

Telling Adult Stories Through the Mouths of Children:

An Analysis of *South Park* as an Adult Animated Show

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Degree in Animation. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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Abstract

This thesis examines how animation can be used to better depict ‘adult’ topics by breaking down key elements of the long-running show *South Park*. It employs a film analysis method to evaluate how *South Park* works as an educational satire displaying various topics whilst reflecting on how animation aids the creators of the show to do so. By analysing this particular show, the thesis explores an adult animated sitcom which still plays into animated tropes but has elements of serious debate. *South Park* uses traditional animation techniques such as visual gags, anthropomorphic characters, and over-exaggeration to present a world where children are arguably more mature in some aspects than adults. Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the co-creators, have found a way to use the medium to their advantage and to aid in expressing their view of our society. The show demonstrates a way to consider politics, religion, and current events through humour which places the moral conclusion between two sides of any argument as opposed to pushing any one stance. Via animation, the show is presented as a ‘low-brow’, easy watch that ultimately leaves viewers with a new perspective and sparks intellectual conversation not only amongst fans but in the wider scope of societal debate. Despite its controversial reputation, *South Park* continues to function due to the fact its animation removes most of the more problematic content from being scrutinised as critics can boil it down to being a cartoon and not something that functions in reality; although most of what *South Park* discusses are very real and honest reflections on the current state of the world. Animation is a medium much greater than the assumption it is solely an entertainment vice for children. By displaying *South Park* as an anarchic, immature aesthetic followed by crude language and content the

co-creators use the medium to full advantage and furthermore parody the preconceived notions of animation.

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Introduction

For years, animation has been viewed as children's entertainment. Being a visual medium that was trying to stand out in its infant phase it relied heavily on showing its audience over exaggerated, fantasy action that was typically violent and featured anthropomorphic characters. Its move from theatre programming to television saw a resurgence of this style of animating viruses, a pre-established Disney realism that was plaguing cinema in the 1960s. This carnivalesque violence and gag humour naturally pulled in a children's audience and was perceived as low-brow entertainment. However, over the last 30 years, animated shows with mature content have been gracing our late-night television schedules and have become even more prevalent in the age of streaming services. Animation as a whole has been overlooked as a genre for children especially in television as it fights to escape the 'Saturday morning cartoon' stereotype that rocked 70s tv. This idea is highlighted to the community, particularly in award season. Trey Parker, one of *South Park* (1997, Trey Parker and Matt Stone)'s creators' stated on the Emmys after their win in 2005:

*"We're put on what they call the "crap" night of the Emmys [...] best-animated series is in that night which is so ridiculous because the Simpsons is probably the biggest show in American history ever and it's on the crap night"*¹

Despite this comment being over 15 years old, attitudes from the creative community as well as wider society have yet to make progress in fully giving animation the credit it deserves as a medium. Animation holds an ability and a capacity to represent and depict various topics in more interesting ways than live action. This

¹ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *South Park's Matt Stone and Trey Parker — Charlie Rose Interview*. 26 Sept. 2005, 11:02

medium's possibilities to explore adult themes, such as politics, racism, religion, mental health, addiction, etc., are limitless.

The majority of adult animation consists of crude humour, extreme violence and skits that visually appeal to a stereotypical childlike style, by undermining these elements as an audience, we miss the deeper message within the content.

Well-executed and fully explored animation can examine mature topics with the leeway to disguise them with satire, dark humour and visual gags. Sitcoms from *Family Guy* (1999, Seth MacFarlane) to *Big Mouth* (2017, Nick Kroll) work so well because they use their animation almost as a distraction to satirically comment on big societal issues. They fully exploit it to make comments and pose questions on our world and probe into controversial topics not just for entertainment and shock factor but to educate audiences and make the viewer consider the bigger picture. Not only does the cartoon format allow them to be crude and explicit but it also allows them to experiment with interesting visual ways to present issues. Nick Kroll, the creator of *Big Mouth*, commented on the medium's creative advantages by stating;

*“Once we realised we could use hormone monsters and different kinds of creatures to personify the emotional states that these kids are going through, animation just felt like the perfect solution in so many ways.”*²

This is a perfect example of how this medium allows a show to offer its audience an element of escapism and lightheartedness visually and comedically alongside

² Chow, Andrew R., (*How Adult Animation Arrived at Its New Golden Age | Time*) 2019

allowing the creators to experiment with how to smuggle in heavier subjects such as, in regards to *Big Mouth*, depression and sexuality in adolescence.



Fig 1 - Big Mouth character Andrew Glouberman surrounded by talking mosquitos used to represent his anxieties multiplying and following him around

As stated most shows use satire in their commentary which is something outside the visual aspect of animation. For satire to work it needs to attack a vice with humour, judgement and irony. The impact of satire within these shows, however, can be lost as most tend to blur the lines between direct and indirect satire by attacking everything including themselves. Direct satire is speaking to an audience through a persona from a position of superiority who indicates what is wrong with society and

is the source of attack and judgement.³ Opposing that, indirect satire is symbolically projecting an undesirable reality onto a character that potentially acts socially disruptive coming to stand for what the satirist is attacking. Indirect satire lacks a position of superiority and therefore leaves the target on the defensive.⁴ ‘The unique dynamic of animation’s plastic, anarchic and carnival potential’⁵ is something that opens the doors to the opportunity to satirical exploit any available topic. In saying this, it is important to note the consequence of attacking everything. A ‘media text has intentions, blatant or otherwise, but individual viewers are free to choose how they interpret the text’s messages’⁶, therefore, displaying all society’s flaws on an even plane can lessen the intended impact of the social commentary.

Dark humour is a motif prevalent alongside satire. All sitcoms utilise this to interpret darker themes in a comedic way that is easier to relate to and as an element of shock factor to keep audiences engaged. Animation writers and artists have always relied on humour and gags to keep any audience interested in their cartoons but it is apparent that the utilisation of dark humour in today’s culture is enabling current animation writers to explore serious themes before the audience is even noticing and being able to handle them with characters and scenes that are impossible within the realm of live action. Within the animation realm, dark humour can be something a lot more visual and violent as well as typical comedic jokes.

To understand why adult animated television is the way it is today, we must look at the history of animation for television. Originally short cartoons played before a film

³ Ryan, Reilly Judd. *Where Are Those Good Old Fashioned Values? Family and Satire in Family Guy*, page 21

⁴ *ibid*, page 21

⁵ *ibid*, page 34

⁶ *ibid*, page 10

at the cinema but as theatrical bills grew shorts lost their exhibition space and moved to what was considered a ‘cartoon graveyard’ - television.⁷ The assumptions about cartoons made within the next two decades remained prevalent up until the 90s and still echo in the commentary of tv animation today. A cultural shift from the 1950s to the late 1960s forced animation into this box by networks linking a specific time slot to a children's audience come to be defined as Saturday morning cartoons.⁸

Hanna-Barbera's Flintstones (1960, William Hanna and Joseph Barbera) was one of the first shows to escape this block and hit prime time by targeting a ‘kidult’ audience. This was achieved by creating cartoons with universal appeal and having visuals and dialogues aimed more toward adults.⁹ The show echoes a sitcom style and allowed animation to escape its box for a short while. *The Simpsons* (1989, Matt Groening) caused a similar upheaval of stereotypical television animation in the 90s by again grabbing a prime time slot and pulling in an audience built up primarily of adults. By now a new generation of creators was rising. The generation who was raised not only on these Saturday morning cartoons but alongside it syndicated sitcom runs of *All in the Family* (1971, Norman Lear).¹⁰ This combination of tastes as well as a rebellious attitude toward the PC culture of television in the 80s propelled these creators to want to make something with an edge. This theme has continued to develop over time as more animated shows target mature audiences. However, the assumptions established from the Saturday morning slots remain and cause conflict with certain individuals who have a distaste for cartoons exploring adult content and using explicit language.¹¹

⁷ Stabile, Carol, and Mark Harrison. *Prime Time Animation : Television Animation and American Culture*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003. Page 33

⁸ Ibid, page 34

⁹ Ibid, page 43

¹⁰ Ibid, page 51

¹¹ Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Taking South Park Seriously*. SUNY Press, 2008., page 8

South Park, the show by the creators quoted at the beginning of this paper, is the perfect case study to examine the capabilities of animation as a medium for adult television. With 25 seasons and a feature film under their belt as of 2023, Parker and Stone have fully exploited animation to make satirical comments on current events, set up outrageously violent gags, and use child characters to humorously push past PC culture. The following chapters explore *South Park* as a whole, its use of child characters, depictions of current events, and controversial satire commentary under the focus lens of why it works as an animated text and how the medium aids these points.



Fig 2 - the four main boys of South Park, (left to right) Stan, Kyle, Eric, and Kenny, in their signature location waiting on the school bus

Chapter 1: A Creative Petri Dish



Fig 3 - Trey Parker (left) and Matt Stone (right) photographed to promote South Park alongside the original paper cutouts used in the first season. The image features the different sizing on pieces for shots alongside multiple heads for Eric's character which would be swapped out for different expressions and mouth shapes.

When *South Park* season one aired on *Comedy Central* on August 13 1997 it was billed as “why they invented the V-chip.”¹² However, *South Park* has never been a children’s cartoon despite the round, colourful faces of the 4 main characters Eric, Kenny, Stan and Kyle and the antics of their small, Colorado town where something out of the ordinary is always happening. *South Park* self-consciously opposed censorship, social taboos, and unquestioning faith in authority and tradition from its first episode on.¹³ It was created by adults for adults by creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker beginning with the initial two short films based in this animated world featuring crude depictions of Jesus Christ. In 1995, the duo were commissioned by Fox executive Brian Graden to create an animated Christmas card to send to his friends after he had seen a short the duo created, *Jesus vs Frosty*, during their time at the University of Colorado, Boulder. The 5-minute short, *The Spirit of Christmas*, showed a group of third-grade boys meeting both Santa Claus and Jesus Christ and witnessing their battle over who rightfully ‘owned’ Christmas.¹⁴ The short went ‘viral’ before going viral was an internet phenomenon. People would copy it from one VHS tape to another until it was spread wildly around Hollywood¹⁵ and the duo was discovered. *Comedy Central*, which was showing less stereotypical content than most networks at the time, offered them a show and allowed them to have as much creative say as they wanted.¹⁶ The show rocketed to popularity and acted as a differential signifier to other popular animated shows such as *the Simpsons* by openly mocking everything at reach in a vulgar, grotesque manner causing them to transgress established boundaries.¹⁷

¹² Gournelos, Ted. *Popular Culture and the Future of Politics: Cultural Studies and the Tao of South Park*. Lexington Books, 2009. Page 12

¹³ Ibid page 11

¹⁴ *Spirit of Christmas*. Directed by Trey Parker, 1995.

¹⁵ Gournelos. Op Cit, page 11

¹⁶ Trey Parker, and Matt Stone. *Speaking Freely: South Park’s Trey Parker & Matt Stone with Larry Divney*. 1 Mar. 2002, 06:14

¹⁷ Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Taking South Park Seriously*. SUNY Press, 2008. page 15



Fig 4 - Santa Claus and Jesus Christ, made from paper cutouts, in the original Christmas short which inspired South Park

Creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker met in a film class in college where they instantly bonded over their sense of humour and cinematic tastes. The pair had grown up in suburban Colorado in the 80s and at the age of 6 would tune in weekly for syndicated showings of *Monty Python* on PBS.¹⁸ *South Park* would go on to become their own creative petri dish to examine and parody all the truly weird things going on in the adult world of America.¹⁹ The original *South Park* footage was created via paper cut-out animation. This is a style of stop-motion animation made with paper and cardboard shapes moved by hand by the animator for every frame. Today the show is done on computers with a digital method reflective of the physical cut-out style.²⁰ The cut-out, simple style of animation done by Terry Gilliam alongside the dark, British comedy of *Monty Python* would shape them completely,

¹⁸ Parker, Trey, and Matt Stone. *The Conversation Hour: Trey Parker and Matt Stone*. 3 Feb. 2017, 05:30

¹⁹ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *Parker and Stone's Subversive Comedy*. 26 Sept. 2011, 06:34

²⁰ *6 Days to Air; the Making of South Park*. Directed by arthur bradford, comedy central, 9 Oct. 2011,

especially comedically.²¹ Due to the style of the show, *South Park* is produced on an unusually tight schedule. It remains under the full creative control of Parker and Stone who not only write and direct but also voice the majority of the characters.²² A typical schedule for the show is 6 days from initial brainstorming to final episode delivery; as it is computer-animated changes are being made up until the morning the episode airs as everyone needed for voice, story, and acting/animation is available in the building.²³ This is a practice typically unheard of in the live-action industry with the exception of late-night talk shows such as *Saturday Night Live*.²⁴ However, through the medium of animation, the creators of *South Park* remain at an advantage over these types of sketch comedy shows as they are less bound or accountable to the ‘real’.²⁵ Although shows, like *SNL*, have satirical parodies, they remain somewhat brief transgressive statements²⁶; this keeps them at a disadvantage in comparison as the creators face elements of fear over backlash or offending anyone, celebrity or group in case they want them for their show in the future.²⁷

Stone and Parker similarly had a distaste for the PC culture that had evolved on television in the 80s and 90s in comparison to shows of the 70s such as *All in the Family*.²⁸ PC culture refers to politically correct language, policies, or measures that are intended to avoid offending groups within society.²⁹ Animation allows the show freedom to bypass these standards and even parody them in later seasons by introducing the character of PC Principal. The simplified voices and animation both

²¹ *The Conversation Hour*: op cit 05:48.

²² *6 days to air*. Op Cit.

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ Gournelos. Op Cit. page 16

²⁵ Weinstock. Op Cit. page 212

²⁶ Gournelos. Op Cit. page 16

²⁷ *6 days to air*. Op Cit.

²⁸ *Speaking Freely*. Op Cit. 02:02

²⁹ “Political Correctness.” *Wikipedia*, 7 Feb. 2023. *Wikipedia*,

abstract and simplify allusions to cultural norms and popular genres and texts.³⁰ *South Park* targets many popular texts, current issues, politics, stereotypical groups, etc in controversial ways which were unheard of on other shows but the main boundaries crossed by the creators concerning PC culture are tv censorship and language. Comedy Central somewhat relies on this perception of the freedom the show has to be topical, aggressive, and free of many restraints.³¹ The tight production schedule puts them in a position to consistently push boundaries by covering risky topics and using obscene language and remains in a power over the network as any changes made last minute could cause delays in the airing of an episode.³² Many parent associations are vocally against the anti-PC culture and anti-authoritarian regime in *South Park* despite the fact it is consistently not marketed as a family show.³³ Their discomfort stems from the preconceived notion that animated shows are strictly for children and, although *South Park* stars school children, the content is not aimed toward them. However, its most vocal opponent is the catholic league, a conservative religious group led by Bill Donohue due to its blasphemous content.³⁴ Donohue has gone on to be mocked and parodied in multiple episodes of the show alongside Kyle's mother being a representation of the parents association trials against *South Park*. The arguments from the main two critics of the show echo claims made against western philosophers for centuries; both philosophy and *South Park* mock religious beliefs, leading younger folks to question accepted authority and values and 'corrupt' our children and culture.³⁵ By combatting the PC

³⁰ Gournelos. Op Cit. page 43

³¹ Ibid page 43

³² 6 days to air. Op Cit.

³³ Nixon, Helen. "Adults Watching Children Watch 'South Park.'" *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1999, page 13

³⁴ Gournelos. Op Cit. page 14

³⁵ Arp, Robert. *South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. page 7

culture, the resourceful and confrontational minds of Parker and Stone³⁶ are doing more than standing out as rebellious artists but also pointing out misplaced, moral concerns in American culture which episodes such as *Death* (S01E06) both parody and satire through self-criticism, gag visuals, and intellectual dialogue.



Fig 5 - a shot from episode 'Death' (S01E06) featuring a mob of angry parents protesting the Terrance and Philp show in hopes of saving their children from crude, inappropriate humour inspired by the parents association against South Park

As mentioned, the *South Park* creators were part of the generation raised on 'Saturday morning cartoons' such as *the Flintstones* alongside *the Simpsons* and *Beavis and Butthead* and draw upon many stereotypical animated tropes throughout

³⁶ Scott, A. O. "Moral Guidance From Class Clowns." *The New York Times*, 15 Oct. 2004. NYTimes.com,

their seasons such as visual gags, heavy dialogue use, and limited animation which is a paired back style of animating saving on both time and budget.³⁷ Despite this, the show deviates from its predecessors by basing itself around a town as opposed to a familial sitcom or duo comedy.³⁸ Not only has this opened the writers up to numerous plot devices by focusing different episodes on new characters, families, etc³⁹ but it also allows the show to fully satirically display current issues in a social system.⁴⁰ Like most contemporary media *South Park* is consistently intertextual, not only with references to the aforementioned animated shows which paved the way but also for film, live-action television, current events, and music. Because it is an animated program, it is easily able to mimic elements from other cultural texts.⁴¹ By 2007 every episode of *South Park* averaged two film source references alongside other verbal and visual references to provide social critique in terms of wider society.⁴² The intertextuality of the show not only plays on the cultural capital and knowledge of the viewer but also on traditional carnivalesque elements embedded in the traditions of animation. *South Park* also relies heavily on media culture, intertextuality, and satirising contemporary issues under the rubric of being “just a cartoon.”⁴³ Episodes such as *Marjorine* (S09E09), reflect the fluctuation of the genre by beginning as a sci-fi horror flick and moving on toward elements of a traditional teen girl drama with references to *E.T.* and featuring music from Justin Timberlake. Original music in *South Park* forms dissonant chains of allusive connections to other films, genre conventions, political events, and social norms with multiple songs

³⁷ Weinstock. op cit. Page 81

³⁸ Gournelos. Op Cit. page 44

³⁹ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *South Park's Matt Stone and Trey Parker — Charlie Rose Interview*. 26 Sept. 2005, 09:58

⁴⁰ Gournelos. Op Cit. page 44

⁴¹ Ibid page 44

⁴² Ibid page 61

⁴³ Weinstock op cit page 212

referencing classic Disney ballads, Christmas carols, and rock-esque montages.⁴⁴

Over two-thirds of episodes contain some level of musical component.⁴⁵ The creators themselves refer to the seasons as albums in a sense.

South Park is just a town but is also a metaphor for the U.S. media, culture, and politics that functions almost exclusively as a tool rather than a coherent entity with reliable institutions.⁴⁶ The animated style of the show was something “people just liked”⁴⁷ that ended up lending itself not only in speed of production but as a way to study our current day-to-day lives in both a humorous and intellectual manner. The creators use it to their advantage to make something evocative that people talk about afterwards⁴⁸ wrapped up in an easy-to-watch style with talking Christmas poo and queer dogs. The arguably biggest aid animation gives to the show, however, is the opportunity to view issues through the lens of foul-mouthed children.

⁴⁴ Gournelos. Op Cit. page 62

⁴⁵ Ibid page 62

⁴⁶ Ibid page 67

⁴⁷ *Speaking Freely*. Op Cit. 06:04

⁴⁸ Ibid 01:26

Chapter 2: Evil Little Bastards



Fig 6 - the fourth-grade schoolchildren of South Park in their typical reaction of disgust and confusion at the antics of their teachers'

People typically forgive children quickly for saying outlandish things because at the end of the day what do they know?⁴⁹ Many shows use children as a representation of anarchic values like Bart's pro-slacker attitude in *the Simpsons* or the unsupervised activities in *Beavis and Butthead*, much to many parents' disapproval. Staying true to their anarchic aesthetic sensibility⁵⁰, Parker and Stone use children as a social critique⁵¹ and a means to sit in between two very different sides of a debate and see them both as absurd as the other. The relationships between adults and children in the town of South Park reflect the changes that happened to familial structures between the 60s and 80s; divorce rates rose and both parents typically worked causing many households to create 'latchkey kids' fending for themselves and being taught by television.⁵² The cast of *South Park* can be split into the community of lost children between eight and ten years old and the community of absurd adults. As the primary focus is on the children, many of the topics in the show revolve around education both in and out of school.⁵³ There is a consistent 'coming of age' narrative⁵⁴ as the children learn how to navigate life, see right from wrong, and survive multiple violent episodes without help from their respective guardians who are shown as deceitful, inept, and corrupt.⁵⁵ Even though the children appear to be the saner side of *South Park*, in true tongue-in-cheek fascination⁵⁶ Parker and Stone want children to talk the way kids talk.⁵⁷ 'The "deliberate immaturity" of *South Park*'s visual aesthetic accentuates the ironic contrast between culturally enshrined ideals concerning children's simplicity and innocence and their actual willfulness,

⁴⁹ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *Trey Parker and Matt Stone on Fresh Air* (2010). 28 May 2010, 09:26

⁵⁰ Gournelos, Ted. *Popular Culture and the Future of Politics: Cultural Studies and the Tao of South Park*. Lexington Books, 2009. Page 59

⁵¹ Ibid page 59

⁵²Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Taking South Park Seriously*. SUNY Press, 2008. Page 158

⁵³ Gournelos op cit page 48

⁵⁴ Ibid page 46

⁵⁵ Weinstock op cit page 157

⁵⁶ Ibid page 82

⁵⁷ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *Parker and Stone's Subversive Comedy*. 26 Sept. 2011, 09:24

perversity, and sadism'.⁵⁸ Stone notes that, whereas "most people" think of children as "innocent," the "essence of *South Park*" is that he and Parker "view kids as just evil little bastards".⁵⁹

Using children as social commentary and for twisted comedy in media has been a recurring theme for years and is by no means a modern concept. It can be assumed a reason for this is part of overcoming the phobia of the dangers our youth are facing as well as a normalisation of human catastrophe.⁶⁰ Humour aids us in dehumanising the ideas of children and innocence⁶¹ making it easier to let go of when it's inevitably destroyed. By representing childhood via animation, the creators permit the viewer to separate the scene from reality since it's easier to accept or witness violence against a fictional cartoon character.⁶² *South Park* looks at both the mortality and morality of the young characters. This can range from violently killing, maiming, and abusing them to exploring themes of relationships, disability, and sexuality. The show primarily juxtaposes the perceived innocence of children with their cynicism and brutality but also depicts their loss of innocence as they learn more about the world.⁶³ The use of children in this way is also another layer of parody and satire within *South Park* referencing classic familial sitcoms where the kids learn something by the end of a thirty-minute time slot in the most literal sense of telling the audience "you know I learned something today."⁶⁴ The four key boys go through similar events together but individually represent the different aspects of children in

⁵⁸ Weinstock Op cit page 82

⁵⁹ Ibid page 159

⁶⁰ Gubanov, Nickolay N., et al. "Motives for Children's Mortality in Modern Dark Humour." *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities (ICCESSH 2019)*, Atlantis Press, 2019. DOI.org (Crossref), page 2136

⁶¹ Ibid page 2137

⁶² Ibid page 2138

⁶³ Gournelos op cit page 49

⁶⁴ Arp, Robert. *South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. Page 27

South Park. Eric Cartman shows the brutality, Stan and Kyle's partnership shows the educational journey and loss of innocence and little Kenny undergoes extreme recurring violence.



Fig 7 - a family breakfast at the Marsh's house showing a levelheaded Kyle sitting across from his angry father Randy. From body language alone we can read Randy as childish, immature, and acting out after not getting his way which would usually be a stereotypical attitude of the children

“Well, Who Didn’t See That Coming?”

Displays of violence are stereotypical in animated shows, it goes as far back as *the Flintstones* as it is an easy way to play into the animatedness of visual humour.⁶⁵ As shows have begun to target a more mature audience the images of violence have become increasingly more graphic, bloody and gory. Any regular viewer or anyone with knowledge of *South Park* knows the recurring trope of the death of Kenny McCormack. In most episodes, especially the first 5 seasons, the character Kenny dies at some stage during the episode in a brutal, violent act followed by his corpse being devoured by rats. In some episodes, his death is even randomly thrown in at the end to reflect the normalcy of how an episode is not complete without the death of a child. Even the reaction from the other children shows the normalcy of the violence they’re exposed to regularly:

Kyle: Oh my god, they killed Kenny!

Stan: You bastards!

‘The cartoon allows the viewer to abstract from reality and gives a better perception of dark humour since it is not so difficult technically and psychologically to kill a fictional cartoon character.’⁶⁶ The repetition of Kenny’s death exaggerates and

⁶⁵ Stabile, Carol, and Mark Harrison. *Prime Time Animation : Television Animation and American Culture*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003. Page 43

⁶⁶ Gubanov op cit page 2138

caricatures horror stories hammered into people's minds via the news. It also echoes repeated patterns in sadistic nursery rhymes from the 20th century.⁶⁷ As a whole humanity finds comfort in patterns and pleasure in both prediction and slight changes in expectations.⁶⁸ Not only do Parker and Stone reference child's television and themes of childhood but this humorous motif of death is directly referencing older texts based upon children's nursery rhymes⁶⁹ further adding to the intertextuality of the show and layers of satire in the use of children. For Kenny to die every episode, he is reset to normal in the next, however, *South Park* does not always return to normalcy and some elements have long-lasting effects.⁷⁰ 'When asked why Kenny has to die in each episode, Parker and Stone answer in unison during an interview on the South Park Volume 1 DVD: "Because he's poor."⁷¹ This is the same reason his body is then devoured by rodents immediately after his death. From this passing comment from the creators, it's clear the violence enacted in the show, and obviously, the brutality of killing a child is not just for crude, dark humour. It has an element of social commentary that is subtly fed through colourful cartoon antics. In true *South Park* fashion though once a rule is established it is quickly broken.⁷² In some seasons Kenny remains dead (S05E13) whilst, in others, they acknowledge the possibility of how he is reset (S14E13). This violent act against Kenny is the most obvious example of violence in *South Park* and how the children deal with it. Again, all done under the concept that this is just a cartoon⁷³ and, as stated in the introduction, is all entirely fictional.

⁶⁷ Ibid page 2136

⁶⁸ Nixon, Helen. "Adults Watching Children Watch 'South Park.'" *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1999, page 14

⁶⁹ Ibid page 14

⁷⁰ Gournelos op cit page 67

⁷¹ Weinstock Op cit page 26

⁷² Ibid page 9

⁷³ Ibid page 212



Fig 8 - Stan brutally sawing his own friend Kenny in half, ultimately killing him to try to prevent the spread of a zombie disease. The amount of blood accompanied by the concept of a little boy murdering not just another boy but a friend shows the violent acts the children of South Park have become accustomed to

“Respect Mah Authoritah”

When it comes to a core member, Cartman, they push the idea of how kids talk to the extreme. His character is based on a now controversial live-action character Archie Bunker from the 70s sitcom, *All in the Family*.⁷⁴ To bypass the PC culture at the time the creative duo considered how to have a character like that on television today and concluded “if Archie Bunker was eight I bet you can do it.”⁷⁵ By animating his character, as the selfish fat kid, they further add a layer to ‘make people mad’⁷⁶ and caricature the idea behind his character further. Cartman’s outlandish behaviour plays a key role in the carnival pleasure⁷⁷ within the show. His character embodies an ‘uglier’ version of America; more conservative, ‘redneck’, uneducated views with a lack of respect for those around him. He is consistently shown to be ‘evil’ and thoughtless in relation to others and ignorant of how his actions have consequences.⁷⁸ Not only does the audience receive entertainment from his controversial behaviour, which is typical carnivalesque fashion and causes levels of shock and laughter by breaking boundaries, but it also appears as a character he delights in his own political incorrectness.⁷⁹ To note carnival language is both abusive and regenerative, it liberates the consumer by saying shocking things typically frowned upon. “Television humour in cartoons is essentially iconic, not representational. The aim is to develop the aspects of characters that could not be

⁷⁴ Fresh air Op cit 09:00

⁷⁵ *Subversive Comedy*. Op Cit 07:06

⁷⁶ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *South Park’s Matt Stone and Trey Parker — Charlie Rose Interview*. 26 Sept. 2005, 05:00

⁷⁷ Weinstock op cit page 26

⁷⁸ Arp, Robert. *South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. Page 10

⁷⁹ Weinstock op cit page 26

emphasised were the characters real actors.’⁸⁰



Fig 9 - Eric Cartman in 'Chickenlover' (S02E04) riding around town on his big wheel after promoting himself to town police officer when Officer Barbrady resigns. The role suits him as he enforced his own brand of justice on people and encourages the public to respect the authority he has given himself. The power that goes to Cartman's head not only reflects his narcissistic, power-hungry mindset but simultaneously is a satiric commentary on the attitude some police officers have when they carry their badges.

A key focus of Cartman's character we see time and time again is his casual racism, antisemitism, and sexism. Cartman plays a massive role in Parker and Stone's satirical illustration of prejudice in small, predominantly white, American towns. Alongside his obnoxious mannerisms and whiny voice, he is the primary person in the town who uses slurs repeatedly and openly in his everyday language. Slurs in *South Park* are shown to function both as social insulators and as catalysts for

⁸⁰ Ibid page 212

neurosis for those on either side of the ethnic or religious divide.⁸¹ Parker and Stone carefully satirise white assumptions about ethnic minorities and, in the process, construct what may be referred to as a “counter-hegemony” in which minority members are shown to be more talented or capable than the white majority.⁸² His antisemitism is shown in more episodes than not as he continually refers to his friend Kyle simply as “jew.” Even in later seasons when he experiences some sort of character development, he remains subtly racist, misogynistic, and manipulative to some extent. This element of his character is vital to note, however, the racial and antisemitic discourse shown through most episodes is arguably too big of a discussion to condense into a chapter for this paper therefore the remaining discussion on Eric Cartman will be focused on his evil, selfish habits and the juxtaposition between his innocence and lack of innocence.⁸³

A study of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, is a philosophical reflection of the evil behind thoughtlessness.⁸⁴ Eichmann followed the laws made by Hitler without question during the Holocaust and how staying as one of the crowd caused him to enact horrors just as evil as his dictator. He lacked the ability to view things from other people’s perspectives and stand up for what was correct, much like the adults featured in the show.⁸⁵ This kind of thoughtlessness, Ardent claims, is potentially one of the worst types of evil.⁸⁶ *South Park* typically dissects moral issues through open dialogue and criticism of both sides. By having Cartman’s character lack the ability

⁸¹Ibid Page 131

⁸² Ibid page 134

⁸³ Gournelos. Opict page 49

⁸⁴ Arp, Robert. Op cit page 10

⁸⁵ Ibid page 10

⁸⁶ Ibid page 10

to reflect when it comes to authority and mindlessly follows what he's told, much like when he speaks up against their fourth-grade teacher despite the fact the other children fail to join in after starting the whole plan (S04E11), the creators prove his evil to be an imitation of the lesser-known evil in our society.⁸⁷ Cartman's character similarly fails to put himself into other characters' shoes. His thoughtless, selfish behaviour leads him to take any plot that aids what he feels is correct to the extreme. Shown through the visuals of him in a Nazi uniform (S08E03), Cartman, much like Eichmann, consumes evil and imitates it blindly.⁸⁸ However, much of what he does, like intentionally choosing the opposing side to his friends just to have the argument (S04E07), reflects a level of childhood innocence he still obtains. *Scott Tenorman Must Die* (S05E04) proves both the brutal evil and childhood innocence that makeup Cartman's way of thinking throughout *South Park*.

Scott Tenormen, a boy in an older grade, sells Cartman his pubic hair convincing him this will make him more mature than the other fourth graders. This misunderstanding around themes of puberty and maturity is shown in various episodes, like when the boys think they have their periods when in fact they're just sick (S03E16). Cartman uses this maturity gained from purchasing another boy's pubic hair and passing it off as his own as a status symbol. The other boys in his clique inform him pubic hair is grown not bought and therefore Cartman is no more mature or 'adult' than the rest of them. Tenormen refuses to give Cartman a refund causing him to plot revenge on the older boy. Although the show is socio-political it uses the role of childhood to also give a privy to the formation of identity in childhood.⁸⁹ The boys learn about who they are, adult themes, their bodies etc. Their

⁸⁷ Ibid page 11

⁸⁸ Ibid page 11

⁸⁹ Gournelos. Op cit. page 52

lack of knowledge of these themes reminds the audience of their age and their innocent nature which is then consistently juxtaposed with cruel acts against those around them.⁹⁰ By the end of this episode, Cartman kills Tenormen's parents and feeds them to him in a chilli contest unbeknownst to anyone. His friends attempted to betray him and help Tenormen, however, Cartman used their good nature and knowledge they would do just that to his advantage. Despite their friendship, from previous acts, Kyle and Stan were cautious of the brutality of Cartman's nature. There is a complete contrast shown in the perceived humorous innocence of Cartman, thinking he can buy his maturity at the beginning of the episode and the lack of innocence in his brutal actions at the end. These juxtapositions using ideals of childhood, the formation of identity, and education⁹¹ are embedded in *South Park's* political oversight. The animated aesthetic of the show allows Parker and Trey to manipulate these types of situations with children that are representative of a unique view of youth that can be emphasised with the idea that it's simply a cartoon.⁹² They present children not as stereotypical angels learning about the world through tender life lessons but as sadistic with immaturity in their design to heighten the comedic, satirical commentary on the trials and loss of youth.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid page 49

⁹¹ Ibid page 49

⁹² Weinstock op cit page 212

⁹³ Ibid page 159



Fig 10 - the final moments of S05E04 where after revealing the heinous act he has committed, Cartman laughs and literally licks the tears from the now grieving Scott Tenorman so that he can taste the effects of his revenge. Visually this demonstrates how depraved and thoughtless Cartman is as an individual

Chapter 3: A Funny Way Out



Fig 11 - 'Weiners Out' (S20E04) is focused on a war between boys and girls where Kyle is the only one focused on the middle ground and can see the ridiculousness between the two genders feuding against one another, this image shows Butters leading the boys in protest through the school hallways declaring everyone must choose a side.

*“I know I am not alone in confessing that my moral and ideological guides for the past half-dozen years have included four foul-mouthed Colorado youngsters made out of torn construction paper. Without "South Park," I would scarcely know what to think about issues like stem cell research, "The Passion of the Christ" or the Pokémon craze.”*⁹⁴

In Scott’s review of *Team America: World Police*, a film made by Parker and Stone in 2004 with puppets, he references his expectations of how topics are satirically covered by the creative duo and the comfort he takes in watching “a wholesale demolition of everything pious, hypocritical and dumb in American culture and society”⁹⁵ on *South Park* twice a week. As discussed in previous chapters, *South Park* covers a wide range of topics in a satiric way using predominantly children characters to enact their middle-of-the-road views accompanied by a juvenile animated aesthetic. The main commentary on how the show handles topics is they appear to lack one set political standpoint.⁹⁶ The creators have chosen mostly to avoid discussing their own political views outside the show but have described themselves as libertarian.⁹⁷ They’ve stated how they refuse to have hardcore political leanings and how they personally feel *South Park* is above choosing one side of a debate.⁹⁸ Their 100th episode (S07E04), which aired around the time of the start of the Iraq war, reflects this standpoint by ending with a song which states “for the war, against the war—who cares! 100 episodes!” This philosophy is proved in every episode of the show. It's clear from taking any example that the show personifies

⁹⁴ Scott, A. O. “Moral Guidance From Class Clowns.” *The New York Times*, 15 Oct. 2004. *NYTimes.com*,

⁹⁵ *ibid*

⁹⁶ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *Parker and Stone’s Subversive Comedy*. 26 Sept. 2011, 11:30

⁹⁷ Nast, Condé. “They Killed Kenny...And Revolutionized Comedy.” *GQ*, 6 Jan. 2006,

⁹⁸ *ibid*

both sides of any argument, politics, religion, current events, etc and exaggerates them to the most extreme then places their characters, usually, the more free-thinking Kyle and Stan, in the centre capable of seeing the absurdity of both sides and finding a new point of view on the issue.⁹⁹ From here the boys and the creators take a funny way out¹⁰⁰ which becomes a vehicle for popular resistance from the norm with viewers.¹⁰¹ For them, it is about creating thoughtful episodes that view an argument from all angles and displaying the inconvenient truths in a humorous way.¹⁰² This method is similar to political comics which have been featured in newspapers for years; highlighting current events and politics in a quick-witted manner which has lasting effects on consumers in terms of education, afterthought and societal discussion.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *South Park's Matt Stone and Trey Parker — Charlie Rose Interview*. 26 Sept. 2005 11:57

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 19:32

¹⁰¹ Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Taking South Park Seriously*. SUNY Press, 2008. Page 23

¹⁰² Bracey, Earnest N. *The Myth of Racial Diversity: What Comedy Central's "South Park" Can Teach Us about Religion and Politics, and Why It Matters*. no. 3, 2021, page 24

¹⁰³ Ibid page 24

Current Events

Despite common misconceptions, the writers do not begin from a place of attack, although to critics and particular groups, it appears that way. Instead focusing on what they want to talk about.¹⁰⁴ They choose and research topics which truly intrigue them and work towards creating a comedic show expressing an educated, satiric view on any given situation. To quote:

“We’re getting into some material [...] if you just go like blah at the beginning and you’re just trying to be cynical and just like trying to say something nasty [...] I know the joke we’re going for there but we just haven’t earned it, you earn it when you bring a whole contextual like emotional journey and narrative and then you can go places”¹⁰⁵

Not only does animating allow them an extreme amount of creative control in dealing with and satirising these topics but so does their tight production schedule. Without a preplan, the creators have the capacity to create a show based on an event happening in real-time and get their view of it, with their own characters,¹⁰⁶ on-air almost as fast as the news. The *South Park* episode handling the Terri Schiavo case (S09E04) hit primetime the same week the news broke national furore.¹⁰⁷ In the particular plot, they knew they wanted to discuss this situation, whether to take a human being off life support or not, happening in real time but didn’t know how to handle such a sensitive topic till they both realised; what if this person doesn’t want

¹⁰⁴ *Charlie Rose* op cit 09:58

¹⁰⁵ Parker, Trey, and Matt Stone. *The Conversation Hour: Trey Parker and Matt Stone*. 3 Feb. 2017, 10:26

¹⁰⁶ *Charlie Rose* op cit 01:22

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid* 09:43

to be shown on television in this state?¹⁰⁸ The episode aired hours before Schiavo passed and went on to win an Emmy¹⁰⁹ after being well-received by critics for handling the frenzy with a refreshing, light-hearted take.



Fig 12 - 'Best Friends Forever' (S09E04) features Kenny in a vegetative state where Cartman campaigns to have his machine turned off so that he can get Kenny's new PSP

It's clear this particular topic had a moral weight to it both in real life and on the show. *South Park* addresses all moral issues through a lens of criticism and open debate and as mentioned landing on a new take after finding both conservative and liberal positions to be inadequate.¹¹⁰ As attested in the previous chapter, Kyle and Stan's friendship shows an educational journey typically ending the show with the pair discussing what they learned today. Their open discussion, analysis and

¹⁰⁸ Nast, Condé. "They Killed Kenny...And Revolutionized Comedy." *GQ*, 6 Jan. 2006,

¹⁰⁹ *Charlie Rose* op cit 10:12

¹¹⁰ Arp, Robert. *South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. Page 11

reflective virtue relate back to ideas discussed by Hannah Ardent regarding the importance of thinking outside the box created by any authority or traditional value.¹¹¹ The children of *South Park* tend to find virtue in any debate.¹¹² They openly discuss and reflect on issues together and individually.¹¹³ By doing such, Parker and Stone find a way to bring current events to television in a way that proves the people screaming on one side and the people screaming on the other are equal despite their differences and it's okay to be in the middle laughing at what's going on.¹¹⁴ The creators' ability to use humour for even the most tragic events reflects how current generations cope with trauma through dark humour and inventive, artistic methods. *South Park's* class-clown libertarianism¹¹⁵ in staying in this middle ground and satirically playing off the stupidity of both sides creates an anti-critic device.¹¹⁶ No matter how ridiculous or over-exaggerated their cartoon depiction of the world is it is almost inarguable against. It sits in the grey. The joke becomes if you argue with what they have to say you are just as stupid as the caricatures on the show so the jokes are now on you.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ibid page 10

¹¹² Ibid page 11

¹¹³ Ibid page 12

¹¹⁴ *Charlie Rose* op cit 11:57

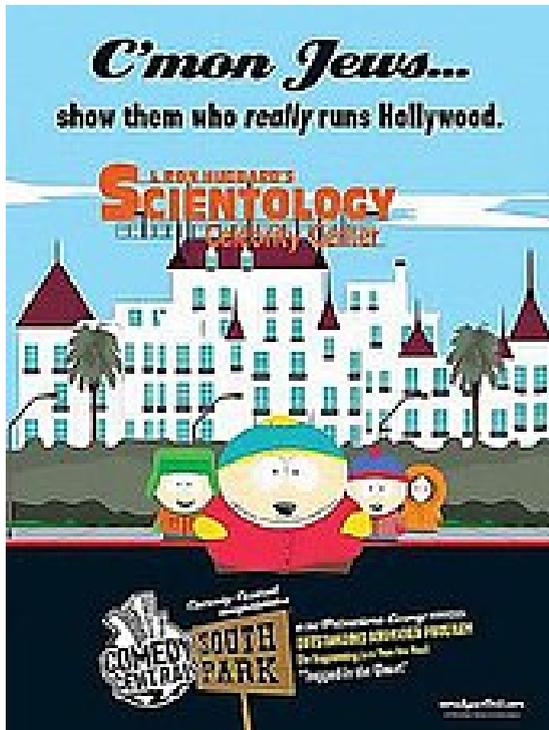
¹¹⁵ Scott. A. o. Op cit

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ ibid

Science and Religion

Fig 13 - ad for South Park



South Park was a show born from satirical blasphemy by depicting crude images of Jesus Christ in the original two short films by the same creators.¹¹⁸ Like the majority of mainstream adult-targeted animation filth and absurdity are part of the spectacle¹¹⁹ and the ‘animatedness’ of handling different issues.¹²⁰ Science and religion are two topics embedded in our society that are unavoidable and typically coincide. Many episodes touch on it in some regards; with Kyle’s Jewish stereotypes (S03E09), introducing a

Mormon family (S07E12) or dealing with the controversy of paedophilia in the Catholic church (S06E08). Parker and Stone, in their true anarchic fashion, refuse to shy away from showing an animated version of religious stories and figures. To some extent, they don’t have to over-exaggerate the stories as “a lot of religious stories, if you animate what they say, look pretty ridiculous.”¹²¹

Trapped in the Closet (S09E12) was a controversial episode as it depicted the religion, Scientology. Stan, in this episode, is looking for something fun to do and ends up joining Scientology where he discovers he has high ‘thetan levels’ and the

¹¹⁸ Arp, Robert. op cit page 97

¹¹⁹ Ibid page 98

¹²⁰ Weinstock. Op cit page 81

¹²¹ Nast, Condé.op cit

church claims him as the second coming of L Ron Hubbard, their founder. In showing the beliefs in Scientology a caption on the screen reads ‘this is what Scientologists actually believe.’ This very simple statement confirms Parker and Stone’s belief that showing any religion as animated and saying “here it is”, can come across as ridiculous due to the aesthetic ability of cartoons.¹²² For a lot of people, it was a particular subject in Hollywood which remained untouched.¹²³ But as both creators note, with their desire to remain punk rock, “you can only say "You can't do that" so many times [to Matt and me] before we're gonna do it.”¹²⁴ Isaac Hayes, who had voiced the character Chef on the show and was a known Scientologist, ‘quit the show, citing the show’s “intolerance” of religious beliefs (like this was a new thing).’¹²⁵

The plot satirises the church as a whole alongside its beliefs, but it focuses on the celebrities presumed to be in the church. Even prior to this episode, *South Park* had satirised the notion of celebrification by parody not only how celebrities act but how we as a society now worship them in a similar way to religious figures. ‘Through elements of parody, irony, and satire, *South Park* provides both a comical and insightful critique of celebrity by mocking their manufacture and flattering representations, as well as questioning why celebrity continues to be celebrated, what underlines this public infatuation, and precisely who is being celebrated.’¹²⁶ Tom Cruise, a known Scientologist, appears as a key point of the episode. After Stan tells him his acting is only okay, animated Cruise hides in Stan’s closet and refuses to come out. The back-and-forth blatantly satirises that Tom Cruise is a closeted

¹²² *ibid*

¹²³ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *South Park 20th Anniversary*. 2016, 40:55

¹²⁴ Nast, Condé. *op cit*

¹²⁵ Arp, Robert. *op cit* page 103

¹²⁶ Weinstock. *Op cit* page 211

man. By focusing the plot around Tom Cruise, Parker and Stone mock the believer over the belief.¹²⁷ But Cruise's cartoon image also played on censorship issues the show faces.

When writing the show they wanted to play on the tabloid news at the time that Cruise was a closeted gay man. Despite their extreme amount of freedom, the creators still have lawyers that verify episode content as it's being created. They were stopped from depicting Cruise as a 'flamboyant gay', then again by stating openly he was closeted gay, and eventually were allowed to parody the concept of being closeted by putting Cruise's character in a literal closet.¹²⁸ Despite escaping most censor issues via the 'just a cartoon' rubric,¹²⁹ this concept caused 'closetgate' - where Cruise allegedly refused to promote his latest film till the episode was removed from the air. The episode did go on to be removed from the air and not put to syndication for a period.

This level of censorship had never before affected any caricatures on the show from the obvious Jesus Christ to any other celebrity whose face cut out was used as opposed to being 'South Parked' up until the representation of the prophet Mohammed. In true parodic style, the show likes to point out hypocrisy where possible and treat nothing as sacred.¹³⁰ Despite featuring in the original airing of *Super Best Friends* (S05E03) in 2001¹³¹, any later depictions of the prophet have been met with extreme controversy. In 2005, any cartoon version of the prophet was censored due to the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy. The episode

¹²⁷ Arp, Robert. op cit page 107

¹²⁸ *Subversive Comedy*. Op cit 10:58

¹²⁹ Weinstock op cit page 212

¹³⁰ Arp, Robert. op cit page 107

¹³¹ Ibid page 104

was completely removed from all sites, unlike Cruise's which ended up returning to the screen. These complications surrounding the blasphemy of a sacred figure are arguably the only instance where both the show nor the network could not win by using animation as a bypass for representing something. This was partially due to threats by a group called Revolution Muslim which stated the creators would be seriously harmed if any representation of Mohammed went to air.¹³² However, as we see time again from the *South Park* duo, the situation was used to their advantage in 3 later episodes; *Cartoon Wars* (S10E04), *200* (S14S05), and *201* (S14E06). In the former, the image of the prophet was covered by a title screen stating: "Mohammed hands Peter a football helmet." Then another caption follows marked by the distinctly sour tone "Comedy Central refuses to broadcast an image of Mohammed on their network."¹³³ The two-part plot which followed four years later had layers of intertextuality. Parodying the idea of censorship further the story focuses on all celebrities/figures depicted through *South Park* hunting for Muhammed's 'goo' which keeps him censored and 'safe.' Before *201* aired, 'Comedy Central censored the image and audio references to Muhammad. This censorship was loudly and vehemently lambasted, even more so than that for the *Cartoon Wars* episodes, but to this day Comedy Central will not re-air *201*.'¹³⁴

Satirical humour is the core of *South Park* alongside its 'animatedness'.¹³⁵ The creators' consistent punk rock¹³⁶ take has led them to handle current events in a way that is undoable by many others. 'Its humour is not easily summarised in terms of its ideological agenda, and it is this very resistance to [a] summary that makes *South*

¹³² Ibid page 105

¹³³ Ibid page 104

¹³⁴ Ibid page 105

¹³⁵ Weinstock. Op cit page 81

¹³⁶ *Charlie Rose* op cit 17:42

Park so open-ended.¹³⁷ From this, they've not only managed to have an extremely successful show but simultaneously log an animated version of events, trends, and their own opinions.¹³⁸ Alongside an extremely educational, intellectual impact on viewers affecting commentary worldwide.¹³⁹ 'Because the show treats nothing as sacred, this lesson comes across as genuine rather than as preachy. By mocking everything, the show's lessons have a deeper meaning.'¹⁴⁰



Fig 14 - South Park's version of Jesus Christ shown on his talk show 'Jesus and Pals'

¹³⁷ Weinstock. Op cit page 23

¹³⁸ *South Park 20th Anniversary*. Op cit 39:00

¹³⁹ Trey Parker, and Matt Stone. *Speaking Freely: South Park's Trey Parker & Matt Stone with Larry Divney*. 1 Mar. 2002, 01:26

¹⁴⁰ Arp, Robert. op cit page 106

Conclusion

To summarise, animation is a medium far more capable of truly exploiting the trials of adulthood and modern society than it is credited for. Parker and Stone are unique, creative minds which not only see the capacity for animation but use it to their full advantage. From this analysis we can see how animation has pushed past the ‘cartoon graveyard’ idea with Hanna-Barbera alongside *the Simpsons* paving ways for shows like *South Park* to take animated television to new levels. The content within these kinds of shows relies heavily on the crudeness of the cartoon genre to playfully educate the audience. As the co-creators of *South Park* acknowledged “there’s lots of ways to approach things and do it where your audience can still totally think about it and talk about it without having to hit it over the head.”¹⁴¹ Animation is a medium that fully allows creators who hold this style of mindset in their storytelling to do just that.

The tight production scheduling of *South Park* directly correlates with the fact it is animated alongside with what they say and how they say it. How their schedule functions allows the writers to stay consistently modern and provoke commentary on topical current events. It's obvious from any analysis that Parker and Stone’s creative control over their project, the fact they both write, direct, and voice act, is what has made the show last as long as it has. Where other long-running shows have consistent changes in writing and multiple influences,¹⁴² the anarchic quality of *South Park* remains unchanged. The main focus of the duo is making each other

¹⁴¹ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *Trey Parker & Matt Stone - TAM 5*. 18:02

¹⁴² Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *South Park’s Matt Stone and Trey Parker — Charlie Rose Interview*. 26 Sept. 2005,

laugh and discussing topics which genuinely intrigue them.¹⁴³ Whether that's by creating their own version of an extreme Donald Trump via Mr Garrison (S19E02), or adding Kyle to an Apple company created human centipede (S15E01), animation is undoubtedly the only medium that could give the pair the creative, comedic outlet they need and ultimately have.

South Park would not be *South Park* without its parodic childlike cartoon style¹⁴⁴ and in turn without the children of *South Park*. The children of the show, as stated, go through an educational journey in most episodes. Their innocence and sadism is consistently juxtaposed to give an over-exaggerated yet still realistic image of how kids today think. The voices of the kids are a gateway for Parker and Stone to comedically comment on topics. But not only comment, openly refuse to pick a political side and point out the similar absurdity in any argument. The children of *South Park* are comically tortured in true 'animatedness' style¹⁴⁵ aiding in many of the satiric points the writers make. Despite almost every element of their use of children being boiled down to the use of animation and its lack of 'real',¹⁴⁶ it has to be pointed out that the key feature animation has allowed these kids which is not just Kenny's cheating of permanent death but the fact they are still children since 1997. Without choosing the medium of animation it would have been literally possible to last as long as it has.

The ability animation has for a show like *South Park* to portray things real or made up is something it is clearly indebted too. This is not including how animation

¹⁴³ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *Parker and Stone's Subversive Comedy*. 26 Sept. 2011,

¹⁴⁴ Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Taking South Park Seriously*. SUNY Press, 2008. Page 82

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, page 81

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, page 213

allowed them to have talking Christmas poo or satanic Christmas critters or even man bear pig. Animation allowed them to portray current events with their own characters¹⁴⁷ alongside real life celebrities. Although animation has not fully allowed them to escape censorship issues, in terms of the depiction of Mohammad,¹⁴⁸ it has still given them an extreme amount of leeway with parodic caricatures. This includes mimicking their idol Terry Gilliam¹⁴⁹ by using real pictures of people in their animation rather than depicting them solely in *South Park* style. By using animation to bring these people and storylines to screen, Parker and Stone, again, can remain completely self reliant and focused on what exactly they want as creatives. As noted, unlike shows such as *SNL* they do not need to worry about objections. Similar to recent news where they caricatured Harry and Meghan (S26E02), anyone who does object to the crude, satiric representation is at a disadvantage from the argument because at the end of the day they are arguing over a cartoon.¹⁵⁰

As a final note, *South Park* is a show which has become embedded in our pop culture. Not only for its intertextuality, use of music, and ability to show events as soon as the news but also for its immature, anarchic ability to handle these things in, at the time when it aired, a new interesting way. By marketing itself as animated programming it became something people watched for comedic entertainment and left with a new view of adult life. It has paved the way for newer shows, such as *Big Mouth* which also uses child characters, to use animation as a medium which offers them an endless amount of advantages. Animation on television has surpassed

¹⁴⁷ Charlie Rose. op cit 01:22

¹⁴⁸ Arp, Robert. *South Park and Philosophy: You Know, I Learned Something Today*. John Wiley & Sons, 2009. Page 104

¹⁴⁹ Stone, Matt, and Trey Parker. *South Park 20th Anniversary*. 2016,

¹⁵⁰ Scott, A. O. "Moral Guidance From Class Clowns." *The New York Times*, 15 Oct. 2004. *NYTimes.com*,

‘Saturday morning cartoons’ by light years and has hatched open ways to tell stories for adults that otherwise could not have been done with the same level of creativity and interesting visuals. Adult animated shows are on an extremely interesting path which is ever growing and changing the minds of society to prove it is more than an easy device to entertain children. This concept has yet, and may never, be completely evaporated but from this analysis of *South Park* it is clear that animation is a medium perfect for adult stories, even coming from the mouths of children.



Fig 15 - the four boys of South Park, Stan, Kyle, Eric and Kenny (left to right), riding around on their big wheels in a recent episode of the show

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