primarily once again highlights Smithers' sycophancy, it also further contributes to an image of Mr. Burns that is closely intertwined with the development of Charles F. Kane. In the course of little more than two seasons, Burns has become a character who – like Kane – represents not only business, but also politics and the media, as well as their interdependencies and the way single individuals unscrupulously exploit their processes and the people involved in them.

However, Burns' affiliation with Kane also sharpens the viewer's sense for possible human tragedies that might lie beneath his seemingly impenetrable coldness. The weakness already hinted at in the references in "Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish" is finally fully elaborated in the adequately titled episode "Rosebud" (EP 5-4), which explores the dark secrets of Burns' childhood.[407] The episode begins with one of the most elaborate extended references in *The Simpsons*, which not only draws narrative parallels to *Citizen Kane*, but also honors it as an outstanding example of creative film-making. The initial shot scans the iron gate to Burns Manor from bottom to top over several signs intended to scare away trespassers and a big "B" at the top. Then, the camera rests on the guards – the Winkie guards from *The Wizard of Oz* – for a while and finally zooms into Burns' bedroom to his bed where he is dreaming about his childhood.

In the dream, the young Burns is happily playing with a teddy bear in the snow when his parents ask him whether he wants to go on living with them, or move into the care of a "twisted, loveless billionaire" instead. His decision is settled within half a second, and Burns drives off with his new custodian, leaving the bear behind. His father calls after him, "Wait, you forgot your bear, a symbol of your lost youth and innocence." Then, the camera focuses on the bear, which is slowly buried under the falling snow. When it zooms out again, it re-

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[407] Broderick and Turner also highlight the importance of this episode for a full understanding of the character of C. Montgomery Burns; see 266 and 70/158, respectively.

veals that the bear and the parent's house have become miniatures in a snow globe Burns grasps in his hand while he is stirring in his sleep. The snow globe drops off the bed and breaks among several other broken ones (and next to a whole crate of "Nev-R-Break" snow globes). The camera zooms in on one of the shattered globes and captures the reflection of Smithers entering the room, while Burns mutters "Bobo, Bobo" in his sleep, calling for his beloved bear.

The episode opening assembles references to two of the key scenes in *Citizen Kane* and imitates the movie's visual language with astonishing precision. The film begins with Kane's death in the vast room already described and involves a snow globe which glides from with hand and shatters on the floor. The snow globe is the only object that still connects him with his long lost childhood: a scene later in the movie shows how he had to leave his favorite toy, a sledge labeled "Rosebud," behind when he moved in with his wealthy mentor.[408] The creators of *The Simpsons* cleverly employ a technical feature also used in the movie, the blending from real falling snow into the miniature world of a snow globe, to establish the connection between the bear, the sledge, and the globe as – to use their own words – "a symbol of [his] lost youth and innocence." While this overly explicit interpretation ironically comments on the possibly exaggerated attempts to read *Citizen Kane* and its highly symbolical visual codes in psycho-analytical terms, it still provides an explanation for Burns' unnatural desire to recover the bear.

The episode title further links the bear to the sledge and turns it into an object of such mystical importance that it easily functions as the main driving force of the remainder of the episode: as much as Rosebud initiates the search for truth hidden in the protagonist's past in the movie, the episode deals with Burns' search for his teddy and, indirectly, for the happiness of childhood days. The bear, after an adventurous journey that included crossing the Atlantic with Charles Lindbergh, being blamed by Hitler for the defeat in World War II, and an expedition to the North Pole, has come into Maggie's possession. Burns tries to buy it, steal it, and unsuccessfully attempts to wrestle it from Maggie's grip. In the end, she teaches him a lesson in humanity and gives him the bear to see him happy again.

While the rest of the plot is no longer indebted to *Citizen Kane*, it still employs some of its innovative stylistic features and thus honors its inspirational status. Several of the scenes that focus on Maggie's perspective use extreme low-angle camera shots, a technique that was relatively uncommon in indoor studio-based productions. Its extensive use in *Citizen Kane* distinguished it from other movies of the time and supported the representation of Kane as a larger-than-life public figure, as well as of his megalomaniac self-perception. Furthermore, the episode also contains several shots that mimic deep focus camera work, a tech-

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[408] Apparently, the sledge that can be seen burning in the furnace of Xanadu at the end of the movie is only an imitation, since the "real" sledge appears in episode 7-4 as decoration in Moe's bar.

nique that makes objects in the foreground and in the background of a scene appear in focus at the same time, and which was extensively and innovatively used in *Citizen Kane.*

The references in the episode create a strong bond between Burns and Kane from childhood to death – although, of course, Mr. Burns never actually dies – and thus repeat the story of the movie on another level: by tracing Burns' life to its very beginnings, the episode "Rosebud" finally provides explanations for his behavior in other episodes, and it particularly places other references to the movie in previous episodes in a larger causal frame. The allusions to *Citizen Kane*, dispersed over several episodes in three seasons, become a powerful factor in the characterization of C. Montgomery Burns as more than just "the evil man." They constitute one of the most fascinating examples of how cleverly the creators of the show use cultural commonplaces to evoke impressions of characters that run deeper than any description could. Mr. Burns has inherited an intermedial history, a personal tragedy, a whole series of ups and downs in his life, and a personality with ambitions, vanities, and weaknesses that cannot be reduced to a simple stereotype. The experiences he shares with Kane, and those only Kane has made, but which now pervade Burns' life as well, let him develop human characteristics instead of just characteristics; he no longer acts according to certain patterns only because it is expected of him in the narrative system of *The Simpsons*, but also because he has a personal background that exceeds the borders of this narrative system.

3.2.4   Plot Comprehension

In subchapter 3.2.1, I already differentiated between two types of episodes that are heavily indebted to other texts in their entirety, but are not parodies in the sense that they are (primarily) intended to create humorous effects: on the one hand, the type of episode described above as *extended homage* employs a movie or book as a source of inspiration, but does not necessarily elaborate on the tension between the two texts in order to generate additional insights.[409] On the other hand, the episodes discussed here consciously use a source text and the creative potential that develops in its relationship with the referring text to support their own narrative goals.

Put more simply, in these episodes, a "reference to other texts […] ensures the text's comprehensibility" (Mai 35). In order to achieve this effect, the episodes in question leave the source text's fundamental messages intact. Gray correctly describes that "many […] episodes take a stock plot and proceed to deconstruct it from inside" (56), but while this has been true for the disharmonic and parodist examples analyzed above, the approach here is different. While it is hardly necessary to create one-to-one adaptations to make the recipient

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[409] The episodes discussed as examples of this type were "Cape Feare" (EP 5-2) and "Bart of Darkness" (EP 6-1).

profit from already established significances, the changes that occur between the two texts have to be designed with the purpose of highlighting those qualities of the source text that further the understanding of the new text.

The first two episodes I want to discuss here both involve references to Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Tell-tale Heart*, but they differ with regard to the quality and quantity of references, as well as in the way they influence the comprehensibility of the episodes. Poe's *The Tell-tale Heart* is one of the finest examples of his perfectly composed short stories: starting in medias res, it has a nameless narrator recount the details of a murder he has committed and how he was convicted by the police. He explains how he meticulously planned to kill an old man living in the same house, and he repeatedly stresses that the perfection of his plan should prove that he is of sound mind. After the deed was done, he cut up the body and hid the parts under the floorboards in the victim's room. Alarmed by the old man's screaming, a neighbor called the police, but the narrator was confident that he had successfully removed all the traces of the crime. However, as he and the policemen sat down in the old man's room, he started hearing a faint noise from under the floorboards that sounded like a beating heart. In his mind, the noise grew louder and louder until he could not take it any longer and confessed the crime. Although some scholars point out that the sound may have been caused by insects in the walls, so-called "death watch beetles,"[410] which are mentioned at another point of the story, it is never revealed whether there was an actual noise in the beginning, which then increased in the narrator's mind, or if it is just his bad conscience and fear of detection that makes him hallucinate.

In the episode "The Telltale Head" (EP 1-8), the creators of *The Simpsons* make use of the topic of a murderer's conscience expressed in the story to point towards Bart's moral dilemma right at the beginning of the story. It is one of the rare episodes that deviate from a linear narrative structure, as it starts with a scene where Bart already has to cope with the body of evidence of his latest prank – the head he has sawed off of the statue of Jebediah Springfield, the town's founder. It then returns to a long flashback describing the motivation for and the psychological consequences of his crime.

Thus, in addition to the textual marker in the title (which exceptionally appears on screen when the story has already started), the episode here also copies the source text's narrative structure in order to fully profit from the viewer's familiarity with the story. Faced by an angry mob who would love to see him punished, Bart explains how he decided to decapitate the statue to impress a couple of bad kids, but then started to feel remorse when he realized how much the statue means to the people of Springfield. The head he carried around in his backpack began to talk to him and voiced Bart's own realization that trying to be popular had made him the most hated boy in town. He buried the head in the family's garden, but

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[410] Robinson 14.

even from the ground, its hollow voice reminded him of the crime he had committed. When he could no longer stand it, he confessed first to his family and then, together with his father, to the other Springfieldians. Touched by his honest report, they forgive him and just put the head back where it belongs.

The narrative experiment of a flashback structure in combination with a prominent marker notably increases the importance of the intermedial reference for the episode: while the rest of the plot has little to do with the original story and does not even try to imitate its atmosphere, the referential frame guides the viewer's perception along established lines and thus activates intermedial knowledge that supports the narrative progress. The audience does not question the function of a talking metal head; in the light of Poe's classic stories, it takes for granted that Bart's inner conflict is transferred to a dialogue with an imaginary partner. As the head becomes a visual aid in an oral re-narration of events, it turns, like the non-existent beating heart in Poe's story, into a narrative tool designed as a visualization of the protagonist's psyche.

As a consequence, the episode exemplifies what I intended to explain when I stated that the changes that occur between the two texts have to be designed with the purpose of highlighting those qualities of the source text that further the understanding of the new text: what is essential to Poe's story is not the crime, nor the criminal, nor the victim or his heart – it is the narrative structure and the metaphorical elaboration of a state of mind. The imitation of those two factors, combined with an obvious intertextual marker, makes it possible that the audience's familiarity with the short story contributes noticeably to the comprehensibility of the episode.

The second episode that refers in detail to *The Tell-tale Heart* supports this notion as it analyzes the story's narrative potential from a meta-perspective. In "Lisa's Rival" (EP 6-2), Lisa's status as the smartest and most talented child in school is threatened by Allison, a new kid in town. Although she tries to befriend her, their rivalry increases because Allison also plays the saxophone and thus ventures into all domains that define Lisa's personality. Her fear of being condemned to be second-best forever finally makes her soften up her moral standards: with Bart's help, she comes up with a plan to humiliate Allison in front of the whole school during a diorama exhibition in the school gym.[411]

Allison has created a diorama of the final scene of *The Tell-tale Heart* with a metronome beating under the floor of the model room. While the teachers are inspecting and grading the exhibits, Lisa hides Allison's diorama in a hatch under the floor of the gym and replaces it with a cow's heart. When Principal Skinner is appalled by Allison's exhibit and begins to question her qualifications, Lisa has reached her goal. However, as Lisa becomes

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[411] Dioramas are small handcrafted models of scenes taken from works of art or real life situations. Nelson's diorama in the episode discussed, for example, is a representation of *The Grapes of Wrath* consisting of a pile of fruit he smashes with a hammer.

aware of how much pain she has caused the other girl, her conscience sets in and she starts to hear the tiny heart beating under the gym floor. As the beating grows louder, she panics and screams, "It's the beating of that hideous heart!" Then, she produces the real diorama from the hatch – still, she does not confess the deed, but claims that it has been misplaced. To everybody's surprise, the teachers do not even praise Allison's diorama ("hmm, a little sterile… no real insight"), but also largely ignore Lisa's own work and award Ralph Wiggum's collection of *Star Wars* action figures instead. Lisa then apologizes to Allison and they make their peace as both have learned the lesson that it is okay to be second once in a while.

The episode employs the intermedial plot and the complex metaphorical construct of a mechanical heart beating under the diorama floor *and* the floor of the gym not only to support its narrative flow, but also to comment on the different medial forms of representation. In contrast to the examples discussed in subchapter 3.2.1, the different modes of literature, theater, and film here influence the impact the intermedial reference has on the action: the diorama as a meta-comment on the plot cannot express the inner conflict in the criminal's mind; it needs to have an actually beating heart under the floorboards to tell the story. Yet, the teachers miss some real insight, and they are right: in accordance with the assessment of the previously discussed episode, the heart is not important. A diorama, or even a stage play, can hardly capture the narrative structure and psychological depth that makes Poe's story work.

The main plot, however, comes closer to the effect the story evokes. Although the audience knows that there actually is a sound under the gym floor, the visual and auditory language of the scene directs all attention to the fact that it is the struggle in Lisa's mind that counts in this situation. Since it possesses the ability to combine various forms of communication and to let them interact in short sequence or at the same time, (animated) film here manages to transport the effect so masterly implemented in Poe's written story to another medium without destroying its subtle symbolism. Taken together, the two levels of the reference perfectly support the understandability of the episode: the audience does not need to think of murder and dead bodies to understand the episode to its full psychological extent; it needs to develop an intertextually prepared awareness of the workings of the human mind. And what could create this awareness more adequately than a classic literary text that has found a way of laying bare the twisted workings of the human soul?

Finally, the episode "A Streetcar Named Marge" (EP 4-2) introduces one of the most extensive intermedial references and shows how another text can work alongside an episode in order to comment on and support its main plot. At the beginning of the episode, Marge announces that she will audition for a musical production of Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but her family does not even pay attention. Ned Flanders is cast as Stanley Kowalski, but Marge and the other women who audition for Blanche DuBois are re-

jected by the director, who is looking for a "delicate flower being trampled by an uncouth lout." Yet, before she drives home, she calls Homer and dispiritedly tells him that he was right, that outside interests are stupid, and humbly takes his dinner orders. The director realizes that she is perfect for the role, takes the receiver, and yells, "Stop bothering my Blanche!" Thus, it is immediately established that Marge does not become Blanche DuBois because of her acting abilities, but because their characters show certain parallels.

Rehearsals begin and Ned and Marge have to find a way to transport the smoldering mixture of desire, hatred, and abuse that develops between the brutish Stanley and his fragile sister-in-law Blanche. While Ned easily gets in character, Marge does not manage to summon enough hatred to break a bottle and attack Stanley with it. Back home again, she asks Homer to run some lines with her, but he is more interested in a videogame and once again voices his obvious disdain for Marge's pastime.

On the following day, as Marge and Ned are again practicing the bottle scene, Marge still prefers to take Stanley's abuse "with gentle good humor," but then Homer arrives to drive Marge home and repeatedly interrupts them. The next scene brilliantly superimposes Homer and Stanley, as the director reminds Marge of what is so bad about Stanley while Homer can be seen in the background aggressively struggling with a candy machine: "Stanley is thoughtless, violent, and loud. Marge, every second you spend with this man, he is crushing your fragile spirit. You can't let that happen!" When Homer returns to his car and keeps honking for Marge to come out, she gets so angry that she imagines that Stanley is Homer, finally smashes the bottle and attacks him. At night, Marge goes to Flanders' house to practice with him. Homer, unable to open a can of pudding himself, yells for her from the garden, imitating Stanley's voice and gestures when he calls for Stella from the street. By this time, Marge has lost all respect for him, just calls him a "big ape," and immediately gets furious again.

On the night of the performance, the whole family gathers in the theater to watch Marge, although Homer seems to be bored and only goes "because he has to." The scenes of the musical that are shown focus on other parts of the play, notably Blanche's arrival in New Orleans, her attempts to gain men's attention, and her slow descent into madness, ending with her famous final remark to the mental doctor (played by Chief Wiggum), "Whoever you are – I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (Williams, *Streetcar* 142). At the end of the musical, Marge is enthusiastically applauded by the crowd; only Homer remains in his seat with his chin on his chest and his eyes half closed. Marge thinks that he is about to doze off and confronts him with hostility, but Homer explains that he was sincerely touched by Blanche's situation and that he has learned a lesson from the way Stanley treated her: "The poor thing ends up being hauled to the nut house when all she needed was for that big slob to show her some respect." Marge realizes that Homer did actually pay attention and quickly forgives him. When they leave the theater, Homer adds that he sometimes is "a

lot like that guy… when I pick my teeth with the mail and stuff." Marge replies, "Maybe just a little," and seems to be entirely content with the cathartic impact the play has had on their relationship.

The episode deals with its intermedial counterpart in a very creative way that could neither be described as parody, nor as adaptation. Instead, it disassembles the play into different elements and puts them together again according to a structure that supports its own narrative design. As a first step, the different aspects of the play are separated into two groups: on the one hand, there is the main constellation of Stanley and Blanche as entirely antithetic characters, which is of utmost importance for the episode's own story. Stanley's animalistic, sensual, egotistic personality easily transfers to Homer, while Marge bears traces of Blanche's more delicate and refined nature (although she lacks Blanche's negative characteristics, which make her an ambiguous character in the play).

On the other hand, there are elements that are irrelevant for the development of the episode plot: the New Orleans setting, Blanche's attempts to seduce men, Blanche's Southern aristocrat background, her feeble mind and descent into madness. The aspects of the second group are entirely condensed into the play-within-the-play, or musical-within-the-episode, towards the end: the musical Homer and kids watch – or at least those parts that are shown to the viewers – does not include any scenes that shed light on the relationship of Stanley and Blanche. As the performance contains several rather ridiculously exaggerated elements of musical productions – group choreographies, light shows, a cheerful happy ending song ("You can always depend on the kindness of strangers") – it might be regarded as an intermedial parody of the way musical adaptations rearrange more serious source texts in order to squeeze them into their own generic conventions,[412] but it is *not* a direct comment on the action of the episode.

The elements from group one, notably the open conflicts between Stanley and Blanche, are instead dispersed over the entire episode via shots from the rehearsals to form a constant mirror to the increasingly troubled relationship of Homer and Marge. Thus, although the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire* does not determine the structure of the episode, the references still contribute largely to its structural arrangement. The musical-within-the-episode does not work as an intermedial guide to the episode because of what it shows, but because of what it leaves out: it is only in Homer's mind and, on a meta-level, in the viewer's mind that the scenes from the play form one homogeneous impression and the parallel stories of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and "A Streetcar Named Marge" become one. Now that the recipients can employ their intertextual knowledge, the references unfold their potential to shape the major portion of the episode's message and prove that they are "designed to provide unspoken metaphorical elaboration and commentary about what is going on in the sce-

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[412] For a more detailed description of the musical parody see Turner 397.

ne" (Matheson 111). It is only with the help of intertextual knowledge that the audience can fully make sense of what is happening.

As parts of the play turn into real life for Homer and Marge, the audience cannot help but combine the two texts and let them influence each other.[413] In this case, it becomes obvious that intertextual relations often automatically fulfill two functions at the same time. On the one hand, the play provides the foil for Homer and Marge to exercise their conflicts with a promise of catharsis: "A Streetcar Named Marge" is not the first episode to insinuate that not all is well in their relationship. The Simpsons are, after all, a dysfunctional family, and reasons for conflicts between the family members are manifold. The intermedial substructure of this episode, however, allows the parents to try out a wide range of emotions that may decide about the success or failure of their marriage: resignation, anger, desperation, denial, "gentle good humor," pride, magnanimity, affection, egotism, self-effacement. The intermedial proxy gives them an opportunity to let their dissonances escalate, but also promises redemption.

On the other hand, the ideas the play expresses come to life again, too. "A Streetcar Named Marge" revisits the play, assesses its individual elements, stresses its most important features, and highlights its qualities. It creates an up-to-date, re-contextualized version and thus ensures that its main concerns are not lost. This, however, leaves the field of intratextual functions and points beyond the borders of *The Simpsons* to other modes that do not affect the series' own narrative achievements any longer. The next chapter will deal in detail with such extratextual functions.

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[413] Turner also points out how the references to *A Streetcar Named Desire* are used to elaborate on Homer's and Marge's relationship (92-93).

3.3 Extratextual Functions

3.3.1 Emotional Reappraisal

The example of *A Streetcar Named Desire* in the episode just discussed once again stresses that intertextual processes always involve a complex network of participating parties (see Figure 5): a source text (*A Streetcar Named Desire*), the source text's author (Tennessee Williams), an alluding text ("A Streetcar Named Marge"), the author of the alluding text (the writer/director of "A Streetcar Named Marge"), the source text's reader (in this case, the writer/director of "A Streetcar Named Marge" and, possibly, also parts of its audience), and the reader of the alluding text (the viewers of *The Simpsons*). In addition to the already complicated set of relations that links these participants, previous audiences of the source text may as well have a say in the process, as their interpretations of the source text, especially professional assessments by critics and scholars, can also influence the way the producer *and* the recipient of the alluding text approach the source text.
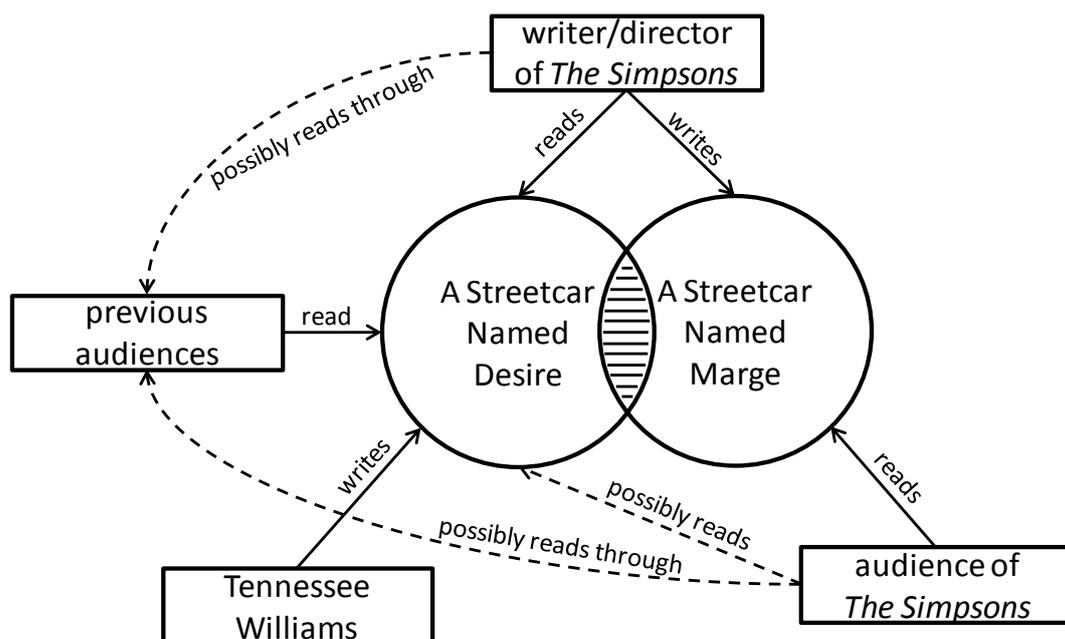
**Figure 5:   Network of parties involved in the intermedial reception
of "A Streetcar Named Marge" (EP 4-2)**

A simple counting of the arrows that point at the two texts in Figure 5 indicates that once the intermedial potential of the overlapping parts of the two texts is activated, the source text seems to attract more attention than the alluding text – and in a way that needs to be clarified in this chapter, it is true. The primary communicative situation involves "A Streetcar Named Marge," its producers, and its audience. Those three form a potentially independent communicative triangle, which can generate meaning along the connections that

form between its three corners.[414] The intertextual area the episode shares with *A Streetcar Named Desire* can become part of this process and influence the development of meaning in all the ways described in the previous chapter – it can fulfill various intratextual functions.

When this happens, however, an additional door opens for the source text to move into the center of attention again. First of all, it can be expected that the creators of a *Simpsons* episode will have read and re-read their source in order to be able to fully assess the impact it could have on their own text. In this process, they might have read other readers' interpretations of the source text and thus developed an understanding of it that is shaped by diverse insights generated in different circumstances of reception. Second, those of the viewers who know the source text, too, may be influenced by a variety of different circumstances of reception: the circumstances when they first read the source text, the circumstances when they watched the *Simpsons* episode, and the circumstances when those previous audiences that might have affected their reception read the source text.

As a result, various factors could possibly have an effect on the (re)interpretation of the source text, since social, cultural, or political discourses are bound to change in different times and places: "if the relations between texts of a given epoch are examined in the light of new categories, such as *race* or *gender*, this produces new insights and understandings" (Hallet 58; his italics; my translation).[415] In addition, the particular relation between the old text and the new text, and especially the new cotext that is created, can highlight aspects of the source text that might have been suppressed by past interpretations. Writing about parody (which he defines along the lines of intertextuality) in *The Simpsons*, Gray detects that "parody has great power and potential to write back to and even write over other texts and genres, to contextualize and recontextualize other media offerings" (2). Thus, in general, any source text will be brought to the surface as it is referred to in *The Simpsons* and will unfold its creative potential for the active audience once again.

As a consequence, two possible starting points for a phenomenon that I would like to call "emotional reappraisal" emerge: on the one hand, for those viewers who are not familiar with *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the episode in question provides something that could also be labeled "second-hand emotion," if this expression did not ring with negative connotations. The producers of *The Simpsons* transport a reduced version of the play and highlight certain aspects that support the narrative concerns of the episode. The emotions the viewers experience are almost exclusively determined by the *Simpsons* story itself, since those parts of the play that do not support this story (e.g., the New Orleans setting, Blanche's descent into madness) are reduced to the status of decoration.

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[414] Of course, it can only generate meaning because the three members dispose of a shared code that refers to objects outside of the triangle.

[415] Original: "Wenn die Beziehungen zwischen Texten einer bestimmten Epoche im Lichte neuer Kategorien wie z.B. *race* oder *gender* betrachtet werden, ergeben sich daraus neue Einsichten und Verstehensweisen."

On the other hand, those viewers who know the play can approach it more independently: although their perception will also to a certain degree be influenced by the way the producers of *The Simpsons* present the play, they will be invited to re-assess their interpretation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* on the basis of their previous impressions, their present impressions, *and* the producers' perspective. For example, the clash of cultures between a Southern aristocrat and a Northern industrial background that seemed to be one of the central underlying conflicts of the play may lose its importance to a more general, interpersonal conflict between Stanley and Blanche, thus making it applicable to a wider range of situations. Similarly, due to the character constellation in the *Simpsons* episode, Blanche's negative traits may fade and let her appear even more as a victim to Stanley's lack of compassion. Still, as Homer summarizes his impression of the play, the predominant message remains intact; the episode does not break with the messages of the play, but boils it down to an essence that supports its own plot. The episodes discussed in this subchapter reveal, however, that both is possible: an emotional reappraisal that virtually transforms an already established message in a way that makes it applicable to a new context, and a re-evaluation that undermines or at least questions an established message to gain its validity from this contrast.

In the episode "Lisa's Date with Density" (EP 8-7), Lisa falls in love with Nelson Muntz, the worst elementary school bully, and tries to bring out the tender sides in him. Their first encounters mainly highlight their differences: while Lisa is interested and committed, Nelson does not seem to care about anything. There are no parents around to raise him, he constantly misbehaves due to the mixture of hatred and boredom that seems to dominate his thoughts, and he does not mind if his behavior affects others. However, Lisa is not willing to give up that easily and slowly begins to change his appearance and his interests. During a date on a lawn below the Springfield Observatory, she once again tries to reach his deeper thoughts and feelings, but instead they end up kissing for the first time (Nelson thinking that is the only way to make her stop talking). Lisa believes that she has finally turned him into a more adapted person, but soon his old self gets the upper hand again when he joins his bully friends who are splattering Principal Skinner's house with rancid coleslaw. When the police are chasing after them, Nelson asks Lisa to hide him, but lies to her about his involvement. After the incident has blown over, they meet again at the observatory. Nelson accidentally gives away that he took part in the prank, so Lisa realizes that Nelson is always going to be who he is and ends their relationship.

Although the plot parallels are scarce, the episode exhibits a close connection to the movie *Rebel Without a Cause*. The intermedial relation is marked by several visual references, including the setting of the observatory and a windbreaker Lisa wears during her last date with Nelson that resembles James Dean's famous red jacket from the movie. In the

movie, the teenager Jim Stark moves to Los Angeles with his parents and has problems with adjusting to the new surroundings. The conflicts begin in his family, since he does not accept his father as a role model and does not think that his parents understand what troubles him. Lacking support at home, he is repeatedly at odds with other authorities, including the police. While many of the other teenagers he meets suffer from the same lack of orientation, their concern for the others' feelings is limited and they also engage in scuffles among themselves. Their pranks become more dangerous and end with the death of a boy called Buzz in a trial of courage that involves driving stolen cars towards the edge of a cliff. Hiding from the police and rival youths, Jim and his two closest friends lie quiet in an abandoned villa and later in an observatory. In the showdown, his friend Plato is killed by the police in self-defense, while Jim is reconciled with his family.

As the plot summary shows, it would be utterly inappropriate to call "Lisa's Date with Density" an adaptation of *Rebel Without a Cause*, so why did the producers include the obvious references to the movie? As a first guess, one could assume that Jim's character might resemble Nelson's and thus provide some explanations for the way he behaves – just like the characters described in subchapter 3.2.3 gained depth from their intertextual relations. So Nelson may be a rebel without a cause, but it is difficult to find further similarities. While Jim is looking for guidance from his parents, Nelson does not even have a family.[416] While Jim is trying to win the love of a girl named Judy, whose reaction is rather unimpressed at first, Nelson is rather unimpressed by Lisa's advances and does not seem to be interested in having a girlfriend. When Lisa asks him about his deeper beliefs concerning a "Nuke the Whales" poster in his room, his reply, "Gotta nuke something…," does not link him to Jim, but echoes Buzz' remark about the motivation for risky car chases, "We got to do something. Don't we?" And why does Lisa wear Jim's jacket, and not Nelson?

The answers can be found in the contemporary reappraisal the episode attempts, which results in a shift of perception as far as the social positions of the characters are concerned: while Nelson might be a rebel, Lisa is much more like Jim than he is. Lisa often feels misunderstood in a family of parents who do not possess the intellectual or spiritual abilities to deal with the questions that trouble their spiritual daughter. Both Homer and, to a lesser degree, Marge can hardly function as role models for her, since her ambitions and interests exceed their suburban lifestyle. Moreover, she often feels misfit among other children and only manages to blend in with them whenever she adopts their behavior.[417] Nonetheless, her family loves her, just like Jim's family loves him and gladly takes him back at the end of the

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[416] When Lisa visits him at his place, he tells her that she is the first one he has had over since his dad "went nuts." Furthermore, episode 4-21 provides the information that his mother is in prison.

[417] For example, the episodes "Separate Vocations" (EP 3-18), "Summer of 4 Ft. 2" (EP 7-25), and "Little Girl in the Big Ten" (EP 13-20) all tell stories of how Lisa becomes more accepted by the people around her once she starts pretending to be someone she is not. See also Gruteser 62-63.

movie. Lisa, too, has a family to return to in the end; thus, it is her who gets to wear Jim's jacket. Of course, the problems of the society represented in *The Simpsons* are different from those of the 1950s, but the Simpson family still represents the "American Standard Home" (Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 10), in general, and in many ways the nuclear family of the 50s in particular.[418] Accordingly, Lisa's relation to her family partly revisits some of the issues raised in the film, such as generational conflicts and the lack of a proper place for disoriented youths in society.

Judged by today's standards, however, Lisa's alienation from her family poses only a minor problem in comparison to the more severe defects in Nelson's environment. His main problem is no longer the misunderstandings between the different generations of a family, but that there is no family at all. While Bart, who holds the image of the prime rebel of the series, is continuously examined with regard to his motivations, weaknesses, and morals, this is the first episode that attempts a similar analysis of Nelson's behavior – and fails. Nelson has completely lost touch with the emotional network that could be provided by a family and seems entirely devoid of moral standards and self-appraisal. Lisa's inquiries about what is inside him reveal "guts and black stuff and about 50 Slim Jims." Put bluntly, he has so many problems that he does not even have a problem anymore: he has sealed himself off emotionally from his troubled surroundings.

As a result of the increasing social problems, the image of the rebel automatically moves to Nelson in the viewer's mind. His deeds are as unmotivated or at least as difficult to explain as Jim's rebellions in *Rebel without a Cause* – but have acquired a vacuity that mirrors the social developments of the 40 years that have passed since the movie was made. Springfield's society still has to cope with problems that have not been solved in many decades of cultural, social, and psychological examination, but it has not found solutions for the newer problems, either. The messages expressed in *Rebel Without a Cause* remain true in principle, but they gain greater validity when adjusted to current contexts. The worries about the moral decay of the American youth, the social reasons for it, and the promise of the family structure that worked as the main protective force in the movie have been taken to the next level: even a dysfunctional family like the Simpsons can still provide the support needed to live through the disturbances any young person will have to endure while growing up, but what happens to those who do not have a family at all, not even a dysfunctional one?

While the episode thus gains its significance from appropriating a previously communicated message and proving its relevance in circumstances that change in the course of time, others create emotional significance by vitiating the expectations older texts have established in the viewers' minds. On the level of single stylistic elements, for example, the audience might actually feel a certain relief once a repetitive narrative formula is broken: in the

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[418] See, for example, Broderick 244, and Cantor "Politics" 162.

episode "You Only Move Twice" (EP 8-2), after a cartoon double of James Bond has once again miraculously evaded death in an elaborate killing apparatus modeled on the laser in *Goldfinger*, it is actually quite pleasant to see him die of simple machine gun fire a few seconds later.[419] After 20-odd movies that left Bond without a serious scratch in countless battles with superior forces, his unexpected death in a *Simpsons* episode not only provides a moment of cynical humor, but also deconstructs the established (albeit necessary) narrative structure of the Bond movies and their limited potential to surprise and touch the audience.

Extended intermedial references to Frank Capra's movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, which has become a famous classic due to regular Christmas reruns, in two different episodes may serve as examples of how *The Simpsons* can appreciate and at other times ironically undermine the message conveyed by one particular text and use both approaches to let the source text come to life again.

In the movie, the protagonist George Bailey experiences a series of severe setbacks and thinks about drowning himself on Christmas Eve. A guardian angel is sent out to rescue him. Preparing for his mission, he watches in long flashback sequences how George repeatedly sacrificed his own desires and ambitions in order to help others. While the people around him have progressed, his decisions and a series of misfortunes have left him facing "bankruptcy, and scandal, and prison." The angel appears to convince him that he has still led a marvelous life and shows him which terrible things would have happened to the people he loves if he had never been born. George realizes that his life is worth living and happily hurries home to sort things out with his debtors, but his wife tells him that a miracle is happening: all the people who have profited from his good deeds file in and bring money to pay for his debts and thus solve his problems.

The Simpsons as a serial sitcom is an expert when it comes to unexpected happy endings: each episode needs to be brought to a satisfying solution and needs to restore the status quo. Consequently, the ending of *It's a Wonderful Life* provides suitable stock material to solve some of the hopeless situations the protagonists of *The Simpsons* maneuver themselves into. In the episode "When Flanders Failed" (EP 3-3), Ned Flanders opens a store selling products for left-handed people, but after a few weeks of poor sales, he is close to bankruptcy. Homer, who had gloatingly been watching Flanders' failure, rounds up every left-handed person in Springfield and saves the store. In addition to the plot similarities, the final scenes of the episode are filled with allusions to the movie. Almost word-by-word quotations like "Oh, golly, it's a miracle!" (Maude Flanders), and "To Ned Flanders, the richest left-handed man in town!" (Homer) are accompanied by visual signs like Maude wearing Donna Reed's dress and Chief Wiggum playing the accordion in a crowd of singing customers. Of course, they are not there primarily to help Ned, but as he rings up the sales on his register,

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[419] See also Rauscher 125.

the audience cannot help but feel the sympathy and relief again that accompanied George's rescue in *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Although the episode puts as much effort into evaluating Homer's psychological development as into understanding Ned's decline, their almost amicable reconciliation in the end guarantees for an all-positive redemptive moment. Even more than the example of the references to *Rebel Without a Cause*, this episode shows that it is possible for *The Simpsons* to employ the emotional effect achieved in another text in a different context to repeat its narrative and emotional impact. It imitates Capra's subtle balancing between sentimentality and irony[420] without adding further ironic comment, and even without stressing any differences between the two situations: the story of the misfortunate left-handed shop owner is as timeless as the story of the belatedly rewarded noble deeds. It is partly due to the canonical status and cross-generational appeal of a movie like *It's a Wonderful Life* that a show like *The Simpsons* can finish its episodes in such a manner: viewers will not question the realism or morality of the ending, but apply their intermedial knowledge and experience the same good-natured morale once again. Watching the ending of the episode, they also watch the ending of the movie afresh and feel the same emotions.

In contrast, the episode "Miracle on Evergreen Terrace" (EP 9-10)[421] takes a completely different direction: Bart accidentally burns the family's Christmas tree and all the presents, hides the remnants in the garden, and blames it on an imaginary burglar. The family is devastated at first, but then tries to find solace in the true spirit of Christmas, "the one day that shouldn't be about material things." However, when news anchor Kent Brockman broadcasts a report about their situation, the townspeople gather at the Simpsons' house and bring money to save their Christmas. When Homer returns from trying to drown his sorrow in beer, Marge welcomes him with the words "It's a miracle" – their living room is filled with people smiling, cheering, and eager to give. In the background, Lisa is playing "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" on the piano, a song also used in the movie. When Homer yells at her and asks her to stop, the reference to *It's a Wonderful Life* is clearly marked once again and the audience is ready to be overwhelmed by the kindness and generosity of Christmas.

But this all happens in the middle of the episode. The truth is revealed when Bart can no longer stand his bad conscience and confesses first to his family and then to the media. Unfortunately, encouraged by their neighbors, the Simpsons have already spent the donated money on a new car (in Homer's words: "let's go buy some happiness") which they have then lost in an accident, and henceforth they receive rotten fruit and hate mail instead of presents. They want to make it up to their town and try to gather the money somehow, but only towards the end of the episode a second miracle seems to be happening: coming home from

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[420] Krusche/Labenski 351.

[421] The title refers to the movie *Miracle on 34th Street*, which competed with *It's a Wonderful Life* in the race for the title of the most successful Christmas movie of the holiday season 1946/47.

an unsuccessful *Jeopardy* session, the Simpsons find a cheering crowd outside their house once again. Their neighbors have decided to forgive them – but also to take all their belongings, which leaves the family with less than they ever had before.

This second, over-ironic miracle counteracts the endings of the movie and of the episode discussed above. Although it does not shake the foundations of the catharsis provided by *It's a Wonderful Life* too fiercely – after all, the episode depicts some wholehearted generosity and some Christmas spirit – it reminds the viewer of the fact that standard solutions need to be thoroughly examined if applied to a new context. When George Bailey receives his friends' money in the end, it is the justified reward for a lifetime of selflessness. The donations balance out the inequities he has had to endure as a result of his altruistic personality. It is imperative to consider the differences in the situation of the Simpsons: first, the power of the media to make and break personal fates stands out as a critical factor; second, it is at least debatable if the Simpsons are noble enough to have earned a miracle like George. During the whole episode, they are mainly concerned with their own desires, which do not involve essential needs, but luxuries. When Bart, tortured by his bad conscience, proposes giving the money to charity, the others ignore his concerns. Even if we put aside Bart's dubious role in the disappearance of the Christmas presents, there is still little that could justify why the Simpsons should receive a generous donation. Thus, in a way, they are even justly punished for their selfishness when their craving for material "happiness" leads to the loss of all material wealth.

Nevertheless, or maybe as a result, the family experience their very own deliverance: once all their possessions are gone and they have overcome their initial frustration, they actually manage to find joy in each other's presence and frolic around the house in a wild chase for the single washcloth the mob has left them. The episode thus offers two moments of emotional deliverance, as it first retells the story of friendship and helpfulness that evokes the positive attitude of *It's a Wonderful Life*, but then destroys the harmony just to catch the viewer again with a truly unexpected final message of a family's love.

On a higher level, however, the entire story reflects back on society as a whole, because, on closer inspection, the Simpsons are at the mercy of the forces around them. They did not ask for media coverage, they did not ask for donations, and when they wanted to use the money to replace only the items the "burglar" had stolen, their neighbors convinced them to buy something wild and funny instead. As they give in to the processes that shape their social position, they become vulnerable to the changing moods of society. Their moment of bliss in the secluded family circle at the end of the episode thus turns into a statement in the opposition of family vs. society and finally supports the central theme of *It's a Wonderful Life* again: after all, George's true wealth is his large, supportive family.

The examples of both *Rebel Without a Cause* and *It's a Wonderful Life* show that the functions of intertextuality in *The Simpsons* do not have to remain within the basic narrative processes of single episodes or the show as a whole, but that they can also creatively involve the source texts. In both examples, the references can be expected to influence the audience's attitude towards the older texts. As a consequence, a new generation of recipients will make an emotional experience that is either similar to the ones felt in previous readings or that evolves in creative opposition to them. Both types reconsider established, potentially encrusted interpretations in order to expose the core of truth that survives an updated, recontextualized assessment. If an older text contains aspects of cultural value, the contemporary intertextual revival will make sure that those aspects will endure.

3.3.2   Cultural Education

One of the main characteristics of postmodernism is the tendency to blend works of high and popular culture and thus dissolve their differences.[422] Pop songs include tones from classic pieces, newspapers quote lines from poems, action movies resemble Shakespeare's plays, and TV shows refer to paintings and statues. Much of this intertextual play deserves the label *pastiche* with its partially negative connotations, as the texts use bits and pieces of other works to add a superficial coating of color, creativity, and intellect.

Whenever the intertextual references have a more refined and complex impact on the alluding text, however, scholars frequently point out that this reactivation of older materials entails an opportunity for cultural education. Once again, postmodern intertextuality in this case follows an older tradition of texts that motivated their reader to wander beyond their borders to other texts that are necessary for a full appraisal. Writing about the origins of postmodern parody, Linda Hutcheon describes how "[T.S. Eliot] would force his reader to work towards regaining the Western literary heritage (and some of the Eastern as well) while reading *The Waste Land*" (*Parody* 2). The highly intertextual content of the poem requires the reader to either reanimate his knowledge of previously read texts, or to catch up on the still unread texts that determine whether or not the poem can unfold its full significance. Hutcheon concludes that parody, which in her definition covers a larger intertextual area than in the way it is used in the present analysis, "has a hermeneutic function with both cultural and even ideological implications" (*Parody* 2). Recipients are motivated to explore the cultural networks the alluding text is a part of and position their interpretation of it in relation to the aspects that gain momentum only because of the intertextual relations.

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[422] Jameson "Logic" 63. See also chapter 1.1.

Similarly, Wolfgang Hallet asserts that cultural studies need to acknowledge these intertextual relations in order to understand how fictional texts can become advocates of cultural education:

> The main task of historical re-constructive literary and cultural studies is to trace other texts and discourses in the analyzed text in order to, first, gain information about the historical and cultural environment of the text, and, second, to record how the text positions itself in its discursive cultural domain, what it responds to, and how it forms culture itself (Hallet 57; my translation).[423]

As a result, the systematic analysis of cultural works becomes a vehicle for greater educational missions: by highlighting the relevance of various other texts and discourses for the holistic understanding of a text at hand, intertextual approaches are likely to broaden the recipient's interests and initiate a potentially never-ending process of cultural hide-and-seek from text to text.

The postmodern fusion of high and popular art, in particular, can open new paths for canonical works of high culture to enter the lives of people who – due to a lack of education, access, interest, financial support – would be excluded from its benefits under different circumstances.[424] Just as television once fostered the dream of an educational forum for the masses because of its easy accessibility and relatively low costs, intertextual productions as a particular cultural genre could function as an inspirational force in the lives of people who otherwise show little interest in highbrow art.

As a result, it does not come as a surprise that many researchers praised *The Simpsons* as a prime candidate for teaching its diverse audience a cultural lesson. Its eclectic choice of intertextual sources and its ability to speak to viewers with the most different backgrounds made Douglas Rushkoff jubilate about a "national media literacy program" ("Prince" 292).[425] Others use expressions that sound familiar from political discourses and expect *The Simpsons* to open up a "public sphere" (Gray 95) or to make knowledge public (see Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 10).

However, as fascinating as this promise of an educational, yet highly entertaining literacy program may be, we need to be aware of the limitations that exist in the relationship between an intertextually composed text and any individual recipient. Irwin/Lombardo correctly point out that not every viewer will notice every allusion, and not every viewer who de-

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[423] Original: "Die Hauptaufgabe einer historisch rekonstruktiven Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft besteht also darin, Spuren anderer Texte und Diskurse im zu untersuchenden Text aufzuspüren in dem Bemühen, einerseits Aufschluss über das historische und kulturelle Umfeld des Textes zu gewinnen, andererseits nachzuzeichnen, in welcher Weise der Text sich in seinem diskursiv-kulturellen Feld positioniert, worauf er antwortet und wie er selbst kulturbildend wirkt."

[424] See Koenigsberger 38.

[425] Gray also uses the expression "media literacy" (2). McMahon suggests that *The Simpsons* "can cultivate cultural literacy and inform us about American values" (215).

tects an allusion will also be able to understand it.[426] For example, if Bart's vision of hell in the episode "Bart Gets Hit by a Car" (EP 2-10) is modeled on Hieronymus Bosch's depiction of hell in the triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, the reference will only address those viewers who are familiar with Bosch's painting and hardly catch other viewers' attention in a way that will make them visit the next Bosch exhibition. Similarly, when Homer's memories of a stop in New York City in episode 9-1 are made up of references to Woody Allen, *C.H.U.D.*, *The Sting*, and Robert Crumb's comic strips,[427] many viewers will realize that there is some referencing going on, but without prior knowledge or any further hints, the scene will neither show them where to search for the sources, nor will it tell them anything truly "educational" about New York City.

Obviously, as far as the educational function of intertextuality is concerned, the difference between marked and unmarked references becomes crucial again. The previous examples have shown that unmarked references can contain intertextual relations of remarkable cultural knowledge, but their educational input for viewers who are not familiar with their sources is at least questionable. Instead, I will focus on two clearly marked references to confirm that some intertextual instances can actually initiate cultural processes in the viewer's mind that exceed the medial borders of a given *Simpsons* episode. "Clearly marked" here indicates references that are accompanied by the title of the source text and/or by the author's name. For example, the parody of *Hamlet* discussed in subchapter 3.2.1 is introduced to the viewer when Homer mentions the title as well as the author, which prepares the audience for the parallel reception of two texts. While the full creative potential of the parody can only unfold to those viewers who are familiar with Shakespeare's play or adaptations of it that are truer to the source, it still conveys some information about the source text's general theme, its main characters, its plot, and its language. Having watched the parody, viewers who did not know the play know more about it than before, and viewers who already knew the play may have gained insights about it that have become clearer due to the ironic exaggerations of the parody.

In modern times of Western cultures, poetry is probably the art form consumed least frequently outside school walls and elitist circles of high art buffs. On the one hand, this might be due to the impression that for poetry to be entertaining, the reader needs to exert considerable concentration and interpretive skills; on the other hand, poetry might simply lack (intertextual) circulation. While *Hamlet* may re-appear in the shape of stage plays, movies, musicals, radio plays, comics, novels, etc., "Sonnet 18" has been adapted in several pieces of classical and popular music, but is quite unlikely to be brought to larger audiences on the radio or television. However, the producers of *The Simpsons* have put great effort into ex-

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[426] See p. 87.
[427] Rauscher 134.

panding their range of source texts beyond the borders of other audiovisual genres or best-selling novels and occasionally included references to poems in the show. Since these references can be expected to confront the audience with an art form they are not dealing with on an everyday basis, the following two examples are particularly suitable to illustrate how the show can contribute to cultural literacy.

One of the most renowned representations is the *Simpsons* version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" in the first Halloween special episode (EP 2-3). Bart and Lisa meet in their treehouse in the dark to scare each other with horror stories. Lisa offers to read him "a classic tale of terror by Edgar Allan Poe," and when Bart suspects that it is a schoolbook, she promises that he will not learn anything. As she starts reciting the poem, the narration switches to a sinister voice over, and Homer, who is eavesdropping from outside the treehouse, envisions himself as the narrator, who is reading and napping in an armchair in his enormous, gloomy library. In this quite unusual cartoon strip, the narrator recites about two thirds of Poe's poem almost word-by-word. Homer throws in the direct speech parts, while Bart appears as the raven in Homer's vision and adds the repeated "Nevermore."

As the narration proceeds, the sequence provides a threefold presentation of the poem. First, the parody stays relatively true to the "poetic" characteristics of "The Raven," as it quotes complete lines and stanzas repeating the original meter, rhyme, and structure. The narrator recites ten out of 18 stanzas with only minor omissions; only those stanzas that focus exclusively on the narrator's growing terror and grief about the lost Lenore (5, 9 to 13, 15 and 16) are left out, which seems logical, since they offer almost no further action that could be turned into plot progress. Thus, by granting so much prominence to the original lines, the episode pays tribute to the fact that Poe wrote "The Raven" mainly to create a masterpiece of complex metrical and rhyme composition instead of aiming at the excitement of real terror: while the animated version reduces the detailed insights into the narrator's mind, it still keeps up the poem's rhythm and accentuates its stylistic features with the help of voice-over narration.

Second, however, the creators are forced to attempt the visualization of the poem's semantic content, which in the original medium is only of secondary importance compared to the poem's stylistic achievements and its representation of the narrator's psyche.[428] They are confronted with the challenge of transforming the lyrical atmosphere of the poem into visual images that capture not only its dreary symbolic imagery, but also the spirit of a cartoon show. The "bleak December" (l. 7) becomes a barren winter landscape in Homer's dream, the ghosts of "each separate dying ember" (l. 8) turn into hands of smoke grasping Homer's head, "fantastic terrors never felt before" (l. 14) appear as demonic faces rising from the dying fire, and the library's interior transforms into more abstract shapes as Homer's mind be-

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[428] Evelyne Keitel shares this perspective (163).

comes more agitated. The creators needed to find visual equivalents for such abstract impressions as "nothing more" (l. 24) waiting outside the door, which they represented a long, darkened corridor with blank walls, but they also had typical cartoon conventions at their hands to illustrate some of the narrator's emotions: his dizziness and increasing obsession with the raven's single word appears as little ravens circling his head chanting "nevermore, nevermore".[429] Toying with the semantic and symbolic levels of the poem, on the one hand, and with the audiovisual features of animation, on the other, the creators achieve two effects: while they create a highly entertaining piece of animated action – in the *Simpsons* version, there *is* action, shattering vases, falling books, climbing, and screaming – they also arouse interest in the original tone and narrative content of the poem.

It is a third level of the narrative, however, that contributes most intensely to the educational function of the sequence. Since the episode provides such a detailed replica of "The Raven," the producers apparently do not expect the viewers to feel the urge to read or interpret the poem again after watching it. As a consequence, they supply an interpretation digest with it in the form of the frame narrative. Lisa's initial promise that Bart "won't learn anything" is just a disguised sign for the audience to pay attention to the things that might be learned from her reading. Bart's constant nagging about the poem's lack of entertainment value in comparison to the media spectacles he is used to serve as welcome invitations for Lisa to explain to Bart (and the viewer) why "The Raven" is still appreciated as a classic achievement.

After the first stanza, Bart ironically asks, "Are we scared yet?" but Lisa informs him that the narrator is still establishing mood. Thus, just before the two stanzas that are essential to creating the atmosphere for the remainder of the poem with the imagery of winter, death, decay, anxiety, and terror, Lisa draws the viewer's attention to the way Poe systematically uses structure and rhythm – inside each stanza as well as in the poem's overall design – to take the reader on an emotional ride that follows the narrator's state of mind. The slow rise of suspense then reaches its first apparent climax when the narrator/Homer opens the door – Bart is anxious: "This better be good!" – but there is nothing. Bart's receptive habits are shaped by the fast successive actions of television, so he complains, "You know what would have been scarier than nothing? Anything!" Although Bart is unable to let himself be pulled in by the rhythm of the poem, his comment underlines how Poe plays with the reader's expectations to build up tension that makes him perceive the narrator's unrest.

Then, after the raven has entered the room and the plot leads up to the point where it first utters his word, Bart again blurts in and turns the phrase into "Quoth the raven: 'Eat my shorts!'" Lisa corrects him, "He said 'Nevermore,' and that's all he will ever say." By giving away that the raven does not actually communicate with the narrator, but just repeats the

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[429] Keitel 164.

word "nevermore" over and over again, Lisa explains how the poem works: the raven is just a one-dimensional mirror for the narrator to project his grief on. Knowing what the answer will be, the narrator throws all the questions at the bird that he did not dare answer himself. Even if the long "dialogue" between them is left out of the adaptation, it thus becomes clear to the viewer that it is not the raven itself, but the ever-repeated "nevermore" that becomes a disturbing burden on the narrator's mind and is largely responsible for his growing insanity. In the end, Bart and Lisa agree that it might not have been the scariest story they have ever heard, but that it might have had a more terrifying effect when it was written in 1845, and that it still a quite impressive achievement.

In sum, the episode provides the audience with a whole educational package: it starts with a detailed, truthful repetition of the source text, it adds an up-to-date intermedial adaptation, it stresses the differences between the two versions, and, as a result, informs the viewer about the advantages of both medial forms. The animated version manages to entertain the audience with a story that feeds off the characterizations and visual strategies established in the other episodes, but at the same time it captures (most of) the spirit of the original text. This combination can be expected to ensure that "The Raven" will stay in the recipients' minds, even if it will take the appearance of the *Simpsons* version. While the cartoon necessarily upgrades the action, Lisa's words and the visual imagery in connection with the accompanying verbal symbolism remind the viewer of the essentially psychological core message of the poem. All in all, the audience receives a fairly comprehensive introduction to Poe's text as a part of the cultural canon.

The episode "Selma's Choice" (EP 4-13)[430] displays another poem in a quite different way, which can initiate a different type of educational input. The Simpson family attends the funeral of Marge's aunt. After the burial, everybody awaits the proclamation of her will, which she has recorded as a video message. The video shows the old lady in an armchair, and she wants to "start by reading a passage from Robert Frost." However, when she reads out the first words of Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken," Homer presses the forward button to run the tape to the important parts. Although Marge is appalled at first, the other attendees are in favor of skipping the poem. As a result, only the first and the last line can be understood: "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood / […] And that has made all the difference" (ll. 1/20). While the forwarding of the tape surely is an act of utter disrespect towards the deceased's will as well as to the appreciation of culture in general, it constitutes an intermedial reference that creates quite interesting points of contact for further considerations.

Firstly, from an educational perspective, it does the exact opposite of what the adaptation of "The Raven" attempts. In case of "The Raven," the episode does not communicate any confidence that the intermedial impulse will abet the viewers to engage in further cultural

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[430] The title is a reference to the movie *Sophie's Choice*.

activities in order to fully appreciate the text, so the creators included almost everything the audience needs to know for a halfway thorough, albeit condensed understanding of the poem. There, the combination of high and popular culture seems to result in a feeling of self-sufficiency that, in a worst-case scenario, could mean that viewers focus their cultural awareness on single texts, believing to learn everything they need to know from them. Optimistically, Irwin/Lombardo affirm that "[s]uch a death knell would only be sounded if a generation of Americans never moved beyond *The Simpsons* in their aesthetic appreciation" (91), and the present example supports their claim that the show does actually motivate its viewers to expand their interests to other texts. By giving away only the beginning and the end of Frost's poem, the reference in "Selma's Choice" makes the audience wonder what the poem is about. Especially the statement that something "has made all the difference" can be expected to leave the viewer with the question what happens between the two lines. Ideally, the mutilated recital will simply motivate the viewers to obtain a copy of the full poem – they know where to look, since the author was named – and catch up on their cultural education.

Secondly, however, the reference rubs salt into the wounds of a limited, fragmented cultural awareness, in general. One of the main problems with interpreting "The Road Not Taken" is that two very different interpretive traditions have emerged with regard to the poem's meaning.[431] The more popular, public opinion regards the poem as an expression of individualism, the importance of free will, and independence from external influences on personal decisions. It seems to illustrate that the decisions we make in life – although we can never go back to test the alternatives under the same circumstances – are always good if we contemplate our own ambitions and let our free will determine what kind of a person we will become. This common understanding is predominantly based on the final three lines of the poem: "two roads diverged in a wood, and I – / I took the one less traveled by, / And that has made all the difference" (ll. 18-20). The road "less traveled by" appears as a symbol of against-the-current individualism, of a willingness to explore new grounds, to make uncommon decisions, and live unlike the majority. The narrator's life becomes determined by his courage; the unusual decisions make "all the difference" and in this light, the fact that he will never be able to tell what his life would have been like if he had followed the other road does not taint the validity of his decisions.

Yet, this reading ignores much of the preconditions established in the first three stanzas of the poem. For example, the following lines include several indicators that both roads actually looked quite the same and it was not possible for the narrator to detect any real advantages or disadvantages for either of them:

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[431] Kearns 72-73.

> Then took the other, as just as fair,
> And having perhaps the better claim,
> Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
> Though as for that, the passing there
> Had worn them really about the same,
>
> And both that morning equally lay
> In leaves no step had trodden black.
> Oh, I kept the first for another day! (ll. 6-13)

As a consequence, some scholars tend to understand the poem in more ironic terms.[432] There is no road less traveled, and what appears to be an expression of spirited individualism turns into a retrospective, emotional euphemism. What seems to be a conscious, well-considered decision from the future point of view expressed in the final stanza is actually little more than a vague impulse, a matter of spontaneity. Without going into a more detailed discussion of the poem, it becomes clear that the way Homer treats it in the episode stands in for a larger cultural problem. Because large parts of the population show little interest in works of (high) culture, these works run the risk of being reduced to one-dimensional catch phrases and proverbs that do not acknowledge their original complexity. The reference in *The Simpsons* takes this to extremes and erases everything that could explain what the poem is about, thus forcing the viewers to search beyond the borders of the series for the complete poem if they want to understand what it is about. The show does not adorn its surface with superficial quotes to add an aura of wisdom and intellect, but reminds its audience of the necessity to put some thought into the interpretation of works of art.

Although the two references discussed in this subchapter are very different as far as their detailedness, length, and obviousness are concerned, both impressively underscore that intertextuality in *The Simpsons* can – under certain circumstances – develop an educational function and enhance cultural literacy. Both build a bridge to texts that are likely to generate only little interest in many viewers if they are presented in different contexts: poetry smacks of schoolbooks, promises little action or suspense, and requires a rather active, focused attitude of reception. Nevertheless, both references succeed in catching the viewers' attention: "The Raven" addresses them on three levels – auditory, visual, analytical – and provides a full-service information package that leaves the audience with the impression that they now "know" the poem. Instead, the reference to "The Road Not Taken" highlights the blank spaces; it provides a frame that poses questions but does not give any answers and thus forces the viewer to take over the active role if he wants to understand why the reference matters. Each in its own way, the two intermedial instances remind the audience that there is a world of cultural artifacts beyond *The Simpsons* that might be worth exploring.

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[432] See, for example, Kearns 74, and Pritchard 127-128.

3.3.3   Inclusion of Social and Political Discourses

One of the most prominent features of *The Simpsons* that distinguishes the show from many other animated programs is the constant inclusion of currently relevant political and social discourses or topics that have stirred society over longer periods of time. For many scholars, this more serious side of the show has been the starting point for equally serious analyses and one of the major legitimating arguments for academic interest in a text that is still regarded as a children's program by considerable parts of the population. Over the years, the different seasons have tackled a huge variety of topics[433] and provided points of contact for various academic disciplines to discover *The Simpsons* as a promising research object. Gray compiles a list of "who and what was being comically attacked […]: consumerism/capitalism, American suburbia, the family, television and the media, Fox and/or Murdoch, politics and politicians, corporations and big business, itself, sitcoms, schools, and religion" (131). Cantor adds "nuclear power safety, environmentalism, immigration, gay rights, women in the military, and so on" ("Politics" 161). Taken together, this expandable list illustrates why the show has not only received attention by cultural and media scholars, but also by economists, sociologists, theologians, psychologists, educationalists, and political scientists.[434]

In general, *The Simpsons* employs various ways of drawing exterior discourses into its narrative frame. The easiest forms appear when characters talk about issues that affect their lives, such as health care, taxes, or crime rates. Their discussions are often initiated by the information provided through Springfield's own media system, which includes newspapers, TV and radio stations. Especially television with its muckraking news anchor Kent Brockman frequently includes messages that point towards topics that are also relevant in the world outside of Springfield, even if they are in constant danger of getting lost among the trivial reports about "dogs that were mistakenly issued major credit cards, and others who weren't so lucky" (EP 7-9). In addition, many plot elements are inspired by current discourses and act out their various aspects in the laboratory world of the animated society. One of the most poignant examples is the driving force behind *The Simpsons'* first venture to the big screen, *The Simpsons Movie*. Here, environmental pollution is carried too far, and as nature collapses, Springfield is sealed off from the rest of the world to prevent the poison and mutations from spreading. In this now entirely secluded microcosm, the population is left alone in its misery and needs to come to terms with the changing situation. From a specific angle, the plot satirizes the U.S. government's reaction to the effects of Hurricane Katrina on New Orle-

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[433] In their essay "Die Mythen des Springfield-Alltags," Tuncel/Rauscher give an overview of some of the major topics that have made their appearance on the show, ranging from stylized political election campaigns to actual political celebrities, and from manipulative media formats to the unsolved problem of illegal immigration. Their considerations concerning references to other texts touch on some of the possible functions intertextuality can have in satirical political commentary.

[434] See chapter 1.4 for several examples of academic texts that approach *The Simpsons* from the perspective of the disciplines mentioned here.

ans, but it also supplies biting commentary on the way business and politics, in general, handle the issue of pollution.

More complex and/or less explicit references to relevant discourses often come in the shape of celebrity cameos: when former presidents, sports stars, actors, and musicians visit the show, their appearance often stands in for larger concepts than their personal attributes. For instance, Homer's quarrels with ex-president George Bush Sr. in "Two Bad Neighbors" (EP 7-13) not only draw their inspiration from the conflicts of two very different men, but evoke aspects of Bush's presidential era and oppose them to the more leftist attitude of *The Simpsons.*[435]

Finally, "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" serves as a platform for commentary on various issues that are difficult to integrate into the main plotlines. In the episode "In Marge We Trust" (EP 8-22), for example, which was aired in April 1997, the show refers to the French nuclear weapons tests on the Pacific island of Moruroa, which were terminated after global protests in 1996. Using the cartoon-in-the-cartoon, the creators thus manage to address topics that are almost impossible to link to the lives of an American suburban family, but are still deemed worthy of cultural preservation and discussion.[436]

In sum, when Megan Mullen states that "[t]hrough its clever use of pastiche, this program has called attention to the flaws and hypocrisies of such sacred institutions as government, organized religion, and the health care system" (63), she seems to use *pastiche* as an umbrella term for all these forms, and not necessarily for references to other cultural texts. However, since *The Simpsons* knows so many ways of pointing towards the reality that exists outside of its medial borders, why could it possibly need intertextual references to other works of art to do the same? The examples discussed on the following pages reveal that intertextuality is used whenever it is difficult to let a given topic appear on the surface level of the storyline.[437] Similar to the "Itchy & Scratchy Show," but in a more detailed and multi-layered way, intertextual references can approach issues that are (1) too complex, (2) too grown-up for a series that maintains a large under-age audience, or (3) too controversial to be explicitly addressed in a mass medium.

In the episode "Das Bus" (EP 9-14), a detailed adaptation of the novel *Lord of the Flies* provides the background for an elaborate analysis of a global political problem: the abilities and shortcomings of the United Nations Organization. The main plot starts with the children of Springfield Elementary School preparing for a statewide Model U.N. convention. They dress up in different nations' (stereotyped) traditional costumes and present the respec-

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[435] Henry "Amanda" 225.

[436] See also Klein 30.

[437] Kurt M. Koenigsberger points out that allusions can serve as cultural memory or can deal with issues that cannot be discussed on the narrative surface level; in general, they account for much of the program's multi-level entertainment value, since they add more or less hidden information to signs that are part of the "normal" storyline; see p. 38-40.

tive country's characteristics to the others. Before long, a big fight starts among them and instead of trying to solve their dispute with diplomatic means they are at each other's throats. Trying to restore order, Principal Skinner pounds his shoe on the desk – a reference to the infamous 1960 "shoe-banging incident" of Soviet First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev at the United Nations – and ironically asks, "Do you kids want to be like the real U.N.? Or do you want to squabble and waste time?"

Then, the children leave for their field trip, but the bus has an accident and falls off a bridge into the ocean. After the bus has sunken[438] and the driver has been washed away by the current, the children make it to an uninhabited island with their last ounce of strength. Once they have regained their breath, the quarrels start again about who is responsible for their miserable situation, but they are interrupted when Bart trumpets on a big conch to catch their attention. He convinces them that they will have a great time on the island if they set up a nice camp with exotic food and monkey butlers.

Here, the extended reference to *Lord of the Flies* begins: the children split into groups to build shelter and search for food, they light a fire using Milhouse's glasses – Nelson beats a stone against them to excite sparks – but soon their confidence begins to crumble. They start fighting about the little food they have left and only stop briefly when Lisa reminds them that they need rules like they learned in the U.N. Club if they want to survive. The situation escalates again when Milhouse is accused of having stolen the remaining food supplies and Lisa demands a fair trial for him. Milhouse blames the disappearing of the food on a monster he believes to hide in the forest. As the improvised legal verdict leaves the enraged children dissatisfied, they split up into one group of bloodthirsty hunters craving vengeance, and Bart and Lisa, who try to protect Milhouse. The hunters put on war paint, grab spears and clubs, and hunt the three renegades across the island. Lisa and the two boys try to hide in a cave, but the mob chases after them to "move in for the kill." Lisa once again tries to stop them and flourishes the Model U.N. Charter – and the hunters grow stiff. It is not the rule book, however, that quenches their blood thirst, but the appearance of the "monster," a wild boar. In their head-over-heels flight, the children trample the U.N. Charter into the ground. It turns out that the pig stole their food, so they apologize to Milhouse, kill the pig, and eat it in return. Then the camera zooms out from the island, and a soothing voice over narrates, "So the children learned to function as a society. And eventually, they were rescued by… oh, let's say, Moe."

On the surface, the episode plays out a version of *Lord of the Flies* that gains its entertainment value from putting established characters into an entirely new situation and from the numerous ironic twists of the source. The omnipresent connections to the United Nations, however, add an aspect that turns the children's conflicts into a didactic re-enactment of larger political discourses. While the novel's allegorical level explored the fragility of civilized

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[438] Hence the reference to the submarine movie *Das Boot* in the episode title.

societies and their regulatory frameworks from a more general perspective, the *Simpsons* adaptation voices more specific doubts about the inefficiency and helplessness sometimes attributed to the U.N. Principal Skinner's initial remarks establish a negative impression of processes at U.N. assemblies, and Lisa's repeated attempts to rely on diplomatic conventions to solve conflicts appear like desperate, almost ridiculous convulsions in the face of uncontrollable, animalistic drives.

While the episode needs to do away with some of the major themes of the novel – individuality vs. peer pressure, rationality vs. emotion, morality vs. immorality – it focuses on the ability of social systems to subdue men's base instincts and analyzes it from the perspective of global politics. On the one hand, the episode treats the U.N. leniently for trying to solve conflicts with diplomatic means: after all, it is Lisa, one of the most positive characters on the show (and not, for example, the equally suitable nerd Martin Prince), who upholds the aspiration to adhere to U.N. regulations. As long as all members are willing to accept them as code of conduct, the regulations work well to minimize misunderstandings and conflicts. On the other hand, however, the limits of the United Nations' influence are cynically disclosed: whenever the children's lower impulses reach the surface, the U.N. resolutions quickly turn into paper tigers. Hunger, insecurity, and frustration make the children attack each other, and once plain fear takes over, the U.N. Charter is virtually trampled under foot.

The hyper-ironic voice over at the end of the episode then finally discredits all belief in the ordering power of the United Nations. The children "learned to function as a society" when they found out by chance that they had wrongly accused Milhouse and when their hunger was satisfied – everything the Model U.N. tried to teach them did not influence their behavior. Abstracting from the children's allegorical situation, the commentary thus points towards a more general sociopolitical truth history should have taught us: only when the basic needs are provided for, peace and democratic structures can develop. Thus, the episode uses intermedial references to re-activate political discourses, to politicize the narrative, and to let different topics clash.[439] The children's adventure, the more general, timeless concerns of *Lord of the Flies*, and the more specific problem of the U.N.'s limited capacity to act intertwine and form a political discourse of their own whose complexity allows for various further considerations.

While the narrative of "Das Bus" still is perfectly suitable and entertaining for children – what could be more fascinating than being stranded on an island without adults? – the topic of the episode "Realty Bites" (EP 9-9)[440] presents a far more adult viewpoint and uses intermedial references to negotiate its appeal for viewers of different age. In one of the episode's main plot lines, Marge once again becomes dissatisfied with her life as a homemaker

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[439] Rauscher and Tuncel/Rauscher also highlight the potential of intertextual references to initiate complex discourses without jeopardizing the narrative integrity of the basic plot; see 108 and 157, respectively.

[440] The episode title is a pun on the movie *Reality Bites.*

and decides to earn a license as a real-estate agent (the sub-plot revolves around Homer buying a criminal's sports car at a police auction). After successfully passing the test, she begins working for the shady lawyer/realtor Lionel Hutz at "Red Blazer Realty." Due to her moral integrity, Marge tells her potential customers her honest opinions about the mediocre houses she is supposed to sell and consequently does not close any deals. Hutz advises her to use more euphemistic words, but also increases the pressure and tells her that she will be let go if she does not manage to sell a single house in her first week.

Since she is eager not to fail on her hard-earned venture from the homestead, she sells the Flanders a house where several people have been murdered before without telling them about its violent past. Marge's concerns for the Flanders' safety haunt her afterwards, so she checks on them at their new house. After a first shock – they are covered with red paint from painting a room – she is so relieved that they are still alive that she tells them the truth, but the Flanders are even happy that they now live at a site of Springfield history and refuse to take back their deposit. Unfortunately, the house is destroyed seconds later when Homer crashes his new car through the wall, so Marge returns the deposit anyway. Hutz is furious about the damage and fires her because she returned the money.

Much of the plot and the whole sub-plot are astonishingly action- and joke-based, considering that the main topic focuses on business and moral considerations. It seems that the producers wanted to address the topic of the moral flexibility needed for salesmanship, but at the same time were aware of the necessity to compose the episode in a way that would also entertain children and other viewers who tune in mainly for more obvious and physical humor. As a compromise, the scenes where Marge is actually seen doing business in the realtors' office are limited in length and frequency, but they are modeled on an inter-medial source that works as a larger commentary in the background.[441]

The movie *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which was written by David Mamet as an adaptation of his play of the same name, deals with a group of real-estate agents who are under ex-treme pressure because their agency plays them off against each other in a race for the best sells. Since the agency keeps the best leads (information about potential customers) for the top sellers and makes the others work rather hopeless cases, they betray their clients and take advantage of each other in order to meet their standards. Because the lowest performer will be fired, some of them resort to desperate measures and two of them finally rob the of-fice to sell the good property leads and get back at their employer. The film (and the play) is renowned for its vivid representation of the ruthlessness in the salesman business, as well as for its brutally open, insulting language and its merciless exposure of unethical human be-havior.

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[441] Irwin/Lombardo point out this references (83).

In the *Simpsons* episode, "Red Blazer Realty" mirrors the agency in the movie: Lionel Hutz is the adamant, uncaring manager who does not refrain from exploiting his customers and his workers. Like the characters Williamson and Blake in the movie, he separates the realtors into closers and losers and humiliates them by handing out or taking away privileges: e.g., the line "cubicles are for closers" is a reference to "coffee is for closers" from the movie. There is a younger salesman who seems to be riding a wave of success and boasts about his sales to demoralize others. He resembles the character Ricky Roma, whose success is based on his ability to figure out a client's weaknesses and use them to settle a deal. The most detailed reference, however, is the introduction of a character named Gil Gunderson, who is to become an occasionally recurring visitor on the show. This elderly, utterly unsuccessful salesman is modeled on one of the most memorable characters of the movie, Shelley "The Machine" Levene (played by Jack Lemmon), whose big talk about his past achievements is more and more being replaced with a painful subservience that reflects his present doldrums. Gil/Shelley is so desperate to make a sale that he sheds all self-esteem and falls back on begging, bribery, and theft for a chance to pull himself out of his streak of bad luck. In both texts, this ambiguous character makes the audience hover between pity and antipathy and puts a finger on the downside of the American Dream, which has no mercy for the weak.

As Marge is thrown into this world of quick sale schemes, hoodwinking, and relentlessness, it immediately becomes obvious that her personality will let her fail as a realtor. As one of the long established moral centers of the show, she cannot but reject the codes of the business and try out her own approach, which is, of course, bound to go awry. Ironically, however, it is not because of her moral resistance that Marge finally fails, but because of Homer's inconsiderate driving. Her slight chance to make it in the retail business without giving up her integrity further highlights the absence of any moral integrity in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The show repeats the criticism of the realty business conduct as expressed in the movie, but softens its cynicism by at least offering a potential respectable alternative.

Yet, what is most remarkable in the context of the present chapter is that the major portion of the discussion is carried out on an intertextual level. On its surface, the episode tells a quite common *Simpsons* story: one of the family members faces a moral dilemma, another has some physical hardships waiting for him, a few jokes involving the Flanders and some other regular characters. The conflict that is fought out in Marge's mind, however, develops a much darker side through its intermedial frame. Her experiences at the realty office stand in for the larger, more desperate struggles presented in the movie and thus open up a discourse that mainly takes place outside of the episode. The references in "Realty Bites" once again illustrate that "*The Simpsons'* extensive use of intertextuality is just one component of a much larger satiric sensibility" (Mullen 74). While the main plot is funny, entertain-

ing, and by no means devoid of moral considerations, it is only in the intertextual references that the episode touches larger social contexts on a more complex, adult-oriented level. For children, the demoralizing performance principle of the capitalist dream will have little or no impact on the episode, but interested adults will be motivated to read it as an instance of a much larger and more complicated social discourse.

Finally, intertextuality can function as a means of addressing discourses that are difficult to tackle in any mass medium because of their controversial position. A closer examination of the way *The Simpsons* uses intertextual references to address the topic of homosexuality exemplifies this approach. Writing about "Gay Life on *The Simpsons*," Matthew Henry elaborately explains how the show needed to slowly establish a tone with which to handle a topic that was still rather absent from mass media texts when it first hit the air. The beginnings of *The Simpsons* are rooted in an era shaped by the conservative, traditional currents of the Reagan years and the Bush Sr. legislation;[442] therefore, its leftist tendencies were bound to create tension with regard to various topics, starting with the actually rather harmless discussion of family values as pulled to the fore in the reactions of President Bush and the First Lady.

Henry describes how the character of Waylon Smithers, Mr. Burns' servile, 24/7 assistant, is slowly developed from a mere addressee of Burns' dependency to a fleshed-out individual whose suppressed homosexuality is becoming more and more obvious.[443] Many of the early instances that contribute to his changing image are hidden jokes and overtones that almost slip by unnoticed and can still be taken for signs of the mutual dependency between Smithers and Burns. Only towards the fourth season and in conjunction with the liberal turn of U.S. society towards the end of the Bush reign, the show began to include more overt indicators of Smithers' sexuality. The first moments still focused on fantasies that visualized his suppressed desires for Mr. Burns' returned affection and did not clarify whether or not Smithers actually lives out his sexual orientation. For example, the episodes "Marge Gets a Job" (EP 4-7) and "Rosebud" (EP 5-4) both involve daydreams in which Smithers envisions situations that show Burns as he makes his most intimate wishes come true and glides through the open windows into his bedroom or climbs naked out of a birthday cake.

In the episode "Secrets of a Successful Marriage" (EP 5-22), however, Smithers joins an adult education course where the attendants can discuss their problems with relationships, and discloses that he was "married once, but [he] just didn't know how to keep it together." The scene fades into a black-and-white reminiscence about his marriage, which shows him hobbling on a crutch towards a cabinet with drinks, while his wife – who looks like Elizabeth Taylor – is lying on a bed in the background. She asks him to make love to her like

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[442] Henry "Amanda" 235.
[443] Henry "Amanda" 233-236.

he used to. When he refuses, she blames it on "that horrible Mr. Burns," but Smithers bawls at her to leave Mr. Burns out of it and smashes the glasses on the cabinet. Suddenly, Burns yells "Smithers, Smithers" from the yard, and he rushes to the balcony to see his boss in a torn shirt desperately crying out for his assistant.

In this short scene, a combination of references to the film versions of Tennessee Williams' plays *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* introduces a complex range of intermedial information that can be activated for a more detailed understanding of Smithers' situation. While Burns' tattered appearance under Smithers' window basically confirms the impression that he is entirely dependent on his assistant and cannot take care of himself, the selection of Williams' two plays as inspirations for this scene indicates that there are more subtle levels in their relationship that need to be further explored. Tennessee Williams is frequently described as a "gay" writer, whose major plays all deal with homosexuality on some level.[444] Although the surface topics of both *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* are manifold – old-fashioned social norms, sexual desires in general, mental instability, cultural clashes, alcoholism – both transport a subtext that probes the sexual orientation of their male characters.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, homosexuality plays a visible role only in the background story of how Blanche's husband killed himself after she found out that he was having an affair with a man. While this sequence of events in not part of the action on stage, it still works as one of the key factors in Blanche's demise and influences her insecure attitude towards men, thus triggering much of the plot. Dean Shackelford argues that Stanley becomes an avenger of gay men who have to hide their feelings from a conservative society when he abuses Blanche and subconsciously punishes her for being so disgusted with her husband's homosexuality.[445] Although this psychoanalytical approach may put a little too much stress on the topic of homosexuality, its importance for the development of the plot is without question and prepares the ground for the more explicit assessment Williams established in his later play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

As Williams was by that time admitting to his own homosexuality more openly (yet still covertly enough to largely avoid the reprisals of the McCarthy era), the play is also more open with regard to the problematic constellation of a husband (Brick) trying to come to terms with his desires, and his wife (Maggie), who has to cope with the absence of desire for her. Again, the main homosexual impulse lies outside the stage action: Brick mourns the suicide of his friend Skipper, whose closeness to Brick had been a constant cause for conflicts in his marriage with Maggie. The play discusses Skipper's homosexuality rather openly[446] and thus

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[444] See, for example, Henry "Amanda" 235, Shackelford "Truth" 103, and Shackelford "Subverting" 135-137.
[445] Shackelford "Subverting" 149.
[446] Shackelford "Truth" 105.

positions Brick between the two forces pulling at him, Maggie's and Skipper's desire for him. Brick's own sexual orientation remains ambivalent throughout the play, but the constant accentuation of the male body and his rejection of Maggie's advances emphasize his potential repressed homosexuality. As their struggles proceed and the impossibility of resolving their conflicting, self-destructive desires in the structures of a traditional Southern society is highlighted more and more, the play becomes "a plea for tolerance of the gay lifestyle" (Shackelford, "Truth" 105).

By putting Smithers in the position of Brick, who is being drawn from his wife by Burns as a hopelessly dependent Stanley, the creators of *The Simpsons* offer a cleverly constructed intermedial parallel to their relationship. Burns shows only minute signs of homosexual tendencies; in the course of the series, he falls in love with several women – including Marge (EP 4-7), Marge's mother (EP 5-21), and a woman named Gloria (EP 13-4) – and actively woos them. Instead of staying within one play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the reference wanders into a second source text: Burns is not Skipper; he does not show any visible desire for Smithers that goes beyond the affection resulting from his dependency. The character of Stanley provides the more suitable comment on Burns' part of their relationship, as both show little respect or tenderness for the person they rely on. When Stanley calls out for Stella, he does not do so because of raw sexual desire, which is directed at Blanche instead, but because of a need for support and protection. Therefore, he is the ideal intermedial explanation for Burns' attitude towards his assistant.

As far as Smithers is concerned, his association with Brick becomes a major explanatory moment in his personal development. Throughout the series, the audience learns little about Smithers' past, and he is never portrayed showing any interest in women. The intermedial trip into his past presents him at a point of time when he might actually have been as ambiguous as Brick in the play: he is married to a woman, but seems to feel much greater passion for Mr. Burns than for his wife. The antagonism tears apart his soul, he is aggressive, and he does not want to discuss the reasons for his situation. This is not the Smithers the viewers know from the show, however. When he is around Burns – which he is most of the time – he is humble, calm, reasonable, and determined.

As a result, the intermedial flashback takes us back to a point of time that precedes the beginnings of Smithers slow but steady coming-out process in the course of the series. The reference to the homosexual undertones of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* thus fulfills a double function: on the one hand, it provides one of the most ambiguous characters on the show with a past that explains much of his development in retrospect. On the other hand, it comments on the still restrictive social norms that force homosexual men and women to undergo severe mental struggles before they can come to terms with their position in society. After he

has separated from his wife and focused all his attention on another man, Smithers still has a long road ahead of him before the show acknowledges his sexual orientation more explicitly.

Season eight brings about a more obvious turn in the representation of gay life, in general, and of Smithers' life, in particular. In episode 8-11, Burns innocently asks him, "Smithers, what do you do on a Friday night? Something gay, I bet?" but it is in the episode "Homer's Phobia" (EP 8-15) that the producers of the show finally address the topic of homosexuality out in the open. Homer befriends John, who owns an outré collectibles shop and is an expert of kitsch products. Homer grows very fond of him, but abruptly turns his back on him when Marge and Lisa tell him that John seems to be gay.

John is modeled on and voiced by the gay director/actor John Waters, whose trashy films provide much of the background for John's shop and appearance.[447] By using a gay celebrity as inspiration for the episode, the creators avoid being trapped in stereotypical representations and immediately fill the character with life. John is presented as an eccentric, yet very pleasant person, whose only "flaw" (in Homer's eyes) is his homosexuality. Homer still shares the old-fashioned belief that homosexuality is caused by external factors and fears that it might rub off on Bart if John keeps spending time with the family. Trying to restore Bart's masculine side, Homer takes him deer hunting. Their trip ends with a pack of aggressive reindeer circling in to attack them, but John is there to save them. Homer then accepts John and tells Bart, who has been totally unaware of his father's concerns, that he will love him any way he chooses to live his life.

The episode approaches the topic of homosexuality with the help of intermedial references to the films of John Waters and by including John Waters as a real person, thus blending fact and fiction of homosexual life for a more comprehensive approach that acknowledges the true core of some stereotypes, but highlights the individual characteristics that so easily are lost in discussions about minorities. As the episode voices a more open acceptance of the gay lifestyle and thereby follows the rising acceptability of the representation of gay and lesbian life in mass media texts towards the second half of the 90s, it also allows Smithers to step further "out of his closet." John and Smithers meet for a few seconds while John is having lunch with the Simpsons (minus Homer) at the flashy "Sha-Boom, Ka-Boom Café." The awkward little dialogue that erupts between them reveals an intimate relationship, jealousy, and typical signs of a sexual innuendo (Smithers: "So this is your sick mother?" – John: "Don't do this to me, Waylon"). It becomes clear that Smithers has by now entered the gay community and is leading a gay life somewhere outside the narrative of *The Simpsons*.

As a consequence, it cannot come as a surprise to even the most naïve viewers when Smithers is seen roller-skating in rainbow shorts in Springfield's Gay Village in the epi-

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[447] See also Hißnauer 142-143, and Rauscher 108-109, who includes several screenshots.

sode "Three Gays of the Condo" (EP 14-17).[448] In a self-referential meta-commentary on its own complex approach to the topic of homosexuality, the episode then closes the circle back to where Waylon Smithers' decision in favor of an alternative lifestyle is rooted. When Homer is told about celebrities who are gay, he is quite surprised: "Tennessee Williams? But how does he survive in the world of theater?"

Like all the examples discussed in this subchapter, the references to Williams' plays reveal an extensive intertextual awareness that allows the producers of the show to approach issues that are only marginally linked to the main plots in greater detail and without jeopardizing the episodes' narrative integrity. Creating a flashback memory from images that stem from an older text here exceeds the intratextual functions for the alluding text and also examines the more complex levels of significance the source texts may incite. Certainly, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* sheds some light on Smithers' personality, just as *Lord of the Flies* lends structure to the children's moral discords, and *Glengarry Glen Ross* sets up the atmosphere in which Marge will have to prove herself. However, all the references also serve a more abstract, extratextual purpose as they convey, firstly, an awareness of the source texts' larger social implications, their interpretations, and cultural impacts, and, secondly, the show's own social, political, and cultural agenda. As Robert Sloane has correctly pointed out, "[t]he program has […] devoted many shows to typically leftist concerns – the environment, labor, homosexuality, immigration, and even vegetarianism. However, the show is by no means wall-to-wall radical propaganda. At its heart, the show is about family" (140). Intertextuality contributes considerably to this balancing act, as it works like a double-coded language: it provides signifiers that not only fill certain gaps in the primary narrative flow, but which at the same time reverberate with external discourses and pull these discourses into the viewer's mind.

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[448] The episode title is a pun on the movie *Three Days of the Condor*.

3.4   Self- and Meta-reflexive Functions

Every episode of *The Simpsons* begins with an opening sequence that finishes with one of the so-called "couch gags": the family members hurry into the living room and – each time in a different fashion – assemble on the couch in front of their TV set. Then the camera switches to the screen they are watching and on which the opening credits roll. This prominent and permanent position of the screen on the screen has repeatedly been regarded as a proof of Matt Groening's own statement that "*The Simpsons* is […] about the process of watching TV" (qtd. in Butler/Sepp 361).[449] William Savage asserts that

> this image indicates that the show is a cartoon of a cartoon, self-reflexively aware of itself existing in its own fictive world, but this image also suggests that we should consider what the show has to say about its medium and its own status as a television show (202).

And it has much to say. From the very first seasons, television plays a major role in the Simpsons' lives. Again and again, the family gathers in front of their set to watch and comment on their favorite programs. It is Homer's only source of cultural education, it provides diversion and mischievous inspiration for Bart, Marge finds romance and domestic education, it serves as a counter-balance to Lisa's intellectual activity, and as a source of love and affection for Maggie.[450] They spend hours watching a diversified program that satirizes all kinds of broadcasts: news footage, commercials, sitcoms, endless bible movies, sports broadcasts, talk shows, action movies, soaps, kids' shows, infomercials, variety hours, reality soaps, game shows, comedies, and – importantly – cartoons. If something changes their access to TV programs, their everyday world is off its hinges: positively, the advent of cable television modifies their daily routine as they discover new things to watch, and it also earns them many new friends whenever there is a major sports event on TV (EP 2-13); negatively, a broken TV set will make Homer cry and the kids scream in agony (EP 2-12).

Recurring formats, such as "The Krusty the Clown Show" and the news/infotainment programs featuring Kent Brockman, provide a constant reflection on the events that move Springfield and the rest of the world. At the same time, they mirror current trends of television style as they imitate the developments of TV programming and exaggerate the ever faster, shriller, and more colorful audiovisual language intended to keep the viewer attached to the screen.

The most detailed and elaborate commentary, however, is hidden in the "The Itchy & Scratchy Show," the cartoon-in-the-cartoon that frequently stands in as a miniature subject of

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[449] See also Arnold "Rest" 265, Gray 160, Gruteser 50, and Turner 388.

[450] In a quite disturbing scene in "Moaning Lisa" (EP 1-6), Bart and Lisa try to make Maggie choose which sibling she loves most, and after a short moment of hesitation, she turns her back on them and embraces the television set.

study for its parent program.[451] On the one hand, the single episodes of "Itchy & Scratchy" often subtly complement the main topics of the *Simpsons* episode they appear in: for example, in "Deep Space Homer" (EP 5-15), Homer's trip into space is preceded by an "Itchy & Scratchy" cartoon that relocates their usual atrocities into space and thus visualizes Homer's fears of his impending journey.[452] On the other hand, the show has triggered whole episode plots revolving around the conditions of its production and reception, as well as around its business surroundings and merchandise empire.

The "Itchy & Scratchy" cartoons are by no means an independent invention of the creators of *The Simpsons* – they are heavily influenced by individual animation series, such as the Warner Brothers cartoons and particularly Hanna-Barbera's *Tom and Jerry* and *Pixie and Dixie and Mr. Jinks*, but the various episodes that trace their historical development also show elements of Disney cartoons, Robert Crumb's *Fritz the Cat*, and such early cartoon characters as *Gertie the Dinosaur* and *Felix the Cat*. Therefore, "Itchy & Scratchy" also enables the producers of *The Simpsons* to position their show in relation to other animated shows or films and use this intertextual mirror to reflect upon the characteristics of the whole series instead of single episodes.

In addition, as the series progressed, the protagonists have increasingly developed a sense for their own mediality and breached the realism of their coherent world more and more openly in order to address issues that concern their own status as parts of a media text. Single lines and images that serve this purpose can be found in numerous episodes and usually work as little jokes that easily slip the recipient's attention. They range from simple lapses in the inner logic of the animated world to quite abstract detours that analyze the complex media phenomenon *The Simpsons* has become from within its own narrative. For example, in "Boy-Scoutz 'n the Hood" (EP 5-8),[453] Bart and Lisa discuss an "Itchy & Scratchy" episode and Lisa argues that "cartoons don't have to be 100 percent realistic," whereupon Homer walks by the window – although a second Homer is sitting on the couch right next to them. This brief disruption of the show's realism acknowledges its artificiality and reminds the audience that the things that happen on and around "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" usually have a second level that tells the viewers something about *The Simpsons*.

The episode "Today I Am a Clown" (EP 15-6), on the other hand, provides an example that aims at a larger context than the animated narrative: the plot is set off when Dr. Hibbert informs the Simpsons that their dog has impregnated his poodle. Since this sounds like something that could already have happened in a previous season, Lisa checks their past in a copy of *The Simpsons Forever – A Complete Guide to our Favorite Family* and discovers

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[451] See also Alberti XVIII, Butler/Sepp 362, Mittell 20, Savage 198, and Sloane 143.

[452] The "Itchy & Scratchy" episode "Scar Trek: The Next Laceration" is composed of references to *Star Trek*, *Alien*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

[453] The episode title is a reference to the movie *Boyz 'n the Hood*.

that their dog should have been neutered after a similar incident in the episode "Two Dozen and One Greyhounds" (EP 6-20). In this short moment, the scene entirely loses its fictional integrity and foregrounds its factitiousness in a way that would have been unthinkable in the early seasons, when realism and narrative coherence were still the most accentuated characteristics of the show. It is no longer a statement about the series' narrative and visual qualities only, but also acknowledges the existence of a related outside world of merchandise, copyrights, business, and – last but not least – an audience.

Instances like this might be responsible for the increasingly critical attitude many fans of the early years expressed and still express with regard to the later seasons. Whenever the "meta" enters the narrative world of *The Simpsons* directly, a certain portion of its realism needs to be sacrificed, and the focus shifts from the ambition to write well-structured, convincing storylines to a type of self-referential humor that sometimes comes across as a thinly veiled excuse for repetitive writing. However, what I am concerned with specifically in the context of the present analysis is how *The Simpsons* can achieve both, coherent, realistic fiction *and* self-reflexive assessments of its own characteristics. I believe that the answer can be found among the functions of intertextuality: by using an external reflector – be it another cultural text or the intertextual melting pot "Itchy & Scratchy" – the show can potentially utter statements about itself without destroying the suspension of disbelief.

Therefore, this chapter will examine instances of intertextual self- and meta-reflection in the shape of direct intertextual references and cartoon-in-the-cartoon proxies in order to understand why in this area, too, intertextuality is one of the key ingredients that make the show work. Based on the preliminary considerations in chapter 2.6, the following subchapters will each deal with a different aspect of *The Simpsons* as it is being examined within the reflexive structures of the show. *Production* here focuses mainly on the creative and economic processes that determine how an episode comes into being; the acts of writing, drawing, and sound recording; production company management; and the technical aspects of the materials the creators have to work with. *Narration* involves different audiovisual styles, the representational abilities of animation, and particularities of the narrative structures in a sitcom series. *Distribution* then turns from the features of animation, in general (which can also include animated films produced for the cinema or for video games, for example), to the characteristics of commercial television, such as financing, advertising, and the product life cycle.[454] Finally, *reception* addresses aspects of the audience's reactions to the show, to animation, or to television, in general. Although it will sometimes be difficult to draw clear-cut lines between the four stages – especially the boundaries between production and distribution are rather fleeting – it should become obvious how the single examples highlight certain aspects of *The Simpsons*, or of its genre, or of its medium.

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[454] See also Ernst/Werkmeister 100.

3.4.1   Reflection on Production Conditions

In this subchapter, three episodes will be analyzed with regard to the aspects of cartoon production they examine more closely. All three put "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" in the center of attention and have the adventures of the Simpson family circle around it in some way. In "Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie" (EP 4-6), a television report preceding the release of the new movie presents a history of early animation and reveals how conditions of production and technology have changed in the course of time. "The Front" (EP 4-19) focuses on the creative processes of writing for animated shows. In "The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show" (EP 8-14), both writing and animation are then tested for the half-life of their creative potential. Moreover, this episode also allows for a glimpse into the processes of voice recording for cartoon characters.

In "Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie," hysteria in Springfield is growing prior to the popular cat and mouse team's first venture to the big screen. Kent Brockman presents a TV report that re-visits the historical development of the cartoon and takes a look behind the scenes. In the first shot, Brockman visits a factory in Korea to show the audience "how American cartoons are made." There are rows of trembling workers in a bleak industrial building who are forced at gunpoint and with motivational stabs of the bayonet to draw cartoons under degrading conditions. This image ironically comments on the fact that most of the animation work for *The Simpsons* is done in South Korea in order to keep costs lower, while only the more creative jobs, like storyboards, or the design of new characters and backgrounds, are given to domestic U.S. animation studios.[455]

Brockman then introduces a clip of the very first Scratchy cartoon, entitled "That Happy Cat". A black-and-white cat with a hat is walking down a street of simple shapes and block houses, stops, whistles a tune, tips his hat, walks on, and the cartoon is over. This rather uninspired story resembles the silent Disney cartoons and other, earlier shorts like the films by Émile Cohl, J. Stuart Blackton, or Winsor McCay, which still drew much of their appeal from the technique of animation, in general. The possibility of making drawn pictures move and of making animals behave in unusual ways accounted for enough fascination, so there was little need for elaborate action or writing. "That Happy Cat" humorously reminds the audience of how animated films had to change in order to entertain viewers who were getting accustomed to seeing pictures move.

The next film Brockman shows, "Steamboat Itchy," then follows the history of animation towards the era of more action-based, fast-paced cartoons that extensively use the interaction of music and pictures. The spoof of *Steamboat Willie*, Disney's first synchronized sound cartoon[456] and a big commercial success, is the first cartoon of Itchy and Scratchy

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[455] See also Ortved 97.
[456] Lenburg 4.

together, and imitates the musical pace and physical deformations of the source. In the Disney cartoon, the happy mouse Mickey works on a river boat, and although he is walked all over and abused by his boss, Pegleg Pete, he keeps up the good humor and frolics about using the animals on the boat as instruments in a long musical number intended to impress a female mouse passenger. The "Itchy & Scratchy" adaptation starts with the same scene: Itchy (who strongly resembles the early Mickey Mouse[457]) is steering the boat when the larger cat enters the bridge. This, however, is as far as the similarities go: Scratchy is cheerful, whistles, tips his hat (still using the skills acquired in "That Happy Cat"), but all of a sudden, Itchy grabs a machine gun, shoots him in the knee caps, and pushes his head into the boiler. Then, as the camera iris closes around Scratchy's scorched head, Itchy peeps, "Oh me, oh my." Those simple words spoken by a cartoon character thus mark the advent of synchronized sound and voice recording in animated cartoons.

Brockman goes on to recount how the antagonists put their differences aside during World War II and "teamed up to fight a bigger foe": in a colored cartoon, Itchy and Scratchy, who by now have changed their appearance to resemble *Tom and Jerry*, together beat up and kill Hitler. Unable to withstand his cartoonish instincts, Itchy then also kills Scratchy, just before Franklin D. Roosevelt enters the screen – not in his wheelchair, of course – to kick the two carcasses' rear ends. Before the end credits, Itchy presents a sign that reads "Save Scrap Iron." The strip imitates the high visual quality of the Hanna-Barbera cartoons, especially in the rather un-cartoonishly painted background of realistic coloring and soft, air-brushed shapes. Moreover, the film reminds the audience of the fact that cartoons have frequently been used for political purposes. Especially during World War II, the potential of cartoons to satirize serious issues and ridicule political figures in a supposedly harmless medium was utilized to mock the propaganda of the Axis Powers and the ideology of an Aryan master race.[458] Among others, several Disney, Warner, and MGM cartoons[459] rather bluntly discredit the political and military enemy and attempt to raise the morale of the population, be it to increase the support for military involvement in the conflict or the acceptance of higher taxes needed to pay for the war efforts.

The short report intended to sum up the history of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" in order to prepare the ground for the next logical step, the expansion to full-length cinema features, in a few minutes paints a complex picture of American cartoon production from the beginnings. It returns to a time when animated pictures alone seemed to be entertaining enough – and needed to be, since synchronized sound was not yet an option – while animation techniques and scripting ambitions were still rudimentary and cartoons were therefore

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[457] See also Klein 32, and Turner 406.

[458] Lenburg 6-7.

[459] Outstanding examples are the Donald Duck cartoons *The Spirit of '43* and *Der Fuehrer's Face*, the Warner Brothers production *Daffy – The Commando*, and MGM's *Blitz Wolf*. See also Klein 26.

considered artistically inferior to other visual arts.[460] Soon, the good-natured, optimistic atmosphere of "That Happy Cat" gives way to the fast-paced action of synchronized sound cartoons, which are full of slapstick and begin to introduce violence – and its seldom fatal effects in cartoons – as one of the main ingredients of cartoon writing. Although it reaches a level of cruelty and harm to the animated body that hyperbolizes other cartoon violence, the harrowing carnage of "Steamboat Itchy" resembles the mindless abuse of animals that caused considerable censoring of *Steamboat Willie*.

Nevertheless, the cartoon also indicates why by the end of the 1920s, animation becomes a serious competitor in the race for audiences and funding. The combination of more refined drawing techniques, swift action, unexpected visual and plot-related experiences, music, voice, and sound effects promises entertainment for diverse audiences and high revenues for the producers. As a consequence, cartoons quickly gain the status of a cultural form that matters, that strives for impressive artistic achievements, and that begins to develop other social functions than mere entertainment. Due to the adding of color, the availability of better and easier-to-use animation methods, and a growing international production industry, animation becomes an arena of ever new styles and elaborate visual experiments. At the same time, its popularity and allegedly innocuous packaging turn it into a vehicle of political messages, propaganda, and social concern.

From there, it is only a small step to the second animation boom initiated by *The Simpsons* towards the end of the 1980s: the Korean animation factory firmly links the "mother show" to the history of "Itchy & Scratchy" and thus explains what animation is like today. Determined by economic factors, influenced by political trends, socially conscious, feeding off cartoon history as well as off other media, and appealing to huge masses, *The Simpsons* has become a major cultural force and a global business player. While it is still aware of its origins – a crude drawing of a dinosaur or a cat walking down the street – it has come a long way from there to turn into an elaborately scripted, animated, and produced example of a thriving industry.

In "The Front,"[461] Bart, Lisa, and their grandfather experience first-hand how the writing processes in this industry work. Bart and Lisa watch a boring episode of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" and agree that the writers should be ashamed of themselves for such a lifeless performance. They decide that they can write better cartoons themselves. They consult the fictitious book "How to Get Rich Writing Cartoons" by John Swartzwelder, one of the most productive authors for *The Simpsons*, and start writing an episode set in a barber shop. Scratchy is getting a haircut and Lisa proposes that Itchy, the barber, chops off his head with a razor, which Bart finds too predictable, however. He suggests a plot where Itchy shampoos

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[460] Lenburg 1.

[461] The episode title is a nod to the movie of the same name, which deals with a group of blacklisted television writers in the 1950s who have to use someone else's name as a front if they want their scripts to be accepted.

Scratchy's head with barbecue sauce, drops flesh-eating ants on it, and uses the barber chair lift to rocket the cat through the ceiling. In the room above, his bare skull crashes through the bottom of a TV set and is then shot by an overweight Elvis Presley, who does not like the program.

They send their script of "The Little Barbershop of Horrors" to the producers at Itchy & Scratchy International, but because it was written by children, CEO Roger Meyers dismisses it instead of giving it a chance against the mediocre scripts his "egghead" Harvard writers are currently delivering. They try again using Grampa's name as a front, and he is immediately offered a job as staff writer. In an ironic instance of self-reflexive criticism, Meyers shoves him into a messy room filled with bored, lazy, idling writers modeled on several writers and producers of *The Simpsons* in order to let them take a look at a good writer who owes his skills to life experience instead of to some "fancy school."

A little later, the children tell their grandfather that they used his name and agree that Grampa will continue to show up at the writers' office, secretly submit their scripts as his own, and share his paycheck with them. When they visit Grampa at his new job, Roger Meyers gives them a tour of the studio. They enter the animation wing through a door that is copied from the entrance of the Animation Building at Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California. Lisa is impressed by the amount of money needed to produce cartoons, but Meyers informs her that they cut costs by re-using "the same backgrounds over and over and over again." While he is speaking, they pass the same cleaning lady and water fountain four times.[462]

After a few creative and successful episodes, Grampa is nominated for an award for best writing in a cartoon series. His "Barbershop" episode competes against three other clips: the first shows a lookalike of the action hero He-Man, introduced as "Strong-Dar, Master of Akom," at his wedding in front of the altar. The cartoon ridicules the ever-changing narrative of He-Man's life in the various *Masters of the Universe* shows that enabled the producers to launch one series after the other without the necessity of a logically coherent background story. Moreover, AKOM is the name of the low cost/low quality South Korean studio that provided millions of animation cells for *The Simpsons* and other popular programs; thus, the episode once again incites an awareness of the international economic systems that are involved in the creation of cartoons.

The next film is the episode "How to Buy Action Figure Man," which deals with a young boy successfully trying to convince his mother to buy him an Action Figure Man figure. Here, the episode ironically comments on the fact that many animated programs are little more than long advertisements for toys and other merchandise products. While *The Simpsons* has also triggered an avalanche of licensed products, the show exists largely inde-

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[462] See also Beard 274.

pendent from its merchandise and puts greater effort into convincing stories and intelligent entertainment. In contrast, "Action Figure Man" is reduced to an advertising medium only: he is not "Action Man," but just a figure from the start. His adventures (which we never get to see) are the adventures of a plastic toy that sits waiting in a plastic box until it is bought by some compliable parent and released into the hands of a child.

The third nominee is the season premiere of *Ren & Stimpy*, but unfortunately the clip is not done yet and the audience has to settle for a black screen. This mischievous attack on the unreliable production circles of that show is a payback to the creator of *Ren & Stimpy*, who had previously voiced some harsh remarks on the quality of the *Simpsons* scripts.[463]

Grampa wins the award, but on the occasion also watches one of his "own" episodes for the first time – and he is appalled by the cruelty and violence. The audience is furious about his disapproval, but some of the other writers realize that he might be right and that they have been wasting their lives on cartoons. From now on, they will put their energy into writing "that sitcom about the sassy robot." Grampa and the children have to accept that not too many viewers want to see the programs they watch questioned, and that people do not want to take cartoons too seriously. Hand in hand, they leave the award show and give up their writing job.

"The Front" weaves a complicated net of references to the production – and especially the writing – of cartoons, including aspects of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show," *The Simpsons* itself, and several other animated programs. On the one hand, the episode emphasizes the enormous resources that flow into cartoon production: like the Walt Disney Studios, Itchy & Scratchy Int. operates a whole production campus, they hire only the most promising talents with outstanding degrees, and have hundreds of people work on every episode (as is revealed in the end credits of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show"). On the other hand, they jeopardize quality as they ship off much of the actual drawing to low cost factories, indulge in self-centered intellectualism, and scare off their viewers by neglecting the original virtues of their product. Still, in this ambiguous picture of cartoon production, there are signs that – despite certain self-criticism – let *The Simpsons* stand out as a truly creative achievement.

When Bart develops his own "Itchy & Scratchy" episode, he starts off with an innovative idea and explains that "the rest writes itself" once the flesh-eating ants are released. How could his story of Elvis Presley shooting a cat's skull on his television set write itself? David L.G. Arnold suggests that the "Itchy & Scratchy" episode functions as a self-reflexive analysis of the overall plot of "The Front": the TV character Scratchy is forced onto a screen on the screen and exposed to the audience's direct reaction. The gun in Elvis' hand becomes the

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[463] *Simpsons* producer Al Jean describes the staff's motifs for getting back at *Ren & Stimpy* in the audio commentary of the fourth season's DVD collection. See also Turner 408.

remote control that decides about life or death of a television program.[464] Bart's episode acknowledges the audience's influence and brings "Itchy & Scratchy" back to what made it successful in the first place: it presents a creative type of violence that surprises the viewers and at the same time involves them in the creative process.

On still another level, however, Scratchy's head appears on a screen on the Simpsons' screen on our screen and thus – in combination with the other cartoons shown at the award ceremony – works as a meta-reflection on cartoon writing. *The Simpsons* has its best moments when it seems to write itself: starting from a creative idea, from a basic, realistic plotline, a good episode can involve the audience in a cultural process that is not limited to the borders of this particular episode. It becomes a story about television, about animation, about cultural appropriation without ever losing touch of its prime function, the telling of an entertaining story. Those episodes need not fear the competition of awkwardly scripted spin-offs, promoted action heroes, or hastily cobbled, behind schedule newcomers. The one guarantee for continuous success is to have the best writers work on the best scripts – it is just not certain if the best writers are those with the best degrees.

The episode "The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show" (EP 8-14) deals with the problems a series can encounter once it seems to lose its impact and business interest come into conflict with its creative roots. The opening scenes establish the background attitude for what is going to happen to "The Itchy & Scratchy Show": a quite creative and well-scripted episode is on, but the Simpson children are not watching. When Marge asks them if they do not like the show anymore, they explain that they still love it, but that they just do not have to see it every day and that there are other things to do. Still, Krusty is mad about the declining ratings this apparently widespread tendency causes for his show and orders Roger Meyers to fix it, or "Itchy & Scratchy" will be replaced.

Trying to find out what is wrong with the show, Meyers invites Bart, Lisa, and some other random children to a research focus group. They are shown cartoon strips and have to indicate whether or not they like what they see, while Meyers is watching them from behind a darkened two-way mirror. The researchers are surprised that the children seem to like everything: they are happy with the humor of the show, they like it when it deals with realistic, everyday situations, but also when it involves crazy schemes and magic. Desperate to find a solution for the decreasing success, Meyers yells at them from behind the mirror, accuses them of not knowing what they want, and asks what is wrong with the show. Lisa walks up to the mirror and explains her point of view: "There's not really anything wrong with 'The Itchy & Scratchy Show.' It's as good as ever. But after so many years, the characters just can't have the same impact they once had." Robert Sloane points out that the situation develops a clearly self-reflexive attitude as Lisa ineluctably speaks to her own image in the mirror. Alt-

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[464] Arnold "Rest" 264.

hough she is addressing the producers behind it, she thus provides "a glimpse into the very real difficulty of producing a quality show year after year" (Sloane 145).

Unfortunately, however, Meyers understands her comment as a request for a new character to spice up the show. In a meeting with his "egghead" writers (who are again modeled on members of the *Simpsons* staff) and Krusty, he proposes to add a character "today's kids can relate to," a dog named Poochie.[465] When the writers are skeptical about the break this would mean for the established structure of the show and find the idea of adding a dog too predictable, Krusty brushes them off with the words, "This ain't art, it's business!" The following lines of the production executives swarm with words like "proactive" and "paradigm" to underline their business perspective on the show. By that time, the writers have ceased to contribute any creativity to the development of the new character, so the producers oversee the first drawings. Trying to be up-to-date, they want him to have "in your face" attitude, and to activate several popular subcultural identities, including hip-hop, surfing, and Rastafari.

When the Simpsons read about the new dog in the newspaper, their reaction is far from enthusiastic, and Lisa explains that "adding a new character is often a desperate attempt to boost low ratings." A second later, never-seen-before Roy enters their kitchen and naturally assumes his place among the family. The others greet him as if he had always been there. His attire and the aura of "coolness" let him appear as the Poochie of *The Simpsons*, a hip, up-to-date character intended to address new audience segments. At least from this point onwards it becomes clear that what happens to "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" one again works as a cartoon-in-the-cartoon mirror of the decisions the staff of *The Simpsons* have to make as their show is staying on the air season after season.

Homer then auditions for the voice of Poochie and gets the job because of his sarcastic, presumptuous attitude. He starts recording the voice tracks together with an actress named June Bellamy, who provides the voices of Itchy and Scratchy. Here, the episode enables the audience to take another brief glimpse behind the scenes of cartoon production. After all, there are professional voice actors behind the famous cartoon characters who might not resemble their fronts at all. Many viewers were quite surprised when they realized that Bart's voice comes from a woman, Nancy Cartwright. Homer is impressed when Bellamy switches effortlessly between the voices of Itchy and Scratchy and tells him that she started off her long career with the Road Runner's characteristic "meep" (she was only paid to record it once, then the producers doubled it on tape).

When the first "Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie" episode is done, Homer invites his friends to watch it together, but the reactions are devastating. The episode focuses entirely on Poochie's in-your-face behavior and his subcultural trendiness, but entirely neglects what

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[465] Klein analyzes the introduction of Poochie as a forced disruption of the established two-character constellation on the show (30).

made "Itchy & Scratchy" big in the first place: they never reach the fireworks factory that promised another accumulation of pointless violence and instead indulge in flattering dialogues about Poochie's qualities. The story does not work at all with the fans who are used to a certain style and certain narrative patterns. When Homer blames himself for the disappointing start, Lisa consoles him and aptly explains that the failure was caused by Poochie being "a soulless byproduct of committee thinking." The producers decide to kill off Poochie right away, and although Homer tries to earn him a second chance, the next episode awkwardly wraps up the case by letting him die on the way back to "his home planet." Again, the children try to comfort Homer and argue that the audience was just not ready for Poochie. At this moment, Roy joins them to declare that he will be moving into his own apartment with "two sexy ladies." Marge gives him a hug and says that they will maybe see him in a few years.

As far as aspects of production are concerned, the episode approaches two major topics that relate directly to the situation of *The Simpsons* itself. Firstly, it tries to emphasize how difficult it is to keep up the high standards of entertainment and sophistication years after a TV series reaches its peak of perfection. As innovative plot ideas were thinning out after six or seven years of production, *The Simpsons* were facing falling ratings and increasing criticism from the hardcore fans. What fans and executives did not consider, however, was that the show was still doing great in comparison to most other programs and just ailing if opposed to the incredibly high expectations it had created itself. Nevertheless, for a while it seemed as if *The Simpsons* was going to go the way of most television series, experience a few attempts to boost ratings, and finally be taken off the air after the last twitches. As Matt Groening describes in the commentary on the DVD release of this episode, the producers had actually been approached by an executive who suggested adding a new character who would come to live with the Simpsons permanently. Primarily, this technique is used in live action shows that involve children, who inevitably grow up. For example, Oliver on *The Brady Bunch* or Luke on *Growing Pains* were obviously added to provide a new youngster for the younger viewers to relate to.

As a consequence, when Roy enters the series as an ironic remark on this desperate proposal, he carries with him a whole history of sitcom development. Not only is his appearance as unmotivated and easy to see through as the adding of Poochie and all the other characters in TV history, but when he calls Homer and Marge Mr. and Mrs. S., he specifically echoes Fonzie's language on *Happy Days* and thus reveals to be even more constructed to match economic factors than it first seemed. His behavior is casual, so he impresses children, his attire is cool, so he appeals to teenagers, and his words resuscitate a successful series from the 70s and early 80s, so he speaks to parents as well. Later, when he decides to move in with "two sexy ladies," he just leaves *The Simpsons* to join the cast of another

popular sitcom, *Three's Company*.[466] He truly lives up to his status as a stereotyped stock character who only exists to spice up bled-out constellations. By granting him this one strange, episode-long cameo on *The Simpsons*, the creators voice their criticism of the typical processes of commercial TV production: maybe they will need him later when they have finally run out of quality scripts, but for now, they concentrate on the core virtues the success of their show is based on in the first place. Once Poochie and Roy are gone, Bart and Lisa return to watching a "classic Itchy & Scratchy" episode and enjoy its quality. Lisa's final remark is a clear reply to anyone who criticizes the show: "We should thank our lucky stars they're still putting out a program of this caliber after so many years."

The second theme is the notion of network executives forcing ideas onto a show and the general opposition of artistic vs. economic viewpoints. The conflicts between the writers and the network executives in the episode underscore their different approaches. The writers have developed a subtle understanding of the inner narrative structures that carry the show, but the network executives are focused on short-term improvements and are willing to go with the flow. In sum, the episode thus serves as an affirmation of the production strategy for *The Simpsons*, which by contract reduces the influence of the network to a minimum and allows the creators to go about their job rather freely. Occasional fights between the parties and jokes at the cost of FOX and its owner, Rupert Murdoch, function as evidence of an operation method that accords the creative staff at least an equal standing in the decisions that concern the show's future.

Still, the writers are depicted by no means all positive: they show little original spirit themselves and do not provide other solutions for the decreasing interest in their show. Similarly to the experience in "The Front," they are so pre-possessed with their own education and the messages they believe their product to communicate that they care even less for the audience's concerns than the executives (who are more directly dependent on what the viewers think). As a result, the normal viewers seem to remain as the one positive instance in the life of a TV series: Bart and Lisa have developed a healthy relationship to "The Itchy & Scratchy Show," they love it, but they do not depend on it so fanatically that they feel the need to scan it for minute mistakes. They can enjoy it when it has its best moments and its most creative plots, but they can also leave it be for a while when it seems to lack spirit. They are not easy to please – they, too, see through Poochie's shameless constructedness – but they are willing to give the producers some credit for what they have achieved, and if necessary, they actively try to make it better and write their own scripts.

In general, the three episodes focusing on "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" as a stand-in for *The Simpsons* paint a comprehensive picture of the conditions that shape the production of the show. The continuous intertextual undertone of "Itchy & Scratchy," as well as the addi-

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[466] See also Sloane 144.

tional intertextual references to animated films and other TV programs function as a self- and meta-reflexive comment on the processes that precede the release of every single *Simpsons* episode. On the one hand, they stress the hardships, technological and financial limitations, creative exhaustion, and pronounced criticism the series – like others – has to deal with. On the other hand, the intertextual comparisons also reveal how successfully the producers of *The Simpsons* have managed to create a product that – in spite of the difficulties – stands out from the crowd as a quality program that exceeds the ambitions put into most other series.

However, "The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show" ends on a slightly distressed note: after Lisa's final praise, she and Bart stare at the screen for another two seconds, then their faces turn blank and Bart suggests to check what else is on. As they flip the channel, the screen turns to television snow and the episode is over. By the time of the eighth season, the producers apparently were no longer sure of a long, successful future for their product – a notion that is confirmed in the DVD commentaries – and were already asking themselves if they could go on providing entertainment that meets their own quality demands and the taste of the audience. After more than 20 seasons and a big screen movie, we can assure them that there are still enough enthusiastic viewers out there to keep them going.

3.4.2   Reflection on Narrative Patterns

What has frequently been named as the factor most influential for the success of *The Simpsons* as a cartoon and a comedy show is that it breaks with key narrative traditions of cartoons as well as of comedy. Instead of exploiting the possibilities of animation to deform bodies and faces, it stresses the realistic representation of the human world: the difference between a human family and *The Simpsons* becomes obvious in the yellow skin, unusual hairdos, and four-fingered hands, but not in the way they behave or feel.[467] Instead of guiding the audience along the common laugh track towards peaks of laughter, the show adds layer upon layer of more or less hidden jokes for the viewers to discover in dependence of their individual mental disposition. Its unaffected interaction with the audience resembles the workings of stand-up comedy or classic movies rather than those of television series. Both deviations from established generic patterns contributed to the show's status as a perceived media revolution, as something not seen before.

While the multi-layered, intelligence-promoting approach to telling jokes became one of the essential reasons for its success with a diverse audience, the pronounced realism offered additional chances for experimental entertainment in at least two ways. On the one hand, the attempt to let cartoon characters develop into fully fleshed out, humanoid, loveable

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[467] See also Arnold "Rest" 263, Cantor "Politics" 162, and Turner 20.

people with normal people's problems accounts for *The Simpsons'* incredibly quick ascent into the realm of global cultural signifiers. Especially Bart at first and Homer in later seasons became icons of cultural communication as they managed to let viewers develop sincere identification with their characters. On the other hand, the realism let *breaches with* this realism stand out more prominently and thus offered another opportunity for memorable moments that toyed with the audience's reactions.

One of the first examples of this occurs in the episode "Bart the Daredevil" (EP 2-8) when Homer falls into a steep canyon twice. It is a cartoonish miracle that he survives this terrible fall in best Wile E. Coyote fashion, and it is typical cartoon writing that makes him take the fall twice. However, in contrast to other cartoon characters, he is hurt badly, and we can actually hear his bones break and see his tissue tear when he hits the rocks. The scene paradoxically reminds the audience that they are watching a cartoon, but also a cartoon that works differently than many other cartoon narratives. Similarly, the periodic Halloween episodes function as points of contrast to the realistic approach of the regular episodes as they allow the writers to include more cartoonish or surrealistic elements that do not match the family sitcom genre.

The scene of Homer's mishap confirms the distinct ambition in *The Simpsons* to show an awareness of and comment on other medial texts, as well as on its own status in relation to them. Despite the attempted (and fiercely defended) realistic, consistent narrative frame especially in the early seasons, the producers here already included statements about how this frame works and what distinguishes it from other texts. Following the style of Homer's tumble into the canyon, there are other hilarious examples of a first way to combine a realistic narrative environment with an expressive media awareness: the temporary deconstruction of the series' own conventions and the simultaneous glance at other options.

Especially the visual language of cartoons has been at the center of many of these breaches, as typical cartoonish events sometimes invade the more realistic world of *The Simpsons*. For instance, when Bart and Milhouse learn about a soon-to-be-filmed movie of their favorite comic series in the episode "Radioactive Man" (EP 7-2), their caps fly off their heads as they gasp in surprise. However, since their caps stick to a vent in the ceiling, the comic store owner realizes that he will have to do something about the air conditioner suction. In "Marge Be Not Proud" (EP 7-11), Bart hears that his parents want to take him to a store where he has just been caught shoplifting a video game. He is so terrified that steam blows from his ears – until Marge removes the two teapots that are boiling on the stove behind him. These short and fleeting moments gain their impact from catching the audience off-guard; for a second, they change the narrative integrity just to change back right away and

leave the viewer reminded of what is possible and common in cartoons, but also of what is essential to *The Simpsons*.[468]

The second approach the show uses to analyze its own narrative structure and language involves – as could have been expected – intertextuality. By referring to other texts or genres, *The Simpsons* can utter statements about their representational conventions and thus in turn reflect on its own. Intertextuality is not necessarily easy to combine with a realistic approach, because consistent narrative laws set certain limits to the interaction with other texts. If the producers want to say something about *Star Wars*, they can make Homer watch *Star Wars* or talk about it, or he can talk to Mark Hamill (or to Mark Hamill *playing* Luke Skywalker),[469] but he cannot talk to Luke Skywalker or become part of the movie in any other way. In the first six or seven seasons, the realism was so essential to the creators that unresolved breaches were scarce and minute. In later seasons, however, the series has ventured into more surrealistic areas and opened the gates for more complex intertextual compositions that can provide insights into the narrative conditions of an animated television series without the intermediate step of, for example, "The Itchy & Scratchy Show." The aim of the present subchapter is to prove that intertextual references are used throughout the series – in the more down-to-earth concept of the early seasons, as well as in the more openly meta-reflexive later episodes – to comment on the characteristics that distinguish the narrative style of *The Simpsons* from other animated programs and other TV series.

As the various examples of "Itchy & Scratchy" discussed in the previous subchapter have already indicated, *The Simpsons* has always positioned itself in relation to the long tradition of animated films and analyzed the similarities and differences between its own characteristics and other texts. Still, while the "Itchy & Scratchy" clips could easily be read as stand-ins for *The Simpsons* as far as production conditions are concerned, they convey little information about its narrative characteristics. As Kent Brockman's report in the episode "Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie" (EP 4-6) convincingly reveals, "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" has evolved as the logical continuation of early silent cartoons, the playful violence of the Disney shorts, and the more explicit deformations of the Warner Bros.' and MGM's cartoons. *The Simpsons*, however, has come a long way from there and tells its stories in a completely different fashion. Just as steam does not normally hiss from the characters' ears, their caps do not fly off their heads, and their eyes stay in their sockets, the show repeatedly stresses its different visual language in opposition to other cartoon programs.

Two exemplary references should suffice to clarify how intertextuality contributes to this: both involve the company ACME. The ACME Corporation is a fictitious commonplace of

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[468] Mike Judge and *Simpsons*-writer Greg Daniels later took the realistic approach in animation even further in the series *King of the Hill*, which even largely avoids close-ups and other visual experiences that do not correspond with the abilities of the human eye. See also Turner 53.

[469] As has happened in the episode "Mayored to the Mob" (EP 10-9).

television history, "**A C**ompany that **M**akes **E**verything" and that serves as a symbolic repre-
sentative for all other manufacturers. Although it has also been named in other programs, it
is most famous for supplying any kind of breakneck machinery to Wile E. Coyote in his fruit-
less attempts to catch the Road Runner. As a result, although "acme" is derived from the
Greek word for "peak" or "prime," its frequently backfiring products have become an inspira-
tion for ever new attacks on the cartoon body.[470]

A quite explicit reference appears in the episode "Last Tap Dance in Springfield"
(EP 11-20): after Bart and Milhouse have playfully ravaged a whole shopping mall while it
was closed, the police assume that a giant rat must be responsible and proceed to catch it.
They set up an ACME rat trap that works with typical cartoon components: an anvil will be
released once somebody pulls at a piece of cheese attached to a cable. Chief Wiggum can-
not withstand the tasty look of the cheese, so he starts wondering whether he might be able
to pull out the bait before the anvil drops. Although his officers warn him that the chances are
"a million to one," he likes those odds, grabs it, and the anvil crashes on his back. At least he
realizes that his "mistake was grabbing the cheese."

This totally absurd situation ironically undermines the narrative rules and patterns that
drive many other cartoons, particularly the many action-based chase films. In those films,
nobody ever asks for the odds – things just happen in a way that makes sure that someone
will get hurt. No matter how useless and ludicrous a set-up seems to be, the outcome is pre-
determined: the prey will escape unharmed while the hunter will painfully experience his own
trap. In the present situation, there is not even a prey, and when Chief Wiggum goes for the
cheese, the audience can be almost certain that he will not take it, or that at least the anvil
will not drop on him. Although *The Simpsons* can be brutal on occasion, violence that could
lead to serious injuries or death is an exception.[471] When the anvil hits, we can see and hear
the pain it causes in a quite realistic way, and when Wiggum states his hindsight, we can be
sure that he will never reach for cheese in a trap again.

Like Homer's dive into the crevice, the ACME experience contrasts a style many
viewers will describe as typically cartoonish (violence *sans* consequence) with what many
viewers would call one of the most famous cartoons (*The Simpsons*) and thus stresses that
not all cartoons are alike. While for some it is essential to exploit the visual possibilities of
animation, and writing is only secondary for the progress of the story, *The Simpsons* has
always taken a different approach, reduced its dependency on refined drawings, and focused
on clever writing instead. However, since the whole ACME incident happens in an entirely
absurd sequence of events – who would blame a crime on a giant rat without the slightest
evidence, and who would release a mountain lion to a mall as the next step to catching it? –

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[470] See also Klein 27-28.

[471] Moreover, on *The Simpsons*, people actually die when their body is hurt: while Homer survives his fall serious-
ly injured, Maude Flanders dies when she falls down a wall in "Alone Again, Natura-Diddily" (EP 11-14).

the reference to ACME may also secretly comment on the direction the show is taking. After all, the series has repeatedly been criticized for coming up with crazier and crazier schemes designed to fill another season with our favorite family's adventures. In a plot that does not make any real sense, an ACME kit does seem like a logical step to initiate the following events.

The second reference occurs in the episode "Realty Bites" (EP 9-9) already described in subchapter 3.3.3. Springfield's stereotype criminal Snake wants to get back his convertible from Homer, who bought it at a police auction. As he realizes that Homer is usually driving with his head up high in the air, he spans a string of "ACME piano wire" across the street to kill him. The tension increases when Homer appears in the distance, talking about how good the air feels on his neck. Luckily, seconds before he would be decapitated, Homer bends down to collect a gumball from the floor and swishes under the wire. Before Snake can remove the wire, however, Kirk van Houten (Milhouse's father) drives along, frantically waving a sandwich in the air and yelling "I told that idiot to slice my sandwich." Then, the wire cuts off his lower arm.

Here, in contrast to the ACME rat trap incident, the audience expects violent, or at least action-packed things to happen. There is speed, recklessness, a chase situation – and then Homer by sheer luck avoids the trap and we as viewers might even be a bit disappointed. We did not really expect him to lose his head, but something was bound to happen at that wire. But then we remember that it is *The Simpsons* we are watching, a show where ACME products cannot work because they would quickly reduce the cast as bodies are stabbed, shot, blown up, flattened, etc. So the next logical step is for the piano wire to slice that sandwich, help someone instead of hurting him, and thus ironically destroy Snake's attempt to introduce the harrowing violence of other cartoons into the world of Springfield. But once again, the viewer's expectations are subverted: suddenly, *The Simpsons* turns into a Wile E. Coyote cartoon – or even exceeds its violence – as the wire chops off the arm and Kirk reacts in a quite cartoonish manner – a hangdog glance and a mumbled "ow."

This back-and-forth joyride of different cartoon conventions leaves the audience stunned and uncertain about whether to laugh or not. In another cartoon, this might have been a regular joke; in *The Simpsons*, it virtually hurts. When Kirk reappears towards the end of the episode, his arm has been sewed back on and bandaged in a sling. As a result, the common narrative patterns of the show are finally restored: steam does not hiss from the characters' ears, and arms do not just miraculously grow back. There is pain, sickness, and fear that match our own sensations, but which are unknown to most other cartoon characters. As an animated program, it seems that *The Simpsons* occasionally needs to remind its viewers of this fact.

However, the show is not only aware of the visual language it predominantly uses, but also of its more general narrative features, i.e. the way it speaks to its audience and tries to entertain it. An extended reference to another cartoon series in the episode "The Day the Violence Died" (EP 7-18) neatly exemplifies how *The Simpsons* regards its own mission in contrast to other programs. After Itchy & Scratchy Int. is sued for plagiarism, the company goes bankrupt and cannot produce any further "Itchy & Scratchy" cartoons. Instead, to fill the gaps in his show, Krusty announces "a cartoon that tries to make learning fun! Sorry about this, kids, but stay tuned. We got some real good toy commercials coming right up. I swear!" What follows is a detailed spoof of a *Schoolhouse Rock* cartoon, more precisely the episode "I'm Just a Bill."[472] *Schoolhouse Rock* is a U.S. series of animated musical short films produced for educational purposes and aired specifically for children on Saturday mornings on ABC. The clips are commonly ordered in groups that cover certain topics, including grammar, politics, science, economics, history, mathematics, and information technology. They generally feature very cheerful tunes, cute characters, few colors, and rather complicated, fast-paced lyrics that support the rhythm.

The *Simpsons* version imitates all these characteristics and even had Jack Sheldon, the singer who recorded "I'm Just a Bill," perform the song "Amendment to Be." The topic of the song, however, is changed into a far more subversive criticism of radical conservatism. The amendment is intended to change the constitution in a way that legalizes harder measures against demonstrators, and the song contains lyrics like "There's a lot of flag burners who have got too much freedom / I wanna make it legal for policemen to beat 'em." In the middle of the cartoon, Bart asks in disgust what kind of a cartoon that is, and Lisa responds that "it's one of those campy 70s throwbacks that appeal to Generation Xers." Bart proposes another Vietnam War to "thin out their ranks a little." The cartoon goes on to reveal more of the amendment's reactionary aims. When it is finally ratified, it opens the door to all kinds of crazy laws who enter Capitol Hill shooting and throwing bombs. As the cartoon is over, Lisa exclaims, "So it's true: some cartoons do encourage violence," and punches her brother's arm.

The parody makes statements about the way cartoons entertain the audience on several levels. First, the whole composition ironically foregrounds how terrible cartoons can be when they try to be overtly educational and appealing to children. Bart and Lisa, who are children of the 90s, immediately see through the façade of cuddly characters and uplifting melodies and reject the information the cartoon tries to convey. The film fails so thoroughly in entertaining its viewers that it not only also fails to do what it was supposed to do – get a political/educational message across – but also incites arbitrary violent reactions. Second, in addition to this rather general juxtaposition of different types of cartoons, the clip also enters

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[472] Irwin/Lombardo 83.

the direct competition with "The Itchy & Scratchy Show." As the previous analyses have un-covered, "Itchy & Scratchy" are used in the show as representatives of a long tradition of var-ious influential cartoons. As a consequence, when an educational program like *Schoolhouse Rock* struggles against the impact of another series, it faces a whole history of cartoons that are made to entertain and feed off a deep appreciation for animated films. For viewers who have been molded by cartoons that try to reach ever more sophisticated levels of technique and action, the rather clumsy drawings of a clip that tries to profit from the appeal of other cartoons to convey educational messages are an insult to the eye and mind.

On a third level, however, *The Simpsons* puts this harsh criticism in perspective and ironically deconstructs its own, allegedly superior position: when Lisa mentions Generation X, many viewers who are familiar with the term will immediately realize that they are members of it. One of the biggest audience segments of *The Simpsons* actually comprises those who are frequently called Generation Xers, those media-saturated experts of popular culture born between the mid-60s and mid-80s. Apparently, there is a danger that *The Simpsons* will go down the same road someday and be regarded as "campy," harmless, crudely drawn chil-dren's cartoons trying to get across political concerns and cultural knowledge. In comparison to *Schoolhouse Rock*, however, it has so far managed to avoid the pitfalls of becoming one-sided and hail-fellow-well-met.

Still, while the producers of *The Simpsons* put so much effort into highlighting the dif-ferences to other cartoons, their concerns might not even be necessary. In the general public appreciation of the show, there seems to be more stress on the words "family" and "sitcom" than on the attribute "animated," and viewers as well as scholars usually name other (mainly non-animated) sitcoms if they want to describe its ancestry. While the animated form has provided *The Simpsons* with some unique visual and narrative options, and has certainly contributed to its success with younger viewers, its more fundamental features and narrative patterns are clearly influenced by the long tradition of family sitcoms.

The Flintstones is usually named as its most obvious precursor, being animated *and* a sitcom, and on several occasions, intertextual references actually honor this connectivity: first, there are two couch gags that recall the Stone Age family. In episode 4-1, the Simpsons are running towards the couch, but the Flintstones have already taken their place. Another time, instead of sitting down, the Simpsons just keep running across the screen in a Flint-stone-like manner with the same background showing behind them over and over again (EP 6-10). A more detailed reference occurs at the beginning of the episode "Marge vs. the Mon-orail" (EP 4-12), which starts with Homer imitating the opening credits of *The Flintstones*: a whistle blows and Homer slides down a pipe to jump into his car, singing "Simpson, Homer Simpson, he's the greatest guy in history / from the town of Springfield, he's about to hit a

chestnut tree."[473] The moment he hits the tree, the completely unrelated homage is over and the actual plot begins. Finally, in the anniversary episode "The Simpsons 138th Episode Spectacular" (EP 7-10), Troy McClure announces the Simpsons as "America's most popular non-prehistoric family," thereby politely allowing the Flintstones the title of America's most popular family.

Despite all this cordiality, however, the similarities between *The Flintstones* and *The Simpsons* are limited. While *The Flintstones* does contemplate the social structures and developments of its time with a winking eye, and even subtly approaches more complicated issues like infertility and gender roles, on the surface it mainly fosters two of the entertainment factors *The Simpsons* always tried to avoid: superficial, clearly marked jokes, and cartoonish slapstick action. As far as its cultural impact, its diversity of topics, and its entertainment intelligence are concerned, *The Simpsons* is much more than a modernized rip-off of *The Flintstones*.

In order to find models that are closer to the narrative system of *The Simpsons*, one needs to look at the live action sitcoms of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Especially the first two or three seasons, which still focused heavily on everyday problems the individual family members had to deal with, found much of their inspiration in older sitcoms, such as *The Honeymooners*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *Happy Days*.[474] As the series progressed, the sitcom element moved further and further to the background, and more far-fetched storylines and exotic settings took over from the concerns of the family home. In season nine, however, there is one episode that very consciously returns to the original family core and seems to stress the still valid appreciation of the everyday struggles that initially triggered *The Simpsons*. At the same time, the episode reveals a strong connection to another sitcom that can be expected to have had a major impact on the show.

"Lisa's Sax" (EP 9-3) tells the story of Lisa's deep emotional relation with her saxophone and in long flashbacks explains how she received the instrument at a very young age as the only means of nurturing her gifted spirit the family could afford. As a second flashback storyline, the episode follows Bart's first days in school and uncovers that he originally was a creative, good-humored kid whose personality was pushed towards mischief and sadism by a school system that was not able to identify and foster his talents.

What turns this revival of the family perspective into such an interesting research object in the context of intertextual self-reflexivity is that the episode starts with a detailed reference to the opening credits of the 70s sitcom *All in the Family*.[475] Homer and Marge are sitting at a

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[473] See also Mullen 63-64.

[474] See Gruteser/Klein/Rauscher 12.

[475] Gray also emphasizes the close connection between this episode and the series *All in the Family* (56).

piano and singing a song, Marge's voice is a bit off, Homer smokes a cigar, and they remi-
nisce about the past:

> Boy, the way the Bee Gees played,
> movies John Travolta made,
> guessing how much Elvis weighed,
> those were the days!
> And you knew where you were then,
> watching shows like *Gentle Ben*,
> Mister, we could use a man like *Sheriff Lobo* again!
> Disco Duck and Fleetwood Mac,
> coming out of my eight-track,
> Michael Jackson still was black,
> those were the days!

The melody, much of the lyrics, their voices and intonations, and the whole situation are an
updated version of the nostalgic song Archie and Edith Bunker sing at the beginning of an
episode of *All in the Family*. The Bunkers, too, sing about the better days of the past, but
while Homer and Marge focus on cultural achievements and trivia, their song "Those Were
the Days" also includes social issues, such as economic security and the welfare state.

In both versions, the scene then cuts to a sequence of outdoor shots scanning the
streets and houses of their hometowns to settle on the front of the families' own houses.
Once the imitated song is over, audience applause swells up and a voice-over announces
that "*The Simpsons* is filmed in front of a live studio audience." Since the 1950s, most prere-
corded comedies have been filmed or taped in front of an audience. Especially sitcoms dur-
ing the 70s and 80s, including *All in the Family*, announced this fact either before or after
every episode. Thus, the unusual applause – *The Simpsons* is decidedly not filmed with a
live audience or a laugh track – and the announcement firmly root this particular *Simpsons*
episode in the tradition of older sitcoms in general and *All in the Family* in particular.

What is crucial for understanding the impact of *All in the Family* on *The Simpsons* is
the series' reputation as a groundbreaking, innovative TV milestone. As one of the most suc-
cessful series of the 70s, and one the most successful sitcoms, in general, it managed to
open up new ways for TV entertainment and reached new audiences among affluent, urban
citizens.[476] It radically abandoned the harmless, politically correct humor of most earlier com-
edy programs and "ushered in a new era in American television characterized by programs
that did not shy away from addressing controversial or socially relevant subject matters"
(Gunzerath 58). The range of topics it dealt with included issues previously considered un-
suitable for U.S. network television, such as racism, women's rights, homosexuality, rape,
miscarriage, cancer, and impotence. Especially the countless conflicts between the con-
servative, apparently prejudiced Archie and his liberal, countercultural son-in-law, Mike, pro-

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[476] Gunzerath 58.

vided the narrative frame for discussions about changes in American society and upheavals in traditional value systems.

Moreover, many of these discussions involved frank language unheard in family television before, particularly the racially stereotyped and gender-related expressions Archie used to express his disdain for people who do not match the categories he had established in his mind. In addition, the series more openly included hints at the protagonists' bodily affairs as it addressed their sexual lives, and frequently featured the sounds of belching and a flushing toilet. Nevertheless, the series also always managed to highlight the love that keeps the Bunkers' family together despite their opposed personalities. Even Archie has his tender sides and comes across as a genuinely loveable character who is basically overstrained by the changes around him.

In many ways, *The Simpsons* actually started as a late 80s version of *All in the Family*. It also centers on a family that provides the background for many conflicts in its own micro-structure. The opposition of Homer and Marge, of narrow-minded egotism and open-minded liberalism, of inconsiderate irresponsibility and dutiful management, serves a double purpose as it supplies fodder for countless alienations and reconciliations, but also keeps the balance in a family that never stops being a family and always returns to the shared emotions that hold it together. Like the Bunkers, they feel enough love for each other to forgive, and as a consequence, they set up a perfect stage where the larger conflicts of society can be acted out and, if possible, resolved. In addition, the family life of the Simpsons, too, knows few taboos: they live in a home that not only accommodates talk, dinners, games, shopping, and TV sessions, but in which belching, sickness, sex, flatulence, and dirty diapers contribute to the realistic depiction of an everyday family. Bart's rejection of authorities and moral codes, as well as his openly insulting language further add to the brutally honest surface of the show and made its early success just as controversial as the beginnings of *All in the Family*. Thus, when the episode "Lisa's Sax" opens with an articulate reference to the older series, it acknowledges their kinship and at the same time proclaims a temporary return to the characteristics that established both shows' success.

On a meta-level, the episode does not only function as a flashback to the earlier days of the Simpson family, but also to the earlier days of *The Simpsons* show: it started out as a family sitcom in the tradition of *All in the Family*, and while the animated form has allowed it to venture into ever more exotic environments, it still carries the family at its heart and probably gains its best moments from the concerns of this innermost circle. The ten episodes before "Lisa's Sax" had Homer become an alcohol smuggler (EP 8-18) and a Japanese advertising icon (EP 8-22), Lisa joined Mr. Burns in a recycling business enterprise (EP 8-21) and fought her way through military school (EP 8-25), and three highly meta-reflexive episodes

explored the show's relation to reality (EP 8-23),[477] commercial television (EP 8-24), and creative scripting (EP 9-2), respectively. The pronounced contrast in "Lisa's Sax," expressed in its general topic and in the extensive reference to *All in the Family* as well as to the family sitcom tradition, in general, constitutes a self-reflexive analysis of what the show has become and what it set out to be. Intertextuality here allows *The Simpsons* to be self-reflexive without being overtly self-reflexive; the episode does not have to say anything about sitcoms and about its own development, yet the message becomes clear. The only obvious break with its narrative reality, the voice-over after the song, would not even really have been necessary, but serves merely as an additional marker of the sitcom relevance.

Nevertheless, it would be presumptuous to imply that the intertextual content of the episode utters serious criticism about the quality of *The Simpsons*, in general. Basically, it reminds the audience that the show has always been indebted to various genres, visual precursors, and narrative traditions. One of them, the family sitcom, may have moved to the background in the course of the series, but that does not stop *The Simpsons* from providing entertainment that reaches several goals at the same time: it discusses complex social and cultural issues, and it weaves a dense network of cultural signifiers, but it always finds a way to return to the core of a dysfunctional, yet loving family. And what makes this achievement seem even more extraordinary is the fact that it happens at a time when it has not necessarily become easier to place intelligent, subversive, and culturally relevant programs on mainstream television.

A second reference to *All in the Family* in the season following "Lisa's Sax" stresses that although U.S. television has certainly expanded the range of issues it is willing to have examined in public, it has also reduced the verbal and representational means for doing so in dependence of an increasing fear of politically motivated conflicts. At the beginning of "Homer to the Max" (EP 10-13), the Simpsons eagerly await the new TV series of mid-season, and one of the programs announced is "All in the Family 1999." The trailer shows Archie Bunker in his chair surrounded by what seem to be his new roommates, and he complains, "Aw, jeez, they got me livin' with an African-American, a Semite-American, and a woman American there, and I'm glad, I love youse all! I love everybody! I wish I'd saved my money from the first show."

Although racism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and all the other social grievances that made it into TV discussions on *All in the Family* in the 70s certainly have not been eliminated, it seems to be even more difficult to address them openly towards the end of the millennium. Due to the conservative revivals of the 1980s and general sociopolitical tendencies to introduce new terms that do not solve the problems but let them appear less demonstrative,

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[477] Robert Sloane develops a fascinating theory about the strange episode "Homer's Enemy," in which he views it as a response to the fans' complaints about too unrealistic plots; see p. 149-154.

The Simpsons had to find more subtle ways of tackling the issues it deems worthy of discussion. As a valued successor to *All in the Family*, it has carried on the tradition of a sitcom that does not sacrifice an important thought for a cheap laugh, and that manages to do the narrative splits between complex social analyses and the conflicted, but reassuring safety of the family microcosm.

This achievement cannot be estimated too highly if compared to other older and contemporary sitcoms, and of course, *The Simpsons* is meta-reflexively aware of the position it holds in the genre: in "Deep Space Homer" (EP 5-15), there is a scene of *Married… with Children* on television which shows Peggy and Al Bundy on their well-known couch. Peggy gives it another try and says, "Al, let's have sex…," but Al responds, "Uhm, no, Peg," which makes the artificial audience fall into a fit of ecstatic laughter. Then Al flushes a toilet standing right next to the couch, which results in even more enthusiastic laughter. This brief sequence actually highlights many of the shortcomings that let other sitcoms be dwarfed by the cultural impact of such complex compositions as *The Simpsons* and *All in the Family*. The seven words of Al's and Peggy's dialogue suffice to summarize one of the major storylines that sustained *Married… with Children* for eleven seasons. The audience will be told when to laugh because the recorded audience is told when to laugh, and since there is no need for hidden jokes on other levels, there is no need to really flesh out the characters, either. The audience will have to dig deep to find any real emotion that would render this accumulation of people a family. What connects *Married… with Children* and *All in the Family* is a foul mouth and the sound of a flushing toilet. As a result, it cannot really surprise that *The Simpsons* is well aware of its outstanding status as one of the most refined and most widely acknowledged sitcoms in TV history, and that it uses intertextual references to self-reflexively comment on what it has achieved. It positions itself in relation to the groundbreaking models of the past, whose aesthetic standards will often inevitably result in a satirical ridicule of contemporary practices.[478]

Finally, however, although *The Simpsons* once set out to be a sitcom and as realistic as possible, it has long stopped being either. A combination of the possibilities the animated form entails, the extensive awareness of other texts and media processes, and the need to develop 20-odd new episodes every year has caused the series to abandon its roots and appropriate countless other genres and narrative strategies over the years. While it might have lost some first-hour fans along the way, it still sustains an audience large enough to provide the financial arguments for its continuation. By now, viewers have become accustomed to a narrative style that does not follow the rules of a coherent fictional world anymore, and the new style has itself become a distinctive feature of *The Simpsons*, just like the uncartoonish animated form, and the socially and culturally aware sitcom narrative. The highly

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[478] See also Hutcheon *Parody* 11.

intertextual, meta-reflexive, and generally curious episode "The Springfield Files" (EP 8-10) may be one of the best examples of how this change occurred, and how the producers of the show consciously accompanied and analyzed the change while it was happening.

The episode's beginning is already fundamentally different from the usual way a *Simpsons* story starts: instead of some place in Springfield, the opening shot shows the cartoon double of Leonard Nimoy; he sits in a darkened room among mysterious objects, suspenseful music is playing, and he addresses the audience, "Hello, I'm Leonard Nimoy." The scenery is loosely based on the semi-documentary series *In Search of…*, in which Nimoy hosted dramatically filmed, half-hour investigations into unsolved pseudoscientific and paranormal mysteries, such as U.F.O.s, Bigfoot, and the Bermuda Triangle. The opening already deconstructs everything cartoonish about the episode: a famous actor – Nimoy did the voice-overs himself – admits that it is him on screen, the setting is realistic, and it does not actually even matter anymore if the scene is animated or live action. Then he goes on to destroy the narrative realism that seemed so essential in earlier episodes: "The following tale of alien encounters is true. And by true, I mean… false. It's all lies. But they're entertaining lies. And in the end, isn't that the real truth? The answer is: No." Any claim to a realistic report is undermined in this doubled ironic twist, as the story that will follow loses not only its ability to suspend disbelief, but also the last hope that there is some deeper meaning to entertainment – television is entertaining, and nothing else.

As Nimoy opens a book and starts to narrate, "Our story begins on a Friday morning in a little town called Springfield," the camera blends over from a black-and-white picture of Homer in the book to the "real" Homer, and the main plot begins. Whereas other frame narratives in the show either belonged to the same narrative level as the main plot (see subchapter 3.2.4 for the example of "The Telltale Head"), or served a rather abstract purpose in the consciously abstract Halloween episodes, Nimoy's introduction as a narrator and his blunt foregrounding of the fictional character of the story prepares the ground for an episode that works under different conditions than most previous ones. Homer spends a whole day drinking at Moe's bar and decides to walk back home through the woods late in the evening. The first thing that happens to him is the incident with the eerie music from *Psycho* already described in subchapter 3.2.2 – another proof that nothing works in usual ways in this episode, not even the soundtrack. Then, as darkness closes in on him, he meets a twinkle-toed, glowing creature in the forest and flees in terror. The scene is accompanied by the typical mysterious music of *The X-Files*, and before long, special agents Mulder and Scully read about the latest alien sighting and decide to investigate in Springfield.

At that moment, an extended crossover of the two series begins, which allows some of the features of the other series to invade *The Simpsons.* Subtitles indicating the time and place of the action start to appear, the music from *The X-Files* continues, and the dialogues,

settings, and editing more and more come to resemble the crime series. Because Nimoy's frame narrative has dismantled the logical boundaries of *The Simpsons'* fictional world, it becomes possible for the two separate narrative systems to merge: Homer does not watch *The X-Files* on TV or talks to David Duchovny, but interacts with the fictional character he plays, Agent Mulder. Just as *The Simpsons* has to change in order to let *The X-Files* join its universe, however, *The X-Files* has to adapt to the new surroundings, too: in the course of their investigations, the seriousness about their job that usually sets the tone for Mulder's and Scully's adventures more and more fades as it subordinates to the meta-critical media awareness of *The Simpsons.* What begins with a nude picture of himself in Mulder's service card and severe doubts about another paranormal mission in the face of illegal drugs and weapons shipments ends with another one of Mulder's monologues about the truth being out there, but no-one – including his partner – is even willing to listen anymore. One cannot join *The Simpsons* without a certain self-mockery.

As the episode progresses, its boundaries further open up to other fictional texts: Homer is asked to pick the alien he saw from an alien lineup including Warner Bros.' Marvin the Martian, ALF, Chewbacca from *Star Wars*, Gort from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and Kang or Kodos, one of the series' own aliens from the Halloween episodes.[479] Again, they all enter Homer's world, or what it has become in Nimoy's narration. Especially the passover of the "Treehouse of Horror" cast into a "normal" episode constitutes a major break with the conventions that ruled *The Simpsons* before it succumbed to Nimoy's mystery/documentary tale.

Simultaneously, the episode becomes more openly meta-reflexive: since the FBI in-vestigation does not provide any clues and no-one believes Homer, he and Bart decide to spend the next Friday night in the woods to wait for the alien to reappear and videotape it. They agree that if they do not find the alien, they will fake it and sell it to the FOX network. Bart throws in with a chuckle, "They'll buy anything," and Homer responds, "Now, son, they do a lot of quality programming, too." They both burst into laughter, and with tears in his eyes Homer mumbles, "I kill me." Especially in an episode that brings together two of FOX' most successful series, their remarks need to be understood in line with many similar comments in the course of *The Simpsons*, which all stress the importance of the own series for FOX' sur-vival. Without the huge revenues the show generated, the chances for FOX to survive the first, struggling years might not have been too good. The producers seem eager to drive this point home again and again, since their success is also the best guarantee for creative free-dom. Nevertheless, they also understand that they better not overdo their criticism of FOX, or they might "kill" their own show.

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[479] For a screenshot of the alien lineup, see Rauscher 104.

Bart and Homer set up camp on the clearing where the alien appeared before, and they have a great time roasting marshmallows and telling each other stories. They agree that even if the alien does not show up, they have spent some quality father-son time together, and for a moment, the episode seems to return to a regular sitcom story. But then, the alien emerges from the woods, and Bart tapes the few seconds before Homer scares it away. What happens next is probably the strangest moment in the episode: as Homer and Bart celebrate their recording, Nimoy closes the book and wraps up the story, "And so, from this simple man came the proof that we are not alone in the universe. I'm Leonard Nimoy. Good night." The nameless, pimple-faced teenager, one of the stock characters on *The Simpsons*, who is apparently working on the set,[480] informs him that they still have ten minutes left, but Nimoy awkwardly excuses himself and drives away.

Without any further explanation, the scene cuts back to the Simpson home, where the alien footage is shown on the news and the people of Springfield start gathering for its next appearance. The whole town has come together in the forest the next Friday night, Mulder and Scully are back, and in another weird twist, Leonard Nimoy leaves his frame position and joins the crowd.[481] When the alien returns, it is revealed to actually be Mr. Burns, heavily doped after his regular Friday night, life-prolonging medical treatment, and radiating a "healthy green glow" acquired from working in a nuclear power plant his whole life. Now that the mystery is solved, the whole crowd, including Mulder, Scully, Nimoy, and Chewbacca, starts singing a song, the story is over, and the book is closed once again. This time, however, the pimple-faced teenager pretends to be Leonard Nimoy and finishes the narration: "And so concludes our tale. I'm Leonard Nimoy. Good night, and keep watching the skis… uh, skies."

So, what do we make of this episode? Is it evidence that at that point *The Simpsons* had finally sold its soul in order to allow FOX to cross-advertise two of its most successful shows? Is it just a misplaced Halloween episode, as fans argue on the Internet?[482] Is it an experiment designed to test whether or not the show does still work if it abandons the narrative patterns that made it big in the first place? Or is it an episode that is less concerned with telling a story than with uncovering the processes of TV entertainment? I would argue that the latter two options seem to be the most convincing ones if we accept the frame narrative as the defining structural device of the episode. The choice of *In Search of…* as intertextual meta-structure is actually perfect to establish the mood for what is going to happen: just as *In*

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[480] The pimple-faced teenager is the character who shows up whenever the series needs someone to take over all the low jobs nobody else wants, e.g., at Krusty Burgers, the cinema, or the video game arcade.

[481] That Nimoy can visit Springfield makes sense, since he comes as the real life actor, and not as, for example, Spock. It is already his second appearance after a longer stay in "Marge vs. the Monorail" (EP 4-12), in which his identity is mixed with his *Star Trek* past, however, when he is beamed out at the end of the episode. See also Rauscher 112.

[482] See http://www.snpp.com/episodes/3G01.html (as visited on Mar. 21st, 2010).

Search of… maintained a carefully balanced mixture of documentary appeal and dramatization, its imitation now supplies the conditions in which the closed reality of *The Simpsons* can meet the fictional realities of *The X-Files*, *Star Wars*, its own Halloween episodes, etc. Since there is a narrator who defines the story as fictional, everything is true and false at the same time, but this does not even matter as long as the story is entertaining. As long as the frame narrative is coherent in itself, anything that happens in the story makes sense.

Things are getting more complicated, however, when the frame narrative dissolves, too, and the two levels of the episode mix. Leonard Nimoy, external omniscient narrator, enters the main plot, and the pimple-faced kid, who does not belong to the world of *In Search of…*, but to the cosmos of Springfield, replaces him. Thus, after two thirds of the episode, the narrative experiment is taken to the next level as the somewhat coherent logic of the first 15 minutes crumbles and all the texts involved intermingle. When *The Simpsons*, *Star Wars*, *The X-Files*, and *In Search of…* join hands for the final celebration, all borders have disintegrated and the texts have become part of a single, all-encompassing intertextual entity.

Yet, what comes as a bit of a surprise is that the ending actually works: when the pimply teenager closes the book, the audience feels that everything has been resolved and that all things considered, the episode made perfect sense. Fan reactions to the crossover were generally rather positive, with many naming it as the best episode of the season. Only eight months later, the episode "The Principal and the Pauper" (as analyzed in subchapter 3.2.1) earned devastating reviews for jeopardizing the show's coherence, for messing around with an established character, and for awkwardly wrapping up a hopelessly tangled plot. The main difference between the two episodes is that in "The Springfield Files," the frame narrative earmarks the episode as an experiment, even if it later becomes part of the experiment itself. Given the episode's positive impact, it is a logical consequence that in later seasons frame narratives became something of a standard solution for introducing largely intertextual plots and for testing other narrative approaches than the family sitcom realism that determined most of the earlier seasons.[483]

Despite the positive outcome of the many unexpected narrative twists in "The Springfield Files," however, the episode also communicates a certain criticism of the values that determine the practices in the television business. Nimoy's initial remarks can without a doubt be understood as an ironic warning about the story that follows. The crossover of the two programs requires *The Simpsons* to forfeit what has been considered its "truth" before; instead, it becomes an accomplice in lies, in obvious fiction that disclaims realism. More openly than previous episodes, "The Springfield Files" sacrifices the integrity of the *Simpsons* universe in order to open the doors for the machinery of the television market. But this is tel-

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[483] Frame narrative episodes that followed "The Springfield Files" are, for example, "The Simpsons Spin-Off Showcase" (EP 8-24), "Simpsons Bible Stories" (EP 10-18), "Simpsons Tall Tales" (EP 12-21), and "Tales from the Public Domain" (EP 13-14).

evision, television is entertainment, so what do we expect? Is entertainment not the real truth? The answer could be yes, but on *The Simpsons*, it is not. Throughout the series, the producers communicate an antipathy with regard to the workings of commercial television, and they meta-reflexively assess the way matters of distribution and sales affect their product. In the next subchapter, I will analyze the role of intertextuality in this process more closely.

3.4.3   Reflection on Distribution Methods

What surprised many fans and critics was how smoothly the crossover with *The X-Files* happened and how little artistic tension arose among the creative staff from the crass breaches with the series' inner logic. Only two years earlier, the episode "A Star is Burns" (EP 6-18) had caused major disharmonies between Matt Groening and producer James L. Brooks, and had once again highlighted Groening's aversion to the rules and processes of commercial television. The episode involves a prominent crossover with the short-lived animated series *The Critic*, which was created by the *Simpsons* writers and executive producers Al Jean and Mike Reiss, and was also produced by Brooks. The series follows the life and work of film critic Jay Sherman, and went on the air with moderate ratings first on ABC and later on FOX. Brooks and the creators decided to take advantage of *The Simpsons'* popularity and planned an episode that would advertise *The Critic*. As a plot link, Springfield hosts a film festival, and since Marge and Lisa enjoy Sherman's show on television, they invite him to preside over the jury. Sherman accepts the offer and stays at the Simpson home, where his sophisticated wit and belching abilities immediately impress everyone.

Matt Groening, however, was less impressed and tried to stop production of the episode, arguing that the crossover violates the series universe of *The Simpsons*, and, more personally, that people would associate him with *The Critic*. When Brooks refused to cancel the episode, Groening went public with his criticism and had his name erased from the episode credits.[484] The episode itself, however, actually works surprisingly well, and was greeted by mixed reviews, ranging from the common "worst episode ever" to very favorable assessments.[485]

Criticism mainly aimed at the fact that *The Simpsons* would cede its integrity in order to help sell another show, while the narrative bending required for integrating another fictional text into the show did not stand out as a negative feature. This ambivalence is also expressed in the plot of the episode: while no changes were made to the narrative pattern and Sherman was treated like a regular *Simpsons* character, one particular scene voiced some

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[484] See Ernst/Werkmeister 100, and Turner 378.

[485] See, for example, the comments on http://www.snpp.com/episodes/2F31.html (as visited on Jul. 23rd, 2010).

explicit rejection of the crossover practice. Shortly before Bart meets Sherman for the first time, he watches the trailer for a *The Flintstones meet The Jetsons* feature on television. He mumbles, "Uh-uh, I smell another cheap cartoon crossover," and Jay Sherman enters the room. Bart jumps up and tells him, "Hey man, I really love your show. I think all kids should watch it… uuh, I suddenly feel so dirty!" Bart's comments become a meta-reflexive voice of reason in an episode that, while being aware of the commercial decisions that motivate its unusual existence, still has to give in to the forces that determine the distribution of the show. Even although *The Simpsons* is probably one of the shows most independent from networks' influence, it is still liable to financial considerations and distribution methods.

Throughout the series, *The Simpsons* has had to cope with the paradox of being dependent on (and extremely successful in) a system of commercial media structures it actually despises or at least continuously questions. When Matt Groening expresses his skepticism towards the entertainment and information qualities of television, he certainly speaks for many members of the staff, who have repeatedly used the show to voice their alienation with common TV practices:

> For me, it's not enough to be aware that most television is bad and stupid and pernicious. I think, "What can I do about it?" […] I feel a bit like a fish trying to analyze its own aquarium water, but what I want to do is point out the way TV is unconsciously structured to keep us all distracted […and] what I'm trying to do – in the guise of light entertainment, if that's possible – is nudge people, jostle them a little, wake them up to some of the ways in which we're being manipulated and exploited (qtd. in Gray 48).

In his book *Watching with The Simpsons*, Jonathan Gray devotes a whole chapter to analyzing "the logic of television and ad parody" (69). He convincingly describes how television programming is designed to generate as much attention to advertising as possible, and how viewing practices are determined by this structure. The fragmentation of plots and information causes the viewer to get accustomed to a fragmented mode of reception, too: a televised text is chopped into little pieces that are – in extreme cases – reduced to clips that in length and composition resemble commercials. Gray provides several examples of how *The Simpsons* ironically comments on how commercials are designed to sell everything, how they influence the programs they are surrounded by, and how they interact with the audience.

One of the most cynical spots appears in the episode "Sunday, Cruddy Sunday" (EP 10-12): in a Super Bowl commercial, a man drives up to a lonely gas station in a Southwest desert. When he honks for service, upbeat rock music starts playing, and three scantily clad women surround his car and sexily perform the cleaning and refilling services. As the camera zooms in on one of the ladies' cleavages, it shows a cross on her necklace, and a voice over announces, "The Catholic Church – We've made a few changes." As one of the last bastions of chaste conservatism gives in to the *sex sells* formula, it becomes obvious that advertising has turned into one of the major forces that determine how we see the world

around us. In advertising, it is possible to create apparently logical connections (attractive, lascivious women = Catholic Church) where none exist, and formerly seminal moral codes lose their impact once it becomes necessary to go with the flow in order to survive as a sellable product.

The content of commercials, however, affects *The Simpsons* only indirectly, and its mockery can be understood as a part of the series' general media awareness and satire. The way ads penetrate other texts, on the other hand, has an immediate impact on every episode that is broadcasted on commercial television. The episode "And Maggie Makes Three" (EP 6-13) ironically prepares the commercial break with a satirical pinch disguised as normal conversation: Homer and Marge tell their children the story of Maggie's birth, but when one of the flashbacks comes to an end, Bart and Lisa are leaving the room. When their parents want to know where they are going, Bart explains, "Dad, you can't expect a person to sit for thirty minutes straight," and Lisa adds, "I'm gonna get a snack and maybe go to the bathroom." Marge seizes the chance to think about products she might like to purchase, thus giving away the real purpose of the break that is about to follow. On television, this scene actually precedes the commercial break of the episode; as a result, it virtually undermines the impact of the ads that followed. The ironic introduction of the commercial block simultaneously criticises how the fragmented structure of television programming affects the viewers' ability to focus and thwarts the sales goal of the oncoming clips: at least for this time, the idea that a desire to buy certain products arises from watching specifically composed narratives will hardly become reality.[486]

Nevertheless, just as the Simpson family is conditioned to arrange their viewing habits around the narrative rhythm of commercial television, the producers of the show realize that it is the triangular combination of advertisement content, advertisement distribution, and the audience's responsiveness to advertising messages that is finally responsible for the shape commercial TV programming appears in. Despite all the media literacy the individual members of the Simpsons seem to have gained in their postmodern environment, they still are just as receptive to product placement messages as any other potential consumer. In a segment of the seventh season Halloween special called "The Attack of the 50 Ft Eyesores," the role of the audience receives the attention it deserves when Springfield's giant advertising characters and corporate mascots come to life after an electrical storm.[487] The citizens stand by staring in awe as the plastic monsters ravage the town and eat people alive. It takes them a while to figure out that the mascots will die as soon as no-one pays attention to them anymore. In his wrap-up report, Kent Brockman warns the viewers that "the scourge of advertising could be heading toward your town. Lock your doors. Bar your windows. Because

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[486] See Gray 84.

[487] See also Ernst/Werkmeister 78, and Gray 81.

the next advertisement you see could destroy your house and eat your family." At that moment, Homer puts his head directly into the camera and addresses the audience, "We'll be right back." Now the future is up to the viewer – will we continue watching as commercials shape the way we perceive our surroundings, or will we turn off and withdraw the attention they need to survive?

It seems that once again the viewers hold the final power to change the texts that constitute their media environment, but is this really a type of power that can be executed, or has it long ago turned into dependency? In the highly meta-reflexive episode "Missionary: Impossible" (EP 11-15), the power of the audience and of the media clash in an intensity that exceeds the previous examples, and the intertextual references that set the stage for this battle leave no space for the realistic fictional world of the early seasons. Homer watches an awful British sitcom called "Do Shut Up" on PBS, the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service, a non-profit public television network founded in 1970 as an economically independent alternative to the big private TV stations. In contrast to the other networks, which commonly earn most of their money from advertising, PBS is largely financed from federal sources, state or local taxes, and fees the member stations pay, but it also heavily relies on private grants and donations. As a consequence, many PBS programs are occasionally interrupted to provide time slots for so-called "pledge drives," fundraising shows that ask the viewers to donate money by phone or via the Internet. Although this financing approach enables PBS to broadcast almost commercial-free programs, the pledge drives still result in fragmented shows and lengthy diversions that generally annoy many viewers.

Therefore, when "Do Shut Up" is interrupted and a telethon host and actress Betty White go on and on about the ten thousand dollars needed to reach the funding goal before the show can continue, Homer cannot stand to wait any longer and donates the money, hoping to stay anonymous so that he will never actually have to pay. Unfortunately, PBS uses a tracking device, and within minutes, the "Pledge Enforcement Van" drives up to the Simpsons' house. Homer explains to the crowd of PBS people that "[i]t's an honor to give ten thousand dollars, especially now, when the rich mosaic of cable programming has made public television so very, very unnecessary." Of course, he does not really want to pay and ends up being chased by an angry crowd that includes not only Betty White and PBS TV host Fred Rogers, but also the *Teletubbies*, several characters from *Sesame Street*, and the fictional cast of "Do Shut Up."

In one of the most unlikely plot twists in the history of *The Simpsons*, Homer seeks shelter with Springfield's church and is sent to a tropical island as a missionary. He builds a casino for the natives, gets them addicted to gambling, redeems himself by building a church, and causes a volcanic eruption when he strikes the bell in the steeple. Tension builds as he and a little native girl he calls Lisa Junior (she even has Lisa's voice) tumble

towards a stream of molten lava – but then Betty White interrupts this show, too: "Oh, that Homer! Always getting into trouble! And if you're one of the millions who enjoys his adventures, or should I say, misadventures, it's time to show your support."

The camera then moves over two rows of FOX stars waiting by their telephones to receive the pledge calls, including the animated characters Hank Hill from *King of the Hill*, Bender from *Futurama*, and Thurgood Stubbs from *The PJs*, plus the animated doubles of Mulder and Scully, Luke Perry, and FOX-owner Rupert Murdoch himself. The telethon co-host from the beginning of the episode walks in and explains, "Sure, FOX makes a fortune from advertising but it's still not enough," and Murdoch bawls, "Not nearly enough!" Betty White moves towards a screen that shows the *Family Guy* title logo and threatens, "So, if you don't want to see crude, low-brow programming disappear from the airwaves, please, call now." Then, Murdoch's phone rings as the first donor calls, and he jubilates, "Ten thousand dollars? You've saved my network!" The scene cuts to Bart on the phone back at the Simpson home, who smiles at the camera and replies, "Wouldn't be the first time."

From the very beginning, it is evident that this episode is hardly about Homer visiting a Pacific island, but about television financing. In contrast to "The Springfield Files," which still tried to establish at least the illusion of a logical narrative frame for its meta-reflexive content, "Missionary: Impossible" abolishes these limitations altogether and sets out to consciously treat *The Simpsons* like what it is – a TV show. The episode investigates the complex relationship between the power of the media and the power of the audience. In the first half, Homer represents a regular viewer who has made a connection with a TV show. He has initially used his power of taste to pick one program over others, and by tuning in, he has given it the right to stay on the air. Now that their relation has been established and Homer has been "hooked" to the series, power switches to the media text and to the broadcasting network, who can demand certain payments for the service they provide. These payments can either consist of abstract characteristics, such as the willingness to accept and respond to commercial breaks and their content, or of actual monetary contributions through fees or donations, as in the present case.

Homer is torn between the desire to return to a program he has come to love and the refusal of the need to pay for the service he receives. The pseudo-compromise he chooses – to pretend to pay and just go on receiving the service – is of course bound to fail, and he painfully has to learn what many viewers tend to forget: TV entertainment costs large amounts of money to produce, and it is neither fair nor possible for the viewers to profit from it without charges. However, when he explains that commercial programming makes publicly funded television unnecessary, he voices an opinion that many other viewers probably share. The audience has become accustomed to the omnipresence of advertisements and regards them as the lesser evil if compared to actually having to pay for television. They are willing to

deal with many manipulative nuisances as long as they can further enjoy a service that does not seem to cost them anything. When Homer refuses to pay, he symbolically experiences the viewer's nightmare: the characters of his favorite show not only haunt him as he cannot watch them on TV any longer, they virtually enter his world and chase him down, demanding the payment they earned during long hours of entertaining him.

The transformation that follows happens without the viewers' knowledge (at least as far as first-time viewers are concerned), since Homer's missionary journey to the tropics seems to turn out as a far-fetched plot that allows the characters to visit yet another exotic setting. The PBS opening of the episode appears to be merely an intertextual, media-critical trigger for the main plot. What the viewers do not immediately see, however, is that Homer secretly leaves his symbolic role as a viewer and becomes the protagonist of a media text instead. He basically enters another world, a parallel universe where another Lisa exists, a kind of exotic spin-off of his suburban life where he can experience new episodes. His adventure on the island is so absurd and fabricated that it actually works like a caricature of the other surrealistic *Simpsons* episodes that caused so much criticism in fan circles.

Nevertheless, just when the viewers have prepared themselves to tear another awkward story to pieces, the second pledge interruption really comes as a surprise. This pledge is no longer about PBS, but about FOX, and the role *The Simpsons* plays for its network. The ending of the episode within two minutes miraculously changes the audience's mood from a critical "what-have-they-done-to-it" attitude to a deep appreciation of what the series has achieved for the FOX network *and* for TV entertainment. The line-up of series that are in need of money and waiting for viewers to call is not made up of failures, but includes some of FOX' most successful shows; still, they are all outshone by the long-term success and revenues of *The Simpsons*. In a way, the show pays for itself: when Homer's adventure is interrupted, his own son bails him out and guarantees that his story will go on – and along the way saves the network and all the other shows that, from a slightly megalomaniac perspective, may depend on it.

Thereby, the episode becomes a powerful statement in favor of the high quality the show has sustained for years: it has not only managed to combine entertainment with intelligent philosophy, but also to be a long-term success in an environment that does not necessarily foster intelligent philosophy in its constant chase for ever more money. In the end, the message is clear that *The Simpsons* is not "crude, low-brow programming,"[488] but intelligent, self- and meta-reflexive entertainment that is able to analyze its own position in a changing environment and adapt accordingly.

Some of the episodes discussed above already indicated that it has not always been easy to maintain this quality in a medium that knows only one major goal – making money.

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[488] The claim that *Family Guy* is crude, low-brow programming might be worth some re-consideration, too.

The creators of *The Simpsons* have consciously accompanied the development of their product and commented on how television has tried to subject it to its revenue-generating or life-prolonging measures. They refrained from adding characters to meet decreasing audience numbers, they tried to avoid jeopardizing its narrative integrity for the purpose of advertising other products, they stressed the importance of good script writing, and they played hardball to prevent FOX from gaining too much influence on the show. All these struggles, however, have been fought along a thin red line between risking the show's economic success and risking its artistic achievements, and in the course of its history, the *Simpsons* team has voiced its uncertainty about the show's future in several episodes. For the remainder of this subchapter, I will analyze one further episode that investigates what can happen to a good show when the financial concerns of television finally get the upper hand.

"The Simpsons Spin-Off Showcase" (EP 8-24) goes beyond the Poochie incident in its depiction of what television networks are willing to do in order to squeeze a show for what little money might be left in it. Instead of opening with the regular credits, the first shot of the episode shows B-movie actor Troy McClure walking the halls of a museum past large posters of several spin-off series, including *Fish*, *The Ropers*, and *Laverne & Shirley*. He blurts out, "Spin-off! Is there any word more thrilling to the human soul? […] I'm here at the Museum of TV and Television with a real treat for *Simpsons* fans – if any – because tonight we present, 'The Simpsons Spin-Off Showcase!'" After an alternative opening trailer he goes on to explain that the network has approached the *Simpsons* team with a request for 35 new shows "to fill a few holes in their programming line-up." He presents a program schedule that exhibits question marks in all time slots except for the slots reserved for *The Simpsons*, *The X-Files*, and *Melrose Place*. McClure admits that the producers did not accomplish what was asked of them, but instead "churned out three *Simpsons* spin-offs, transplanting already popular characters into new locales and situations."

The first new series, "Chief Wiggum, P.I.," teams up Wiggum and Principal Skinner as crime fighters in New Orleans, and spoofs the never-extinct television genre of the police action drama. In the tradition of shows such as *Magnum, P.I.* and *Miami Vice*, Wiggum and Skinner are supposed to believably transport characters established and fleshed out on *The Simpsons* into an alternative backdrop and an entirely different genre,[489] which is of course bound to fail: Wiggum as notoriously inapt policeman is entirely useless when it comes to solving crimes, and Skinner as "Skinny Boy, man-on-the-street," is probably the worst-cast Don Johnson rip-off in TV history, even despite his hastily grown three-day stubble imitation. They awkwardly set out to solve their first case, but the weakly written wisecracks and far-fetched turns of the plot immediately give away the "lackadaisical and uninspired" (Sloane

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[489] Rauscher describes how this spin-off not only mocks the concept of spin-offs as such, but also mimics several other crime series (131).

155) nature of their endeavors. In accordance with McClure's initial remark that the spin-offs have been "churned out," the show meets the worst expectations and adduces evidence that the producers half-heartedly tried to earn a few extra dollars by feeding off another show's success.

Nevertheless, in a crossover that by far exceeds the unpleasantness of the crossover with *The Critic*, the Simpson family shows up for the mandatory "parent" appearance and tries to give the spin-off a boost. Ironically, Lisa, who usually sees through the manipulative workings of business affairs, holds a little marketing speech: "Chief Wiggum, I can't wait to hear about all the exciting, sexy adventures you're sure to have against this colorful backdrop." Her blunt enumeration of the keywords that are supposed to generate interest in the offshoot foreshadow Wiggum's comment when his new arch-enemy is getting away at the end of the pilot episode, which finally reveals the cheap, repetitive formula that is intended to inspire plot after plot with minimum effort and maximum profits: "Ah, let him go. I have a feeling we'll meet again each and every week – always in more sexy and exciting ways."

The second segment is, if possible, even more ridiculous: the sitcom parody "The Love-Matic Grampa" employs all the sitcom clichés *The Simpsons* tries to avoid. Moe the bartender leaves the show to have his own series that circles around the wasteland of his love life. As his main sidekick, however, he does not take Barney with him, but the ghost of the recently deceased Grampa Simpson, who now inhabits the love-testing machine at Moe's bar. The show features a taped audience that laughs at the most inappropriate moments – for example when Moe sighs that he is "so desperately lonely" – and ecstatically hollers when a famous guest star like Homer comes to visit. The truly awful, upbeat, high-spirited opening theme explains how Grampa got lost on the way to heaven, replaces any kind of characterization process, and immediately reduces the potential topics of the series to the love-related verbal battles between Moe and the wise machine. The visual composition imitates the three-camera setup usually used in sitcoms, and the "actors" repeatedly address the audience directly when they wink at the camera or comment on the action in other ways.

The wacky narrative premise of a supernaturally animated object follows the tradition of such short-lived sitcom experiments like *My Mother the Car*, and by contrast highlights the importance of realism for the emotional truthfulness and sociocultural relevance of *The Simpsons*. The utterly humorless, non-romantic story and the desperately unfunny jokes become even worse due to the artificial audience's inadequate reactions, and by default, the positive qualities of *The Simpsons* are pulled to the fore and remind the viewers that it does not have to fear competition from more stereotypical sitcoms.[490]

The final spin-off, "The Simpson Family Smile-time Variety Hour," then illustrates the worst thing that could have happened to *The Simpsons* if it had gone the way of many other

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[490] See also Sloane 156.

popular TV shows. According to McClure, the new show provides the Simpson family with an opportunity to present the full range of their talents, yet one member refused to participate. Nevertheless, McClure is certain that "thanks to some creative casting, you won't even notice." Just like the cast of *The Brady Bunch*, the Simpsons (minus Lisa, but plus "Lisa," a sporty, blond teenager) move into their own live variety show that parodies several programs in the style of the 70s, such as *Laugh-In* and *Saturday Night Live*.

Straight from *Laugh-In*, the show opens with Kent Brockman announcing the cast from inside a broadcast booth while a clock on the wall behind his back shows the time when the segment actually went on the air for the first time, thus creating the impression that it is actually "live."[491] What follows is a series of sketches and sing-and-dance numbers that once again try to support lame jokes with the controlled audience's help and sacrifice moral and social concerns for superficial entertainment. The Variety Hour shoots off a collage of elements tried out in various comedy shows in the course of TV history, from guest stars to sparkling, colorful settings, to predictable wordplays, to meta-commentaries intended to let bad jokes appear "consciously bad." All the ingredients basically serve one goal: just like "The Love-Matic Grampa," it presents all kinds of comedy commonplaces that were once considered to be funny, but lose what little spirit they had once they are compared to the humor that flourishes in a regular *Simpsons* episode.[492]

The final musical act then reveals what seems to be the producers' main anxiety with regard to the show's quality, as the Simpsons assemble in an ice cream parlor and Marge reads out the newspaper headlines: "Inflation, trade deficits, horrible war atrocities… how are we supposed to do our big musical number with so many problems in the world?" Fortunately, Homer has found a solution and one thing that is "still pure and good" – candy. He intones the song "I Want Candy" by The Strangeloves, and soon Bart and "Lisa" join in to sing and twist away Marge's worries about society's ills. The connection to real world issues that contributes so crucially to the intelligent entertainment of *The Simpsons* is replaced with "information that is sweet and goes down easy, not something that is troubling and ethically difficult" (Sloane 159). The cynical song self-reflexively underscores how far *The Simpsons* has come from the happy-go-lucky ancestors of television comedy, but it also stresses that it has developed into a major cultural force by going against the grain of much other contemporary television content.

When the variety segment is over, Troy McClure ends the spin-off case and returns to "the show that started it all." Marveling how it is possible to keep *The Simpsons* fresh and funny after so many years, he offers a few glimpses at what the next season will hold in stock: "magic powers" (Homer turns Lisa into a frog), "wedding after wedding after wedding"

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[491] Sloane mentions this fine-tuned reference (158).

[492] Rauscher also views this episode as an attempt to theoretically act out the potential fates of *The Simpsons* as a commercial television show (132).

(Selma marries Lenny, Bumblebee Man, and Itchy), and "long-lost triplets" (Bart meets two ethnically varied lookalikes). McClure then cuts to a family snapshot of the Simpsons, in which a small alien suddenly appears: "So join America's favorite TV family, and a tiny green space alien named Ozmodiar that only Homer can see, on FOX this fall. It'll be out of this world!" Ozmodiar bears an astonishing resemblance to "The Great Gazoo," an alien with remarkable powers that was added to the cast of *The Flintstones* to revive the series' spirit in what was to become its last year, and that only Fred and some other characters could see. So, as the eighth season approaches its ending, has *The Simpsons* reached a point where only the standard procedures of TV resuscitation can carry it through another season that is worth the money its production costs?

Luckily, we now know that none of the adumbrated events actually came true in season nine, but they serve as a grim reminder of what mediocre TV writing and network business decisions can result in. In face of the severe criticism that was building up among the fans of the show around the seventh and eighth season, the selection of cheap spin-offs and the unsettling glance into the future provided in "The Simpsons Spin-Off Showcase" deliver an impressive pleading in favor of the efforts the producers of *The Simpsons* have put into preventing their show from going down the hill like many other television texts have. The change towards more meta-reflexive types of humor and plot writing may have been the price to pay for a refusal to participate in the regular mechanisms of the TV product life cycle. Instead of giving in to the temptation of trying out all the usual television formulae for continued success and stable revenues – new characters, unexpected turns in the established characters' lives, cross advertising, spin-offs, etc. – *The Simpsons* has subdued its own medium and its own status as a medial text as new sources of inspiration for intelligent humor and further adventures. Its intertextual awareness of the fates other shows met when they experienced the rising influence of economic factors and TV network plans caused it to metareflexively prefigure its own potential fates before they could actually become reality. In one of the strangest episodes of the series, the VH1-documentary parody "Behind the Laughter" (EP 11-23), the creators even examined what could have happened to their series if it had not been animated and the "actors" had experienced all the tragedies we expect from human stars, such as drug problems, bad financial decisions, creative conflicts, and personal animosities.

In the end, however, *The Simpsons* generates the most relevant meta-reflexive moments when it regards itself as what it is: an animated sitcom that needs to maintain the balance between pleasing a mainstream audience, pleasing television network officials, and pleasing the staff's own artistic ambitions. Episodes like "Missionary: Impossible" and "The Simpsons Spin-Off Showcase" more or less openly abandon any pretense to fictional integrity; they break through the barrier that in other episodes separates Springfield from the world

where viewers watch Springfield. They investigate the conditions that largely determine the way the stories from Springfield reach our real world screens, and by testing alternatives, they generate respect for how stubbornly *The Simpsons* has followed its path despite the obstacles commercial television puts in the way of intelligent – or even intellectual – entertainment. The analysis of economic and medial conditions is also always a word of rebuke to those fans who expected better or different things from the show and voiced their disappointment clearly and sometimes offendingly over the Internet and elsewhere. The complicated relationship between *The Simpsons* and its audience will be at the center of the final subchapter.

3.4.4   Reflection on Audience Reception

David L.G. Arnold claims that "[w]e can learn a lot about ourselves by watching *The Simpsons* watch television" ("Culture" 1), and the various episodes discussed in the previous subchapters should convince us to agree. Even those meta-reflexive comments that primarily aim at the conditions of production, narration, and distribution of *The Simpsons* still often implicitly involve the audience as a decisive factor in the show's environment. If cartoons need to move towards more action-based plots, if they feel the pressure to add new characters or try out alternative narrative patterns, they first and foremost respond to shifts in the viewing habits and desires of the audience. Similarly, the meta-reflexive analysis of advertising, pay-TV, and other outgrowths of commercial television also inevitably consider the viewers' reactions to the respective media structure. As a consequence, the masses of "normal" viewers indirectly influence many of the show's characteristics and constitute the research laboratory in which ingredients are tested for their relevance, new directions are tried out, and the successful balance of entertainment, education, and criticism is rearranged again and again.

However, two groups of viewers stand out in the crowd and have been addressed and analyzed to a larger extent: children and aficionados. Both groups have in common that their reactions to *The Simpsons* have generated considerable feedback from the show's creators, media critics, and all sorts of social commentators. In contrast to the rather faceless masses of other viewers, both children wearing Bart T-shirts or imitating his catch phrases, and hardcore fans posting their opinion on the Internet have made a lasting impression on the public mind and on the people who are responsible for the product that motivated these visible reactions. Throughout the preceding chapters, the audience has continuously functioned as one of the corners in the triangle of intertextual signifying processes; together, creators, texts, and recipients have made it possible for intertextual references to develop the various functions described above. In this final subchapter, I want to return to the audience –

mainly represented in the two groups of peculiar recipients – and examine the way *The Simpsons* expresses its view of the relation to its viewers through intertextuality.

As early as the second season, the producers of *The Simpsons* decided to review the show's impact on children, and considering the mixed reactions bordering on a cultural war resulting from the "Bart-mania" of the early 90s, it is easy to understand why they felt the urge to vindicate their product. While more and more children and teenagers were discovering *The Simpsons* as a pool of signifiers suitable for voicing their own concerns, various authorities – schools, churches, politicians – also discovered that the show played an important role in the youths' lives, but predominantly expected it to undermine social agreements and moral codes.[493] Requests to ban *Simpsons* merchandise from school property and to cancel the show altogether testified to a growing fear of its negative influence on more impressionable viewers.

The producers' prompt reply came in "Itchy & Scratchy & Marge" (EP 2-9), the first episode in a long line of self-reflexive assessments that use the cartoon-in-the-cartoon to analyze aspects of *The Simpsons*. After watching one of the conventionally cruel "Itchy & Scratchy" episodes, the baby Maggie seems to have developed the wrong ideas about the consequences of violence and hits Homer over the head with a mallet. A little later, the family gathers in the living room to figure out why she might have acted that way. Maggie watches another episode in which Itchy attacks Scratchy with a kitchen knife, and she immediately turns around, grabs a pencil, and tries to stab her father. Homer, his head thickly bandaged, shies away in panic, and Marge concludes, "So television's responsible."

Close-ups that show Maggie glued to the television set and mesmerized by the things she sees seem to support Marge's reasoning, so she does not allow her children to watch cartoons anymore, and decides to take action against the producers of such violence-encouraging programs. When her letter of complaint fails to impress the executives at Itchy & Scratchy Int., she initiates public protest marches and participates in TV discussions about the controversial topic. Still, people do not take her seriously and brush away her concerns by pointing out that there was violence long before cartoons were invented, and that there are more severe psychological problems that are responsible for violent behavior. Nevertheless, her crusade motivates thousands of worried parents to write threatening letters to Itchy & Scratchy Int., and before long, they have no other choice but to erase the violent imagery from the show.

In their essay about the meta-analytical functions of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show," Martin Butler and Arvi Sepp convincingly argue that the cultural struggle between Marge and "the media" consciously simplifies the complex interdependencies of violence, representations of violence, their intra- and intertextual relations, and the social and personal context of

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[493] See also Sloane 143.

reception and appropriation in order to imitate the line of argumentation that prevails in many discourses dealing with violent and allegedly violence-encouraging cartoons (and other texts of popular culture).[494] All arguments that ask for further evidence and the abundant examples of children who do not act violently after watching cartoons ricochet off the reduced formula "baby does what baby sees," and soon Bart and Lisa have to watch the first "Itchy & Scratchy" episode that has been produced under Marge's supervision. Cat and mouse peacefully share a pitcher of lemonade and assure each other of their deep friendship. Unfortunately, this positive message does not impress the young viewers too much – according to Bart, "it sucks!" What follows is just as exaggerated as Maggie's reaction to cartoon violence: Maggie brings Homer a glass of lemonade, and the children of Springfield, bored by the new harmony television has to offer, turn their backs on TV, wipe their eyes, and step out into the sunlit world that lies behind their living room walls. They skate, jump, run, frolic around in a perfect idyll of a childhood without television; kids fly kites, throw Frisbees, and play with marbles in a green, suburban paradise; in a scene that evokes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and with it the ideals of an American childhood in the great outdoors, boys queue up to paint a fence.[495] The ironic inversion of Marge's worries about the impressionable youth towards an audience that uniformly changes for the best and creates a media-free Utopia is just another crack in her oversimplified theory.[496]

In the end, however, the reputation of cartoons needs to be restored, and the episode achieves this by elevating them to the status of an art form. When an exhibit tour brings Michelangelo's statue of *David* to Springfield, the conservative hardliners expect Marge to lead the protest against the supposedly offending "full frontal nudity." She reveals that she regards the sculpture as a masterpiece, and in another TV talk show, she has to admit that it is hardly justifiable to censor one form of art and let another follow its inspiration freely just because of the taste of certain subgroups of the population. Now that the protest has faded, "Itchy & Scratchy" returns to its old content and the children abandon their outdoor play in order to watch cartoons again. Deserted playing grounds and treehouses stand against a bleak sky as life scurries back into the television twilight.

Although the children are at the center of this conflict, at first sight they appear to be passive victims of the forces that determine their environment. Like marionettes, they seem to let the media and their parents control their behavior, as if they did not have a choice how to spend their time as long as entertaining cartoons are on the air to hypnotize them. Firstly, however, this fatalistic perspective is undermined by the highly ironic juxtaposition of television/apathy/violence vs. sunlight/activity/harmony. The division of the children's options into

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[494] Butler/Sepp 368.
[495] Savage 203.
[496] See also Butler/Sepp 370, and Klein 43.

good and evil blurs the perfectly legitimate middle course: they could simply spend some time watching TV, some time playing outdoors, and neither would cause unmotivated violent behavior. Secondly, the episode contains several indicators that the children – in contrast to their parents – have acquired a media literacy that enables them to analyze the shows they watch and elaborate on the impact they have on their own lives.

A skillfully implemented reference to Hitchcock's *Psycho* plays an important role in the almost secret development of an opposite position to Marge's point of view. When Maggie lifts her arms to hit her father, the aforementioned suspenseful violin theme of the shower scene swells up. As he loses consciousness, Homer grabs a canvas that looks like a shower curtain, pulls it off his work bench, and knocks over a can of red paint. The paint runs into a drain in the floor. The camera zooms in on the drain, switches to a close-up of Homer's eye, and then zooms out again to catch an overview of the whole crime scene. This detailed re-construction clothes Maggie's act of aggression in the pace and visual style of a classic me-dia murder. A few moments later, when Maggie tries to stab Homer with a pencil, the charac-teristic music sets in again.

But why does *Psycho* serve as a model, and not the episode of "Itchy & Scratchy" that has just finished and apparently triggered the whole incident? The message implied here is quite in line with other arguments uttered in the course of the episode: there has always been violence, in plays, novels, movies, on television, and in the real world. Just as *Psycho* did not result in hundreds of shower murders, a cartoon does not simply cause violent behav-ior.[497] Instead, cartoons and other cultural texts possess a cathartic potential that enables the recipients to approach the frustrations and aggressions of their lives from a detached point of view and develop skills that help them to deal with the resulting emotions. When Marge stops her children from watching "Itchy & Scratchy," Lisa's experience with culture allows her to see the greater connections of media literacy and personal education: "But, mom! If you take our cartoons away, we'll grow up without a sense of humor and be robots."

If we follow her line of argumentation and combine it with the intermedial reference to *Psycho*, Maggie is still going through a certain rite of passage. In her early years, she will have to learn to differentiate between events in the media and in the real world, she will have to develop an understanding of different genres, and she will have to find ways to channel her own aggressions and frustrations – potentially with the help of the cathartic solutions of-fered in cultural texts. Society will help her little if it banishes specific cultural manifestations of the problems that exist in its own structures; instead, it should put all its efforts into mini-mizing the reasons for aggression and frustration in the first place.

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[497] Savage mentions other examples of violent cartoons that allegedly caused children to imitate violent actions (206).

As Butler/Sepp point out, the episode – and its cartoon-in-the-cartoon mirror – thus primarily works as an assessment of different modes of reception: Maggie is too young to abstract from what television shows her, Marge lacks the media literacy to see its educational potential and assumes the one-dimensional perspective of a censor, Homer and Bart indifferently look for entertainment, but Lisa has developed the ability to see through the processes of media texts and separate manipulative content from artistic achievements.[498] In the course of the series, Lisa repeatedly stands out as a self-reflexive media critic and frequently serves as the voice of reason in an environment that usually responds to cultural texts rather ingenuously. She enables the producers to combine a child's perspective with the most mature assessments of media texts, and as a consequence, she constantly tests the quality of their own product.

Moreover, as long as Lisa does not stop analyzing the media around her, related discourses will not stop either. Although "Itchy & Scratchy & Marge" ends on the note that art can do anything if society as a whole just manages to deal with its messages in enlightened ways, the discussion of the potentially negative influence of cartoon violence has not been settled for good. Five season later, in the amusement park movie theater of "Itchy & Scratchy Land" (EP 6-4), Bart and Lisa watch excerpts from the early "Itchy & Scratchy" films "Scratchtasia" and "Pinitchyo," which are both extremely violent parodies of the Disney movies *Fantasia* and *Pinocchio*, respectively.[499] After Itchy has once again poked Scratchy's eye out, Lisa remarks, "I wonder if this kind of violence really does desensitize us?" At this moment, a short-circuited Scratchy robot breaks through the screen, collapses at the bottom of the stage, its head falls off, and fountains of artificial blood spatter the audience. The children do not even notice the havoc and decide to get some ice cream. Once again, "Itchy & Scratchy" represents more than its own history; it reverberates with the history of animation, in general, and its most prominent characters/creators, in particular; and in the end, the questions that arise around "Itchy & Scratchy" will have to be asked with regard to *The Simpsons*, too.

Taken together, the instances that critically examine the impact of cartoons on children's behavior reveal a certain insecurity about the multi-generational appeal of the show: on the one hand, it becomes obvious that the creators believe in the intellectual and educational qualities of their program, and also in the viewers' receptive ability to understand the irony that is meant to soften the blow of many upsetting scenes. On the other hand, they need to be aware of the diversity of their audience and the multitude of possible interpretations that follows from the multitude of individual backgrounds. How could the producers foresee how many children will react to their show like Lisa, or Bart, or Maggie? The impos-

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[498] See pp. 372-373.
[499] See also Klein 29, and Turner 32.

sibility of predicting the influence *The Simpsons* will have on different types of viewers might be one of the main reasons why the producers do not stop to self-reflexively question their own work.

As far as another important group of viewers is concerned, however, it has been comparatively easy to anticipate their reactions. Starting with the very first episodes, fanatic, highly educated fans have eagerly analyzed every imaginable aspect of the show and made their comments public on the Internet. While some have used the discussions in the – by now – countless fan forums as a starting point for thorough academic research about the series,[500] many others have entered into rather personal, emotional relationships with the show and followed its progress with do-or-die perseverance. Because the first seasons of *The Simpsons* provided a form of television entertainment that was, firstly, entirely different from the rest of what TV had to offer and, secondly, an underground voice gone mainstream for the alienated, media-saturated, educated young adults of the early 90s, many enthusiastic viewers quickly developed almost messianic expectations towards its impact on popular culture.

The creators soon realized that they held powerful tools in their hands to secure those frenetic viewers' attention, and steadily increased the number and sophistication of hidden jokes – funny billboards, advertisements, intertextual references – to further fuel a phenomenon that came to be known as "Freeze Frame Fun": fans taped the newly aired episodes, fine-combed them for split-second gags, and shared their findings with like-minded viewers. As more and more citizens were gaining access to the Internet, online news groups and web platforms became the main meeting points for the exchange of *Simpsons*-related trivia, and the numbers of participants quickly skyrocketed. However, since these online analysts also felt a growing public interest in their entries, many of the discussions on the Internet – and apparently also many participants' viewing habits – soon bordered on obsession. As Chris Turner aptly puts it, "[t]here was way more than one guy out there in cyberspace – there were soon millions – and many of them were *Simpsons* nuts, and they were watching each episode *very* closely" (285; his italics).

With expectations soaring during seasons two and three, disappointment was bound to follow as soon as *The Simpsons* started trying out different narrative strategies and examining itself. Soon, the Internet began to hum with harsh criticism about the plot writing, animation, and character development on the show, and before long, the ever more hostile attacks

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[500] The most outstanding example of a research book that feeds off the knowledge accumulated in the online discussions certainly is Chris Turner's massive work *Planet Simpson*. In addition to the two chapters described in detail in chapter 1.4, the book includes chapters about most of the main characters which not only examine the characters' roles in the narrative structure of the show, but also consider their respective impact on popular culture and – through popular culture – on society. Moreover, Turner devotes one chapter each to extensive discussions of the second life of *The Simpsons* on the internet and the representation of the internet on the show, and to international aspects, ranging from the global *Simpsons* merchandise empire to differences in international viewer reception to the depiction of foreigners in the cartoon.

on show and staff culminated in the catch phrase "worst episode ever." Moreover, since Matt Groening and some other staff members admitted that they would occasionally read the commentaries on alt.tv.simpsons, the earliest and most prominent *Simpsons* discussion forum, what started as a platform for the cultural analysis of a most beloved series surprisingly quickly turned into one half of a battlefield of intellectual pride – the other half being the show itself. While the diehard fans posted ever more drastically negative reviews of new episodes, culminating in threats to the writers' health and requests to have staff members fired, and did not tire to unveil mistakes in the series' animation or narrative coherence, the creators more and more often made fun of obsessive fans directly on the show.

In the beginning, the writers' revenge came in the shape of rather gentle pinches, especially in repeated teasers that withheld information which would have been valuable to settle the fan discussions about such persistent questions as whether Smithers is gay or not, or which state Springfield is in. As viewer reactions grew nastier, however, the tone on *The Simpsons* also changed and resulted in more direct attacks on this particular segment of the audience. For example, in the episode "Homer Badman" (EP 6-9), a muckraking infotainment program called "Rock Bottom" airs a highly dramatized, badly investigated documentary that accuses Homer of sexually harassing a babysitter. In the end, the show host has to apologize for the arbitrary allegations, and he also announces a whole list of corrections concerning previous docudramas. The corrections are presented as a fast-scrolling fog of texts racing over the screen. Yet, if fans of the Freeze Frame technique bothered to look closely, they could discern 34 "corrections," including statements like, "If you are reading this, you have no life," and "Everyone on TV is better than you."[501] By hiding these insults in a box that only obsessive fans would open, the producers made sure that they exactly hit the people they were aiming at.

Before long, however, it became obvious that the creators of the show were losing patience with those fans who could never be satisfied and would not stop stressing mistakes and shortcomings instead of the outstanding overall quality of *The Simpsons*. In order to get their disdain out in the open, they once again used the intertextual mirror of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show." The first fierce attack was included in "The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show" (EP 8-14): when Homer has recorded his first episode as the voice of Poochie,[502] he and the voice actress of Itchy and Scratchy, June Bellamy, agree to attend a fan meeting to advertise the renewed show. Not surprisingly, they face a crowd of nerds who know every detail of the series and are eager to show off their superior wisdom:

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[501] For a full-length transcription, see Turner 286.

[502] See subchapter 3.4.1 for a more detailed description of the episode plot.

> *Fan 1:*   In episode 2F09, when Itchy plays Scratchy's skeleton like a xylophone, he strikes the same rib twice in succession, yet he produces two clearly different tones. I mean, what, are we to believe that this is some sort of a magic xylophone or something? Boy, I really hope somebody got fired for that blunder.
>
> *June:*   Uh, well, uh...
>
> *Homer:*   I'll field that one. Let me ask you a question. Why would a man whose shirt says "Genius at Work" spend all of his time watching a children's cartoon show?
>
> *Fan 1:*   [embarrassed pause] I withdraw my question.
>
> *Fan 2:*   Excuse me, Mr. Simpsons, on the "Itchy & Scratchy" CD-ROM, is there a way to get out of the dungeon without using the wizard key?
>
> *Homer:*   What the hell are you talking about?
>
> *June:*   You're a lifesaver, Homer. I can't deal with these hardcore fans!

June and Homer here meet a group of viewers who share many features with the members of alt.tv.simpsons and other *Simpsons* fans of the more fanatic kind: their extreme involvement with the show attests to a deep appreciation that involves interest in its merchandise and an astonishing willingness to spend hours watching and re-watching. Still, this affection is oddly paired with a desire for perfection; good is not good enough, and mistakes or weaknesses are intolerable. "Itchy & Scratchy" (or, for that matter, *The Simpsons*) has raised the bar in the competition of TV shows so noticeably that it is only judged in comparison to its own earlier achievements and is criticized for minor flaws, while other shows might not even be worth watching and receive less praise, but also less drastic scolding.

In addition, the episode includes a significant scene featuring the intertextual, stereotypical stand-in for all obsessive fans, the obese, sarcastic, repulsive, media-manic Comic Book Guy. After Homer's admittedly poor Poochie-episode has hit the airwaves, Bart and the Comic Book Guy exchange their opinions:

> *Comic Book Guy:*   Last night's "Itchy & Scratchy" was, without a doubt, the worst episode ever. Rest assured I was on the Internet within minutes registering my disgust throughout the world.
>
> *Bart:*   Hey, I know it wasn't great, but what right do you have to complain?
>
> *Comic Book Guy:*   As a loyal viewer, I feel they owe me.
>
> *Bart:*   For what? They've given you thousands of hours of entertainment for free. What could they possibly owe you? If anything, you owe them.
>
> *Comic Book Guy:*   [hesitates] ...worst episode ever.

In the course of the series, Comic Book Guy has turned from an supposedly stereotypical comic book store owner into a character who is not only laden with intertextual, pop-cultural knowledge, but who also works as a kind of personified meta-statement about parts

of the audience of *The Simpsons* and about the show's heavily referential nature.[503] Lacking social contact with other human beings, the way he divides his time is entirely determined by the reception of cultural texts, be it a *Dr. Who* marathon (EP 7-15), downloading nude pictures of *Star Trek* crew members (EP 9-14), or browsing his huge collection of illegal videos, which includes such treasured rarities as "Alien Autopsy," "Illegal Alien Autopsy," and a "good version" of *The Godfather – Part III* (EP 12-11), as well as underground cartoons like "Itchy and Scratchy meet *Fritz the Cat*" (EP 7-18). His commitment to popular culture does not stop at passive consumption, however: the texts penetrate his life and send him to *Star Trek* conventions, comic book fairs, and other dubious fan events.

In "Treehouse of Horror X" (EP 11-4), he becomes "The Collector," a psychotic super villain who collects celebrities and stores them in giant plastic protective sheaths. By force, he adds Lucy Lawless, the actress who plays *Xena: Warrior Princess*, to his collection with the intention of marrying her. He demands that on their wedding night, she will have to call him "Obi Wan, Iron Man, Mr. Mxyzptlk [a villain from the *Superman* comic books], and of course, Big Papa Smurf." But even in regular episodes, his personality frequently blends with the characteristics of the heroes he adores, such as Superman, who seems to contribute a major part of his alter ego: for instance, in the episode "Homer vs. the 18th Amendment" (EP 8-18), when the police interrogate him to find out if he is the infamous "Beer Baron" who supplies Springfield with illegal alcohol, he replies, "Yes, but only by night. By day I'm a mild-mannered reporter for a major metropolitan newspaper." In episode 9-23, after Homer accidentally knocks over the port-a-potty the Comic Book Guy is using, he mumbles, "It appears I would have to find a new fortress of solitude," which is the name of Superman's lair.

In his obsession with popular culture, and especially with cult texts that smack of nerdy over-adoration, Comic Book Guy himself becomes a double-edged comment on the relation between *The Simpsons* and its viewers. On the one hand, he is extremely intelligent – in episode 10-22, he is a member of Springfield's intellectual elitist branch of Mensa – and he is well-educated, at least as far as cultural artifacts and rhetoric are concerned. Therefore, he actually embodies qualities the writers of *The Simpsons* share with their most committed fans: the interest in popular and classic culture, in intelligent entertainment, and in the processes that influence the appearance of media texts actually formed the basis for the close relationship that, through the show, quickly developed between its creators and many of its recipients. Comic Book Guy's willingness to let cultural texts dictate a considerable part of his life and to assimilate their language, look, and patterns turn him into an ideal viewer, someone who will understand the hidden messages of a multi-level text as a challenge and as an invitation to actively participate in the process of generating significance. In viewers like him, intertextuality can unfold its full potential: it can provide entertainment that requires deeper

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[503] See also Rauscher 118.

involvement than superficial time-fillers and it can develop the various functions discussed in the previous chapters. Only viewers who possess such an extensive cultural knowledge will ever be able to appreciate the series to its full extent.

On the other hand, since popular culture gains an almost religious status in Comic Book Guy's life, the distance that should stand between fictional worlds and his real life is in constant danger of disintegration. A mediocre episode of "Itchy & Scratchy" becomes a personal insult to his intellect. His minor everyday problems become struggles of a lonely hero against a hostile environment. And Lucy Lawless becomes Xena; actress and fictional heroine merge to become a unified object of desire that seems to be available in the real world. In times of stalkers, teenagers hiding in fantasy worlds, and self-aggrandizing spree killers, this kind of fanatic reception seems to be a risky pre-stage of far more dangerous types of intertextually molded personalities. It is understandable that the staff of *The Simpsons* feel at least a bit uncertain about their most diehard fans' commitment to the show. Given the fact that they receive drastic reviews like the following example, the staff members can be expected to observe the fanatic viewers' dedication with a certain ambivalence: "Grrrr! Who was responsible for last night's monstrosity? He should be forced to apologize on the air, and then be fired from the show, sterilized, and sent to live like an animal in the sewers below Los Angeles for the rest of his life."[504]

Comic Book Guy's character perfectly embodies the ambivalence as he combines intelligence and cultural education with an entirely unlovable smart-aleck presumptuousness, cynicism, and complacency. As his presence in Springfield has grown stronger and his personality has become more refined in direct dependence on the growing obsession in fan circles, he has developed from a minor character to a constant reminder and analytical mirror of *The Simpsons'* problematic relationship with its fans. When he and Bart argue about who owes whom, their conflict needs to remain unsolved: many viewers will name *The Simpsons* as one of the defining cultural forces in their lives, but without its fanatic fans, it would never have had such an outstanding impact on cultural and television history in the first place.

Ultimately, however, children and hardcore fans are only two groups of viewers that have aroused some noticeable public attention, but the particular patterns of reception that define their relation to the series do not necessarily correspond with those of the large masses of "normal" viewers. At the end of the analysis of the functions of intertextuality in *The Simpsons*, it seems appropriate to return to "the regular viewer" and to take a closer look at one the show's finest parodies, which – as a sort of byproduct – ironically examines the importance of television for common people. The segment entitled "The Shinning" in the Hal-

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[504] The comment refers to the episode "Lisa on Ice" (EP 6-8); see http://www.snpp.com/episodes/2F05.html (as visited on Apr. 4th, 2010).

loween episode "Treehouse of Horror V" (EP 6-6) is a parody of Stanley Kubrick's movie adaptation of Stephen King's novel *The Shining*.

The Simpsons drive into the mountains to spend the winter taking care of Mr. Burns' mansion, which is closed and abandoned for the cold season. Before he leaves, Mr. Burns cuts the television wire and removes the beer supplies in order to make sure that nothing will keep the family from working hard on his estate. Groundskeeper Willie, who is staying in an adjoining building to attend to the garden, meanwhile discovers that Bart has the power to read his thoughts, and, given the history of massacres that happened among former caretakers, he tells Bart to use his ability to call him if Homer becomes a threat. Missing his two favorite things, Homer soon goes insane and writes "No TV and no beer make Homer go crazy" in gigantic scribbles all over the walls. He starts communicating with ghosts/people he imagines to roam the deserted corridors, who tell him to kill his family if he wants them to give him beer. Homer starts chasing his family through the halls with an axe, and Bart calls Willie, who runs to rescue them, dropping his portable TV set in the snow, but is chopped to death in seconds. The chase continues outside in the snow, and just as Homer catches up with his family, Lisa finds Willie's TV and quickly shows it to him. Homer rejoices, "Television! Teacher! Mother! Secret lover!" and his insanity and urge to kill phase out.

Much of the episode's imagery is lifted directly from Kubrick's movie, including waves of blood flowing from the elevators, Moe as a bartending ghost in a dimly lit bar, and the famous shot of Homer/Jack Nicholson breaking through a door with an axe. The various references to the film and several hidden jokes alone account for much of the story's entertainment value and turn it into one of the most memorable parodies in the course of the series. What is more interesting from a meta-reflexive perspective, however, is the shift in the focus on the events and psychological preconditions that drive the plot. In *The Shining*, the building itself swarms with evil forces and amplifies the psychological disturbances and fears its inhabitants experience. Although Jack, the maniac father, is liable to violent behavior, alcoholism, and self-doubts, he is sent over the edge by the house, which manipulates him for its own purposes by sending him visions that take the shape of people who once lived there, but who are not part of Jack's own memories. Moreover, his clairvoyant son Danny is also haunted by gruesome visions that could not possibly originate from his own past. The mental struggles do not only take place in the inhabitants' psyches, but also between them and the supernatural powers of the house.

In contrast, the house in the parody contributes little to the sequence of events except for a generally eerie atmosphere. The only odd event all the family members experience is the blood flowing from the elevators, but this is not even a vision as they can soon feel the blood flowing around their ankles. Mr. Burns, who is still present at that moment, tells them that the blood usually gets off at the second floor, and the joke is over without having influ-

enced the events that follow in any way. Instead, it is the absence of television that unhinges Homer's mind, and this causal relation is highlighted again and again in the course of the segment. The ghosts Homer envisions do not belong to the house, but to his own past and – in particular – to his past media experience. Moe, a real person from Homer's environment, is the first one to appear, but soon he is joined by a band of television/media images: a mummy, a vampire, a werewolf, Freddy Krueger from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and Pinhead from *Hellraiser* team up to push him towards killing his family.

When he breaks through the door, he quotes Jack Nicholson's famous line from the movie, "Here's Johnny," which is in turn a reference to the opening announcement of *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*. While in the movie the line was little more than another sign of Jack's descent into sadistic, ruthless bedevilment, its origin in television becomes the essential message in Homer's mouth and initiates a whole series of similar remarks. Unfortunately, he has picked the wrong door and stares into an empty room. At the next door he breaks through, he whoops, "David Letterman," and when he finally finds his family behind the third door, he babbles, "I'm Mike Wallace. I'm Morley Safer. And I'm Ed Bradley… All this and Andy Rooney tonight on *60 Minutes*." In his madness, he lists icons of TV entertainment, names that used to bring him entertainment and relaxation when he still had television. Homer has never shown any particular fondness of individual programs, he is not a fanatic fan of any single show, but the constant flow of light recreation that TV provides has helped him to deal with the pressure that comes with a job and family. Now that TV is gone, the suppressed rage shoots to the surface in the shape of names and images that once made their appearance on the screen.

Once again, the creators of *The Simpsons* express an ambiguous view towards their home medium: in a way that resembles the impact of cartoons on children's behavior in "Itchy & Scratchy & Marge," television is the problem and the solution at the same time. It provides common people, John Doe and Homer Simpson, with cheap entertainment, possibly education, pastime, and diversion, but it may also work like a manipulative opiate, blur the viewers' sensitivity for their real life problems, and channel frustrations into the more remote areas of the human mind where they might become manias. Towards the end of "The Shinning," however, for once it does not cause or glorify violence, nor does it estrange the family members from each other – this time, it ends the slaughter and invites the family to cuddle up around it in the snow, to huddle together in unison and, as Homer puts it, "bask in television's warm, glowing, warming glow."

So, is this the end? Television saves us all? On *The Simpsons*, things are never that easy, and an issue as complicated as the role of television in modern societies can never end on a note that uncritically promises a rosy future. The family sits in the snow, and mesmerized by the colorful, moving pictures on the tiny screen they hold in their hands, they

eventually freeze to each other and to the portable set. Helplessly glued to the screen, they cannot change the channel when the live broadcast of the *Tony Awards* with Tyne Daly and Hal Linden begins. Homer's gaze turns blank, and he mumbles, "Urge to kill rising…" In the end, it is essential to be able to switch off.

It is one of *The Simpsons'* most outstanding achievements that it has quickly developed an analytical awareness of its own medial characteristics and found ways of critically assessing them within its own narrative frame. Among these characteristics, its relationship with the audience features prominently and is discussed on various levels, from individual aspects (e.g., violence) to the series format to television in general. The producers of the show do not simply accept certain patterns of reception as an economic success factor but permanently observe the behavioral problems that may occur as a result of TV consumption. In this process, they situate their own text in opposition to, but also embedded in other television formats and narrative strategies. While they stress the intellectual and educational qualities of their own product (and extensively use the creative momentum of the conflicts/dialogues with the audience) they are also aware of its potential to cause audience reactions that border on the harmful, especially as far as fanatic or more impressionable viewers are concerned.

The intertextual references to the cartoon format through the analytical mirror of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" as well as to other, non-animated television texts on the one hand function as comments on the media environment of *The Simpsons*, but they also reflect back on the show itself. It is in this constant flow of media analysis, self-assessment, and audience interaction that intertextuality in *The Simpsons* can unfold its utmost creative and critical potential and turn the show into a forum of cultural discussion that has little in common with most of the superficial programming that surrounds it on television.

4.   Conclusion

The numerous examples in the preceding chapters have demonstrated that the function of the countless intertextual and intermedial references in *The Simpsons* can by no means be reduced to the humorous moments they initiate. Although I have only included about one third of the more than 400 episodes, it has been possible to find convincing examples for eleven functional categories and various narrative and technical approaches that are in-volved in creating/supporting these intertextual functions. While it has been feasible to scan individual references for their *one* predominant effect on the recipient to prove the existence of clearly distinguishable intratextual, extratextual, and self- or meta-reflexive functions, the complex web of references and functions becomes even more fascinating when we take into account that most references will automatically affect the viewer in more ways than the ones primarily intended by the producers (if it is even possible to determine those) or deemed es-sential by the analyst.

In subchapter 3.2.3 I described the extensive references to *Citizen Kane* in the epi-sode "Rosebud" as a means of lending depth and personal history to the character of Mr. Burns. While this is legitimate – after all, Burns' past and personal development are at the center of the episode – it is easy in such a highly intertextual episode to pinpoint a whole selection of intra- and extratextual functions in addition to character development. First, the entertainment functions in the shape of *homage* or *cultural quiz* work in this episode as with almost any other reference: many viewers, and especially culture and media buffs, will take delight in combing through the episode for minute details and in the memory of an appreciat-ed work of art. Second, imitated camera angles and techniques – the deep focus camera work so innovatively used in *Citizen Kane* – settings, and music all contribute to an atmos-phere that lifts Burns from his stereotypical role of the villain and places him in more emo-tional surroundings that allow for an assessment of his personal history. Third, the parallel story of the movie (and especially the early and prominent position of the symbolic "Rose-bud" in the episode title) supports the entire plot of the episode and makes sure that at least those viewers who are familiar with *Citizen Kane* will grasp the condensed, yet complex meaning that unravels around Burns' teddy and the role it plays in the flashbacks of his youth. Thus, including the primary function of character development, all four types of intra-textual functions co-operate in this reference and fabricate a memorable *Simpsons* moment that heavily profits from the heritage of another text.

In addition to the four intratextual functions, it is even possible to observe all three types of extratextual functions in the same episode: as a fifth function, the episode brings back *Citizen Kane* to the viewers' attention and opens it up for discussion and emotional re-appraisal. In this case, *The Simpsons* repeats and validates the movie's messages; the de-

tailed evaluation of the various forces that shaped Kane's life is transferred to Burns' and initiates a similar glimpse behind the façade of a man who seemed larger than life and untouched by human emotions. Sixthly, the episode can easily have an educational function for those viewers who are not familiar with *Citizen Kane*: just as Kane's last word, "Rosebud," triggered the journalist's search for truth in the movie, the apparently unrelated episode title might cause interested members of the audience to start an investigation themselves. It is only with the intermedial knowledge of the source text that "Rosebud" begins to make sense as a word that describes what happens in the *Simpsons* episode and viewers will have to search for its origin if they want to understand its meaning. Finally, the episode also uses its cultural predecessor to address social and political discourses that seem relevant to the discussion of the position Burns holds in the world of Springfield. The critical perspective of a society shaped by economic, political, and medial networks of power that provided the background for Kane's personal development still belongs to the catalogue of social issues that the creators of *The Simpsons* deem worthy of examination. While the power of the media and the influence of single persons on this power is examined in closer detail in Burns' "Kane-like" run for governor in "Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish" (EP 2-4), the more general topics of ruthlessness, corruption, and greed in the intermingled circles of business and politics also pervade his attempts to retrieve his beloved bear at any cost.

It would probably carry things too far if I tried to find evidence for self- or meta-reflexive functions in the same reference (does the imitation of camera techniques tell us anything about the artistic ambitions of cinema film vs. those of television?), but there are other examples that prove the point here. In general, most episodes that more obviously address self-reflexive questions with the help of "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" or other meta-narratives include all kinds of self- and meta-reflexive comments. In "The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show" (EP 8-14), for instance, the examination of production conditions also inevitably tells us something about narrative patterns (the limited variety of chase-and-deform cartoon narratives requires new protagonists to stay fresh), about distribution channels (it is the need for continuous success on commercial television that necessitates market research groups and executive intervention), and audience reception (it is the love or rejection of the viewers that determines the course of action in the other three categories). Furthermore, those episodes that more explicitly use texts from outside the series' universe to make statements about *The Simpsons* itself always involve other functions, as well. On the most sophisticated analytical level, the aforementioned adaptations of *The X-Files* or *The Shining* are subtle comments on the qualities of *The Simpsons* or television; from a more down-to-earth perspective, the references are entertaining, create a particular atmosphere, or arouse interest in another cultural text.

Thus, in sum, the multitude of the functions of intertextuality and intermediality in *The Simpsons*, as well as the combinations thereof, corresponds with the sheer number of references and once again proves how important intertextuality is for the show's success and also for its cultural self-conception. At its heart, *The Simpsons* is about an animated family, but at the same time, it is essentially concerned with its medial environment and with cultural manifestations of any kind. Its creators have systematically and continuously assessed their own show's features and those of other texts, which has enabled them to make the best of a combination of old and new. At a time when the audience could be expected to include many viewers who had been shaped by the extensive audiovisual culture of the 20th century and who had therefore made many cultural experiences before, the creators did not pretend to invent something entirely new: in those numerous cases where viewers could be expected to have laughed about a similar joke before, or felt a similar tension, or loved a similar character, they identified the most likely precursors and creatively used the cultural vocabulary established in previous texts. As a consequence, while the intertextual references are unquestionably entertaining, they are much more than mere decoration: they are an essential ingredient of *The Simpsons'* narrative system, they transport well-tried narrative elements into new surroundings, and they create new impressions from innovative blending and juxtaposition.

The case studies in this analysis have shown that there is a larger concept behind intertextuality in *The Simpsons* than the lack of innovative ideas, the aim for a cheap laugh, or the playful exhibitionism of cultural knowledge. While those aspects might at times also inspire intertextual references, they can hardly account for the ongoing success of the show, its appeal of innovation and creativity, and the status it has achieved in cultural studies and among media buffs. Intertextual references can fulfill various functions that are essential for the show to work as a media-saturated entertainment program and as an analyst of medial structures and narrative patterns. Its pronounced genre awareness combined with the representative possibilities animation has to offer have turned *The Simpsons* into a cultural multiplier that constantly forces the recipient to cross textual and medial borders, consider issues that lie only on the margins of the core viewing experience, just to return to the heart of the show with an ability to view it in the context of an almost unlimited experience of other texts. With intertextuality as a dominant ingredient, the show is able to address any issue, be it cultural, social, political, or concerning its own medial status, with the help of the uncountable intertextual links that pull other texts into the world of Springfield.

It might well be due to this innovative concept and the long-lasting economic success it has helped to ensure for *The Simpsons* that both animation and intertextuality have experienced an astonishing boom on television since the beginning of the 1990s. Yet, programs that tried to copy the concept without adding new ideas – *The Critic* stands out as the most

closely linked and inevitably doomed relative – did not manage to repeat the same success story. However, there are programs and feature films that have also been able to summon a sizeable fan community by using the achievements of *The Simpsons* as a starting point for alternative entertainment. In the field of animation, *Family Guy* – among others – provides further interesting material for studies on the functions of intertextuality in cartoons as it radically moves away from the smooth, uninterrupted narrative flow that makes *The Simpsons* so agreeable with a diverse audience. The first episode of *Family Guy*, "Death Has a Shadow" (1999), starts with a family watching television, or more precisely, a drastic, violent version of an episode of *The Brady Bunch*. About 20 minutes later, the family is united again in a courtroom when all of a sudden the giant Kool-Aid advertising mascot crashes through the wall and interrupts the trial. Throughout the series, rather "normal" instances of intertextuality (especially references that appear on the screen on the screen) take turns with entirely unrelated, absurd breaches of the narrative coherence that allow other texts to interrupt and undermine the fictional reality of the animated sitcom. While entertainment is without question once again a main function, those references can hardly be expected to support the main storyline with regard to atmosphere, characters, or plot comprehensibility, or to provide enough information to enable the audience to reassess the referenced text. Further research is required in order to understand what the functions of those types of references are and how they still manage to merge into a unified text that seems to be more than playful pastiche.

Similarly, the success of animated programs and the extensive narrative options that come with the animated form (see chapter 2.5) have motivated live action programs to experiment with modes of representation that imitate cartoon language. Among others, the extremely successful series *Ally McBeal* and *Scrubs* have tried out ways of visualizing their protagonists' psyches and emotional states with the help of visual codes tested in animation, such as deformations of shapes and sizes, changes in coloring, and symbolic language – in the first episode of *Scrubs*, the main protagonist envisions himself as a frightened deer in the headlights of an approaching truck when he is faced with an unexpected question on one of his first days as a medical intern. In those series, the alternative modes of representation (in combination with an affection for other cultural texts that resembles the intertextual enthusiasm of *The Simpsons*) have resulted in narrative approaches that are situated on the threshold between live action and animation and also possess almost unlimited options for including intertextual references in order to achieve certain effects. Especially in light of the ever more refined possibilities of computer animation, these new hybrid forms offer a wide range of texts that promise new insights with regard to the functions of intertextuality and intermediality in television and cinematic texts. Despite all technological progress, however, many cultural works that creatively incorporate intertextual references remain indebted to *The Simpsons* for having impressively proven that intertextuality can create more than funny par-

odies, and that it can be an innovative step towards intelligent, sophisticated, and even educational television.

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The Simpsons Episode Guide[505]

Season 1 (1989-1990)

Episode 6: **Moaning Lisa** (7G06). Original airdate: 2/11/90. Writer: Al Jean, Mike Reiss. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 8: **The Telltale Head** (7G07). Original airdate: 2/25/90. Writers: Al Jean, Mike Reiss, Sam Simon, Matt Groening. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 11: **The Crêpes of Wrath** (7G13). Original airdate: 4/15/90. Writers: George Meyer, Sam Simon, John Swartzwelder, Jon Vitti. Directors: Wes Archer, Milton Gray.

Season 2 (1990-1991)

Episode 3: **Treehouse of Horror** (7F04). Original airdate: 10/25/90. Writers: John Swartzwelder, Jay Kogen, Wallace Wolodarsky, Sam Simon. Directors: Wes Archer, Rich Moore, David Silverman.

Episode 4: **Two Cars in every Garage and Three Eyes on every Fish** (7F01). Original airdate: 11/1/90. Writers: Sam Simon, John Swartzwelder. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 6: **Dead Putting Society** (7F08). Original airdate: 11/15/90. Writer: Jeff Martin. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 7: **Bart vs. Thanksgiving** (7F07). Original airdate: 11/22/90. Writer: George Meyer. Director: David Silverman.

Episode 8: **Bart the Daredevil** (7F06). Original airdate: 12/6/90. Writer: Jay Kogen, Wallace Wolodarsky. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 9: **Itchy & Scratchy & Marge** (7F09). Original airdate: 12/20/90. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 10: **Bart Gets Hit by a Car** (7F10). Original airdate: 1/10/91. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 12: **The Way We Was** (7F12). Original airdate: 1/31/91. Writers: Al Jean, Mike Reiss, Sam Simon. Director: David Silverman.

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[505] This episode guide contains only those episodes that have been referred to in this paper. For a complete episode guide to *The Simpsons* please visit www.snpp.com. The numbers in brackets behind the episode titles stand for the production code numbers.

Episode 13: **Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment** (7F13). Original airdate: 2/7/91. Writer: Steven Pepoon. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 14: **Principal Charming** (7F15). Original airdate: 2/14/91. Writer: David Stern. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 18: **Brush with Greatness** (7F18). Original airdate: 4/11/91. Writer: Brian K. Roberts. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 19: **Lisa's Substitute** (7F19). Original airdate: 4/25/91. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 21: **Three Men and a Comic Book** (7F21). Original airdate: 5/9/91. Writer: Jeff Martin. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 22: **Blood Feud** (7F22). Original airdate: 7/11/91. Writer: George Meyer. Director: David Silverman.

Season 3 (1991-1992)

Episode 1: **Stark Raving Dad** (7F24). Original airdate: 9/19/91. Writers: Al Jean, Mike Reiss. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 2: **Mr. Lisa Goes to Washington** (8F01). Original airdate: 9/26/91. Writer: George Meyer. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 3: **When Flanders Failed** (7F23). Original airdate: 10/3/91. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 4: **Bart the Murderer** (8F03). Original airdate: 10/10/91. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 6: **Like Father like Clown** (8F05). Original airdate: 10/24/91. Writers: Jay Kogen, Wallace Wolodarsky. Directors: Jeffrey Lynch, Brad Bird.

Episode 7: **Treehouse of Horror II** (8F02). Original airdate: 10/31/91. Writers: Al Jean, Mike Reiss, Jeff Martin, George Meyer, Sam Simon, John Swartzwelder. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 18: **Separate Vocations** (8F15). Original airdate: 2/27/92. Writer: George Meyer. Director: Jeffrey Lynch.

Episode 19: **Dog of Death** (8F17). Original airdate: 3/12/92. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 21: **Black Widower** (8F20). Original airdate: 4/9/92. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: David Silverman.

Episode 23: **Bart's Friend Falls in Love** (8F22). Original airdate: 5/7/92. Writers: Jay Kogen, Wallace Wolodarsky. Director: Jim Reardon.

Season 4 (1992-1993)

Episode 1: **Kamp Krusty** (8F24). Original airdate: 9/24/92. Writer: David M. Stern. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 2: **A Streetcar Named Marge** (8F18). Original airdate: 10/1/92. Writer: Jeff Martin. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 5: **Treehouse of Horror III** (9F04). Original airdate: 10/29/92. Writers: Al Jean, Mike Reiss, Johnny Kogen, Wallace Wolodarsky, Sam Simon, Jack Vitti. Director: Carlos Baeza.

Episode 6: **Itchy & Scratchy: The Movie** (9F03). Original airdate: 11/3/92. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 7: **Marge Gets a Job** (9F05). Original airdate: 11/5/92. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Jeffrey Lynch.

Episode 9: **Mr. Plow** (9F07). Original airdate: 11/19/92. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 12: **Marge vs. the Monorail** (9F10). Original airdate: 1/14/93. Writer: Conan O'Brien. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 13: **Selma's Choice** (9F11). Original airdate: 1/21/93. Writer: David M. Stern. Director: Carlos Baeza.

Episode 14: **Brother from the Same Planet** (9F12). Original airdate: 2/4/93. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Jeffrey Lynch.

Episode 15: **I Love Lisa** (9F13). Original airdate: 2/11/93. Writer: Frank Mula. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 17: **Last Exit to Springfield** (9F15). Original airdate: 3/11/93. Writers: Jay Kogen, Wallace Wolodarsky. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 18: **So It's Come to This: A Simpsons Clip Show** (9F17). Original airdate: 4/1/93. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Carlos Baeza.

Episode 19: **The Front** (9F16). Original airdate: 4/15/93. Writer: Adam I. Lapidus. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 21: **Marge in Chains** (9F20). Original airdate: 5/6/93. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Jim Reardon.

Season 5 (1993-1994)

Episode 1: **Homer's Barbershop Quartet** (9F21). Original airdate: 9/30/93. Writer: Jeff Martin. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 2: **Cape Feare** (#9F22). Original airdate: 10/7/93. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Rich Moore.

Episode 4: **Rosebud** (1F01). Original airdate: 10/21/93. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 5: **Treehouse of Horror IV** (1F04). Original airdate: 10/28/93. Writers: Conan O'Brien, Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein, Greg Daniels, Dan McGrath, Bill Canterbuy. Director: David Silverman.

Episode 7: **Bart's Inner Child** (1F05). Original airdate: 11/11/93. Writer: George Meyer. Director: Bob Anderson.

Episode 8: **Boy-Scoutz 'n the Hood** (1F06). Original airdate: 11/18/93. Writer: Dan McGrath. Director: Jeffrey Lynch.

Episode 9: **The Last Temptation of Homer** (1F07). Original airdate: 12/9/93. Writer: Frank Mula. Director: Carlos Baeza.

Episode 15: **Deep Space Homer** (1F13). Original airdate: 2/24/94. Writer: David Mirkin. Director: Carlos Baeza.

Episode 16: **Homer Loves Flanders** (1F14). Original airdate: 3/17/94. Writer: David Richardson. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 18: **Burns' Heir** (1F16) Original airdate: 4/14/94. Writer: Jace Richdale. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 20: **The Boy Who Knew Too Much** (1F19). Original airdate: 5/5/94. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Jeffrey Lynch.

Episode 21: **Lady Bouvier's Lover** (1F21). Original airdate: 5/12/94. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 22: **Secrets of a Successful Marriage** (1F20). Original airdate: 5/19/94. Writer: Greg Daniels. Director: Carlos Baeza.

Season 6 (1994-1995)

Episode 1: **Bart of Darkness** (#1F22). Original airdate: 9/4/94. Writer: Dan McGrath. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 2: **Lisa's Rival** (1F17). Original airdate: 9/11/94. Writer: Mike Scully. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 4: **Itchy & Scratchy Land** (2F01). Original airdate: 10/2/94. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 5: **Sideshow Bob Roberts** (2F02). Original airdate: 10/9/94. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 6: **Treehouse of Horror V** (2F03). Original airdate: 10/30/94. Writers: Greg Danula, Dan McGrath, David S. Cohen, Bob Kushell. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 7: **Bart's Girlfriend** (2F04). Original airdate: 11/6/94. Writer: Jonathan Collier. Director: Susie Dietter.

Episode 8: **Lisa on Ice** (2F05). Original airdate: 11/13/94. Writer: Mike Scully. Director: Bob Anderson.

Episode 9: **Homer Badman** (2F06). Original airdate: 11/27/94. Writer: Greg Daniels. Director: Jeffrey Lynch.

Episode 10: **Grampa vs. Sexual Inadequacy** (2F07). Original airdate: 12/4/94. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 13: **And Maggie Makes Three** (2F10). Original airdate: 1/22/95. Writers: Jennifer Crittenden. Director: Swinton O. Scott III.

Episode 16: **Bart vs. Australia** (2F13). Original airdate: 2/19/95. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 18: **A Star is Burns** (2F31). Original airdate: 3/5/95. Writer: Ken Keeler. Director: Susie Dietter.

Episode 20: **Two Dozen and One Greyhounds**. Original airdate: 4/9/95. Writer: Mike Scully. Director: Bob Anderson.

Episode 25: **Who Shot Mr. Burns – Part 1** (2F16). Original airdate: 5/21/95. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Jeffrey Lynch.

Season 7 (1995-1996)

Episode 1: **Who Shot Mr. Burns – Part 2** (2F20). Original airdate: 9/17/95. Writers: Bill Oakley, Josh Weinstein. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 2: **Radioactive Man** (2F17). Original airdate: 9/24/95. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Susie Dietter.

Episode 4: **Bart Sells his Soul** (3F02). Original airdate: 10/8/95. Writer: Greg Daniels. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 6: **Treehouse of Horror VI** (3F04). Original airdate: 10/29/95. Writers: John Swartzwelder, Steve Tompkins, David S. Cohen. Director: Bob Anderson.

Episode 8: **Mother Simpson** (3F06). Original airdate: 11/19/95. Writer: Richard Appel. Director: David Silverman.

Episode 9: **Sideshow Bob's Last Gleaming** (3F08). Original airdate: 11/26/95. Writer: Spike Ferensten. Director: Dominic Polcino.

Episode 10: **The Simpsons 138th Episode Spectacular** (3F31). Original airdate: 12/3/95. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: David Silverman.

Episode 11: **Marge be not Proud** (3F07). Original airdate: 12/17/95. Writer: Mike Scully. Director: Steven Dean Moore.

Episode 12: **Team Homer** (3F10). Original airdate: 1/7/96. Writer: Mike Scully. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 13: **Two Bad Neighbors** (3F09). Original airdate: 1/14/96. Writer: Ken Keeler. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 15: **Bart the Fink** (3F12). Original airdate: 2/11/96. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 18: **The Day the Violence Died** (3F16). Original airdate: 3/17/96. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Wes Archer.

Episode 21: **22 Short Films about Springfield** (3F18). Original airdate: 4/14/96. Writers: Richard Appel, David S. Cohen, John Collier, Jennifer Crittenden, Greg Daniels, Brent Forrester, Rachel Pulido, Steve Tompkins, Josh Weinstein, Matt Groening. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 23: **Much Apu about Nothing** (3F20). Original airdate: 5/5/96. Writer: David S. Cohen. Director: Susie Dietter.

Episode 25: **Summer of 4 Ft. 2** (3F22). Original airdate: 5/19/96. Writer: Dan Greaney. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Season 8 (1996-1997)

Episode 1: **Treehouse of Horror VII** (4F02). Original airdate: 10/27/96. Writers: Ken Keeler, Dan Greney, David S. Cohen, Jacqueline Atkins. Director: Mike B. Anderson.

Episode 2: **You Only Move Twice** (3F23). Original airdate: 11/3/96. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Mike B. Anderson.

Episode 4: **Burns, Baby Burns** (4F05). Original airdate: 11/17/96. Writer: Ian Maxtone-Graham. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 7: **Lisa's Date with Density** (4F01). Original airdate: 12/15/96. Writer: Mike Scully. Director: Susie Dietter.

Episode 9: **El Viaje Misterioso de Nuestro Jomer** (3F24). Original airdate: 1/5/97. Writer: Ken Keeler. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 10: **The Springfield Files** (3G01). Original airdate: 1/12/97. Writer: Reid Harrison. Director: Steven Dean Moore.

Episode 11: **The Twisted World of Marge Simpson** (4F08). Original airdate: 1/19/97. Writer: Jennifer Crittenden. Director: Chuck Sheetz.

Episode 14: **The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show** (4F12). Original airdate: 2/9/97. Writer: David S. Cohen. Director: Steve Moore.

Episode 15: **Homer's Phobia** (4F11). Original airdate: 2/16/97. Writer: Ron Hauge. Director: Mike B. Anderson.

Episode 17: **My Sister, My Sitter** (4F13). Original airdate: 3/2/97. Writer: Dan Greaney. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 18: **Homer vs. the 18th Amendment** (4F15). Original airdate: 3/16/97. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Bob Anderson.

Episode 19: **Grade School Confidential** (4F09). Original airdate: 4/6/97. Writer: Rachel Pulido. Director: Susie Dietter.

Episode 21: **The Old Man and the Lisa** (4F17). Original airdate: 4/20/97. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 22: **In Marge We Trust** (4F18). Original airdate: 4/27/97. Writer: Donick Cary. Director: Steve Moore.

Episode 23: **Homer's Enemy** (4F19). Original airdate: 5/4/97. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 24: **The Simpsons Spin-Off Showcase** (4F20). Original airdate: 5/11/97. Writers: David S. Cohen, Dan Greaney, Steve Tompkins, Ken Keeler. Director: Neil Affleck.

Episode 25: **The Secret War of Lisa Simpson** (4F21). Original airdate: 5/18/97. Writer: Richard Appel. Director: Mike B. Anderson.

Season 9 (1997-1998)

Episode 1: **The City of New York vs. Homer Simpson** (4F22). Original airdate: 9/21/97. Writer: Ian Maxtone-Graham. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 2: **The Principal and the Pauper** (4F23). Original airdate: 9/28/97. Writer: Ken Keeler. Director: Steve Moore.

Episode 3: **Lisa's Sax** (3G02). Original airdate: 10/19/97. Writer: Al Jean. Director: Dominic Polcino.

Episode 9: **Realty Bites** (5F06). Original airdate: 12/7/97. Writer: Dan Greaney. Director: Swinton Scott.

Episode 10: **Miracle on Evergreen Terrace** (5F07). Original airdate: 12/21/97. Writer: Ron Hauge. Director: Bob Anderson.

Episode 14: **Das Bus** (5F11). Original airdate: 2/15/98. Writer: David S. Cohen. Director: Pete Michels.

Episode 23: **King of the Hill** (5F16). Original airdate: 5/3/98. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Steven Dean Moore.

Episode 25: **Natural Born Kissers** (5F18). Original airdate: 5/17/98. Writer: Matt Selman. Director: Klay Hall.

Season 10 (1998-1999)

Episode 9: **Mayored to the Mob** (AABF05). Original airdate: 12/20/98. Writer: Ron Hauge. Director: Swinton O. Scott III.

Episode 12: **Sunday, Cruddy Sunday** (AABF08). Original airdate: 1/31/99. Writers: Tom Martin, George Meyer, Brian Scully, Mike Scully. Director: Steven Dean Moore.

Episode 13: **Homer to the Max** (AABF09). Original airdate: 2/7/99. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Pete Michels.

Episode 16: **Make Room for Lisa** (AABF12). Original airdate: 2/28/99. Writer: Brian Scully. Director: Matthew Nastuk.

Episode 18: **Simpsons Bible Stories** (AABF14). Original airdate: 4/4/99. Writers: Tim Long, Larry Doyle, Matt Selman. Director: Nancy Kruse.

Episode 20: **The Old Man and the 'C' Student** (AABF16). Original airdate: 4/25/99. Writer: Julie Thacker. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Episode 22: **They Saved Lisa's Brain** (AABF18). Original airdate: 5/9/99. Writer: Julie Matt Selman. Director: Pete Michels.

Season 11 (1999-2000)

Episode 4: **Treehouse of Horror X** (BABF01). Original airdate: 10/31/99. Writers: Donick Cary, Tim Long, Ron Hauge. Director: Pete Michels.

Episode 13: **Saddlesore Galactica** (BABF09). Original airdate: 2/6/00. Writer: Tim Long. Director: Lance Kramer.

Episode 14: **Alone Again, Natura-Diddily** (BABF10). Original airdate: 2/13/00. Writer: Ian Maxtone-Graham. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 15: **Missionary: Impossible** (BABF11). Original airdate: 2/20/00. Writer: Ron Hauge. Director: Steven Dean Moore.

Episode 18: **Days of Wines & D'oh'ses** (BABF14). Original airdate: 4/9/00. Writers: Deb Lacusta, Dan Castellaneta. Director: Neil Affleck.

Episode 20: **Last Tap Dance in Springfield** (BABF15). Original airdate: 5/7/00. Writers: Julie Thacker. Director: Nancy Kruse.

Episode 23: **Behind the Laughter** (BABF19). Original airdate: 5/21/00. Writers: Tim Long, George Meyer, Mike Scully, Matt Selman. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Season 12 (2000-2001)

Episode 8: **Skinner's Sense of Snow** (CABF06). Original airdate: 12/17/00. Writer: Tim Long. Director: Lance Kramer.

Episode 11: **Worst Episode Ever** (CAFB08). Original airdate: 2/4/01. Writer: Larry Doyle. Director: Matthew Nastuk.

Episode 20: **Children of a Lesser Clod** (CABF16). Original airdate: 5/13/01. Writer: Al Jean. Director: Michael Polcino.

Episode 21: **Simpsons Tall Tales** (CABF17). Original airdate: 5/20/01. Writers: John Frink, Don Payne, Bob Bendetson, Matt Selman. Director: Bob Anderson.

Season 13 (2001-2002)

Episode 1: **Treehouse of Horror XII** (CABF19). Original airdate: 11/6/01. Writers: Joel H. Cohen, John Frink, Don Payne, Carolyn Omine. Director: Jim Reardon.

Episode 4: **A Hunka Hunka Burns in Love** (CABF18). Original airdate: 12/2/01. Writer: John Swartzwelder. Director: Lance Kramer.

Episode 11: **The Bart Wants What It Wants** (DABF06). Original airdate: 2/17/02. Writers: John Frink, Don Payne. Director: Michael Polcino.

Episode 13: **The Old Man and the Key** (DABF09). Original airdate: 3/10/02. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Lance Kramer.

Episode 14: **Tales from the Public Domain** (DABF08). Original airdate: 3/17/02. Writers: Andrew Kreisberg, Josh Lieb, Matt Warburton. Director: Mike B. Anderson.

Episode 20: **Little Girl in the Big Ten** (DABF15). Original airdate: 5/12/02. Writer: Jon Vitti. Director: Lauren MacMullan.

Season 14 (2002-2003)

Episode 17: **Three Gays of the Condo** (EABF12). Original airdate: 4/13/03. Writer: Matt Warburton. Director: Mark Kirkland.

Season 15 (2003-2004)

Episode 6: **Today I Am a Klown** (#FABF01). Original airdate: 12/7/03. Writer: Joel H. Cohen. Director: Nancy Kruse.

List of Films[506]

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). D: Stanley Kubrick. P: Stanley Kubrick. S: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke.

32 Short Films about Glenn Gould (1993). D: François Girard. P: Niv Fichman. S: François Girard, Don McKellar.

Adaptation (2003). D: Spike Jonze. P: Edward Saxon, Vincent Landay, Jonathan Demme. S: Charlie Kaufman, Donald Kaufman. B: Susan Orlean.

Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes (transl. *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*) (1972). D: Werner Herzog. P: Werner Herzog. S: Werner Herzog.

Alien (1979). D: Ridley Scott. P: Gordon Carroll, David Giler, Walter Hill. S: Dan O'Bannon, Ronald Shusett.

The Amityville Horror (1979). D: Stuart Rosenberg. P: Ronald Saland, Elliot Geisinger. S: Sandor Stern. B: Jay Anson.

Anchors Aweigh (1945). D: George Sidney. P: Joe Pasternak. S: Isobel Lennart. B: Natalie Marcin.

Angel Heart (1987). D: Alan Parker. P: Elliott Kastner, Alan Marshall. S: Alan Parker. B: William Hjortsberg.

Apocalypse Now (1979). D: Francis Ford Coppola. P: Francis Ford Coppola. S: Francis Ford Coppola, John Milius. B: Michael Herr, Joseph Conrad.

Barton Fink (1991). D: Joel Coen. P: Ethan Coen. S: Ethan Coen, Joel Coen.

Basic Instinct (1992). D: Paul Verhoeven. P: Mario Kassar. S: Joe Eszterhas.

Batman (1988). D: Tim Burton. P: Jon Peters, Peter Gruber, Chris Kenney. S: Warren Skaaren, Sam Hamm.

The Birds (1963). D: Alfred Hitchcock. P: Alfred Hitchcock. S: Evan Hunter. B: Daphne du Maurier.

Blitz Wolf (1942). D: Tex Avery. P: Fred Quimby. S: Rich Hogan.

Das Boot (1981). D: Wolfgang Petersen. P: Günter Rohrbach. S: Wolfgang Petersen. B: Lothar-Günther Buchheim.

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[506] In the list of films the following abbreviations will be used: D=director, P=producer, S=script, B=book (if the film has been adapted from a literary source).

Boyz 'n the Hood (1991). D: John Singleton. P: Steve Nicolaides. S: John Singleton.

Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo (transl. *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*) (1966). D: Sergio Leone. P: Alberto Grimaldi. S: Furio Scarpelli, Sergio Leone, Luciano Vincenzoni, Agenore Incorocci.

Cape Fear (1962). D: J. Lee Thompson. P: Sy Bartlett. S: James R. Webb. B: John D. MacDonald.

Casablanca (1942). D: Michael Curtiz. P: Hal B. Wallis. S: Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein, Howard Koch. B: Murray Burnett.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1958). D: Richard Brooks. P: Lawrence Weingarten. S: Richard Brooks, James Poe. B: Tennessee Williams.

C.H.U.D. (1984). D: Douglas Cheek. P: Andrew Bonime. S: Parnell Hall. B: Shepard Abbott.

Citizen Kane (1941). D: Orson Welles. P: Orson Welles. S: Herman J. Mankiewicz, Orson Welles.

A Clockwork Orange (1971). D: Stanley Kubrick. P: Stanley Kubrick. S: Stanley Kubrick. B: Anthony Burgess.

Crocodile Dundee (1986). D: Peter Faiman. P: John Cornell. S: Paul Hogan, Ken Shadie, John Cornell. B: Paul Hogan.

Daffy – The Commando (1943). D: Friz Freleng. P: Leon Schlesinger. S: Michael Maltese.

The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951). D: Robert Wise. P: Julian Blaustein. S: Edmund H. North. B: Harry Bates.

Dead Poets Society (1988). D: Peter Weir. P: Tony Thomas, Steven Haft, Paul Junger Witt. S: Tom Schulman.

The Deerhunter (1978). D: Michael Cimino. P: Barry Spinkings, Michael Deeley, Michael Cimino, John Peverall. S: Deric Washburn.

The Demon Seed (1977). D: Donald Cammell. P: Herb Jaffe. S: Robert Jaffe, Roger O. Hirson. B: Dean Koontz.

Dracula (1992). D: Francis Ford Coppola. P: Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Fuchs, Charles Mulvehill. S: James V. Hart. B: Bram Stoker.

Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964). D: Stanley Kubrick. P: Stanley Kubrick. S: Stanley Kubrick, Peter George, Terry Southern. B: Peter George.

Fail-Safe (1964). D: Sidney Lumet. P: Max E. Youngstein. S: Walter Bernstein. B: Eugene Burdick, Harvey Wheeler.

Fantasia (1940). D: Paul Satterfield, Samuel Armstrong, Jim Handley, T. Hee, Norman Ferguson, James Algar, Bill Roberts, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, Ford Beebe. P: Walt Disney. S: Joe Grant, Dick Huemer, et. al.

Fritz the Cat (1972). D: Ralph Bakshi. P: Steve Krantz. S: Ralph Bakshi. B: Robert Crumb.

The Front (1976). D: Martin Ritt. P: Charles H. Joffe, Jack Rollins. S: Walter Bernstein.

Der Fuehrer's Face (1942). D: Jack Kinney. P: Walt Disney. S: Joe Grant, Dick Huemer.

Full Metal Jacket (1987). D: Stanley Kubrick. P: Stanley Kubrick, Jan Harlan. S: Stanley Kubrick, Michael Herr, Gustav Hasford. B: Gustav Hasford.

Ghostbusters (1984). D: Ivan Reitman. P: Ivan Reitman. S: Harold Ramis, Dan Aykroyd.

Glengarry Glen Ross (1992). D: James Foley. P: Nava Levin, Jerry Tokofsky, Stanley R. Zupnik, Morris Ruskin. S: David Mamet. B: David Mamet.

The Godfather (1971). D: Francis Ford Coppola. P: Albert S. Ruddy. S: Francis Ford Coppola, Mario Puzo. B: Mario Puzo.

The Godfather: Part III (1990). D: Francis Ford Coppola. P: Charles Mulvehill, Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Roos, Gray Frederickson. S: Francis Ford Coppola, Mario Puzo. B: Mario Puzo.

Goldfinger (1964). D: Guy Hamilton. P: Albert R. Broccoli, Harry Saltzman. S: Richard Maibaum, Paul Dehn. B: Ian Fleming.

Goodfellas (1990). D: Martin Scorsese. P: Irwin Winkler. S: Nicholas Pileggi, Martin Scorsese. B: Nicholas Pileggi.

Gone with the Wind (1939). D: Victor Fleming. P: David O. Selznick. S: Sidney Howard. B: Margaret Mitchell.

The Graduate (1967). D: Mike Nichols. P: Lawrence Turman. S: Calder Willingham, Buck Henry. B: Charles Webb.

Grand Canyon (1991). D: Lawrence Kasdan. P: Lawrence Kasdan, Charles Okun, Michael Grillo. S: Lawrence Kasdan, Meg Kasdan.

Hellraiser (1987). D: Clive Barker. P: Christopher Figg. S: Clive Barker. B: Clive Barker.

It's a Wonderful Life (1946). D: Frank Capra. P: Frank Capra. S: Albert Hackett, Frank Capra, Jo Swerling, Frances Goodrich. B: Philip Van Doren Stern.

Jaws (1975). D: Steven Spielberg. P: Richard D. Zanuck, David Brown. S: Peter Benchley, Howard Sackler. B: Peter Benchley.

The Jazz Singer (1927). D: Alan Crosland. S: Alfred A. Cohn, Jack Jarmuth. B: Samson Raphaelson.

King Kong (1933). D: Ernest B. Schoedsack, Merian C. Cooper. P: Ernest B. Schoedsack, Merian C. Cooper. S: Ruth Rose, James A. Creelman. B: Merian C. Cooper, Edgar Wallace.

Koyaanisqatsi (1983). D: Godfrey Reggio. P: Godfrey Reggio. S: Alton Walpole, Godfrey Reggio, Ron Fricke, Michael Hoenig.

The Lost Weekend (1945). D: Billy Wilder. P: Charles Brackett. S: Billy Wilder, Charles Brackett. B: Charles R. Jackson.

The Maltese Falcon (1941). D: John Huston. P: Hal B. Wallis, Henry Blanke. S: John Huston. B: Dashiell Hammett.

Miracle on 34th Street (1947). D: George Seaton. S: George Seaton. B: Valentine Davies.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939). D: Frank Capra. P: Frank Capra. S: Sidney Buchman. B: Lewis R. Foster.

Natural Born Killers (1994). D: Oliver Stone. P: Rand Vossler, Don Murphy, Jane Hamsher, Clayton Townsend. S: David Veloz, Richard Rutowski, Oliver Stone. B: Quentin Tarantino.

A Nightmare on Elm Street (1984). D: Wes Craven. P: Robert Shaye, Sara Risher. S: Wes Craven.

North by Northwest (1959). D: Alfred Hitchcock. P: Alfred Hitchcock, Herbert Coleman. S: Ernest Lehman.

Pinocchio (1940). D: Hamilton Luske, Ben Sharpsteen. P: Walt Disney. S: Aurelius Battaglia, William Cottrell, Webb Smith, Joseph Sabo, Ted Sears, Erdman Penner, Otto Englander. B: Carlo Collodi.

Poltergeist (1982). D: Tobe Hooper. P: Steven Spielberg, Frank Marshall. S: Steven Spielberg, Michael Grais, Mark Victor.

Psycho (1960). D: Alfred Hitchcock. P: Alfred Hitchcock. S: Joseph Stefano. B: Robert Bloch.

Pulp Fiction (1994). D: Quentin Tarantino. P: Lawrence Bender. S: Quentin Tarantino.

Raiders of the Lost Ark (1980). D: Steven Spielberg. P: Frank Marshall. S: Lawrence Kasdan. B: George Lucas, Philip Kaufman.

Reality Bites (1994). D: Ben Stiller. P: Danny DeVito, Michael Shamberg. S: Helen Childress.

Rear Window (1954). D: Alfred Hitchcock. P: Alfred Hitchcock. S: John Michael Hayes. B: Cornell Woolrich.

Rebel without a Cause (1955). D: Nicholas Ray. P: David Weisbart. S: Stewart Stern.

Le Retour de Martin Guerre (transl. *The Return of Martin Guerre*) (1982). D: Daniel Vigne. P: Daniel Vigne. S: Daniel Vigne, Jean-Claude Carrière. B: Jean de Coras.

The Right Stuff (1983). D: Philip Kaufman. P: Irwin Winkler, Robert Chartoff. S: Philip Kaufman. B: Tom Wolfe.

Saturday Night Fever (1977). D: John Badham. P: Robert Stigwood. S: Norman Wexler. B: Nik Cohn.

The Shining (1980). D: Stanley Kubrick. P: Stanley Kubrick. S: Stanley Kubrick, Diane Johnson. B: Stephen King.

Short Cuts (1993). D: Robert Altman. P: Cary Brokaw. S: Robert Altman, Frank Barhydt. B: Raymond Carver.

The Silence of the Lambs (1990). D: Jonathan Demme. P: Ron Bozman, Gary Goetzman, Kenneth Utt, Edward Saxon. S: Ted Tally. B: Thomas Harris.

The Simpsons Movie (2007). D: David Silverman. P: Richard Sakai, Mike Scully, Craig Sost, Matt Groening, Al Jean, James L. Brooks. S: John Swartzwelder, George Meyer, Al Jean, Mike Reiss, Matt Selman, Ian Maxtone-Graham, Jon Vitti, Mike Scully, James L. Brooks, David Mirkin, Matt Groening.

Sin City (2005). D: Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller, Quentin Tarantino. P: Robert Rodriguez, Elizabeth Avellan, Frank Miller. S: Frank Miller. B: Frank Miller.

Smilla's Sense of Snow (1996). D: Bille August. P: Bernd Eichinger, Martin Moszkowicz. S: Ann Biderman. B: Peter Høeg.

Sommersby (1993). D: Jon Amiel. P: Arnon Milchan, Steven Reuther, Mary McLaglen. S: Nicholas Meyer, Sarah Kernochan, Antony Schaffer. B: Daniel Vigne, Jean-Claude Carrière, Jean de Coras.

Sophie's Choice (1982). D: Alan J. Pakula. P: Alan J. Pakula, Keith Barish. S: Alan J. Pakula. B: William Styron.

The Spirit of '43 (1943). D: Jack King. P: Walt Disney.

A Star Is Born (1937). D: William A. Wellman. P: David O. Selznick. S: Robert Carson, Dorothy Parker, Alan Campbell.

Star Wars (1977). D: George Lucas. P: Gary Kurtz. S: George Lucas.

Steamboat Willie (1928). D: Walt Disney, Ub Iwerks. P: Walt Disney. S: Walt Disney, Ub Iwerks.

The Sting (1973). D: George Roy Hill. P: Tony Bill, Michael Phillips, Julia Phillips. S: David S. Ward.

A Streetcar Named Desire (1951). D: Elia Kazan. P: Charles K. Feldman. S: Oscar Saul, Tennessee Williams. B: Tennessee Williams.

Things Change (1988). D: David Mamet. P: Michael Hausman. S: David Mamet, Shel Silverstein.

Three Days of the Condor (1975). D: Sydney Pollack. P: Stanley Schneider. S: Lorenzo Semple Jr., David Rayfiel. B: James Grady.

Three Men and a Baby (1987). D: Leonard Nimoy. P: Ted Field, Robert W. Cort. S: James Orr, Jim Cruickshank. B: Coline Serreau.

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre (1947). D: John Huston. P: Henry Blanke. S: John Huston. B: B. Traven.

Twilight's Last Gleaming (1977). D: Robert Aldrich. P: Merv Adelson. S: Ronald M. Cohen, Edward Hübsch. B: Walter Wager.

Vertigo (1958). D: Alfred Hitchcock. P: Alfred Hitchcock. S: Samuel Taylor, Alec Coppel. B: Pierre Boileau, Thomas Narcejac.

Wall-E (2008). D: Andrew Stanton. P: Jim Morris, Lindsey Collins. S: Andrew Stanton, Jim Reardon.

The Wizard of Oz (1939). D: Victor Fleming. P: Mervyn LeRoy. S: Noel Langley, Edgar Allan Woolf, Florence Ryerson. B: L. Frank Baum.

List of Television Programs[507]

60 Minutes (September 1968 – present). C: Don Hewitt. P: George Crile, John Drimmer, Imre Horvath, Josh Howard, Merri Lieberthal.

All in the Family (January 1971 – April 1979). C: Norman Lear. P: Mort Lachman, Norman Lear, Don Nicholl, Hal Kanter, Woody Kling.

Ally McBeal (September 1997 – May 2002). C: David E. Kelley. P: David E. Kelley, Bill D'Elia, Kayla Alpert, Kim Hamberg, Mike Listo, Jack Philbrick, Steve Robin, Pamela J. Wisne.

American Dad (February 2005 – present). C: Seth MacFarlane, Mike Barker, Matt Weitzman. P: Kara Vallow, Seth MacFarlane, Mike Barker, Matt Weitzman.

The Brady Bunch (September 1969 – March 1974). C: Sherwood Schwartz. P: Sherwood Schwartz, Lloyd J. Schwartz, Howard Leeds, David Whorf.

The Cosby Show (September 1984 – April 1992). C: Bill Cosby, Michael Leeson, Ed Weinberger. P: Bill Cosby, Marcy Carsey, Gordon Gartrelle, Bernie Kukoff, Nancy Stern, Tom Werner, Janet Leahy, Caryn Mandabach.

The Critic (January 1994 – May 1995). C: Al Jean, Mike Reiss. P: Al Jean, Mike Reiss, James L. Brooks.

Dinosaurs (April 1991 – July 1994). C: Michael Jacobs, Bob Young. P: Michael Jacobs.

Dr. Who (November 1963 – December 1989). C: Sydney Newman, C. E. Webber, Donald Wilson. P: John Nathan-Turner, Barry Letts, Verity Lambert, Innes Lloyd, Graham Williams, Philip Hinchcliffe.

Family Guy (January 1999 – present). C: Seth MacFarlane. P: Seth MacFarlane, David Zuckerman, Lolee Aries, David A. Goodman, Daniel Palladino.

Fish (February 1977 – June 1978). C: Danny Arnold. P: Norman Barasch, Roy Kammerman.

The Flintstones (September 1960 – April 1966). C: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera. P: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera.

Friends (September 1994 – May 2004). C: Kevin S. Bright, Marta Kauffman, David Crane. P: Marta Kauffman, David Crane.

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[507] In the list of television programs the following abbreviations will be used: C=creator, P=producer.

Futurama (March 1999 – present). C: Matt Groening. P: Matt Groening, David X. Cohen, Ken Keeler.

Growing Pains (September 1985 – April 1992). C: Neal Marlens. P: Michael Sullivan, Dan Guntzelman, Steve Marshall.

Happy Days (January 1974 – September 1984). C: Garry Marshall. P: Garry Marshall, Edward K. Milkis, Thomas L. Miller.

The Honeymooners (November 1952 – February 1970). P: Jack Philbin.

In Search of... (April 1977 – March 1982). C: Alan Landsburg Productions.

The Jetsons (September 1962 – October 1987). C: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera. P: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera.

Laugh-In (January 1968 – March 1973). C: Ed Friendly, George Schlatter. P: Paul Keyes, George Schlatter, Carolyn Raskin, Ed Friendly.

Laverne & Shirley (January 1976 – May 1983). C: Garry Marshall, Lowell Ganz, Mark Rothman. P: Jeff Franklin, Mark Rothman, Nick Abdo.

Leave it to Beaver (October 1957 – September 1963). C: Joe Connelly, Bob Mosher. P: Joe Connelly, Bob Mosher, Harry Ackerman.

King of the Hill (January 1997 – September 2009). C: Mike Judge, Greg Daniels. P: Mike Judge, Greg Daniels, Howard Klein, John Altschuler, Dave Krinsky, Michael Rotenberg.

Magnum, P.I. (December 1980 – February 1988). C: Donald P. Bellisario, Glen A. Larson. P: Donald P. Bellisario, Glen A. Larson, Chas. Floyd Johnson, Tom Greene, Rick Weaver.

Mario Puzo's The Last Don (May 1997). C: James T. Davis, Graeme Clifford. P: Joyce Eliason, James T. Davis, Frank Konigsberg, Scot J. Kelly, Larry Sanitsky.

Married… with Children (April 1987 – June 1997). C: Ron Leavitt, Michael Moye. P: Pamela Eells, Ron Leavitt, Michael Moye, Kim Weiskopf, Richard Gurman, Katherine Green.

Melrose Place (July 1992 – May 1999). C: Darren Star. P: Aaron Spelling, E. Duke Vincent, Darren Star, Frank South, Charles Pratt, Jr., Carol Mendelsohn.

Miami Vice (September 1984 – January 1990). C: Anthony Yerkovich. P: Michael Mann, Richard Brams, Donald L. Gold, Michael Attanasio.

Monty Python's Flying Circus (October 1969 – December 1974). C: Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, Michael Palin. P: Charles Brand, Ian MacNaughton, Anne James, John Howard Davies, Thomas Woitkewitsch.

My Mother the Car (September 1965 – September 1966). C: Allan Burns, Chris Hayward. P: Rod Amateau.

Pixie and Dixie and Mr. Jinks (October 1958 – October 1961). C: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera. P: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera.

The PJs (January 1999 – May 2001). C: Eddie Murphy, Larry Wilmore, Steve Tompkins. P: Eddie Murphy, Will Vinton, Ron Howard, Brian Grazer.

Ren & Stimpy (August 1991 – November 1996). C: John Kricfalusi. P: John Kricfalusi, Mark Heller.

The Ropers (March 1979 – May 1980). C: Johnnie Mortimer, Brian Cooke. P: Wendy Blair, Don Nicholl, Michael Ross, George Sunga, Bernard West.

Roseanne (October 1988 – May 1997). C: Matt Williams. P: Bruce Helford, Tom Arnold, Roseanne Barr, Marcy Carsey, Tom Werner, Jay Daniel, Matt Williams, Eric Gilliland, Bob Myer, Jeff Harris, Daniel Palladino, Rob Ulin.

Saturday Night Live (October 1975 – present). C: Lorne Michaels. P: Lorne Michaels, Jean Doumanian, Dick Ebersol.

Schoolhouse Rock (January 1973 – May 1996). C: David McCall. P: Radford Stone, J.J. Sedelmaier, George Newall.

Scrubs (October 2001 – March 2010). C: Bill Lawrence. P: Bill Lawrence, Neil Goldman, Garrett Donovan, Tim Hobert, Tad Quill, Bill Callahan, Zach Braff, Josh Bycel, Jonathan Groff.

Sesame Street (November 1969 – present). C: Joan Ganz Cooney, Lloyd Morrisett.

South Park (August 1997 – present). C: Trey Parker, Matt Stone. P: Trey Parker, Matt Stone, Anne Garefino, Brian Graden, Deborah Liebling.

Star Trek (September 1966 – June 1969). C: Gene Roddenberry. P: Gene Roddenberry, Fred Freiberger, Gene L. Coon, John Meredyth Lucas.

Teletubbies (March 1997 – January 2001). C: Anne Wood, Andrew Davenport. P: Kenn Viselman, Mary Pyke, Anne Wood.

Tom & Jerry (February 1940 – August 1980). C: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera. P: William Hanna, Joseph Barbera, Rudolf Ising, Fred Quimby.

The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson (October 1962 – May 1992). C: Sylvester L. Weaver, Jr. P: Frederick De Cordova, Peter Lassally, Rudy Tellez, Jeff Sotzing, Art Stark.

Three's Company (March 1977 – September 1984). C: Brian Cooke, Johnnie Mortimer. P: Don Nicholl, Michael Ross, Bernard West.

The Twilight Zone (October 1959 – June 1964). C: Rod Serling. P: Rod Serling, William Froug, Buck Houghton, William Self, Bert Granet, Herbert Hirschman.

Xena: Warrior Princess (September 1995 – May 2001). C: John Schulian, Robert Tapert. P: Robert Tapert, John Schulian, R. J. Stewart, Sam Raimi.

The X-Files (September 1993 – May 2002). C: Chris Carter. P: Chris Carter, Vince Gilligan, Howard Gordon, Frank Spotnitz, R.W. Goodwin.