

GENRE and TELEVISION

From Cop Shows to Cartoons
in American Culture

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From Saturday Morning to Around the Clock — The Industrial Practices of Television Cartoons

Genres traditionally have been primarily conceived of and studied as textual systems, subjected to scholarly definition and interpretation. Despite the ubiquity of this textualist assumption within film and television studies, many scholars have acknowledged the role of media industries in creating genres, incorporating industrial practices into their accounts of textual genres. This chapter examines the industrial facet of genres in depth, addressing specific attributes of the television medium. While most accounts of industrial practices frame the industry as a producer of genres through the creation of *generic texts*, I wish to look at the industry's productive role in constituting genres through the circulation of *generic discourses*. The role of the industry in generic processes supercedes the traditional confines of production as the primary industrial practice, especially for the television medium, as exemplified by two moments in the history of the cartoon genre.

Most scholarly accounts of media industries posit genres as a useful tool for industries to systematize similarity and differences, maintaining efficiency both for production and audience reception practices. Yet nearly all accounts of the industry's role in constituting genres have been solely focused on the process of textual production as the primary way by which industries constitute genres, implying that genres are encoded into texts through production — the author (whether individual or institutional) draws upon some facets of a given genre category, and encodes that particular genre definition into the text itself. This production-centered model has been most prevalent within film genre studies.

Thomas Schatz highlights the role of the Hollywood studio system in utilizing genres as part of a factory-like mode of production.¹ Other specific genre studies highlight the role of individual *auteurs*,² studios,³ or even nations⁴ in the production practices of genres. While certainly these are important considerations toward understanding the industry's role in film genres, scholars rarely consider how nonproduction practices of industrial organizations and personnel also constitute genres. How do industries “produce” film genres through techniques such as marketing (advertising campaigns, trailers, posters, press releases, star publicity, internet presence, merchandizing), distribution (packaging, saturation versus rollout, targeting markets, international sales, rereleases), exhibition (placement in film bill, location of theaters, show times, ratings, theatrical technologies), and nontheatrical practices (availability and location within video stores, sales to television, editing for new markets)?⁵ For most film genre analyses, examination of “industry” is equated with the study of “production.”

This elision is even more troubling for television, because the industrial practices of television are far less production-centered than for the film industry. The predominance of ongoing series as the primary textual form on television leads to greater ambivalence as to when exactly is the “moment of production” — if a program lasts for many years, can we identify exactly what notion of genre was operative within the production process? For instance, the sitcom genre shifted significantly throughout *All in the Family's* run. In 1971, the show was rebelling against a conservative and predictable genre, while in its later years the program shifted toward restoring notions of family and tradition to the genre that it had been instrumental in reconstructing. In this case, is there a singular “moment of production” to be studied? Production is an ongoing process in the majority of television, revising notions of genre throughout the run of a series as producers respond to the ongoing cultural circulation of programs; our analytic accounts of television industries must account for these ongoing processes.⁶

The predominance of previously produced programs within any channel's schedule is another aspect lessening the importance of production for television. From television's early reliance on repackaged film westerns to the emergence of reruns in the 1960s, from pay cable channels playing feature-length films to contemporary channels like TV Land, featuring only “classic” programming, the term production is inadequate to describe how many channels air programs. While reusing or repurposing footage is a rarity for the film industry — generally used as a gimmick as in *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (1982) — it is common enough within television to be more than just a marginal exception. Additionally, many major players in the television industry are not primarily producers, ranging from networks who purchase most of their programs (especially primetime entertainment shows) from film studios or independent producers, to cable channels like MTV whose primary programming was (at least initially) provided by music labels. Nevertheless, as argued concerning

Michael Jackson's videos in Chapter 1, industrial institutions like MTV or ABC are directly constitutive of television genres even when they are not "producers" per se.

How might we examine the industry's role in constituting television genres without focusing solely on textual production? A variety of industrial practices work to articulate discourses within a larger generic cluster. Advertising, trade press accounts, and target audiences all foster generic definitions and meanings within both film and television. In addition to the cinematic practices mentioned above that are also applicable to television, we need to consider specific practices that are unique to television. Although generating a comprehensive list of industrial sites where genre operates is nearly impossible, some important practices include sponsorship decisions (how do sponsors use genres to target customers and "purchase" appropriate audiences?), corporate synergy (how do conglomerates employ specific genres to further profits and cross-promotions?), regulations and policies (how do both self-regulation and governmental policy utilize generic distinctions in defining their regulatory scope?), technological shifts (how might technical developments favor or discourage certain genres?), and intermedia relations (how do institutions transfer genres across media, such as film adaptations of television, or shifting radio programs to television?). A specific case study might dictate other important ways in which industrial practices utilize, and are constitutive of, genres as cultural categories.

Two specific types of television's industrial practices seem particularly relevant for understanding television genres: program scheduling and channel identity.⁷ Scheduling practices organize programs for audiences and often communicate generic assumptions (like daytime versus late-night talk shows). Both placing programs within larger temporal blocks (Saturday morning, late-night, "family hour") and stringing together programs in a block (ABC's TGIF line-up, UPN's night of African-American sitcoms) use genres to reach specific audiences, working to constitute the genre by linking it with particular assumptions. Scheduling is probably more important for networks and affiliates attempting to reach mass audiences, rather than niche-defined cable channels; the latter tend toward 24-hour generic consistency instead of compartmentalizing different timeslots for various audiences. Nevertheless in all instances, scheduling practices are one of the primary ways the television industry provides generic frameworks to situate program.

The identity of the channel or network carrying a program also can activate genres explicitly (Comedy Central) or implicitly (NBC's reputation for urban white sitcoms in the 1990s). This is clearly more prevalent in recent years, given the outgrowth of cable/satellite channels with explicit generic names (SoapNet and Game Show Network) or generic acronyms (CNN's Cable News Network and A&E's Arts and Entertainment). Generically loaded channel identity has historical precedents as well — CBS's switch from rural sitcoms in the 1960s to urban shows in the 1970s is probably the most famous example. Channel identity

can operate on a more local level as well. Boston's two main UHF stations in the 1980s had different generic reputations for their programming of syndicated reruns and films — WSBK-38 played reruns of "highbrow" sitcoms, like *M*A*S*H* and *The Bob Newhart Show*, and classic Hollywood films on *The Movie Loft*, while WLVI-56 featured more kid-friendly shows like *Happy Days* and *The Flintstones*, low-budget kung-fu films, and Saturday afternoon's *Creature Double Feature* of 1950s horror movies. Of course, both stations were less culturally valued than the more reputable network affiliates and their full range of generic offerings. Any channel develops its identity by accumulating assumptions from programming decisions and promotional strategies, forming a framework for audience comprehension often linked to genre categories.

Both scheduling and channel identity can articulate genres to particular target audiences and cultural hierarchies. For instance, daytime soap operas are linked to female audiences and lowbrow cultural tastes through their scheduling, while generic differences between different networks' offerings form important distinctions for fans. For instance, NBC soaps are often seen as pandering to a young audience, while CBS offers more traditional soap operas for older, longtime fans. Even though channel identity and scheduling frame the ways audiences interact with television, they are by no means determinate of audience pleasures, nor are they necessarily imposed from the top down. Audiences often use time-shifting technologies, such as VCRs and Digital Video Recorders, to work against industrial scheduling practices and partially disconnect a show from its industrial matrix.⁸ Additionally, channel identity can emerge out of audience practices as well, such as when a station gains a reputation counter to its explicit definition (like E!'s growing reputation for shameless sensationalism instead of their nominal "Entertainment Television" label). But even if some audiences counter industrial practices, industries still construct the framework for most people's interactions with media.

These two industrial practices of scheduling and channel identity forge discursive associations within a genre, activating cultural hierarchies and values, mobilizing certain assumptions of "proper" audience identity and pleasures, and policing the boundary of what texts are legitimate components of the genre. Sometimes a single text can be recategorized via shifts in scheduling and channel identity — Susan Murray offers a fascinating example of how *American High's* (2000–01) shift from Fox to PBS triggered a host of new genre associations without changing the program itself.⁹ I illustrate the importance of both scheduling practices and channel identity in genre formation by examining two distinct moments in the history of the cartoon genre, highlighting the need to move beyond production as the primary industrial practice. Many television cartoons that are popular to this day were produced for theatrical film distribution in the 1930s and 1940s, prior to television's rise. Despite the cinematic origins of these animated shorts, they acquired different definitions, interpretations,

and valuations through their television circulation. Examining production practices cannot account for the changing generic implications linked to Warner Brothers' short *Hair-Raising Hare* from its theatrical premiere in 1946, to its appearance on ABC's Saturday morning *Bugs Bunny Show* in 1965, to being featured on *Cartoon Network's Greatest 50 Cartoons* in 1999. Despite the stability of the film text itself, its generic implications have shifted between these historical moments, from mass-audience film short to kid-only television filler to classic of American culture. To account for these generic shifts, we need to examine the industrial practices that have worked to constitute and transform definitions, interpretations, and evaluations of the cartoon genre on television.

Although I am focusing on industrial practices and their role in generic processes for cartoons, it is important to remember that the industry is not separable from the larger circulation of media texts and audience practices within historical contexts. The industry is not a self-sufficient and isolated sphere of media practice; thus my analysis foregrounds the linkages between the industry and other aspects of media operation. This is how television works — in interactive tandem through all realms of media practice. Additionally, it is inadequate to conceive of categories like “industry” as discrete and clear. For instance, where might we place the generic practices found within the covers of *TV Guide*? While, traditionally, we might consider the magazine part of the popular (not trade) press and within the sphere of reception, the magazine is both owned by a major media conglomerate (News Corporation, which also owns Fox television and cable channels), and offers enough of an “insider” perspective that it clearly resides partially inside the industrial sphere. Additionally, the generic labeling found in *TV Guide*'s listings are sanctioned by industrial press releases and promotional documents, suggesting that we cannot rest upon the clear boundary between industrial trade press and mass-market popular press. *TV Guide* exemplifies the fluid boundary between the spheres of industry, audience, and broader cultural circulation. In this case study, while I foreground the industry as a powerful and productive site of genre practice, the ways the cartoon genre operates within these historical moments always exceeds the somewhat arbitrary limits of our conception of industry. By looking at industrial practices through trade and popular press accounts, archival documents, and personal interviews, we can understand how industrial practices operate in tandem with other spheres of media practice to constitute genres as cultural categories.

Saturday Morning Genres: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery

Nearly everyone can agree on a textual definition of the cartoon genre — if it's animated, it's a cartoon.¹⁰ But genres are more than just bottom-line delimitations of a category; the genre is formed by a broad array of cultural assumptions of meaning, value, and social function exceeding any textual definition. Even if

we all agree what texts should be labeled as cartoons, there is no consensus as to the implications of that label. While Bugs Bunny shorts have been consistently labeled as cartoons since their creation in the 1930s and 1940s, what this generic label means has changed over time. This is the job of the genre analyst and historian: to trace out the changing ways in which generic categories operate culturally. We can see these shifts in the two major transformations within the cartoon genre on American television, focusing primarily on how the television industry was an active creator of this generic category outside the process of production itself. I am focusing specifically on cartoons within the United States — the history of animation in other countries, such as Japan, would tell a very different tale of the category, furthering the point that we must examine generic histories within culturally specific confines.

There is no “canonical” history of television animation, as animation has been a marginal topic within film studies — and within the small body of animation scholarship, television has been viewed primarily as “the cartoon's graveyard.”¹¹ Television scholars have mostly ignored animation, and those that have examined the genre tend to focus more on recent works than on televised animation from the 1950s and 1960s.¹² Yet this early period was the formative era for television cartoons, establishing most of the assumptions that the genre would adhere to until the 1990s — especially for industrial practices, as television networks linked the genre explicitly with a scheduling timeslot that would come to define the cultural category with a three-word phrase: Saturday morning cartoons.

The cartoon genre's shift during this era is striking. In 1957, ABC had no Saturday morning programming at all, while CBS and NBC featured a variety of live-action children's shows, adventure programs, and one cartoon each — *The Mighty Mouse Playhouse* (1955–66) and *Gumby* (1957), respectively.¹³ Cartoons were scattered throughout television schedules in the late 1950s, with occasional network primetime entries, like CBS's *Gerald McBoing Boing Show* (1956–58), and a vast number of syndicated afternoon and evening showings of *Popeye*, *Looney Tunes*, and *Krazy Kat*. Most televised cartoons in this era were recycled film shorts, often presented by a live-action clown or cowboy host to serve as a framing device. Cartoons, especially as syndicated programs, garnered quite high ratings with both children and adults and often won their timeslots against live-action original programming. As a cultural form, cartoons were still known as they were in the era of the studio system: as entertainment for mass audiences, but with particular appeal to children.

A decade later in 1967, the picture had drastically changed. All three networks now featured full schedules of Saturday morning programming from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., showing nothing but animated programs such as *Space Ghost and Dino Boy* (1966–68) and *George of the Jungle* (1967–70). Nearly all of these cartoons were produced originally for television, with the notable exception of Saturday morning stalwart *The Bugs Bunny Show* (1960–2000). Cartoons

had virtually disappeared from other parts of the network time schedule, with the era of primetime cartoon experimentation ending by the mid-1960s. Syndicated cartoons still persisted across the schedule, but ratings were far weaker, especially among adults. Most importantly, cartoons were now culturally defined as a genre whose primary audience was children, and not legitimate entertainment for adults as part of a mass audience.

How did the cartoon genre undergo these transformations? Various industrial practices undertaken by television producers, programmers, networks, sponsors, and syndicators during this time period worked to redefine the cluster of generic discourses constituting the cartoon genre. Production is not the primary motivating factor in this case — many of the cartoons themselves were produced many years before their television appearance, designed for a different medium and exhibition context altogether. Rather it is the ways in which these texts, both recycled and original, were situated through scheduling and cultural circulation that linked the genre to a set of shared assumptions that have remained associated with the cartoon genre to this day. Specifically, the transformation of what was once a mass-market genre with so-called “kidult” appeal into the kid-only Saturday morning margins led to some key shifts in our cultural understanding of the genre.

There is no single causal factor for this generic shift. As in most historical examinations, there are a variety of causes needed to understand this cultural phenomenon. A number of large-scale factors were partially formative of this shift, providing cultural and industrial contexts for this transformation from 1957's broad distribution of cartoons to the emergence of 1967's Saturday morning enclave. In examining the story of the cartoon's move to Saturday morning in the early 1960s in greater detail, I map out the stimuli leading to the genre's redefinition. This shift was not culturally “neutral,” but rather loaded with a number of assumptions in terms of cultural value, constructions of children's tastes, and industrial commercialization.

One crucial contextual development for the rise of television animation stemmed from the transformation of cinematic animation units. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, animated film shorts were featured on most film bills, with studios providing their own shorts (notably Warner Brothers and MGM) or distributing cartoons from independent producers (like Disney or Walter Lantz). This system flourished due to the vertical integration of the studio system, guaranteeing exhibition of animated shorts in studio-owned theater chains or through block-booking practices including cartoons within packages of feature films. Although cartoons were not profitable themselves, they were part of the whole package that film studios offered to moviegoers to fend off independent competitors. This situation was disrupted by the Paramount case of the late 1940s, ending vertical integration and guaranteed exhibition of studio products. Studios reallocated their priorities toward large-budget A pictures

throughout the 1950s, attempting to draw audiences to floundering theaters through spectacle and gimmickry.¹⁴

The demise of cinematic cartoon units was a gradual but direct reaction to the Paramount decision. Since cartoons had traditionally not been a source of direct studio income, they were one of the primary areas that studios could downsize to remain economically viable. Independent exhibitors would not pay much for cartoons, as they did not seem to lead to greater box office numbers, so studios could earn little via theatrical distribution of these comparatively expensive short products.¹⁵ As the theatrical market for cartoons declined, many studios dismantled their animation divisions: MGM in 1957, Warner Brothers in 1963, even Disney all but ceased short production in the 1960s. Independent animators were similarly withdrawing from the theatrical market, with Terrytoons selling out to CBS in 1955 and Famous Studios ceasing production of its popular *Popeye* series in 1957.¹⁶ Not only did these shutdowns make film animation scarce, but they also resulted in a number of out-of-work animators seeking employment through the new avenue of television production.

One of the few profitable activities of animation studios in the 1950s was selling shorts to television. Disney pioneered the use of animation on television through its primetime hit *Disneyland* (1954–61). The show mixed older cartoon shorts with new live-action segments, all framed within a promotional pitch for the company's forthcoming theme park.¹⁷ Other cartoon studios followed suit by selling their pre-1948 libraries to television in the mid-1950s, including Terrytoons, Warner Brothers, Columbia, and Paramount's *Popeye* series. These shorts were primarily distributed via syndicators like Associated Artists Productions (A.A.P.), a subsidiary of United Artists that owned *Popeye* and Looney Tunes libraries. These syndicated shorts soon entered daytime and early evening lineups on stations across the country, gaining favor with programmers as top-rated programs with no production costs. Animation studios realized that their most profitable assets were not new shorts produced for theatrical release, but old libraries made available for endless repetition on television, shifting the primary site of the animation genre to the television screen.¹⁸

Although the move from theaters to televisions did not necessarily alter the cartoons themselves, there were a number of textual transformations that helped redefine the genre for its new medium. Cartoons were rarely programmed on their own — since shorts were typically six to seven minutes, they needed to be combined to fit into the half-hour matrix of the television schedule. Stringing together three or four cartoons in a half-hour block significantly changed the way audiences experienced the shorts — instead of working as an amusing break before or between features, cartoons became the feature themselves, attracting audiences who found cartoons enough of a draw for their viewing time. As I discuss below, this meant primarily (but not exclusively) children. Additionally, most of the recycled cartoons were presented within a

live-action frame. These programmatic contexts ranged from a host simply introducing the cartoons (such as a clownish Dick Van Dyke on 1956's *CBS Cartoon Theater* during primetime) to a larger program with characters and live-action narratives, like the single cartoon within *Captain Kangaroo* (1955–84) episodes.¹⁹ While the cartoon itself may have remained the same from the film era, the way cartoons were presented on television altered their textual flow and relocated the texts within the realm of children's programming.

Not all cartoons migrated to television unchanged, however. In addition to the selection process instigated by industrial maneuvers (like the union-mandated cutoff date of 1948 for television releases),²⁰ cartoon libraries were culled and edited for social reasons as well. While the visual style and humor of cartoons was celebrated for not aging, some content was deemed troubling for recirculation. Most notably, a number of shorts with explicit racial stereotyping, such as Warner Brothers' *Coal Black and De Sebben Dwarfs* (1943), never made it to television due to concerns about their appropriateness a decade later, especially for children. While it is nearly impossible to identify exactly what cartoons were not imported to television, reminiscences of animators suggest that television sponsors and programmers were fearful of featuring any representations of black cartoon characters, whether explicitly racist or not.²¹ Other cartoons produced during World War II were not shown on television, due to both their racist anti-Japanese content (like *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips*, 1944) and their dated (and often brutal) references to wartime current events.

Some cartoons were edited to pare down or change questionable material as well. *Tom & Jerry* cartoons were regularly changed for television, transforming the character of a black maid, Mammy Two Shoes, into an Irish maid by redubbing her voice and recoloring her legs and arms (all that was seen of the character) white.²² Numerous racially suspect scenes, as well as images of violence deemed excessive, characters smoking or drinking, and representations of guns, were all edited from Disney, Warner Brothers, and MGM shorts when appearing on television.²⁴ While not implying that the changing or censoring of racist or other images was inappropriate, it is important to note the cultural effects of such practices. By eliminating references to blacks and other nonwhite human characters out of fear of complaints of racism, television programmers effectively created a white-only genre of programming. This policy was consistent with network live-action practices of the 1950s and 1960s — both to avoid accusations of racist representations and to placate racist viewers who did not want to see “positive” images of blacks, television presented mostly white characters.²⁴ The elimination of racist representations from cartoons was performed under the common rubric of “protecting children,” working to make cartoons a space free from controversial images (although the genre would come under fire in the late 1960s for its violent and commercial content). Finally, by eliminating racist (though highly sophisticated and topical) cartoons like *Coal Black*, programmers

shifted the genre's content away from the cultural references that typically entertained adult audiences in theaters, and more toward repetitive visual humor and slapstick violence. The censorious practices of the television industry helped redefine the cultural content and associations of the preexisting film cartoon genre.²⁵

The reorganization of the film industry helped bring archived theatrical animation to television, albeit in somewhat altered form, but it was not the only reason for the rise of televised cartoons. A number of animators began experimenting with original animation for television in the 1950s, an option that had been viewed as economically unfeasible. The production costs for typical animation were far too exorbitant to be justified for the still uncertain television market — a typical MGM seven-minute animated short in the 1950s cost between \$40,000 and \$60,000, while half-hour live-action telefilms could be made for only \$15,000.²⁶ The 1950s saw the rise of a new technique, called “limited animation,” which minimized movement and repeated cels to decrease both the number of drawings used and time required to animate segments, therefore reducing costs.²⁷ This technique was most heralded in the work of theatrical animation studio UPA and their 1951 short, *Gerald McBoing Boing*, which used limited animation primarily for aesthetic variation. The earliest pioneer of limited animation for television was Jay Ward, who created *Crusader Rabbit* for syndication in 1949 (reemerging in a more sophisticated form in 1957). *Crusader* was an extreme example of bargain basement production, as it reduced motion to an average of only one movement per four seconds (compared to the 10–20 moves per second of traditional animation), and cost only \$2,500 per 20-minute episode.²⁸ More typical was Hanna-Barbera's debut program in 1957, NBC's first Saturday morning cartoon *Ruff and Ready* (1957–64), which cost \$3,000 per 5-minute segment.²⁹ Both *Crusader Rabbit* and *Ruff and Ready* exemplify a number of shifts in animated form that would become typical on television: minimal visual variety, emphasis on dialogue and verbal humor, and repetitive situations and narratives.³⁰

By 1957, there were two distinct forms of televised cartoons: endlessly rerun Hollywood shorts and low-budget original programs. Both modes of animation were primarily used to reach the children's audience — while the animated shorts of the theatrical era were regarded as mass entertainment, they were definitely skewed more toward children. As Warner Brothers producer Leon Schlesinger remarked in 1939, “we cannot forget that while the cartoon today is excellent entertainment for young and old, it is primarily the favorite motion picture fare of children.”³¹ Likewise, while the television cartoon genre had not yet been designated as *just* for children, the industry did conceive of children as the *primary* audience for cartoons in the 1950s. Whereas other television generic offerings in the 1950s were invested in promoting associations with

quality, prestige, and sophistication to promote the nascent medium, cartoons were mostly seen as low-budget filler.

An exception to the cartoon's low cultural locale in the late 1950s was *The Gerald McBoing Boing Show*. CBS jumped on the limited animation bandwagon in 1956 by contracting UPA to produce a primetime program, consisting of both recycled *McBoing Boing* theatrical shorts and original material. The program tapped into the prestige of UPA's *McBoing Boing* series, which had been hailed as the savior of theatrical animation. UPA's graphic style was explicitly linked to modernist aesthetics and design, with the Dr. Seuss scripted premiere short winning an upstart Academy Award in 1951 over the traditional powerhouses of MGM, Disney, and Warner Brothers. The television show combined UPA's high cultural legitimacy with educational segments like "Meet the Inventor," all under the auspices of low-budget animation techniques that held particular appeal to CBS. While critics and parents hailed the show as educational, cultured, and even "avant-garde" entertainment, the show never met CBS's expectations to compete against *Disneyland* in the ratings.³² While primetime cartoons would get additional chances in the 1960s, television animation and cultural legitimacy seemed incongruous bedfellows from the beginning.

The genre's low cultural value partly stemmed from the industry's initial disinterest in reaching children's audiences. While television featured many programs for children, they were seen as a necessary component to serve a mass audience rather than a desirable separate advertising niche. Television's industrial predecessor of radio reached out to children as a part of the mass audience, primarily with kid-friendly family programming. As NBC executive Fred Wile Jr. wrote in a 1954 memo concerning children's programming on Saturday morning, "all our experience in radio indicates that the Saturday morning audience is not exclusively a kiddy audience. If you recall, the highest ratings on Saturday morning used to be the all-family appeal show." He suggests "what we should strive for are all-family appeal shows with an emphasis on the youngsters."³³ Nevertheless, networks were reaching out to sponsors to target children, such as in a 1954 NBC promotional piece highlighting the captive audience of "15,000,000 kids every Saturday morning." Featuring a boy holding a toy sword and the caption "the generals have gone AWOL," the brochure calls for sponsors to "give him his marching orders on NBC television."³⁴ However, NBC's mid-1950s lineup of clowns and puppet shows failed to make much of an impact on either sponsors or Saturday morning audiences.

The industrial appeal of a predominantly children's audience grew during this time, as a number of sponsors began targeting children as primary consumers. In the early 1950s and before, toy manufacturers generally thought toys were not viable objects of advertising, as children were not active consumers. Some toy companies incorporated live advertisements into local children's shows, but in general there was little market for sponsors aiming

directly at children. But in 1955, just as upstart ABC had successfully ridden *Disneyland* toward legitimacy as a network, a small toy company named Mattel decided to invest its entire corporate value in advertising by sponsoring ABC's new *The Mickey Mouse Club* (1955–59) children's program for a full year. The risk paid off, as Mattel's Burp Gun became the first nationwide toy sensation in 1955. Mattel broadened its customer base to girls in 1959, by using television advertising to promote their new doll Barbie, whose success is obvious. Through the phenomenal success of these two campaigns, the toy industry and other companies wanting to target children, such as cereal manufacturers, dedicated themselves to reaching the sizable baby-boom children's audiences via television.³⁵

By the late 1950s, the networks were primed to deliver children to eager sponsors, but the only surefire method was through the Disney name. CBS attempted to counter Disney by purchasing Terrytoons' studio and holdings, leading to a primetime anthology of shorts, *CBS Cartoon Theater*, and two Saturday morning cartoon retreats, *The Mighty Mouse Playhouse* and *The Heckle & Jeckle Show* (1956–60).³⁶ While both Saturday morning programs were popular enough to enjoy long runs and solid ratings for sponsor General Foods, the Terrytoons material failed to produce the cultural excitement of ABC's two Disney programs. NBC was unsuccessful in finding an established animation studio to team with except for Columbia/Screen Gems, whose "cartoons were among the least appealing short subjects ever released."³⁷ So in 1957 NBC took the risky step of ordering original animation production for the still undefined slot of Saturday morning, purchasing *Ruff and Ready* from the new animation studio Hanna-Barbera. *Ruff and Ready* was a hit, although NBC was not willing to jump aboard an animation bandwagon, maintaining their Saturday morning mix of cartoons with puppet shows, adventures serials, and educational programming.

This moment in 1957 was the calm before the televised cartoon storm. While still few cartoon programs aired on Saturday morning, a number of central cultural assumptions had been linked to the cluster of the cartoon genre. Television cartoons were still associated with their theatrical antecedents, as most televised animation were recycled or adapted from film sources. As such, the programs were still tied to notions of a mass family audience with primary appeal toward children. Cartoons were considered "filler" and culturally devalued, often shoehorned into live-action programs or relegated to the syndicated margins of the television schedule. The few cartoons that were able to gain cultural legitimacy borrowed their prestige from the cinematic reputation of their producer (Disney) or character (Gerald McBoing Boing). Yet the late 1950s would witness a transformation of the set of cultural assumptions included in the cartoon genre, as sponsors looked to target children and producers brought more original animation to television. But how did the industry construct the newly desirable target audience of children?

As sponsors became more interested in reaching the children's audience, the television industry attempted to understand what this audience wanted to see and how best to sell them to sponsors. But as Ien Ang has argued, the television industry never merely accesses or targets preconstituted audiences, but works to construct audience categories through their programming, marketing, sales, and measuring practices.³⁸ The television industry constituted the children's audience during this era by linking together a number of associations under the rubric of what the trade press often called "kidvid" or the "moppet market." One notable assumption was that children did not mind the repetition of shorts found in recycled film cartoons like *Bugs Bunny* or *Popeye*. The President of A.A.P. suggested that children actually preferred repeated over fresh material as they relished the familiarity.³⁹ An NBC executive questioned the discerning taste of children when noting that syndicated shows of old recycled film shorts were doubling the ratings of NBC's stalwart *Howdy Doody* (1947–60).⁴⁰ The success of recycled film shorts, the industrial profitability of such textual reuse, and the assumption that children could not tell the difference all led *Variety* to predict in 1957 that original animation would never fly on television.⁴¹

Another vital assumption about children was that they could not discern levels of "quality" (which are usually held up as self-evident by adult reviewers). In discussing Walter Lantz's unpolished performance as host of *The Woody Woodpecker Show* (1957–58), a *Variety* reviewer asked, "since when do kids need the kind of polish adults demand in adults?"⁴² Another reviewer suggested, "where the moppets are fixated by virtually anything on the TV screen, adult audiences are at least one notch more discriminating."⁴³ Assumptions about children's lack of taste carried over to the rise of limited animation. While adult reviewers noted that the visuals in original television animation were far less sophisticated and nuanced than in classic theatrical shorts, the industry clearly believed that children could not discern (or simply did not care about) the difference between the two styles.⁴⁴ Elements of animation that critics assumed would appeal to children included "noise and fast action" and unrealistic violence.⁴⁵ As original television animation emerged in the late 1950s, the industry's construction of the children's audience was a key component of the generic cluster containing the cartoon. The subsequent rise of Hanna-Barbera and their model of television animation drew upon and revised these notions of the children's audience, adult appeals, and cultural status of the cartoon genre.

The emergence of Hanna-Barbera was the catalyst that would eventually lead to the institution of Saturday morning cartoons, traveling through the unlikely detour of primetime. Bill Hanna and Joseph Barbera were former MGM animators who had popularized the *Tom & Jerry* series in the 1940s, but found themselves out of work following MGM's animation shutdown in 1957. Seeing the potential of animation for the television market, they pitched their services by adapting UPA's style of limited animation. However, instead of

UPA's modernist graphic style, Hanna-Barbera offered a pared-down visual style, emphasizing dialogue, sound-effects, and repeated motion. They followed *Ruff and Ready* in 1958 with a syndicated program owned by Kellogg's, *Huckleberry Hound* (1958–62). While Kellogg's was certainly aiming at a children's audience in lucrative late-afternoon timeslots, the show transcended its targeted audience. One report suggested that over 40% of *Huckleberry's* audience were adults, while another article described daily *Huckleberry Hound* watching rituals in a Seattle bar.⁴⁶ Hanna-Barbera's next syndicated program was equally popular with adults, satirizing popular westerns with *Quick Draw McGraw* (1959–62). The breakout success of these programs led to the biggest boom of cartoons in television history.

The immediate success of Hanna-Barbera's original television animation led to an overhaul of what animation would look and sound like for years to come. Today, most animation scholars and fans assume that this shift was for the worst — the limited animation style of television "killed off" the classic animation of Warner Brothers and MGM, with only Disney carrying the torch into their feature film work. We can see this hierarchy at work in interviews with canonized cartoon directors like Chuck Jones, who called Saturday morning cartoons "crap" and termed them "illustrated radio," dominated by dialog without any visual vibrancy.⁴⁷ Likewise cartoon voice artist Mel Blanc claimed that television animation "kill[ed] the cartoon industry."⁴⁸ Academics have reproduced this hierarchy by valorizing classic full animation from Disney, Warner, and Tex Avery's MGM work through detailed analysis, while only mentioning Hanna-Barbera as the nadir of the form.⁴⁹ Implicit in this hierarchy is that the classic animation of the studio era was better suited to a discerning mass audience, able to amuse and amaze all ages through its superior humor and vibrant visuals, while the television material of the 1960s was low-budget and low-brow filler, suited only to the unrefined taste of children.

While this argument might be defensible on aesthetic grounds, the history of the reception of these early television cartoons suggests that they were not objects of adult derision upon their emergence. Rather, the early Hanna-Barbera programs were held up as valued advances in animation that were more entertaining for adults and children than the studio shorts that we now regard as "classic." Critics hailed characters like *Huckleberry Hound*, *Quick Draw McGraw*, and *Yogi Bear* (who was featured on *Huckleberry Hound* before getting his own syndicated spin-off in 1961) for their adult wit and satirical content. The puns, malapropisms, and old jokes that may seem stale today, made Hanna-Barbera cartoons appear groundbreaking in their intergenerational appeal. This goal of reaching the "kidult" audience was achieved not through creating unified cartoons with universal appeals, but by specifically aiming the visuals and "wacky" sound effects at the "moppets," and the dialog at adults.⁵⁰ As *Howdy Doody's* Bob Smith suggested in 1961, "Hanna and Barbera are creating

children's visual shows and adult audio shows. Turn off the sound and children will enjoy what they see. Turn off the picture, and adults will enjoy what they hear."⁵¹ A *TV Guide* reviewer similarly summed up the different appeals of *Huckleberry Hound*: "Children like the show because of the action and the animals. . . . Adults like the show for its subtleties, its commentary on human foibles, its ineffable humor."⁵² These programs that have long been condemned for dumbing down animation were viewed at the time as actually broadening the genre's appeal through intelligence and sophistication.

Some critics explicitly compared Hanna-Barbera shorts with classic studio material. A *Parent's* magazine writer called the cartoons of 1962 "as far removed from the old animated cartoons of pre-World War II vintage as today's car is from a Model T."⁵³ One of the grounds for comparison was violence, a common object of discussion concerning animation. This same writer praised Hanna-Barbera's material for relying upon character "rather than sadistic action," noting the violent content of most studio shorts seen on television — as is typical in violence debates, a strain of selective myopia emerges, as she hailed Hanna and Barbera's early work on *Tom & Jerry* as being appropriate for "family audiences," overlooking that *Tom & Jerry* was quite possibly the most excessively violent of all studio series. Despite this article, few accounts during this era castigated cartoons for their violent content, explicitly noting the difference between real violence and the fantasy actions in animation, a distinction that seems to have been lost in most discussions of television violence today. By this point in the early 1960s, cartoons were well ensconced within what James Snead calls animation's "rhetoric of harmlessness," with cartoons regarded as culturally marginal enough to exist only in the world of innocuous fantasy, without "real-life" effects.⁵⁴ Interestingly, although children's televisual tastes and practices were a site of parental and cultural activism in postwar America, cartoons' assumptions of harmlessness exempted the genre from much of the anxiety that dominated this historical moment's construction of childhood.⁵⁵

While the Hanna-Barbera material was the most popular original television animation and certainly led the animation boom of the early 1960s, another producer made a series of important cartoons that fit a similar pattern of "kidult" appeal: Jay Ward. Whereas Hanna and Barbera were established studio animators who immediately created a popular formula for television, Ward was an industry outsider whose style never achieved mass appeal. *Rocky and his Friends* (1959–61) played during early evening hours, reaching a solid family audience despite little network support. Ward's style matched the basic model of Hanna-Barbera, with bare-bones visuals, broad characterization, and pointed satirical references to contemporary America, especially Cold War politics. *Rocky* and its later incarnation of *The Bullwinkle Show* (1961–64) form the primary exception to today's critical disdain for early television animation. However, in the late 1950s, Ward's shows were far less successful than

Hanna-Barbera's cartoons, even though most critics at the time regarded the work of both producers as equal in adult appeal.

Entering the 1960 season, the generic cluster of television cartoons had a number of new facets: animation had established itself as having legitimate "kidult" appeal within syndicated late-afternoon and early-evening timeslots. Cost-cutting techniques of limited animation had reduced production costs sufficiently to warrant network experimentation with original animated programming. Additionally, the success of studio shorts in syndicated reruns suggested that the market for animated properties on television was potentially eternal; as one *Broadcasting* article suggested, "they never grow old, never depreciate."⁵⁶ Advertisers had begun showing interest in reaching young audiences, while animation had gained enough legitimacy to be viewed as more than just "kid's stuff." In 1960, ABC took a risk by programming three animated programs in their primetime lineup, including an original animated sitcom aimed primarily at an adult audience, *The Flintstones* (1960–66).⁵⁷ Although ABC's innovation would be a huge popular success, leading to television's biggest boom in primetime animation, the end result of *The Flintstones'* success would be to drive cartoons out of primetime for a generation.

ABC was not on equal footing with NBC and CBS in 1960. Always the upstart, ABC was at a disadvantage in shifting from radio to television, lacking the name programs and talent of NBC and CBS. Deficient in capital and market penetration, ABC established itself in the mid 1950s by taking innovative programming risks, reaching out to audiences and producers that the other networks ignored. ABC reached the Nielsen Top Twenty for the first time in 1954 through a partnership to create *Disneyland*, and similarly forged a successful alliance with Warner Brothers to produce a string of hit westerns in the late 1950s.⁵⁸ Like Fox in the early 1990s, ABC's marginal status enabled — and forced — the network to follow less traditional paths, withstanding many failed experiments in the hope of one breakout success. Its animation experiment of 1960 was, thus, not an anomalous move for ABC, but the outcome was certainly not what the network anticipated.

Two of ABC's three primetime cartoon entries in 1960 fit into established practices of television animation. *Matty's Funday Funnies* (1959–61) originally aired late Sunday afternoons, but was moved to Friday night in 1960 to reach a broader audience. The show consisted primarily of old shorts from the Harvey/Paramount studios, such as the Casper the Friendly Ghost and Baby Huey series, framed by new animated characters Matty Mattel and Sister Belle, designed by sponsor Mattel for merchandising purposes.⁵⁹ ABC's second primetime cartoon was *The Bugs Bunny Show*, featuring both recycled and new animation from Warner Brothers. Since Warner's pre-1948 shorts had been saturated in syndication by A.A.P., ABC capitalized with its strong relationship with the studio to highlight Warner's post-1948 material on *The Bugs Bunny*

Show. This program made television regulars out of classic cartoons from directors Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng, featuring newer characters Pepe LePew, Foghorn Leghorn, the Tasmanian Devil, and the duo of Road Runner and Coyote. Warner also contributed original animated bumpers and framing narratives to the program, sustaining the market for the studio's animation unit. *The Bugs Bunny Show*, moving to Saturday morning in 1962, provided exposure to Warner Brothers animation for multiple generations to come and soon became synonymous with classic television cartooning.

The biggest surprise of the entire 1960 season was certainly *The Flintstones*, a Hanna-Barbera cartoon that defied nearly all established conventions of animated television. The show was formally structured like a sitcom, complete with single half-hour narrative episodes, suburban setting, domestic plots, and even a laugh track, deriving primary character and situational inspiration from *The Honeymooners* (1952–57). Hanna-Barbera was attempting to capitalize on the adult audiences for their syndicated programs, and ABC primarily targeted an adult audience as well — the show's initial sponsors were Miles Labs and R. J. Reynolds, until parental protests that the show was selling cigarettes to children forced the latter to withdraw in 1961. The 8:30 p.m. Eastern timeslot was later than typical for children's programs, and the trade press clearly indicated that ABC and Hanna-Barbera were primarily aiming at adults with the show.⁶⁰ The show was a breakout success, finishing the season at #18 in the overall Nielsen ratings and giving ABC a still comparatively rare non-western hit.

Critics gave the program mixed reviews. Some enjoyed the show's satirical jabs at suburbia and the sitcom format, while others found the humor obvious and the situations contrived. Surprisingly, no reviewer that I found questioned the appropriateness of animation for an adult audience, suggesting that the genre had yet to develop a "kids only" stigma.⁶¹ Ironically, reviewers of *The Bugs Bunny Show* assumed the show was solely aimed at a children's audience, even though the shorts featured on the program had been created for mass consumption in movie theaters. *The Flintstones* was viewed as more adult oriented, primarily because it drew upon the cultural assumptions of the more adult, family-friendly genre of the sitcom. Through genre mixing, *The Flintstones* was able to establish more cachet and legitimacy than cartoon shorts.⁶² Yet today our critical hierarchies have been inverted — the Warner shorts are seen as "classics," worthy of academic study and cultish devotion, while Hanna-Barbera programs like *The Flintstones* are blamed for the death of classic animation and viewed as childish Saturday morning filler.

The success of *The Flintstones* led to television's first animation boom, bringing a variety of subject matters and settings to both primetime and Saturday morning cartoons. ABC tried to strike gold again with two primetime animated sitcoms during its next season, Hanna-Barbera's *Top Cat* (1961–62) and *Calvin and the Colonel* (1961–62). The latter program is an interesting footnote in media history,

starring the voices of Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll in an adaptation of their characters of Amos and Andy that had made them one of radio's biggest success stories. Since *Amos 'n' Andy's* (1951–53) television incarnation had been cancelled under fire, Gosden and Correll had been unable to translate their radio hit to the television screen. After their radio show ended its three-decade run in 1960, they tried their hand at television once more, literally exemplifying Chuck Jones' pejorative phrase "illustrated radio." Gosden and Correll revisited some of their classic radio scripts with few changes in content, while animating their blackface characters as a wily fox and dumb bear (without losing their stereotypical black dialects and malapropisms) from the South who moved up North to predictably "wacky" results. While animation studios were pressured to excise egregious racial representations from their television libraries, ABC felt comfortable recasting well-known racist caricatures as animated animals within *Calvin and the Colonel*. The show was cancelled from primetime within a season due to poor ratings, although the show survived in syndication throughout the 1960s, seemingly free of controversy.

The other networks tried their hand at primetime animation in 1961 as well. NBC signed *The Bullwinkle Show* after ABC had given up on moose and squirrel, placing it on Sunday evenings as a lead-in to *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* (1961–81), which they had also lured away from ABC. CBS offered *The Alvin Show* (1961–62), based upon the 1958 hit novelty record by Alvin and the Chipmunks, on Wednesday evenings. ABC kept both *Bugs Bunny* and *The Flintstones* in primetime, renaming *Matty's Funday Funnies* in winter 1962 to *The Beany and Cecil Show* (1962–63) and retooling the program to focus on the show's most popular animated segment. Thus, in the 1961–62 season, networks programmed seven animated series in primetime, a record showing for the cartoon genre. This boom is in keeping with a programming trend of the 1960s — as networks gradually wrested control of programming away from sponsors in the late 1950s and early 1960s, they developed strategies for using genre cycles and formulas to spread success throughout their lineups. This led to the cycle of "innovation–imitation–saturation," whereby one successful ground-breaker begets clones that eventually clutter the schedule to such a degree that the formula quickly dies through overexposure.⁶³ This pattern of generic cycling is still common in television programming, but was central to this era, with similar cycles of westerns in the late 1950s, documentaries in the early 1960s, and spy programs and fantasy sitcoms in the mid 1960s.⁶⁴

The saturation phase of the cartoon boom was surprisingly quick in coming — the only primetime cartoon from 1961 which would last through 1963 was *The Flintstones*, which reputedly survived primarily because of a dedicated following amongst teenagers.⁶⁵ Other cartoons attempted to take hold in primetime in subsequent seasons, including Hanna-Barbera's *The Jetsons* (1962–63) and *The Adventures of Jonny Quest* (1964–65), as well as UPA's *The Famous*

Adventures of Mr. Magoo (1964–65), but none lasted more than one season in primetime. All of these cartoons were met with the critical scorn typical for derivative clones of previous successes in all genres; as one *Variety* reviewer suggested, “with cartoon shows in boomsville, subject matter is getting harder to find.”⁶⁶ Importantly, reviewers suggested that the only way these shows would succeed was “in attracting the less critical moppet audiences,” although success with children was not enough to sustain a program in the primetime lineup.⁶⁷ *The Flintstones* lasted in primetime until 1966, marking the last network primetime cartoon until *The Simpsons* emerged in 1990. Cartoons disappeared from primetime because of their perceived inability to reach adult audiences; although certainly the boom waned because of the typical effects of generic saturation, the industry took the failure to mean that the genre was inappropriate for adults. This assumption about the audience appeals of animation became one of the vital meanings that entered into the generic cluster of the cartoon in the 1960s, helping to form the shape of genre for decades to come.

The post-bust residue of other generic booms in the 1960s disappeared from the airwaves — the documentaries, westerns, spy shows, and fantasy sitcoms that lasted only one season generally were not to be aired again, at least until the rise of cable. This was not true for cartoons, however. Since the industry believed that the “uncritical moppets” would watch any cartoon that moved, they looked for a way to capitalize on their expensive investment in primetime animation. CBS found the answer in spring 1962 — *The Alvin Show* had been a primetime bomb, but CBS had already paid the producers for a season of product (a typical arrangement for animation because of the extended production time needed to animate a program). Instead of merely cutting their losses in primetime as with other genres, CBS moved the program to Saturday mornings. In doing so, the network drew upon two assumptions from the cartoon generic cluster — children did not mind watching repeats and recycled material, and children were uncritical viewers who would accept programs of any quality. CBS’s move was considered a ratings success and other networks would follow suit, with nearly every primetime animated failure finding a new home on Saturday morning in the 1960s.

Prior to this shift, Saturday mornings had featured a mix of live-action programming and cartoons, with the latter mostly composed of recycled film shorts like *Mighty Mouse* and *Heckle and Jeckle*. Networks were generally reluctant to invest the money necessary to create original Saturday morning cartoons, as sponsors wishing to reach children were still most interested in late-afternoon and early-evening timeslots with their superior overall ratings. NBC had programmed a few original Saturday morning cartoons, such as Hanna-Barbera’s *Ruff and Ready* and *King Leonardo and his Short Subjects* (1960–63), but still scheduled these programs among educational programs, sitcom reruns, clown and puppet shows, and other live-action children’s fare. ABC followed *Alvin’s*

lead, moving *Bugs Bunny* and *Top Cat* from primetime to Saturday morning in fall 1962. CBS pushed Saturday morning animation further, creating the first cartoon-dominated lineup in 1963, programming *The Alvin Show*, *Mighty Mouse Playhouse*, *Quick Draw McGraw*, and the original *Tennessee Tuxedo and His Tales* (1963–66) in a highly rated two-hour block, appealing to kid-seeking sponsors such as General Mills and Kellogg’s.⁶⁸

The success of this block demonstrated the importance of niche marketing within television programming. Saturday mornings did not have strong overall ratings, especially compared with the late-afternoon slots that sponsors had been using to reach children audiences. The central difference, as illustrated by NBC’s internal study of audience potential for different timeslots in 1962, concerned not the number of children watching, but the relative density of age groups.⁶⁹ The weekday 5:00–7:30 p.m. timeslot reached 41 million viewers, double the reach of Saturday morning’s 20.5 million. The late-afternoon slot reached more children in all age groups than Saturday morning, including children under 6 (6.4 to 5.7 million), 6–12 years (10.0 to 8.5 million), and teenagers (4.7 to 2.1 million). Yet television stations and networks sold slots to advertisers, especially in the early years of demographic targeting, based primarily on total ratings points and shares. Since adults were much more of a component of the late afternoon slot than on Saturday morning (19.9 to 4.2 million), advertisers who were aiming primarily at children would have to pay higher rates for the late-afternoon slots because of the high numbers of total viewers. While there were more children 12 and under among the late-afternoon audience than on Saturday morning, proportionally they made up only 40% of the late-afternoon audience as compared to 69% of Saturday mornings. Advertisers targeting children could spend less on Saturday morning ads, but reach a higher proportion of their target audience per dollar, making it a successful mode of niche marketing. This practice presaged the logic of narrowcasting that would dominate in the 1990s, as market segments were constituted both by appealing to core groups of children and by driving away undesirable adult audiences.⁷⁰

The industrial logic of Saturday morning cartoons was motivated by this early example of television narrowcasting. CBS’s lineup in 1963 was highly successful in drawing both children viewers and child-hungry sponsors. More primetime rejects found themselves on Saturday morning schedules, including *Bullwinkle*, *The Jetsons*, *Beany and Cecil*, and eventually *The Flintstones*. As the genre continued to be dominated by theatrical retreads and primetime failures, production costs were negligible for most Saturday morning cartoons — networks and producers could maximize returns on their productions by endlessly rerunning one season of a program like *Top Cat* or *The Alvin Show*, making the generic timeslot a comparatively low-risk venture with high potential for long-term profits.⁷¹ Saturation hit Saturday morning quickly, but it did not result in

the typical generic decline; instead networks saw the timeslot as a cash cow for toy and food sponsors looking to reach the “kidvid” audience and decided to raise the stakes by including more original Saturday morning cartoons. In 1965, the two biggest cartoon hits were ABC’s *The Beatles* (1965–69) and NBC’s *Underdog* (1964–66), as well as other modest successes like *Atom Ant* (1965–67). Many of these subsequent original cartoons followed the structure of *The Flintstones*, featuring half-hour stories per episode rather than the compilation of shorts typical of older animation. Thus, cartoons were further defined by the industrial imperatives of network schedulers, abandoning the traditional model of the seven minute short that predominated in the film era. New production continued through the 1960s, leading to the spate of superhero programs that triggered controversies concerning both cartoon violence and merchandizing, and firmly establishing Saturday morning as the primary home for television animation.⁷²

The boom in Saturday morning cartoons in the mid 1960s also stemmed from the pendulum swing within this era’s regulatory climate. Newton Minow made a historic splash in 1961, introducing his tenure as FCC Chairman by chiding broadcasters for their banal television programming. He specifically noted a number of offending genres in his “vast wasteland” speech, including game shows, westerns, sitcoms, and repeatedly cartoons.⁷³ Minow, claiming that cartoons “drowned out” quality children’s programming, challenged broadcasters to improve children’s broadcasting by eliminating “time waster” shows and move toward more educational and “uplifting” programming. Networks responded by making modest offerings to appease Minow’s calls for transformation, bringing educational children’s programs to the air, such as *Discovery* (1962–71), *Exploring* (1962–66), and *1, 2, 3 — Go!* (1961–62), even though sponsors were less than eager about these offerings. But when Minow left the FCC in 1963 and Lyndon Johnson encouraged a hands-off policy for the FCC, the networks quickly swung back toward their profit-maximization practices, encouraging the booming expansion of cartoons on Saturday morning and shuttling less lucrative live-action educational programs to even more marginal Sunday mornings.⁷⁴

As Saturday morning cartoons rose in popularity, the syndicated market for animation dried up in these years as well. Networks bought up some of the most popular syndicated programs for Saturday morning filler, including *Quick Draw McGraw* and *Yogi Bear* (1961–63). Additionally, the rise of color television in the 1960s made black-and-white reruns less desirable; monochrome animation such as *Popeye* and early *Looney Tunes* was viewed as comparatively inferior to the all-color output of Hanna-Barbera and newer Warner Brothers material on Saturday morning.⁷⁵ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the late-afternoon slots were less effective at drawing only children, leading to comparatively inflated advertising rates because of more adult viewers, whom cereal and toy

companies wanted to avoid. Syndicated animation shifted primarily to fringe UHF stations, a televisual site even more marginalized than Saturday mornings.

While certainly Saturday morning cartoons were successful at drawing the children’s audience, we need to look for generic appeals outside the texts themselves. Many of the programs that helped create the Saturday morning cartoon boom of the mid 1960s were originally designed for mass audience appeal, either in primetime television or theatrical run — or both, in the case of *Bugs Bunny*. While certainly the bulk of the original animation created for Saturday morning was designed with kids in mind, most of the assumptions constituting the television cartoon genre were already established before the boom of original animation in the mid-1960s. The generic label “Saturday morning cartoons” was primarily the result of numerous industrial practices, including sponsor narrowcasting, the rise of limited animation techniques, and the reorganization of the film industry. Additionally, the industry, as part of a larger cultural context, drew upon and furthered cultural assumptions linked to the cartoon genre — that kids will gladly watch recycled and repeated programs, that kids cannot discern quality of animation, that cartoons should not address “adult” subject matter, and that cartoons are “harmless” entertainment. All of these factors coalesced in the 1960s to constitute the generic cluster identified by the category “Saturday morning cartoons.”

The main effect of establishing Saturday morning cartoons as a cultural category was filing the entire genre under a “kid-only” label. This was accomplished less by shifting cartoons toward a children’s audience and more by moving away from the adult audience. Cartoons had been on Saturday mornings since the mid 1950s, but it was only in the mid-1960s that they became difficult to find anywhere else in television schedules. Likewise, sponsors embraced Saturday mornings not because they could reach *more children* in that timeslot, but because they could actually reach *fewer adults*, thus raising the percentage of children per rating point and advertising dollar. The cartoon’s appeal to children was always considered a default — in the mid-1960s what changed was the assumption that adults could like cartoons too. Following their Saturday morning exile, cartoons became stigmatized as a genre *only* appropriate for children, removing the traditional affiliations with a mass audience. This was accomplished partially by networks latching onto an existing phenomenon — adults watched the least amount of television on Saturday mornings. But the industry furthered this association by marketing Saturday morning cartoons solely to children, by ignoring the visual complexity and adult humor that marked earlier animation, by sponsors only advertising to children during the timeslot, and by isolating cartoons from all other genres and timeslots to maintain tight associations between all texts within the generic category. The marginalization of cartoons also furthered its appeal among its target audience — one of the joys of Saturday morning cartoons for

children was the very fact that adults were not watching the programs (and ads) aimed primarily at kids. Parents accepted the generic timeslot's role as "babysitter" and yielded media control to children, furthering the industrial commitment to defining the genre narrowly.

The rise of the Saturday morning cartoon paradigm is deeply rooted in its 1960s context, both emerging out of and impacting American culture during this era. Central to this context are changing notions of childhood; recent scholarship in cultural studies has examined childhood as a social construction, considering how cultural practices and media constitute the shifting meanings and boundaries of youth.⁷⁶ Changes in the cartoon genre were dependent on the growing acceptability of targeting children as a consumer market — and the success of these efforts on television certainly encouraged both greater marketing to children and the subsequent backlash over these practices in the 1970s. The size of the baby boom generation focused greater attention on 1960s children as a desirable marketing demographic, as programming strategies successfully created Saturday morning as a kids-only island in the weekly schedule, further reinforcing the boundaries of this market niche. As this generation of children was defined as a discrete segment of society — along with the simultaneous delineation of teenagers as a distinct social group and market — Saturday morning cartoons helped to further fracture American society into market niches that were both created by industries and lived within families. Even if sponsors and networks were the primary agents of change for both the cartoon genre and children's consumerism, the practices clustered around these phenomena were adopted into the lived practices of changing family dynamics in the 1960s.

This history of Saturday morning cartoons shows how media industries can define, interpret, and evaluate genre categories outside the realm of the text. Many of the programs labeled cartoons in both the 1940s and 1960s did not change, although their generic definition and assumptions did. This model of genre history does not chronicle the changing texts of a genre — *Crusader Rabbit* begot *The Flintstones* begot *Atom Ant* — but charts the evolution of the category itself. Cartoons shifted from a mass audience theatrical label to a "lowest common denominator" category, implying shoddy production values, formulaic stories and gags, hyper-commercialization, and limited appeals to anyone except children. The effects of this shift helped to define the debates concerning children's television that took hold in the late 1960s and 1970s, with groups condemning the genre's violent content and commercialization. Had cartoons not become isolated in the television schedule and defined as a kid-only genre, these complaints and controversies could not have occurred as they did. The assumptions constituting the cartoon as a cultural category were established in the 1960s through the institution of Saturday morning as a separate realm of programming, impacting the cartoon genre to this day. While many of the

categorical assumptions forged in this era still remain operative, cartoons underwent another transformation in the 1990s, one that has worked to redefine the genre and its role in American culture.

Targeting a Taste Culture: Cartoon Network and 1990s Television

"I get it, I get it. I'll never have to change the channel."

— A young Cartoon Network fan⁷⁷

"Saturday morning cartoons" was the reigning generic label through the 1980s. While cartoons still air on Saturday mornings, and the label still has cultural resonance, the generic cluster of the cartoon has broadened significantly in the 1990s and beyond. Cartoons are now seen as more legitimate and respectable programs, as some shows have explicitly adult appeal and primetime success. Networks have moved away from Saturday morning cartoon programming, as both NBC and CBS have yielded the early Saturday morning children's field to Disney-owned ABC and Fox in recent years, counterprogramming with news and sitcoms.⁷⁸ Meanwhile cable channels featuring primarily cartoons have reshaped the ways in which audiences interact with animated television. All of these shifts have led to dismantling the enclave of Saturday morning, as the category of the cartoon genre has gained prestige and legitimacy through its expansion beyond the Saturday morning network schedule.

How can we account for this shift? Again, like the creation of Saturday morning, there is no singular cause or motivating mechanism. Rather, the cartoon genre has shifted due to a conjuncture of a number of forces, ranging from macro-industrial changes to the surprise success of a few specific programs.⁷⁹ After outlining a number of causes for this shift, I turn to an in-depth analysis of one central site of cartoon genre practice in the 1990s: Cartoon Network. This examination of changes in the cartoon genre and the rise of single-genre cable channels in the 1990s highlights how generic history must look beyond textual chronicles — programs and practices from the 1940s, 1960s, and 1990s are all components of the contemporary generic cluster of cartoons, understandable only through an account of industrial practices.

One important shift contributing to generic redefinition in the 1990s was the rebirth of theatrical animation as a mass-audience phenomenon. Ever since 1937's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Disney Studios was known as the preeminent producer of theatrical feature-length animation. The format had dwindled in the 1960s and 1970s, with films like *The Sword and the Stone* (1963) and *The Aristocats* (1970) garnering little critical or audience support. Disney hit its nadir in 1985 with *The Black Cauldron*, an attempt to crossover to a more adult audience that resolutely failed to connect with any audience. Feature-length

animation was uncommon and not lucrative in the 1980s, as the format suffered from the generic assumption that cartoons were for kids, as fostered by Saturday morning television.

The success of two Disney films altered these assumptions for both industry and audience, marking the rebirth of theatrical animation. Disney's *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), a live-action/animation mix, became a huge box office and critical success. The film played upon nostalgia for the glory days of studio animation, creating an entire world of cartoon production set in 1947 Hollywood, just before the Paramount decision and television's rise dealt death blows to theatrical cartoons. Combining clever adult humor and satire with appearances from classic characters most familiar to younger audiences from Saturday morning television, like Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck, *Roger Rabbit* legitimated cartoon appeal among all audiences, helping to broaden the appeal of marginalized classic animated shorts. Disney's 1989 fully animated film, *The Little Mermaid*, brought the feature-length format back to respectability. Like *Roger Rabbit*, the film received critical praise and box office success from a broad audience of adults and children, capitalizing on its hit soundtrack and sophisticated animated style. Disney parlayed *Mermaid's* success into a string of animated features, culminating in the first animated film to receive an Academy Award Best Picture nomination — *Beauty and the Beast* in 1991 — and what was then the all-time highest grossing animated film (since surpassed by 2003's *Finding Nemo*) — 1994's *The Lion King*. The success of Disney features with all audiences helped restore the legitimacy and broad appeal of animation, factoring into the genre's transformation on television. Additionally, the growing importation of Japanese animation, both in theatrical releases like *Akira* (1988) and *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and television programs like *Sailor Moon* (1995–2000) and *Dragonball Z* (1996–2003), have fostered a growing cult audience of older viewers to revisit animation beyond the bounds of Saturday morning traditions.⁸⁰

At the same time Disney and anime reached new audiences with theatrical animation in the late 1980s, network primetime television turned to animation for the first time since *The Flintstones* moved to Saturday mornings in 1966. Much like ABC in the 1950s, Fox was a fledgling network in the late-1980s, unable to compete equally with the Big Three; thus Fox was better positioned to take risks, with little to lose from failure. In an attempt to expand upon one of their few successful programs, Fox decided to spin-off the animated bumpers from *The Tracey Ullman Show* (1987–90) into a half-hour animated family sitcom; in January 1990, *The Simpsons* debuted. As I discuss in Chapter 6 in considering genre mixing, the show's immediate success was met with controversy, primarily concerning anxieties over offering adult satirical content to animation's assumed childish audience. Yet *The Simpsons* demonstrated the possibilities of primetime animation to abandon the generic linkages to

children and appeal to a broad mass audience, eventually achieving the milestone of the longest running television sitcom, animated or live-action. Much like the success of *The Flintstones* in the early 1960s, *The Simpsons* launched a wave of short-lived primetime animation trying to follow the traditional system of innovation-imitation-saturation. Unlike the 1960s, however, failed shows like *Family Dog* (1993) and *Fish Police* (1992) never made it to Saturday morning reruns, as these programs permanently disappeared from the airwaves quickly. A second wave of primetime animation in the late 1990s was more successful, as *King of the Hill* (1997–), *The PJs* (1999–2001), *Family Guy* (1999–2002), and *Futurama* (1999–2003) all established themselves as at least moderately successful primetime programs, moving the cartoon genre away from Saturday morning as the solitary home for network animation.

The Simpsons and its long-lasting success made primetime animation popular on nonbroadcast channels as well. Both MTV's *Beavis and Butthead* (1992–97) and Comedy Central's *South Park* (1997–) were able to reach teenage and adult audiences, creating merchandizing phenomena and successful feature films capitalizing on the broad appeal of the genre.⁸¹ Even more notably, both programs generated heated cultural controversies following in *The Simpsons'* path; at the center of these controversies was a conflict between their often lewd and satirical content and the generic assumption that cartoons must be primarily for children. These conflicts suggest that, while individual programs and their corresponding industrial and audience practices can redefine the assumptions that are part of a generic cluster, these generic linkages are often sufficiently well rooted and firmly established to resist rapid change. While both *The Simpsons* and *Beavis and Butthead* had fostered nearly identical controversies before them, the conflict over children wearing *South Park* shirts in school demonstrates that the generic linkage between children and animation cannot be easily detached. Yet the success and cultural circulation of these programs have resulted in an overall shift in animation toward acceptability as adult entertainment and a legitimate site of cultural satire.

While the rise of primetime cartoons and rebirth of theatrical animation suggests how new cartoons in the 1990s have moved toward including and addressing adult audiences, it cannot fully account for the changing circulation of animation dating from earlier eras. The 1990s witnessed older cartoons becoming recontextualized in two different directions. The first has been the growth of "classic quality" discourses concerning older animation. Following the ground laid by *Roger Rabbit*, media critics and animation buffs posit a "golden age" of animation in the 1940s and early 1950s, canonizing directors like Tex Avery and Chuck Jones. Via celebratory books, retrospectives, and home video rereleases, the studio animation from Disney, Warner Brothers, and MGM all have become associated with markers of quality that allow them to transcend their Saturday morning confines.⁸² Likewise, a new generation of animated

programs, like *Tiny Toon Adventures* (1990–92), *Animaniacs* (1993–98), and *Pinky and the Brain* (1995–98), have been positioned as “neo-classical” throwbacks to these traditions, often containing direct references to the “golden age” via character cameos or clever allusions. Thus, according to the classical history of animation, the period from the 1960s to the 1990s is a wasteland of Saturday morning knockoffs (with a few exceptional quality shows like *Bullwinkle*) from which golden age shorts need to be rescued.

Another set of discourses reframes Saturday morning cartoons, not as an object of scorn but as a marker of camp nostalgia. In the irony-saturated 1990s, Saturday morning cartoons gained cultural cachet as a shared set of cultural references, especially among so-called Generation-Xers. Films like *Reality Bites* (1994) and *Slacker* (1991) use ironic readings of cartoons to establish character identification, while popular “alternative rock” bands are featured in recorded compilations covering *Schoolhouse Rock* songs and Saturday morning theme songs. Semi-scholarly books like Timothy and Kevin Burke’s *Saturday Morning Fever* openly contest the use of “Saturday morning” as “a shorthand epithet for culture judged to be juvenile, low-quality, moronic, mind-numbing, or cut-rate.” The Burkes defend Saturday morning via generational bonding — “a lot of Saturday Morning was crap. But it’s our crap, and we’re tired of smug folks twice our age telling us their crap was better than our crap.”⁸³ Programs like *Speed Racer* (1967) and *The Smurfs* (1981–90) have been reclaimed by adults, not as “quality,” but because they contribute to a shared set of childhood memories and identity formation. We can see both of these discourses of quality and nostalgia at work in the industrial formation of Cartoon Network.

The rise of Cartoon Network points toward the central reorganization of the television industry over the last twenty years, as nonnetwork television channels have reached a level of circulation to become vital players in shaping a genre. The rise of cable and satellite in the 1980s and 1990s has remapped the terrain of the television schedule, especially in terms of market segments and genres. In the 1960s, the Big Three networks were able to isolate cartoons on Saturday morning to create a kid-only block to lure specialized sponsors. Similar practices maintained clearly scheduled slots for soap operas, talk shows, game shows, sports, news, situation comedies, and dramas — every genre had its core place in the television schedule, ensuring that at most times, each network would be primarily competing against similar programming for the same audience. Yet as the number of channels has risen, genres can no longer be effectively isolated by timeslot, as entire 24-hour channels exist for news, sports, science-fiction, game shows, music, cooking shows, home improvement programs, and even direct market advertising. The traditional practice of narrowcasting via generic scheduling has given way to channel identity as a prime practice of generic and audience definition.

Like most of the cable channels that emerged in the 1990s, Cartoon Network was born of ownership interests and synergistic possibilities more than of creative pursuits or serving the public interest.⁸⁴ Turner Broadcasting purchased the MGM/United Artists library of films in 1985, including A.A.P.’s pre-1948 Warner Brothers and *Popeye* cartoons, to provide programming for its cable superstation WTBS (and later TNT in 1987).⁸⁵ Cartoon programs such as *Looney Tunes* and *Tom & Jerry* garnered solid ratings on WTBS, so Ted Turner saw cartoons as an opportunity for expansion. He bought Hanna-Barbera’s studio and library in 1992, giving him ownership of the most popular cartoons in television history. Instead of incorporating these cartoons into a larger schedule on WTBS, Turner decided to dedicate an entire channel to reaching cartoon fans, launching Cartoon Network in October 1992.

Cable channels had relied upon cartoons prior to Cartoon Network. Most notably, Nickelodeon had built an audience in the 1980s mixing cartoons with live-action children’s programming; the children’s channel developed high-profile cartoon offerings with the simultaneous emergence of *Doug* (1991–94), *Rugrats* (1991–), and *The Ren and Stimpy Show* (1991–96). Despite the success of Nickelodeon and their cartoon offerings, they firmly segregated children’s programming from their nighttime offerings of rerun sitcoms and dramas known as Nick at Nite. By keeping their cartoons solely in morning and afternoon timeslots, Nickelodeon was relying on the central assumption established by Saturday morning cartoons — television animation is designed for child audiences.⁸⁶ This assumption played out on other cable channels as well — both Disney Channel and Family Channel included cartoons in their daytime lineups for kids, but in primetime and late-night, they shifted to live-action “family” programs and movies to draw in mixed audiences.

Cartoon Network drew its scheduling model less from these children’s channels and more from the 24-hour single-genre channels that Turner had helped popularize with CNN. While conventional wisdom in the 1970s suggested that the appeals of news, weather, and sports were all too narrow to transcend their well-established places within the television schedule, the success of CNN, The Weather Channel, and ESPN in the 1980s proved that genre narrowcasting could reach sufficient audiences to become profitable. Cartoon Network explicitly defined itself not by audience groups, such as Nickelodeon or Family Channel, but by the singular cartoon genre. Like most startup cable channels, it relied initially on repackaged and rerun programming, milking their self-proclaimed “world’s largest cartoon library” of over 8500 programs.⁸⁷ Initially, Turner overcame the channel’s low penetration on cable systems by luring sponsors through package deals with TNT and WTBS, promising more affordable access to children’s audiences than from Nickelodeon.⁸⁸

Cartoon Network grew far more quickly than even Turner’s most optimistic predictions. Upon its launch in October 1992, the channel was carried by

only 233 cable systems, reaching approximately two million households.⁸⁹ Yet the channel garnered high ratings and used the weight of Turner Broadcasting to rapidly expand into more cable systems. By the end of 1994, Cartoon Network was the fifth most popular cable channel in the United States; in the spring of 2001, it ranked second among daily cable ratings.⁹⁰ Cartoon Network was bolstered by the 1995 merger of Turner and Time Warner, as the channel was able to add post-1948 Warner Brothers cartoons to its library, as well as newer Warner creations like *Tiny Toons* and *Animaniacs*. The channel's success was conveyed into new program production, transforming Hanna-Barbera into Cartoon Network Studios to produce original cartoons, resulting in popular new programs like *Dexter's Laboratory* (1995–2003), *The Powerpuff Girls* (1998–), *Ed, Edd n Eddy* (1999–2004), and *Samurai Jack* (2001–). Significantly, the channel lacks the demographic uniformity of Nickelodeon or Disney Channel, as over one-third of viewers for Cartoon Network are adults. While the channel does not have the reach of the broadcast networks, they have effectively provided the television cartoon genre with its broadest mass audience since the institution of Saturday morning in the mid-1960s. Cartoon Network's popularity and success in returning cartoons to a mass audience have directly altered and transformed the cartoon genre.

So how has Cartoon Network changed the assumptions constituting the cluster of the cartoon genre in the 1990s? The primary shift is certainly through broadening the genre's assumed target audience. Along with *The Little Mermaid* (and other Disney features) and *The Simpsons* (and the primetime cartoons which followed it), Cartoon Network has worked to disassociate the kids-only stigma from the cartoon genre, which had been predominant since the emergence of Saturday morning. While featuring Saturday morning staples like *The Smurfs* and *Scooby Doo* (1969–76), they also feature many cartoons initially designed for mass audiences, ranging from television productions like *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* to theatrical shorts like *Popeye*, *Bugs Bunny*, and Tex Avery's MGM cartoons. While none of these cartoons exclude children, many of them tap into the "classic" discourse surrounding studio animation giving adults a "legitimate" mode of enjoying animation. Notably, Cartoon Network does not play many of Hanna-Barbera's lesser efforts from the late 1960s and 1970s, as these shows would certainly turn off most adult viewers (and probably many children), but instead features the more successful early Hanna-Barbera material under the dual rubrics of quality and campy nostalgia.⁹¹

According to Linda Simensky, formerly Senior Vice President of Original Animation at Cartoon Network, the channel does not specifically target its programming toward adults or children. She describes the channel's target audience as a "taste culture" or "psychographic" consisting simply of "people who like cartoons," regardless of age.⁹² The age breakdowns commonly reported in the trade press — 45% of the audience is aged 2–11, 15% are teenagers, and

40% are adults — suggests that the channel is able to reach a broad audience, yet the programmers are aware that their audience is a niche among the general populace. Compared to other kid-centered cable channels, like Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, and ABC Family, Cartoon Network both reaches a broader audience (in terms of age) and a more narrow one (in terms of taste). This "taste culture" can be sold to advertisers as prepackaged and selected, in keeping with the logic of a post-Fordist media economy.⁹³

Cartoon Network constitutes its audience and the corresponding "taste culture" through its promotional activities, use of branding, and trends in original production. The channel promotes itself and its programming through highly kinetic and colorful animated ads, designed to tap into the graphic tastes of cartoon-lovers of all ages. Additionally, the channel uses more "hip" and ironic ads to appeal to adults.⁹⁴ In one series, mirroring the celebrated ad campaign for ESPN's *Sportscenter* (1979–), Cartoon Network offices are portrayed as a place where cartoon characters and humans work side-by-side. In one ad, Aquaman from *The Superfriends* (1973–86) proclaims that he likes working at Cartoon Network because it's the only place where "aquatic telepathy is a valuable job skill." Another features a typical Hollywood agent negotiating contracts for his cartoon clients Dexter and Cow & Chicken. These ads directly reach out to adult cartoon fan's knowledge of characters and their imagination of the "behind-the-scenes" world of cartoons portrayed in *Roger Rabbit* as well as classic shorts like Warner Brothers' *You Ought To Be In Pictures* (1940). Additionally, the Aquaman ad taps into nostalgic discourses, as *Superfriends* was a much-revered 1970s Saturday morning staple that has since become a touchstone Gen-X reference point. Cartoon Network uses a similar sensibility in their pre-Super Bowl special, *The Big Game* (2000–01), which features famous sportscasters and stars mocking themselves as they treat cartoons as a major sporting event pitting Bugs versus Daffy, Coyote versus Road Runner, all with parodies of typical Super Bowl hype, half-time shows, and iconic advertisements.

Cartoon Network also uses branding to identify and reach its core audience. Branding has become a vital aspect of 1990s television, working to create channel loyalty through associating a particular channel with a larger lifestyle and set of tastes.⁹⁵ Cartoon Network explicitly attempts to brand itself through a variety of techniques, ranging from their ubiquitous logo found in promos and bumpers, to a highly promoted Web site with original "webtoons" and behind-the-scenes material. Some branding efforts tap explicitly into the nostalgic discourses surrounding Saturday morning, as the channel has entered the merchandizing realm with videos of *The Flintstones* and *Jonny Quest* and CDs of cartoon theme songs, while other strategies follow the more typical assault of Disney, as with the ubiquitous *Powerpuff Girl* merchandise appealing to both kid and adult cartoon fans. The specifics of Cartoon Network's brand identity match the defining characteristics of this "taste culture" — people who love cartoons as

nostalgia, art, and entertainment. This directly contrasts with the ways other cable channels present cartoons primarily as children's entertainment. Cartoon Network acknowledges that much of their audience is children, refraining from showing more controversial racial representations, war era propaganda shorts, or explicit gun or blood violence, but Simensky suggests that they are less censorious of violence and adult references than Nickelodeon or other outlets for televised cartoons.⁹⁶ In 2001, Cartoon Network developed a late-night programming block called Adult Swim, featuring more sophisticated cartoons aimed at an adult audience while advising, "All kids get out of the pool!" As such, Cartoon Network defines itself as a "safe place" for both children and adults to watch cartoons, offering insulation from "questionable" content for kids and enabling adults to acknowledge their animated taste without scorn.

As Cartoon Network developed a strong presence in the cable landscape, it established a distinctive approach to original programming. The earliest series produced by Cartoon Network stretches the definition of the term "original" — *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* (1994–) consisted nearly entirely of recycled animation cels from Hanna-Barbera's archive, originally drawn for their mid 1960s Saturday morning show, *Space Ghost and Dino Boy*. Cartoon Network producers turned the original's bare-bones visuals into an asset by reanimating select cels atop new backgrounds to create a fictional talk show on the moon, hosted by bored hero Space Ghost and his vanquished enemies Zorak and Moltar. The program became a sensation among young adult audiences in its Friday night timeslot as a post-Letterman hyper-ironic deconstruction of the talk show, although Cartoon Network also initially ran the show in the mornings for younger audiences. With a parade of nostalgic has-beens and counter-cultural fringe figures for guests, *Space Ghost* turned Cartoon Network into an original producer for minimal costs, firming the channel's identity as a hip outlet for cartoons that appeal to more than just kids.⁹⁷

Cartoon Network followed the hip cachet of *Space Ghost* by creating a number of truly original cartoons to be featured on 1995's *World Premiere Toons*, a weekly program debuting commissioned shorts from Hanna-Barbera and independent animators. The series was hyped as a throwback to the classic days of studio animation, with full animator control, high budgets, and full animation style. Cartoon Network assessed the long-term potential for each short, signing some animators to create ongoing series out of successful shorts; this testing area brought new cartoons to the air, leading to series like *Dexter's Laboratory*, *The Powerpuff Girls*, and *Johnny Bravo* (1997–). All of these programs fit Cartoon Network's brand identity and taste culture, featuring young characters and animals with outrageous graphics and physical humor for kids, along with sophisticated humor, ironic attitude, and pop culture references for adult fans. Additionally, both the premiere shorts serving as potential series "pilots" and the resulting original series follow the short 7- to 11-minute format that is typical of

classic cartoons, tying back to a pretelevision definition of the cartoon genre. The channel promotes the adult appeal of these shows, scheduled mostly in early evening timeslots, through a pseudo-documentary ad campaign showing the exploits of adult fans who try to live their lives following cartoon role models like *Johnny Bravo* and *The Powerpuff Girls*.

While certainly Cartoon Network is committed to the cartoon as a broadly defined genre, it is clear from their programming and ad campaigns that they specialize in a particular type of cartoon, a specific articulation of the genre that the channel works to establish as most legitimate and high quality. Simensky offered a nutshell version of this genre definition by calling Bugs Bunny "the icon of taste" for Cartoon Network, suggesting that if viewers don't appreciate Bugs, they won't enjoy the channel as a whole.⁹⁸ This rendering of the cartoon genre replays a dichotomy common to animation studies, positing the binary of Disney's wholesome, family-friendly, artistic, and photorealistic cartoons versus Warner's anarchistic, wacky, sophisticated, and timelessly humorous style.⁹⁹ Not surprisingly, considering both Turner's library and its merger with Time Warner, Cartoon Network falls firmly on the latter half of this duality. While the channel offer no explicit definition of the core textual qualities of cartoons, Cartoon Network's industrial practices posit a specific assumed delineation of the cartoon genre, through both its programming of classic cartoons and production of original programs in the Warner mold.

Cartoon Network's generic practices defining the cartoon and evaluating the genre's history become manifest in their marathons of *Cartoon Network's Greatest 50 Cartoons*. First aired in 1998, Cartoon Network offered new iterations of their canon in 1999 and 2001. As genre theorists have discussed, listing texts is a vital way in which critics constitute genres for their further analysis.¹⁰⁰ Creating generic corpuses is not limited to academic critics however, as institutions and audiences participate in the same type of generic analysis through their everyday interactions with genres. The common practice of creating "greatest" or "best" lists of any given category operates as a specific moment in which genre is manifested through defining and evaluative practices. Cartoon Network's 1999 list (see Appendix A) is an example of an evaluative generic discourse that poses a particular definition impacting the cartoon generic cluster. In analyzing the list, I do not mean to suggest that it was necessarily adopted by audiences as definitive statements of value, but certainly the hoopla surrounding releases of most canonized lists (such as AFI's Top 100 Films of the 20th Century list) suggests that audiences do engage with these lists as a touchstone for their own practices of definition and evaluation.¹⁰¹

Cartoon Network's list of fifty cartoons from 1999, chosen primarily by the cartoon-fan staff of Cartoon Network, definitely favors the Warner-centric vision of the genre that Simensky suggested. Twenty-one of the shorts were produced by Warner, featuring classic cartoons starring Bugs Bunny, Daffy

Duck, and Porky Pig (with single entries each from Sylvester and Tweety, Foghorn Leghorn, and Road Runner and Coyote). MGM is also well-represented with sixteen cartoons on the list, with the majority directed by the man most credited with developing Warner's anarchistic style, Tex Avery. Avery is certainly the most celebrated director on the list, with fourteen entries beating out Chuck Jones' eleven entries (including Jones filling the top four slots on the list). *Popeye* and *Betty Boop* creator Max Fleischer has five entries on the list, while Hanna-Barbera are represented by two made-for-television shorts and three of their MGM *Tom & Jerry* cartoons. Other major cartoon producers are notably absent, with only one UPA short, and none from either Walter Lantz or Disney. While five made-for-television shorts are included, the list is certainly designed to tap into discourses of quality much more than nostalgia, as it serves to reinforce Cartoon Network as a site for the "best" cartoons on television — as originally seen in cinemas.

The domination of Warner and MGM in the absence of Disney is not surprising, given Cartoon Network's ownership and direct competition with Disney Channel and its subsidiary Toon Disney. Certainly, any viewer with knowledge of the ownership of these subsidiaries might interpret the marathon's selections and omissions with appropriate levels of cynicism, yet certainly a good number of viewers (especially children) would be unaware of these structures. The industrial reasons behind these omissions are not self-evident however — while the cynical viewer might assume that the Turner-owned Cartoon Network is interested only in featuring its own products (as I initially did), the proprietary practices are actually reversed. Cartoon Network, in an effort to make the most comprehensive marathon possible, has tried to feature cartoons from Disney and Nickelodeon in their marathons, but these companies have refused to grant permission for Mickey Mouse or *Ren & Stimpy* to appear on Turner's channel, even as part of a cartoon canon. Clearly, dueling industrial definitions of the cartoon genre are at play, as Disney wishes to maintain control of the specific incarnation of the cartoon that they feature on Disney Channel and Toon Disney, maintaining a separation from their competition at Cartoon Network.

Because of both industrial constraints and certain generic assumptions operative for Cartoon Network, their canon offers a particular vision of the genre. I do not wish to decry any "injustice" or bias in Cartoon Network's self-proclaimed canon — all lists like this are inherently skewed and limited, as well as certainly being driven by particular tastes and contexts. Rather, even if we accept that such a canon is not a "true" selection of the best cartoons ever, it does work to define the genre in a selective fashion that needs to be acknowledged. Because Cartoon Network is one of the primary sites in which the cartoon genre functions as a mass-market format with adult appeal, we need to examine what definition of the genre is being legitimated through its practices and what type of cartoons are being excluded.

One clear way to highlight exclusions is through a comparison with a similar list produced under different contexts. In 1994, animation historian Jerry Beck spearheaded an effort to create a list of *The Fifty Greatest Cartoons* by polling animation professionals and scholars, culminating in a book (published by Turner Publishing) and corresponding 1998 special on Cartoon Network (see Appendix B).¹⁰² Both lists start with the same parameters — ranking cel-animated (apart from claymation or computer animation) short cartoons. Given that Turner's corporation released both the book and television program, we cannot view this list as any more "authentic," unbiased, or outside the industrial mechanisms. Similarly, the goal behind the 1994 list was different than Cartoon Network's 1999 list, as Beck wished to define a canon of classic animation for fans and producers, while Cartoon Network's marathon was clearly a way of self-promotion and celebration of the quality of the channel's library. Despite these contrasting contexts, the differences between the lists point toward the ways Cartoon Network articulates a specific genre definition which is not shared by all cartoon fans or producers.

The 1994 list similarly values the anarchistic Warner style, with four of the top five belonging to Jones' Warner output, ten Jones shorts overall, and seventeen Warner cartoons representing the most from any studio.¹⁰³ What is less represented on Beck's list is MGM (seven compared to Cartoon Network's sixteen) and Tex Avery (five to Cartoon Network's fourteen). Also missing from Beck's list are any made-for-television cartoons, which are represented by Cartoon Network through two of their original shorts (*The Chicken from Outer Space* and an episode of *Dexter's Laboratory*), two Hanna-Barbera productions (a *Huckleberry Hound* short and *Pixie & Dixie* cartoon), and a *Bullwinkle* episode. Beck's list fills in these gaps primarily by including Disney shorts, which occupy nine of the slots. I would argue that Disney's exclusion on Cartoon Network is not simply because of ownership, as the brand of humor in the Disney shorts is more subdued and less anarchistic than in Warner or MGM, and not in keeping with Cartoon Network's brand of cartoon. Other inclusions on Beck's list which point toward gaps in Cartoon Network's canon include independent animation (such as Marv Newland's *Bambi Meets Godzilla* and Sally Cruikshank's *Quasi at the Quackadero*), noncomedic shorts (like UPA's adaptation of Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and MGM's anti-war parable *Peace on Earth*), and "controversial" representations (like Warner's *Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs* and Disney's *Der Fuehrer's Face*).

Through comparisons with Beck's list, we can see how Cartoon Network's canonizing practices point toward what falls inside and outside the channel's definition of its eponymous "cartoon." Cartoons are primarily comedic (with the sole exception of Fleischer's *Superman*), establishing their multi-generational appeal through the brand of high-energy visual humor typified by Avery and Jones. Simensky suggests that this comedic bias is both because of the limited quality of most noncomedic shorts and because the dark vision of some serious

shorts would conflict with Cartoon Network's personality. Cartoon Network's canon are produced primarily by major studios for either theatrical or television exhibition, not by independent animators working outside of the industrial system — again Simensky suggests that the lack of independents is because both their more artistic edge is not appreciated by most Cartoon Network fans and the cost and logistics of securing rights to independents are fraught with numerous difficulties.¹⁰⁴ Cartoon Network generally features a mode of full animation, exemplified by Warner, falling between the heightened realism of Disney and the stripped down abstraction of UPA. And of course, they are mostly owned by the AOL Time Warner Turner conglomerate, an aspect motivated by practicality, cost, external limitations, and self-promotion. All of these features are continually reinforced through Cartoon Network's lineup of recycled theatrical shorts, reruns of Hanna-Barbera television material, and original productions. Cartoon Network defines itself as *the* location for 24-hour cartoons — and simultaneously guarantees the specific definition of the cartoon genre will be featured on the channel.

In recent years, Cartoon Network's brand identity has shifted somewhat, expanding their definition of the cartoon genre. As anime has become a hot commodity — and distribution deals with Japanese companies have become commonplace — Cartoon Network has expanded its lineup of Japanese anime imports. Some programs, like *Dragonball Z*, *Yu-Gi-Oh*, and *Cyborg 009*, air on late-afternoon action block Toonami, whereas others such as *Hamtaro* and *Pokemon* target young children in the early morning; most notably for anime fans, Cartoon Network has brought cult mature anime titles to late-night audiences, including *Cowboy Bebop*, *Trigun*, and *InuYasha*. As befits their Japanese origins, the taste culture of Bugs Bunny is nowhere to be seen in these programs, as they tend toward action, sci-fi, and fantasy narratives more than comedy, while featuring anime's trademark heightened naturalistic graphic style unlike Cartoon Network's norm. Newer original programming from Cartoon Network has also expanded the horizons of its genre norms, as *Justice League* (2001–) offers a serious darker take on the *Superfriends* characters, and *Samurai Jack* mixes the UPA-influenced style of *Dexter's Lab* and *Powerpuff Girls* with Japanese mythology and live-action samurai epics to produce one of the more strikingly original animated television programs ever. Adult Swim mixes the anarchistic adult irony of *Space Ghost* and *Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law* (2001–) with the subtle humor of *Home Movies* (2001–), producing a lineup most notable for excluding the core cartoon audience of children. None of these programs directly follow the generic norms originally promoted by Cartoon Network, but as its core audience has solidified, the channel has been willing to expand its draw to welcome fans of other animation forms, thereby extending its brand of the cartoon genre. This expansion may cause such generic dilution as to further fracture the channel's taste culture of cartoon fans

into isolated sub-markets — it's hard to imagine too many *Tom and Jerry* fans also embracing *Cowboy Bebop* and *Hamtaro* — although it is too soon to tell if the channel's success in broadening its audience will lead to an ultimate weakening of its core identity.

Cartoon Network demonstrates how a channel's industrial practices are constitutive of a genre, through a range of techniques including original production, marketing and advertising, reframing old programs, and establishing a channel identity. The channel is certainly not alone in defining the genre in the 1990s — any attempt at a comprehensive account of the genre would have to account more for changes in feature films, network television, the Internet's fan culture and the rise of online animation, gains in computer animation technology, the animated home video market, and other cable channels. Yet Cartoon Network is a primary site of industrial practice constituting the cartoon genre in the 1990s, directly drawing upon and transforming the larger generic cluster by breaking down the assumptions established by Saturday morning cartoons that animation is primarily a children's form. Cartoon Network mobilizes discourses of nostalgia and classicism to appeal to adults, constituting the unified “psychographic” of “people who like cartoons.” Of course, we must keep in mind that this constructed audience is not fans of just any cartoons, with the genre being defined more narrowly toward humorous and visually frenetic mainstream animation in the Warner model.

These two shifts in the history of televised cartoons have had significant generic consequences. The move to Saturday morning in the 1960s severely limited the possibilities of television animation, leading to over-commercialization, a decline in production values, and little acknowledgment of the potential sophistication of the children's (and adult) animation audience. The Saturday morning era represents the nadir of the animation genre, as innovations were foreclosed by the factory-style lowest common denominator approach and kid-only stigma offered by the networks. I regard the shifts in the 1990s to be predominantly positive developments for the genre, working against the genre's stigmas by making cartoons a legitimate form for adult fans via primetime programming, expanded animated feature films, and cable channels, all of which helped bolster the quality of children's animated programming as well — the commercial success of Nickelodeon and Disney have allowed them to invest in noncommercial educational programs for younger children, as well as developing new channels like Noggin. Cartoon Network's practices have helped lead to a cartoon renaissance, both in greater access to cartoon history and in promoting new production featuring full animation, sophisticated content, and a creator-centered approach to production. While acknowledging the limits of the specific articulation of the genre offered by Cartoon Network — personally I would like to see more independent animation and historically suppressed shorts featured on the channel — the industrial practices of Cartoon Network have helped make

the cartoon a legitimate genre for mass audiences once again, working to erode the stigmas associated with cartoons since the onset of Saturday morning.

This chapter points to the limitations of texts themselves as evidence for genre analysis; television texts, such as the popular case of Bugs Bunny shorts, cannot tell us how this genre has evolved from its theatrical heyday in the 1930s and 1940s, to the kid-only isolation of Saturday morning in the mid 1960s and 1970s, and now to its rebirth as a mass format via 1990s cable channels. The assumptions constituting the cartoon genre are made up of more than texts, as cultural meanings are actively linked to the generic cluster by press accounts, audience practices, and industrial programming and marketing strategies. These assumptions are not “exterior” to the genre, as practices such as targeting audiences and canon formations are central to the ways in which the cartoon works as a cultural category. Genre critics must account for the specific structures and practices of the television industry, carefully examining how institutions operate for the specific medium of television. While we need to be critical of ownership systems and point out how conglomeration impacts media content (as with Cartoon Network’s definition of the genre matching its ownership interests), we cannot simply point to ownership as the ultimate explanatory mechanism for all phenomena (as in political economy’s most vulgar form). The history of the cartoon points to the television-specific attributes of scheduling practices and channel identity as constitutive of both media genres and (partially) delimiting the ways in which audiences interact with television. While both Saturday morning cartoons and Cartoon Network were primarily industrial formations, we cannot stop our analysis of these practices at the level of the industry itself — media industries always interrelate within the multiple spheres of texts, audiences, and historical contexts.

Additionally, we can draw a number of conclusions from this case study that pertain to media studies more broadly than the somewhat specialized realm of animation scholarship. As cultural scholars have turned toward examining media constructions of childhood, these genre practices point to how media industries construct child audiences and their tastes. The creation of Saturday morning cartoons worked to posit a particular vision of the child audience as undiscerning, easily satiated by anything animated, and valuable targets of advertising. This formation had substantial impacts, leading to controversies about children’s media violence and consumerism in the 1970s.¹⁰⁵ Saturday morning cartoons and Cartoon Network both construct a hypothetical child who needs to be protected from certain content, such as the racial representations in *Coal Black*, but not from other messages, like ads for candy, violent toys, or commercialism itself. These politicized constructions of childhood need to be grappled with if we are to understand how both the cartoon genre and the larger relationship between children and television operate within American society.

The history of the cartoon also provides an insight into the central issue of mass versus niche marketing. The conventional history of television suggests that broadcasters in the 1960s were in the business of reaching mass audiences, caring primarily about numbers of viewers rather than who constituted any audience group. In the age of cable and upstart broadcast networks, this model has been reconceived as narrowcasting, searching for more specific audience segments consistent with a post-Fordist economy. While certainly this overarching pattern has explanatory power, the specific case of the cartoon belies this pattern — Saturday morning cartoons followed narrowcasting practices in the 1960s, with networks attempting to actively exclude adults from their timeslots to provide sponsors with a denser child audience. Conversely, Cartoon Network has explicitly targeted both children and adults in the 1990s, attempting to reach a broader audience than cartoons had traditionally enjoyed on network broadcasts. Certainly Cartoon Network is still a narrowcaster, as “people who like cartoons” is a niche, but the genre’s history suggests that the master narrative of “mass to niche marketing” does not apply across all television genres.

A Bugs Bunny short itself has not changed intrinsically from its production in 1946 to its differing television exhibitions in 1965 or 1999. Yet the cartoon genre to which it belongs has undergone a number of crucial transformations that are vital to our understanding of how cartoons operate culturally. Only through analyzing the changing configurations of the cartoon as a cultural category — as constituted by media industries, texts, contexts, and audiences — can we account for how a 50-year-old film can be redefined, reinterpreted, and reevaluated through its various televisual incarnations. By accounting for the cultural operation and evolution of cartoons as tendered by media industries, we are better able to understand the politics and practices that are central to this underexamined genre. But industries are only one site of generic practice — I now turn to an examination of media audiences and how they use generic categories to understand the television talk show.