

THESIS: GROWLY MACDOUGAL

My Integrative Project was the production of a pilot for an animated show, "Growly MacDougal: Stunt Bear." The pilot is 10 minutes long. When I thought about what I would like to do for my Integrative Project, it seemed to me that an animated pilot would be a good way to combine my interests in illustration, animation, and comedy writing. I wanted to produce a pilot for an animated television show with humor that would appeal to adult audiences and have an attractive and unique style of drawing in the characters and backgrounds. For this pilot the plot would stand alone, but at the same time give an indication as to what the series could be like. I also wanted to make sure that the humor in the episode matched my own comedic sensibilities, which run along a more subtle and cerebral path.



Though now there are many more examples to the contrary, cartoons are too often dismissed as a medium for children, or a medium incapable of competing in content with live-action. Many adults are reluctant to watch any animated feature. There are, of course, shows and studios that have fought this stereotype, most notably Pixar and a collection of shows from Adult Swim on Cartoon Network. I, too, seek to make an animated feature that is still relevant and enjoyable for an older audience. I can accomplish this by pairing the art style and appearance that's usually aimed at a more immature audience with humor that is decidedly more complex. I want the audience to watch it and take away the unique experience of childish, fun characters acting and behaving in a much more traditional sitcom way. The setting, plot, and look are outlandish, but the dialogue is more traditional.

To go about this, I utilized a range of techniques and resources. For principal animation, I chose to use Adobe Flash for animation hand-drawn on the computer, because it's easy for me to use and I'm familiar with the program. Flash offers excellent traits in its ease of frame manipulation and sound synchronization. I used the V-room in the Duderstadt center to record the voices of me and other voice actors for my pilot, which gave me clear and high-quality recordings. For the music in the show, I used a combination of original music commissioned from friends and other students as well as public domain music I can use without charge or royalties. Sound design was handled by a third party, a former student, Sam Zettell.

The idea and category of "Adult Animation" is one that's been explored for a long time, with varying degrees of success. In the very beginning of animation, when the first films were being produced, they were not aimed exclusively at

children, but rather were a marvel for everyone to see. Max Fleischer's *Bobo the Clown* and the film *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) were more of an exploration into animation than a full-fledged narrative.

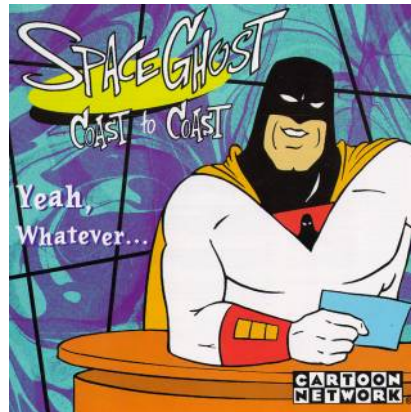
Perhaps the first instance of modern adult animation we have comes from the feature film *Fritz the Cat* by Ralph Bakshi. This film was released in 1972 and received an "X" rating. Based on the Robert Crumb strip of the same name, it explored the adventures of Fritz the Cat in 1960s New York. Though it was a cartoon, it involved explicit sex scenes as well as ideals of hedonism, along with drug use and other themes and events definitely not intended for children. Both the humor and the plot were complicated and decidedly adult in nature. It was wildly successful. In fact, it's the most successful independent animated feature of all time.



After *Fritz the Cat*, the next large milestone in animation for adults, in my mind, was the release and subsequent popularity of *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* started as a short segment on the Tracey Ullman show in 1987 before being turned into a full-length animated sitcom 3 years later for FOX. *The Simpsons*, though animated, is at its core a fairly traditional sitcom. The humor and subjects it addresses are not those explicitly for a younger audience, but more related to life and the human condition. It was a show that parents could watch with their children and still completely relate to. *The Simpsons* also has been the recipient of numerous awards for writing to this day. It managed to break out of the mold of a childish or children's oriented show with its smart plotlines, humor, and adult, realistic characters.



The last instance of adult programming that I'll refer to for now is the advent of the Cartoon Network's "Adult Swim" programming block, launched in 2001. The roots of Adult Swim went back to 1994, when Cartoon Network began to produce a show called *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast*. This show was a brief animated show aimed at the 18 plus crowd who might be watching the Cartoon Network later at night. It used the classic cartoon characters of Space Ghost and Brak, and a good amount of repurposed animation of both of them, however, in a drastically different setting. They were placed as the hosts of a talk show. The show often exhibited absurdist humor and had high-profile guests such as Conan O' Brien, who would be interviewed on the show by the animated Space Ghost. *Space Ghost: Coast to Coast's* success paved the way for the introduction of a formal block of programming that would be known as Adult Swim.



Adult Swim's first line-up included *Sealab 2021*, *Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law*, *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, and *The Brak Show*. From there it has evolved and now is a block lasting from 6 p.m. to 3 a.m. on the Cartoon Network, with a huge

amount of programming, all of it aimed at the over-18 crowd. Adult swim also deals in more complex and intellectual humor such as absurdist and black humor, something that is a new direction for cartoon media.

The presentation of adult themes and references within a traditionally more immature medium is a juxtaposition that is not incomparable to facets of the Dada movement. Looking at what is undeniably one of the most well-known and symbolic pieces of the movement, Duchamp's "Fountain," we can find parallels. Where Duchamp placed an almost unmodified urinal into a gallery, and asked the viewer whether the simple placement in a gallery made it art, so are these adult-oriented animation playing with how they're presented. Their content is in contrast to their environment, and when their ideas are presented in that way, it's almost a mirror image, saying, "Is this not for adults, simply because of it's medium?" Where Duchamp's urinal was supposed to be given artistic thought because it was in a gallery space, you have also to question you predetermined thoughts about cartoons when ideas are presented within them.



For many of these shows, such as the *Simpsons*, these cartoon characters live in a world just like, or very close to, our own. We see them interacting and living as we do, but in an animation. *The Simpsons* even has guest stars who are bonafide celebrities in our world. This reference to popular culture and our lives directly is almost a form of pop art. We observe the life we live from day to day, but through the lens of animation, giving a new perspective, and making us evaluate it slightly differently.

In my further work on this Integrative Project, I realize what a fine balance must be kept in order for this sort of medium and humor to be successful. For example, I had a gag where a character is hit with a gun, and when I added some blood, it became too much for some viewers. I have to be mindful of the disparities between my medium and my content, and adjust them to a point where they work harmoniously instead of against each other. I find that the writing is just as important as the animation, if not more so. In the end, I am proud of what I've produced and think it is an interesting and entertaining show.

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