A thesis submitted to the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy of
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Degree of Master of Science

Environment in television animations

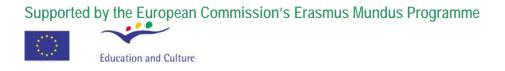What do Lisa Simpson, Brian the dog and the people of South Park have to say about environment?

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS submitted by:

Silvia CEAUSU for the degree of Master of Science and entitled: *Environment in television animations. What do Lisa Simpson, Brian the dog and the people of South Park have to say about environment?*

Mass-media and popular culture have become an important arena for meaning and concept construction in society. Since the rise to prominence of the environmental issues on the social and political agendas, mass-media has had a strong influence on the attitudes and behaviours relevant for the environment as well. The research of the media content related to the environment reveals how the environmental message is understood and retransmitted and can offer indications of how attitudes are formed in the wide, media-consuming public. This research can be particularly useful in determining how information could be tuned up to reach and convince wider segments of the public. Popular culture in particular has become an important arena for meaning construction for an important part of the audience and with the development of the new media, it message reaches faster and farther, popular culture products achieve global audience, and the messages get diversified and multiplied in numerous forms. In spite of that, mass-media content and popular culture remain rather poorly explored from an environmental point of view. This paper takes on one of the most popular and representative forms of the today popular culture: television animation series. These have achieved impressive levels of popularity and have become also a source and stage for political debates, in addition to their entertainment purposes. This research will look into the environment relevant content of the three most popular television animations series according to the literature: *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, and *Family Guy*. The scope of this paper encompasses the analysis of the verbal and video content of one season each from *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* and two seasons of the *South Park*, all broadcast initially during 2006 – 2007. The results of the analysis are corroborated with background information regarding the creators and the production of the three animations. The conclusions of this research show a heterogeneous content, an ongoing contest for meaning in the products of this genre. The research shows a surge in the interest for car and fuel related topics but also a maintained perception of a juvenile, idealistic, emotional message coming from the environmental movement. The creators of these animations series emerge also as influential agents in the media which represent and speak to certain segments of the audience, having powerful control over their creation more then the networks which broadcast them. All these conclusions point to the need of a reconsideration of the environmental message, going outside of the traditional channels and forms of transmission, more customized for different segments of the public.

Keywords: Animations, television, environmental attitudes, mass-media

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1. Introduction

Political concepts and social values are shaped by mass-media and by the information media transmit (Delli Carpini and Williams 1994). We are surrounded not only by a physical environment but also by a symbolic environment. George Gerbner stated: "Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced. We live in a world erected by the stories we hear and see and tell."(Gerbner 1999). It is in this symbolic environment that we end up constructing the notions and concepts that define the relationships between ourselves and between humanity and nature in general (Gerbner 1999). In this symbolic environment, social status and power are defined and determined as well, more and more often through purchasing power and material goods. This fact has a more significant impact on the environment than ever, as consumption grows (Olsen Jr. 2002). All these aspects are part of the symbolic environment of which a significant part is represented by the contribution of the modern media.

Popular culture has been defined in numerous ways and in different stages of the debate surrounding it, its influence was considered as mind-numbing, controlling or just reflecting modern life. As a big part of the symbolic environment though, the influence of popular culture on our behaviours and attitudes can not be ignored or dismissed anymore without proper research. Meister and Japp (2002) argue "We believe that for most citizens, popular culture is a primary site of meaning construction, probably the major arena in which most understand, reinforce, and/or modify the circumstances of their lives" (Meister and Japp 2002). Analyzing and researching popular culture is central to the understanding of the inner motives and drivers of individuals in attitudes and activities impacting the environment. Moreover, popular culture research gives invaluable indications of how the environmental scientists and the environmental movement in general managed to convey their points of view to the wider public. However this area still remains poorly researched until now and few media studies were conducted with a focus on environmental issues.

The environmental movement has sensed the potential of popular culture, and of television as a central aspect of it, in influencing the prevalent concepts and meanings in the society. Thus many environmentally themed media products sprang up since the 1970s until now following several cycles of media attention to environmental issues (Hansen 1993; Gauntlett 1996; King 1994; Opel 2002). The research showed though that the audience of television programs providing environment related information, for instance, was formed by individuals already having an interest in such issues (Holbert et al. 2003) and hence the environmental message did not reach generally

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those which had to be convinced but rather those already careful of their impact on the environment. Also the environment related content of the media consisted mainly in approaching traditional issues associated with the environmental movement such as conservation (Dunaway 2006) and recycling (Gauntlett 1996). Much less were issues such as lifestyle or consumption on the environmental agenda of mass-media.

The research of the environmental content in mass media concentrated first on the news media. Entertainment entered only later in the interest area of the researchers (Gauntlett 1996; Brerton 2005; Mitman 1999; Whitley 2008; Meister and Japp 2002). Usually the research has been limited only to those programs with a message, those that were intentionally created to educate or address an interested audience. Few studies though approached these media products from multiple angles, content and audiences being studied mostly separately (Livingstone 1998). The idea that television and popular culture in general are damaging for the environmental attitudes of their audiences has become a large spread assumption.

One of the least analyzed genres of television from an environmental point of view is that of television animation series. In the modern day popular culture it is not difficult to argue for the importance of animations. They bring significant amount of money to their television networks and productions companies (Editorial 2007; Dean 2008). They have been successfully combined with the political satire as animations offer opportunities for comedy beyond any other genre. The power of animations consists exactly from not being taken too seriously and being able to say a lot of things behind the atmosphere of comedy and immaturity. Tha fact is the animation series have become more and more popular since the 1960s when *The Flintstons* was the first prime time television animated show. Since then, animations such as *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, *Family Guy*, *American Dad* and others have become acknowledged and rightful items of the popular culture meaning construction arena (Carter 2007).

Considering the significant gaps existing in the research of environmental content in media, this paper takes on the task of adding to the knowledge of the environment relevant content in three popular animation series: *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, *Family Guy*. These media products are not intended to be educational or to raise environmental awareness. Their main purpose is to entertain. Nevertheless, they represent additionally a new and significant arena for political debate. They have a young and numerous public, an important part of it formed through Internet, for which popular culture and the new media are the most significant places for meaning and attitudes construction. These series have also the characteristic of being created and aired for years and therefore they represent a constant presence in the media landscape.

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This research will focus exclusively on researching the audio and, to a lesser extent, the video content of the three animation series, *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, *Family Guy*, during an approximate time frame between 2006 and 2007. This period can be identified as a peak of media interest for environmental issues due to the high visibility of the documentary *An inconvenient truth*, of several Hollywood movies such as *The perfect storm* or *The day after tomorrow*, and the emerging debate regarding climate change. This approximate time frame includes 2 seasons of *South Park* and one each of *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*. Due to the global success of all three of these animation series, their research from a non-American point of view has become relevant. Thus this paper analyzes the possible readings and meaning of the environment relevant content from the perspective of a non-American researcher.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to add to the understanding of how environmental attitudes are formed through popular culture, how the efforts of environmentalists to convey messages are taken up and processed by media. This knowledge is useful for those trying to convey an environmental message to the general population and can give an indication of how this message can be tuned up to be as convincing as possible for larger sectors of the population. The paper will offer indications of what are the main environmental topics taken up by television animation series and what are the possible readings of the environment relevant content.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research question of this paper is: How do the most popular television animation series approach environmental issues?

Subsumed to this research question are the following research objectives:

1. Determining the most frequently mentioned topics relevant for the environment

2. Identifying the characters with environmental attitudes in the plots of the animations series

3. Describing how the characters with environmental attitudes are regarded by others

4. Describing how are specific environmental issues approached

5. Describing the links between other elements of popular culture and the three animations series and how these connections influence the content of the three animations

1.3 Methods

The object of this research, the three animation series, was determined through a survey of the existing literature on animations. The literature cites *the Simpsons*, *Family Guy* and *South Park* as the most popular television animation series based not only on the broadcast ratings but also on DVD sales, Internet popularity and longevity of the show (Dean 2008; Leonard 2006; Carr 2009; Horowitz 1999; Strum 1998). All three series have aired for years in which they have consolidated an audience, their characters' images and an assumed political standpoint.

The reference point used for the decision about which episodes to use for this analysis was the release and subsequent success of the Al Gore movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*. This reference point was chosen having in mind the theory of cyclical attention given to environmental issues in the media (Gauntlett 1996; McComas and Shanahan 1999) and considering that the significant success of this movie could very well signal such an increase in the attention paid to environment. Nevertheless, the timeline of the release and the awards received by the documentary *The Inconvenient Truth* is only a reference point and had no bearing on the actual results of the analysis. The Al Gore's documentary was released for the first time at the beginning of 2006 at the Sundance Film Festival and then presented to the general public in June 2nd, 2006. *The Inconvenient Truth* has received the American Academy Award in February 2007 for best documentary and Al Gore has received the Nobel Peace Prize for his climate change awareness raising efforts in December 2007 (Braslau 2006). Considering this broad timeline, it can be assumed that 2006 and 2007 were years of high interest for environmental topics. Thus this paper is analyzing the episodes of *the Simpsons*, *Family Guy* and *South Park* broadcast in this time frame. One other reason for choosing this time frame is the previous research done on this topic by the author of this thesis which concentrated as well on the year 2007 and which will be used as a starting point of the methodology of the current research (Ceausu 2009).

Usually a season of a television series starts in the autumn and ends in the late spring of the next year. This is the case with *The Simpons* and *Family guy*. For their analysis there were chosen season 18 and respectively season 5, both running from September 2006 to May 2007. In the case of South Park, the seasons start in March and end in November each year. Due to this and to the fact that South Park seasons are shorter then of the other two shows, this paper analyzes all the

South Park episodes from both 2006 and 2007 for this research. In total, this thesis analyzes 22 episodes of *The Simpsons*, 18 episodes of the *Family Guy* and 28 episodes of *South Park*.

The research was done both directly through watching the respective video material and through the qualitative analysis of the transcripts of the episodes. The transcripts of the episodes were easily found on the internet, proving once again, if necessary the popularity and wide distribution of the shows. The transcripts of the episodes were assigned as primary document in the Atlas.ti software with the purpose of coding the written material.

As mentioned above, the starting point of the coding process were the results of a previous research. As part of the course Applied Research in Preventative Environmental Approaches (ARPEA), I have conducted a research on the project Green Week of the American Television Network NBC (Ceausu 2009). The Green Week is an yearly commitment of the above mentioned network to present for a week specially produced environmentally themed content during its normal broadcast with the purpose of raising awareness for environmental issues, and as much as possible integrate environment in the plots and scripts of the entertainment shows during the respective week. The results are relevant for the present paper because the topics approached in these television products are intentionally environmental. The results of the previous research offers thus clues about what television producers consider as being environmental, what are perceived as being the most important environment related topics and hence what a researcher should look for initially in an environment related analysis of pop culture products. Mapping the sequences with environmental themes in the NBC Green Week entertainment program, the research has helped define 15 environmental topics (Ceausu 2009) (see Annex 1). These topics were the starting point for the coding process of *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy* and *South Park* episodes. The codification has been done based on the presence of certain key words with environmental significance in the respective paragraphs corroborated with the meaning and context of the sequence. The key words used in this research had also as a starting point the previous research done regarding the 2007 NBC Green Week (Ceausu 2009) (Annex 1).

The initial codes were the categories identified in the ARPEA research but the codification process has been flexible, being adapted to the actual content of the analyzed material. Thus some codes were renamed and redefined, some disappeared and some were added. The 15 categories from which the content analysis started and the 28 final codes are presented in the table 1.1 along with the families of codes developed after the initial coding of the text. Because the episodes didn't have a specific environmental focus, many of the issues approached from an environmental point of view by the NBC Green Week program were not always or at all approached the same way by the

animations, even if these issues were present in the shows. These sequences were coded as well, as they can be considered relevant for the topic of this paper. Thus some codes were duplicated: a version related to environment, another not related to environment. This is the case for the codes **References to the planet** and **The problems of the poor countries**. The initial code of **Nature protection** was split between the portrayals of **Wildlife** and issues pertaining to **Animals protection**. Several others codes were added to the list among which **Pro-environmental behavior** and **Anti-environmental behavior**.

Table 1.1 The codes used for the coding process

INITIAL CODES	FINAL CODES	FAMILIES OF CODES
air pollution	air pollution	
cars and fuel	car and fuel	Energy
energy	electricity	
chemicals	chemicals	
climate change	Climate change	
	Extreme weather	
	Al Gore – linked to climate change	How are environmentalists perceived
	Al Gore – not linked to climate change	
	Environmentalists characterization	
concern over the resources	Concern over resources	
consumerism	Consumerism	
food	Food	
General environmental issues	General environmental issues	
nature protection	Wildlife	Attitudes towards nature
	Animals protection	
ozone layer	Ozone layer	
problems of the poor countries	poor countries - environmental	Developing countries
	poor countries - non environmental	
references to the planet	references to planet-related to environment	
	references to planet- not related to environment	
waste	waste	
water	water	
	Land use	Systemic issues
	Corporate – related to environment	
	Corporate – not related to environment	
	Taxes and administrative issues	
	Pro-environmental behavior	Attitudes towards environment
	Anti-environmental behavior	

The codes were used to mark quotations in the test. A certain quotation could be coded with any number of codes depending on the meaning and the key words contained. In the end, connections were made according to co-occurrences between codes referring to the same quotations with the purpose of emphasizing certain connections. All the quotations in the text were then added as primary document in the Atlas.ti software and reanalyzed to determine the frequency of certain words and thus determine the relative salience of different environmental topics.

This thesis also contains a discourse analysis of the events and plots with environmental relevance in the three animation series. The research will highlight the possible readings of the texts and events of the shows, and than focus as well on the context of the environmental relevant plots, the characters exhibiting the most constant environmental attitudes and behaviors and the way they are considered by the rest of the characters.

1.4 Limitations

One major limitation of the analysis of these products of pop culture is that while they are referring mainly to the American context, the author is not thoroughly familiarized with the American context. The analysis is made from the point of view of someone who lived outside of US and has knowledge of the American situation only through the available media and media products. The analysis will be relevant for an international context only even though the animations are strongly imbedded in an American context.

Another limitation is that fact that there are very few researches done regarding the topic of this paper. For much of the information, this research had to draw on internet resources, resources that could be considered scientifically less valid then traditional publications. Nevertheless, internet sources fit the deep post-modernist character of these cultural products. In the modern media-saturated society, internet could be considered, at least at an international level, the main propagation media for these pop culture products. In the same time, because this paper aims to shed some light on the possible real audience readings of these cultural texts, non-academic resources can be very useful.

The interpretations done here are based on a content and qualitative analysis of the transcripts of the involved animations series. The analysis contains though only a series a hypotheses of how these cultural texts could be interpreted but can not say definitely what are the meanings this texts to take for all the categories of people watching them. In the same time, the

author has an admitted biased towards the environmental movement as a student of an environmental program.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Media and popular culture research*

2.1.1 Theoretical approaches

Mass-media, seen as the main propagator of popular culture, and consequently mass-media research, has always been connected with the theoretical approaches to culture in general and with the way popular culture was defined and researched in the academic world. Thus this chapter presents the most important theoretical approaches to culture and popular culture in the same time. Many of these approaches connect with other economic and social issues and theories. This is relevant in the field of green cultural and media studies as today's environmental issues are perceived as a direct consequence of the current economic and social paradigms.

The meanings of popular culture have ranged extensively. Initially has been defined as folk culture, the expression of nature through the unspoiled preindustrial peasants (Storey 2003). Then it has become the culture of masses, either imposed by the elites so as to control the masses or the challenge of the uneducated to the authority of the elites (Storey 2003). Then came the definitions of popular culture as arena of manifestation and negotiations of hegemony, as expression of postmodernism, as area for the definition of identities or as cultural expression of globalization (Storey 2003). No matter the definitions though, for a long time popular culture has been dismissed as an expression of either decadence or manipulation (Storey 2003). Storey (2003) argues that for many the assumption remained in the academic and non academic world that popular culture "represents little more than an example of cultural decline and potential political disorder" (Storey 2003 p. 31). Based on this assumption, researchers are bound to always find what they expect to find.

Table 2.1 Theoretical approaches in media and popular culture research

Theoretical approach	Important theorists	New concepts	Approach to popular culture	Main criticism
Mass culture theory	Frank Raymond Leavis Matthew Arnold Jose Ortega y Gasset Dwight MacDonald	Mass society	Unchallenging, simple, easily comprehensible culture of the many	Elitist
The Frankfurt School	Theodor Adorno Max Horkheimer Herbert Marcuse	The culture industry	A means for pacifying and controlling masses	Exaggerates the manipulative effect of media
Structuralism and semiology	Ferdinand de Saussure Claude Levi-Strauss Umberto Eco	Langue – language Parole – units of language Signified Signifier	As expression of the same underlying universal mental structure	Difficulty to be proven and researched, contradictory results
Marxist approach to culture	Karl Marx Graham Murdock Peter Golding Antonio Gramsci	Hegemony	Expression of hegemony and leadership of the dominant class	The causal relationship between economic and class relations and the cultural production raises a lot of questions
Feminism	Liesbet Van Zooten Angela McRobbie	Gender roles	Expression of male dominance in society, having the role to socialize into gender roles	Not taking into consideration historical context and other factors
Postmodernism	Lawrence Alloway Jean Baudrillard	Collage Time and space confusion Metanarratives	No distinction anymore between high and popular culture	Its features are not exclusively new and other artistic and scientific approaches still coexist so it's difficult to advocate a total redefinition of modern culture

2.1.1.1 Mass culture theory

The large scale education programs initiated in the 19th century led to an increase of the alphabetized population. This was felt as a challenge to the cultural authority of the elites which provoked a redefinition of the boundaries of high culture and a separation from what was considered popular culture through the appropriation of certain parts of the artistic production such as Shakespeare and opera, and making artistic taste a matter of class (Storey 2003).

Strinati (1996) also explains the emergence of the theory of mass culture as a result of the creation of the mass society. The mass society is perceived by the theorists of mass culture theory as the effect of industrialization and urbanization which destroys communities and the moral benchmarks of the society, transforming population in a homogeneous, anonymous and atomized mass bound together only by contractual relationships (Strinati 1996). This new social structure facilitates the rise of the so-called mass culture. The mass culture, as opposed to folk culture and high culture, is created in an industrialist fashion to appeal to the widest public possible (Strinati 1996). That entitles the use of the lowest common denominator and the prioritization of marketability over quality and value. The theorists of mass culture consider democratization in the field of cultural production as suffocating the high culture (MacDonald 1953; Leavis 1932). In the same time, mass culture is seen as favoring only those forms of culture that are easy to comprehend and are unchallenging, offering immediate pleasures for the passive masses (MacDonald 1953; Leavis 1932). The elites on the other hand, were seen as having the role of protecting the high culture and educating the masses, acting as arbiter of taste (Strinati 1996). Often the mass culture was associated with Americanization, as America is seen as the land of the ultimate industrialization of culture (Hoggart 1958; Orwell 1965).

Strinati's critique of the mass culture addresses especially its elitist nature and failure of the mass culture theorists to recognize that taste and criteria in art are socially constructed. Strinati (1996) points out that many times popular culture proves to be more adequate to the conditions and lives of the general public then high culture and that could be an explanation more valid then the assumed simplicity of popular culture. The author exemplifies with the case of the American murder and crime novels which became more popular with the British public because of their higher relevance for the working class British young male then the traditional British novel more preoccupied with the lifestyles of the upper classes, their mansions, butlers and romances in exotic places (Strinati 1996). Strinati (1996) also argues that the boundaries between mass and high culture and more and more difficult to define and definitely mobile. Something like jazz which was previously considered an element of mass culture is now considered a legitimate form of art.

2.1.1.2 The Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt school was formed by German sociologists who were forced to leave the Nazi Germany. They were strongly influenced by the Marxist ideology (Giles 2003), fearful of the expansion of the Nazi ideology and thus even more critical of the influence of mass-media. They considered it as a method of controlling and homogenizing the population (Giles 2003).

This approach drew directly upon the Marxist ideology and completed it with a cultural approach in order to provide an analysis of the capitalist society and the culture it developed. Adorno (1991), one of the most prominent representatives of this theoretical approach, develops the arguments of Marx regarding the use and exchange values of goods in order to apply them to cultural products such as popular music. The exchange value is the value a certain product has on the market. The use value is the utility a product actually has for its owner (Strinati 1996). Marx argued that in the capitalist systems of production, marketing and consumption, the exchange value is a reflection of social relations on the product and that it dominates and obscures the use value of the product, thus leading to commodity fetishism (Marx 1963). Adorno argues that in the case of cultural products being produced now as any other commodity, because the product in consumed immediately, the exchange value becomes the use value (Adorno 1991). Hence we actually start to appreciate the price we pay for the cultural product rather then the product itself. Of course, such a theory would not explain the emergence of today extended electronic piracy of cultural products.

Keeping with the economic focus of the Marxist theory, Adorno (1991) formulated the notion of culture industry. He argues that the products of the culture industry are used to manipulate masses into the acceptance of the capitalist mentality and values. Adorno (1991) sees the popular culture along with the relative economical abundance of the working class, as the means for pacifying and controlling the masses through the creation of false needs and allowing people to pursue these needs and giving the feeling of fulfillment in the capitalist system.

2.1.1.3 Structuralism and semiology

Another approach which had an influence on the study of pop culture and culture in general is structuralism. This approach, founded by the Swiss linguist Saussure, is based on the distinction made between "langue" – language and "parole" – the units used in the manifestation of language such as writing and speaking (Strinati 1996). Saussure also defines the signifier, the actual word or phrase uttered or written, and the signified, the notion itself or the object in the real world evoked by the sounds or the letters of the signifiers.

These ideas of the founder of structuralism influenced also the development of semiology. While structuralism is considered as being the study of the "…the universal character of mental and cultural structures, and their causal effects in giving rise to observable social phenomena (Strinati 1996, p. 89), semiology on the other hand "has been defined as the scientific study of sign systems like culture" (Strinati 1996, p. 88). Many times their object of study and their methods overlapped which led many times to the identification of one with the other.

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The ideas of structuralism and semiology were applied in several cultural researches. Levi – Strauss applies the principles of structuralism to the analysis of myths. He argues that myths of different peoples from different continents are the expression of the same universal underlying mental structure. Umberto Eco used the ideas of structuralism and semiology to popular culture analysis, specifically to Ian Fleming's novels about James Bond. Eco argues that Fleming's novels are so appealing to large audiences because they address universal binary oppositional notions such as good – evil, freedom – totalitarism or loyalty – disloyalty.

2.1.1.4 Marxist approach

Even as Marxism has strongly influenced the approach of the Frankfurt school on popular culture, Dominic Strinati (1996) identifies theorists which clearly have to be classified under the Marxist ideology. This approach it is based on the understanding of the notion of ideology. Marx (1963) argues that in a class divided society, the ruling class will also have the means not only to control production of material goods but also the production of art, ideas and culture. Thus in the capitalist society the dominant ideology will necessarily be the ideology of the owners of the means of production because they have the power to impose it. Marx's model of the society has at its base the economic relations of classes. Built on this base and being influenced by it there is the superstructure of ideology.

Murdock and Golding (1977) find empirical evidence that substantiate Marx's theory of a relation between economic relations and culture. They reject though the direct causal relationship suggested by Marx. They focus instead on the structure of ownership of mass-media. They conclude that indeed a concentration of production companies has taken place in the entertainment and culture industry as in other branches of the economy as well (Murdock and Golding 1977). Hence they argue that decision-making in mass-media has indeed become concentrated in the hands of a few which control the production and distribution of popular culture. Murdock and Golding (1977) consider that market forces and power relations will gradually exclude cultural products challenging the economic and social structure of the society. That would lead to homogenization and simplification of cultural products, even in the case of those produced by publicly owned media companies because they two exist in a competitive cultural environment.

Of course the Marxist understanding of ideology and mass-media raises a number of questions. As Strinati (1996) argues, it seems this approach, as other before it, ignored the audience's role in understanding and decoding the messages transmitted by media. Also Strinati (1996) raises the issue if the relationship between economics and mass-media is unidirectional or

the communication processes influence economic relations in their turn as well. On the other hand, which are the other factors which influence cultural outputs, how do they exert their influence (Strinati 1996)? It might be added as well that the recent booming development of the internet is contradicting the theory of Murdock and Golding (1997) as it offers cheap and far-reaching ways of sharing ideas and entertainment.

Another important theory which has its roots in Marxism is the one formulated by Gramisci. This theory it is based on the on the notion of hegemony exercised through leadership in the field of ideology and culture by the dominant class (Strinati 1996). The hegemony isn't imposed by force but instead is determining people to willingly accept the dominant ideology through the work of the so-called "organic intellectuals" of the dominant class (Strinati 1996). Nevertheless, the hegemony in its turn is negotiated and compromised with other classes of the society as well. The emergence of the notion of hegemony in cultural studies meant that popular culture has started to be seen more as an arena where concepts are constructed and negotiated, and hegemony confirmed of contested (Storey 2003).

2.1.1.5 Feminism

Feminism critiques popular culture from the perspective of gender relations. Feminists see popular culture as the expression of a strongly male dominated society in which production, work, intellect, activity are associated with masculinity whereas consumption, leisure, emotion, passivity are associated with femininity (Strinati 1996). Feminists argue that women are rarely having a prominent role in popular culture. When they are present, women have only certain types of jobs, are less educated and less capable than men (Van Zooten 1991). Mass-media has also the effect of socializing women and men into gender roles (Van Zooten 1991).

One of the researches that were done in the spirit of feminism is the one of McRobbie (1991) about the magazine *Jackie* which target audience are teenage girls. McRobbie (1991) argues that the purpose of this magazine is to introduce young girls to the future roles as wives and mothers and to reproduce in the new generation the old behavioral patterns of femininity (McRobbie 1991). Of course, it is very problematic to what extent *Jackie* magazine achieves its potential purpose in a society in a continuous change. The research fails to account for the historical and social context in which the magazine is published (Strinati 1996).

2.1.1.6 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is an artistic, scientific and philosophical movement that denies the existence of previously assumed boundaries between popular and high culture and in general considers structures and boundaries blurred in a society flooded by media and information. In response to elitist nature of modernism, postmodernism movement denied the traditional boundaries between high culture and popular culture. In artistic terms, postmodernism is, according to Strinati (1996), reflected in the contemporary cinema and television. Employing the techniques of pastiche and collage (*Back to the Future* series, *Pulp Fiction* movie), reusing and recreating past styles and genres (*Body Heat* movie), repeating already successful formulas (*Rocky* series, *Rambo* series) or presenting a certain spatial and temporal ambiguity (*Back to the Future*, *Brazil*) (Strinati 1996).

Cultural theorists describe the phenomenon of postmodernism as being specific to the current media-saturated society, in which media don't reflect the reality anymore but they become the reality. Due to media saturation, the masses and media collapsed into one, and the theorists of postmodernism consider obsolete the differentiation between the producers and consumers of the media messages (Giles 2003). Giles (2003) argues that this rather true for more recent media such as internet. Postmodernism was also associated with an increased superficiality, concern for styles and appearance at the expense content, substance and meaningfulness (Strinati 1996).

In scientific term, postmodernism meant a more flexible approach towards popular culture and an increased attention paid to its influence, denying the distinction between high and popular culture (Storey 2003). The researchers started considering media as not something evil in itself and started referring rather to the circulation of information than manipulation or propaganda. The postmodernist approached influenced also a body of research that looked more positively at the influence of mass media, pointing out to the emancipation of women or the improvement of social position of minority groups as determined in part at least by the increased influence of mass-media (Giles 2003).

2.1.2 Empirical approaches

The beginning of media research coincides with the increase in the significance of radio as a news and entertainment source in the years preceding the Second World War. The first work in this area was marked by the convictions of the researchers that media such as radio and later television had a negative and manipulative effect on their audiences. One of the important early works was in fact "The invasion from Mars: a study in the psychology of panic" authored by Cantril (1940). In this book, the author dealt exactly with the unintentional disruptive effects of radio. He analyzed the effects of the 1938 broadcast of the dramatization of H. G. Wells's "War of the Worlds" which

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provoked an outburst of hysteria, some people actually trying to flee from the way of the fictional invaders from Mars (Cantril 1940). Another example of media use in those years was the use of films for communist or Nazi propaganda. One of the most well known was "Olympia", a film about the Berlin summer Olympics in 1936. Hence a very popular metaphor for media at that time was the "hypodermic needle", as inoculator of ideology.

2.1.2.1 Effects tradition

Based on the earlier perception of the negative influence of mass-media on the audiences, mainly during the 1960s and 1970s a whole body of research was developed, looking into the effects of different kinds of television programs. The studies focused mainly on researching the relation between violent TV programs and violent behavior (Giles 2003). This whole body of research was named "the effects" tradition. The typical method of this work was to expose a group of students to a certain type of video material and then gauge their short term reactions or mood changing through observing their behavior during completion of different tasks or through filling out questionnaires. The assumption was that in laboratory conditions, the researchers could determine a direct causal relationship, removing the influence of environmental conditions and cultural context (Giles 2003). Ignoring the cultural context was also the main source of criticism that was brought to this line of research.

Table 2.2 Empirical approaches in media and popular culture research

Empirical approach	Important researchers	Results and theories	Methods	Main criticism
Effects tradition	Albert Bandura Donald Broadbent Dolf Zillmann	Causal relation between violent media and violent behaviour;	Laboratory experiments in which subjects were watching media and then completing questionnaires or	Ignoring other factors, social context and others.

		Direct imitation theory; Excitation transfer	solving a task; Bobo doll experiments	
Cultivation approach	George Gerbner Katherine McComas James Shanahan Bradley Greenberg	Symbolic environment; mainstreaming; resonance; drench hypothesis	Viewing patters based on questionnaires and diaries of media use	Doesn't tell *how* the media is used, *how* its message is decoded
Uses and gratifications approach	Zizi Papacharissi Alan Rubin Melvin DeFleur Sandra Ball-Rokeach	Dependency theory Expectancy-value theory	Surveys, interviews	Focusing on individual and ignoring the social and cultural context of media use
Cultural studies	Sonia Livingstone Stuart Hall David Morley Henry Jenkins	Media messages, dominant code, preferred reading, negotiated code	Content analysis Discourse analysis	Not enough audience research

2.1.2.2 Cultivation approach

The cultivation theory offered a different approach to media, putting it more in a cultural perspective. The researchers of this line of thought see media as an agent of cultural socialization. Media is seen as promoting a system of messages reflecting the "dominant social paradigm" of society, acting as a cultural arm of leading organizations and institutions (Pirages and Ehrlich 1974; Shanahan et al. 1997). The notion of mainstreaming is characteristic for the cultivation theory and describes the idea that audiences are drawn towards the values and ideologies of the mainstream, tending to homogenize society (Shanahan et al. 1997). In the case of violence in mass media for example, the cultivation theory argues that rather then an increased aggressive behavior in the audience as implied by the media effects research, it determines an atmosphere of fear in society and the perception of increased violence (Giles 2003). The cultivation research works more with data of patterns of television viewing obtained through questionnaires or media diaries but doesn't say much about how mass-media is used or how television is watched, how audiences process the information transmitted through media or indeed, what kind of messages does media transmit.

2.1.2.3 Uses and gratification approach

The next step in mass-media research was to account to a larger extent for the audiences. The uses and gratification line of research treats the viewer individually, a person that seeks to

satisfy needs or wants through mass-media. The uses and gratifications approach led to several theories of which the most important could be considered the dependency theory and the expectancy-value theory. The dependency theory postulates that in a society with an almost always present mass-media, we ended up depending heavily on it for information about the outside world and ultimately about ourselves, for orientation in actions and interactions, and for entertainment (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach 1989). The expectancy value theory says we choose to watch a certain TV program because we expect a certain need of us to be satisfied by that choice. We continue to watch that program as long as our need is satisfied (Giles 2003).

2.1.2.4 Cultural studies approach or the "active audience" tradition

Different from the uses and gratification research which approached the mass-media users individually, the cultural studies assimilated viewers to different social groups. The particularities of each social group would influence how the messages of mass-media are interpreted. This is why this line of research was named the "active audience" tradition, because the viewer is not anymore only a receiver. The "active audience" approach criticized the previous media research for adherence to objectivity and contented that media studies should be fully based on cultural and political theory. This line of research also became much more interested in the contents of mass-media and the texts with the purpose to decipher the cultural representations of mass-media (Giles 2003).

2.2 Environmental issues in the media

Along with the surge of environmental topics in the public arena came also the implication of media in this field and the subsequent research. There is a theory of environmental concern having a cyclical evolution (Gauntlett 1996; McComas and Shanahan 1999). Each time environment becomes important in the political and public debates there is also a surge of the environmental issues on the mass-media agenda which in turn affects the debates and the public attitudes to the problem. There has been also research on the influences of the television networks environmental agenda on the public agenda regarding environment. Atwater at el. (1985) found a correlation between the two, concluding they influence each other (Atwater et al. 1985). On the other hand, Ader (1993) found that the salience of the environmental issues in both media and public agendas were not correlated to the actual pollution levels for example, as a measure of environmental degradation (Ader 1993).

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2.2.1 Environmental issues in the media - Cultivation approach research

The first research of the influence of mass-media on environmental attitudes was on the line of the cultivation approach. Novic and Sandman (1974) found that heavy media users were in fact considering themselves less informed about environmental issues then other segments of the population. The results seemed to be confirmed by research conducted by Ostman and Parker (1987a, 1987b), particularly regarding television. Based on telephone surveys conducted in 1984 in Ithaca, New York, Ostman and Parker found that the use of television as a source of environmental information had negative correlation with people's knowledge of the environmental issues and their environmental conscious behavior (Ostman and Parker 1987a). In the same time, newspapers were considered as more credible sources of environmental information by more educated media users (Ostman and Parker 1987b). The cultivation approach launched also the notion of the "dominant social paradigm" and Pirages and Ehrlich (1974) identified it even from 1974 as promoting growth, materialism, consumption, values opposed to a large degree to environmentalism.

There is also research trying to integrate the cultivation theory with the uses and gratification approach. Holbert et al. (2003) use data from a census about the genre of television programs watched and try to determine a connection between television choices and the environmental attitudes. The conclusion is that people with a higher environmental awareness are more prone to watch factual based television than other people. On the other hand, environmental concern is a very weak or not at all a predictor of fictional programs watching such as comedies or drama (Holbert et al. 2003). The authors of the research go further trying to find a link also between environmental conscious behaviors and the choices of television programs. Holbert et al. consider that if people use television "to understand the world around them and their role within it" (Holbert et al. 2003) they might also get their behavior influenced by the TV program they choose. They find a strong correlation between factual based television programs like documentaries and public affaires programs and pro-environmental behaviors. Holbert et al. (2003) conclude that a certain type of television programs watched has as a consequence more environmental sound behaviors. Of course, such a causal relationship is difficult if not impossible to prove if environmental awareness is already determining viewers to look for a certain type of programs.

In another article in line with the cultivation approach, Shanahan et al. (1997) conclude that television might have a mainstreaming effect in the direction of the moderate environmentalism prevalent in society, by showing that heavy viewers are less likely to sacrifice for the environment, but they are more fearful of the negative effects of technology on the environment. For example, in the social sub-groups that are generally more environmentally concerned, television heavy viewers

score less in the factors measuring the degree of environmentalism then the average of the members of the sub-group. In the same way, the heavy viewers from the sub-groups more prone to anti-environmentalism, are more concerned about pollution then persons with similar social characteristics who watch less television. The research also shows that heavy viewers are less knowledgeable about the environment (Shanahan et al. 1997). The results regarding the perceptions of the influence of technology and science on the environment seem to confirm the previous research that showed scientists were being perceived by television viewers as weird, difficult to understand, isolated (Gerbner et al. 1981). Regarding environment, science is perceived as being potentially dangerous. This led to mistrust and a negative attitude towards science in general (Gerbner et al. 1981).

In the light of this mixed results, Shanahan et al. (1997) stress the importance of more content analysis of the television programs to show which are the dominant images of the environment promoted in the media and also the importance of more research about the influences of particular television genres (Shanahan et al. 1997). In general, research according to the cultivation theory yielded mixed results, showing that environmental information in mass-media can determine an increased knowledge about environmental issues but not so much a change in the behavior which proves ultimately that environmentally sound behavior depends more on values and ideologies or the narrative reasoning as Shanhan at al. (1999) argue.

2.2.2 Environmental issues in the media – Content research

In this subchapter are included researches employing both content analysis, a more direct research of the verbal content of instances of pop culture, and discourse analysis, a more complex and interpretative method of the cultural studies. One of the important sources for this chapter is the book *Enviropop: studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture* a collection of texts specifically referring to environmental topics in popular culture. The authors included in the book adopt a critical, rhetorical perspective in analyzing bits of popular culture for their explicit or implicit environmental meanings. They use different notions from cultural studies such as simulacra (Opel 2002), miths (Retzinger 2002), rituals, comic frames (Todd 2002), liminal, fantasy and dialectic (Olsen Jr. 2002; Corbett 2002; Hope 2002) to decode the significance of popular culture products such as postcards, games, movies, TV series, tabloids and advertisements regarding environmental issues.

2.2.2.1 Environment in television

Television is recognized as one of the most important media for the production and expression of popular culture. It is also one of the main information sources. Some of the most important research in this area is described further.

Mentioned above, the research of Shanahan at al. (1997) pointed out the need for more content analysis of the system of messages that the audiences are exposed to, to be able to assess correctly why watching TV might have the results described. The same team of researchers had indeed conducted previously content research (Shanahan and McComas 1997) but these resources, especially research regarding entertainment and fictional programs, were at that time (and it could be argued still are) rather scarce (McComas et al. 2001; Gauntlett 1996).

In a 2001 article, McComas, Shanahan and Butler resume 6 years of media content analysis in search for environmental topics, between 1991 and 1997. They consider that the presence of environmental topics in television programs is a measure of the integration of the environmental concerns into the everyday lives of the Americans and into the most popular modern source of narratives (McComas et al. 2001). The TV programs targeted for this research were prime-time entertainment and fictional programs aired on local network television associates of NBC, ABC and CBS, and since 1997 also Fox. The sample was formed by programs broadcasted for a week each of the 6 years. Of these, only about 0.5% was considered as having environment related content (McComas et al. 2001). The environmental content was identified as episodes during different programs. Of these, the majority ended in less then 1 minute and very few lasted more than 6 (McComas et al. 2001). Most of the environmental episodes were defined as either concerned or neutral, and much fewer as unconcerned. But towards the end of the sampling period, the number of the unconcerned episodes grew as the total time of environmental episodes decreased (McComas et al. 2001).

The presence of environmental episodes had a positive correlation with the nature theme of the shows but this kind of shows was relatively infrequent, only 2% of the sample. Much more frequent were law enforcement/crime and family/relationships themed shows but the environmental episodes were almost absent in these categories which in fact dominates the TV programs. It is also relevant to note the demographics of the characters involved in the environmental episodes because usually the producers of the show choose the type of characters which they think seem the most credible to the audience (Greenberg and Collette 1997). The typical character involved in an environmental episode was male, white, middle-aged and middle or upper class. The surveys though showed that typically the more concerned American citizens tended to be at that time non-white females between 18 and 29 (Moore 1995). Concluding, the authors find that environmental

issues are not at all integrated in the television prime-time television programs and moreover, during the sampling years, the number of environmental episodes decreased (McComas et al. 2001).

Image 2.1 Captain Planet and the Planeteers

Due to this infrequency of environmental themes on TV programs, most of the content analysis of media, focused on shows that were specifically designed to present environmental issues. King (1994) analyzes the "Captain Planet and the Planeteers" cartoon, deconstructing the discourse and identifying the symbols and representations. The plot of the cartoon is that Gaia, the spirit of the Earth, worried by the effects of the human activities on the planet, chooses five special teenagers whom she endows with the power to control four natural elements plus the special power of the heart through five rings. When these "planeteers" unite their powers, the environmental superhero Captain Planet appears and fights the environmental wrongdoers represented by greedy evil people. At the end of each episode, the characters are offering tips to the children on how to "save the planet" through recycling or saving water. In the same time, each episode of the cartoon is often interrupted but commercial breaks in which children are offered a wide range of products and encouraged to consume and buy toys, sweets etc. (King 1994). Even though the message of the cartoon seems to be strongly environmentalist, King (1994) points out to the contradiction of promoting consumerism in same time, through aggressive advertising during the commercial breaks while preaching environmentalist messages. King (1994) names this the liberal environmental paradox (King 1994). In the same time, King points out to the fact that the cartoon presents serious environmental issues determined by corporate and institutional factors but proposes to children individual solutions for saving the Planet. The cartoon also promotes a diffuse guilt about the environmental crises (King 1994). The discourse analysis of the author refers also to the aspects regarding gender issues and North-South issues which seem to confirm previous stereotypes (King 1994).

Another analysis of children programs with frequent environmental topics, this time in UK, was conducted by Gauntlett (1996). He presents the content of these shows and then he bases his analysis on the interviews conducted with the producers of these shows. *Blue Peter* is a long-lived show, targeting children between the age of 7 and 11 (Gauntlett 1996). The show started at the end

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of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s to present many environment related reports and even start recycling campaigns or other environment themed campaigns that made children feel empowered. Later on, due to a decrease in the interest for the environmental issues in society but also to the difficulty of finding new angles to environmental stories, the show involved less in this sort of actions (Gauntlett 1996).

Newsround is a news program for children with a long commitment to the environment. This show functioned as an outlet, a forum for all those environmental news largely ignored by the mainstream, adult news media with a much more politically leaned agenda (Gauntlett 1996). The producers of this show took this as a true mission and were very much committed to environment (Gauntlett 1996).

The Animals of the Farthing Wood is an animated series about a group of animals fighting together against dangers produced by humans or other animals. In this case, the producers didn't have the intentions to create an environmental program but the problems of the animals made it seem as approaching environmental issues (Gauntlett 1996). The series present the problems that the animals have as a consequence of the disappearance of their habitat, use of pesticides or hunting. Gauntlett (1996) also points out that this last show, being fictional (with positive and negative characters) has a higher potential of mobilizing the emotions of the audience.

Even though the Gauntlett (1996) analyzes mainly the motivations of the producers of these shows for taking up environmental topics, he incidentally lists many of the most prominent environmental issues at that time: recycling, pollution, oil tankers disasters, aerosols, farming with its use of pesticides and habitat loss. He also points out that no matter the motivations and the commitment of the producers of the shows, the message seems to be one that ignores any institutional causes for the environmental issues, deals with the problems as provoked by a single wrongdoer without addressing the institutional background, and ultimately they propose the same individual fixes of recycling cans and paper (Gauntlett 1996). The research also points out that many times the intentions of the producers of a television program are not mirrored by the reactions and understanding of the audience.

In an article that had the main research topic distinctions between fictional and non-fictional television, Delli Carpini and Williams (1994) provide also a very useful analysis of the content of three shows broadcasted on ABC television network with the occasion of the Earth Day. Their arguments against making the above mentioned distinction is that news on television are often framed and presented with the methods of fictional programs, presenting villains and heroes,

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avoiding many times a more profound analysis of the issues in question (Delli Carpini and Williams 1994). The authors are critical of the approach of ignoring the entertainment programs of television based on the reason that it doesn't address or influence real or political issues. Delli Carpini and Williams (1994) point out that this kind of television has an influence at the level of the "foundations of politics", those concepts like power, freedom, equality that underpin political attitudes and actions. The discourse analysis of the three shows point out that even though they blame flawed ineffective institutions for environmental issues, the solution is always individual (Delli Carpini and Williams 1994).

Phyllis Japp and Debra Japp (2002) point out to the tensions and the competition existing between two meanings of the term "good life": "less is more" and "more is better" (Japp and Japp 2002). As an expression of the former in poplar culture, the two researchers analyze the show "*The Good Life*". The show presents nature as ordered and cheerful as in a postcard (Japp and Japp 2002). The so-called good life is a chosen lifestyle available to those affluent enough to buy a new house in natural settings, thus running away from the pollution and the stressful urban settings that the consumerist culture have created. This choice of a new lifestyle is not determined by a feeling of moral responsibility of these high-earning professionals for the environmental damages created by the economy, nor by the need to reduce one's spending due to economic hardships. For the persons presented in the show it is a matter of individual style choice in search of the "true inner self" and the natural background is the ultimate commodity that can be purchased (Japp and Japp 2002). In this way the legitimacy of the simple life of those living it out of need is stolen and appropriated by those who choose it. Social and environmental issues are obliterated by the visual and verbal discourses of the show (Japp and Japp 2002). The expressed intention of the show is also undermined by the pervasive role of advertising. The conclusion of Japp and Japp (2002) is that "The Good Life" show uses the assumptions and the language of the consumerist culture, using nature as a backdrop for lifestyle trends and thus bridging the apparently opposing approaches "more is better" and "less is more".

The conclusions of the content studies of television programs presented above are mainly that they rarely address environmental issues, especially during the entertainment and fictional programs. When the environment is present on television, this happens much more in nature related shows then in programs with other themes, more in comedies then in dramas. Children programs seem also to have a much higher affinity for environmental issues than in adult targeted programs. The nature shows address indeed much more often environment as do also news program especially when a disaster with environmental consequences occurs but these programs are watched mainly by

people having already a strong environmental commitment. When the entertainment industry talks about environment though, it seems it doesn't manage to split with the consumerist culture or proposes totally inadequate individual actions, unlikely to make a significant change. Nevertheless, as negative to the environment as the effects of television seems to be, there are others who consider this as a significant path to be taken to raise awareness about environment (McNelly 1999) or television makes its own steps in this direction as it is the case of the NBC Green Week initiative which goes one for three years now.

2.2.2.2 Environment in cinema

Retzinger (2002) analyzes the Hollywood movies making references to the American agrarian myth, the one praising the tough and honest lives of the American farmers (Retzinger 2002). The author uses the notion of myth as a theoretical tool to analyzed Hollywood agrarian themed productions. Retzinger (2002) points out how the movie plots describe the relationship between humans and the land they are cultivating. Almost always, the earth is presented both as a mother, nurturing and taking care of its workers, but also as a fertile virgin character, ready to be subdued by the masculine worker. The initial myth was talking about the self-sufficiency of the agricultural worker and the relationship between production and consumption but in the movies the author analyzes, the farmers are always cultivating only cash crops like corn or cotton (Retzinger 2002). The plots almost always focus on the personal and familial dramas of the characters, never giving significant details about the farm, the ecological, economical or social dimensions of agriculture (Retzinger 2002). Many times the nature itself is turning against the farmers and becomes the force they have to fight to retain their lifestyles. Retzinger (2002) concludes that although myths and their cinematographically portrayal could be a good way of bridging the gaps in our society between urban and rural, between production and consumption, the agrarian myth presented in Hollywood fashion is far from fulfilling such a purpose.

Greg Mittman (1999) analyzes wildlife portrayal in movies of the twentieth century, usually focusing on those presenting hunting experiences or conservation efforts. He analyzes how the lens of the camera and the need for excitement in the cinema industry has affected the way wildlife is presented. Scientist and conservations became obviously concerned that applying commercial techniques to wildlife movies, would eventually harm the purposes of the conservation movement (Mitman 1999). But the Hollywood interpretations of nature, clearly has shaped the expectations of the public regarding the excitement nature has to offer and, as other forms of pop culture such as

postcards and advertisement, has constructed the notion of wilderness as pristine and untouched by the human activities (Mitman 1999).

Another author which analyzed Hollywood productions from an environmental point of view is Pat Brerton (2005) in the book *Hollywood Utopia. Ecology in contemporary American cinema*. He's analyzing movies such as Blade Runner (1982), Dances with the wolves (1990), Emerald Forest (1985) or The Fifth Element (1997) for the way they present nature and the relation of men with the natural elements. His understanding of cinema as a vehicle for green ideas is much more positive than that of Retzinger (2002). Brerton (2005) finds the movies of the second half of the twentieth century much more concerned about the disconnection between humankind and nature (Brerton 2005).

2.2.2.3 Written press

DeLoach at al. (2002) provide an interesting and insightful analysis of the way the label "tree-hugger" is used in the written media in the references to the environmental movement. They find the label is used within four contexts: to delegitimize environmental claims by reducing them to absurd and laughable, as a self-identifier for those in the environmental movement, in references to others, and as a mean to moderate one's stand, moving away from what is perceived as a radical "tree-hugger" (DeLoach et al. 2002). The authors trace the origin of the term to the environmentalist to the National Parks Service Rangers. The person who came the closest to actually being a tree-hugger was Julia Butterfly Hill. She lived in a tree for 2 years in order to protect it and other trees, and to protest the logging companies working in the area. DeLoach (2002) argue that this label has no chance of becoming a positive or even neutral one as it is to concrete and graphic and easy to be transformed in a laughable characterization.

Pompper (2002) addresses the way environmental risk is presented in supermarket tabloids (Pompper 2002). The hypothesis is that this popular media targeting lower status readers would primarily use frames that oppose the mainstream and dominating frames, in the same time trying to ridicule and challenge the scientists and the administration, the upper strata of the society (Pompper 2002). The authors used a computer-assisted textual analysis program that identified five frames used to report environmental risk news based on specific clustering of words: bureaucrats and taxes, American resourcefulness, energy and species, society and health, and elites and destruction. The analysis of this frames showed indeed that supermarket tabloids were more likely to express opposition to the dominant ideology regarding environmental risks (Pompper 2002).

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In a study about how the written media influenced American environmental conflicts, Neuzil and Kovarik (1996) described the influence of specialized hunting magazines on the establishment and strengthening of the conservation movement. In the conflict between the upper-class sportsmen hunters and the market hunter that were selling their catch to sustain their life, the magazines had the purpose of organizing the sportsmen groups, formulating their positions, and coordinating their actions (Neuzil and Kovarik 1996). Politically, this stance materialized in the support for the creation of hunting regulations that would protect wildlife (Neuzil and Kovarik 1996).

Another case in which the implication of the mainstream written media helped the case of the environmentalists was the one of the female employees poisoned with radium at a factory. In a time when the public saw radium as a miracle element, the newspapers started a campaign to support the claims for compensations of the affected women (Neuzil and Kovarik 1996). They settled for a much lower financial compensation then requested because of a precarious state of health and high medical bills. The case pointed out the formation of a coalition between newspapers, Consumer League and persons fighting for the protection of workers that defeated the powerful business interests and the powerful reputation of scientists in society (Neuzil and Kovarik 1996).

2.2.2.4 Environment in advertisements

The last three sections of the book *Enviropop: studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture* analyze the connections between the advertising industry and the environment. Corbett (2002) looks into the way nature and environment are used as backdrops and rhetorical tools to sell different products. The author develops several concepts relating to the advertising industry based on a content analysis (Corbett 2002). He concludes that advertising is inherently "brown" as its purpose is to sell as much as possible. Advertising promotes an anthropocentric view and a commodification of nature and its elements. As in other cases in pop-culture, environment is simplified, idealized and lacking any problems whatsoever (Corbett 2002). All these have the effect of disconnecting consumers from nature but promising them a true natural experience through consumption. Corbett (2002) points out also that advertising works in the wider system of the society, reinforcing and being reinforced by other cultural factors.

Diane Hope (2002) analyzes also the world of advertising, in this case print advertisements. She chooses two visual icons used largely by companies to convey their message: landscape and

pristine nature, and the planet Earth type of adds. The first category are mainly used to sell tourism packages or other traveling related products such as cars of airlines tickets (Hope 2002). Usually nature is presented as a Garden of Eden found somewhere else, never close to the consumer, far from the workplace and the troubles of the urban environment. Nature is presented in opposition to work and the place we actually live in, thus disconnecting the environment from the effects of our daily lives and activities (Hope 2002). The nature is preserved for us in another place, independent and unaffected by the use of our cars, the pollution from our cities, thus obliterating the global interconnectedness of ecosystems (Hope 2002). The planet Earth type of ads are mainly used to sell the products of global corporations or services that can be used at a global level such as the financial services of Merrill Lynch or communications and multi-media from Sony. The picture of the planet was popularized at the end of the 1960s after the American space missions. This image was transformed in the realm of advertising so as to suggest globalization, power and control (Hope 2002).

The last section of the book *Enviropop: studies in environmental rhetoric and popular culture* presents an analysis of the advertisements of a particular type of cars: Sports Utility Vehicles. The focus on this type of products is motivated by their popularity. Olsen (2002) reveals a certain set of values and attitudes regarding environment that can be discovered in the subtext of these ads (Olsen Jr. 2002). The author uses the concepts of fantasy, liminality and dialectic to analyze the presence of the environment in the SUV ads. The product, the SUV itself, promise to bring nature to us, and hence solve the dialectics of our relationship with nature (Olsen Jr. 2002). The SUV helps construct a fantasy of endless wild nature that we can tame and control from behind the wheel of our car. Our consumerist culture makes it possible for this type of vehicles to become so popular based primarily on their symbolic power (Olsen Jr. 2002).

2.2.2.5 Environment in other forms of media and pop culture

Image 2.2 Nature postcards

The images of nature don't form of course only in television or cinema. Rehling (2002) analyzes the significance of nature pictures in greeting cards (Rehling 2002). Rehling's conclusions are that greeting cards use nature as a background for humans, human relationships but also to suggest a mood or as metaphors for human affection, achievements or caring, and thus ignoring the true characteristics of the natural world. The humans apply significance and meaning to the

elements of an idealized, sanitized nature, thus strengthening these cultural constructs of nature in the collective psyche (Rehling 2002). In these idealized images of nature, all the negative aspects were removed: human disturbance, disease, predators. Wild animals are used as well to represent humans, are put in human and thus funny instances (Rehling 2002). The implicit messages that these images transmit are that the use of nature for amusement and other purposes is acceptable and appropriate (Rehling 2002).

The author goes further more in analyzing the significance of these uses of nature in greeting cards. First, the natural world and the human world are divided. They find connections only in these symbols the artists confer to the elements of the natural world (Rehling 2002). The culturally constructed nature in greeting cards is serene, peaceful, welcoming, with no visible damages produced by the human world. The highways, the exploitation of mineral resources or the effects of pollution are deflected from the symbolical representations on the greeting cards (Rehling 2002). And as Rehling (2002) points out, for most of the people living in urban settings these encounters with the culturally constructed notion of ideal and undisturbed nature are much more frequent then with the real wilderness, the one which is much less comfortable and has become patchy, constrained and littered. When people actually confront the real nature, they take with them these culturally acquired meanings which might actually determine them to approach "cute" wild bears or to feed wild animals at the zoo (Rehling 2002). But when we discover that in fact nature doesn't live up with our created expectations, we get disappointed and instead of finding the fault in our cultural notions, we blame nature and those elements of it that disturb our "postcard" experience. Rehling (2002) argues it is the way we end up agreeing with policies that aim at fighting weeds and insects that doesn't fit in our idealized picture of nature.

Omissions in greeting cards are as important as the images present. Swamps, steppes, deserts might be extremely might be extremely important as ecosystems but they have little inspirational or symbolic value (Rehling 2002). Thus in a culturally constructed world they might become less worthy on being protected. These kinds of representations might lead to the type of positions expressed in the debate about the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve (Dunaway 2006) in which the white stretch of land was seen by some as "nothingness". In the same way, some animals can become more valuable then others: bears more important then insects, swans more important then lizards and so on (Rehling 2002).

Another area of the popular culture with a significant audience are the board or family games. In analyzing Monopoly^{TM} National Parks Edition, Opel (2002) approaches the importance

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of games in strengthening values. In this case, The National Parks Edition has the same rules as the traditional Monopoly^{TM} game but instead of resorts, the players can purchase national parks and gain profit out of their administration. The author utilizes the concept of simulacrum coined by Baudrillard (1983), a way of creating a hyperreality that reinforces the meanings and values attached to different symbols in our society and that in the same time deflects opportunities for contestation (Baudrillard 1983). Games and films are both examples of simulacra (Opel 2002). In the case of the Monopoly^{TM} game this simulacra merges public and private property, masking the potential conflict that exists between the initial reasons for the creation of national parks – to protect that land from private exploitation – and the goals of the game, to purchase as a player, as many parks as possible (Opel 2002). Thus the game promoted as an educational tool, obliterates one of the conflicts of the capitalist society between private and public property and induces in the players the acceptability of national parks being owned by private companies (Opel 2002).

3. Environment in the most popular television animation series

3.1 General characterization of the three animation series

It's not difficult to argue for the importance of television animations in the modern day pop culture. As MacFarlane, the author of *Family Guy* argues, animation can be more profitable for a production studio then any other type of show (Dean 2008). Their lovable characters appear on t-shirts, as toys or in advertisements (Stanley 2008). The characters don't grow old and don't go to strike; they don't require salaries or ask for raises. Moreover, combined with political satire, they have become an arena for reflection, and social and political debates (Skoble 2001). The power of animations consists exactly from being able to say and do almost everything because they are not taken seriously, they faces are not associated with real people but in the same time, and with the right drawing, anybody can be associated with the face of a cartoon character. Wisnewski (2007) goes farther and argues: "Our families are modeled after television images and cultural icons such as those spoofed on Family Guy" (Wisnewski 2007)

The genre of animations is made even stronger by the similarities between them. They all present recurring themes and plots such as army enrolment, satire directed at politicians, corruption or parodies of movies such as *A perfect storm*. The characters of animations even transgress from one show to the other like in the *South Park* episode, *War of cartoons* and references to each other are frequent as well as to other pop culture items. These inter-linkages create a true net of meanings in popular culture products.

The animation series are applying a comic frame to real life events. In all of the three animations there is an interplay between the subversive trends of the topics of the episodes and the purpose of entertaining the audiences. Any readings of the texts have to be made keeping in mind both purposes of the creators: to entertain and to express something. This creates a series of equivocal messages which can by interpreted in a myriad of ways. This is why this chapter is offering also background information on these three animations series to try to understand the extent to which the meaning of the content matches the intentions of their creators. The main purpose of entertainment can not be denied but the messages can be found in what are the topics approached in the episodes and who are the characters being subjected to satire in these series.

3.1.1 South Park

South Park is an animated series broadcasted weekly, on Wednesdays, on the American cable channel Comedy Central (McKinley 2003). The animation series started in 1997, it's now in its 13th season and the officials of the network agree it was this show that put Comedy Central "on the map" (Halbfinger 2007). Apart from television and significantly contributing to its worldwide success, the show is streamed on internet on its own website and partially on other websites for free. In less then one year from the internet debut of the series in 2008, the episodes have totaled 300 million views (Carr 2009). The series are created by Matt Stone and Trey Parker and the show is now in its 13th season and it is the most popular and successful show and franchise of the channel Comedy Central (Editorial 2007; Carr 2009). The story follows the adventures of the four-graders Stan, Kyle, Cartman, Kenny and their colleagues in their hometown of South Park. In a language that can many times be described as offensive and rude, and with cardboard paper animations that are intentionally unrefined, the series present a sharp satire of the modern days everything, from Scientology to politics and pop stars, through the more or less innocent eyes of 9 year old children (McKinley 2003). The show has sparked public debates, conflicts with the company owing the Comedy Central channel and even with its own cast as in the case of the Scientology mocking episode (Stanley 2006) but has also won praises like the Peabody Award for "stringent social commentary" in June 2006 (Leonard 2006).

The proof that the show is aiming at transmitting more then entertainment comes not only from the show's content but also from the belief of its creators that "…..television could do more than entertain" (McKinley 2003) and in accordance to its creators' beliefs, many times *South Park* characters end with a fable summarized in the end most often by either Kyle or Stan. The political importance of *South Park* is suggested also by the efforts made to define the political affinities of the two creators of the show (Tierney 2006). Matt Stone defined his political allegiance, and

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probably that of his creative partner, with the sentence "I hate conservatives, but I really [...] hate liberals" (Tierney 2006). At one point the two creators of *South Park* described themselves are libertarians, a political term describing a class of people arguing for a minimal involvement of government and state in the lives of citizens. That is relevant for the position one could expect from the series regarding environmental issues as many time environmentalism is seen as promoting increased government implication in economy through regulations and taxes.

The audience of the show is most often described as young males and *South Park* seems to have its highest appeal for the teenage and early 20s segment of the population (Halbfinger 2007). Michele Ganeless, general manager at the Comedy Central, said about data related to television watching: "We hope it validates what we've known from our research: that we have the most popular programs on college campuses" and that prove to be indeed true (Malone 2007). But the perception of the show evolved over the years from an underground hit and the expression of a new young generation of slackers to a comedy program with a point of view. This new approach diversified the show's audience, much like in the case of other programs of the Comedy Central channel which combine comedy with political satire (Stanley 2006; Carter 2007).

South Park presents the universe of a small fictitious town named, of course, South Park from Colorado, USA. The population of the town has representatives of any class or category of people capable of bringing up one of the modern day controversial topics. The same as Springfield in *The Simpsons* or Quahog in *Family guy*, South Park is a small scale representation of the humankind itself, or from a more limited perspective of the American society. The animation looks into the South Park adults' unexamined behaviors through the eyes of 9 year olds who are trying to make sense of the world around them, getting little help from the often unreasonable and absurd adults of the community (Young III 2007). Stan and Kyle, the two good friends are the reflective voices of the show and often deliver a final conclusion to the episodes. Eric Cartman is the evil genie and as Young III (2007) describes him, he blindly emulates the evil and the cruel characters in our society. Kenny is the character that often dies and resurrects in the next episode and his words are mostly muffled and intelligible only for his animated friends. Young III (2007) argues that *South Park*, smuttiness and potty humor, provides an outlet for our suppressed desires and thoughts that are socially unacceptable. In the same time, besides catering to the entertainment needs of the audience, the language tries to make also a point about freedom of speech (Young III 2007).

3.1.2 The Simpsons

The Simpsons debuted as a series on the Fox network in 1989 and since then it has become an iconic item of popular culture, leading its characters to world fame and occupying an important part in their fans' lives (Newman 2008). The main characters initially appeared in *"The Tracy Ullman show"* in 1987 but because of their popularity, they were given a prime-time spot two years later (Horowitz 1999). Shortly, it has become the most popular show on Fox network in its Sunday prime-time spot (Strum 1998). The series is now in its uninterrupted 20th season of social and political satire. The creator of the show is Matt Groening but as compared with the *South Park* and *Family Guy* creators, his political preferences went unexamined which indicates *The Simpsons* are much less controversial from a political point of view and the satire is rather directed towards social aspects and professional categories (Ellis 2008) and not so much political characters. Now *The Simpsons* are the longest running comedy still present on American television networks and still has a sizable audience after two decades from the debut (Brewer 2007).

From a production point of view, the script writing and animation itself are separate and done in different locations, which takes the time for the creation of one episode to 8-9 months, the same timeframe as in the case of the *Family Guy* series. This means that both *The Simpsons* and *Family guy* have a longer latency period in relation to the real world events they satirize as compared to *South Park*.

The best understanding of the popularity of *The Simpsons* comes out by searching on the Internet, so characteristically for the essence of all the things the shows stands up for, in the postmodernist, media-saturated society (Horowitz 1999). The Web site www.snpp.com [4], *The Simpsons* Archive is a collection of all the things the shows has had an influence on: articles, production details, other fan sites (Horowitz 1999). Browsing though all those details, someone can easily find proves of the series international success: the UK *Simpsons'* official Web site [1] Spain *Simpsons'* official Web site [2] Finland *Simpsons'* official Web site [3], just to name a few of the non-American Internet sites dedicated to the popular show. Moreover, the characters are used as marketing tools. As proof of their international fame, a renowned fast-food chain uses their image to sell its products in Asia, Europe and South America (Stanley 2008). The global audience of *The Simpsons* family has been awarded in 2007 with a movie that was a box-office success worth almost 200 millions USD in the first two months from the release (Brewer 2007). The movie is especially relevant for this research even if not included here. The topic that *The Simpsons'* movie approaches is an environmental one. The Springfield Lake is polluted and though measures are taken for the pollution to be mitigated, Homer Simpson "manages" to give the final blow to the

affected ecosystem. The comedy then follows humorously the way authorities try to deal in an inappropriately way with the ecological disaster (Brewer 2007).

The Simpsons television series were initially designed with an adult audience in mind. It was meant to be a sitcom with animated characters (Horowitz 1999). But along with the entrance on the market of *South Park* and then of *Family Guy* series, both with much more controversial language and plots, *The Simpsons* have started to be seen much more as a show for the whole family (Strum 1998). Moreover, the appeal of the show crossed over many ethnic or racial boundaries as the yellow people with blue hair could be easily identified as having any ethnic background (Miller 1993). The multi-layered comedy of *The Simpsons* targets a rather educated audience, immersed and knowledgeable of the present-day pop culture but in the same time aware of the fascination of television, the mind-numbing effect of television programming and ready to laugh of it (Horowitz 1999). As the producer himself declares, the show is designed to reward the devoted fans by presenting jokes only a constant and attentive viewer can detect, thus deepening and multiplying the meanings and readings of the show (Horowitz 1999).

The general topic of the 20 years show is an American dysfunctional family in the average American town of Springfield. The name of the town is a "wink" at the popular culture knowledgeable audience as it is taken from another American situation comedy from the 1950s (Brewer 2007). The family is composed from the blue-collar working father, Homer Simpson who's over-weight, lazy and addicted to television and beer. His job is at the Springfield nuclear plant which offers the creators numerous occasions for approaching energy security and environmental topics. For instance, in one of the episodes of the second season Blinky, the three eyed fish sparks a debate about the environmental impacts of the nuclear plant (Todd 2002). The mother of the family, Marge Simpson was an ambitious woman in her youth but she gave up her dreams in favor of her family. She is the more reasonable and sensible part of the couple. They have three kids: Bart, a mischievous ten year old who's always getting in trouble at school; Lisa, a precocious and very intelligent 7 year old; and Maggie, the toddler who has barely spoke in the show. The most interesting of the characters for this paper is Lisa, who in the 20 years of the show has been consolidated as an environmentalist, an animal rights advocate, a very intelligent person for her age, and the moral guardian of the family. Skoble (2001) argues that Lisa is actually the embodiment of the ambivalent relationship that the American society (and, why not, the global society) has with intellectuals and experts in general (Skoble 2001). Maybe the only intellectual in the Simpson family, she's presented as both wise and profound but also sometimes as preachy and arrogant, as in

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the case of the episode when she becomes vegetarian (Skoble 2001). Of course, many readings of the text are equivocal and distorted by the satirical nature of the show (Skoble 2001; Todd 2002).

3.1.3 Family guy

The *Family Guy* series is the newest of the three analyzed here. In a way, it's a combination of both the focus on family life of *The Simpsons* and the daring and obnoxious attitude of *South Park*. Some have criticized the series as being just a vulgar copy of *The Simpsons* (Dean 2008). But the Fox channel seems to be poised to continue the show despite its ups and downs in audience ratings and the political debates it triggers. The creator of the *Family Guy* is Seth MacFarlane and he has struck an over $100 millions contract with the network for continuing his work as animator and has now became the highest paid producer-writer in television history (Dean 2008). The creator is also a prodigy in composing music and gives the voices of most of the male characters in the show. He published his first cartoon at 8 years old in a local newspaper (Dean 2008). His politically charged cartoon sparked some controversies, one recently related to the American presidential election campaign and the fact the MacFarlane hasn't hidden his liberal political preferences (Barnes 2008).

Family Guy is broadcast on Fox Channel in prime time on Sundays, after *The Simpsons*. *Family guy* has now overcome its television program neighbor as the most popular television animation series and in the demographics of males aged 18 to 34 it's cited as the most watched scripted television program (Dean 2008). This television success is complemented by achievements in other areas such as impressive DVD sales of almost $400 millions, high download rates on iTunes and one of most pirated shows on internet, one of the most significant criteria, even though informal, telling of the *Family Guy* world-wide success (Dean 2008). During its 8 seasons, *Family Guy* has become a franchise worth around $2 billion dollars (Dean 2008). The showed premiered in 1999 in prime-time and MacFarlane became the youngest person ever to have a network prime-time show at 25 years old (Dean 2008). Since then the show was canceled twice due to bad ratings and political controversies. But the showed was aired on other networks achieving extremely high ratings in the key demographic of young males and the DVD selling reached millions of copies (Dean 2008). The production of the show restarted in 2004 and the broadcast in 2005 [5]

In a way, *Family Guy* as the other animations, is the absolute exponent of post-modernism blurring the line between reality and appearance, drawing heavily on other pop culture products, sometimes even being accused of plagiarism (Wisnewski 2007). The show's setting is the town of Quahog, as in the other two animations, a small copy of the society itself. The characters of the

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show form a dysfunctional family. The father is a slow-witted man with an insignificant job. His wife is much sharper and coming from a wealthy family which represents a pretext for several of the show's plots. She adores Peter nevertheless and their three children: Chris the dim overweight son, Meg smarter but always the target of jokes in the family and Stewie, the intelligent and evil toddler (Wisnewski 2007). The family is completed by their dog, Brian who talks, drinks martinis and is continuously in an inner conflict between his dog and obviously human sides (Goldberg 2006). Brian the dog is actually one of the most complex characters of the show, building a reputation as an environmentalist during the 8 seasons of the show.

3.2 Environment related content in television animations

3.2.1 South Park

Environmentalism could not be missed from all the topics this controversial series approached and among the three series analyzed in this paper, *South Park* is the one that has given the most attention to environmental issues. During the 28 episodes that were analyzed in this research, three of them had at least one of the main plots based on metaphors or issues pertaining to environment.

In the second episode of the 10th season, the creators of *South Park* take on the issue of hybrid cars. The episode is titled *Smug Alert* and has as a key point the Academy Award acceptance speech of George Clooney who declared that people in Hollywood are ahead of the rest on several key issues, including the protection of the environment. The episode starts with Kyle's father, Gerald Broflovski driving a hybrid through the town of South Park and attracting attention to himself and letting everyone know that he "…couldn't sit back and be a part of destroying the Earth anymore" (South Park ep. 10.2). He even stops at one of the traffic lights and tells another driver in an SUV that "the emissions from a vehicle like yours cause irreparable damage to the ozone" (South Park ep. 10.2). He then goes on to give fake tickets to the drivers of gas-guzzlers in the parking lot of a supermarket for "failure to care about environment" (South Park ep. 10.2). This sparks a conflict with the other drivers and upon reaching home, he decides along with his wife to move in San Francisco where the people are "motivated and progressive like us" (South Park ep. 10.2).

When Kyle and his parents move, Stan is heartbroken and Gerald Broflovski tells him that until he makes everyone in South Park drive hybrids, the Broflovskis "just gonna have to be with

our own kind" (South Park ep. 10.2), that means in San Francisco. Stan decides to make everyone in South Park drive hybrids and he writes a song with the lyrics: "Come on now, people now people now/People now, come on now, people now/Got to drive hybrids, people now/People now, people now, people now/Hybrids are for people now, people now/Group of people driving people now/Get a hybrid, be good people now" (South Park ep. 102). Upon hearing the song, everyone decides to buy a hybrid and start having a similar behavior as Gerald Broflovski, congratulating each other for driving hybrids: "I guess it's up to us to show everyone the way. Good for you!" (South Park ep. 10.2) or "Can you believe some people still don't drive hybrids?" (South Park ep. 10.2).

Stan is happy with his achievement of making South Park the city with the highest percentage of hybrid owners in the country and hopes this will bring his best friend Kyle back. But Roger McFriendly "the person who watches over the delicate ecosystem of South Park" (South Park ep. 102) approaches Stan and smacks him before presenting him the grim situation of South Park. A dark cloud has gathered over the city: it is not smog, it is "smug". Roger McFriendly explains: "Hybrid cars make better for emission levels, but people who drive hybrid cars are the leading cause of smug. You can have smug in the atmosphere, and you know what that leads to? Global laming!" (South Park ep. 102). This cloud of "smug" it's on its way to merge with the cloud from San Francisco, "the smuggest city in the country". The critical mass for a huge storm will be reached when the "smug" cloud from the George Clooney Academy Award acceptance speech will meet the smug clouds of San Francisco and South Park. This point in the episode is a reference to the movie "*A perfect storm*" in which three atmospheric phenomena merge together to create a storm of great proportions. The movie is based on a book with the same title that presents real life events happening at the beginning of the 1990's but the movie focuses much more on the spectacular special effects, missing out many of the significance of the real life events. (Knox 2001).

People of South Park find out about the possibility of a huge storm coming up because of the local "smug" cloud and start accusing Stan for making them drive hybrids. They decide that they have to destroy all the hybrids to save the city of South Park from total destruction. Because Stan is considered the only person responsible, he has to destroy himself in a masher all the hybrids from South Park. The storm comes and harms South Park and destroys San Francisco totally. Kyle and his family are saved in the last moment. In the final sequences of the episode the people talk about rebuilding their lives but they decide they have to "make sure nobody gets a stupid hybrid" (South Park ep. 10.2). It's Kyle's role to tell the adults of South Park: "Hybrid cars don't cause smugness, people do. Look, hybrid cars are important. They may even save our planet one day.

What you all need to do is just learn to drive hybrids and not be smug about it." (South Park ep. 10.2) But the rest of the town decides "Perhaps... one day... we can learn to drive hybrids without being smug about it, but for now... the technology is just too much for us" (South Park ep. 10.2).

Another environmentally significant episode of *South Park* is the episode 6 of the 10th season titled *Manbearpig*. This episode is relevant because the Al Gore character makes an appearance in this episode and even though he doesn't talk about climate change or anything related to environmental issues, the script makes clear references to the climate change awareness raising campaign led by Al Gore. Al Gore makes a visit to the South Park school to inform the children about a great danger to humankind, a monster named Manbearpig: half man, half bearpig. The ex vice-president tries to convince Kyle, Stan, Cartman and Kenny of the existence of Manbearpig by scaring them, wearing a costume and appearing in the evening as Manbearpig. The character Al Gore seems to be very affected because nobody takes him "serial" and he doesn't get enough attention. The children think he doesn't have any friends and feel bad for him. Al Gore convinces the four children to go with him in search of Manbearpig. They reach a cave and start exploring it but the children remain stuck inside because Al Gore starts shooting randomly in the cave to kill Manbearpig. Al Gore's character manages to exit the cave and while the others try to save the entrapped children, the ex vice-president is convinced he has to kill Manbearpig and save humankind. Thus he decides to flood the cave by changing the flow of a nearby stream. The children miraculously escape and Al Gore ends his presence in the episode with the words "Well, my work here is done. I've killed MBP, and now I must save the world from something else. Maybe I'll make a movie. A movie starring me. Then people will take me super serial." (South Park 10.6) The character of Al Gore makes another short appearance in another episode in which he still pursues his obsession with killing Manbearpig at any costs.

As it can be noticed from the narrative presented above, climate change doesn't intervene in the plot. The creators of *South Park* though, Matt Stone and Trey Parker, have created an episode related to the topic of climate change in the season 9 which was not included in the content analysis of this research. For the purpose of a more thorough analysis, the plot of that episode will be shortly presented below. The episode is titled *Two days before the day after tomorrow* and it's yet another parody of a popular movie about extreme weather events: *The day after tomorrow* which presents the catastrophic effects of an abrupt climate change. The creators of *South Park* take on the opportunity to satirize also the reaction of the American media and authorities to the hurricane Katrina disaster.

The episode starts with Stan and Cartman playing in a boat and accidentally destroying "the biggest beaver damn in the world" (South Park 9.8). This creates a huge flood in Beaverton, a town near by South Park. Nobody actually tries to save the people trapped by the flood but everybody is busy on determining who's to blame for the disaster. The accusations shift from the terrorists to George Bush. The media report huge destructions in Beaverton: "We do not have any reports of fatalities yet, but we believe that the death toll may be in the hundreds of millions. Beaverton has only a population of about eight thousand, Tom, so this would be quite devastating." (South Park 9.8) Finally, the experts decide the global warming is the cause of the Beaverton flood and everybody panics and closes inside the community centre. In a scene of extreme absurdity, all the people evacuate the town of South Park and run from an invisible danger while screaming "We didn't listen!" and other clichés used in an environmental context like "We didn't take care of our earth, and now you've inherited our problems" (South Park 9.8). All the inhabitants of South Park lock themselves inside the community centre while leaving behind a scene of extreme serenity with the mountains on the background. The atmosphere of absurdity is continued when three of the men from the community centre go outside very warmly dressed and prepare for a new ice age with temperatures of "over 70 million degrees below zero" (South Park 9.8) while the weather seems to be sunny. Even if they feel is very hot, they think it's because they are in the last stages of hypothermia. The episode ends with the blame once again shifting due to another farfetched scenario and the script highlights the willingness of people to believe anything rather then the simple explanation of the beaver damn being broken by some kids playing around. During the whole episode, climate change or global warming, as mentioned in the script, it is not denied as a scientific fact.

The last episode of *South Park* presented in this analysis is the third one of the 11th season of the show and it's a metaphor of the human impact over the Earth. The title of the episode is *Lice Capades* and the secondary plot of the episode presents the life of lice on one of the children's heads. The episode presents the lice society very similar with a human one and the hairs seem like a forest. The lice are presented pulling down one of the hairs in a clear allusion to wood cutting. One of the lice becomes worried about "what kind of world our baby is gonna grow up in" (South Park 11.3) and he tries to convince the others that "The environment... is changing. I believe it is somehow, reacting to our presence on it." (South Park 11.3) Nobody believes that the world in which they are living, in reality a child's head, might be conscious and thus try to get rid of them. "I think we're looking at a global catastrophe, the likes of which we've never seen!" (South Park 11.3) says the environmentally aware louse. When the child applies anti-lice shampoo, the chemicals bring havoc to the lice's world and many of them die. The hero louse decides to leave for another

"planet" and save his baby. He attaches himself to a fly which takes him away from the damaged "world".

3.2.2 The Simpsons

The Simpsons series have a more constant preoccupation for the environment along the episodes analyzed. Lisa is the character shown as having constant preoccupation with environmental and animal rights issues. In episode 2 of the 18th season, when Bart upstages Lisa in jazz, she feels she has to get involved in something else meaningful. She decides to save from certain death some of the dogs from the Springfield animal foster. In the episode *GI (Annoyed Grunt)* Lisa s presented as a member of PETA, throwing paint over the fur coat of Krusty the clown, but immediately afterwards asking her victim when is the his new movie coming up.

Even tough the content relevant for the environment is more constantly presented throughout *The Simpsons*, only one of the episodes is built around an larger environmental topic. *The Life Aquatic* is an episode in which Homer decides to take Marge to her childhood favorite holyday place: the Barnacle Bay. Here they discover that the place has lost its charm due to the hard times the fishermen had because the yum-yum fish, the local popular food, disappeared. "Maybe you just over fished them?" suggests accusatory Lisa. Homer and his kids decide to bring to life at least the small carousel for Marge. But the things go wrong and Homer ends up having to pay for damages so he goes fishing with the local fishermen. The yam-yam fish comes back and everyone is happy. But a storm approaches and the fishermen have to fight with the strong wind and high waters, prompting another reference to the movie "*A perfect storm*". Meanwhile Marge and Lisa visit an institute. One of the items has written: "Press button to see what global warming will do in the next three years". Lisa is curious about it but Marge states "Three years is a long ways away". At the end of the episode, after the fishermen manage to escape the storm and consider going fishing again, Lisa spells the environmental lesson for them: "Haven't you learned a lesson here? Overfishing and greed have brought this town nothing but wrack and ruin." The fishermen agree: "Got to be some way we can make money without depleting our precious oceans." At the end of the episode we can see how the locals chose to cut the trees instead of the fishing which disappoints Lisa profoundly. In other episodes we can see Lisa fighting for supporting the children in need from Springfield that don't attend school or unearthing the truth behind news media reporting at Fox News. Lisa Simpson character is well defined, showing interest for a wide range of important issues, seeking truth and justice many times in an idealistic way.

3.2.3 Family guy

In the *Family Guy* series, as in *The Simpsons*, one of the characters is consistently presented as having an environmentalist attitude: that is Brian the dog. In the episode *Hell comes to Quahog*, Brian's environmental attitudes can be inferred when, at the car dealership where the Griffins go to buy Meg a car, he exclaims: "Look at all these Hummers. What kind of jerk would drive one of those?" He is shown reading the book "Crimes against nature" and when the heat comes, Brian turns off the air conditionining: "Just open a window. Air conditioners are harmful to the ozone layer." He's confronted by Lois: "Save your hippie […] for the winter months, okay?" He is also teased about his environmental concerns by the evil baby Stewie with who he's often in conflict. Because Meg can not buy the car she wants, she gets hired at the Superstore USA, who has just opened up in Quahog. Brian shows also his anti-corporate feelings, telling Meg: "Giant mega-stores like Superstore USA are ruining this country. They don't pay their employees a decent wage or give them health benefits" or telling others "That mega store is a big, evil corporation that means nothing but trouble for this town." In Quahog everybody loses their businesses because of Superstore USA and Peter loses his job. When the town is experiencing "the worst heat wave in a century", Quahog remains without electricity for the extensive needs of the Superstore USA to be met. Brian convinces Peter to join in a protest against the mega-store but Peter gives up the protest as soon as he discovers the industrialized air conditioning inside the Superstore USA and accepts a job in the mega-store. At the end, Brian and Stewie manage to destroy the Superstore USA from Quahog and things come back to normal again, including electricity. Even though the electricity topic was not approached in this episode from an environmental point of view, as determining an impact on the environment, it nevertheless allowed for exposing the environmentalism of Brian the dog and joined in the image of one character both environmentalism and anti-corporatism.

The second episode with a strong environmental focus in *Family Guy* is the one in which the Griffins spend their holidays in a cabin on the lake of Quahog. Bathing in the lake they discover the water smells weird and their hair is falling. Brian indicates the Quahog oil refinery on the other shore of the lake as responsible for the situation. Lois wonders: "So they can just dump their waste into the lake?" Peter notices saddened: "What kind of world is this where you can't even trust the oil companies anymore." Lois goes and confronts the mayor of Quahog about the pollution in the town's lake: "The Quahog Oil Refinery is emptying all their toxic waste into the lake. I mean, you couldn't possibly have sanctioned that kind of blatant industrial pollution, could you?" The mayor admits his corruption and therefore Lois decides to run for mayor so she can fight the corruption and the oil company. Brian supports her and gives her advice all the way.

It follows a very strong satire directed at the election campaigns in which the highlight is a town hall electoral debate. After Lois proposes plans for different issues, she realizes people react only to short, simple answers. Asked what are her plans "for cleaning up our environment?" she answers "9/11". Another citizen asks: "Mrs. Griffin, what about our traffic problem?" And her answer is again, emphasizing the words: "Nine...Eleven" with reference to the 11th of September 2001 terrorist attacks on US. Lois Griffin wins the election and becomes mayor with the first priority to clean up the lake Quahog. At a town meeting she says: "And I think we all realize the importance of stopping the environmental damage being done to Lake Quahog" and she proposes a modest tax increase to obtain the money for the clean up. The citizens are not happy and protest until Lois uses again her campaign tactics "That's right, terrorists. We have intelligence that suggests that... Hitler is plotting with... with the Legion of Doom... to assassinate Jesus... using the lake as a base." The citizens are finally convinced: "Those things all sound scary" and Lois obtains the money to clean up the lake. The town starts enjoying the benefits of a recreational space such as the lake Quahog but Lois becomes tempted by the money she has control over. She starts using public money for personal expenses and she gets criticized by Brian. At one point, Lois accepts a fur coat as a present from the owner of the Quahog oil company in return for allowing them to damp toxic waste in the lake again. She is worried about what Brian the dog will say but she decides: "Eh, I'll just take him for a ride in the car, he'll forget all about it." Here comes into play the dual nature of Brian and his inner conflict of being both a dog and a person and usually the dog is trumping the person. When the new waste pipe is inaugurated, she decides "Politics does terrible things to good people" so she gives up the mayor position so the lake comes back to its initial polluted state.

3.3 Results of the content qualitative analysis

Table 3.1 The results of the coding process

CODES	PRIMARY DOCS				
	Family Guy Season 6	South Park Season 10	South Park Season 11	The Simpsons Season 18	Totals
air pollution	0	5	1	1	7
Al Gore - linked to climate change	0	0	0	0	0
Al Gore - not linked to climate change	3	21	5	0	29
animal protection	0	0	0	8	8
anti-environmental attitudes	5	1	0	1	7
attitudes of perceived environmentalists towards others	0	10	0	1	11
car and fuel	8	36	0	10	54
chemicals	0	0	0	4	4
climate change	0	0	0	1	1
consumerism	0	0	0	1	1
corporate - related to environment	3	0	0	0	3
corporate - not related to environment	12	0	0	1	13
electricity	9	0	1	2	12
Environmentalists' characterization	1	8	1	0	10
extreme weather	5	9	0	6	20
food	0	0	0	7	7
general environmental issues	2	11	4	2	19
land use	1	1	1	0	3
Ozone layer	1	1	0	0	2
poor countries	0	0	0	0	0
poor countries - non	0	3	0	0	3
pro-environmental attitudes	4	14	1	4	23
references to planet	2	4	1	9	16
references to planet	0	0	5	0	5
resources	1	0	1	9	11
taxes and administrative issues	1	0	0	0	1
waste	2	1	2	6	11
water	10	0	0	6	16
wildlife	9	16	0	21	46
Totals	79	141	23	100	343

The table 3.1 presents the results of the coding process. As it can be noticed the most used code was the one referring to **Car and fuel**. The quotations marked with this code were often referring to hybrids which were mentioned 47 times in the episodes analyzed, being one of the most popular environmental topics overall and having a whole episode dedicated to them. The **Car and fuel** code was used also for issues related to traffic or fuel efficiency.

The second most used code was the one referring to wildlife. This code was used for those sequences referring to wild animals. A great variety of wild animals were mentioned like manatees, whales, dolphins, bears, ostriches, cod, giraffe and others. In some instances, animals are given

anthropomorphic qualities, especially in *South Park*, as in the case of the manatees becoming authors of the *Family guy* series or in the case of the otters as evolved organisms in the future that acquired the capacity to talk and they built an empire. Most of the animals mentioned are mammals and/or species for which conservation efforts have been made. The danger of extinction though it is mention only in relation to a fictitious species of fish named yam-yam.

In the initial research of the NBC Green Week programs, Al Gore was considered as a key word to signal references to climate change as his name was used mainly in connection with this environmental aspect. That has changed in the present research because the references were much more directed at Al Gore himself and they had little to do with the issues that Al Gore advocated. The references to Al Gore seemed much more political and in none of the coded sequences was Al Gore mentioned in connection to climate change. This is true both in *South Park* and *Family Guy*. In *The Simpsons* Al Gore is not mentioned at all. Because of this context, the references to Al Gore were subsumed in this research to a family code **How environmentalists are perceived**. This is true especially in the case of *South Park* where the political allegiances of the creators of the show seem to determine certain attitudes toward politicians. It is not clear if the attitude itself towards Al Gore could influence how environmentalists in general are seen or is an attitude referring only to the politician Al Gore. But as he has become one of the leading speak persons of the environmental movement, it can be assumed that the portrayal of Al Gore has a certain impact over the environmentalists in general.

Climate change is one of the codes that scored poorly being mentioned only once and appearing one more at the initial credits of one of *The Simpsons* episodes when Bart Simpson writes on the blackboard "Climate change did not eat my homework". More or less closely related to climate change are the sequences related to **Extreme weather**. These quotations were coded differently because in none of the respective sequences the extreme weather was attributed to climate change. In *South Park* and *The Simpsons* the extreme weather events were pretexts for parodies of the movie *Perfect storm*. Through the comic frame, allusion is made to global warming by calling the accumulation of smugness "global laming" in the *Smug Alert* episode of *South Park*. As presented in the previous subchapter regarding environment related content in animations, the *South Park* series have made references to global warming but in an episode not included in the coding analysis.

The codes **Attitudes of perceived environmentalists towards others** and **Environmentalists' characterization** were two faces of the same coin. The first code is supposed to offer a mirror for the environmentalists of how their behavior towards others is perceived. This

mirror is thus signaling the approach more or less disguised of the animations' creators towards the environmentalists. The words utter in the sequences coded with **Attitudes of perceived environmentalists towards others** and used to refer to „the others" from an environmental point of view are: ignorant, small-minded, jerks. **Environmentalists' characterization** code is used for the sequences referring to those perceived as environmentalists from either the point of view of others or as self-descriptions. In the first case some of the words used are: idealistic, hippie, smug, self-sufficiency. In the second case the words used are: ahead of the curve, progressive, protective of our environment.

Some of the words frequently encountered previously as associated with environmental topics were scarcely used in the animations. This is the case of the word „green" which is not used in these animations as defining the environmental movement. In the previous research also the expression „saving the Earth/the planet" was often used in relation to the purposes of the environmental movement. In the three analyzed animations the references to the planet are present only in the *South Park* episode *Lice capades* presenting a metaphor of relation between humankind and the planet.

Definitely, the most environmentally charged series of episodes from those analyzed is the 10th season of *South Park* broadcast in 2006. In presents the highest number of times the **Pro-environmental attitudes** code was used. It is also the season in which the most often uses of **Car and fuel** and **General environmental issues** codes were used. The most **Anti-environmentalism attitudes** were found in the *Family Guy* season along with the most references to corporations, related or not to the environment. But most of the quotations for which the corporate codes were used had a negative dimension attached to them, presenting corporations such as those from the retail or oil industry as having a negative influence on the environment and social issues.

In these animations we can notice a reduced interest for the developing countries problems, environmental or not. This is coupled with the high frequency of the **Car and fuel** code which in essence is an issue specific to affluent countries or to big affluent cities in the developing countries. The traditional topics of the environmental movement such as air pollution, water and waste seem to slip from the perceived current agenda of the environmental movement. These findings are consistent with those previously determined (Ceausu 2009).

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3.4 Discussion

The table of the content analysis of the text shows the main environmental emphases of the creators of the three animations. The interpretation of it is though very tricky. It is obvious that currently cars and fuel is a big topic associated with environmentalism (**Car and fuel** code = 54); it is difficult though to interpret the high uses of the code **Pro-environmentalist attitudes** in *South Park* as an environmentalist leaning of the show itself. A closer look at the environment related episodes shows the image might be quite different. The comedy frame makes the readings of the show quite complicated and most probably there are multiple interpretations depending on the audiences own initial knowledge and attitudes. Corroborated with the high score for the **Environmentalists characterization** code and the high presence of Al Gore in the same season 10 of *South Park*, the conclusion seems rather to be that this series of episodes creates a much more detailed and diversified image of environmentalists. Al Gore own appearance in one of the *South Park* episodes as animated character can be interpreted as influencing the image of the environmental movement but it's difficult to determine to what extent.

Analyzing the whole context of the environment related content in the three animations can certainly offer us a more complete picture of the approach these shows have towards environment. In doing so, we should probably keep in mind the two opposing theories of why the absurd is funny as many aspects of these animations are bordering the absurd: the first theory says we laugh at the absurd because we know it's not true; the second theory says we laugh at the absurd exactly because we know it's true (Kaye 2007). Many times asking ourselves why something is funny, might gives us the answer of what our intimate and hidden perceptions are about some things.

In the *Smug Alert* episode of *South Park*, people driving hybrids are presented as having a shallow attitude towards the environment and not even a minimal understanding of the effects hybrids help prevent: Gerald Brofloski thinks SUV's main impact is on the ozone layer. Hybrids are presented as rather a pretext for smugness and self-appreciation, offering the feeling of being better then the rest of the people. What convinces people of South Park to drive hybrids are in fact not arguments about climate change or environmental impacts of any kind but a song with simplistic and repetitive lyrics, mimicking and parodying in a way the songs calling to action of some environmental NGOs. Absurdity is pushed to extreme to highlight the inconsistencies of the people of South Park and to satirize the avoidance of responsibility in real life. When driving hybrids creates a smug cloud, the people of South Park start to blame Stan for creating a song and thus "making them to drive hybrids". In the case of the *Family Guy* episode *It takes a village idiot and I married one*, people from Quahog are not convinced to pay for cleaning the lake by arguments

either but by a series of words with negative connotations. Logics don't seem to play a role in the animations characters decision to take environmental actions. In *The Simpsons*, Lisa doesn't manage to convince the people of Barnacle Bay either about the importance of preserving resources. These situations seem to be a satire at both the society in general and its lack of interest for significant issues but might also say something about the perceived lack of power of the environmental movement to actually convince and produce a profound change. These cases also highlight the irrationality of many generalized reactions and one of the strongest examples is the reaction of the people of South Park to the danger of climate change in the episode *Two days before the day after tomorrow*.

At the end of the *South Park* episode *Smug Alert*, Kyle, the son of Gerald Broflovski is the voice of ration and moderation, pointing out that not hybrids are the cause of smug but their drivers. Kyle acts as a moderator between what are presented as the two extremes: the majority of population who don't care about climate change and those who buy hybrids, presented as acting based on a trend and declaring themselves saviors of Earth. In *Family Guy* Brian the dog is the voice of ethics and environmental concern which makes him the target of jokes. In *The Simpsons*, Lisa is the most environmentally aware member of the family. It can be noticed that either the children or Brian the dog are presented as genuine environmentalists. Both categories are outsiders of the adult world. Both have little true influence on those who they try to convince and those who are actual decision-makers. Kyle in *South Park* and Lisa in *The Simpsons* have to fight with the adults to impose their views. Adults end up adopting environmentalism as a snob act in *South Park* or just misunderstanding the message in *The Simpsons* in the case of the Barnacle Bay people. In *Family Guy*, Lois, the housewife becomes extremely concerned about the health of her family after they bath in the local lake and they become affected by the pollution. She runs for mayor of the town of Quahog but then she becomes corrupted and she gives up the fight for maintaining the Quahog lake clean. Marge Simpson is also an example of an adult unaware and uncaring about the effects on the environment: she estimates that three years for the effects of climate change is "a long way away". This preoccupation with the environment resting mostly on children determines the question if the environmental movement is still seen in its infancy or are all these cases just a satire to the adult population? Considering that the main part of the audience for all these shows are rather closer to childhood, the second answer could very well be true as well.

One more thing is worth mentioning about the characters seen as having a more constant environmental preoccupation: both Lisa Simpson and Brian Griffin are susceptible of being deterred in their ethical and environmental pursuits. Even though both are seen as intelligent,

sophisticated personalities, preoccupied with social justice and truth in general besides environmental issues, their inner contradictions pose challenges for them. Lisa is a exceptionally mature girl for her age, being mature both in her thinking and in her moral attitudes. But she still can't escape the childhood temptations which many times distract her in her pursuits like in the case of bashing Krusty the clown for wearing fur but asking him about his new movie the next minute. Brian has to fight his inner canine instincts and behaviors. His human and canine nature seem to be continuously in conflict and just being taken by Lois for a walk outside seems to make him forget about ethics.

Talking about the characters in animations it is worth pointing out in all the three animations the fictional local communities in which the adventures take place. The populations of the towns have a very important place in the overall flow of events and the local people represent in themselves a well defined collective character. Quahog for *Family Guy*, South Park for *South Park* and Springfield for *The Simpsons* are the metaphorical representation of the world as a whole, including in their population all the generic categories related to any kind of modern day debates: immigrants, homosexuals, disabled, different races, teachers, policemen, politicians and so on. This diverse mix of professions and backgrounds offer the perfect context for a whole series of issues to be approached and laughed at from an environmental point of view but not only: corruption of public servants and politicians, big companies and corporations, greed, short-sightedness and so on. In this context it's worth mentioning a rather interesting aspect of the environmental plots in animations: environmental problems never get solved. Can this be an allusion to the real life situation, the effect of a perceived reality?

Even if climate change is very rarely mentioned in the episodes analyzed in this research, there a several issues that are worth discussing. First, it seems that parodies of movies that present extreme weather events are the favorite topic for the animations creators when it comes to climate change. This is mainly the case for *South Park* but also *The Simpsons*. Hollywood has created a series of movies about the dangers of extreme weather, connecting them sometimes with climate change but these movies have invested mainly in creating special effects rather then offering a reliable and accurate account of possible events. The two movies approached in these animations are *The Perfect Storm* and *The Day after Tomorrow*. Knox (2001) argues about the first of them: "*The Perfect Storm* is a predictable Hollywood special-effects movie, or a less formulaic best-selling book" (Knox 2001). Thus there are signs that show that Hollywood movies which claim an environmental focus, are many times sacrificing accuracy over special effects and spectacular displays. This makes them easy targets for parodies.

One other important issue to study is the place of Al Gore, one of the most famous advocates of actions against climate change, in the animations discussed here. In the *Family Guy* series, in one of the episodes, when Peter and Brian come back from a trip in the past, they discover the present has changed and Al Gore became president, solving many social issues. *South Park* seems much less appreciative of the ex vice-president. As presented in the previous subchapters, Al Gore is envisioned as a needy, hungry for attention character which is ready to invent any threat so he can be the saviour of humankind. In *Manbearpig* episode of *South Park* he's fighting the monster called manbearpig, half man, half bearpig. Along with the clearly fictitious nature of this monster, the description itself is meant to seem ridiculous. It is difficult to interpret if the manbearpig is only a pretext to present Al Gore actions as motivated by his will to attract attention or the invented animal is also a metaphor for climate change. Al Gore uses words as: global catastrophe to describe the effects of manbearpig so from this perspective, this episode of *South Park* could be interpreted as offering also a metaphor for climate change. But the series has a history of being much more direct when it comes to making a point about something. The fact the climate change is not once mentioned in the episode could mean an effort of the creators to shy away from the climate change debate itself.

Another relevant point would be to analyze the interplay of politics and environmental topics in animations. *South Park* seems definitely more preoccupied in satirizing at least some categories of environmentalists. Matt Stone and Trey Parker's animation seem to provide much sharper ironies of Al Gore and Hollywood environmentalists even though the creators don't seem to make any effort to try to undermine environmental issues themselves. When the environmentalist is a louse in the episode *Lice Capades*, *South Park* approach to environment seems quite "green". *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* though present a much easier and direct message regarding environmental issues. There can be many assumptions between the political attitudes of different programs and the political allegiances of the networks on which they air. For example Fox Network is known for having a conservative approach in American politics but nevertheless both the animations presented on this network, *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* have a rather less acute satire directed at environmentalists. In one of *The Simpsons* episodes, Lisa fights with the intentional manipulation of news present exactly on the Fox Network. Moreover the anti-conservative stance present in some of the *Family Guy* episodes have been scrutinized by the Fox News channel, belonging the same company as the channel that airs the *Family Guy* animation (Barnes 2008). Most of the programs are produced by companies that are independent from the television networks that air their products. The conclusion can be drawn that networks have a rather low influence on

what the programs they air are about and the content is much more dependent on the creators own political attitudes.

4. Conclusion

This research has tried to broaden the understanding of how environmental issues are presented in popular culture by approaching a scarcely studied area: television animation series. The findings of this paper complement previous researches done in the environmental content of television programs and popular culture in general. As compared to other products of popular culture, these animations don't proposed a sanitized and idealized approach to nature nor to they propose simple fixes to complicated matters as others have been accused. But what can be said about *South Park*, *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* is that indeed they too are part of the liberal environmental paradox identified by King (1994). Even though consumerism doesn't seem to be actively promoted in the series and the anti-corporate attitudes are present, outside the scripts and of their imaginary lives these characters are used to promote a long series of products, including those of big corporations such as Coca-Cola or Burger King. They also provide significant revenues to the television networks through the "brown" industry of television advertising.

This research had as a starting point the conclusions of a previous work addressing the environmental content in programs intentionally designed to raise awareness of environmental issues during the NBC Green Week. The results of that research were used for defining what are considered environmental issues in today's popular culture. Those issues delimitations were adapted to suit the highly satirical and controversial context of television animation series genre. In no sense, the codes defined in this research are the only one applicable for popular culture texts. In fact, this research has proven how flexible an approach has to be to capture a valid perspective in the diversity of popular culture products.

This paper has highlighted how this type of programs is a very important modern-day arena for meaning construction in the environmental field as well, especially for the demographic of males between 18 and 35 years old. The content of the three series analyzed here is not homogeneous, proving popular culture is a disputed territory where the contest over meanings is continuous. In interpreting the results of this analysis is worth remembering the interplay between the purposes of the creators to both entertain and express a point of view. The animation series are beyond a doubt one of the clearest expression of postmodernism in today's media and thus strongly anchored in the modern day popular culture.

The methodology of this paper tries to combine two methods developed previously by media researchers: content analysis and discourse analysis. Content analysis of animations is very useful in determining which are the most visible issues on the environmental agenda. But using only content analysis can be quite deceiving unless it's complemented by a proper discourse analysis. Many times words are used to mock or to parody and few conclusions can be drawn without understanding the context of the animations' plots. The full image will though certainly be created only by backing up the content and discourse analysis results with audience research as the readings for the animations are extremely complex. The meaning and interpretations can be multiple and at several levels. In depth audience research is an important option for mapping these multiple interpretations. Thus one of the most important conclusions of this paper is the necessity of more audience research coupled with discourse and content analysis of popular culture items, as usually these two complementary approaches have been applied separately by different research traditions.

Analyzing the approach to environment these television animations series have revealed, there are several points that can be emphasized here. Environmentalists still have in the popular culture the image of idealists and hippies. Moreover, the characters showing profound and constant attachment to environmental purposes seem to be either children or Brian, the talking dog. They all are still outsiders of the adult human decision-making world. Moreover, they still have to fight with their inner impulses (related to either animal nature or childhood) weakening their resolve related to environmental issues. This might very well suggest a perceived weakness and lack of maturity of the environmental movement. Moreover, the image of environmental awareness in animation when it exists on a large scale, is presented as originating in either irrational fear or smugness, thus consolidating the perception of trend and fashion that environmentalism has acquired during the ups and downs of the environmental issues on the public agenda.

The animations, especially *South Park*, prove the pitfalls of having famous spoke persons for the environmental cause. As they may resonate with a certain category of the population, they risk being seen as pursuing their own goals and using environment as way to boost their popularity. No doubt, *An Inconvenient Truth* documentary wouldn't have had the same success if it wasn't for Al Gore. Hollywood actors are important message carriers as well throughout the world. But this raises issues about political partisanship and lack of true authority in the case of environmental issues. The message of the *South Park* series especially seems to be that for the demographics representing their audience, a more direct, reasonable and balanced approach would be more effective. *South Park* doesn't contest the environmental facts but it tries to expose the motivations

that might make environmentalism for some rather a trend to embrace at some point then a serious issue. In general, animations series rate very poorly in accurate environmental information conveying. The relevance of animation series for the environmental movement seems to be in the public images it creates in relation to certain famous environmentalists and in the creators' attempt to insert certain environmental topics in regular entertainment content, thus reminding the audiences about the significance of such issues.

Politics seem to play a part in the approach of animations to environmental issues but rather at the level of their creators then at the level of television networks. All the creators of the three animations presented here are extremely valuable people through their talent and the audiences they manage to attract. Audiences are the key when it comes to advertising money coming in for the networks and all of the shows presented here hold a strong position in the most popular demographic for advertising. The creators have pushed the television networks for which they work into contracts that make them some of the most successful writers and producers in television. They seem to have a strong leverage regarding the content of their shows and moreover, both Matt Stone and Trey Perker, but also Seth MacFarlane have penetrated the new booming medium of internet thus giving them even more freedom in the expression of their opinions and satire.

In the continuously changing context of popular culture, one thing remains certain: the research of these cultural items can reveal and uncover numerous tensions and competitions over meaning. Defining environmental issues and the humankind relationship with our planet is a continuous process which should be thoroughly understood and followed to determine the drivers of our behaviors and attitudes, and to understand how messages could be tuned up to reach wider audiences.

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5. [5] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0182576/episodes

6. Annex 1 – The categories defined by previous research in mass-media environmental content (Ceausu 2009)

Ozone layer related expressions

Hydrofluorocarbons

Refrigerator

Spray can

Car and fuel related expressions

carpool

ridership programme

commuting

(not) driving

gas guzzler

gas

biodisel

hybrid

Prius

Electric car

Trash powered car/garbage car

SUV

Parcking lot

References to the planet

Global

Planet (save)

Planet

Planet (destroy, ruin)

World (save)

World (destroy)

World (change)

World

Earth

Earth (save)

Earth (killing)

Earth smart

General concern for the environment

Environmentally

Environment

Environmental advocate

Environmentalism

Environmental officer

Environmental themes

Green policy/program

Green

Green technology

Ecofriendly/environmentally friendly

Green travellers

Environmental impact

Footprint

Tree-hugging

Natural/naturally

Eco-initiative

„just doing our part"

Hemp clothing

Air pollution

Air…poisoned

Burn tires

Nature protection expressions

Kill trees

Endangered falcon

Whale

Polar bear

Endangered species

Plant (a tree)

Penguin

Forest

Protected land

Mother Gaia

Energy related expressions

Power (electricity)

Power failure

Leave light on

Battery

Light bulb

Incandescent

Compact fluorescents

Wasteful (energy)

Wasted energy/waste energy

Conserve energy

Energy effcient

Energy manager

Light timers

Minister of Energy

solar power

Waste related expressions

Recycling/recycling bin

Recycled

coton diapers

Compost toillets

Compost

Environmentally responsible bag

Litter/littering

Recyclable paper

Recycle packaging

Food related expressions

Organic

Beef

Cheese

Food waste

Buying local

Vegetarian

Cattle/cattleman

Cow

Livestock

Farmed

Chemicals related expressions

Aluminium free deodorant

Styrofoam

Toxins

Non-biodigradable soap

Phosphate free soap

Non-toxic cleaners

Synthetic carpets

Plastics

Climate change related expressions

Carbon credits

Climate

An Inconvenient Truth

„The truth is very inconcenient"

Al Gore

Global warming

The treaty (Kyoto Protocol)

CO_2 taxes

Sea level rise

Carbon footprint

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Water related expressions

Inefficient washers

Water conserving showerheads

Wasteful (water)

Shower

Water

Save water/conserve water

Concern over the resources expressions

Renewable bamboo

Resources

Sea bass

Overfished

Renewable resource

Poor countries problems

Malaria

Consumerism

Consumer