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**What Now?:  
A New Zealand Children's Television Production  
Case Study**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
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## ABSTRACT

This case study provides a snapshot of cultural agency within the production of a publicly funded magazine programme strand for children in New Zealand. **What Now?** considered by cohorts of children since 1981 to be a New Zealand children's television institution, was scheduled in a commercial zone after school, and on non-commercial Sunday mornings, during the last years of the twentieth century. The thesis is framed by discussion of the complex global forces that shaped children's audio-visual flows in the late 1990s. This discussion moves between analysis of parental concerns about diminishing public media spaces for local children and commercial and post structuralist celebration of children's pleasures in consumption, and how this tension has seen children's media rights become highly politicised during the 1990s. It takes a critical stance, analysing the unequal command over material resources and power for different agents, and the consequences of such inequality for the nature of the symbolic environment for children. It follows this frame with analysis of stakeholder struggles over shaping the text of **What Now?** The discussion concentrates on one year of production – from annual public funding round in 1997 to reformatting of the strand in 1999. The author is interested in competing cultural, economic and political discourses in production talk. She analyses the interplay and negotiations between programme stakeholders, as revealed within the discursive battles of production talk, and their consequences for content and style of a television text. Micro-production moments illustrate how producers and other adult stakeholders imagine their child audiences, and how reified and reductive constructs of the child audience become instrumental in decisions made over commissioning, scheduling, creating and judging children's programmes. The thesis sets itself a sequence of tasks: to articulate between global and local conditions of production, to complete a fine-grained study of children's television producers as they imagine the role of their programme in children's lives, to explore how those creative visions for children are delimited by other powerful stakeholders' contrary constructs of children's audiences, and to speculate about how the eventual text serves as a symbolic resource for New Zealand children. It draws on cross-disciplinary theorizing of culture, power and media agency to enable analysis of who has the power to delimit symbolic resources available to children in their 'serious play' of learning and identity formation. Certain conclusions can be drawn from the data, but the data also suggests many more questions for subsequent research.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABSTRACT

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# CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The case study provides a close-grained snapshot of cultural agency within the production of a television programme for children during a period of rapid change in New Zealand. The study explores the interplay of corporate and national cultural policy practice, as revealed in the strategic discourses of production talk, and their consequences for content and style of a television text. The foundational premise of the research agenda is that the process of producing children's television production is culturally significant because the content and production values of children's programmes are designed to provide symbolic resources with which children can play and learn. The thesis explores how producers negotiate between a range of constructs of the 'child' and how some agents in this negotiation have more power in this process than others.

The television production case study centres on **What Now?**, but also discusses aspects of **Squirt**, programmes that targeted primary-aged children on free-to-air national television between 1997 and 2000. These children's productions, made for six to twelve year olds, were commissioned by Television New Zealand (TVNZ), funded by New Zealand On Air (NZOA) and overseen by the executive producer of TVNZ's Children's and Young People's Unit. They were funded by NZ On Air to fulfil the public service objective of providing local educational and entertaining television public spaces for children in New Zealand. But herein lies a central political tension explored in the thesis—they were to be commissioned by a commercial broadcaster only if they could also serve as media commodities that delivered local children's audiences to advertisers and sponsors.

The thesis can be read at several levels.

It tracks the impact of rapidly evolving global audio-visual arrangements during the late 1990s on children's television producers in a small, deregulated media market.

It tracks how children's producers responded to conflicts between the requirements inherent in the statutory framework that shaped policy practice, and the requirements of commercial stakeholders.

It analyses the ways in which funders, commissioners and producers imagined 'children's culture', the role of local children's television in that culture, and the implications of these imaginings for completed broadcast texts.

It tracks how producers of children's television in New Zealand manoeuvred, using global cultural and economic resources, in order to carve out local and particular creative spaces.

### **The value of a New Zealand focus**

It might be assumed by those concerned with global issues that a research site of live, after-school and weekend children's magazine television in New Zealand is too ephemeral and peripheral to mainstream political, economic and cultural concerns *to matter* for media researchers. Whereas researchers have long argued that news is important for democracy; that drama and film production are central to the politics of cultural identity; that reality television, talk shows and soaps are key to understanding audience pleasures and that popular music expresses the hybridity of post-colonial diaspora, children's television production has been largely neglected. At a banal level this neglect of local children's production agency might be attributed to the fact that powerful adults rarely view after-school and weekend-morning children's television. When they do watch, its content and style ensures that 'any passing interest adults might have in their children's preferences is unlikely to survive more than a single edition'. (Buckingham, 1995: 53). Children's television appears to become newsworthy only when anxious parents complain about how it transgresses the cultural norms they set for their children, and even then concern is likely to centre narrowly on advertising or violent imported animations, not local daily children's production.

Another reason for research neglect might be the result of cultural scholars' distaste for perceived middle-class panic over 'appropriate' children's media provision. Cultural scholars choose to focus on sub-cultural agency and those few that have been drawn to children's media use have consequently tended to concentrate on exploring how children subvert television to their own ends. They have found that children appear to prefer popular culture and tend to reject earnest material designed to educate and uplift them. Such cultural scholarship, whilst providing useful critique of elitist middle-class judgements of 'quality' provision for children, does not advanced our appreciation and

understanding of how cultural politics of production shapes children's televisual texts. The supply end of children's television production has received little attention anywhere.

Likewise, the setting of a children's television production case study *in New Zealand* might seem to make an already marginal research endeavour appear even more peripheral to mainstream cultural studies concerns. However, it will be demonstrated that the site of live commercial children's television production in New Zealand has heuristic value because it repositions the analytic lens, providing a viewpoint which privileges cultural sites normally neglected in dominant British, American and even Australian research perspectives. New Zealand's hybridity, which borrows from the English-speaking world, makes it a prime location for research on the relationship between the global and the local. New Zealand-broadcast television has long been a pastiche of American, British and Australian material, and local fans have long embraced first runs and replays of **Dr Who**, **Postman Pat**, **Thomas The Tank Engine**, **Bananas in Pyjamas**, **Loony Tunes**, **Sesame Street**, **The Muppets** and **The Simpsons**. This overwhelmingly overseas look of local broadcasting television becomes 100-per-cent-imported content on pay services. In postcolonial New Zealand, 'What is local culture?' cannot be answered by policy rationales oriented by issues of indigenous language (Sweden, France), Reithian national uplift (Britain), and market innovation (USA). Certainly New Zealand shares colonial anxieties with Australia. But in the 1980s Australia embarked on an assertive national policy of developing an 'Australian' cultural identity by providing substantial state funding for television production and protecting its culture industries with quotas and cultural policy. New Zealand, by contrast, abandoned a cultural nationalist agenda in favour of reducing barriers to global capital and audio-visual trade. If cultural studies scholars in Australia argue that Australian culture exhibits many characteristics associated with the rootless muddle of postmodern sensibility, then it can be argued that this might be the case even more in economically deregulated New Zealand as it celebrates mid-summer Christmas, synthetic snow and jolly Coca-Cola inspired Red Father Christmases, with a Polynesian twist. (Perry, 1998).

At the practical level of field research, New Zealand provided a rich location in which to gather a range of data. The intimacy of a small cultural community enabled relative freedom to cross between institutional boundaries and this was made easier still through long-existing work relationships with people at all levels of the media and advertising industries. These sources have been generous with information, have taken a personal interest in the research, and have provided a rich array of material with which to map the

details of how children's rights discourses and commodified cultural flows emerge in the local New Zealand context. Data collection may well have been more difficult in larger regulated, and therefore more bureaucratic, policy environments. In such ways being at the perceived capillary end of arterial capital flows had advantages, simply because there was less commercial risk for all concerned. However, because marketing instrumentality can only ever manifest itself in the particularity of the local, *any* local commercial broadcasting site is always best conceptualized as being 'at the end' of capital flows. Given that the global can only be tracked in the ways it emerges in specific localities, New Zealand's physical distance from 'the centre' of global corporate power does not appear to have disadvantaged this research.

### **Reasons for personal and intellectual engagement**

Questions about culture and cultural agency explored in this thesis grew out of personal and intellectual struggles to understand 'media childhood' as I mothered sons born in the early 1980s. I found it increasingly disconcerting to find that, as I observed my children's responses to the media, my 'mothering heart' was feeling one thing, while my 'research head' was thinking another. This ambiguous response to children's television (and children's use of television) has had several implications for the research project. It has led to a praxis that appreciates, and does not dismiss, the anxiety of parents when it comes to what children learn from media experiences, whilst problematizing many of the 'commonsense' conclusions that have been drawn as a consequence of this anxiety. It also means that dominant media theories, embedded as they are in Australian, British and USA cultural and institutional contexts, are analyzed for their utility in framing the issues raised in a small deregulated nation. A range of theories have generated questions and fed curiosity, thus energising the research, but the thesis is not written *through* any one theory, because no one version fits. As a result, I have been drawn to a range of theories, remained alert to the differences and arguments between theories and, ultimately, reached a point that finds any one theory inadequate.

This thesis reflects interests developed over twenty years of study and work: initially debating cultural politics in 1970s Australia, then absorbing and exploring ideas from British, American and Australian cultural studies during the 1980s. My ideas were honed whilst designing and teaching tertiary media courses for the New Zealand Broadcasting School, an applied educational institution with close ties to the broadcasting industry,



and through lobbying for local children's production within the rapidly shifting environment of deregulated broadcasting in New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s.

But the greatest influence on the choice of case study has been the absorbing and confusing job of parenting two boys during this time. I watched television with my sons and observed their evident pleasure in after school and weekend morning television, in particular cartoons. Their avid chat about media content, vigorous 'acting out' of narratives with peers, and intense collecting passions for heavily promoted spin-off toys raised challenges and questions for me. I was uncomfortable with censorship, either on the grounds of violence or commercial sell, but still I wanted variety and diversity from the medium of television for children. I became a New Zealand cultural nationalist on behalf of my children, as it appeared that fewer and fewer imported cartoons for children were being promoted with greater and greater marketing vigour in New Zealand. In 1984 (whilst a television reviewer for the Christchurch daily newspaper, *The Press*) I began keeping a diary of my reactions to imported children's television, and its ripples in my sons' peer-group cultures.

Deregulation in American television in the 1980s saw a boom in half-hour cartoons and associated merchandise on American cable television, and their export as cheap children's programming to many countries, including New Zealand. This was also the period when 'supersystems' of commodities were launched as major news events through mega-budget adventure films. During the 1980s **Masters of the Universe**, **Thundercats** and, the huge supersystem of **Starwars** stand out. The promotion of **Super Stars of Wrestling** merchandise in children's viewing time followed, to be itself followed, memorably, in the early 1990s by the supersystems **The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** and **Mighty Morphin Power Rangers**. I discovered later that this period brought accelerating shifts in corporate integration, consolidation and media convergence, thus transforming global marketing to children.

Knowledge of boys' fan enthusiasms and collecting passions extended to girls' 'crazes', like **My Little Pony**, **Barbie**, **Cabbage Patch Dolls** and **Jem**, through friendship networks at the local early childhood 'Playcentre'. Feminist mothers expressed concern when they saw toys promoted stereotyped passive play for girls, whilst looking on with distaste at the rough warrior play of boys. I observed early on that fathers seemed less concerned than mothers (and, indeed, were often enthusiastic) about war animations, action movies and the toy weapons offering narratives of pursuit and conquest and

reflecting polarized versions of gender stereotyping, Aryan ‘goodies’ and coloured, deformed ‘baddies’. It was at this time that an anti-war toys group, ‘Play for Life’, began in Palmerston North. This group was overwhelmingly female in membership and promoted workshops for parents at early childhood centres on how to counter the boisterous copy-cat play of boys. They also lobbied broadcasters and politicians to ban ‘war toys’ and associated animations.<sup>1</sup> Lobbying for local educational children’s television, as well as lobbying against sexist and violent imported children’s programmes, appeared to be a female ‘control’ issue. Furthermore, it was an issue that appeared to attract articulate, book-reading middle-class mothers who wanted peaceful gender equality and/or ‘public service’ television (if any at all) for children. This ghettoizing of ‘concern’, and its anti-television subtext, repelled me. I wanted more local television for children, but was equally drawn to the subcultural, anti-elitist research of cultural studies.

At this stage I was drawn to neo-marxist work on globalization. It appeared that commercial strategies were being directed towards the colonization of all children’s play. I noted that many single income parents felt beleaguered by demands for the latest (expensive) toy from their offspring, soon to be made redundant by the next marketing campaign, but also noted how they felt blackmailed when children argued that they ‘had to have one’ in order to fit into the playground pecking order. It was perplexing to find that British and Australian cultural studies during the 1980s was bent on rescuing these same artifacts of corporate marketing culture from elitist middle-class cultural judgement. Patricia Gillard’s 1980s work on children’s media agency, for example, appeared to de-energise any political arguments for ‘better’ local programming for children as versions of ‘better’ and ‘quality’ became relativized. My diary expresses growing exasperation that debates about ‘audience agency’ in Britain and Australia had different implications for children within regulated contexts, where non-commercial and commercial services alike were required to provide local variety and diversity to children’s media. In New Zealand there was little informed public debate over the politics of local children’s media choices, and what little there was reflected anxiety about ‘war toys’ and aggression rather than dealt with more fundamental questions of economics, marketing and cultural politics.

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<sup>1</sup> See Levin et al (1996) for a rationale for playground intervention in boys’ violent play; Seiter (1998) and Philp (2000) for critiques of such a stance.

By the late 1980s I was establishing myself as a policy analyst in New Zealand. This was a period of radical neo-liberal reconfiguration of New Zealand economic policy, which included the deregulation of the broadcasting media. Intellectual curiosity, driven first by lobbying for local public service funding for children's productions, later focused on fundamental questions about childhood and cultural agency. Was it possible to find ways to understand the production of children's television culture and the culture of children's production in relationship to specific agents, practices and social and institutional contexts? If so, how? New Zealand appeared to offer a near pure experiment in the downstream effects of deregulated broadcasting for children, and curiosity about this experiment's implications for local children's producers has evolved into the current thesis. The decision was made to track one local production for children through a yearlong cycle, from annual commissioning to annual commissioning, in order to explore these issues.

### **The structure of the thesis**

Following on from this introduction, Chapter Two takes a genealogical approach to the vast literature theorizing childhood and the media child. It sets out key historical, 'commonsense', and emergent theories of childhood that have defined the cultural objectives for local television programme provision for children. Such a review provides evidence of how a range of scholars from different disciplines positioned themselves as either expert allies of these 'commonsense' views of the role of television in children's lives, or at odds with them, and also shows the development and evolution of the fields of enquiry.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical orientations for the case study. The fields of sociology of media and industrial production, active reception, consumption theory, cultural studies and postmodernist aesthetics are drawn on to construct a theoretical frame for the study. Dornfeld's (1998) insight that the divide between production and consumption can be bridged by constructing producers as viewers, and viewers as producers, became key to the case study data analysis. The case study uses production in order to analyse the imagined audiences for production content and consequences for cultural agency.

The thesis draws on relevant aspects of postcolonial and post-modern geography to describe the cultural spaces of media saturated cultures, and the implications of

collapsing geographic place and time for identity formation. It argues that 'cultural identity' is positioned and hybrid; 'cultural knowledge' is discursive, contingent and provisional. However, I take issue with a tendency to infinite regress within much post-structuralist scholarship. I take a critical stance that argues that political, economic, technological and industrial choices shape representations in the public domain, and thus symbolic resources for identity formation for children. This has implications for local children, in terms of their growing and learning, as well as future opportunities as consumers, citizens and producers in their own right.

Chapter Four discusses methodological decisions, and ethical issues arising from the process of grounded research in a television production site. I was fortunate that key informants were generous with both time and information, but such intimacy and access also brought issues of debt and capture. Texts (interviews, diary notes, production and policy documents, media clippings and television programmes) were collected for later discourse analysis. The use of a discourse-centred approach drawn from Fairclough (1995), Potter et al (1995) provided the researcher with an abundance of moments of producerly textual evaluation and political manoeuvring for analysis. However the fast changing nature of the research site necessitated modification of the initial plan to use close-grained discourse analysis within the 'ethnographic moment'. Whilst saturated discourses threw up the metaphors that provided clues to the discursive strategies of participants, this richness of data became a problem when faced with the task of writing up a year of production turmoil. In the end a simple narrative style has been adopted, interspersed with samples of more speculative discourse analysis to illustrate key discursive battles.

Chapters Five to Eight provide the key larger contexts within which to understand this national children's production case study. Articulation between global strategies and local production agency enables one to understand why the production site became overwhelmed by crises during the year of study. Technological, economic and cultural changes were accelerating during this period of the late 1990s. These tectonic shifts disturbed any hoped for stasis within the ethnographic research site. Chapter Five provides a brief analysis of the broadcasting discourses of public service broadcasting and the media market. This chapter also analyses paradoxical and conflicting rights discourses shaping commercial free speech and parental and child media rights. Chapter Six maps contradictory tendencies to economic and cultural fragmentation *and* consolidation and uniformity within global audio-visual flows and marketing to children

during the late years of the twentieth century. New Zealand's production possibilities reflected these paradoxical tugs. Chapter Seven lays out broadcasting policy and regulation in key countries in order to provide a comparative framework for the discussion that follows of radical deregulation of broadcasting in New Zealand. Chapter Eight provides a brief background to the format and style of **What Now?** within children's television production in New Zealand.

Chapters Nine to Thirteen presents the production case study. Chapter Nine describes how local public media space for children was negotiated between the funder (New Zealand On Air) and broadcaster (Television New Zealand). In Chapter Ten a range of negotiations between producers and commercial clients are explored, in order to tease out how local and global capital use local broadcasting, and explore how cash-strapped producers are creative in the ways that they use corporate money to make local television for children. Chapter Eleven tracks the power battles over defining the audience, how competing constructs of the audience were researched and defended, and how decisions about preferred audiences by commissioners and producers constrain the universe of viewing for children in New Zealand children's programmes. Chapter Twelve provides a series of micro-production case studies that are used to explore how producers interpret being on the side of local children, putting New Zealand on air, creating style with attitude, and celebrating children's culture for a range of stakeholders in the production process. Chapter Thirteen completes the case study by explaining what happened during the following funding round, and the implications of changing media politics for producers. Chapter Fourteen draws final conclusions from the data and suggests future directions for research.

## CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature reviews reveal how a field defines itself. In trying to organize and impose order on a potentially bewildering array of individual studies, they highlight those dimensions researchers in a field consider important at a particular time. (Pecora, 1995: 354)

### Introduction

There is no argument about the need to protect and supervise the suckling child until she/he is weaned, walks and speaks. Thereafter the social meaning and even existence of childhood differs across cultures, over time, according to gender and class and, critically for this study, within the institutional arrangements of state broadcasting. 'Childhood', for the purposes of this chapter, is treated as a passage through early life. It is not restricted to one age group, rather it is the movement toward, into, and through the next stage, and incorporates a growing anticipation of the rights, abilities, and social identities children gradually learn to expect will accompany this movement to adulthood (Cook, 2000: 109).

'Our children are our future' is a cliché that is deployed to defend radically different adult visions for the future. The passion with which people talk of a 'child' is rooted in emotionally charged adult memories of their own childhood (both good and bad) and, consequently, their ideals for current relationships with children, and aspirations for a future state of affairs (Cox, 1996: 27). Consequently, it has been argued that a range of essentialist, and frequently sentimentalised, constructs of ideal 'childhood' carry within them implicit ideals for the future, and moral justifications for claiming power to shape that future.

Fearful claims of erosion of childhood, or the need to escape from childhood, mean only that the pattern of childhood, its boundaries or determinants, have aroused the disapproval of one or other observer. (Shamgar-Handelman, 1994: 252).

This chapter surveys academic and popular western literature written by adults for adults about the modern state of 'childhood', and then considers the disputed constructs of 'childhood' since the advent of television. 'The child' is positioned, in this literature, as being forever 'the other' who is known through relationships with adults. Understandings of 'childhood' are necessarily the result of 'social and discursive processes' which are defined primarily through differences to the other shifting binary construct, 'adulthood' (Buckingham, 2000: 7). Consequently, conflicting constructions of 'child' and 'children' also have implications for understandings of 'adult', 'parent', 'mother' and 'community/society' because each structures and constitutes the other. Indeed, it has

been asserted that children's culture has become conceptually connected to women, and has thus been devalued, as women are, within wider debates over 'culture' (Amit-Talai et al, 1995: 32). It is important to remain alert to how definitions of 'child' shape the prescriptions for mothering, yet, equally, as women increasingly participate in the 'life-world' of paid work, how changing parenting relationships also give rise to new versions of 'childhood' (Archard, 1993; Qvortrup et al, 1994; Shamgar-Handelman, 1994; Burman, 1995; Cox, 1996; Jenks, 1996; Gittins, 1998; James et al, 1998).

Recent formulations, like the celebratory 'media savvy kid', or formulations that disturb the norms of modern childhood, like the demonic 'child killer', provide updated versions of childhood which 'simultaneously (affirm) the category, thereby keeping children and childhood bounded, and thus knowable, conceptual entities' (Cook, 2000: 116).

'Childhood' even remains a meaningful category for the optimists and pessimists who argue the 'death of childhood'. As Buckingham puts it, 'The sacred garden of childhood has increasingly been violated, and yet children themselves seem ever more reluctant to remain confined within it.' (2000: 4). As a consequence, one must be alert to how the word 'child' is deployed within the discourses involved in preserving, changing or destroying the accepted truths within the discursive field of, in this case, 'the media child' (Signorielli, 1991; Luke, 1990b, 1991, 1996; Schirato et al, 1999).

It is to be noted that whilst key social theorists of 'childhood' explore the discursive sites of family, school, health, state and law, and thus inform one on the ways that institutional discourses constitute childhood, they rarely touch on the media. Yet, as Hengst emphasises:

Children grow up with and within a world in which media penetrate into every sphere and domain of life. What makes the media a special factor within socialization processes is that they are both non-localized and ever present. They influence not only the temporal and spatial shaping of everyday life. Experience with media products, be they stories, scenarios, characters, leaves its marks in thoughts, in the imagination, in daydreams, entertainments and games. Access to electronic media is difficult to control, which leads to changes in intergenerational relations, indeed shaking the very foundations of childhood as a pedagogically defined phase of learning. (Hengst, 1997: 425).

In turn, discourses of 'childhood', and their implicit versions of ideal 'adulthood', shape all texts (print, audio, video and digital) that are constructed *by adults for children*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As Buckingham notes, children's television, despite its label, is rarely produced *by children for children* (2000a: 8).

## **Rationale for the literature review**

Given that there are so few direct models for this study of children's television production, why provide a literature background at all? There are three key reasons.

Firstly, a literature review outlines the expert sources for 'commonsense' constructs of childhood currently held by many parents and politicians, at least in developed countries. These define the cultural objectives for local television programme provision for children in New Zealand.

Secondly, such a review provides evidence of how a range of scholars from different disciplines position themselves as expert allies of these 'commonsense' views of the role of television in children's lives, or at odds with them. Luke (1991) suggests that only such an 'archaeological' approach does justice to the density of discourses circulating within the professional debates shaping children's production. The cross-disciplinary and hybrid nature of debates impinging on this study requires one to critique the literature's epistemological claims to authority.

Thirdly, in the process of mapping these alliances and conflicts over constructs of the media child it is possible to lay out competing interpretations of the role of children's television in children's lives. In turn, these disputes point to recent wider fundamental shifts in questions that are being asked by scholars about social relations and cultural production. These are addressed in detail in the third chapter.

## **Summarizing modern literature on the media child**

Luke (1991) suggests that it is through adopting an 'archaeological' approach to modern constructions of the media child that one can do greatest justice to the wide range of dominant, emergent and even forgotten discourses that mark out the boundaries of work on the construction of 'the media child'. Such an approach provides the necessary backdrop with which to then engage with recent critical theory that posits that 'childhood', as it has been constructed and idealized in the developed world since the Enlightenment, requires deconstruction as a modernist discursive concept.



Anxiety over controlling the symbolic content of television ‘for the children’s sake’ has spawned a huge literature, largely from the United States of America.<sup>3</sup> The overwhelming concern of research since the 1960s in the USA is over how individual children respond to specific selected television messages in socially controlled or laboratory situations. This literature, in turn, divides into two major sets of concerns.

The first set of concerns examines the medium for effects (largely negative) of television on behaviour of children. These concerns have been buttressed by extensive content analysis in ‘cultivation research’ that is designed to quantify the volumes of perceived violent, stereotyped, sexist and racist material to which children are exposed on television. Signorielli (1991), for example, surveys American research on attention and comprehension, formal attributes, imagination, parental mediation, gratifications and cultivation studies on gender and social conditioning, and concludes that television, both as a medium and as it is currently socializing children, is largely negative. This approach is premised on the belief that there is a clear link between children’s viewing of television and consequent reactions to, mimicry of, or attitudes to violence, stereotyping and sexism for children in the wider community. ‘Effects’ research evidence is largely discounted by the American broadcasting industry, who argue that such research cannot separate the effects of television viewing out of the multi-causal social factors in children’s behaviour.

The normative assumption of television’s overwhelmingly negative influence on children’s behaviour and values has been challenged by British, Australian and, later, American audience researchers and ethnographers who demonstrate that children engage with television in a range of highly complex ways (Palmer, 1986a, 1986b; Buckingham,

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<sup>3</sup> See summaries in Gunter et al 1990; Neuman, 1995; Steiner, 1995; Wartella, 1997; Jordan et al, 1998; Pecora, 1999; Roedder John, 1999. Studies draw from fields as substantively and ideologically diverse as child psychology (Himmelweit et al, 1958; Schramm et al, 1961; Greenfield et al, 1984; Singer, 1980, 1994; Comstock et al, 1991, Clifford et al, 1995, Alexander et al, 1995), the wealth of studies on the impact of violent media (for example Huesmann et al, 1994; Levin et al, 1996), pedagogy (Palmer, 1987, 1988; Gunter et al, 1990; Neuman, 1991, 1995; Huston et al, 1989, 1998), stereotyping of gender and race (Gerbner et al, 1977; Johnston et al, 1982; Signorielli, 1991; Berry et al, 1993), health, (Hammond et al, 1999), consumption (Young, 1990; Alexander, 1995; Pecora, 1995, 1998) and the consequent policy issues. (Palmer, 1988; Minow et al, 1995; Lisosky, 1995, 1997; Kunkel, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1998, 1999; Buckingham et al, 1999, Buckingham 2000a).

1996, Buckingham et al 1999; Davies, 1995, Davies & Machin, 2000; Lohr, 1999; Seiter, 1998). Another large body of research tests children for cognitive comprehension, attention and learning from media content. Summaries by Cupit (1987), Neuman (1995), Wartella (1997) Pecora (1999) support the role of television as an entertaining, yet pedagogically sound, medium for children. In the USA the exemplar of creative and research cooperation is in the formative and summative research for the Children's Television Workshop (Palmer, 1988). In Britain similar research has a long history stretching from Himmelweit's seminal investigation in 1958, to Davies' work (1989b, 1995, 1997, 2000). In Australia the work of Cupit (1987) and Palmer (1988) have justified a positive role for television in children's lives. It is this body of work that has provided much of the scholarly rationale for developmentally targeted children's programming, against which current benchmarks of child-targeted content and choices of production style are measured in national broadcasting systems.

### **Constructing the modern child**

It has been noted already that 'childhood' is often so taken for granted that it is important to first unpack the 'commonsense' meanings of 'childhood' that currently circulate. Certainly the intensity of parallel and competing constructs of the 'child' in the First World suggests the importance that has been placed on the stage of 'childhood' for the replication of culture and social order in the modern period. 'Childhood' is largely defined by professional discourses in the modern state. Education, psychology, health and welfare define the cultural capital that 'patrol the boundaries marked out around childhood as a social status' (Holland, 1992: 12). Recent social theory asserts that the hardening of modern 'childhood', like 'nationhood', is pivotal to understandings of modernity. Modern state institutions are designed to supervise and protect the innocent child from exploitation, even from neglectful parents. (Qvortrup et al, 1994; Stevens, 1995).

A concern with 'childhood' has only emerged relatively recently within historical writing. Aries (1962), in his influential survey of French childhood, argues that the concept of childhood (as understood by the Greeks and Romans) only re-emerged after the Renaissance, and then only in noble and affluent classes. Space for the 'state of childhood' has emerged at particular times in different cultures, and modern 'childhood' is a privileged social condition that has emerged as a result of material and cultural progress.

British evolutionary historians mapped the British 'childhood' as utilitarian child-centred Factory Acts and, later, post-war welfare legislation saved it from exploitation in the 'dark satanic mills' of industrialized Britain. There continues to be romantic potency in stories of saving children from the grip of the industrial horrors of inhuman regimentation, to be *returned* to playful innocence once more. But research suggests that no such utopia ever existed within mercantile guild apprenticeships and rural family sweatshops (Steedman et al, 1985). The history of childhood, in common with other progressive histories, has tended to construct an intensely teleological view of the evolution of 'modern childhood'. De Mause (1976), for example, lays great store on the inexorable climb of *progress* in the narrative of children's history when he paints the picture of 'childhood' emerging from ancient darkness into modern light. As he puts it, the history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awake. He proposes a 'psychogenic theory of history' whereby the history of childhood illustrates the evolution of human personality through successive and positive developments in the relationship between parents and children. Socialization becomes the 'funnel of history—the living thread in which the future and past entwine' (quoted in Kline, 1995a: 110). Jenks notes that this narrative of inexorable 'moral progress' reaches absurd heights:

[Shorter's (1976)] work is unctuously self-congratulatory of the humane achievements in child-rearing that have come to be crystallized in the form of today's nuclear family... "Good Mothering" we are informed, is an invention of modernization. (Jenks, 1996: 67).

Whatever their view of the pre-modern period, modernist histories tend to construct a universe in which the treatment of children since the Enlightenment becomes the critical measure of social advancement in western society. Children, once driven up chimneys, down mines and into factories as money-earning assets for families, have now become the central 'job' of western nuclear families and the welfare state. The regimentation of the factory and industrial state, itself a by-product of scientific enlightenment rationalism, is replaced by a range of benevolent bureaucratic institutions like schools, welfare and health (and, arguably, public service broadcasting). Regimentation and bureaucracy ensure that the social condition of children (of the poor at least) is regulated by the state, and thus protected from physical and moral harm, if necessary from their parents. Jenks alerts us to a fundamental historiographical problem that has beset such modernist histories of childhood.

...we live and write history by a central tenet of nineteenth-century reforming liberalism, which tells us that one measure of a society's civilization and progress is to be found in its treatment of disadvantaged and dispossessed groups: women, slaves and children. (Jenks, 1996: 63-64).

The belief in the importance of the quality of childhood as a measure of progress in the modern state ensures that decisions with a bearing on the physical, emotional and cultural environment for children are fiercely contested within the politics of the modern state. Consequently television, as both a medium and a tool of cultural socialization, has come under intense scrutiny.

Popular histories of New Zealand childhood such as Trewby's (1995) follow a familiar teleological pattern. The reader is told the progressive story of childhood care under the umbrella of the world's first welfare state. Within this model national laboratory, we trace the narrative of colonial charity to the natives, Bowlby's science of child feeding, and schools as the means of uplifting the working class. The tracking and regimentation of children (regardless of feckless family origins) at camps, through adoption agencies and through programmes of school milk and dental health, were to ensure a future generation healthy in body and mind. Happy, 'well-developed' children become the primary project of modern institutions like schools, health departments and courts (Cote, 1996: 11). In New Zealand, children's radio and early television were defined by Shelley's colonial version of the Reithian vision for broadcasting, whereby universal access to uplifting radio, and later television content, was a citizen's right (Day, 1994, 2000). Children 'listened' with (implicitly British middle-class) mothers in healthy nuclear suburban families. The 'hardening' of a construct of a modern 'state of childhood', contained and provided for separately from adults, becomes central to definitions of the evolving private and public sphere. Such a construct shaped the post-war family and gender relations; it frames all present battles over cultural identity and social relationships that are fought 'on behalf of the children'. Luke (1991), using Foucauldian frames, views institutional schema as manifestations of powerful modernist middle-class surveillance of cultural construction.

But as Max Weber said, such histories demonstrate a simplistic view of history and a complicity of theory with progress. New Zealand mothers and their children were addressed by the state (and in the popular press) as exemplars of colonial British nuclear family life, just as the traditional ways of iwi and whanau were 'educated out of' the indigenous people through the cultural eugenics of assimilation. It can be argued that national media saw the extension of the modern project in national media regulations, codes of practice and the funding of 'safe-zones' of local child-appropriate programming. The case study is a snapshot of one such child-centred, publicly funded, 'safe zone' in crisis within a post-colonial state.

## **The metaphors of incompleteness in childhood**

Archard posits that to have a concept of 'childhood' is to have a view on the features that distinguish it from 'adulthood'. Jenks alerts us to 'growth' metaphors common to modern constructs of the child:

...tabula rasa; as laying down the foundations; as shaping the individual; taking on; growing up; preparation; inadequacy; inexperience; immaturity, and so on. Such metaphoricity all speaks of an essential and magnetic relation to an unexplicated, but nevertheless firmly established rational adult world. This adult world is not only assumed to be complete, recognizable, and in stasis, but also, and perhaps most significantly, desirable. (Jenks 1996: 9).

Jenks usefully adapts Hockey and James' four contributory strands of 'becoming' within the modern social science of childhood.

- i. that the child is set apart temporally as different, through the calculation of age;
- ii. that the child is deemed to have a special nature, determined by Nature;
- iii. that the child is innocent; and
- iv. therefore is vulnerable and dependent.

In sum there are themes which centre, first on the questions of the child's morality (ii and iii); and second, on its capability (i and iv). (Jenks 1996: 123).

The entire social science construct of childhood can be said to draw on metaphors of evolution or biology, wherein every stage of childhood becomes the precondition for the next. Nature is genetically and biologically fixed. In-built structures provide primary structures that drive development, and the environment is the occasion for, and scene of, evolving changes. The first construct of incompleteness is drawn from Locke. Children lack social experience and knowledge and therefore require firm shaping by a rational and structured environment. In such a way Parsonian sociology, so influential in post-war America, posits that activity is regulated through normative coercion, thereby ensuring the values of a cultural system. Bad children are the result of bad parents and bad environments. In many countries, official reports, for example the Newsom report into the actions of the young murderers of James Bulger cite unregulated access to popular media as a contributing cause of crime by young people. (Barker, 1997).

The second construct of incompleteness derives from Piaget's (1954) psychological schema of stages of development for thought and intelligence. He describes inevitable and clearly defined stages of intellectual growth from pre-conceptual thought, through intuitive concrete operations, up to the level of formal operations in early adolescence. Vygotsky's (1978) revision of Piaget conceptualises less formal stages, structured this time by language, articulations of concepts and social opportunity (Smith, 1998: 9).

These stages provide the developmental ideals for television fare for different stages of childhood.

Yet both of the above approaches prove to be inadequate for explaining the role of social context in shaping childhood culture, both in terms of the impact of parental class, gender, ethnicity and, in particular, peer group relationships (Berry & Asamen, 1993; Adler & Adler, 1998). Qvortrup et al (1994) categorize studies of childhood into four broad thrusts. The first is the normative socialization and developmental studies of children as 'incomplete adults', discussed above. Two others, the relations between the generations and relations between peers within children's culture, require later in-depth discussion. The fourth, institutional arrangements related to children, is best discussed at this point because such 'arrangements' relate to the perceived problems presented by the 'incompleteness' of 'childhood'.

It has been noted that the modern understandings of 'child' are largely the result of state policies that make 'childhood' arguably the most intensively governed sector of personal existence (Cote et al, 1996: xvi). Professional discourses define childhood as the incomplete 'other' to the completeness and autonomy of 'adulthood', and thus the vulnerable state of childhood requires careful and constant supervision and surveillance because they are both a burden and a precious resource. Like the adult, the child is both 'individuated' and 'individualized' within the modern state with paradoxical consequences of *both* increased institutionalisation and control *and* diversity of lifestyles and individual choice (Frones, 1994: 164). The state regulates, sets norms and funds a range of functions that shape 'habitus' (the material—and domestic—structures of family life). The power of the western ideology of 'individualism' has seen adult human rights extended to children and influences the discourses surrounding state protection and provision, ensuring the freedom to choose and access to the privileges of citizenship within various codified quasi-judicial international documents, like the United Nations Charter of Children's Rights. It is brokered by modern states and non-governmental organizations to define the dimensions to children's culture everywhere (Carlsson, 1999). This is a two-edged sword. In the modern state, children are regulated by categories of age, gender, ethnicity and nationality, but the western ideals of 'rights' also enshrine definitions of equality and freedom of speech defined by the west.

## **Divisions, dimensions and boundaries in childhood**

Archard (1993: 24) suggests a schema that enables one to discuss childhood in terms of 'divisions', 'dimensions' and 'boundaries'. Even though his work does not pay attention to the media, his schema can be usefully applied to television provision for children in New Zealand.

Age 'divisions' within western childhood, and thus media childhood, adopt the broad outlines of Piaget's schema for social development. The 5–7-year-old threshold typically marks the acquisition of qualitatively higher cognitive competence, namely 'concrete sequential'. The other end of childhood's 'middle age' is around 12 years of age, where Pecora summarizes that 'problems, concerning cognition, socialization and behaviour emerge as the organizing principles' in social science (1995: 358). The obligations of western states to provide for children's development are drawn from such a step-wise model of developmental progression. Hypothetico-deductive social science research on the television-viewing child has designed sophisticated, objective measurements to reach empirical answers to a range of developmental questions and it is fair to say that this overarching postivist discourse dominates official constructs of the western media child and judgements about appropriate content (Cupit, 1987; Luke, 1991; Signorielli, 1991; Pecora, 1995, 1999; Roedder John, 1999).

New Zealand draws heavily on social science research, in the absence of local research.<sup>4</sup> Regulatory bodies like the Broadcasting Standards Authority, self-regulatory bodies like the Advertising Standards Authority and the Commercial Association of Broadcasters, and funding bodies like New Zealand On Air, look to child psychology for scientific guidance for codes, and appropriate content for different age groups. This makes imported evidence from child psychology extremely powerful in decision making over broadcasting codes, scheduling regulations, programme content and funding decisions for New Zealand children (Hardie, 1990; Lealand et al 1991; Tetley, 1997). The little original research that exists is largely modelled on overseas research, for example the Mental Health Foundation's adoption of the USA-based NCVTV violence count coding systems (see also McNair, 1992; Hoek et al, 1993). Tetley (1997) summarizes influential social science research for the national children's programme funder, NZ On Air, under several headings: Perception of Content, Outcomes of Television Viewing (a. negative,

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ritchie et al, 1990.

b. positive), and Family/other Moderators of impact. Age specificity appears as the first of seven criteria to be met for funding programmes.<sup>5</sup>

New Zealand marketers also draw extensively on overseas social science research for their understandings of child consumers (Lealand et al, 2000). Cook notes that in marketing:

...there has been the transformation of the early life course from being only grossly differentiated to finely differentiated. As childhood increasingly came under the gaze of developmental psychology...the age-stage paradigm was quickly adopted by the toy industry (and to a different extent, the clothing industry) as a template upon which new symbolic and economic exchange value could be realized. With each movement from one defined 'stage' to another, new meanings, and new products arose to mark that transition- reifying them to a large extent. (Cook, 2000: 112).

Recent work investigates how modernist institutions have regulated girls and boys separately within welfare provisions, educational opportunities, curriculum, social policy and, more recently, market research.

Gender structures childhood in fundamental ways within institutions of home and school. Indeed, it is argued that gender structures childhood experiences as profoundly as age (Nava, 1992; Burman, 1995; McNamee, 2000). Gender has been used as a form of market differentiation since the rise of department stores during the 1920s and 1930s, when the notion of the 'gendered child' and its power over 'mother's purse' began to be viewed as a valuable (even though toys have always reflected gender roles). Early department stores even recognized the value of connecting gender with aspirant ideals. Each stage of 'gendered childhood' provided new meanings, and new products to mark the transition—thus reifying age stages of 'gendered childhood' (Seiter, 1993). The 1930s–1950s saw an expansion of age-size ranges to include toddlers, children, girls, teens and preteens, thereby creating the opportunity for exchange value in distinctions previously ignored or thought to be trivial (Cook, 2000: 110). Even then, gendered aspiration to older status were connected:

...having observed 'mature' 12 year old girls spending time looking at and purchasing the clothes of the older girls, clothing merchants purposely made access easy between junior sizes and those in the preteen range, while physically and iconographically distinguishing them. (Cook, 2000: 113).

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<sup>5</sup> New Zealand broadcasters group children into three bands: 5–8 year olds, 9–12 year olds and 5–12 year olds (TV3 & TVNZ: 1995). Children's consumer groups are subdivided into 0–2 year olds (toddlers), 3–5 year olds (preschoolers), 5–7 year olds (kids), 8–12 year olds (tweens), and 13 years and above (teens) (McGilvray, 2000).



This refinement of market niches has particular implications for this case study. Details of recent proprietary market research on the child consumer are hard to obtain, although marketing texts assist in understanding how both developmental and gender divisions have been applied in practice (Schneider, 1987; McNeal, 1987; Del Vecchio, 1997; *Capturing Kids*, 1998, 1999).

Archard (1993: 25) identifies juridical, epistemological and political vantage points from which differences between children and adults can be described. The dimensions of children's culture, or how they are defined by 'immaturity', 'lack of reason and knowledge' differ. For example, United Nations documents define childhood as being under the age of 18, as do the codes in Sweden and Britain. In New Zealand, people meter ratings define the child as 5–15 years of age, and the Broadcasting Codes of Practice and the Code for Advertising to children define 'child' as being under 13 years of age. Defining when childhood ends, and 'adolescence', 'youth' and 'teenagehood' begin is difficult and a range of quite arbitrary decisions are made by stakeholders—decisions that may relate to judgements about audience power, media influence and commodified consumption. 'Depending upon which variables are chosen, the categories of 'children' and 'youth' are conceptualised in different ways' (Amit-Talai et al, 1995:35).

It is significant that, in practice, many commercial programmers, advertisers and programme makers act in ways that collapse the categories of 'adult', 'youth' and 'childhood' for reasons of efficiency, but are justified in cultural terms (Peretti, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Creative writers address audiences in which more knowing, media literate children enjoy intertextuality that draws on adult programming (Davies et al, 2000; Owen, 2000). Some programmes invert the dimensions of adult/child with constructs of children as 'knowing' and adults (in particular fathers) as 'infantile' (Calcutt, 1998). Others define childhood as a dimension of culture that is revolutionizing adult culture (Rushkoff, 1994, 1996, 1997). Technically, many creative agents (including children's producers and advertisers) may be required to adhere to modernist dimensions of childhood laid down in the codes, but increasingly address children as subversive cultural agents.

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<sup>6</sup> Even so, they still call on arguments, based on divisions, to suggest that children 'tune out' of inappropriate material because they are developmentally unable to comprehend its adult meaning.

Archard puts forward boundaries as a final useful way of analysing constructions of childhood. The protective boundary of ‘watershed’, a time agreed upon as when children’s viewing ends and adult viewing begins, is one such instance. This differs between different regulatory regimes, and evidence everywhere indicates that children disregard such boundaries in their viewing, or even use such notifications of boundary to guide their viewing.<sup>7</sup> Preserving the boundary between commercial and non-commercial children’s media is important for many parents and this is reflected in the continuing provision of non-commercial television in many countries. This thesis explores how this boundary has become highly porous, and its implications for the ideal of public service provision. National regulations are another set of boundaries, established to guard the boundaries of culture and identity. During the last two decades of cultural diaspora and falling trade barriers, debates surrounding the role of the state in preserving boundaries around the integrity of national childhoods (and thus ‘authentic cultures’) have become fraught (Bell, 1995; Home, 1998). The debate about preserving forms of ‘authentic’ local cultures for children through funding local television is central to this case study.

It is important to note that adult discourses about divisions, dimensions and boundaries of childhood are not consistent or coherent. Institutions such as families, schools and national television can be contradictory in their arrangements and requirements of children. It can be argued that, whilst children are exhorted and enticed to ‘grow up’, they are also ‘kept in their place’ and denied access to material that they may desire, on the grounds of ‘immaturity’ (Buckingham, 2000a: 7). In many cases children do not necessarily comply with the age divisions, dimensions or boundaries of childhood as imposed by their parents or the state. When asked, children in England, Australia, and the USA *say* that they most often opt for the pleasurable frisson of adult programmes over developmentally sound programming, and are far more sophisticated about media messages than some parents and politicians argue (Buckingham, 1996; Cupitt, 1996; Sheldon et al, 1996; Seiter, 1998).<sup>8</sup> Children in most western countries demonstrate a

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<sup>7</sup> In Britain this boundary is set at 9.00 pm, and in New Zealand at 8.30 pm. The watershed is criticized variously as being too early, too late, and, equally, irrelevant, given the huge numbers of children who view past watershed either with their families or in wired bedrooms. In Canada and the USA provision has been made for parental patrolling of the boundaries of childhood viewing through the use of blocking devices like the V-chip.

<sup>8</sup> Although, intriguingly, older children continue to espouse protection for those younger than themselves.

preference for hit adult programmes like **The Simpsons, Friends, Seinfeld, and South Park**.<sup>9</sup> At the same time there is a boom in the production of specialized children's programmes that draw children to their own zones of viewing away from adults, to what Kline calls audio-visual ghettos (1995b: 114). Meanwhile, the growth of interactive media and multi-media are making the contours of broadcast media less important as definers of culture for children as the dividing lines between media and non-media products are becoming more and more permeable within overarching global brands (Hengst, 1997; Kincheloe, 1997, McLaren, 1997).

### **Archaeological echoes**

Before we move on to theoretical and empirical literature that proposes a so-called 'new' construct of an 'agentive' or 'active media child' it is critical to make a short historical detour. The dominant narrative of 'progressive science' has ignored recurring ontological patterns in parenting and media research. The dominant and teleological narrative of progress can best be critiqued through historical analysis which demonstrates how the discourse of 'progress' effectively suppresses older knowledge and insights, thus obscuring the genealogy of many, so-called *new* theoretical and methodological tools re-emerging in research into the television-viewing child.

Initially, in contrast to such 'disreputable' popular media like comics or film, television was welcomed into the home as a tool of general education that could assist busy mothers, and their children, assimilating into post-war American suburbs. Indeed, broadcasters marketed television to suburban middle-class parents on the basis of pro-social children's programming (Spigel, 1990, 1992; Tichi, 1991; Seiter, 1993). As saturation point was reached in sales of television sets to the American suburbs, commercial and production attention swung away from children's programming to more lucrative lures of adult programming.

These new programming strategies, designed to target adult household shoppers with sitcoms, soaps, action drama and westerns, were also hugely popular with children. This popularity alarmed large numbers of parents and teachers. The American tradition of research on the child and television developed as a response to anxiety about the medium

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<sup>9</sup> For a pessimistic view of this phenomena see Kellner (1997), and for a celebration of this style of scriptwriting see Owen, 2000.

and its content rather than the need to ask questions about the relationship between the content of television and drivers within the political economy of television in America.<sup>10</sup>

The monoculture of effects research that emerged in the USA is best understood within the historical context of recurring cycles of parental anxiety over new forms of mass entertainment. A survey of literature makes it apparent that there has been a recurring pattern of anxiety over the introduction of new audio-visual technology. Each new medium, it appears, has its turn in the research limelight.

Wartella and Reeves' (1985) review of trends in child-related media research concludes that, since the days of early film, adult anxieties have been remarkably similar. New technology, developed by enterprising capitalists, attracts children beyond 'the pale' of middle-class control. Each new innovation appears to trigger similar responses. Researchers have long directed their inquiries to questions posed by worried parents because it is to such questions that politicians tend to grant money. This review of the Payne Fund's 12 volumes of research studies by psychologists, sociologists and educators on film, radio and other media, published in 1933, is interesting in light of this. Questions as diverse as radio and film's impact on sleep patterns, attitudes to foreign cultures, school achievement and delinquent behaviour, were all considered. The guarded conclusion, from vast research endeavour, is that that the same film may affect children differently, and that contributing factors include the child's age, sex, pre-dispositions, perceptions, social environment, past experiences, and parental influences. Critically, this finding is only marginally different from conclusions drawn four decades later, again after surveying a vast range of sponsored research, by the United States' Surgeon General's report on Television Violence (1972).

Research in the age of radio and film provides a complex and interesting view of the child's use of the media. Wartella and Reeves describe the startlingly eclectic nature of the 1933 research endeavours. Blumer's symbolic interactionist work, for example,

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<sup>10</sup> The Parsonian climate of public culture and research in post-war USA saw the growth of an industry in hypothetico-deductive research on the child and television that was designed to find answers to the anxieties expressed by caregivers. Political sponsorship of social science research peaked during the 1960s and 1970s. As Cox puts it, 'Science has given the west a perception of a child as a problem which science can solve, especially when science is helped by a politics of social reform, which clearly identifies heroes and villains.' (1996: 187).]

embraced hybrid methodologies, combining qualitative and the complementary use of statistics. This included work on parental mediation (1949) found that such mediation of comic reading (like television) was advocated by almost all mothers, yet few actually prohibited their children's enthusiastic consumption of lurid comics. Their greatest concerns were reserved, unequivocally, for the pernicious effects on 'other' (lower-class, less supervised and therefore vulnerable) children. This foreshadows the well-established 'third person effect' (Cupitt, 1996; Buckingham, 1996).

Wartella et al conclude

We emerge with a picture of children's use of contemporary media and a focus on children's knowledge of the world, their attitudes and values and their own moral conduct (1985: 122).

We also gain a picture of anxious parents worrying about the impact of the media on their children's behaviour and perceptions. There has been a recurring landscape of parental anxiety and panic, research initiatives and regulatory responses in a range of countries (Cunningham, 1992; Buckingham, 1996; Barker, 1997). Media panics that have focused anything from popular music to cartoons and wrestling, have recurred in New Zealand (Shuker et al, 1990).

There is, however, a widely held view that television is central to shaping contemporary children's culture and that parents are less able to control it than any previous medium. Walkerdine (1993) and Seiter (1998) note class bias in verbalising concerns over the media. Fear and anxiety about television are amplified in policy debates by what Seiter calls the 'cultural capital' for middle-class parents in being 'anti-television':

...beliefs about media effects are implicated in fears about the future, the degree and nature of social aspiration, the moral judgements of popular media, and consumer culture... a studied conspicuous ignorance about television is a mark of distinction, and like all distinctions it is valued because it is so difficult to maintain. (Seiter, 1998: 4).

Walkerdine observes that British middle-class families are more talkative about the media than working-class families, where practices of 'talking things out' and therapeutic conversations are less common. This class bias against commercial television is, arguably, also the case in New Zealand, where pressure groups are drawn overwhelmingly from educated professional classes.

The previous section has outlined the well-researched, repeating pattern of understandable, but relatively ill-informed, parental 'commonsense' panics over the uncontrollable power of electronic media in children's lives. It is important now to

consider popular books that stoke panic about the 'death of childhood', and television's role in destroying it.

### **Popular writing on the media child**

Cox, in his history of the adult/child relationship, sums up populist texts on television effects when he says that 'In the world of social criticism the impetus to theatricality is strong'. This theatricality is nowhere better demonstrated, he suggests, than in recent texts which:

...shorn of caveats, parentheses and abstractions present dramatic narratives about the pernicious corrupting influence of television over modern parenting and childhood. These authors take on a task of calling parents to political action (1996: 169).

Many of these key texts share the conservative's wish to hark back to an essentialised and romanticised childhood before commercial television, when the civilizing efforts of parents and schools were not undermined by the alluring cultural promiscuity of popular culture.

Eklind (1981) condemned television because it forces children to grow up too fast by exposing them to content that they are not ready to cope with. Winn and Postman both expand this anti-television stance into a call to parents to ban television for their children, and political action to ensure other parents follow suit. These texts provide inspiration for recurring 'switch-off' campaigns in the west, including, in the early 1990s, New Zealand (Clarkson, 1992).

Winn's (1984, 1985) accusation that 'the Box' has drug-like qualities that corrupt the purity of childhood continues to have leverage in popular public debate (Mittell, 2000). She argues that, regardless of content, the medium destroys a child's ability to concentrate, and any time spent watching has the effect of displacing time for imparting values of the home and school. In her view, there is no such thing as good television for children. It is nothing less than a Pied Piper stealing away a generation of children from their parents.<sup>11</sup> Postman (1983) argues a more persuasive case for alarm over television as the 'total disclosure medium':

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<sup>11</sup> See Ross (1999) for an illustration of how these ideas continue to have persuasive power in New Zealand.

The new media environment that is emerging provides everyone, simultaneously, with the same information...electronic media finds it impossible to withhold any secrets. Without secrets, of course, there can be no such thing as childhood. (Postman, 1983: 80).

This fear continues to resonate in popular writing in New Zealand. Postman also asserts that print encourages a linear, rational exposition of ideas, which is not possible with television's scattered deluge. He goes so far as to mount a critique of the pro-social, cognitively researched **Sesame Street**, on the grounds that it echoes short, sharp advertising formats, and provides no space for literate concentrated thought (Postman, 1987).

Meyrowitz (1984, 1985) presents a considered discussion of television's role in changing social relationships. He argues that the shared experience of television not only facilitated the integration of females into male-dominated public life by providing them with insights into its workings, but it has also integrated adults and children into one, popular, culture. As a consequence, differences in dress, languages and vocabularies for different genders and ages are disappearing. As children speak and behave more like adults, so too, 'many adults dress like 'big children': in jeans, Mickey-Mouse or Superman T-shirts, and sneakers (1985: 227). This idea has resonance in recent popular and marketing literature.

In the United Kingdom the resistance to television has related to the cultural affiliations of content, rather than to the medium itself. Post-war literary scholars like Leavis did not so much attack the medium as the popular American form and content of television. Leavis fought for the preservation of literary aesthetic judgement for the content of broadcasting in order to provide cultural uplift for the working classes. This dismissal of popular culture (usually American) as low quality continues to pervade current judgements over 'worthwhile' children's activities, objectives for media education and, critically for this project, definitions of 'quality' children's television. Hoggart, founding member of the left-wing-inspired cultural studies movement, also railed against the corrupting influence of American popular culture. His concern was with authentic British working-class culture and, in 'The Uses of Literacy' (1958), he argued for the preservation of some utopian form of authentic British working-class culture as a source of cultural pride and creativity (see also Oswell, 1999).

## **The active media child**

Jenks et al (1996) identifies a split in social studies of 'children' which distinguishes between 'social structural', and 'socially constructed' research on childhood. So far only 'social structural' research into 'childhood' has been discussed. Now attention turns to an important body of research that explores how children inhabit their worlds of meaning, created by themselves and through interaction with adults. It suggests that 'children's intimate worlds of meaning may be structured in ways that are unfamiliar to adults' (Jenks, 1996: 210).

Early cultural studies scholars like Hoggart, Williams and Hebdige, whilst interested in audience agency within a range of subcultures, including working-class youth, said nothing about children, possibly because, viewed through a marxist lens, children lacked personal agency. Children's audience agency is first explored in Hodge and Tripp's study of children's pleasure in a 'trashy' cartoon **Fangface**. For them, Piaget offered the schema of development for a range of creative opportunities for children's television producers. Possibilities for age-specific content offered 'a welcome breath of sanity in a field whose narrow concern with the possible pathological effects of television on children was in itself in danger of becoming pathological.' (Hodge et al, 1986: 8). Whilst agreeing with the social sciences that child viewers are quite different from adults in important ways, they critically emphasize that, in other ways, adults and children are similar and they call for 'a principled, systematic way of explaining the differences and similarities and their consequences.' Hodge and Tripp's methodology was exemplary, paying careful attention to children's language and body language in group-interviews, thus demonstrating how power differentials occur between children and adult interviewers, as well as between children. They noted, for example, that adults silenced children by non-verbal judgements, boys frequently silenced girls, and peer-group leaders influenced the views of their peers. These insights into the power dynamics of children's focus groups become important for analysis of the role of focus group evidence in the later case study.

Hodge and Tripp's study concludes that the provision of child-centred relevant complexity is important, and that children's pleasure in a range of popular culture should not be an excuse for not caring about complexity in children's production. 'Media professionals should not underrate children's ability to handle great complexity, nor should they under-provide for that need of children for relevant complexity.' (1986:14). Hodge and Tripp stop short of later semiotic celebrations of children's textual agency



that build on their insights into children's active pleasure in popular culture: for example, **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** (Kinder, 1991), **My Little Pony** (Seiter, 1995) and **The Little Mermaid** (Richards, 1995). Such textual analyses offer important correctives to overwhelming anxieties about children's consumer culture. They assert that children are not as gullible as they have been viewed by social science research and appreciate that children can enjoy the hedonism of consumerism, and that consumer culture plays a pleasurable subversive and sociable part of children's culture. Seiter and Richards, for example, observing their own children's interactions with so-called stereotyped gendered cartoons like **My Little Pony** and **The Little Mermaid**, suggest that such texts provide spaces for girls, much as soaps do for their grown-up mothers, in a world where 'white boys rule'. Popular children's television provides children with membership in a

...shared repository of images, characters, plots and themes; it provides the basis for small talk and play and it does this on a national, even global, scale. (Seiter, 1993: 7).

Seiter argues that both contemporary constructs of childhood and parenting are embedded in consumption. She adapts Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to American children's media culture in order to demonstrate that adults (and pressure groups like Action for Children's Television) are misguided in their aspiration to impose their bourgeois (yet equally consumerist) norms on children's culture (1993: 42). She demonstrates the hypocrisy in creating a distinction between middle-class tastes (for example for **Pooh Bear** and **Beatrix Potter**) whilst demonizing popular consumer culture (like **My Little Pony** and **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles**). Middle-class hierarchies of taste simply disguise the commodification of all cultural pleasure. Her central thesis argues that children use their media culture in ways that can be subversive to the desires of parents, but these uses might, by extension, be equally subversive to the inscribed meanings of 'child-centred' production teams. Seiter notes how daughters subvert feminist mothers' choices of non-sexist cultural capital by choosing 'Barbie' and pink socks. Children appear to use television programmes and popular culture as forms of peer-group cultural capital. This represents an act of separating from, and subverting, perceived parental authority.

Kinder adapts Althusser and Lacan to posit that children's commercial television provides a pleasurable and interactive entry into narratives designed to grow into ever more complex cultural schemata every time the child consumes television. The power of Kinder's analysis lies in her adaptation of Fiske's model of intertextuality to the textual structures of Saturday morning children's television which sees both primary and

secondary texts conflating into new global intertextual 'supersystems' of consumerism. She describes 'supersystems' of cartoons, films, spin-off toys with built-in collectability, as an evolving form of seamless communication with child consumers. Kinder (1991), like Seiter, notes that children's media texts often echo adult genres and narratives in their discourses of oppression based on class, gender, race and ethnicity but, like Seiter, she argues that children actively use these so called 'trashy' texts in unexpected ways that undermine critiques of middle-class parents. She argues that, during the 1980s, Saturday morning television, and its spin-off merchandising, produced a classless peer-group play environment in which cheap animation collectables enabled working-class children to act out consumer fantasies alongside middle-class children. She notes that middle-class children, in fact, rebelled against their parent's preferences for pedagogically constructive, and expensive, toys in preference for the latest peer-group merchandising hit.

Both Kinder and Seiter provide important corrective studies, but fight old battles against the crude 'effects' tradition, on behalf of children. Their binary position, which subscribes to an overly romantic notion of semiotic freedom for children, does not heed Hodge and Tripp's warning about laissez-faire provision. Meanwhile, their subjective adult judgements about children's culture remain speculative because they are not contextualized by careful ethnographic exploration (Davies et al, 2000).

A recent rich line of research uses frames from anthropology to explore how commodities are used as cultural signs, and why this is important for children's peer culture. Anthropologists have long accepted that so-called 'cultural luxuries' can be viewed as social necessities once they are understood within consumption patterns that build social cohesion, networking, and belonging, for a social group. If one has to choose what self to be, then consumption becomes part of the act of constituting oneself 'as a self that chooses' (Slater, 1997b: 91).

Historical work on childhood provides evidence that children in the past were adept in the art of using a range of ephemeral (even forbidden) products as markers of peer group status and belonging. The key studies of Opie et al (1985) into playground games and argot, illustrate how 'scraps of lore' that children learn from each other become valued symbolic capital and boundary markers from the adult world (Holland, 1992: 13). For example, dirt, as opposed to the virtue of parental cleanliness, has long been an important childhood cultural differential for children (see, for example, its role in initiations and

club-rules). In turn, James (1998) investigates children's passion for lurid boiled sweets and the way in which this social world of children is separate but nevertheless dependent on the world of adults. Here the child

...establishes an alternative system of meanings which adults cannot perceive. It is this which allows the culture of childhood to flourish largely unnoticed by adults and, at the same time, to exist largely beyond their control. (James, 1998: 404).

Formanek-Brunell (1998) describe how girls during the 1880s subverting the preferred meanings of dolls by performing elaborate doll funerals, and on other occasions doll hangings, thereby subverting intended forms of passive 'doll-play'. Such evidence of recurring patterns in children's play alert researchers to how often it is the objectives, and consequent objects for research, that have changed, not 'the child'.

Recent ethnographic studies are beginning to make up for the lack of attention to childhood culture. A range of recent research with children and pre-adolescents offers overwhelming evidence that children are highly discriminating about content on behalf of themselves and others, and are able to discuss genres and modal differences.<sup>12</sup> Children often use media content to mark out cultural territory and calibrate their maturity through deliberate choice of gross bad taste and horror (Sheldon et al, 1996; Kelley et al, 1999; Davies et al, 2000). Proclaiming one's own tastes and thus defining oneself as more or less 'mature', can thus be constructed as a form of 'identity work', especially within contexts in which being a 'child' is to be seen as vulnerable and powerless.

In New Zealand, audience research work has been conducted for producers on the responses of early childhood and primary-aged audiences to individual, child-targeted programmes (Murray, 1993; Lealand, 1995a, 1997; Lealand et al, 1991) and prime time programmes (Lealand et al, 1995; Murray, 1997). Instrumental focus group research, combined with quantitative analysis, has been commissioned for decision making by the Broadcasting Standards Authority and NZ On Air from MRL Research (1992), Research

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<sup>12</sup> For example only: Palmer, 1986a, 1989b; McRobbie, 1991; Walkerdine, 1998; Buckingham, and his British team's extensive fieldwork, 1993, 1996, 1997, 2000a; Davies, 1989b, 1995, 1997; Howard, 1998; Bloustein, 1998; Lemish, 2000; Pecora, 1999. Enlightened regulators increasingly commission such work on children's reception. For example the Australian Broadcasting Authority has commissioned qualitative studies of primary-aged children that demonstrate that children are sophisticated media users and regularly 'age-up' in their media choices (Sheldon et al, 1996; Cupitt et al, 1996).

International (1997) and Colmar Brunton (2000). Market researchers also use qualitative audience research to improve their marketing 'conversations' with media savvy and active children in order to sell. (*Capturing Kids*, 1998, 1999; *Marketing to children and teens*, 2000). 'Knowing' the child audience clearly remains a discursive construction with ideological dimensions. It is through such research that meanings of childhood are constructed and defined (Davies et al, 2000: 11).

Hengst (1997) researches branded media scripts used and adapted in pre-adolescent boys' urban street games. Research into children's peer street cultures demonstrates the central role of media in projects of identity. Studies of playground fashions, like those around Tamagotchi (Bloch et al, 1999), 'pop' music (Lemish, 2000), as well as reversioned games with cards (as with Pokemon), illustrate how important the media are for constituting cultural capital within a peer group. A body of work now agrees that the primary-school-age cohort is 'aspirational', and aspires to the tastes of the cohort a year or two older; as an early study of children's relationships with popular music described it, music permits children to 'eavesdrop' on adolescence (Cristensen et al, 1986).

Recent studies undermine the early developmental taxonomy of childhood in three important ways. Firstly, they indicate the difficulty of judging when childhood ends and 'youth culture' begins. Secondly, they illustrate how often childhood stages are broached. Thirdly, developmental stages appear to be defined by boys' behaviour. Experiment, naughtiness and physical acting out, whilst often viewed as traits to be expected from young males, are viewed as undesirable, and even dangerous, traits in girls, compared to the passivity of 'nice girlhood'. A range of ethnographic research demonstrates that, from a very early age, gender shapes children's peer culture and the cultural resources (including media) that exist, and/or are drawn on for use in the task of identity formation. In one disturbing study in the American school environment, males express repulsion at any thought of being transformed into a girl, whereas girls don't mind the idea of being transformed into boys (Sadker & Sadker (1994) quoted in Pecora , 1999: 223). This gendered view of cultural capital is echoed in terms of the power of gender to shape media provision for boys and girls where it has long been a commonsense view of the television industry that boys reject girls' culture (Wartella, 1998). Early evidence also suggests a trend emerging in cross-national ethnographic work where gender appears to be losing its salience, not because of gender equality in terms of cultural environments, but because girls are increasingly moving into boys' spaces, but not the other way around. The 'commonsense' notion of commissioners,

increasingly supported by ethnographic evidence, that boys want only male culture whereas girls are adaptable, is explored within the gender politics of the production case study,

There has been extensive research on youth subcultures, in contrast to research into children's culture, but likewise feminists argue that 'youth culture' too has been defined through male eyes. (McRobbie, 1991; Nava et al, 1997; Walkerdine 1998). There is now an emerging body of research on the use of television programming, advertising, collectable dolls, magazines, girls' novels and 'bubble-gum' music in girls' adolescent culture, and increasingly within pre-adolescent culture. (Mazzarella et al, 2000). Walkerdine, for example, discusses girls' acting-out of erotic music play as a liberating play of 'fantasizing otherness,' which enables them to break free from the requirements of being 'nice'. This playful self-transformation has, she suggests, always been undertaken by working-class girls (Cinderella, rags to riches), but threatens rational middle-class aspirations for orderly girls (Walkerdine, 1998: 263). This research demonstrates how the media provides scripts for defining personal, gender and peer group 'identity'. Recent attention has been given to girls' 'body projects' which are part of the job of creating an 'improved self' and are accomplished through cycles of consumption (Bentley, 2000: 216). Burman (1995: 58) observes that many (implicitly unenlightened) parents aid and abet their daughters' 'rights' to be fashionable by becoming consumers on their behalf, because they appreciate their 'need' to be accepted by their peers. These paradoxical trends of hyper-female play fantasies based on music stars, and girls' new exploration of 'male' preserves of media preferences, music performance, computers and street sports are explored later in the case study.

Ethnographic research appeals because it appears to facilitate children's agency in media choices and credits children with ingenuity and intelligence. In this it produces a much-needed corrective to the worst excesses of the media-effects tradition by providing children with a voice. But such studies are localized, and thus limited, in their findings, and it is important to avoid the trap of a new reified romanticism about 'active media savvy children'. Children (like adults) are both 'media savvy' and 'media stupid' and it is wrong to generalize to a new homogeneous and undifferentiated form of 'childhood'. It is important to continue to look at specific children in specific social environments in order not to confuse the power over text with power over the production agenda of corporate agenda setters. (Philp, 2000: 18). Buckingham, for example, warns that celebration of the variety of children's responses to television content can lead to a

superficial populism and/or dangerous political apathy, and an exaggeration of the degree of power or freedom children possess. He agrees with Hodge and Tripp that one can acknowledge what children bring to television texts, but one also needs to account for what they find there to choose from. (Buckingham, 1993: 131). Indeed, recent constructs of the media savvy and active media child have provided powerful rationales for continued deregulation of the media industry in the hands of commercial stakeholders. (Lealand et al, 2000). The simplistic binary of the 'innocent vulnerable child' and the undifferentiated image of the 'liberated child' increasingly disable constructive political debate. (Zanker, 1995).<sup>13</sup>

But such studies challenge essentialist and unreflexive claims by parents, policy makers and producers that they are 'on the side of children.' It appears that there is an insoluble gap between adults' and children's judgements of cultural worth and it can be argued that in these terms ethnographic research provides children with a voice for the first time. Such studies challenge the simple binary of the public = good, commodified = bad policy divide by demonstrating that children use a range of cultural ideas, products and brands within peer groups for their own ends, sometimes in highly assertive and subversive ways. This makes any task of advocating for the rights of children (over 5 years of age) to age-targeted and culturally appropriate television more problematic.

Is the March Hare in *Alice in Wonderland* right when he says 'I like what I get is the same thing as I get what I like' when it comes to children's media provision? (Quoted in Goonesekera et al, 2000:1) If so, what does this say about what children say they want in commercial environments where choice is defined only by the market? There is evidence from programmers that children (boys or girls) do not want what is designed for them by adults as 'developmentally appropriate'. Whose media rights win in media provision if qualitative research finds that children like to watch material that their parents dislike or disapprove of? But how much is this to do with tools of measurement for audience satisfaction? What do a range of children mean by 'choice', 'liking', and 'high quality'? (Valkenburg et al, 1999). What is the significance of British evidence suggesting that

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<sup>13</sup> The political dangers of binary debate over media provision have been illustrated in New Zealand. A journalist, interviewing Gillard on a trip to New Zealand, pitted Gillard's views on the active child audience against lobbyists in the Children's Television Foundation, who were advocating for better provision for children in the deregulated environment of New Zealand. See B. Riley (1990) 'New View' in the *New Zealand Listener*, 1 October, 77.]

children, given time, may well prefer the complex dramas that are currently failing in the economic determinism of ratings judgements? (Davies, M.M., 2000). Given that ‘double access intellectuals’ like Kinder and Seiter argue for children’s media agency and their right to pleasure in popular culture and rejection of ‘worthy middle-class culture’, what are the rights of children themselves to be treated as ‘double- access’ intellectuals when it comes to choice?

### **The consuming media child**

As far back as the 1970s, American children’s programmers had clear ‘commonsense’ views of what the child audience wanted. These views shaped American children’s television schedules. Younger children liked comedy, as exemplified by both **Sesame Street** and **Scooby Doo**, and repetition was a key to both educating and entertaining children, as exemplified by Hanna Barbara cartoons. Children want recognizable characters and stories, and these were increasingly provided by highly promoted animation hits and associated merchandise promotions, as Englehardt observed (1986). But key to this case study are the long-held observations that children watch up—preferring programmes for those older than they are—and that there are gender differences in their television preferences (Wartella, 1998: 53). In a textbook for those marketing to children on television, the mantra for commercial children’s television in the USA was described as being:

keep the audience up  
keep the costs down  
keep the regulators out. (Schneider, 1987: 5)

It was also noted that, ‘if in doubt target boys’.

A renewed interest in the child audience grew in the maturing media market of the late 1970s. This was accompanied by new moves to use children ‘as arbiters of their peers consumption’ (Cook, 2000:114) on review boards for television and film ventures, as well as participants in testing groups for new products. Pecora (1998) describes the increasingly elaborate, indeed merging, arrangements between toy manufacturers, licensees, broadcasters and production houses in the late 1970s and 1980s. Cultivation research at the time demonstrated the gender-polarized consequences of this for animations and spin off toys (Berry et al, 1993). New industrial forces were shaping children’s media and play culture (Kline, 1993; Wartella, 1997; Pecora, 1998).

Views on the consuming child are as polarized as views on effects of violence on children. In 1986 Englehardt critiqued the gendered and commodified world of Saturday morning children's television in America as the intrusion of corporate capital into children's culture.<sup>14</sup> Steinberg et al's (1997) critiques of commercial children's culture are inflected with familiar left-wing critique of corporate capital's role in creating a debased children's popular culture. Kline's (1993, 1995a, 1995b) powerful critique of the construction of a consuming childhood by entertainment and marketing strategies points to a qualitative increase in the power of commercial interests to shape children's culture in the west during the 1980s. The consolidation of trans-national toy, media and licensing interests enabled the increasing commodification of all children's cultural space, leading to a subsequent attrition of the child's 'garden of innocence'. He dismisses the post-structuralist celebration of children's agency within consumer culture as dangerous political quietism at best and, at worst, as an apologia for corporate agency. He argues that since the United States broadcasting industry deregulated in the early 1980s there has been an expanding scale of marketing to children that represents a powerful but ambiguous vector in children's lives throughout the world. Indeed, he goes so far as to assert that 'the consumption ethos has become the vortex of children's culture.' (1993: viii).

There is ... an invisible hand in the market, which influences childhood by shaping the things that children use and the media through which they learn about them. (1993: 19).

He argues that the development of global marketing campaigns for children using licensed characters, back-storied television narratives, films, videogames and toys has created a synergy of cultural forces which are seeing corporate interests colonizing children's play and socialization for their own profit.<sup>15</sup> In Kline's work we have swung back to unabashed normative judgement. He calls for politicians, parents and teachers to reconsider the downstream cultural effects of the market on the socialization and play of children. If the media is changing the qualitative experience of childhood then it is urgent

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<sup>14</sup> Although it must be remembered that Disney had introduced the concept of 'total merchandising' in the 1930s with Mickey Mouse and, later, in the 1950s with his constellation of programming, films, theme parks and merchandising. See Anderson, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Whereas Postman feared the merging of adult and children's culture, Kline fears that children are increasingly absent from culture and marginalized in zones of global 'kid-vids' packed with gendered and racist narratives defined by toy manufacturers. Both these viewpoints are proven in Chapter Six to be right *and* wrong in different ways.



that child-centred creative producers, not marketing departments, are the gatekeepers of culture for children. He calls for radical re-regulation of key media industries.

Kline's distaste for commodified children's culture opens him to attack from critics who accuse him of indulging in middle-class cultural nostalgia for a golden past childhood (Sieter, 1993; Buckingham, 2000a). Yet, despite perhaps utopian solutions to current dilemmas facing children's production, Kline's careful marxist-inspired analysis of industrial changes in children's culture provides the influential base for this study of local children's culture.

### **The end of childhood?**

Change, as ever, attracts visionaries, and the recent overwhelming speed of globalization, commodification and convergence has attracted popularisers of new utopian childhoods. Rushkoff (1994, 1996, 1997) posits nothing less than the reversing of roles between adult and child. As adults become increasingly illiterate immigrants into new cultural forms, so too, digitally literate children pioneer those same forms.

Today's screenager—the child born into a culture mediated by the television and computer—is interacting with his world in at least as dramatically altered a fashion from his grandfather as the first sighted creature did from his blind ancestors. (1996: 3).

As a consequence, adults need to learn from children how to speak, what to wear, when to laugh, even how to perceive the action of others. The days of adult gatekeeping are part of an old order of superseded one-way broadcasting media. Like other popularisers before, Rushkoff is short on caveats, parentheses and hard evidence, but he expresses a certain Zeitgeist shared by many creative intermediaries of popular culture as it becomes both less viable to be a 'child' and a life-style choice for adults to be 'child-like' (Calcutt: 1998). As children define themselves through style that is defined in AO movies, adults use children's brand icons on T-shirts and eat children's chips. In this account the very category of 'children's television' becomes a quaint modernist discursive construction that emerged, briefly, as an answer to the twentieth century scarcity of frequency. Now utopian visions of a new level of human evolution within cyberspace are possible, and time, space and even chronological age have ceased to have social relevance.

However, such apocalyptic technological determinism is discredited by intimate studies of media use by children (Sefton-Green, 1998). Media habits continue to vary according

to class, culture and gender, and television still remains an important part of the mix (Lemish, 2000; Lohr et al, 1999; Lealand, 2000d). It is dangerous to generalize across cultures and between studies. Different cultural, economic and political environments shape patterns of media use and children's play environments.

## Summary

Literature on the media child illustrates the lack of consensus over the meaning of television in the lives of children—what it should ideally be, and whether age-specific funding for media production is anything more than a short modernist experiment. The television medium has been damned and praised, and children's television texts examined in many different ways. Cultivation researchers have measured time spent viewing as units of positive and negative impact, post-structuralist scholars have deconstructed texts as complex polysemic semiotic systems and ethnographic research has analysed the meanings of texts in children's play. Different discourses construct 'the child', 'children's culture, and the role of 'the media' in that culture in different ways.

One thing is clear. Each new medium and popular textual innovation has been received with anxiety by caregivers and parents, whilst the same media innovations have opened the adult world further to cohorts of children who have responded with curiosity, excitement and pleasure. Just as recent research indicates that children construct meaning and cultural pleasures from their new access to adult media content, so too, many parents and politicians aspire to protect children from exposure to 'inappropriate' adult media content. Likewise, just as the ongoing politics of providing nationally funded media content for the socialization of the next generation has gained new potency with indigenous revivals, there is growing impotency over containing children's cultural choices, and thus socializing influences, to what is provided by positive regulations for children's content. Thus, television, as it mediates the world for children, has been both praised and demonised.

Recent research into the reception of media by children themselves, both individually and in peer groups, has given voice to their pleasures and anxieties in policy debates for the first time. These viewpoints are co-opted by child advocates, producers, marketers and post-structural scholars, to justify very different positions in the power struggle over the child audience. Children's voiced preference for global popular, aspirant youth and adult culture over indigenous pedagogically appropriate material, presents a crisis of

sorts for current debates over national provision for children. It focuses attention back on what powerful adults working in national policy and media organizations deem to be 'good television for children'. It makes one pay attention to how these powerful individuals come to their understandings of childhood. Poststructuralists champion children's pleasures in consumer culture. Marketers and advertisers construct their market arguments around constructs of canny assertive children. Many parents continue to look to social science to allay their fears over their children's vulnerability, and to the state for firm guidance in codes. Child advocates argue for the extension of citizen rights to children. The winners of these discursive battles define the form and content of children's television productions. Whilst there has been a burgeoning field of intimate studies of children's viewing, talking about media, and use of media in peer group play, there has been little fieldwork completed on the 'supply side' of cultural production for children. This is one such contribution.

### **Research challenges**

What is surprising, given the anxiety over media content for children in the USA during the 1980s and 1990s, is the limited number of scholars who have critically analysed the downstream effects of the deregulated television industry on range and variety of television experiences for children in the USA. It is clear from the literature review that there is a paucity of direct models for this television production case study, although a range of scholars recognize this gap and call for production research in a diversity of geographic production sites.<sup>16</sup> The interconnectedness of global media, toy marketing and children's play has been clearly described. (Kline, 1993; Pecora, 1998). Buckingham et al's (1999) British case study provides, arguably, the only study outside America of the consequences of shifts in children's culture and television during the 1990s. This case study, first devised in 1995, can be said to cover a similar period of change within the New Zealand context. This production case study is intended to be a contribution to the work of mapping a range of local children's media cultures, in this case from the geographic location of a small post-colonial South Pacific nation.

The next chapter sets out the theoretical frames for the television production case study and outlines an epistemological crisis over agency in cultural formation and meaning in

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<sup>16</sup> Wagg, 1992; Kline, 1993; Watt, 1994; Bazalgette et al, 1995; Davies, 1995; Kline, 1993; Pecora, 1998, Buckingham, 1999.

the late twentieth century. As shall be demonstrated, the making of television for children in the west provides a key site in which to explore the implications of recent debates over the constitution of power, knowledge and cultural meaning in the west. The case-study approach to the production of **What Now?** enables detailed analysis of cultural agency, which, in turn, highlights the specificity of forms of global agency within the local text and the ways that local agency, in turn, inflect global flows.

## CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

We are not living in a global village, but in customised cottages globally produced and locally distributed. (Castells, 1996: 341)

We no longer have roots, we have aeriels, ...we no longer have origins, we have terminals' (Wark, 1997: 30)

### Introduction

The literature review in Chapter Two surveyed constructs of childhood and the way in which television is implicated in the emergence of new 'mediated childhoods'. It was confined to a discussion of the reception of television productions by children and summarised work on the 'bottom up' production of meaning by children from their television viewing and how these understandings shape the politics of children's media consumption and institutional arrangements. This chapter shifts attention to frames that explore the 'supply end' of media production, whilst keeping in mind the insights from the earlier discussion of reception, in order to lay out theory frames for the television production case study of **What Now?**. It is important to analyse the culture of production *and* the production of culture in order to track agency in the production case study.

A gap between the data-rich and theory-thin fields of social science and the theory rich- and data-thin fields of cultural/textual studies (Alasuutari, 1995) requires bridging in order to fully analyse the dialectic of material and cultural conditions which shape the production of meaning in children's television programmes. The fields of sociology of media organisation and industrial production, active reception and consumption theory, and post-modernist aesthetics all offer important insights for this study. Processes within the production context are used to analyse how producers, script writers, researchers, local licensing and marketing agents align themselves with local and wider associations of meaning, and the text's style and content provides evidence of local cultural agency and emerging and declining global supersystems.

Geertz (1993: 27) argues that theoretical ideas adopted from related studies can be applied to new interpretive problems. 'Good theory' from related fields enables one to narrow the focus of attention from ever expanding options within a new research context to manageable elements that 'matter' in terms of those frames. Geertz suggests such an eclectic approach provides an apparently messy, but in fact effective, way of approaching the analysis of inevitably partial, fragmentary, and positioned viewpoint and data. For

him, 'good theory' enables useful conclusions to be drawn, no matter that they first appear to be tentative, contradictory and confusing. These 'useful' conclusions, in turn, enable more specific and focused questions to be raised in subsequent research.

Crane (1993) notes that one of the most active fields in the sociology of culture is the 'production of culture perspective', which examines the relationship between the conditions surrounding the production of cultural symbols and the characteristics of the cultural symbols themselves. Gatekeeping studies describe consequences of organizational systems for the fate of creative products (for example, popular songs), where the role of marketing is critical for understanding both production and consumption (Ryan, 1992). Ryan calls for focused and detailed research into the variety of ways producers are constrained by the possibilities available to them within particular institutional sites. Other studies have concentrated on the impact of reward systems, market structures (Winter, 1994), and gatekeeping systems on the careers and activities of Tunstall (1993), for example, surveyed producers to investigate the impact of changing economic and cultural environments on their professional situation. More recently, Neuman (1991), Turow (1997) and McAllister (1998) have usefully concentrated on close analysis of market structures and their impact on the operational and creative options of content providers and the consequent choices for viewers.

Parsons argued that 'sociology' converged into a single theory in order to understand the problematic of modern society by using elements of Pareto, Durkheim and Weber. Now it can be argued, in turn, that cultural studies has grown out of the problem of understanding the intimate experiences of the 'post-industrial' social and the cultural condition. In cultural studies 'the corners of sociology, literary criticism and anthropology have been cut off or melted away' (Alasuutari, 1995: 24) to give space to a new discipline interested in 'the analysis of cultural forms and activities in the context of the relations of power' (Bennett, 1998). Frith (2000) argues that there is a critical need for more television production studies that combine such hybrid research methods, as for example in the ways that sociological perspectives can be strengthened when interwoven with insights from textual analysis and anthropology.

The few existing case studies of television production, like those of Tulloch and Alvorado (1983), Silverstone (1985), Moran (1982) and Buckingham (1987) of science fiction, documentary, police drama and soap respectively, have demonstrated the utility of a cultural studies frame. These studies use interviews with key informants in order to

outline the processes of commissioning, creating and scheduling individual programmes in order to analyze decisions that shape the final text. Studies like these enable specificity and clarity in describing the relationships between institutional interests and imperatives, economics, production practices and consequent media form. However, it is fair to say that the role of television producers, however they might be defined as agents, has been largely neglected in cultural studies over the last decades. Dornfeld observes that:

The profitable orientation toward the study of audiences has left in its wake a shallow pool of research on production processes, and a limiting theorization of producers as the conduits of corporate ideologies. We need to rethink producers as particular types of agents, producing media texts within contexts constrained by both culture, ideology, and economy, but operating within particular social locations and frameworks. (Dornfeld, 1998: 13).

For example, a survey of the present state of television studies dedicates only 10 of 120 pages to the production process, whereas it notes a wealth of audience studies (Frith, 2000: 38 quoting Corner). There are, of course, pragmatic reasons for the apparent neglect of the television production process. Since the invention of the VCR, programmes have been readily available for textual analysis and use in audience reception studies. As a consequence a range of television texts have been accessible for post-graduate research in cultural studies. Access to the production process, by contrast, whether through direct observation, indirect use of interviews and archives, or a combination (as in this case), depends on the cooperation of secretive commercial broadcasters, as well as the producers who receive commissions from them. Frith also notes that it has not been easy to justify eclectic theoretical frameworks for disciplinary reasons in Britain because such work crosses the current demarcation zone between the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Board. However, institutional research distinctions are human constructions and are not intrinsic to the nexus of processes and relations being studied. As Frith points out:

The organizational culture of television, the new networks of trust and knowledge and the shifting criteria of professionalism are equally shaped by economic pressures (the workings of television's quasi-markets for instance) and by ideological pressures, by ethical commitments and aesthetic criteria (Frith, 2000: 49).

Dornfeld's (1998) study of the production of an American Public Broadcasting system documentary, **Childhood**, demonstrates how combining ethnographic participation, observation and interview enables one to map how power is constituted through everyday production processes, and through the negotiated demands of 'expert' and economic stakeholders. Dornfeld's production ethnography is discussed later in detail as offering an exemplary illustration of the benefits of drawing on sociological, anthropological and cultural studies theoretical frames. Critically, his work makes a virtue of crossing back

and forth *between* production and consumption, thus bridging the gap between theories of television production and audience reception and cultural meaning.

## **Theorising cultural production**

First it is critical to understand the importance of television within larger debates over recent formations of culture. Part of the problem facing those who attempt to theorize media cultural production, as Meehan puts it, lies in the fact that:

...television is constituted as a contradiction. It is both an industrial culture, thus lending itself to industrial economic analysis like baked beans, and equally a culture industry necessarily theorized through cultural frames. The term television embraces a range of social practices bounded by material constraints...As part of the base, television is characterized by relations of production that are typical of capitalism...yet equally... television presents selected images, world views, symbols, myths, truth claims, values and visions (Meehan, 1994: 564).

This theoretical dilemma manifests itself clearly in the binaries that recur in debates over cultural value: manufacture/creation, commodity/artefact, ideology/culture, consumption/interpretation, audience/public.

According to Harvey (1996: 223) Marx's self-professed agenda was to get behind the screen of 'the fetishism' of the market in order to tell the full story of social reproduction through commodity production and exchange. However, work premised on the determinism of marxist 'base' and the abstractions of 'ideological superstructure' have become unsatisfactory for explaining the processes of cultural formation because they lack a fine-grained appreciation of the range of decisions that shape cultural output of corporations. Neither do they solve the continuing problem of how to conceptualise 'culture' as more than a 'commodity' in developed societies. This gap is being rectified in studies of consumption (Featherstone, 1991; Bocoock, 1993; Fine et al, 1993; Slater, 1997, Nava et al, 1997). This recent research endeavour is best described not so much as a field but as a 'spaghetti junction of intersecting disciplines, methodologies and politics' (Slater, 1997: 4). Theorising consumption requires both the investigation of macro-frames of corporate capitalism and the micro-sites of 'authorship' and consumption, and thus permits the discussion of cultural meanings attached to products, which enables one to escape the limitations of marxist determinism. But, equally, such work continues to draw on the virtues of marxist analysis, the mapping of unequal flows of capital and power facilitated by global communications oligopolies, whilst articulating this information with anthropological discussions of culture, as well as insights from post-structural scholarship.



Scholars of consumption are interested in the role of the media in promoting consumption in the post-industrial context, and its consequences for cultural expression, social organization and power in the post-industrial landscape of *post-modernity*.<sup>17</sup> It is important to distinguish this *industrial* condition from the metaphors used to describe the *aesthetic* experiences of *post-modernism*, although both concepts are later strategically articulated for use within the case study.

Critical theory has long viewed commercial television as the primary promotion tool in post-industrial capitalism (Schiller, 1992; Mattelart et al, 1984). As Murdock strikingly puts it:

The old imperialism that shaped successive waves of settlement was based on command over territory. The new imperialism aims to annex the imagination. Its subjects are asked to salute brands not flags. It is spearheaded not by nation states but by transnational corporations. The pink splashes that marked the British Empire on the old maps have given way to the golden arches of McDonald's and the blue denim of Levis (Murdock, 1998: 18).

Recent analysis of global corporate strategies demonstrates that national policy boundaries and, by extension, regional and indigenous cultures, are indeed becoming increasingly permeable to global articulations of capital and media, and that media symbols and narrative have become constitutive of a new transnational commercial culture (Schiller, 1992; Mattelart et al, 1984; Herman, 1995; Herman et al, 1997).<sup>18</sup> It has been argued that post-industrial capitalism (which for the purposes of this case study includes post-colonial New Zealand) has facilitated new 'public spheres' within commodified popular culture, providing, for example, global circulation for subversive hybrid music genres like rap which create new transnational communities for oppressed groups. They challenge the modern role of the nation state in cultural identity formation by bringing into being new 'circuits of commodity production and circulation to envision and activate new social relations' (Lipsitz, 1994: 12). But these new 'public spheres' of popular culture also permit the commodified construction of new global communities for children, as for products like **Playstation** and **Pokemon**. These have arguably created spaces for play that are beyond the surveillance of parents or state.

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<sup>17</sup> There is considerable debate as to whether this period is best described as late-modernity or post-modernity. For the purposes of this thesis we use 'post-modernity'.

<sup>18</sup> Even though Massey reminds us that 'culture has always been fluid and permeable and very rarely in history have place and community been conterminous'. (1991: 241).]

## **Broadcasting's role in creating the imagined community of 'the nation'**

A brief detour is necessary to appreciate the key role of broadcasting in constructing the fragile sense of 'New Zealand' nationhood, and its implications for public service provision for children. This forms a backdrop to the qualitative shift in cultural experience over the last two decades, and explains new difficulties in defining provision for 'children' as a 'national cultural minority'.

Radio in New Zealand became instrumental in constructing the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) of the nation out of far-flung British colonies during the late 1920s and 1930s. State radio provided the political information and emotional connection required to build a sense of shared purpose and cultural identity between isolated, insular, immigrant colonial communities. A sense of 'New Zealandness' can be argued to be brought into being by broadcasting. (Day, 1994). But broadcasting content carried euro-centric value judgements about class, gender, race and cultural standards, and early notions of what it meant to be a 'Kiwi' were defined by narrow anglo-celtic, male, foundation myths of heroism, sport and war. Modern national identity, as elsewhere, has often been defined more by what it is *not* as much as what it *is* (Lealand, 1998a).

From the sixties onwards re-emergent and imported cultural pressures began to undermine the emergent unitary ideology of national culture and identity. On the one hand, commercial popular radio culture began to fragment audiences into a range of demographic and psychographic taste-publics. This process accelerated as a result of the decision in the mid-eighties to deregulate the economy and thus New Zealand, the laboratory for the welfare state became, arguably, a laboratory for neo-liberal theorists. On the other hand indigenous, and other marginalised groups —women, homosexuals and Pacific Islanders —began to challenge patriarchal, euro-centric, colonial definitions of national identity.

By 1995 it could be said that in 'all spheres of social coordination, economic, cultural and political, the trajectory of change appears to be away from the nation-state as a salient form of community.' (Bell et al, 1995: 4). One paradoxical exception appears to be national sport, which has been reversioned by commercial television into a commodified version of mythical nationhood, albeit promoting multinational brands. By the 1980s, in post-colonial New Zealand (as elsewhere), the desire for an essentialist national identity was being replaced by a plethora of globally circulated, commodified, diasporic and re-emergent tribal hybrid identities.

However, the discourse of 'nationhood' remains powerful because of its commonsense 'banality in the everyday practices (and rhetoric) of politicians and governments', including the continued, though minimalist, regulation of broadcast television in New Zealand (Bell et al, 1995: 3). There is a powerful residual role for state intervention in defending versions of 'soft progressive nationalism' which acknowledge hybridity and inclusiveness (Bell et al, 1995: 6). The institutional arrangements of Access radio and NZOA arguably exemplify a minimalist version of regulatory provision for 'progressive nationalism' in New Zealand. Thus the 'the national' becomes a form of *strategic* nationalism that encourages hybrid diversity, and 'nationhood' becomes 'a question rather than an answer', in a state of permanent 'becoming'. Strategic nationalism, in the form of state subsidy for local artistic endeavour, is a form of 'R & D' for the culture (Horrocks, 1995: 85), and a cultural balance to market forces.

Post-modern geographers talk about how children negotiate, via media sources, a sense of what they share in common with youth across the globe (Massey, 1998), as well as a particular sense of national 'us' and foreign 'them' (Holloway et al, 2000). Holloway et al build on Said (1978) to describe ways in which New Zealand and British children imagine each other 'in terms of place, people and patterns of daily life'. They also observe that these imagined geographies rest on mediated fictions. In their example, New Zealand children's views of Britain are mediated by mainstream television like **Coronation Street** in the same way that British children's understandings of the antipodes are coloured by shows like **Neighbours**, **Crocodile Dundee** and **Home and Away** (in the absence of New Zealand shows). They argue that these imaginings also exhibit an assumption of cultural similarity—that of relatively affluent white nations.

How does the text of **What Now?** construct both a sense of nation and a national childhood? How does it reflect the indigenous and minority diversity that makes up the post-colonial nation? How does it position the child as part of a majority and as part of a minority? Is it possible anymore to think of children's television as a culturally central shared phenomena, like the old Telethons that presumed the presence of, and were driven by the wish to locate 'the middle ground of New Zealand life'. (Perry, 1994)? How does **What Now?** reflect the new commodified public spaces circulated by global capital, and strategic forms of national cultural intrusion premised on national identity? How does the particularity of the Treaty between indigenous people and the crown shape this strategic nationalism for children in post-colonial New Zealand?

## **Privatization and the 'public sphere'**

There has been wide debate about what now constitutes the 'public sphere' in mediated society (Habermas, 1992,1994; Keane, 1991; Boyd-Barrett, 1995, Curran et al, 1997). Habermas proposed such a cultural space in his studies of post-Enlightenment Europe. His imagined perfect public sphere was a domain where private citizens could rationally debate issues of public concern. Guilds, market places, coffee houses and union halls were envisaged as places where such rational debate of issues of public concern could be mediated justly between private interests in 'civil society', and public power and state. Habermas argues that the media industries of the twentieth century have seen the collapse of this public sphere. Their role in the commercialisation and commodification of public communications has been instrumental in destroying the 'life-world' of rational public debate. The 'culture industries' distort flows of information and debate, which has fostered political and commercial manipulation, and enabled the colonization of the 'life-world' by the economy and the state entailing a displacement of 'communicative' practices by 'strategic practices' which embody purely instrumental (modern) rationality (Fairclough, 1995: 136). One could argue that this is demonstrated in the lopsided debates over local children's television in New Zealand, as modern rationality in the form of ratings and market research replace public service objectives?

Despite its limitations in practice, Habermas' ideal model and critique of state coercion and market logic has been incorporated into the work of a range of critical New Zealand scholars (Atkinson, 1994; Winter, 1994; Cocker, 1996; Hope, 1996; Murdoch, 1998; Farnsworth, 1998). They argue that the privatisation and marketisation of state television sees public democratic spaces increasingly under threat from pressures of commodification. Political power is shifting from citizens to the economic clout of transnational capital arrangements. It is now widely agreed that the New Zealand media system must be analysed as critically balanced between transnational capitalism and state public intervention. This case study illustrates that local national agency in New Zealand children's production has, indeed, become increasingly defined by what is left over as the local margin of manoeuvre within overwhelmingly global flows.

## **Theorizing the global context**

Over the last two decades, communications technologies and transnational corporations have been instrumental in creating integrated global markets which transcended the 'politics of space' and local identity in which nations were once located. Widespread

fears about the homogenisation of culture over the last three decades can be reduced to sets of issues surrounding interlocking drivers: cultural commodification and Americanisation (Appardurai, 1996). These two sets of drivers are closely linked because American media models of marketing, commercial media formats and content, have been exported to most of the world. The natural drive of capital to maximize profits and expand markets, as posited by Marx, has been clearly illustrated in the case of the entertainment industries. Early market advantage provided by American innovation and domination of global markets has been amplified by what Ricardo calls the 'natural economic advantage' of the English language as the *lingua franca* of the global marketplace.

Three key interlinking global industrial and cultural trends have been identified by neo-marxist scholarship: globalisation, commodification and cultural fragmentation. These are discussed in the next section.

Much empirical work has been done on the large picture of the growth of large post-industrial transnational media corporations since the Second World War (Mattelart et al, 1984; Schiller, 1992; Herman & McChesney, 1997). It is generally agreed that corporate desire for production efficiency and market profits has driven a tendency towards high levels of concentration, internationalisation and cross-media ownership between culture industries that, whilst still largely American owned, are characterized by shifts to new 'kereitsu' style alliances with Japanese and European corporations. This has seen the emergence of complex industrial arrangements, product flows and contra-flows, underpinned by American marketing discourses and media formatting. (Cunningham et al, 1996). In this sense global culture is still centred in the Western first world and still largely speaks English.

During the 1990s a pattern of intensifying transnational corporate take-overs, mergers and consolidation has been observed. (Appendix One) As global media companies absorb smaller companies they have become vertically and horizontally integrated to facilitate corporate efficiencies in terms of both production supply and market positioning for distribution. Rupert Murdoch's empire, for example, once an Australian newspaper empire, now embraces production, distribution and creative rights over the range of media platforms. These include American Fox Broadcasting, 20th Century Fox Studios, a global Sky Channel which includes children's pay channels with link to animation (including the top children's show in New Zealand in the late 1990s, The

**Simpsons**), merchandising and print, and audio-visual media investments in New Zealand. Likewise, the transnational global children's pay channel Nickelodeon (which commissions the hit animation **Rugrats**) is owned by Viacom who also owns Blockbuster video, Paramount Pictures, theme parks, Simon and Schuster publishers and MTV. Neo-marxist critics argue that, as global oligopolies articulate with each other in ever more complex arrangements, their domination of audio-visual trade will have critical implications for range and variety of cultural choices and the authority of national democracies.

This tendency towards global corporate control and standardization of a range of consumer products is countered by evidence of a contrary tendency to vertical fragmentation of companies and differentiation of products in the post-industrial marketplace. Cultural producers respond with increasing speed to new market opportunities through just-in-time post-fordist production flexibility and dis-aggregation into separate specialized but functioning interlinking units. In Chapter Seven it will be shown that these paradoxical centrifugal and centripetal forces, on the one hand to post-fordist dis-aggregation and differentiation of markets and on the other to monopoly and global markets, are amply demonstrated in recent shifts within the children's entertainment industries. Economic rationalists argue that the increasing responsiveness within the media marketplace creates a culture of choice; conversely, critics argue that this choice simply absorbs any radical edge (as in music genres and art), thus not creating 'a cosier form of capitalism' (Slater, 1997b).

The fast-food industry illustrates the uneasy tension between consolidation and fragmentation, both at the industrial level of production and, equally, at the level of market strategy. For example, McDonald's standardizes hamburgers to the point that they can be playfully used as an international measure for assessing cost of living (Perry, 1998: 153). But the homogenisation of hamburger product is balanced by a management strategy of localism: 'ownership' of franchises, local sponsorship for Ronald McDonald Houses, inclusion of local artists in advertising campaigns and campaigns like 'Kiwi burger'. Marketers appropriate Kiwi signifiers in order to construct brands with local cultural authenticity.

Global commodity signs like Coke/Pepsi, McDonald's/ Burger King and Nike/Adidas illustrate how marketing has shifted from using product benefits, to the symbolic appeals of branding. In such a way they can absorb the mana of the iconic All Black New

Zealand rugby team's haka as part of a global branding campaign for sports gear.

Appadurai, building on Schiller and Mattelart's criticism of transnational advertising, calls modern advertising

...the key technology for the world-wide dissemination of a plethora of creative, and culturally well-chosen, ideas of consumer agency. These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising...that the consumer is helped to believe that he or she is an actor, whether, in fact he or she is at best a chooser (Appadurai, 1990: 306-7).

Garnham (1990) asserts that understanding the commodification of culture is central to understanding new cultural formations and that television has been central to this process. He suggests that one reason for a continuing place for national broadcast television in a globalizing economy is that it continues to offer an efficient promotional window for the national distribution of globally circulating cultural commodities. The drive to efficiency and profits within commercial media has resulted in the creation of the audience as a commodity for sale to advertisers. Garnham, like many others (Leiss et al, 1986; Ang, 1996) argues that the cultural 'software' of television programmes acts as the free lunch for the work of watching commercial television. Kline says that nowhere is this more so than in children's television.

Scholarly work on the history, epistemology and methods of market research is scant but two recent contributors, Levitt (1993) and de Mooij (1994), are in widespread agreement with the analysis of corporate and market mechanisms by critical scholars. However, unlike many technological determinists of the left, both these marketing scholars have considerable respect for the power of local and individual cultural agency. Levitt conceptualises the global market as being structured through the tensions between scale/scope and volume/variety. De Mooij is primarily interested in how local cultural preferences of *adult* consumers require regional strategies for many products. She notes, interestingly, that *youth* (and by extension, children's markets) are increasingly viewed as truly transnational taste markets, with needs and wants that transcend the cultural idiosyncrasies of their parent's generation. For example Nintendo's **Pokemon** targets 'children as collectors' through global product launches enabling children in San Jose and Sockburn to be addressed as similar consumers, in contrast to their parents. Product differentiation into a series of collectables, across a range of media platforms and toys, also sees complex production and licensing arrangements between geographic zones, whilst maintaining standardized 'quality' product expectations amongst children (Zanker, 1999). Such transnational marketers use global strategies to target child audiences, but still continue to use local television in a range of ways (cartoons, advertising,

promotional and licensing deals) for launching new brands (Pecora, 1998). As a consequence, 'all aspects of the production of meaning, and all channels through which its meaning can be constructed and represented, become subjected to intense and rationalized calculation' (Slater, 1998a: 7).

This thesis argues that the media, and the economically reductionist ways that transnational, franchised and local businesses use the media, deserve to be analysed differently from other industrial processes. Their 'products' constitute the images and cultural discourses through which both adults and children construct their identities and make sense of the world. Kline (1995a: 108) goes so far as asserting that 'marketing has become the 'privileged discourse of late capitalism' and that those concerned with the socialization of children should pay closer attention to the specific management strategies and communication media through which 'use-values are currently projected into the global market-place.'

### **Post-industrial culture**

Lash et al (1987) describes the current confusing scene as 'disorganization capitalism', which neatly conceptualises the complexities of current global flows, the confusing centrifugal and centripetal forces at play, and the apparent fundamental disjunctures between economics, politics and culture. This global 'disorganized capitalism' is also becoming an increasingly 'fast capitalism' as post-fordism, computers, fibre-optics and satellites speed up the circulation of capital and commodities (Lipsitz, 1994). Critical theory, at its bleakest, asserts that that the flat, normless and centreless cultural diversity created by the commodification of all culture forms can be viewed as simply another side of globalisation. Homogenisation is absorptive, but never completed, within the overarching commercial formats and styles of the American media industries. Homogenisation and differentiation are thus opposite sides of the same global culture that is created by the increasing concentration of culture and capital. Critical theorists like Castells (1996), for example, describe the cultural implications of this as nations 'imploding' into confusing and competing identities or 'exploding' into a complex global scene.

It is time now to look at this evolving global landscape from a different perspective, this time from the perspective of living *within* the mediated flows of post-industrial culture. The next step is to interrogate what is meant by terms like 'culture', 'cultural identity'



and 'cultural agency', for the purposes of analysing a national television production for children at the turn of the millennium.

Appadurai usefully argues that 'disorganized capitalism' is characterised by multiple imagined worlds shaped by flows of capital, labour, commodities, information and images. The nation state is being bypassed by five new dimensions of belonging: ethno-scapes, media-scapes, techno-scapes, finance-scapes and ideo-scapes and these global 'flows' overlap in idiosyncratic and highly diverse ways of belonging (Appadurai, 1990: 296). In a later discussion Appadurai (1996) draws on Deleuze and Gattuari to describe a world that is 'rhizomic', that has implications for social imagination and individual identity.

The USA is now only one node of a complex transnational construction of the imaginary landscapes. The world we live in is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new idea, we need to bring together the old idea of images (in the Frankfurt school sense), the idea of imagined communities (in Anderson's sense) and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations...now mediated through the complex prism of the modern media. (Appadurai, 1996: 30).

Whereas he views the imagination as the organizing field for negotiations between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility, this thesis argues that for children this is mediated by the imaginations of producers as individuals.

Hall (1991a, 1991b, 1994, 1995) helpfully suggests that new forms of cultural identity are being forged from horizontal and vertical dimensions of culture. Vertical dimensions refer to the dimensions of ideology, power, economics and politics that critical theory helps theorize. Horizontal dimensions refer to personal power derived from cultural dimensions of consumption and the intimate audience uses and functions of communication. Thus, identity formation in the post-industrial world can be characterised as a 'project' of discursive production that is contingent and never complete, and which may involve articulation (but not necessarily so) between multiple shifting identities. Television's 'profuse flow of ... sounds and images provides viewers with a rich array of materials', enabling them to 'refashion their individual 'identity projects' in highly complex and typically contradictory ways'. (Barker, 1999: x). Free-to-air television is a cultural resource that is open to virtually anyone. Its content provides material for the 'selective construction of social knowledge, of social imagery, through which we perceive the 'worlds' the 'lived realities of others', and imaginary, reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible 'world-as-a-whole''. (Barker, 1999: 4) As the flow of media resources speeds up, and media proliferate, there are more resources to

draw on, enabling more complex, yet provisional weaves of identity, and a greater range of possible identities.

[Identities] are narratives constructed from the inter-subjective resources of language and, as such are social and cultural 'all the way down'/ That is identities are constituted in and through cultural representations (including those produced by television) with which we identify. (Barker, 1999; 33).

## **Living in a mediated world**

How television has transformed culture has been theorized since its invention. As long as 60 years ago the art historian Arnheim speculated that the social consequences of television were

...related to the motor car and aeroplane—as a transport for the mind...as such it...renders the object on display independent of its port of origin, making it unnecessary for spectators to flock together in front of an original. (Morley et al, 1995: 130).

Since the advent of television, one is no longer *in* space the same way because it provides universally accessible and promiscuous sources of information and culture. 'Television' (in its broadest sense embracing sound recording, video, digital effects, live satellite and cable transmission), has become a global shared language, and new digital transnational media (characterized by interactivity) increasingly share a sense of 'global time' (Morley, 1992: 226). 'Television' has been characterised as consisting of fragments of 'perpetual present' because it functions as a 'relay and retrieval system for audio-visual material of uncertain origin' (Morse, 1998). Media 'time' has become based on a video paradigm: attention spans are short, and events jumbled out of narrative order via rewind, fast forward and channel hopping (Lash et al, 1994: 16). Television, in other words, represents a crisis for both modernist sense of 'time' and geographic 'space'.

Hall, elegant as ever, defines post-modernism as 'another version of that cultural amnesia, characteristic of American culture—the tyranny of the new' (Hall, 1996a: 131) and this definition has certain advantages in terms of this case study. However it is important to note that post-modern theory has been influential in challenging dominant pessimistic and optimistic theories of media, whilst providing the well-recognized metaphors that are now commonly used to describe characteristics of television texts.

It is said by Baudrillard himself that he offers a vision of television that is no longer optimistic or pessimistic, but ironic (Baudrillard, 1994: 111). In his vision of television, there can be neither a positive (in terms of agency), nor negative (in terms of powerful

effects) role for television, and, by extrapolation therefore, no positive or negative role in children's lives. The post-modern aesthetic of television is exemplified for Baudrillard in the early styling of MTV 24-hour music television and advertising. Viewers of these texts wallow in a fragmented world of floating signifiers where boundaries between advertising and programming blur, and image and sound referents are untied from their original meanings (Baudrillard, 1988; Poster, 1994). Pastiche, collage, allegory and ironic styling characterise a new post-modern aesthetic, which ransacks all genres, high and low, of all periods, thus creating a flat, timeless, multi-layering of image and sound (Caldwell, 1995: 206). This is experienced by the viewer as a 'schizophrenic emphasis on vivid, immediate, isolated, effect-charged experiences of presentness in the world—of intensities' (Featherstone, 1991: 124). Storytelling moves from the discursive to the figural and images overwhelm the linear conventions of 'realistic' narrative forms (Lash et al, 1994b: 16). Even history becomes flattened into 'a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios, a kind of temporal central casting' (Appadurai, 1996: 30). In Baudrillard's apocalyptic vision, the individual becomes 'only a pure screen, a switching centre for all the networks of influence' as everyday life and reality implode into a 'hyper reality' of spectacle, a world of 'simulacra', an 'obscenity of information constantly feeding on itself'. This results in a 'state of fascination and vertigo linked to a delirium of communication' of hyper reality (Baudrillard, 1988, 1994, Poster, 1994). Post-modernist theorists describe nothing less than an epistemological shift from rationalism and realism to experiences of 'rapture' (on a positive reading) and/or existential anxiety (on a negative reading). The individual's cultural experience is forever scattered and decentred because there can no longer be any defined 'centre' or 'periphery' to culture and society.

What does this mean for this project of children's television? Firstly, recent post-modern metaphor is useful for describing some of the characteristics of the so-called 'post-modern' text of children's television. Secondly, the post-modern condition, which is described by scholars as constantly bewildering, raises the intriguing question as to *who* is bewildered and *who* is decentred in this process of cultural deconstruction, and how this relates to the project of cultural identity. Recent cultural scholars argue that Baudrillard's existential post-modern angst simply expresses the bewilderment of a middle-class, European male intellectual, a bewilderment possibly shared by modernist policy makers who, like him, cannot recognize the contingency of their own theorising and judgements of cultural quality. (Hall, 1991a, 1991b; O'Hara, 1995; Hooks, 1995).

## Youth culture and identity

Chapter Two alerted one to growing ambiguity in discussions about where childhood ends and youth culture begins—cultural scholars now widely accept that age and gender are processes of ongoing negotiation for children. (Mazzarella et al, 2000). It is useful, in light of this, to explore the constitution of identity in youth culture, how this is perceived to differ from the constitution of identity in children's culture, and how this relates to the perceived role for local children's television production in children's culture.

Youth culture has been characterized as being in a state of 'perpetual becoming' (Barker, 1999: 3) forming 'constellations of temporary coherence' (Massey, 1998) open to international 'routes' of influence, rather than 'roots' of local culture (Wark, 1994). One researcher even suggests that 'the acclaimed strengthening of youth culture, particularly at the global level, may be an all-encompassing phenomenon which transcends age and gender'. (Lemish, 2000: 8). 'Fast capital', facilitated by new communications media, ensures a rapid mobility of ideas, images and people across national boundaries, thus facilitating a sensibility of code-switching, syncretism and hybridity, which is uniquely suited to living within, and exploiting the multinational nature of capital. Certainly commercial music is viewed as one such key vehicle for youth culture. For example, diasporic black musicians in Jamaica, New York and London (ex-colonial or subjugated populations long accustomed to coding subversive messages) carry on transnational political conversations within blues, rock, hip hop, Afro-beat and rap, and these influences are now heard in the South Pacific. Post-colonialist theory demonstrates how subaltern sensitivities of previously colonized groups now circulate *within* the contingent and changing articulations of commercial culture. Commodified culture is now all pervasive, and new radical strategies for living *inside it* are emerging.

... 'the popular' has become...an intersection between the undeniable saturation of commercial culture in every area of human endeavour and the emergence of a new public sphere that uses the circuits of commodity production and circulation to envision and activate new social relations (Lipsitz, 1994: 12).

In such a way the music of subjugated people's has now 'captured the cultures of their colonizers' (Lipsitz, 1994: 33), thus superseding marxist resistance from 'outside'.

Young Maori and Pacific Island musicians join this transnational musical conversation, whereby commercial black music makes profits for corporations, whilst creating coded spaces for cultural, social and political assertiveness in struggles over identity, autonomy, and power (Lipitz, 1994: 27). Imported black music provides local youth with models of

activism, and, in turn, their own musical reversionings create new 'local public spaces' for marginal and subjugated groups. Thus it can be argued that groups like 'Upper Hutt Posse' become 'more themselves' by playing around with musical references from elsewhere because these references enable them to carve out their own unique political and cultural public space (Lipsitz, 1994: 63).

In post-colonial New Zealand it can be argued that everyone's forebears came to New Zealand from elsewhere, whether from Pacific Islands 700 years ago, northern and southern Europe one or two centuries ago, or in post-war diasporas from Europe, Africa and Asia. Cultural hybridity has great resonance with youth, increasingly so with inter-marriage. Aotearoa/New Zealand, it can be said, comprises an evolving post-colonial diasporic nation where the 'changing same of diaspora involves creolised, syncretised, hybridised and chronically impure cultural forms' (Barker, 1999: 70 quoting Gilroy, 1997). How do the chronically impure forms of youth culture relate to ideals for the revival of authentic Maori culture and, later, the project of national child-centred television for New Zealand children? The Maori cultural renaissance and its relationship with emergent youth culture is discussed first because this provides an important cultural context for disputes over national non-commercial children's television funding.

The legal machinery now surrounding the fulfilment of requirements under the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1845, has seen a range of critical institutional shifts since the mid 1980s. There has been official recognition of te reo (Maori language) as taonga (cultural treasure) under the obligations of the Treaty (Orange, 1992), which has been used, successfully, to argue in the Privy Court for access to the broadcasting spectrum. There has been higher visibility for Maori tikanga, cultural artefacts and tribal 'canon' as New Zealand moves through a process of decolonisation, largely the result of historical evidence researched for the court process of land settlements. Markers of ethnic difference, in common with other indigenous revivals, have tended to become frozen into 'museum culture', and contextualized within preferred narratives of 'authentic culture' (Potter et al, 1995: 80). Public funding for broadcasting is viewed as a critical strategy for Maori renaissance. The Crown's obligation under the Treaty has seen the establishment of iwi (tribal) radio stations and an ongoing political wrangle over the establishment of a national Maori language channel. NZ On Air, the funding body created in 1989 to disburse the licence fee, carries an obligation to reflect the bi-cultural nature of New Zealand on free-to-air national television and does so by funding Maori language, off-peak programmes.

At first reading, this cultural process of retrieval and preservation stands in stark contrast to the fluidity and global hybridity of popular youth culture. So how does NZ On Air justify up to 100 per cent public funding for hybrid local youth show (**Mai Time**) which features global brand names? In fact it is the notion of essentialist Maori culture that repays further analysis. Maori 'identity' has diverse forms that stretch from the ethnic absolutism of tribalism, adhered to by the likes of Tama Iti (Maori separatist), the officially sanctioned museum culture of marae etiquette, and hybridizing cultures of gang whanau (family) and youth hip-hop street cultures. Increasing numbers of Maori youth switch fluently between cultural codes of traditional, mainstream and commodified culture, just as children of Indian immigrants have been shown to do in Britain (Gillespie, 1995; Hall, 1995). **Mai Time**, which targets Maori and Pacific Island youth, offers a site in which global commercial music flows are promoted and, equally, a site where new hybrid retakes offer subversive public spaces for local 'R & D' in cultural identity. This promotion of global commercial music and brands is not uncontroversial. **Mai Time** has been decried by those opposed to its funding as 'label-city for global brands', but the then executive producer Tainui Stevens responds:

I have not a problem with accepting the hegemony of Planet America, they are so influential, but we do not need to lose sight of the local. Within the Marae (of Mai Time) we can rejoice in all cultures (Pitch to 1997 Board meeting of NZ On Air).

Generous 100 per cent NZ On Air funding (despite commercial content) is premised on the success of **Mai Time** in terms of young Maori audiences moving from popular culture back to pride in Maori culture through music. As increasing numbers of young fluent Maori speakers emerge from schools, Greg Mayor, the producer, uses a strategy of promoting Maori music, Maori personalities and increasing Maori language. As a consequence it is becoming, in his words, 'cool to korero (speak)' in Maori. The programme is widely regarded as one of the success stories of NZ On Air subsidy.<sup>19</sup> Beginning as one element of the minority off-peak enclave of Maori language Marae, **Mai Time** is now scheduled on late Saturday mornings in commercial time, where it has

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<sup>19</sup> **Mai Time** receives 100 per cent funding from New Zealand On Air and broadcasts on TVNZ's Channel Two. It targets 'rangitahi' (Maori and Pacific Island youth). It comprises a 75 per cent local, 25 per cent imported mix of music clips and studio material. Originally its local content focused on Maori hip-hop and Rhythm and Blues, but it now embraces a wider selection of New Zealand bands (interview with Greg Maher). NZ On Air has been prepared to fund this idiosyncratic mix of global music clips, gossip about stars and brands, and the broadcaster has been happy to shift the increasingly successful programme to 'commercial' time slots.

a following amongst 'pakeha' (ethnic European) viewers. As a consequence, it now has the enthusiastic support of TV2 managers, who view it as a place of cultural experiment, adding an edgy allure to their channel's local profile with youth, and a programme that attracts increasing amounts of niche youth advertising.

What implications do the funding of **Mai Time** and other youth programmes like **Ice TV** have for the funding objectives for children's television? Hengst (1997) talks of media producers (programmers, musicians, marketers and advertisers) as constructors of circulating 'cultural scripts' of meaning, which are adapted in play as they provide structures for children's peer group knowledge and schemes (as in urban skate boarding). Cultural scripts adopted by children involve intense consumption and awareness of global trends in marketing commodities and often focus on male youth culture rather than material targeting children. Chapter Two discussed a rich line of research that examined how girls used commercial media texts and music in the construction of identity, and versions of femininity which are often defined by consumerist 'body-projects' (Lemish et al, 1998; Walkerdine, 1998; Mazzarella et al, 2000). It is notable that Lipsitz stops short of romanticising the liberationist powers of hybridising youth music when he acknowledges that no cultural form is *innately* radical, and that youth culture, for example rap, illustrates this its misogynist lyrics (1994: 63).

Youth culture poses a problem for children's producers because of its foregrounding of irreverent, often norm-breaking, global content and intensive, fast-changing celebration of commodification. This contrasts to the rationale of public service children's broadcasting, which is to exist as a 'safe zone' *apart from* commodified culture and transgressive texts, whilst at the same time acculturating them into *authentic* local culture and citizenship. Youth culture thus represents much that children's programmes are defined to provide an alternative to - non-commodified media space. Even producers who wish to be on the side of children in these aspirant cultural pleasures, find their production possibilities constrained by fears of breaching parent trust in their norm-reinforcing role in public culture. Meanwhile, broadcasters accuse the producers of not reflecting children's cultural pleasures. Children's producers are commissioned to make programmes that are age specific, educational, non-commercial and local, but they are also judged on whether children choose to view them. If a majority of viewing children

demonstrate enthusiasm for youth culture, what becomes the justification for age-specific programming for children over the age of 5 years?<sup>20</sup>

### **Cultural capital and the role of cultural intermediaries**

The literature review indicated that Bourdieu has had a profound influence on recent work on parent and child cultures and tastes (see Seiter, 1993, 1998 in particular).

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classification is expressed or betrayed (Bourdieu, 1984: 7).

Bourdieu helps one conceptualise children's television production in three ways. Firstly his work on cultural capital helps to explain the key role of television in habitus (the material—and domestic—structures of family life) and therefore the depth of feeling amongst adults over the right to control the symbolic environment of children's television. Secondly, the adaptation of Bourdieu by the likes of Seiter takes us forward in our understanding of children's pleasure in emulation, and its central role in peer group cultural capital for children.

...adults may emulate bourgeois norms, but children, oblivious to the benefits of adhering to their parents' tastes, may set upon imitating older children - as in the fascination of young children with teenagers - or members of their peer group who are not necessarily 'higher' on the social scale by adult standards (Seiter, 1993: 48).

Thirdly, Bourdieu fires a provocative broadside at cultural studies when he critiques post-structuralist scholars as 'double access' intellectuals who have access to both high and low culture and thus wield a form of symbolic violence over those who cannot choose between forms of culture.

In her more recent book, Seiter analyses how parental, and much academic, discussion of children's television use is inflected with a sense of the illegitimate status of television, which is belittled because

Children are oblivious to many adult notions of cultural prestige and yet have begun to appreciate some of the distinctions between adult and child attitudes to television...television takes its place

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<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that Maori television funding divides into kohanga reo (early childhood) and rangitahi (youth), thus collapsing the 6–12 year old audience into rangitahi. The reasons for this are worth further investigation. Is it the result of budgets, or because the early childhood, primary aged, and youth categories of western childhood make no sense within Maori media culture?



in the repertoire of forbidden references, like those to smelly feet, or body parts, or diapers. (1998: 4).

Children's versions of 'cultural capital' present problems for adults in many different ways. Parents, for reasons ranging from the financial to the religious, may want to put a stop to their children's enthusiasm for certain forms of commodified peer group culture. Middle-class parents and policy makers may find that children switch off carefully designed 'age-specific' and 'quality' local television. Pacific Island parents may disapprove of their children embracing black American ghetto music, instead of forms of their own indigenous culture. Post-structuralist studies of children's pleasures in commercial media cannot help with issues of production value.

Dornfeld argues that producers are far from disinterested cultural agents within power struggles in and over discourse. They bring their own cultural capital to the task of making judgements about what is important in children's culture. Children's producers are necessarily grounded in 'fields of financial and cultural capital and these constrain the kinds of agency available to the producers and the practical strategies they employ' (Dornfeld, 1998: 32). In Britain, Brunson, (1990); Wagg (1992), Buckingham (1996, 1997; Buckingham et al, 1999) have argued that the 'cultural capital' of British middle classes has captured the high ground of modernist public service media policy. 'Good' children's television adapts or emulates the canon of high culture literature and reflects middle class cultural aspirations and values. In the USA, Seiter (1993) and Kinder (1991) argue that parents (and indeed lobby groups like Action for Children's Television) criticize popular children's culture, whilst neglecting to critique their own bourgeois consumption patterns.

Bourdieu enables one to theorise axes of consumption at work in emulation patterns within consumer society. Consumers are required to understand and manipulate complex connotations for very similar consumer goods in order to choose appropriate symbols of cultural capital. (Seiter, 1993). In such ways the political economy of the sign (brands rather than physical products) become central objects of consumption (Nava et al, 1997) and cultural meaning is constituted through the playful differentiation between symbols not within them. This results in an unanchored production of lifestyles using the codes and templates of marketing. (Slater, 1997a: 191).

Bourdieu identifies four different forms of cultural capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) in his study of the French petit bourgeoisie (1984: 370). Desperate for

upward mobility and status, they search for, adopt and continuously reject the changing cultural capital of fashion. They leapfrog each other in search of social status. They are guided in this task by a group of specialists who discover newly emerging fashion and taste. These 'new intellectuals', or 'cultural intermediaries' (Featherstone, 1991; Nava, 1997; Slater, 1998) adopt a learning mode towards life that is fascinated by identity, presentation, appearance, lifestyle and an endless quest for new experiences. Professional 'intermediaries' work in marketing, advertising, fashion journalism, public relations, radio and television (as both producers and presenters) and criticism. Their classificatory systems identify emerging cultural capital, yet they themselves remain beyond classification.

Marketers, it can thus be argued, provide insecure, aspirant children with information about the ever-differentiating symbols of new cultural capital in children's commercial culture. They 'break the news' in strategic promotional campaigns which use, amongst other tools, local children's television. In turn, the *What Now?*'s production team trawls marketing 'news' in order to become the trusted cultural intermediaries, who do not support a *particular* form of cultural capital, but have an ongoing interest in sources for cultural capital: music, computer games, entertainment programmes. Their young viewers judge the team on their judgements about emerging cultural capital. The case study explores how the production team performs a 'synaptic function' as they function as the true readers, true analysts of their cultures in which they live and work, the society in which they must seek and create an audience. The problem is that this wealth of cultural insights does not help critical analysis because, in such a way, all judgements of cultural worth are made relative within a matrix of cultural capital.

But Bourdieu notes that cultural scholars themselves are also, by self-definition, privileged 'double-access intellectuals' who play a key role as cultural intermediaries in judgements about elite and popular cultures. Cultural studies recent reification of audience agency within cultural studies has seen a celebration of children's agency within popular culture, but might it not also raise questions about who judges the perceived value to children of commodified and non-commodified children's media content? What rights do children themselves have to be double-access intellectuals during their formative cultural experiences? What role does public service media play in ensuring that they are exposed to a range of imaginative horizons not provided by market rationalism?

## **Serious playfulness as a key to the case study**

Children's play, which is formative, can be conceptualized as 'serious fun'. But views on the role of this 'serious fun' in childhood culture are deeply polarized. The literature review in Chapter Two discussed how theories of human development conceptualize children's play as the purposeful steps of physical and social development towards adulthood. Play is *the* central mechanism for cognitive and social learning. Mainstream anthropologists, in turn, view play as a universal human process of experimenting with and rehearsing for inherited cultural roles. Play is thus viewed as an essential element in a process of developing a stable adult identity and productive citizenship. In the west, 'good' children's play relates to these objectives of 'growing up'. Play is supervised, purposeful activity and fun within safe guidelines and boundaries. Television is only acceptable when it promotes this 'good' play by being adult supervised, rich in productive learning and values for citizenship. Children's play, in the view of many of Seiter's (1998) informants for example, is viewed as dangerous when it is anarchic, wild and willful, and television is bad when it promotes such instincts in children.

Television, it can be argued, makes anarchic post-modern cultural play accessible to all children of all ages. It frees children, already 'playful', to explore and become cultural agents in their own right. For those on the side of 'children as free agents', television frees children from surveillance of teachers and parents. In modernist terms, though, this is dangerous play because it is purposeless, uncontrolled and uncontrollable. It is play untied from parents, place, cultural traditions, education and values. For those on the side of 'children who are vulnerable' this form of mediated play cannot contextualise a confusing world in appropriate age stages. Thus media play may *become* the world to the child; as U2 puts it, television becomes 'even better than the real thing' and it subverts traditional and modern social and moral frameworks of what 'becoming' means. This makes possible the dangerous willful 'agentive' child who 'plays' with cultural information drawn from 'inappropriate' sources.

How do theory frames for 'play' enable one to map the possibilities for cultural space within **What Now?**, and their implications for the production process?

## **Playful resistance**

A metaphor of 'playful resistance' is drawn from the 'long, ambiguous, uneasy, but productive relationship of cultural studies with marxism' (Barker, 1999: 17). Audiences (including children) 'resist' the inscribed meanings of texts by 'playing' with them. In

Fiske's (1987) extreme formulations text and audience disappear into pleasurable processes of viewing. In this he pays homage to de Certeau who conceptualized the 'tactics of the weak' whereby those who lack power over cultural production (like children) resort to poaching cultural space and use it for personal play. De Certeau's radical view of audience agency casts the act of reading as 'advances, retreats, tactics and games played with the text. 'Mutation makes the text inhabitable, like a rented apartment' (de Certeau, 1984: xix). For example, educational and persuasive 'inscribed' meanings of programmes are adapted by children to new ends, and both programme makers and advertisers find themselves engaged in an often futile effort to construct texts that appeal to an 'elusive child audience'. Seiter (1993) discusses the discomfort of feminist parents as their daughters choose Barbie in direct rebellion against their mother's wishes and tastes.

### **Fan play**

Jenkins (1992) builds on these ideas of audience activism. For him, reading a text becomes:

... a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience (Jenkins, 1992: 26).

He conceptualizes fans as 'semiotic poachers' who steal, mix and match elements from material intended for other purposes. Ethnographic research demonstrates the pleasures children derive from 'playing as fans' within their peer groups (Bloch et al, 1999; Lemish, 2000). How do producers decide what is appropriate fan play? How do they become 'semiotic poachers' in their own right? How is conflict between adult approved 'role models' like the presenters, and censored forms of fandom from disapproved sources negotiated? How does the team respond to the desire for this news of transgressive popular icons (Beastie Boys for example), which are attractive to children expressly because of their excessive and rebellious connotations? How does the **What Now?** production team respond to the pleasure children derive from calibrating their maturity against knowledge of 'forbidden' icons (Davies et al, 2000)? How does the team juggle parental disapproval with the knowledge that this very disapproval may add to the 'cultural capital' of the programme?

### **Vulgar play**

According to Bakhtin, human society has always had its 'liminal spaces' where everyday life is turned around, and outlawed, taboo behaviour is 'played out'. Fiesta, carnival and

music hall have long provided places where vulgar behaviour was permitted away from the surveillance of authorities. Fiske adapts Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and applies it to the 'vulgar' site of popular television. Audience research and ethnography demonstrates children's enthusiastic tastes for a range of material that is viewed as vulgar by adults (Davies et al, 2000). Seiter describes how advertising jingles are often sung moments before or after crude language or jokes are used, even suggesting that very young children understand the disreputable status of television:

No wonder teachers hate popular children's television when it is associated with bedlam, rule-breaking and forbidden activities (Seiter, 1998: 4).

Chapter Two discussed how girls enact erotic music clips as a form of 'self transformation' (Walkerdine, 1998). In such ways, it can be hypothesised that girls' 'vulgar play' enables them to break free of the crippling passivity and modesty of 'proper', 'nice' behaviour.

If such carnivalesque rupture and anarchic play is viewed as undesirable by teachers and caregivers and public funders, but is enjoyed by children, how does the team of **What Now?** reflect these vulgar children's pleasures? How do they appeal to the 'wild and restless' child (often male), to ensure that they remain tuned, and to the precocious sexual play of girls, whilst not being censured by feminists or conservative parents? How do producers reconcile the subversive pleasures of vulgar content with the progressive policy objective of providing children with locally designed culturally progressive, ethnically and gender sensitive content that reflects parental values? It is posited that the post-modern aesthetic of televisual excess (Caldwell, 1995) provides a screen whereby, as Buckingham puts it 'Any passing interest adults might have in their children's preferences is unlikely to survive more than a single edition' (1995: 53).

### **Intertextual play**

Intertextuality, whether between programmes, or between programmes and advertising, is a key media pleasure for children (Kinder, 1991; O'Donohoe, 1997; Meijer, 1998).

Intertextuality also screens children's peer-group culture from adults around them. The **What Now?** team and marketers are required to understand the intertextual references in order to address the audience in terms that they respect. Intertextual play is particularly important to this case study because:

...intertextuality functions as a powerful vehicle of commodity formation. In this process, the newly emerging subject comes to perceive himself or herself as a gendered commodity around which a whole commercial nexus is organized...Further, the child comes to believe that this is activated and extended whenever he or she consumes a product. In short, television teaches viewers that commercial interactivity empowers precocious consumers by enabling them to assimilate the world as they buy into the system (Kinder, 1991: 39).

A habit of 'intertextual' reading is adopted in this case study in order to focus attention on ways that **What Now?** relates to other children's texts (both current and past), advertising and adult genres. 'Inter' and 'intra' textuality maps articulations between television programming, promotion and advertising of merchandising, as well as connections with tertiary texts of fandom, public relations and journalism. **What Now?** is used as a cultural site in which to track the marks of emerging and declining cultural supersystems, as well as the ways that script writers, researchers, local licensing and marketing agents play with the wider commercial nexus of meanings. These textual marks enable one to map the articulations between the strategies of modernist corporate agencies: toy-companies, market researchers, advertising agencies, licensees and television broadcasters. This enables one to test Garnham's assertion that local broadcasting works as a paid and unpaid distributor of marketing and funding strategies of global narratives and commodities.

### **The significance of play metaphors for the case study**

The metaphors used in constructs of media play discussed above are used to identify important aspects of production detail, content and textual style. Disputes over what is appropriate mediated 'play' for children are key to mapping the discourse battles within the case study of **What Now?** Metaphors deployed in these different constructs of play enable one to reach into the heart of the cultural dilemmas facing producers of children's television in New Zealand.

Children's television (and all media production) is serious fun.

### **Knowledge and power**

Both Hall and Bennett critique Foucault for neglecting analysis of 'the power relations which structure the inter-discursivity, or the inter-textuality, of any field of knowledge'. (Hall, 1996a: 136) However, Hall finds merit in Foucault's outline of discursive and competing regimes of truth that constitute power through normalization, regulation and surveillance. This sees him adapting Foucault's view of discourse to provide ways of articulating between very different discursive domains:

Articulation is the connection that can make a unity of two different elements under certain conditions. It is not a linkage which is necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time... You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made? The so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be articulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness'. The unity which matters is a linkage between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected (Hall, 1996a: 141).

Bennett (1998) also finds value in Foucault's work, in terms of what he calls the 'Foucault effect', which encourages one to focus on detailed routines and operating procedures of cultural institutions. He argues that it is in the 'politics of detail' that one discovers how fields of conduct are organized and regulated, because power is at its most powerful when it is hidden within the mundane routines, systems and 'commonsense' knowledge and events of everyday life (Bennett, 1998: 84). This thesis articulates the different discursive domains of media, childhood, economics and national culture in order to explore the mundane site of live commercial after-school children's television.

Ang (1991, 1996) also uses Foucauldian frames to analyze the power of people-meter ratings to 'streamline' a construct of the 'television audience' and the role this plays in justifying 'commonsense' views of programmers and commissioners of television programmes. This image of 'streamlining' has particular resonance in terms of the child audience, where ratings data, despite its demonstrable flaws, still constitutes the instrumental measure that reassures advertisers and broadcasters of the worth of their economic compact. It constitutes a rational rhetoric, with stable taxonomic collectives, and predictive power. It becomes the agreed upon currency that reduces the perception of risk for broadcasters and their advertisers. The 'discipline' and logic of ratings, whatever their predictive accuracy (discussed in the case study), continue to define the power relations between producers, commissioners and funders, and thus possible outcomes for children within the framework of broadcast television.

Dornfeld's ethnographic analysis of a documentary television production site provides the final formative element for the framing of the case study. He adapts Ang's Foucauldian discourse analysis of the audience, articulates this with recent insights from cultural anthropology and ethnography of audiences, and applies these frames to the analysis of the production process itself. His theoretical innovation for this current study, is his analysis of how creative producers prefigure 'the audience' and future consumption of the documentary text, whilst all the time negotiating between other expert and commercial stakeholders, and the imagined audiences. His exemplary production study

of American public service broadcasting documentary constructs producers as very particular and important readers of their television texts, both before and during their making. He calls for a re-conceptualising of the production process as a 'multiple and contested one', and one in which producers are both 'producer and consumer of texts'. Producers bring their own cultural capital to a television project; they also make strategic decisions, taking into account powerful expert and economic sources of cultural capital. Dornfeld asks how and why and in what context 'producing agents' structure their particular statements about the world, and thus imagine their audience. The construction of producers as audiences in a special sense enables articulation between the large frames of political economy and the insights from audience research about the micro sites of reception.

Dornfeld's interest in cultural formation is centrally concerned with questions of cultural agency—in his case the agency of documentary producers within the opportunities and constraints provided by powerful 'experts' and broadcasting institutions. Children may, as Seiter and others have argued, choose very different cultural symbols to adults, but television choices are, necessarily, delimited by the adults who produce them. Recent post-structuralist perspectives have de-emphasized or de-centred the author of texts, but Dornfeld (1998) argues that it is time to recognize the agency of producers and analyze constraints on the work of cultural production in relation to historical and social settings. He constructs authorship as a grounded, empirically assessable dimension of cultural production. This way he attributes some definable form of agency to authors of television texts, even while producers are 'trafficking in narratives of self and other and the way they are enlisted in constructions of identity, community and nation' (1998: 18). This approach provides a key orientation for this study of children's television. The discourse centred approach provides the researcher with an abundance of moments of producerly textual evaluation and interpretation and takes us beyond the constraints of stark production routines, structures and processes to include *both* interpretive symbolic perspectives *and* practice-oriented data. Socially grounded practices of professional behaviour, administrative routines, and 'communicative modalities' are recorded and analysed in this case study.

Who produces children's television? In its broadest definition it includes everyone who has an economic stake in the programme, and thus veto power over its continuing existence. The judgements of powerful cultural funders, advertisers, programmers, advertising agencies and agents for international licences are critical for a programme's



survival. Each stakeholder makes ongoing judgements by impersonating in advance 'various presumptive audiences who thereby participate in the work they will later view' (Dornfeld, 1998: 62). Channel heads, programme commissioners, buyers and programmers, often with no interest in children's audiences, make cultural choices for children in commissioning strategies, at international trade shows, and in channel scheduling strategies. At the other end of the scale are the individuals on yearly production contracts who work on creative content, shooting and editing. Front-people, for example, view themselves as subversive advocates for children but they can only grab tactical opportunities (like de Certeau's readers) 'on the wing'.

In the end, the decision has been made to concentrate on the talk of the executive producer and her trusted core team because they are the 'synapses' between everyday production and commissioning power derived from audience research, the politics of culture and finance. This small group prefigures acts of consumption by both children *and* powerful stakeholders to ensure programme survival. It will be shown how they use a version of Certeau's 'tactics of the weak' in order to make do in spaces controlled by powerful funding and scheduling stakeholders. These they 'make habitable through the ruses and deceptions which characterize tactics as a set of manoeuvres that always have to be conducted in the enemy territory' (Bennett, 1998: 174).

### **Countering a tendency to infinite regress**

Key theories of post-industrial cultural formation for the case study have now been laid out and discussed. These assist one in describing how linear sense of time and geographic sense of space are collapsing in a media saturated world and, as a consequence, cultural identity is becoming positioned, overlapping and hybrid, and knowledge discursive, contingent and provisional. One reaches a position where judgement, truth, and quality become ensnared in the relativities of cultural capital, or simply reflect current truth/knowledge within shifting discursive fields. The essentialist cultural visions of self, identity, society and nation, which grew out of enlightened civic rationalism and led to projects of national and cultural development, appear to have shattered in the wake of these developments. This cultural relativism has consequences for self-reflective intellectuals if, as Murdock puts it:

Marketing men set about mapping style communities based on shared tastes, and academics reading these signs of the times, declared the arrival of the post-modern age in which appearances eclipsed substance and what you saw was what you got. By the beginning of 1989, the figure of the consumer had come to dominate the landscape of late capitalism (1992: 17).

Critical scholars argue that post-structuralist theory has a tendency to ‘infinite regress’ that, arguably, blunts critical judgement and thus the possibility of progressive politics (Morley et al, 1995; Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Murdoch, 1998; Bennett, 1998; Dornfeld 1998, Frith 2000; Born, 2000). This blunting of political agency is dangerous because questions about what is important to help one live in society have not been superseded, but are simply put aside in current post-modern and post-structuralist discussions of culture. Intellectuals who refuse to pronounce value judgements upon choices of consumers, and upon their needs and wants, become unwittingly aligned with the ‘logic’ of consumer society, and thus empower cultural judgements made by the market alone. It is even *more* important, given the discursive, contingent and positioned nature of all judgements on culture, and the commonsense everyday invisibility of market forces, to analyze how commodities come to be constructed the way they are in the marketplace, and consequences for cultural range and variety. How can a scholar avoid what Morley (1992) calls the ‘teleological moral success story’ of normative judgement that besets modernist realist meta-narrative (and its converse materialist logic in marxist critique), as well as avoid the moral paralysis of what Geertz (1993) calls the ‘epistemological hypochondria’ of cultural and ideological relativism? It is important to find a way to defend and sustain critical analysis, whilst retaining sensitivity to one’s partial and positioned view of culture.

It is helpful to ask, not *what is* post-modern culture, but rather *where* is it, and *why*, and *which groups* have the most interest in constructing and promoting it. Caldwell notes that television, even in its so-called modern realist period, has always been marked by excessive style, but that recent, so-called post-modern, forms of populist television are defined by an aesthetic of excessive spacial and temporal references that flood the viewer. Knowing references, savvy direct address and digital effects load programmes with a range of audience ‘hooks’ or appeals (Caldwell, 1995: 26). It is the aura of post-modernist excess that requires contextualizing within institutional forces like funding, sponsorship, licensing, promotion, advertising and scheduling techniques of broadcasting. Thus it can be posited that **What Now?** is constituted out of a hybrid mix of modern public service and post-modern commodified content and style. Education looks like entertainment, content is built out of a pastiche of elements taken from a range of genres and eras (from silent movies to weather bulletins and video-clips), commercial sponsorship is presented as public service, and, in the case of the NZ On Air’s Eric the

Fish, it can even be argued that public service presents its appeals as an advertisement.<sup>21</sup> Stylistic excesses load the programme with a range of audience appeals, textual characteristics of what Caldwell calls 'trash' television. Post-modern metaphors provide the shorthand with which to freeze frame, and thus preserve 'thick description' of text, which in turn generates the 'delicacy of distinctions' that can make a difference in cultural and social interpretation (Geertz, 1993: 27). This very heterogeneity of **What Now?**'s textual connotations provides the indicators of 'sociocultural contradictions' and reflect the choices and options taken by producers (Fairclough, 1995: 2). This is why it is important to keep returning to sociological questions of agency and power.

It is proposed that the 'televisuality' of post-modern forms of 'exhibitionism' and 'excess' are less a defining aesthetic than a kind of corporate behaviour, enabled by globalisation and new digital technologies (Caldwell, 1995: 337):

Televisual exhibitionism is driven as much by industrial conditions and economic crisis as it is by changing cultural and aesthetic tastes...it is the media's own tools and capital that is needed to manufacture excessive style (Caldwell, 1995: 277).

Kline notes that there are few better guidebooks to the post-modern commodity form than children's commercial television, but he is clear that so-called 'post-modern television' is the result of the marketing fervour of transnational corporations, still largely headquartered in the USA. Caldwell (1995: 24) argues that post-modern theory is not necessarily *wrong*, but that as a theory it cannot be used to distinguish between what is 'post-modern' and what is 'modern' about the television industry. Post-modernism becomes a tautology because it creates an endless loop of self-fulfilling analysis devoid of data. Slater (1997b) attacks the 'textual determinism' which sees social reality swallowed up by 'omnipotent code', thus simply confirming the 'fetishism of commodities' that they set up their theorizing to deconstruct and calls for detailed analysis of the production of, so-called post-modern culture. Fairclough (1995) argues that relativist 'language games' make unsubstantiated and dangerous claim that 'ideology' has been superseded by 'hyper reality'.

It is for these reasons that it is important to analyse the culture of production *and* the production of culture in **What Now?**

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<sup>21</sup> Saatchi and Saatchi devised a campaign to create awareness of NZ On Air and the programmes it subsidized. The star of this campaign was a fish called Eric.

## Conclusion

This study sets itself three core tasks: a fine-grained study of children's television production decisions, their implications for children's television text, and the imagining of acts of consumption of those texts by stakeholders in children's television. It interests itself in the interplay between economic organization and political agency as revealed by competing cultural discourses in production talk. This approach provides a way of mapping a range of contexts from the global capital to micro-reception, from public space to pleasures of consumption. It draws on cross-disciplinary theorizing of culture, power and media agency, whilst remaining sensitive to new readings of identity formation and the situated pleasures of consumption. It also takes a critical stance. It is concerned with analysing the unequal command over material resources and power for different agents, and the consequences of such inequality for the nature of the symbolic environment.

[It] sets out to show how different ways of financing and organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for a range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to them.' The approach is critical but 'necessarily engages with empirical research, and ... has no qualms about addressing issues of pragmatic and policy concern.' Above all 'it is interested in the interplay between symbolic and economic divisions of public communication. (Golding et al, 1991: 15).

One's interconnectivity within global cultural flows defines one's power over shaping one's culture and this thesis demonstrates that some stakeholders in children's television initiate, some negotiate and some have to make do with what they are given (Golding et al, 1991: 24). Dornfeld argues that divided, apparently incongruent theories of production and consumption can be made congruent by viewing producers as viewers, and viewers as producers. Intended *and* interpreted meanings are thus opened up for analysis. In this study on children's production one keeps returning to the added problem of the *child audience* and what that means to a range of stakeholders. As the literature review noted, 'the child' is forever constituted as 'the other', and must always be viewed, therefore, through adult relationships with, and ideals for, children.

Most importantly, the central feature of *contested* discourses for production and culture are now foregrounded. As Foucault asserts, power is at its most powerful when it constructs a 'commonsense' view of institutional practices that make 'invisible' the mechanisms that constitute that power. Discourse analysis is sensitive to the often spontaneous and serendipitous nature of creative cultural work, thus avoiding the trap of production/textual determinism, but alerts one to overarching constructs of power and knowledge, whilst guarding against the economic determinism that can occur when

applying 'macro' marxist theories of capital. This sensitivity to moments of production team negotiation enables the articulation between the macro and micro theorizing of textual production. This case study into the dynamics of cultural formation focuses on a site in children's television production. The next chapter describes the specific tools used to identify and analyse the discourses of power operating in the production of children's television.

## CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY

Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities. (Anderson, 1983: 122).

### Introduction

Geertz encourages a research process that complements speculation with innovation during field research in order to avoid what he calls the 'dead hand of competence' that forever threatens to create conservative orthodoxy in a field (1993: 88). Frith (2000) argues that the television production and textual meanings produced are overdue for speculative, above all, eclectic, research initiatives. Methodological choices made during this project reflect a faith that in opening oneself to risk, and thus the possibility of a gallant failure, permits at least the *possibility* of new insights into a field. The previous chapter outlined how this research is indebted to a range of theoretical work for justifying a choice of grounded ethnographic research. The choice of a grounded research approach has enabled a circular process of setting up hypotheses and themes, gathering data and then refining hypotheses and themes in order to construct increasingly sensitive categories for coding.

The collection of texts is treated as data that enables one to articulate between discursive domains and reveal the relationships, overlaps, contradictions and antagonisms between discourses. The transcribed interviews, conversations and institutional documents are analysed using s. This decision to use discourse analysis was made at the pilot stage of the research because it permits the fine-grained analysis of production talk. Each progressive stage of research has confirmed this the value of this decision, although ways of using it have been adapted. It has proved to be a powerful tool for analysing the cultural positioning of creative agents, and thus the constitution of cultural power.

The fear of too tidy a determinism between production talk, textual outcomes and inscribed meanings haunts studies like this one. In the end, interpretations are offered which attempt to make sense of key aspects of the production, but the serendipitous nature of the creative process is also accepted, and the presence of contradictory, sometimes paradoxical and confusing data is acknowledged. This research does not aim to deliver a smooth narrative of a production process. It prefers to problematize the process of cultural formation and thus raises further questions for investigation.

## **Pilot study**

Chapter One discussed how this research evolved out of the researcher's increasing discomfort over multiple roles she found herself playing and the increasing difficulties this posed for political action. This discomfort was made more acute given that changes to broadcasting were wide-sweeping and radical in New Zealand during the 1980s— certainly when compared with Australia and Britain, where a long history of scholarly policy analysis informed public debate. This provided the impetus for research into the cultural consequences of New Zealand's deregulated television ecology for local children. Thus the researcher found herself positioning within the politics of her research site from the very beginning. This research evolved out of personal and critical engagement with media cultural formation.

The personal stake in the research created an early incentive to generate questions that mattered politically. As a result it was not surprising that certain 'allies' had expectations that the research would showcase their political causes, just as it was to be expected that other stakeholders were highly defensive about the objectives of the research. Careful ethical boundaries had to be negotiated to ensure safe research practice, most particularly for informants from other social and political contexts. It was important that the researcher be able to look them in the eye after they had read the research conclusions, a problem that is particularly acute in a small country.

The pilot stage for the research explored the disjuncture between 'on the ground' experiences, dominant policy rhetoric of economic rationalism, and international scholarly viewpoints. Cunningham (1992) provided a frame for questions about 'cultural intangibles' in broadcasting. He argues that media theorists and social scientists should become involved in analysis and justification of the non-economic benefits of broadcasting rather than leave such definitions to rational economics. Defending intangible cultural definitions of certain cultural nodal objectives for public broadcasting like 'quality', 'diversity', and 'choice', against definitions of economic rationalism appeared to be a worthwhile policy research objective. A range of New Zealand scholars was already engaged in the defence of the intangible of public service news and current affairs against perceived post-deregulatory commodification (Winter, 1994; Atkinson, 1994; Cocker, 1996). It appeared that the work of children's producers (a group with a low profile in national debates) was overdue for research attention and that local children's genres ran a high risk of being marginalised within a deregulated television industry. Early research design was premised on a high-minded assumption that, as a

result of greater knowledge, one could outline a clearer set of arguments vindicating regulation of children's media production.

In the event, the questions deepened, rather than resolved themselves, as the self-reflexive process of questioning commonsense and institutional understandings of the role of local children's television production in New Zealand progressed. By the time the form and focus for this research was finalized, questions had shifted from the definition of nodal intangibles in children's broadcasting policy to fundamental questions about cultural formation and identity in post-colonial New Zealand. The fine-grained detail of a case study of live daily children's television provided the ideal ephemeral and mundane cultural site in which to observe and analyse the workings of everyday power in cultural formation.

The last chapter outlined the range of theoretical frames that have influenced the very broad interpretation of what can be considered as 'data'. A wide range of textual material has been collected and analysed. This includes policy documents, personal diary notes, commentary, ratings data, informant interviews with the range of stakeholders, participant observation of production processes, viewing with target audience, access to fan mail to the club, videotapes of the programme, ads and music videos shown during the programme. 'Text' hereafter means a broad range of written, spoken and audiovisual material. The early decision to conduct grounded research made during the pilot stage has not changed, although the grounded and increasingly eclectic research approach has enabled the ongoing process of modifying research questions in light of growing theoretical sophistication and insights provided by the fieldwork data.

Models of discourse analysis were tested during the pilot stage to explore how power struggles occurred in and over discourse. This enabled a focus on changes in discursive practices, as parts of wider processes of social and cultural change. Discourses could be viewed as both permeable and rigid, sometimes associated with particular social domains or institutions (like childhood and the media), and at others forged temporarily to form boundaries and relationships between them. Critical discourse analysis had the virtue of enabling the social and ideological work of language through detailed properties of texts, both what is in them and what is excluded (Potter et al, 1995). Critical discourse theory appeared to provide both theoretical rigour, and the necessary methodological tools, to engage with discursive battles over children's production.



The pilot study used transcribed text from informant interviews with key children's producers as data for analysis. The researcher already knew these producers from lobbying work with the Children's Television Foundation and, as a consequence, many of the usual difficulties of access to a professional world were not encountered because trust was already established. The main difficulty in the early stages was shifting from the persona of a lobbyist to that of a researcher, but even this was made easy by the generosity of the producers interviewed. Three highly articulate and expressive executive producers were interviewed on their goals for, and frustrations with, producing for children.<sup>22</sup>

Appointments were made with one executive producer in Christchurch and two in Dunedin. A schedule of questions was tested with a colleague (himself a producer), and adapted in light of his responses. The slate of questions needed considerable refining because fluency of expression and digressions proved to be both advantageous and problems. The decision was made to develop 'clusters' of questions that could be used as appropriate within defined areas of interest, for example views of the child audience, or relations with programmers. This worked very well because it enabled a discreet check that all areas were covered whilst allowing articulate informants to lead the researcher into new territory. Later reading confirmed this intuitive strategy. Potter et al (1995) observe that the abrupt closure of talk, as characterized by the shift between questions, echoes elements of negative response in conversation. It quickly became clear that a conversational tone created a relaxed and confidential interaction. However, the intrusion of the interviewer into the conversations also required a fastidious noting of those intrusions. The three interviewees signed release statements about disclosure. Key informants were sent final drafts using material from their interviews for comments before further publication.

'Saturated discourses' were identified through a process of tracking repeating metaphors, phrases and positional statements in interview texts. It was posited that producers were involved in a rhetorical process of making sense out of competing and antagonistic discourses in order to provide solutions to problems for a range of stakeholders in the production process. These stakeholders were posited to include the funding agency, commercial broadcasters, parents, children and the creative team itself. Key phrases and metaphors about the value of local children's television production were collected and

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<sup>22</sup> Janine Morrell, Rex Simpson and Ian Taylor.

then diagrammatic maps of the relationships between clusters of aligned key phrases were constructed. Some of these discourses appeared to articulate with each other. Others stood alone. Three separate key 'saturated' producer discourses were identified and outlined: 'Courtship discourse: selling solutions to schedulers', 'Child-centred discourse: Television's Pied Pipers', 'Creative discourse: The Programming clobbering machine.' The original intention was to continue this work of discourse analysis in a larger study however the fast changing politics of broadcasting created a highly unstable research site which required that the case study was written up in a descriptive political-economic narrative style, interspersed with speculative discourse analysis.

In the wake of the first World Congress of Children's Television, held in Melbourne in 1995, stakeholders were approached to fund a larger study using 'Delphi' discourse techniques. It was intended to construct a survey out of elements of 'saturated discourses' of children's television in order to assist stakeholders in reaching a policy consensus over national goals for children's television production. In the event, potential industry patrons and funders declined to fund, and it became apparent that there was a lack of interest in defining cultural intangibles for children when dominant definitions of value in the deregulated environment were those that served the interests of industrial stakeholders like advertisers and broadcasters.

### **Refocusing research**

As a result of time spent deepening theoretical perspectives, new frames evolved. The research focus moved to questions underlying the rationale for children's television provision by NZ On Air. Questions about the current construction of childhood and the role of television in a local sense of identity came to the fore. The goal became to contextualize broad political economic issues within the concrete processes of day-to-day production. A decision was made to find a production case study in which to engage in ethnographic fieldwork. It was hoped that the production context, processes and outcomes could be used to create 'thick' description in order to explain the choice of style and the range of meanings and resources it made available for local identity formation for local children. A core task was to analyse transcribed interviews using discourse analysis in order to concentrate on what production team members *did* with their talk (discourse practices) and also on the range of resources the production team drew on in the course of those practices (Potter et al, 1995: 81). It was hoped to focus on

the interpretative repertoires that provided the machinery for production rationales and agency in children's television production.

Janine Morrell, Executive Producer of Television New Zealand's (TVNZ) Children's and Young Person's Production Unit (CYPU) at the time, was approached and she agreed to help the researcher find a suitable case study. Morrell commented that she felt it would be useful for someone from a lobbying and teaching background to understand the pragmatics of day-to-day production. The executive producer, researcher and thesis supervisor were all, at the time, members of a short-lived children's television advisory committee for TVNZ. A trip to Auckland for an advisory meeting provided a low-key opportunity for supervisor and researcher to discuss the proposal with the head of production. Permission was granted and a letter of approval placed on the file at the network headquarters. The executive producer and producer were provided with a written proposal and ethical agreements for research access and interviewing protocol were signed. It was agreed that interviews would be transcribed and that any chapter that included interview material would be presented to the executive producer for comment before submission.

Janine Morrell was the mentor for research from start to finish, even though she was increasingly inaccessible as the politics of production became intense, enforcing often-weekly trips for her to Auckland and Wellington. Relaxed exploratory interviews became another demand on her overfull life and, as a consequence, the original research timetable was not possible to fulfil, although she continued to be very generous with her information. Her continued commitment to the research during difficult months instilled an inevitable sense of gratitude in the researcher. The sense of obligation made it difficult, on occasion, to avoid capture by the political interests of the mentor, especially during the dramatic stages of reformatting and the decision to shift the production north to Avalon. The ethical agreement became an important rudder for helping the researcher to guard against requests to function as an informed lobbyist for the production company, although on one occasion the researcher wrote a support letter for the proposal to the funding agency. Interviews with Morrell were interrupted by phone-calls and visitors, and characterized by the informant's natural tendency to hop between topics. As a result, interviews were not as complete or consistent as would have been ideal. Her dramatic, highly articulate and fast-speaking pattern was characterized by a naturally rhetorical style. She punctuated her talk with summaries of other conversations, even to the point of

using 'he said', 'she said' and 'I said'. This was helpful when it came to triangulating information with other informants.

Another key informant turned out to be the producer, Tony Palmer, who had extensive experience in sports broadcasting, as well as some years in children's production. He made it clear from the start that he was a practical professional man who had little respect for the role of broadcasting theory or academics. The researcher entered the relationship with the uneasy feeling of being viewed as a 'theorist' in a world of intuitive action and commonsense, sometimes cynical, judgements. It did not help that the proposal he read had been formulated for cultural studies readers, not a hardened sports journalist. His jaundiced insights into the politics of broadcasting taught the researcher much about the fearful environment of deregulated television, where one's creative future could be cut short at the whim of a programmer or funder at the annual funding round. In his late forties, he was one of the 'wrinklies' in the team. His preference for pragmatic industrial evidence rather than 'heady' political-economic analysis gave the researcher food for thought on more than one occasion. His laconic manner made it difficult to judge whether he simply suffered the regular interviews or in fact enjoyed the process of discussing the production of **What Now?** He gave generously of his time but there was a continuing 'suppliant and expert' informant relationship. He might have easily cowed a younger researcher less intent on tapping into his depth of production and institutional experience.

### **The choice of production**

A decision had to be made over how fine-grained to make the production study. The decision was made to conduct, initially, a relatively large, and thus relatively coarse grained case study of the evolution of a new production within the stable of the Children's and Young People's Department of Television New Zealand. There was some lingering vanity that such a production study would provide insights into the politics of children's production that would provide policy solutions to current problems facing children's producers. It was hoped to find a new programme idea and then follow it through concept, pitch, funding and production stages. Reception by its audience would then be studied. Janine Morrell included me in plans for two new programmes, one for a children's news programme, the other an international co-production. Successful outcomes to these projects were uncertain and the time period allocated for research was tight, so, in the end, a 'compromise' was reached and the long running programme **What**

**Now?** became the case study of choice. It was hoped that a complementary, broadly targeted primary-school-aged show, **Squirt**, could be used as a comparison. Both programmes were tracked for several months, but the logistics of travelling to Dunedin (where **Squirt** was made), and reaching key people by phone in a busy production house, prevented such a comparison. In the end **What Now?** became the focus of fieldwork, although wider political-economic analysis still includes discussion of **Squirt** and, later, the evolving idea for the news programme **Wired**.

As a case study, **What Now?** had a dual benefit. Firstly, it was securely in production. Secondly, its production team worked in production offices and studios a ten-minute walk from the New Zealand Broadcasting School in Christchurch. It thus fitted the requirements for both doctoral research and the logistic and time constraints presented by a teaching job. As a 15-year-old programme it did not have the immediate surface appeal of, seemingly, more innovative ventures, but in the event it offered a range of insights into programming and audience that would not have been possible with a newer programme concept. The plan was to follow the programme from the annual NZ On Air funding process, through one production year and then through the funding process that would seal its fate in the following year. In fact, keeping teaching commitments whilst spending time at the studios proved to be a difficult juggle. Early on the researcher felt that justice would be done neither to work nor research job and that in an ideal world a researcher would need to be at the studios all the time. This proved not to be the case because the cyclical routines of production ensured a high degree of redundancy in the data. Indeed, it became necessary to choose *where* to focus attention rather than to attempt to produce an ethnographic narrative of the entire production cycle.

By dropping into the production on a regular basis the researcher was able, after a couple of months, to come, stay and go without formality. However, one of the early and continuing difficulties turned out to be explaining to members of the team what was interesting to the researcher, and thus convincing busy workers to make contact when such events or meetings were planned. Often people were too busy to remember and the researcher heard about events after they happened. Sometimes it appeared as though the key decisions were only discussed 'on the wing', in corridors and in confidential meetings.

**What Now?**, in common with the rest of children's television, was viewed as a great stepping stone in training for other television jobs but only a few recruits expressed

interest in dedicating themselves to the specialized area. The mix of seasoned operational staff, often very young and untested team members, and seasoned overseers, like Tony Palmer, made up the team.

1998 proved to be an extraordinary year for the production team. Firstly, as a result of poor ratings the programme went through a process of reformatting for the following year. It changed from a 30-minute commercial show in 1997, to a continuity programme (called interstitial format) spread over 2 hours around imported cartoons (from 1999 until 2000). This formatting crisis proved to be a boon for a researcher because it laid bare many of the issues that challenged broadcaster, funder and producer, just as it revealed how each viewed the role of the programme in the mix. Secondly the managers of the team were told in the middle of the production year that the programme was to shift away from its 'home base' in Christchurch to Wellington in order to rationalize the company's business operation. The rumour mill was unsettling, but the news was worse. At first the shift appeared to make the research project very difficult because of the disruptions to the rituals of 'normal' production. In the end these events provided insights into the way TVNZ managerial decisions had an impact on creative continuity for the team. The shift also highlighted the ways that key **What Now?** producers acted as advocates for the 'team' whilst assimilating change and constructing new narratives that could provide an incentive for accepting future new realities. It also clarified team hierarchies.

Key players in the creative team gained packages to shift. Some young unencumbered upwardly mobile workers saw the shift as a benefit because it offered a fresh start in an industry where institutional memory is short. This contrasted with the bitterness of older traditional operational staff who lost work in the contracting production base of Christchurch. Many of these individuals had great nostalgia for the old 'job for life' bureaucratic systems of state television. This group felt great anger towards 'headquarters' in Auckland, and ambivalence towards the transferred core of young creative workers. This provided polarized, but useful triangulation, of viewpoints on events within the production unit.

### **The choice of ethnographic grounded research**

Dornfeld expresses well the approach taken in this research:

The traditions of interpretive social science and fieldwork approaches to communication bolster my approach in this study. These paradigms see ethnographic knowledge as the product of an

encounter between interpreting researcher and thinking, acting subjects, propelled by the objective of portraying and analyzing 'native' frameworks of understanding and action... The ethnographic model employed here seeks to move between, on the one hand, native understandings, conceptualizations, and theories and, on the other, real-life practices and institutional constraints, to consider the relation between the symbolic and the practical... In this way a progressive form of inter-subjectivity leads to reflexive engagement. (1998: 24).

Potter et al (1995) note that the researcher's position in the hierarchy is worth some analysis in itself, because it is this that decides what material they can access and, consequently, judgements made about research focus. There is no doubt that if this researcher had been mentored by one of the operational staff she may have found questions related to technology, management systems and changing craft practices critical for the consequent shape of **What Now?** As it happens, this researcher has found a mentor in an executive producer and this, inevitably, positions the research towards questions related to genre, funding and management issues within television production, even though interest in textual issues also draws her towards the day-to-day production systems.

The research diary became invaluable for refining thematic issues and evolving hunches. The process of grounded research found theory informing data collection, and data informing the choice of theoretical frames. Preliminary codes were designed, but a process of progressive focussing of codes, and thus related discourses, continued throughout the period of data collection. On some occasions interpretive repertoires and ideological practices on a large scale became manifest in details of the production. The researcher observed the alignments of agents (and their texts) with different 'allies', and the positioning of speakers and text against perceived 'enemies', definitions of which were fluid, and changed according to production politics. For example, in a conversation with a producer about funding, a programme commissioner could be either an ally or an enemy, according to their support for **What Now?** It was interesting to track how use of the personal 'us' changed in the interviews, depending on the rhetorical purpose of the interviews. Sometimes 'us' referred to the producer and TVNZ versus the funder, on other occasions it represented producer and the creative team versus TVNZ. Sometimes parents' views were sought and valued; on other occasions, they were viewed as a shared problem for producers and broadcaster. Sometimes what was *not* said was as important as what *was* said, as for example in the neglect of girls as audiences, compared to boys. Argumentative discourse, which updated and made personal narratives coherent, were critical for defining the articulations of discourse on which cultural power was based. Sometimes themes merged or even disappeared, so that categories continually needed to be refined.

## Field-work issues

In the early stages it was critical to simply map the apparently floating constellations of workers moving in and out of the offices—they were involved in field-crews, studio work, postproduction and club matters. The first question was: who was the core team? This was made more difficult by the fact that people worked different shifts and towards different deadlines. At 3.45 pm weekdays **What Now?** could be said to exist in several versions simultaneously: studio live transmission, field filming, pre-production planning, scripting, rehearsals and contracted odd jobs. Sometimes an issue of interest would crop up in preplanning and in an ideal world one might hope to track it. This was rarely, if ever, possible given the deadlines of television and the time constraints of a teaching job.

In the early weeks the researcher was faced with an overwhelming picture of purposeful activity, much of it inaccessible because it was conducted on the phone, on headphones and on computer. There was a very human desire to have a ‘panoptic’ view of the range of parallel processes in order to make sense of the busy scene. Over the first few weeks of observation and questioning the researcher began to recognize not just personalities and jobs, but patterns in the processes. It became very clear that no one person on the team *could* have a ‘panoptic’ view, because the system ran along a range of ‘lines of production’. Too many things were happening at once, along different timelines, for different managers to ever be able to cover everything systematically. Many data-rich events, anecdotes and exchanges were going to be missed. It continually surprised the researcher how workers in discreet elements of the production often did not know, or understand, the routines of others.

Clearly there was a chronological story to be told that explained the different seasons of production. The application for funds was made in September (after some months of talks with both broadcasters and funders), funds were granted in October—at which point there was a month or so of reviewing the previous year’s production and consequent redesigning of elements for the next year. Summer holidays over, the core creative team reconvened in mid-January to refine format elements and plan the production for the year. In February the full creative team began work and the operational team began work on field direction, studio operations and postproduction. One of the first research decisions to be made was whether the researcher was going to analyse both the half-hour weekdays and the 2-hour Sunday morning shows. Both are referred to in terms of content but the decision was made to concentrate on production talk about weekday shows because of the significant tensions between commercial and non-commercial drivers that



were apparent within them. Another appealing way of telling the production story was to find themes that illustrated the processes of production. As Dornfeld puts it, it became important to 'look for the structural and conceptual tensions that emerged repeatedly in different forms and contexts' (1998: 27).

A range of communicative modalities are used: formal texts, written material, formal interviews, conversational language as well as images, notes, diary entries, email, drawings and letters, scripts and observation of interactions. At the start, a decision was made to interview representatives for each area of the creative team in order to orient the researcher to the systems. A decision was made 1 month into the year as to which informants to contact regularly for updates, and key informants were chosen on the grounds that they had an overview of sections of the production processes, or were involved in central decision making. A decision was made to keep in touch with the funders by phone. A request was granted to attend the funding round in 1997 to observe the process, and confidentiality over funding decisions agreed to. One intensive interviewing trip made to 'Head Office' in Auckland prior to the 1998 funding round was used to clarify research hunches and triangulate data with managers, programmers, commissioners and staff members involved in publicity, audience research, advertising sales and marketing. A trip to Auckland in early 1999 was used for follow-up interviews, as well as interviews with toy manufacturers, food companies, advertising agencies and children's marketers on creative strategies used during 1998. Some of these informants generously provided access to expensive trade magazines, research documents and marketing events like the 'Capturing Kids' seminar in 1999. The natural tendency to generalize too readily to macro frames from the context of one research site was countered by visiting other productions for perspective. Visits to Kids TV and Taylormade in Dunedin were made on several occasions.

Several different types of interview are used in this project. Some interviews are highly ordered and directive, and are designed to find out information and map systems. In some of these interviews craftspeople explained their processes; and they sometimes found this difficult to do because much of their communication was codified or even non-verbal. Observation of processes and non-verbal modalities became important ways of understanding team production. Most interviews with ongoing informants are conversational in style and the interviewer is recognized as part of the process.

Over 80 formal recorded interviews were recorded and transcribed over the year. Many more informal interviews took place and, when possible, details recorded from them immediately afterwards. The executive producer, Janine Morrell, was a key interviewee for the political overview of production and her viewpoint was triangulated with that of Tony Palmer, people at NZ On Air and individuals from Auckland TVNZ headquarters. Interviews with Tony Palmer (producer), Jane Palmer (club coordinator and merchandising) and Sarah Pennock (creative director) were done progressively at intervals of 2–3 weeks in order to catch up with production events. Other key people were interviewed at least once, and optimally twice—firstly to understand their role, and secondly to explore experiences in that role. A range of other craftspeople from graphics, field and studio direction, presenting and graphics were interviewed at stages in the process once clear lines of interest had been focused. An attempt was made to transcribe all interviews within 48 hours. Comments by the interviewer, pauses, irony and other moments of emotions were noted. The interviewees are listed at the end of the bibliography.

It was important for the researcher to become ‘part of the furniture’ in order to observe technical and creative processes. At first there was a degree of awkwardness for the researcher as she adjusted from her usual role of providing feedback to students, to quietly observing and being a supplicant for information or clarification from busy people who, presumably, had nothing to gain from providing it. It also felt awkward, at first, to often find herself the oldest person in the room, but this seemed to cause no inhibitions for others, after the first couple of occasions. The average age of team members was early 20s. Some team members were tertiary graduates; others were school leavers, and some were even still at school. Many were in their first television job. There were seasonal, in-depth, official debriefs of the programme when the whole team was present. These were invaluable occasions for observation. The first November format review involved the whole team as they brainstormed creative ideas in small groups for themes for the following year’s show. This was followed by a formative review in April, once the show was in production. These sessions helped to build a palpable sense of ownership by all members of the team. They often commented on ideas that they had initiated or contributed to with proprietary interest. Management used these collaborative occasions to mix up departments and build new friendship alliances.

The researcher watched many episodes of the programme, as it went to air, in the homely offices in an old two-storey house next to the studios. Tony Palmer (producer), the core

production team, main scriptwriter, and front people had desks on the ground floor in an open plan room. In the centre of the workstations was a comfortable dilapidated old sofa where 'meetings' happened, and where the researcher could sometimes watch the programme with the team as it went out live. The room had several monitors suspended from the ceiling so that the team could watch while they did their jobs. The creative team of scriptwriters, graphics, creative director, line manager and producer watched the live programme go out at 3.30pm whenever they could. There was chat about the production processes, opportunities lost and won; and presenters, scriptwriter and researchers were provided with generous peer-group feedback on the programme. It provided an opportunity for the researcher to ask questions about the choice of music and popular cultural icons, some of which were beyond the ken of an 'old wrinkly'. The atmosphere felt generous. Bravura performances, favourite joke riffs, grubby barnyard humour and glitches were commented upon. Good jokes saw Andrew Gunn, the scriptwriter, acknowledged by the team. New graphics were commented on. New ideas were analysed for success or failure. Presenters had positive comments passed on and bloopers openly commiserated over. It was clear that peer feedback and approval was very important for team members, and comments expressed the team's sense of being ignored by headquarters. This created an atmosphere of besieged camaraderie and creative outrage when news of ratings was bad. They, after all, opened up to two bags of mail a day, were involved in using the exploding database of the club, and knew the difficulties that 7 tele-operators had fielding calls when competitions were run. Many believed these were better indications of popularity and appreciation, but no one dismissed the danger that low ratings represented for ongoing survival.

Also on the ground floor, in a room off the passage, were 'the club' team of three core members. It was here that the club activities, competitions, newsletter, web site and merchandising were designed, and the chore of letter opening (up to 4 mailbags a day) completed. A range of letters were circulated, and some of these were passed on to the presenters and other team members to answer, in order to 'keep the team in touch with why they were making the programme' (Palmer, J, 1/9/98). The researcher made this room a comfortable first port of call on many occasions. She opened letters, read comments from fans and admired artwork and constructions sent in for competitions, while operational systems hummed along upstairs. Here production assistants timed scripts and kept directors on track, filled in sheets to record music use, planned future programme content and phoned talent. In a sunny landing corner a highly respected and seasoned financial manager calculated the running budgets. Itinerant journalists and

directors with desks upstairs (one lived in Auckland) wandered in and out with crews. Across the corridor upstairs was the executive producer's office. It was colourful, had a fairy doll's house in one corner, and a comfortable sofa and chairs in another. Janine Morrell was often in other places but when she was 'in', clear command lines of energy emanated from her room. In operational areas one was aware of craft shorthand between the team members.

Two 2-week samples of videotaped programmes were kept for content analysis if necessary. In the early stages it was not anticipated that this would be the case but as research questions evolved this decision paid off because the study now includes some detailed case studies based on October 1998 programmes. Advertising material was also elicited from clients and advertising agencies.

Over such a long case study it was inevitable that access to information would be incomplete and partial, but sometimes the researcher had access to information that even core team members were not aware of. For example, it surprised the researcher early on to find out how little many members of the production team knew or cared about the politics of broadcasting. In some cases this was the simple result of youth and inexperience, but this was certainly not the case for more seasoned staff, who were immersed in the crises of daily deadlines. People in quite senior management positions were not clear about, or particularly aware of, the politics of funding from NZ On Air. Some of this lack of awareness could be attributed to functional specialization, which saw politics relegated to the executive producer. Certainly the team appreciated her ability to protect the production base from moves north by Auckland managers of TVNZ.

As time spent with the team lengthened, new ethical considerations emerged. There were issues of secrecy and power between members of the production hierarchy that needed to be respected. The lag between data collection and analysis proved often to be a boon in disguise. Productions have short institutional memories and what had been 'sensitive information' during one production year, proved not to be so a year afterwards.

Commercial confidentiality, which threatened to be difficulty at certain points, ended up being resolved simply because time passed, and with it any commercial risk to the stakeholders. However, other material (like the value of children's advertising within **What Now?** was not obtainable. Auckland managers indicated that the processes of discounting and bulk buying made calculating this figure difficult, but it was clear that it was also politically sensitive during the post-election policy positioning over advertising

to children. Safe research required that the research process did not compromise informants in their professional lives, but it also required resisting the trap of indebtedness to those who exposed their working lives to the researcher. A related risk was self-censorship, in the knowledge that the givers of information were also future readers. Despite the ethical guidelines in place, access to ‘secrets’ caused the researcher some anxiety. Some informants were not in the ‘loop’ when format changes were occurring and the shift to Wellington was being negotiated. Jobs were at stake for people I had become close to during the collaborative research. The researcher also had the interesting challenge of being supervised by someone who was already deeply involved in the national policy politics of children’s broadcasting, thus becoming a source of production discourses himself.

Ethnographic research has come under attack for the propensity of researchers who use these techniques to ‘go native’ and end up empathising with their informants’ points of views, thus ‘losing’ the necessary critical analytical distance from those perspectives. As Born puts it in terms of her ethnography of the BBC:

While it is true that the characteristic attempt in ethnographic research to achieve a kind of double consciousness—*both empathy and distance*—involves a necessary methodological detour through identification, it is an error to confuse the detour with the final destination. It is a means to greater insight. Achieving distance means attempting a move beyond relativism, and it is here that ethnographic work necessarily entails an engagement with the problem of value. (Born, 2000: 409 *Italics included*).

Going ‘inside’ a production means analysing the reflexivity and intentionality of media professionals. It also means following the ways in which such actors themselves think across the distinctions between production, texts and audiences. It also requires researcher reflexivity. This researcher found this openness to new data meant throwing away precious analytical categories. Early categories, for example for ‘child-centred’ and ‘commercial’, were progressively dismantled as they blurred in the production process. Sometimes it appeared that the clear object of research (children and children’s television) was dissolving in front of the researcher’s eyes. Facts and viewpoints that seemed easy to grasp in the binary debates of broadcasting policy became more difficult to come to grips with in the shifting sands of ‘making do’ of everyday television production. It is here that attention to presumptive audiences of producers became critical to enable distanced analysis.

## CHAPTER FIVE - CHILDREN AND COMMERCE

We are moving headlong into a borderless global economy powered by a borderless media. A most remarkable consequence has been the gigantic leap in consumer empowerment and the corresponding dis-empowerment of Governments. (Wiggs, 1999).

In the transnational arena, extended and unbounded concepts of human rights and free speech are the forward guard of narratives of the West arriving on commercial wings. (Price, 1995: 219).

### Introduction

The contemporary crisis of social theory has emerged largely from the inability of either the nation state or the free market to address the new complexities of economics and culture. This chapter lays out the thinking behind key broadcasting models in liberal democracies, with a particular focus on the elements that relate to the provision for children. Section A provides a brief exposition of two theoretical broadcasting policy positions, along with elements of criticism and a brief analysis of how they have been applied in practice. This enables the particular decisions, made by the Fourth Labour government of New Zealand during the late 1980s, to be put into international perspective. Section B discusses how certain definitions of 'rights' have been favoured in recent international agreements, and the ways these have shaped global patterns of audio-visual content and trade during the late 1990s. This chapter provides the philosophical base for Chapter Six, where the dramatically changing landscape of international audio-visual trade to children during the 1990s is described. These changes have accelerated since 1998, with profound implications for national children's television production.

As will become evident in this particular chapter, there are two sets of discussions that cut across each other in recent policy debate over the role of media in liberal democracies. The first concerns debate between advocates of free market provision and public service provision. The second set of discussions, which undercuts the first, concerns debates between paternalists and libertarians (Curran et al, 1997: 332). This undercutting creates surprising political and cultural alliances within the politics of children's broadcasting in a range of countries. Debates over 'audience', already fiercely contested when it comes to adult provision (Ang, 1991), become even more confused and fiercely contested when it comes to provision for child audiences. There is more opportunity for confusion over who *is* the 'principal agent' for children's television than for any other specialized audience, simply because children are always 'spoken for', rather than have the capacity to act as their own political agents. It is in the interpretation of 'principal-agent' relationships between broadcaster, state, and funder (either

advertising or public), and the consequent interpretations of benefits offered by each policy position, that the internal logic of each discourse, their warrants and consequent implications for children's television can be best understood (Hay, 1999: 134). It is helpful to keep two considerations in mind during this next section: firstly, the power of various adult audiences over the construction of children's programmes, each of which hold a particular construct of the child viewer in mind; secondly, the ways in which the 'child' and the 'parent' are aligned (or placed in opposition) in different discourses of audience. These have consequences for producers.

The second debate cuts across the first. Those who advocate for the protection for children, both from the left and the right of the political spectrum, want a society where there is a set of rights that protects the vulnerable from irresponsible media. Children, as the most vulnerable audience, ipso facto require the greatest paternalistic protection ('in loco parentis') to ensure their safety and protection. Concerns have been expressed over how best to shield children from violent material, and, more critically for this study, exposure to commercial persuasion. Regulatory requirements for age appropriate local content, which are designed to ensure the enculturation of the next generation, also reflect a paternalistic tradition of 'in loco parentis'. By contrast anti-protectionists, of both the left and right, argue that state censorship, or content regulation, is no longer possible or desirable. The key imperative is to break down all barriers to free expression and active audience choice.

### **A. Public Service and market provision**

Theoretical debate over media provision intensified during the 1980s and 1990s as the old rationale for broadcasting regulation, scarcity of access to signal, crumbled in the wake of satellite, cable and then digital plenty. New technology offered the potential for vast consumer choice, and advocates for the free media market in a range of countries believed that the old period of broadcast scarcity, and consequent regulation of access to frequency, was over. They argued that market mechanisms would ensure freedom of choice in a new age of technical innovation and globalisation. Advocates for public service broadcasting provision, by contrast, argued for the continuing need for a state regulated 'open terrain' of public space (Price, 1995). Both advocates of the market and advocates of national public service television claimed, and continue to claim, to serve the best interests of the 'audience'.

The polarised public service and market broadcasting policy discourses are outlined in the brief 'saturated' texts (Potter et al, 1995) in order to clarify key precepts and metaphors that recur in a range of stakeholder documents. Elements of these emotive calls to action keep reappearing, in a range of guises, within discursive battles over children's media policy, and it is important to first view them within the matrix of other elements of the 'saturated discourse'. In each case the saturated text is followed by a brief critique of the philosophical stance and examples in practice.

### **Public service broadcasting: saturated text**

In public service broadcasting in a democracy, the audience is addressed as a citizen with a range of information, education and entertainment needs. In the case of children, broadcasting is required to address the needs of the learning child as she/he becomes a citizen. Such systems are marked by certain ideals. Firstly, a national public broadcasting service should be available for the entire population of citizens. It should reflect the geographic diversity of the nation. The lives and experiences of children in the provinces should be reflected in children's television as much as those in production centres. Such a service is universally funded and, as a consequence, all children, regardless of socio-economic background, should receive the same good service. Success should be measured in the range of good programming choices rather than in a race to win ratings. 'Good programming' is judged according to production values and the provision of a broadcasting ecology containing range and variety and intensity of enjoyment. There should be universality of appeal. This has been summed up as making good programmes popular and popular programmes good. This should be achieved for children as well as adult viewers. Public service broadcasting also caters for minorities. It enables children to understand and be uplifted in programmes tailored to their developmental stage. It enables children to understand what it means to be both part of a proud minority and part of a tolerant majority. Such a system should foster a sense of national identity and community by including children across the nation in the national/community imagination. It should be detached from vested interests, including government, and be free from control by ideological, political or business interests, including sponsorship and advertising. Legislative guidelines should encourage programme makers to experiment and innovate so that the medium will attract the best and most creative people, and as a result the audience will be provided with the greatest choice. Its high standards are a key contribution to the cultural resources of the society for the next generation.



The ideal service for children is thus one that delivers the same high production values, range and variety of genre as is ideal for adults except (even more costly) in age appropriate forms. This modernist ideal has never existed in a pure form, but the BBC's 'Great Tradition', which aspires to it, has inspired public service ideals everywhere. Public service objectives continue to shape and guide national regulatory responses to perceived threats to children's cultural identity and sense of national citizenship (drawn from Hawke, 1990; Zanker, 1992; Home, 1993; Curran et al, 1997; Murdoch, 1998; Smith, 1996; Frith, 2000; Horrocks, 2000; Born, 2000).

### **Critics of public service broadcasting**

Market critics accuse public service television models of economic inefficiency. They are both costly to consumers and marked by the cultural elitism of middle-class policy makers and television professionals. Attempts to moderate class bias, thus increasing inclusiveness are, demonstrably, politically misjudged failures because audiences, particularly children's audiences, have voted with their remotes. Broadcasting elites are out of touch with the tastes of a range of pluralist audiences (including children). As Rupert Murdoch famously opined of British advocates for public service:

Much of what passes for quality on British television is no more than a reflection of the values of the narrow elite which controls it and has always thought that its tastes are synonymous with quality. (Brunsdon, 1990: 69).

It can be argued that 'quality programming' is best judged by viewers themselves, from what is provided by a competitive market. Public service broadcasters are particularly out of touch with children's culture. Ratings and qualitative audience research shows that children like popular culture, usually in preference to 'worthy and earnest' educational programming, which is better suited to school.

The burden of proof for continued public service television has shifted to the advocates for public service broadcasting. They are required to demonstrate that costly local production equates to measurable 'quality outputs' and that judgements of 'value', 'diversity' and 'quality' are more than elitist class judgements. The 'democracy of the market' has become a powerful rhetorical weapon in disputes over 'quality' measures. As a local children's producer puts it, what is the point of making beautifully crafted local children's programmes that few local children wish to watch (Taylor, interview, 1997)?

Cultural studies also attacks unreflective definitions of public service 'quality'. Audience research suggests that children are highly critical viewers who make clear judgements

about what they do and do not like. Scholars (Wagg, 1992; Buckingham, 2000) attack the largely unscrutinised hierarchy of supposedly 'authentic' cultural and social values that dominated BBC production for children in earlier decades. This stable middle-class ideal of enculturation and socialization of future citizens has been challenged by seismic cultural hybridization over the last two decades of post-colonialism. Children, and particularly youth audiences, embrace popular culture as a resource for identity construction and peer pleasure.

### **Commentary**

National cultural identity, once galvanised by nationalist modernising projects like public service broadcasting, is being absorbed into global communities of interest and taste, or fragmenting into tribal and regional affiliations. Cultural identity, as a consequence, is increasingly described in metaphors of 'flow' and 'hybridity' (Massey, 1998). What were once viewed as simple binaries of public or commercial, national or global, are now overlapping in a variety of ways. Indigenous voices, niche post-colonial narratives and consumer appeals jostle with the old hegemony of middle-class, white, public-service taste in New Zealand broadcasting. All, for example, are simultaneously present, in combination, and recontextualized in various ways, in the instance of a sporting hero like Jonah Lomu. He is, at the same time, a national cultural icon, a member of the Samoan diaspora, an international cult figure, a public relations role-model for children with kidney disease, a star who makes rugby a commercial sport on television, a focus for body fetish and a branding symbol for McDonald's.

Shelley's vision for public service broadcasting in New Zealand was Reithian in inspiration (Day, 1994) and, as in Britain, public service broadcasting advocates in New Zealand are on the defensive against economic rationalism and the instrumentality of ratings. Public service advocates everywhere are grappling with the problem of justifying 'intangibles' like 'quality' and 'cultural value' without falling into elitist and classist traps (Born, 2000). As ratings discourse is increasingly adopted as a measure of success by public service broadcasters like the BBC and ABC, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to justify low rating programming when their choice of ratings currency suggests that children are shifting in numbers to commercial channels. Tracey, for one, argues that the broad 'ideal of public service broadcasting on the BBC model is becoming globally extinct' (Tracey, 2000: 29).

As global niche choices expand, and public broadcasters' financial commitment to children's production is increasingly threatened at the national level, new global market opportunities have opened up for beleaguered public broadcasters and producers: that of premium branding (Cox, 2000: 4). The next chapter looks at the ways in which national public service broadcasting providers (like BBC, ABC and PBS) are repositioning themselves as 'quality benchmarks' within children's audio-visual trade and associated ancillary rights and licensing (Steemers, 1999). It has to be asked whether these developments, spearheaded by affluent English-speaking nations, have now bypassed older modernist notions of national, culturally specific, public service television for children. It also needs to be asked what significance these developments have for less affluent importing nations, like New Zealand. At this point it is important to lay out the second of the key dimensions in policy debates over broadcasting for children.

### **The media market: saturated text**

Economics has long been a politicized 'science' and normative models of 'natural economy' have had a recurring political attraction (Price, 1995). Market advocates are tantalized by a utopian promise that, through eliminating the perversions that contaminate the pure economic realm, social and economic problems will dissolve. Hence economic freedom becomes *the* necessary pre-condition for political freedom. Most recently, market reforms, inspired by the neo-liberal economic principles outlined by the Chicago school, have gained in currency in the USA and spread throughout the western world.

The Chicago school offered a rational system of economic ideas within neo-liberalism at a time of growing anxiety about the messiness of Keynesian economics. Monetarism's economic and philosophical package made privatisation and commodification consonant virtues. The model argues for reduced state function, free markets, deregulation and privatisation, and an ideological commitment to the individual rather than to society. In such ways the national state is reduced from the blown out centralized functions of the welfare state to neutral and minimal functions. Its role is restricted to maintaining property rights and rules of exchange and working as a traffic cop to facilitate movement between competing private interests to ensure a level playing field in the marketplace. It is argued that as 'sovereign consumers' purchase their choice of goods and services in a free market, they shape the market itself.

The *media* marketplace functions no differently than any other market place. In common with other markets, the broadcasting market permits consumers to act on their personal judgement of their own best interests. In its extreme expression, all 'provision for the consumer on a competitive basis in a non-distorted market is a public service' (Curran et al, 1997: 332). Advocates argue that choices made by informed media consumers ensure that commercial competition in free-to-air broadcasting produce the range of programmes demanded by audiences. Furthermore, the aggregation of individuals' preferences determines the best allocation of scarce resources. When these principles are applied to the television market it provides what consumers want: a diverse output to choose from and a television system free from government interference. The deregulated broadcasting media provide competition, the profit motive, and open markets, which yield optimum future media choice for all; and thus the 'public interest' is fulfilled by the broadcasting market. In a commercial broadcasting system, market ratings measure adult audience satisfaction with programmes. This is equally the case for children. In such a competitive system a programme is successful and 'good enough' if it is chosen by most children. If children prefer to tune into imported cartoons rather than consume indigenous product it is an indicator that indigenous producers do not provide the 'quality' programming preferred by children. Only when producers respond to children's needs and desires better, will they be able to compete in the open market. As media markets transcend national boundaries there is a growing range and variety of 'quality' niche appeal programmes from a variety of sources, not just the broad appeals of national broadcasting provision. New niche pay channels like Nickelodeon further expand market choices for both parents and children (Easton, 1990; Cunningham, 1992; Sharp, 1994; Price, 1995; Minow, 1995; Herman, 1995; Easton, 1997, Hay, 1999).

### **Critics of the pure media market**

Cultural critics argue that market mechanisms ignore important positive externalities that markets cannot provide, such as the public service dimensions of culture, education, and places for democratic debate, minority viewpoint and enculturation of children into national norms and identity. This cultural gap in market delivery puts civic society of national democracies at risk as the state increasingly abdicates its civic role by handing over public media space available for the enculturation of the next generation to the market (Herman, 1995: 178-9). Turow (1998) and McAllister (1996) fear that the development of privatised 'quality' market niches of pay television syphons off the politically active middle classes from an inclusive public sphere. These arguments, based

on cultural intangibles, gain little purchase in a policy environment where tenets of market economics rule.

It is now critical to summarise economic arguments that posit that the neo-liberal model of a pure television market is deeply flawed. Whereas ‘the media industry’ is often viewed as a pure market, actually it consists of a defined collection of different media businesses competing for customers. Furthermore, there are certain drivers within this inherent messiness of ‘the media market’ that prevent them ever working as a perfect market. Hay (1999) surveys and analyses media economics to reach the conclusion that there are centripetal tendencies within broadcasting that limit real range and variety and, therefore, real choice for the range of audiences including, implicitly, children. The main reason for this can be attributed to the behaviour of advertisers who are the primary client for commercially sponsored broadcasting. Advertiser preferences lead to market failure for certain less affluent and/or numerous audience types. A democracy designed to serve all citizens thus requires the regulation of broadcasting funding and delivery.

Hotelling theorised in 1929, in a classical article about competition in the broader market place, that there was a general tendency of all markets towards homogeneity and centrality (Hotelling, 1988). In the same period public intellectuals like Dew and Menchen argued that commercial radio broadcasting was inherently averse to controversy and dissenting opinion, and that it became intractably so by the nature of advertiser-supported programming (Minow, 1995: 77). During the 1950s Steiner adapted Hotelling’s ‘theory of excessive sameness’ to America television programming. He argued that powerful centripetal forces in the broadcasting marketplace compound to create a law-like dynamic whereby, over time, fads in popular media genres and formats rise and fall but the domination of a few mainstay formats remain the consistent organising principle. This conservatism of media markets is a consequence of fear of exposure to financial risks of content and format innovation. The tendency in broadcast television production commissioning is to clone, rather than innovate, and to appeal to the largest possible audience rather than serve a range of audiences.

Studies done by the NAB during the cable explosion of the 1980s illustrated, by tracking formats over several years in markets of 50 channels or more, that programming variety, even in a multiple channel market, can actually contract. It appears that in the USA media market plenty does not necessarily mean variety, and multiple sources do not necessarily mean choice. Neuman (1991) summarises a range of economic studies with a

view that, just as technological and delivery factors contribute to possible choice and variety in the new niche age, there are also drivers that limit choice. This has implications for the extremely risky industry of children's television production everywhere, but particularly for small media markets like New Zealand (Zanker, 1995).

McAllister (1996) builds on these analyses to argue that it is a natural part of the national broadcasting culture to move in the direction of making optimistic forecasts about winning the biggest share of the largest desirable audience. Thus there is a tendency toward competition between companies for the position of industry leader, so that it becomes most important to gain the largest 'share' of the most desirable audiences for sale to advertisers even though the costs might be high, and the desirable audience split. Fierce competition between TV2 and TV3 over the disposable income of the 18–39 year-old audience in New Zealand provides a case in point. The possibly logical economic option of serving smaller minority audience tastes, which may generate modest profits, has proven less attractive at the national level. The scenario for audiences that generate no profit, or may indeed cost money, is gloomier still. Serving niche audiences, which include the specialised niches of children's production for children, is an economic liability for broad service free-to-air television. Thus the national television market place is tilted, logically, (in light of the drivers outlined above) in critical directions. Firstly, it favours programmes that appeal to adults who spend household money and thus appeal to advertisers. In the off-peak schedules, like children's viewing after school, cost-effectiveness favours cheap and even free programmes, provided by toy companies, over costly locally produced programmes for children. For children, this has increasingly meant animations that serve as promotions for supersystems of other licensed commodities.

Given that broadcasting cannot be viewed simply as a pure market, but rather is an oligopoly, there remain economic problems. Economists agree that they have a great deal of trouble modelling oligopolistic behaviour:

The metaphor is the poker game with five or six players. Each player knows a great deal about what the other is up to, but does not possess perfect knowledge. (Gomery, 1994: 201).

Outcomes of oligopolistic corporate interplay depend on how many firms there are, how big they are in relationship to each other, and past corporate histories. At the global level, audio-visual trade and commerce is being captured by an oligopoly of vast vertically integrated companies with global interests: one example is Murdoch's News Corp which

owns Fox channel, production studios and global satellite networks (Herman et al, 1997). It is equally clear that at the national level only a few firms compete for the audience and advertising dollar. Recognizing the problems associated with oligopolistic (even duopolistic) broadcast behaviour is central to the analysis of the New Zealand case study.

### **Commentary**

There is no pure example of market delivery in broadcasting, just as there is no pure example of public service broadcasting. Arguably the best example of free market broadcasting delivery was set in place in the USA under Reagan during the early 1980s, when Fowler headed the Federal Communication Commission (FCC). This period proved to be a watershed for children's programming in the USA, with implications for children's media for the next decade and a half and, subsequently, for international audio-visual children's media trade and marketing to children.

Leverage for market delivery in American broadcasting came as early as the Radio Act of 1920 and the Communications Act of 1934. These formulated a peculiarly American definition of 'public benefit' and 'public interest' in broadcasting whereby whatever the market found profitable to offer audiences was, by definition, 'in the public interest'. During the radio era, American audiences, once parochial and regional, were reconfigured into Designated Marketing Areas (DMAs), which were shaped by the range of radio signals, rather than the old particularities of community and state. This enabled 'public benefit' to communities to become increasingly conflated with 'public interest' to 'DMAs of consumers' within the American media landscape (Minow, 1995). The powerful concept of a Designated Marketing Area gains new resonance in the next chapter as a key concept for understanding changing patterns in children's popular commodified culture.

The American media has, in the last few decades, found a defence for market freedom from content regulation in the First Amendment of the Constitution. For first amendment rights to be abrogated the government had to establish that the public had a compelling *interest* in the restriction of free speech. In effect, the First Amendment wording: 'Congress shall make no law ...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...' provided the means of foreclosing further discussion on 'public interest'. The argument went thus: the marketplace of ideas, however imperfect, cannot abide any form of government intervention, and that any intervention—even on behalf of children—is unconstitutional. This argument was used in 1983 when the FCC refused to reconsider its

lack of children's television policy (Minow, 1995: 106–7).<sup>23</sup> These decisions had extraordinary implications for the reconfiguring of children's culture globally.

The power of the First Amendment was compounded by the deregulation of children's television in 1980 under the regime of FCC Chairman Fowler. In his words, television became defined as the industrial equivalent of 'a toaster with pictures'. Not only were requirements for educational programmes dropped but the FCC also repealed regulations on commercial time limits for children. In 1994 Commissioner Quello objected to suggestions that the FCC clarify its policies with respect to the laws regarding education and informational components for children on the grounds that 'the more specific we get in clarifying the rules the closer we are to violating First Amendment rights' (Minow, 1995: 106). The FCC argued that the market challenge, and opportunity, was for someone to make quality programmes that were wanted by the public.

This free market stance was maintained despite strong arguments to the effect that the power of the First Amendment over freedom of rights over speaking and listening is only a 'preferred freedom':

...—one that, when balanced against other rights, gets the benefit of the doubt – it is not an absolute freedom. One area the First Amendment receives special scrutiny is where speech concerns children, whether as speakers or listeners. The assertion that a child's place in the 'marketplace of ideas' is no different from adult's, that a child's obvious *need* to be protected from harm and to be taught the lessons of civic society is not 'compelling' enough to require broadcasters to honor it is simply wrong. (Minow, 1995: 111–12, italics added).<sup>24</sup>

With deregulation, the economics of children's programmes changed radically. By 1990 network educational programmes for children had dropped to fewer than 2 hours per week. Toy-based programmes for children boomed, and by 1984 syndicates owning rights to these programmes controlled 25 per cent of advertising for children, thus undermining advertising rates and any financial incentive for networks to make programmes. By 1985 such programmes were deemed 'in the public interest' on the basis of phenomenal sales to children. This led to the spiralling boom in toy merchandising cartoons, described by Kline (1993), and the emergence of a form of payola whereby syndicates of manufacturers were able to buy the best airtime for their programmes. In

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, market failure *was* recognised by the FCC under Fowler, but he interpreted its job as being limited to maximising market efficiencies. Decisions over funding for market failure were political (from the spectrum fee for example) and thus delegated to Congress (Minow, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to see 'need' even mentioned.



1980 there were 13 toy cartoons, by 1987 there were 70 and they comprised more than half of all children's programmes. By 1991 the FCC had ruled that programme length cartoons were not ads unless they included paid ads. Merchandising cartoons boomed from 1.5 hours per week to 27 hours per week in 5 years and children's television culture underwent a critical qualitative change that was to have global significance for children's culture. Television became simply one promotional window for wider supersystems of toys and other media (Palmer, 1988; Kunkel, 1999; Minow, 1995; Kline, 1993; Herman et al, 1998). In one year alone **The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** earned 450 million dollars in sales related to 1,000 licensed products. In 1994 **Mighty Morphin Power Ranger** earned one billion dollars (Minow, 1995: 52-53).<sup>25</sup>

In 1983, when the FCC denied Action for Children's Television's request to revisit the issue of children's television programming, Chairman Fowler insisted that the market would serve children well enough. In short, 'someone would sooner or later figure out how to do what the networks had historically failed to do, make a profit while doing quality children's programs.' (Minow, 1995: 127). By 1995 it appeared that Fowler's faith in the market had been vindicated when Nickelodeon, a dedicated children's cable channel owned by Viacom, announced that it would spend \$30 million developing original programmes to compete with public broadcasting for 2-6 year olds. CEO Laybourne argued that service to children and service to advertisers was not incompatible. Nickelodeon, she says, tries to provide a 'nurturing, protective environment' for children (Laybourne, 1993):

While we are a business, we're responsible as kid advocates to protect them from commercial exploitation... That means walking a very distinct, but fine line. (Laybourne, 1995).

This argument of child advocacy in hand with market success gained increased potency as Nickelodeon's premium brand spread globally and has been adopted as a strategy by a range of terrestrial broadcasters, like TVNZ. To confound critics who still wished to believe in an old polarised model of market/public service provision, in 1998 Nickelodeon announced it was joining *with* the Public Broadcasting Service to provide a new educational pay service, 'Noggin' (Flint, 1998). Thus the pay system offered the best of public service educational programming for a discerning market of parents.

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<sup>25</sup> This was still not comparable to the profits earned by feature films and associated merchandise, such as the **Star Wars Trilogy**, but recent new supersystems (for example Pokemon) successfully embrace film in their brands.

However, left-wing scholars and advocates of public service provision take a different view of these events. Pay services, no matter what their programming merits, pose a threat to the open democratic terrain of public space. Turow argues that American democracy and civic life are now facing a crisis, as public space is sliced and diced by niche media. He argues that this attrition of national public space has implications for the acculturation of children into democracy and national identity (Turow, 1998: 3). The syphoning off of affluent families to pay services like Nickelodeon threatens the economic viability of nation-building public service provision, traditionally supported by those same middle-class parents, and even free-to-air commercial, advertising supported, provision for children. Turow and McAllister argue that premium children's pay services create a gap between media-rich and media-poor children, thus potentially creating a society of information-rich and information-poor children.<sup>26</sup>

The rub for those fighting for cultural intangibles of educational programming is that if 'being in the public interest of children' could only be judged on the grounds of children being interested, then who could make 'quality judgements' about what were 'the lessons of civic society' for children? The answer was political and it came in 1996 when, under Clinton, the Congress ordered the Federal Communications Commission to ensure that broadcasters complied with the spirit of the 1990 Broadcasting Act's requirements for educational programming. Whereas during the early 1990s *The Jetsons* could be submitted as evidence of educational programming, now 'quality thresholds' drove a demand for developmentally appropriate material. The industry complained bitterly that this move this saw broadcasting obliged to show 'worthy' material that children did not want to watch (Kunkel, 1999; Benton-compolicy@cdinet.com accessed 20/3/97).

## **Summary**

Economic perspectives are central to any analysis of children's television because they enable one to track changing economic conditions and their impact on definitions of quality within the media production and broadcast environment. This is particularly so for the 'invisible', off-peak, audience of children:

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<sup>26</sup> In New Zealand commentators have noted that pay services have a bell curve appeal to poor families who see it as cheap entertainment, and wealthy families who wish to have premium services. However, these arguments have echoes in concerns about equitable access to computer technology.

First one should establish and define the basic conditions of an industry, then seek to establish its major players, (structure), then define the behaviour dictated by this structure (conduct) and finally evaluate the core questions of industry performance. (Gomery, 1994: 199).

This thesis describes the relationships within and between the international and local market structures to understand their consequences for programme making, scheduling and marketing of children's material. It analyses how a category of market structure leads to specific corporate conduct in New Zealand during the 1980s and 1990s.

## **B. Rights**

Paternalistic and libertarian arguments about rights undercut the philosophical binary of consumer/ citizen rights outlined in the last section. Rights can be constituted as 'rights to be preserved' or, conversely, 'rights to be protected from' and as such rights can be described as negative and positive according to the needs of different parties. For example, market supporters might argue that 'the right to freedom of speech', can be expressed negatively as 'the right to protection from' interference by the state. On the other hand, public service advocates might argue for 'the right to freedom of speech', and 'the right of protection from commercial pressure'. This picture of positive and negative rights becomes more confused once media rights for children are laid over it. This is in large part due to the diversity of adult/child relationships, and the consequent diversity of views on the appropriate place of media in children's lives, but it also relates to an emerging conflict between so-called 'parental rights' and 'children's rights' in recent policy debates.

Children's 'rights' have evolved within the context of wider, adult-focused international laws, agreements, conventions, bills and charters of rights, all of which bear the markings of discourse battles during the 1980s. Just as it has been discussed how American media policy debates have shaped intellectual arguments in favour of the media market, it is now critical to discuss how American debates over individual rights have gained purchase within the international structures, institutions and economic and cultural agreements shaping children's global media.

Positive discrimination has seen a political demand for representation of minorities on-screen, and media provision for indigenous peoples. This has been paralleled by new leverage for arrangements in favour of 'consumer power'. At the same time, conservative rights activists have mounted public relations campaigns and used programming and advertising boycotts in order to put economic and moral pressure on

broadcasters. For example, in 1999, family rights activists in the Baptist church boycotted Disney over the funding of **Ellen** because of her public declaration of lesbianism in the programme. In such a way the American rhetoric of minority cultural rights for access, and fair representation in the media intersect, critically, with minority rights for moral protection, and both are fought increasingly through consumer pressure. Meanwhile the liberal rhetoric of minority individual freedom of speech also intersects with the First Amendment doctrine that effectively clamps down on government involvement in areas of identity and cultural discourse within the wider market economics of broadcasting.

It has already been discussed how the American media effectively used the First Amendment of the Constitution to defend themselves from regulation of children's content until the political change of heart in 1991, further emphasised in 1996. Deregulation from the late 1970s saw the economic metaphor of the 'media marketplace' gain immense power. Earlier content requirements for television virtually became an object of ridicule (Price, 1995: 167). For example, a 1983 case that argued for children's access to civic and educational content was rejected by the FCC on the grounds that 'the more specific we get in clarifying the rules the closer we are to violating the First Amendment rights' (Minow, 1995: 55). Whereas over-commercialisation of channels was once ruled against 'the public interest', by the 1980s shows (such as toy cartoons) that constituted 100 per cent commercial content met public interest requirements because the public of children were clearly interested in them—as demonstrated by ratings and sales of associated merchandise. The next section briefly examines the way in which American 'free speech' arguments have been applied to international cultural and trade agreements.

During the 1990s American arguments of free commercial speech gained considerable leverage and small nations found their protective cultural barriers to global product over-ruled by international courts in favour of regional or global trade agreements. For example, the European Free Trade Association based in Geneva informed Norway that it could not prohibit advertising to children on satellite broadcasts into the country, and in 1996 the European Court of Justice informed Sweden that it could not block children's advertisements beamed into Sweden if they originated in another EU country, despite their political wish to do so (Herman et al, 1997: 51). In the same year, leading world broadcasting associations and advertisers devised a single global standard for the purchase and production of TV ads, thus enabling global technical and systems

standardization in campaigns (Innes, interview). In the late 1990s Australasian compliance with international agreements protecting creative and performing rights was also tightened up. (Chunn, interview)

Thus it can be said that two pincers of 'rights' worked overwhelmingly in the favour of global entertainment conglomerates: rights to freedom from regulatory interference in free commercial speech across national boundaries, and ownership rights to universal protection from copyright and performance piracy. International trading regulations and standards were rationalized, whilst protecting (largely American) owners of creative rights. Meanwhile, in the wake of the 1996 Telecommunications Act in the USA, an already limited number of global media conglomerates were in the process of consolidating into even larger synergies of vertically and horizontally integrated media companies enabling a new level of cross-promotion within popular culture, and consequent hyper-commercialization of children's popular culture that saw both eager children and their anxious parents targeted as specialized global markets. As shall be demonstrated in the next chapter, national television production for children, already risky, was becoming even less viable unless it could tap into the new global supersystems of audio-visual trade and consumables.<sup>27</sup>

New Zealand politicians encouraged free flows of audio-visual material in a decision at the 1991 Uruguay round of GATT free trade negotiations to make an offer which locked in the national policy of deregulated trade that existed at the time, thus agreeing to no local content quotas for audio-visual material. This constituted a breathtaking, and clearly unresearched, vote of confidence in the media market to provide for the local cultural media choices for children (Norris et al, 1998: 62).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) encourage regional free trade (Finnegan, 2000: 40-51).

<sup>28</sup> By contrast, France, the USA and Australia have refused to drop national trade barriers for audio-visual products, arguing their cultural significance. In Australia the Blue Skies decision saw this breached when the Closer Economic Relations (CER) trade treaty between Australia and New Zealand was interpreted as embracing audio-visual trade. This, ironically, offered one of the few forms of leverage into larger markets for New Zealand children's producers.

## Freedom for commercial speech

During the same decade that international and regional free trade and copy-right and performance agreements were being tightened up to protect creative individuals, newly extended, and somewhat unbounded, individual concepts of human rights and free speech were also evolving. Arguments of commercial free speech, tied to the mechanism of the 'sovereign consumer' in free market theory and thus to definitions of public interest, as 'whatever the public was interested in', had extended to children. Again, these shifts are encoded in international, regional and national conventions and charters of individual rights. Market discourses of the 'marketplace of ideas' and the freedoms of 'consumer sovereignty' have segued, increasingly, into arguments tied to democracy, individual freedom and choice. For example the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reads:

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, *regardless of frontiers*, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or *through any other media of his choice*. (Article 19, italics added).

The regional European Convention of Human Rights includes an Article 10 on freedom of speech. Clearly designed to ensure political, religious, scientific and artistic freedoms, this article has been interpreted by The European Advertising Standards Alliance to encompass commercial messages. The same is happening in other regions, for example The Interamerican Society for the Freedom of Commercial Speech in Central and South America illustrates the well organized and dedicated regional movements galvanized to lobby against regulation of free commercial speech. Currently there is no Asia Pacific alliance, but Wiggs (1999) in New Zealand argues for a new self-regulatory 'Borderless Advertising Charter' in which the first paragraph would be the UN Covenant Article 19.

In New Zealand, the passing of the New Zealand Bill of Rights mandated the statutory right to freedom of expression 'whereby everyone has the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and opinions of any kind'. Through such agreements, the world is becoming powerfully defined as a large consumer-driven marketplace where regulators intent on restricting advertising, the supply of product and commerce generally, have no place. As Wiggs views it from New Zealand:

We are moving headlong into a borderless global economy powered by a borderless media. A most remarkable consequence has been the gigantic leap in consumer empowerment and the corresponding dis-empowerment of Governments. (Wiggs, 1999).

The Television Broadcaster's Council (which encompasses all free-to-air and pay channels in New Zealand), the Australian and New Zealand Advertisers Association, and the Advertising Agencies Association of Australasia, used this document during the late 1990s as the legal basis for the right of children to receive advertising. The self-regulated industry in New Zealand defines current community standards, and fights vigorously against any reduction in commercial time during children's programmes.

### **Disputes concerning free commercial speech to children**

The discourses in favour and against commercial free speech were most clearly outlined during 1999 when Sweden drafted a plan to ban television advertising to children in the European Union when it assumed presidency in 2001 (Edling, 1999). Global Advertisers made a concerted effort to persuade governments that access to commercial speech was a child's right. Articles referring to the integrity of the child and the right of participation in the media of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's were cited. Arguments were mounted to persuade policy makers of advertising's role in helping children to discriminate and grow up in a consumer driven world. Children, 'like adults, should know, or they should be taught to know, that one can't have everything advertised'. Deprived of advertising, it was argued, children were deprived of fundamental educational rights to be taught by trusted adults (parents) to deal with advertising's enticements (Howell, 1999: 9). It was asserted that consumer rights to information went hand in hand with individual parental responsibility and forms of industry self-regulation. The championing of commercial freedom of speech came with a right-wing individualistic view of the role and duty of parents to educate children in the values of the free society and a liberal democracy. Underpinning all these arguments is the ideological view that Sweden's protection of children from advertising presents a:

...serious attack on our citizens' freedom of thought and speech, a wide ranging attack on the freedom to communicate commercially, and an insidious attack on the family and the duty to educate our children in the values of a free society and a liberal democracy. (Twinn, 1999).

Banning advertising, it was posited, was a reactive political solution, attractive because it promised an illusory solution to social, moral, dietary and environmental anxieties. All anti-advertising viewpoints represented a clear misunderstanding of the role of advertising, which was responsible, fun and educational. If it was legal to sell it should be acceptable to advertise. Advertising was an essential service in complex societies. It gave people, including children, choices, it encouraged new product development and fostered competition which benefited consumers, including children.

Australian former advertising executive and media guru, Phillip Adams expressed, with hyperbole, the heat that advertising to children generates in those opposed to it. For him, advertisers to children are:

...corporate paedophiles, mighty multinationals in search of the big quid, who abbreviate millions of childhoods, turning youngsters into insatiable consumers. The advertising jingle replaces the nursery rhyme, the 30 second spot the bedtime story and kids have their fantasies reconfigured so that they'll buy, or coerce their parents into buying, this burger or those shoes. The innocence of kids is betrayed by cynical bastards in boardrooms. Behold 1000 Pied Pipers leading our kids in a dance of death towards shopping mall and checkout. (Adams, 1997: 56).

Ralph Nader, the green candidate in the American 2000 presidential elections and veteran consumer advocate, constructed advertising as an environmental health and pollution problem. He asserted that it was impossible for American parents to control influences that came to bear on their children as a result of commercial persuasion:

Children are subjected to a barrage of clever parent-bypassing ads for Whoppers, Happy Meals, Coke, Pepsi, Snickers bars, M&M's and other junk and fast foods. Children are urged to buy these products directly themselves. These ads may contribute to skyrocketing levels of childhood obesity...doubling since 1960. (Posting to the online Media-alert discussion group, 5/6/98).

Like Adams, Nader has resorted to dramatic language as he urges the Congress and Senate to compel the Federal Trade Commission to initiate broad-based rule-making on marketing to children, in order to ban 'unfair and deceptive practices', and thus 'protect children from this part of the advertising industry and its commercial molestations'. This view has gained considerable support in New Zealand health and parenting circles. Exposure to commercials on television is linked to creating an 'obesogenic environment' for children (Wilson et al, 1998: 650) in content analysis conducted by paediatricians, and a range of other health groups (Moore, 1997; Glaser, 1998; Ross, 1996; Hammond et al, 1999; Fyfe, 1999).<sup>29</sup>

A more moderate developmental viewpoint was expressed by an advocate for The Children's Society in Britain on the eve of a conference held in 1999 in London to debate the Swedish foreshadowing of European wide bans to children. She argued that advertising was aimed at 'persuading children or their parents to spend money. Such advertising encouraged a degree of covetousness at a stage when children are unable to exercise sufficient discretion in assessing the merits of such an attitude to life' (Seaford, 1999: 8).

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<sup>29</sup> It appears, though, that these 'expert' accounts from paediatricians are supported by little actual research evidence and appear at regular intervals around the world. See Nau (1989).]



This heated debate over advertising to children presents several paradoxes. One paradox is over the *power* of advertising. On the one hand, advertising agencies and broadcasters would have those corporates that wish to market to children believe that their advertising budgets are being spent on commercials that have a profound impact on a consumer's purchasing habits. On the other hand, they would have parents believe that advertising has only limited influence over 'product market share', and that the media-canny child is the riskiest market of all to reach with creative advertising. Possibly the most curious paradox of all, though, is the fact that, despite frenzied debate in the world press about the power of *advertising* over children's purchasing behaviour, the targeted market for television spot advertising to children is in crisis. The emerging ecology of pay services, product branding, ancillary rights, licensing rights and media convergence sees the boundaries between programme and advertising breaking down, as do the distinctions between media and other forms of cultural play for children. The next chapter teases out these issues, which are central to the case study.

There is a lack of research consensus about the role of advertising in children's lives, the age at which children recognize selling intent, and even the issues of branding (Roedder John, 1999). New Zealand, in the absence of local research, draws on data and public health discourses from the USA, Britain, Europe and Australia.

### **Children's rights**

The last piece in the 'rights' puzzle that needs to be put into place is the rhetoric of 'universal human individual rights' as they have been extended to children. European, notably Nordic, countries have researched the status of children with a strong political and social perspective since the 1980s (Qvortrup et al, 1994). But in contrast to other liberation movements, the children's rights movement is not activated by the group itself, but by interested adults, raising the issue of whose struggle it is, and for whom. How can one judge what 'children themselves' (given the diversity of children) want? To what extent do they want liberation and to 'speak for themselves'? This is a key issue explored within the case study.

Children's rights were codified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child that was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989.<sup>30</sup> The Convention of Children's Rights has proved to be a two-edged sword. In the modern state, children

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<sup>30</sup> This document was ratified by New Zealand in 1993 and was up for review in 2000.

have the 'right' to be distinguished by category of age and nationality and to be equal in gender. This construction may cut across children's own expressed desires, and even the desires of a range of non-western parents.

As Buckingham notes, the tendency of the discourse of children's rights has been to admit children to 'the public sphere'. It treats them, in certain respects, as citizens, as in 'children's views should be given due consideration in processes that affect their interests'. This extends the sphere of welfare rights into that of the media: 'the Convention affirms the 'freedom' of children to seek, receive and impart information of all kinds...either orally, in writing, or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of the child's choice.' (Buckingham et al, 1999: 169). A new genre of children's programmes is premised on providing just such a space for children's voices.<sup>31</sup> Buckingham sounds a note of warning that programmes that offer voice and access to children are actually neither common nor especially popular with the child audience, an observation that is particularly interesting in light of what happens in the case study.

Two international forums, in Melbourne (1995) and London (1998), have been held to refine what is meant by Articles 12, 13, 16, 17 and 18 of the Convention of Rights of the Child in terms of the mass media. Supported by Unesco, world-wide statutory broadcasting bodies, and with patronage of figures as varied as Mrs Clinton,<sup>32</sup> Paul Keating, Hazel Hawke and Nelson Mandela, these events have resulted in an internationally brokered 'television charter'. This calls for provision for children as citizens, and thus their right to experience their own cultures through high-quality programmes designed to meet a range of developmental stages, as well as share the best of the world's programmes, scheduled where they can view them. Implicit within these provisions is a construct of a western child, as defined by social science, pedagogy and civil rights. Such documents suggest that there is emerging international consensus over children's media rights that brokers a bridge between the best of public service Reithian objectives, and American discourses of free speech. Some objectives (1, 3, 4, 6 & 7) of

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<sup>31</sup> These ideals have been influential in New Zealand magazine programmes like **What Now?. In Focus**, a news access programme produced by Rex Simpson in the mid 1990s, saw teams of children contributing stories alongside youth reporters. This programme won an award but was canned by TV3, despite protests from teachers.

<sup>32</sup> In 1996 Hilary Clinton published *It Takes a Village*, which reflected rather facile communitarian mother-hood statements of the period.

the Children's Television Charter (see Appendix Two) can be nested within the public service broadcasting mandate to educate and enculturate children in local cultures. But other objectives defend access to other cultures and the individual rights of the children to hear, see and express themselves, and thus empower free-speech arguments (de Los Angeles-Bautista, 1999). Individual media rights, which may be opposed to local parental wishes, feed into the rhetoric of global commercial free speech. The best exemplar of this is Nickelodeon, which positions itself with children with its international child-centred 'Declaration of Children's Rights.' Children's rights discourses have also been used to associate corporates with the Unesco declaration of children's rights and, by extension, free speech. In May 1999 ten New Zealand children were invited to join a 3-day global millennium summit for 2000 children held at Walt Disney World in America. This 'Millennium Dreamers Awards' was an initiative of McDonalds and Disney, in association with Unesco.

Some of the difficulties with new child-centred definitions of rights are illustrated in the discursive complexities of the 1998 London World Congress on Television and Children (Home et al, 1998). This event brought together a range of conflicting interests in children's media, but one vigorous request came from people who wanted the 'child's voice' (clearly still an essentialized notion) 'to be heard' in proceedings at the London Congress.<sup>33</sup> The discursive difficulties inherent within the phrase 'to hear the child's voice' are well illustrated in a so-called 'access' documentary made by children who attended the event. **Summit Up** was constructed to present a supposedly unmediated 'children's eye' view of the 'adult driven' Congress. But as one adult, when questioned by a child interviewer, put it succinctly: 'this video, despite what you say, is shaped by an adult viewpoint'. The video report contrasted the earnestness of discussions between adults and their lack of knowledge of popular children's culture and pleasures. Boffin after boffin failed a 'current affairs' test made up of questions about popular television programmes. For example, the ombudsman from Sweden lost a point for failing to recognize the **Mighty Morphin Power Ranger** gun. This is hardly surprising, given that Sweden has banned the programme, and advertising, to children on free-to-air television. In fact, if anything, the programme illustrates the power of marketing in defining

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<sup>33</sup> Buckingham's team track the history of this discourse in Britain through three distinct stages: firstly, in the 1970's libertarian educational movement; secondly, within arguments for protective social and welfare rights; and finally, through a 'renewed emphasis for a need for children's participation rights.'(Buckingham et al, 1999: 169).

children's cultural capital. The children (more teenagers than infants anyway) chose to focus their 'dialogue' with adults around icons from adult designed and commercially promoted children's entertainment properties, and the eternal youthful pleasure of displaying disrespect for elders.<sup>34</sup> Commercial cultural capital is used to expose a subtext of 'stuffy middle-class' regulators, it does this without then turning an eye onto the marketing mechanisms that drive the popular culture it celebrates. The documentary has real value simply because it demonstrates the power of the marketplace over the imaginative geography of a group of British children/youth. The question of which adults, for what reasons, and to what ends 'speak for children' haunts all children's production, and audience research, even that which declares that it liberates children.

Children's cultural choices are delimited through regulation and cultural production by adult choices. As Buckingham notes, the sentimentality of utopian anarchism (as exemplified by Rushkoff in the documentary) too easily becomes unreflectively complicit with the sponsors of the agenda of commercial free speech. The equation of children's fandom with 'children's rights' needs to be analysed within the context of institutional and corporate drivers, just as public service provision needs to be analysed within the regulatory context of unreflective romantic adult notions of the protected garden of childhood.

The urge to curb the promotion of global consumer culture to children comes down firstly to a belief in the power of the media as the dominant socializing agent in contemporary society, and secondly to a utopian belief in some form of *authentic* children's culture. Children's media rights documents enshrine children's rights to enjoy their indigenous and national cultures, but they also enshrine the right of those same children to 'the best' of global product, however defined. The significance of this for national media policy is considered in the next chapter. As the International Committee on the Rights of the Child, mandated in 1993 to monitor international implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child concludes:

...in all countries the child's right to information is to be implemented in an extremely complex environment, bringing together a wide range of actors whose interests are often conflicting. (David, 1999: 31).

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<sup>34</sup> Only once did the programme deepen understandings of complex issues for children. This was in a 'Nick News' item on the Bosnian war, given from the perspective of a young girl.

## Summary

Thus one can postulate a complex ideological field of differing discourses of positive and negative rights that draw inspiration from differing discourses of 'childhood', and what commercial broadcasting means for that childhood. During the next chapters it is important to keep in mind which 'child' is conjured within statements about 'rights', 'choice', 'freedom' and 'future'. Is she/he the 'vulnerable child', with implicit welfare provision, regulations and/or strong parental gatekeeping in the place of the state? Is he/she the 'developing child' who requires pedagogically sound provision? Is he/she an agentive child who is a social actor with intensities of preference within a market, or an agentive child viewed as a social participant in democracy, thus requiring the opportunities due to a future citizen, or both? As Born notes, commerce, co-productions and entrepreneurship, just like public service broadcasting, can produce both good and bad television for children, and the questions then become: what is the balance and the degree of certain kinds of pressures? How married are they (or not) with other values? (Born, 2000: 419).

The modernist ideal of providing a special child-centred television zone for children away from commercial contamination, if it were ever possible, is now being irrevocably breached in two different directions. Firstly, there is the power of the market to appeal to children directly without parental gatekeeping, and children's enthusiastic response to so called 'vulgar' entertainments. Secondly, there are rapid technological changes that make national boundaries increasingly unenforceable in an age of satellite, cable and cassette. Children are using a range of media platforms like computers, electronic games, CD-Roms, internet and video, and television is being reduced to just one window of creative rights within wider audio-visual flows. Chapter Six outlines and assesses these radical shifts in audio-visual flows and marketing to children since 1996. Chapter Seven describes key national regulatory responses. These are the final frames required to make sense of what happened to local children's television in New Zealand during the late 1990s.

## CHAPTER SIX - INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING IN THE 1990S

My dream, your nightmare. (Sylvester to Tweetie Pie).

### Introduction

Chapter Six provides an overview of what the polarized, yet sometimes overlapping, discourses discussed in Chapter Five mean for the small, exposed national broadcasting system in New Zealand, and its provision for children. Since 1996 the international children's audio-visual industrial environment has been turbulent. It has seen the global children's market explode, transforming the media landscape and, in the process, driving new, paradoxical, patterns in audio-visual trade. Key public service broadcasters and producers in wealthy, English-speaking countries are adopting strong global 'market positions', and transnational media conglomerates, like Nickelodeon, are investing in educational children's product designed to appeal to parents.

Whilst transnational media conglomerates continue to dominate global audio-visual trade, key public-service broadcasters and producers in wealthy, English-speaking countries are also earning strong global 'market positions'.<sup>35</sup>

There has been a softening, and indeed overlapping, of the old binary outlines of commercial and public service provision for children within the global audio-visual ecology. This new cultural complexity has important ramifications for children's peer-group culture, cultural heritage and information equity everywhere. Global children's audio-visual hits emerge from both old public service providers like the BBC and 'child-centred' commercial companies like Nickelodeon. Both global conglomerate and public-service funded organisations window their audio-visual properties across a range of media over different periods of time, and negotiate licensing and merchandising deals for their brand. These new arrangements have important roles to play in this story of free-to-air local television production for the 6–12 year old in New Zealand.

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<sup>35</sup> USA companies receive 75 cents of every dollar of international television trade, and the 'Hollywood majors' (Warner Brothers, Disney, Paramount, 20th Century Fox, Universal, Columbia, and MGM/UA), the studios that produce most of America's film and television programmes, receive anywhere from 60 to 67 cents of that amount (Seagrave, 1998: 1, quoted in Allen, 2000).

## **The emerging global audio-visual flows for children**

It is useful to revisit Kline's gloomy prognosis for the future of national range and variety on television for children, which was written during the early 1990s. He described a new American monoculture of merchandising cartoons on free-to-air television and exported around the world, and how this threatened the viability of indigenous production on commercial channels, as imported popular hits offered programmers lower costs with lower market risk. He described the threat that this constituted for public service channel funding as such channels were bypassed by child viewers in their preference for popular hits on commercial and pay television. Kline described nothing less than a deepening crisis facing indigenous public service productions for children in the foreseeable future and, with it, a crisis for children's culture. He also predicted equity issues as pay channels like Nickelodeon syphoned children off from affluent families. A privatised and commodified media environment, premised on individual parental 'caveat emptor', rather than the old public service premises of 'in loco parentis' and 'pro publico bono' appeared to be unstoppable. He asked the question lurking in the background of many policy discussions so far. Was nationally funded children's programming necessary in this new market-driven universe of global hits? To this question he gave an emphatic 'Yes'. As children embraced universal cartoon hits, they were in danger of losing their sense of 'authentic' non-commodified culture, as well as the particularities of their own culture. He called for urgent re-regulation of national broadcasting systems.

By the late 1990s much appeared to confirm his predictions. In 1998, the year that data for this ethnographic study of New Zealand children's television production processes were collected, the combined Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon programming expenditures outstripped that of general broadcasters such as the BBC and ITV (Herman, 1998). Expenditure on original programmes by children-only pay channels was rapidly increasing, while free-to-air channels, even in larger countries, were threatened with decreasing audience share as options grew. In 1998 Nickelodeon earned US\$773 million in net revenue (Flint, 1998). In the broadcasting market, the 'Hotelling' effect was in clear evidence as increased competition from new services saw national full-service broadcasters concentrating production efforts on the advertising-attractive household shopper (Osborne, 1998: 2). Local children's programming was made even less attractive by the fact that 60 per cent of children's broadcast viewing in the USA (a similar trend is visible in New Zealand) was for 'non-kid' viewing such as **The Simpsons**, **Friends** and prime-time movies (*KidScreen* editorial, October 1998). It appeared that Kline's

pessimistic forecast had come to pass with the passage of 15 years. Child targeted, nationally funded, free-to-air broadcasting was in crisis. Had its time passed?

Other developments, however, challenged Kline's pessimism. These developments, outlined now, present diverse new opportunities for children's producers, and culturally diverse programming for children that had not existed before.

### **New diversity in content and arrangements**

Kline's pessimism about a global monoculture of American cartoons and toys has not come to pass. Children's media production in the late 1990s was no longer necessarily American. This marked a shift in trade patterns during the decade. As one leading Canadian producer puts it bluntly, 'The US has become more of an ancillary market; open to acquisition of internationally-produced product.' (Kettler, 1998: 14). In 1997/8 trade flows swung in radical new directions when Ragdoll's **The Teletubbies**, distributed by the BBC, became a huge USA hit (Britt, 1998) and the Nintendo-inspired cartoon, **Pokemon**, followed to take the network market by storm.

During the late 1990s production of early childhood properties was booming because hits were highly lucrative, given wide cultural acceptance and relatively uncontroversial merchandising possibilities. Fantasy figures like blue dinosaurs (USA **Barney**), trains (British **Thomas the Tank Engine**), fruit (Australian **Bananas in Pyjamas**) and penguins (Europe **Pingu**) provided cognitively appropriate experiences for young children, but had the virtue of transcultural appeal. This acceptance has a long tradition. Public service producers of early childhood shows like **Playschool** and **Sesame Street** have formatted for local cultural inserts for many years and **Teletubbies** follows this tradition.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Morrell was involved in early inserts of **Maori** in **Sesame Street** during 1986/7. **Play School** first ran with English inserts, but shifted to New Zealand footage as the production base grew. It is perhaps indicative of the low investment in children's programmes on TV3 that **Teletubbies** used English inserts, unlike Canada, South America and the USA where local clips were shot. There have been some New Zealand overseas sales in the early childhood market. Simpson and Pye have sold early childhood programmes overseas. In 1998 Morrell proposed a new early-childhood programme that could be sold overseas. The key issue for NZ On Air was Maori culture and language, and this was a problem for local producers to solve by reversioning. As Morrell put it, if it has too much te reo (language) it has limited appeal in Australia and this means that



Early-childhood production aside, fierce disputes continued over provision for the primary-aged child, given that this is the age during which social identity and values are formed. However, despite this, there was a strong trade in 'quality' drama and Australia, Britain, Canada (and even New Zealand) were viewed by countries like Sweden as producing programmes of a high quality as measured in social and moral values and story-telling techniques (Rydin, 2000b: 18).

Part of the reason for a swing to counter-flows of children's material into the USA from outside can be attributed to innovative international co-production partnerships. These provided the necessary investment for costly series, whilst retaining valuable rights. Some of these co-productions span previously unheard-of organizational divides. In 1998 the BBC co-produced the primary targeted **Microsoap** with Disney, a venture described by one of the producers as 'an exercise akin to introducing two 800 lb gorillas', that signifies the trend to flexible new global commercial arrangements (Fry, 1998: 82).

Voicing the new discursive complexities, the editor of *Broadcasting & Cable* argues that a new 'quality' commercial environment challenges the over-simple binary of 'regulated and/or state-funded = good: commercial entertainment/ global popular culture = bad.' (Life, 1998). He paints an international landscape of children's television production and delivery that increasingly challenges the gate-keeping of old national regulators and the restricting binary of commercial and public service. 'The media alert child consumer is perceptive and has judged that old public service providers have lost touch with them'. He disagrees with European Union moves to introduce quotas:

But why should children tune into a public service broadcaster if it cannot deliver shows that engage and entertain? The European Broadcasting Union report's recommendation to set quotas for range and domestic production is misguided and is not the answer to the problem. The problem is one that has to be solved by the broadcasters themselves; by their producers who must grab back the attention of this new generation of media-literate kids with genuine alternatives. If you want to know something about what you are up against, check out the survey of cable and satellite-viewing kids published here in this 'Televison Europe' special. This is the new generation and these are the kids who are turning their backs on conventional TV. (Life, 1998).

During the 1990s a culturally varied, child-centred, global audio-visual culture has developed, confounding Kline's nightmare prediction of sexist, Aryan, war cartoons and toys. Firstly, there has been a perceived shift in parental attitudes to television, as the

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merchandising deals are not appealing for licencees. In 1998 Morrell won her early-childhood programme funding from NZ On Air with **Bumble**, but by that time she was an independent and had to battle with her broadcaster, TVNZ, over issues of ownership of rights over merchandising.

generation that grew up with, and became fans of, the first toy-inspired cartoons reached parenthood. Secondly, parents have become a powerful, active, secondary market. Some marketers posit that a shift from 'value' to 'values' and to 'relationships of belonging' with the cocooning of the first generation of television-literate baby-boomers has created a secondary market for children's media (Rolli, 1994: 25). It is clear that parents are now the target market for new 'premium' children's viewing zones on both free-to-air broadcasting and specialist dedicated pay channels for children. Nickelodeon, for example, has been designed to appeal to middle-class mothers by providing space and agency to girls, unlike much male targeted animation fare. As they have become the gatekeepers for subscriptions to pay television there has been a shift to a focus on 'parent appeal', last seen during the roll out of television sets to the suburbs in the 1950s.

This trend to varied educational offering for children has been accelerated by USA regulation, first in 1990, but with more teeth in 1996 (perhaps reflecting the political times). Congress enacted requirements for 3 hours of educational programming a week (Kunkel, 1999). Children's viewing could no longer be written off as a 'cheap and nasty' children's ghetto by powerful USA networks that wish to have license renewals, and children's television is no longer out of sight and out of mind as it was in the 1980s and early 1990s. 'Quality' branding makes increasing sense for American broadcasters, if not in terms of business, then at least in terms of license renewals. Ironically, this new environment has led to a new protectionist agenda amongst American producers hurt by overseas contra flows. Morrell, on her return from the 1998 World Congress on Children's Television in London, expresses her amusement at a USA delegate standing up and declaring, 'we are being dumped upon with the import of cheaper product':

...well I thought, here we go, there's a turn up for the books. They have been dumping on everyone else for ages (Morrell, 11/4/98).

### **The power of animation**

Kline's bete noir of animation genre was also changing. Kettler, president of Canadian 'Sunbow' Entertainment, and specialist in children's animation, might agree with Kline that 'major Hollywood studios have embraced animation (as well as forms of puppetry and full-suited characters) not for the art form but for the billions of dollars it can deliver in related merchandising', but she also notes that the economic viability of independently produced animation from a range of countries has been improving ever since the introduction of global channels. The growth of global channels has seen animation diversifying as a genre. It has broadened from the shoddy shut-off world of Saturday toy

animations for kids aged 2–11 during the 1980s into a range of products for four distinct audiences: pre-schoolers, 6–11 year olds, 12–17 year olds, and young adults in prime time (Kettler, 1998: 14). This new sensitivity to developmental appropriateness is, on the face of it, a victory for child development specialists and educators, but has much to do with animation's ease of language reversioning, which permits economies of global production sales, and thus narrower and narrower child-centred developmental niches.

Nickelodeon's successes illustrate the economic and cultural flexibility of the animation market for properties that appeal to age-specific targets but also appeal to a range of other ages. It has positioned itself, in the eyes of American children, on the appeal of cutting-edge animations.<sup>37</sup> It has been levered into global markets by its owner, the vertically integrated conglomerate of Viacom, which also owns the Cartoon Network and MTV Pay services. Nickelodeon's belief in the ongoing global power of animation was signalled in its setting up of a dedicated animation facility in Los Angeles in 1998, with a first task of producing five new animation series. The aim for Viacom, in common with other large entertainment conglomerates, was to 'cut costs on recruitment of talent and escape the trap that Disney faces 'buying talent'' that shared profits in rights. In the post-Fordist universe, these animations were to be made by 250 non-unionized animators (Robertson, 1998).

In 1998 **Rugrats**, commissioned from Klasky Csupo, became the most watched children's animated show in the USA—with a cumulative 5.3 rating and 2.2 million viewers, based on total USA households. It also became a hit in Canada for 2–11 year olds (Animation special report, *KidScreen*, May 1998). Part of its success was wide age-group appeal, and it also performed extremely well on reruns. This suited 100 per cent children's pay channels like Nickelodeon, and provided marketing opportunities as a result of its long shelf life:

Little kids look at the characters and point to the fact that they are not babies any more; older kids enjoy the humor, according to Cyra Zarghami, executive vice president and general manager of Nickelodeon. 'The storytelling is so different because it is really real life in animation, rather than action and fantasy.' (Robertson, 1998: 25).

Nickelodeon cartoons have been highly sought after by free-to-air broadcasters like the BBC, ABC and TVNZ, as draw cards for their children's zones. So powerful is the

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<sup>37</sup> **Doug, Rugrats, Cat Dog, Rocko's Modern life, The Angry Beavers, KaBlam!, Hey Arnold and The Ren and Stimpy Show.**

formula of Nickelodeon perceived to be, that national broadcasting programmers now vie for purchasing Nickelodeon shows to programme the equivalent of Nickelodeon's strategy of hit 'signature show appointment viewing.' (Turow, 1998). But, as Nickelodeon's pay service reaches around the world, more and more free-to-air broadcasters are losing access to valuable first-run rights (and licensing opportunities for food and merchandising) for Nickelodeon hit animation brands. In 1998 *Rugrats* was a huge hit for national free-to-air TV2, when the pay service of Sky foreshadowed the introduction of Nickelodeon to New Zealand. Shaw, the programme buyer, challenged Sky over the local first-run rights owned by TVNZ, but this could only be a short-term game; it became clear that local access to first rights to Nickelodeon hits would go to pay television.

Programmers universally acknowledged the appeal of animation for the child audience, but new ways of 'punching through' the 'clutter' of animation were needed in order to brand channels in the minds of children. In 1998 Disney's 'One Saturday morning' began to win Saturday mornings against the then market leader Fox Kids with a strategy of 'interstitial programming'. This saw channel stars used to 'anchor' the morning show of animations. This was the brainchild of Laybourne, ex-Nickelodeon and now president of Disney/ABC cable networks. Robin Williams reprised his role as the genie from *Aladdin*, to create an interstitial entitled 'Great minds think for themselves'. Fox retaliated with another interstitial concept, this time 'the Membrains', a comedy troupe from Canada's YTV who came up with a comedy concept of on-air puppet hosts who 'addressed teens, tweens, and younger kids as well'. This strategy of 'interstitials' is central to the New Zealand production case study (Robertson, 1998: 36).

## Summary

International audio-visual trade has become both increasingly lucrative for companies that can produce the next global hit, and more risky for the rest. Pay services recognize the worth of a hit animation series for cross-cultural appeal, and national broadcasters understand its power to brand channels in children's minds as 'destination viewing' (Editorial in *KidScreen*, May 1998). The powerful model of Nickelodeon illustrates the new benefits of parent appeal in the pay market where parents are gatekeepers. It celebrates 'kids' who are 'media savvy' consumers *and* future citizens. Its 'attitude' to 'media savvy kids' deliberately targets both boys and girls and declares its intentions in a declaration of 'kids rights'.

## Shifts in the appeal of children's audiences for marketers

National commercial broadcasting channels are judged by corporate advertisers (national and transnational) on their cost effectiveness in terms of reaching children as consumers. Effectiveness of advertising buys, measured in 'reach' (number watching over a period of time), TARPS (target audience ratings points) and CPI (cost per thousand viewers), is critically compared with the cost-effectiveness of other options in the marketing mix. Evidence from the USA in 1996 suggested that a radical shift in children's viewing preferences was occurring in the USA when free-to-air broadcasters, even those with vertically integrated structures like Disney/ABC and Fox/Saban, experienced plummeting ratings for children's programming (Ross, 1996: 63). For the first time, the American advertising industry faced a fundamental crisis of confidence in television's ability to reach the child audience, from which it has never completely recovered.

*Advertising Age* (7/10/96) headlined 'Children tuning out TV in alarming numbers...Ratings for children's broadcast TV for the new season—after only a month—are skidding downward precipitously from 7% at ABC to a whopping 62% at CBS.' The depth and suddenness of the drop in the US\$600 million kids marketplace was of such intense concern to the agency community that advertisers announced a large study into 'kids' use of time and media.<sup>38</sup> This moment signalled a new wave of qualitative marketing research into children's culture by advertising agencies, specialized child marketing companies, generic product companies and television channels themselves. These research endeavours are discussed in some detail later in this chapter. Yet by late 1998 there was new euphoria from broadcasters showing the hit **Pokemon**, which swept up to the top position in ratings in the USA, faster than any other cartoon in history. This brought with it a deluge of new licensing possibilities and advertising tie-ins:

What a difference a show makes. At the end of 1998, Kids WB had stalled on Saturday mornings, posting a Neilson Media Research ratings as low as a 1.2 among kids 2-11...enter **Pokemon** which became the top rated programme ever for Kids WB. (Schneider,1999: 2).

But the risks were great and the rewards went to the few hit programmes. In many ways the **Pokemon** phenomena only underscored the fundamental shifts that were occurring in the role of television within the booming children's consumer market. Television was ceasing to be the one stop shop for advertisers. Strategies of branding through the use of licensing, sponsorship, public relations and cross media promotions were becoming part of marketing strategies and the promotional mix for brands wishing to reach child

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<sup>38</sup> It must always be pointed out that people meter ratings measures have to always cope with the fact that children are unreliable button pushers.

consumers. The late 1990s saw a 'boom and bust' children's broadcasting environment that was growing increasingly reliant on hit programmes and the related advertising revenue attracted by product licensing and associated merchandise. Some smaller national broadcasters, like TVNZ, began to fear losing access to the crucial audience provided by first release hit programmes. This vulnerability grew as vertical integration of production (animation studios) and distribution (satellite global pay) developed into a new oligopoly of huge companies like Nickelodeon/Viacom, Fox/ Saban, Cartoon Network/Warner Brothers and ABC/Disney.

Several hypothetical nightmares now loomed for national free-to-air broadcasting sales and marketing departments. As media options proliferated, media buying reached new levels of sophistication. First rights in designated marketing areas, whether national signal areas or regional satellite footprints, became crucial. Marketers for TNCs found that pay services sometimes provided better TARPS than free-to-air broadcasters with their broad draw of demographics. These expanding marketing choices for TNCs compounded anxieties already facing local broadcasters. Not only are they forced to compete with global channels, they are facing new questions of advertising effectiveness from fussy advertising clients wishing to reach the child consumer. Local agencies and creatives found their businesses increasingly restricted to locally distributed products or servicing licensing deals and 'style books' from global brand headquarters. Children with access to the internet began to expect goods at the same time as international launches on web sites. This desire saw **Pokemon 3** launched globally in October 2000 in all territories at the same time, thus bypassing distributors in the range of territories. There is evidence that the late 1990s marks the beginning of the rethinking of television's role in the marketing mix for many advertisers and marketers to children.

## **Tweens**

'Tweens' and teenagers have become the fastest-growing consumer market at the turn of the millennium (Rice, 2001). Trade journals and popular press alike quote vast sums for the worth of the American market alone. In 1998, the year the case study data was collected, the American market research firm Texas A & M stated that USA pre-teens spent about \$17 billion of their own money, directly influence \$187 billion, and together they influenced how parents spend by another \$500 billion (*KidScreen* editorial October 1998). Another market research firm, KidsTrends, quotes that in 1999 'Tweens', of which there are 23 million in the USA, spent US\$55.7 billion, and influenced \$250

billion in purchases by parents (Rosenberg, 1999: 40). The importance of children to the economics of marketing and the consumer market is clear. In 1998, 45 key promotions were launched in the USA, 44 of which were child targeted, 5–6000 new toys were launched (47 per cent licensed toys), 761 children's shows were aired and 5,000 new children's books were introduced, in addition to back-list titles (*Licensing Now*, September/October 1998: 20).

But still, despite this vast market activity, the odds of becoming the next **Harry Potter** or **Pokemon** remained slim, and the metaphors employed by children's marketers reflect that risk. For example, market experts presenting at the 1998 'Capturing Kids' marketing conference (held in Auckland and designed to attract small businesses wishing to reach children in New Zealand) used a wealth of hunting, fishing and battle metaphors to describe marketing strategies. The title itself aside, these included 'netting' 'hooking,' 'hunting,' 'luring,' the 'attention', 'imagination', 'loyalty' and 'peer-group cool' of the 'elusive,' 'restless,' 'ever shifting,' 'changing,' 'fickle,' 'sophisticated,' 'savvy,' 'media aware' child audience. One sales director describes his company's strategy as 'keeping our powder dry and shooting when the ducks are flying.' In the toy industry the 'ducks fly' in the last quarter of the advertising year before Christmas. Marketing product to children was described by one presenter, in an interesting mixture of metaphor, as a 'minefield with very few ground rules' (Zanker, 1999). Even given the fact that post-war marketing has had a partiality for the rhetoric of war and hunting, this language reaches new strategic levels as it talks of the elusive, fickle, cunning of children.<sup>39</sup>

The increasing market value of children globally, and the risks attached to appealing to them, has seen the evolution of a largely secretive and proprietary children's market research industry. Specialized market researchers have become powerful cultural intermediaries whose role in defining and describing changing children's culture enables some of the financial risk to be removed from designing brand appeals. The scale of this research dwarfs research on children by national public service policy makers. Market research sells itself, as never before, as a way of empowering children's views and preferences. Recent sophisticated qualitative cultural work co-opts a range of

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<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that the conference was deferred, and the title changed to 'Marketing to Children and Teens' in 2000. This reflected the political sensitivity of advertising to children in the wake of the Labour Party attaining power in late 1999 on a platform that included a review of children's television and advertising.

ethnographic techniques, as well as the emerging evidence and theoretical constructs from recent active audience research. Ongoing ‘conversations’ between researchers, children (and their parents) are constructed as a new form of cultural ‘anthropology’, or as an ‘empowering dialogue’ (Zanker, 1999).

It is hardly surprising, but important for this project, to note that in the absence of local market research on parents’ attitudes and children’s culture, New Zealand recycled findings from overseas—largely American, British and Australian market research (Lealand et al, 2000). This adoption of research from elsewhere has implications for this case study. Roper Starch World Wide New York, for example, claimed evidence that ‘Americans do not overwhelmingly object to the way that television sells to kids. Maybe they (parents) figure it is good training for later on.’ (Heubusch, 1997: 55). It is not surprising that American parents, who have had few alternatives to commercial saturated media hold these views, but it is specious to use this to speak on behalf of New Zealand parents. Yet such ‘research’ is quoted authoritatively in New Zealand children’s media debates. In such rhetorical slippages one can see American sources used to shape policy understandings of parenthood and childhood in New Zealand. The small amount of public research on advertising and parental attitudes that has been done in New Zealand has been commissioned from commercial research companies and demonstrates a lack of reflexivity about culture, agency and childhood.

At this point it is appropriate to analyse the essentialized construct of the ‘media savvy kid’, who has a conversations with researchers about their intensities of consumer preferences. Marketers have waged a largely successful public relations campaign to justify commercial free speech across national boundaries, using international rights treaties and agreements, as discussed in Chapter Five. It is frequently pointed out that ‘...we have been living in a consumer culture for a couple of generations now’ (Rosenberg, 2000: 40) and that evidence from active audience research studies with children demonstrate that children are not easily duped or persuaded, and can distinguish between fact and hype possibly more astutely than some adults can. Children are able to distinguish between media modalities and content at increasingly early ages. They understand intertextual references and enjoy irony. Above all, they are themselves agents in the pleasurable flows of global culture as they create new hybrid and surprisingly idiosyncratic forms of local culture (Bowlby, 1999; Eagle et al, 2000; ANZA, 2000).



## Market research on children's culture

How does market theory construct children and their consumer behaviour? What type of research has been undertaken with children? Where is the research based? What does it conclude about children? How do marketers describe the power of television and advertising in children's lives? What are the implications of these answers for the local range and variety of resources for local children?

De Mooij (1994) posits that all market research is about defining and analyzing differences in demographic and social characteristics as well as values, in order to find common characteristics, and thus define 'clusters' in populations. One such benefit of this 'clustering' can be seen in the boom in age-specific early childhood television as a result of economies of scale permitted by international co-productions and sales. de Mooij notes that:

A basic rule of international advertising ... that people show more similarities than differences... some groups like professionals and young people have been identified as having needs and wants that increasingly transcend borders (de Mooij, 1994: 142).

Where possible, it makes financial sense for marketers to reduce cultural differentials to global demographic and psychographic 'clusters' (Levitt, 1993). Evidence from marketing journals like *Variety*, *Broadcasting and Cable*, *Kidscreen*, *Licensing Age* and *Toy Trader* suggests that marketers increasingly view children as *global* consumers who share more than they differ in tastes. Kids are kids and, no matter where they grow up, they like consuming and doing the same things. Nickelodeon's Declaration of Children's Rights is an expression of this view (see *KidScreen*, Animation special report, May 1998: 39–55). In this next section an argument is made that there are strong incentives, within market structures, to give preferential hearing to the evolution of new universal tastes over the old orthodoxy of cultural difference.

The difficulty in pinning down cultural appeals for the emerging cohorts of diverse child consumers is echoed by many market researchers. Like youth culture, the 'hot buttons' of children's culture are in constant ferment and change. As a result, straightforward survey and focus group work used to track changing tastes in children's culture has become a specialized business. The use of children's consumer panels, established groups of informants and street-corner observation are used to keep track of what's hot and what's not in consumer items and language use. Large omnibus surveys generate a range of information, and also offer the opportunity for companies to attach tailored questions to them. Each piece of research may take a couple of months to complete and, even then, it

will only tell the client about the current market (at best) or past perceptions (McGee, 1997). Large surveys ('Generations' which provides data on 8–18 year olds in the Asia Pacific region, and 'Panorama' which provides a New Zealand survey of 10–19 year olds) offer data on media use, pocket money, pester power with parents, and a wide range of tastes, from favourite brands of clothes, chips, fast food and idols. The sample for New Zealand in the 1999 'Generations' survey was over 400 children aged 6–18 years. Such a broad age group immediately limits its targeted usefulness, but whilst this may be too wide a range to be of much use to product marketers in order to map the subtle calibrations within children's culture, it hints at further tailored proprietary research that can be bought. Large companies, like Levis, fund their own commercially sensitive cultural surveys of designated marketing zones like South East Asia. Then again, there are advertising agencies like Saatchi and Saatchi which have set up 'kids connection' divisions to research the child consumer, first in New York, now in London. And finally, there are influential specialized companies, like the American firm Millward Brown's KidSpeak, KidsMap and KidTrends, Young Direction, and the British Children's Research Unit, which specialize in tailored proprietary children's quantitative and qualitative research market research. Spokespeople from these firms regularly feature as expert columnists on children's consumer trends in a range of trade journals. In 1998 a specialist children's research firm, Logistix Kids, opened in Australia.

Toy companies have been amongst the first to use qualitative research, where observation has been used since the earliest days, using both one-way-mirror play settings and video:

Visit our Head Office in Los Angeles at any time and you will find a room full of children playing with toys under the watchful eyes of researchers and clinical psychologists. (*Capturing Kids*, 1998: Mattel presentation).

Hasbro has a similar play laboratory in Florida. Focus groups are currently much favoured for research with children, despite their limitations for use with peer-driven tweens. For example, Logistix in Australia holds 'scoop groups' to advise everyone 'from cereal companies to dot-com start-ups.' (McGilvray, 2000: 4). Peer friendship interviews have been used to explore symbolism, imagery, feelings and emotions (McGee, 1997: 53). Innovative techniques have been inspired by 'street corner' anthropology, like Dee Dee Gorman's ethnographic work tracking inner city early adopters of shoe styles (Gladwell, 1997), as has bedroom 'anthropology' and the bedroom census (*Getting older younger*, BBC World, Prime 23/9/00). As a Nintendo trendspotting spokesperson puts the process:

Kids have got an amazing social network. Once you've got a few trendsetters who jump onto it, word spreads like wildfire, kids are quicker than adults, they're involved in the learning process and personal development everyday. They're tuned into accepting and running with new ideas. (Norman, 1999: 56, quoting a 'trendspotter' from Nintendo).

In the tiny market of New Zealand, marketers tend to draw on material from corporate headquarters overseas (like Mattel and Hasbro), and research material made available through the World Federation of Advertisers, and they resort to tailored pieces of local research to complement this imported material (Irwin, interview, 6/6/98). Small, specialized research companies like Next Step and Stag Concepts Ltd, as well as multinational generic market research firms like CM Research, Research International and AC Neilson, offer local tailored children's research, and use occasions like 'Capturing Kids' to solicit clients. Such firms also conduct quantitative and qualitative audience research for NZ On Air and the Broadcasting Standards Authority.

## **Summary**

In the above we see at work the search for new signifiers of 'cultural capital' being moderated by the new class of 'cultural intermediaries' — marketers to children. They research cultural pleasures in an attempt to map fashion and taste in order to shape new differentiated cultural commodities that appeal to children, whilst building in appropriate appeals to the secondary market of parents. It might be argued that, in the USA at least, some children's voices are being heard by marketers in ways they have never been heard before. But it can also be argued that market research simply justifies cautious commercial ends (Born, 2000). What is important for this case study is the fact that it is largely American marketing constructs of consuming childhood that define the products available for consumption in New Zealand, whether imported or locally made. The dominance of American research, with American children in shaping children's culture, will continue while American markets are seen as the place where new crazes are made or broken. In this way, American childhood experiences still largely define the streamlined construct of the global consuming child.

## **The consuming child**

The consuming child is differentiated into a range of markets by age and gender.

...three eternal truths regardless of generation, geographic location or culture. Kids are very different at different ages, but boys and girls are fundamentally different after seven. Boys like action. Girls like social interaction. (Wilson, 1998).

Englehardt (1986) and Kline (1993) describe the universe of pink saccharine narratives for girls, and violent versions of star wars for boys. In 1998 Fox went one stage further:

Acknowledging a well-known fact of human nature- that boys and girls are uniquely different in their lifestyles and interests, Fox Family Channel, now Fox Family Channels, is establishing The Boyz Channel, the first and only network for boys, and the Girlz channel, the first and only network for girls, targeting 2-14 year olds, with parenting programming on in the evenings (Fox Family Channel, New York, via PR newswire, C-prn@clari.net, October 27<sup>th</sup>).

Schneider (1987) is probably the first marketer to record a widespread commonsense view in the television industry that boys constitute the critical audience because they are the most difficult audience to appeal to. Boys find it harder to concentrate on a range of programme material, preferring cartoons. Boys are also acutely aware of male role models and gender differentiation. They reject anything that they deem to be girlish. Whereas girls will watch what boys watch, boys will reject what girls watch. This has profound implications for this case study (Wartella, 1998).<sup>40</sup>

It is useful, at this point, to consider one typical essentialized childhood marketing typology, first encountered in an article written by Rolli for American KidSpeak research during 1994 (Rolli, 1994). This typology was encountered again at a New Zealand marketing seminar in 1998, but this time it was illustrated with the iconic brand choices for each age level during that year. It is interesting to note several things about the typology: firstly, the overlaps between the age stages; secondly, the opportunities these provide for the 'push-pull' between early adopters and core markets in peer culture, thirdly, the role for non-threatening subversion of parental control; and fourthly, the strong bias towards male preferences.

#### **KidSpeak's the 'Four emotional territories...consumer childhood'**

- 1. Nursery (0–5)** – Brands like Fisher Price and the Early Learning Centre exploit the innocence, charm and playfulness of young childhood, whilst offering parents reassurance on educational value and health and safety. Marketing activity is generally aimed at the parent.
- 2. Playground (4–10)** – Brands like Nintendo and Sega offer sanitised versions of conquest for father and son to play together, while programs like **Gladiators** bring this to life on the TV screen.
- 3. Street corner (8–15)** – Brands like Nike and Levis exploit the opposing motivations of parent and child. While they offer children a statement of independence from family values and a blatant

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<sup>40</sup> An unsourced story (possibly urban myth) tells how **My little Pony** was designed after market research suggested that little American girls dreamt about horses and long hair just before falling asleep.

declaration of peer group belonging, they offer parents the reassurance of being established, ubiquitous brands, sanitising the rebellion.

**4. Underground (12+)** – Brands like British Knights and Death cigarettes fulfill the children's desire for a violent severing from parental values and a statement of marked individuality. Marketing here is to the child alone. (*Capturing Kids*, 1998).

It can be posited that a basic model of commodified childhood shapes media choices in three directions. The first is in the direction of hypersegmentation, best illustrated by **Teletubbies**, designed to appeal to 2–4 year olds, which has now seen the development of **The Tweenies**, designed to appeal to 4–6 year olds. The second is through the accentuation of gender characteristics to define product lines, with male tastes given priority in scheduling decisions. The third direction is the collapsing of age segmentation with the emergence of programmes like **The Simpsons** and the new 'lifestyle' appeals of youth culture.

### **Disappearing childhood**

It is commonplace in the popular press to note that once children reach school age, they seem to be 'a generation stuck on fast forward' (Kantrowitz et al, 1999: 63). Children appear to pass through the traditional 'stages' of childhood at younger and younger ages (Geary, 1999). Parents talk of children skipping over the protected spaces of 'playground culture'. 'One minute they're crawling around in the sandbox, the next day they're trawling the internet.' (Kantrowitz et al, 1999: 64). There is popular fear that middle childhood (the age group for this case study) is disappearing as aspirant children increasingly skip from early childhood tastes to popular youth and adult culture.

American market research has discovered the category of 'tweens', described as the cohort before teenagehood, who are not only media savvy, but are more likely than any generation before to be the product of broken homes and rushed parents who do not have time to read to them. These children have demanding lives, where after-school time is either over-scheduled or solitary and housebound, and where they are increasingly treated as peers by working parents. They are more self-reliant younger, (editorial in *KidScreen*, January 1999) and make many decisions over household purchases and clothes (*Newsweek* 18/10/99). Dr Michael Cohen from ARC Consulting provides evidence that girls in the USA begin menstruating 2 years earlier than they did 10 years ago and that today's 10 year old cognitively looks like a 12 year old from 20 years ago' (Maddaver, 1998). Nickelodeon, ever a trendsetter, has scripters who write for 'kids' that

grow up a little quicker each year. 'They're highly intelligent and highly aware of pop culture and everything that's going on in the world. They're not naïve.' (Tollin et al, 1998: 47). Some companies argue that old stratifications of child development are becoming redundant as cohorts of children aspire to older brands (Grimes, 1994: 30). 'Age compression rattles the toy business' reads one headline (Ashdown, 1998). This is evidenced in the shrinking 'age-window' for traditional toys like Action Man and Barbie (*Toy and Hobby Retailer*, September 1998). Boys, previously targeted by age-specific games from Nintendo and Sega are searching out hard action teenage games from Playstation. The self-described marketing task of Playstation is to 'convert gamer virgins into seasoned professionals' loyal to their company products (Presentation from Playstation at *Capturing Kids*, 1998). Brands targeting younger children are finding it increasingly difficult to attract their designated audiences as these audiences 'age up'. This was a crisis that faced **What Now?** in 1998, charged as it was with age-specific duties by the funder NZ On Air.

Marketers acknowledge the steep odds against success within broiling children's culture and have become adept at casting a range of cultural lures in the knowledge that only a minority of them will become hits with the child consumer. As Nickelodeon puts it:

Nickelodeon's mission statement doesn't mention television or toys or movies or recreation because Nickelodeon isn't a particular product or service. It's a philosophy about entertainment for kids that can take many different forms. ...hearing the name Nickelodeon, seeing the Nickelodeon logo, playing with Nickelodeon product, or watching Nickelodeon on television all make kids feel a certain way...What is good for kids is good for business. (Nickelodeon, *Tools and Rules*, 1998).

A near spiritual dimension of this identification with brand is best expressed by an American creative who said:

The Tao of designing is knowing how to locate cool...and that's a worthy goal, but coolness is not just putting sunglasses on a character or standing it on a skateboard. It's something beyond that; it's more spiritual. It's the intangibles you have to get a hold of and put into a product or a property. (Ashdown, 1998: 18).

## **Marketing supersystems**

Kinder, in 1991, was prescient when she described a media 'supersystem' as:

...a network that cuts across several modes of production; ... collectability, through a proliferation of related products and must undergo a sudden increase in commodification, the success of which reflexively becomes a "media event" that dramatically accelerates the growth curve of the system's commercial success. (Kinder, 1991: 123).

No one product or medium is being served in a supersystem. All mediums, merchandising and licensing associations are designed to unite in building the power and

longevity of the brand. As a consequence, during the 1990s the boundaries between media and advertising progressively broke down. New extensions of brands provide children with opportunities for play using their favourite characters and narratives across multi-media-platforms and a range of merchandise. They provide media businesses (including the marketing arms of public service broadcasters like the BBC and ABC) with new ways of extending the life of creative products through rights, ancillary sales and licensing. They provide opportunities for producers of broad targeted properties, like Hollywood films and popular music groups, to extend their reach into the children's market.<sup>41</sup> Generic products, like breakfast cereals, chips and ice-cream, use hit entertainment brands to position their goods 'front of mind' with children in supermarkets. This is called 'pester power'.

The longevity of 30-year-old programmes like Hanna Barbara's **Scooby Doo** (awareness of 93 per cent for kids 6–11 in the USA in 1998) has seen Warner Brothers give **Loony Tunes** a face lift and brand it in its own right to increase new licensing opportunities (Kirchdoeffer, 1998a: 16). Such licensing decisions in America have a ripple effect through all levels of the children's commercial world. This includes decisions made over the commercial environment, and creative content for NZ On Air funded programmes like **What Now?** and **Squirt**, as shall be seen in the case study.

It is widely accepted by manufacturers of associated merchandise, toy retailers and licensees in food and clothing companies, that children's brands rarely outlive their television or film exposure. It is also widely believed that without merchandising there is no kids' trend in the late 1990s.<sup>42</sup> Business commonsense now agrees that children's programming is 'not a starter' without attached merchandise and ancillary rights. Frankiss, 1997: 13). Even **Sesame Street**, which describes its core mission as 'teaching children to learn'. In 1998 this 'now extends beyond TV into nearly every medium that reaches kids, domestically and globally, on-line or on the newsstand, through plush doll or at a theme park' (Kirchdoeffer, 1998b: 59). It is even said to provide programming free to countries like Malaysia, in return for opportunities to sell merchandise. Arguably,

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<sup>41</sup> For example the cross-generational appeals of Will Smith in **Men in Black**

<sup>42</sup> Children's prestige drama and animation, which are often tied to books and films (for example **Winnie the Pooh**, **Thomas the Tank Engine** and **Madeline**) may be exceptions to this because they target parents. In the case of Action Man and Barbie, ongoing popularity is maintained through seasonal 'jags' or 'flights' of advertising.

**Pokemon** has taken branding and multi-level marketing to new levels, ‘Powered by juvenile affluence and the latest multimedia marketing techniques...It has put deep into the shade anything that has come before it, from conkers to yo-yo’s to Cabbage Patch Kids’ (Laurence, 1999: 21). In 1998/9 **Pokemon** represented the most developed multimedia supersystem so far, in a long line of children’s collectables. But television programming, whilst still important, was no longer the premier promotional ‘window’ for the **Pokemon** global brand, which has been overtaken by the video game (Zanker, 1999).

The television spot-advertisement, demonised by some, is still a valuable part of the marketing mix, but its value is increasingly weighed against other weapons in the armoury of branding strategies for companies. Strategies are moving from tactical advertising buys to strategic branding using a range of communication avenues. Licensees selling toys, food and associated merchandise can construct a mix of packaging, promotions, direct mail from shops and distributors, media events, public relations, contra and sponsorship deals with broadcasting companies, and product placement and sponsorship within schools. Local broadcasting sales and marketing departments, once the pre-eminent one-stop shop for those marketing to children, now have rivals for marketers wishing to brand their products in the children’s hearts and minds. This is bad news for free-to-air broadcasters in small nations.

## **Summary**

In this chapter a booming transnational children’s market industry has been described. Entertainment brands, and a range of mutually supporting ancillary rights and licensing opportunities have extended the power of branding within children’s culture. This new, commodified environment provides demonstrable pleasures for children. It provides trusted brands for harried parents offering a range of financial expenditure, from a packet of chips or \$5 card pack to entire outfits and computer games. Programmers rely on certified global hits to ensure their ratings and this, in turn, assures desirable audiences for advertisers. Is there, given this fast-changing children’s media ecology and its considerable benefits, any continuing rationale for local live programmes that attempt indigenous enculturation of local children? If this new international marketplace provides range and variety that children flock to consume, can broadcast ‘quality’ now be defined by what the market of canny parents and enthusiastic children choose to consume? If children, as the market appears to suggest, are more similar in their media and cultural



pleasures than they are different, is there any longer any point in expensive indigenous programming in any country, most of all in small countries with limited budgets?

But continuing parental anxiety over commercial media continues to keep the issue of commercial children's culture newsworthy. Whereas some parents express relief that brands provide tips for gift buying, others fear that the global commodification of children's culture steals their children away. Whereas some like the fact that recent global brands take into account parental fastidiousness over violence and sexism, others fear the intensity of peer aggression and competitiveness that the themed 'collectables' inspire. Many remain confused. As one parent puts it:

Would my refusal to buy my son another item of mass-produced, fully themed merchandise be the act of a saint or a crank...are our kids a pack of early adopting attuned Zeitgeisters or a hapless target market (Norman, 1999: 55)?

## CHAPTER SEVEN - PUBLIC BROADCASTERS AND REGULATION IN THE 1990S

It is occasionally indicated to us that we are apparently setting out to give the public what we think they need and not what they want—but too few know what they want, and very few what they need. (Lord Reith, quoted in Keane, 1991: 57)

### **The problem of quality judgements in policy formation**

National media regulations provide a range of political responses to recent perceived cultural challenges to ‘authentic’ local childhood cultures. What represents ‘quality’ broadcasting for children in any one national broadcasting system is shaped by culture, and is reflected in the value that each national policy framework places on such intangibles as ‘range and diversity’, ‘educational age-appropriateness’, ‘national cultural identity’, and ‘creative freedom’ (and financial subsidy) for producers. These intangibles cost the state money and are difficult to defend against the neo-liberal push for market delivery in an age of multi-media niche choice.

It can be argued that defining ‘quality’ continues to be important for politicians, funders and broadcasters for three broad reasons:

1. ‘Quality’ has a powerful rhetorical function.
2. Such statements assist the functioning of regulation. They enable both short-term judgements over individual programmes as well as longer-term ‘holistic’ evaluation of the ecology of broadcasting.
3. ‘Quality’ definitions provide a standard from which to evaluate the behaviour of individual broadcasters. (Adapted from Ishikawa, 1996)

This does not mean that definitions of ‘quality’ are easily agreed upon. They are fiercely contested, indicating the powerful strategic role of ‘quality’ definitions in policy rhetoric. Indeed, it can be said that the battles over defining ‘quality’ can be used to lay out the matrix of discourses disputing the role of children’s media in children’s lives. Raboy reduces the strands of ‘quality’ discourse to:

1. market assumptions—delivering audiences.
2. high policy assumptions—where quality is defined by national interest (in this case creating vehicles for local culture/education/moral uplift for children).
3. professional assumptions—whereby quality is judged by standards of production and market assumptions (like ‘delivering audiences’).
4. public interest assumptions (in this case ‘in the best interests of children’ as defined by consensus emerging from public debate). (Adapted from Raboy, 1996: 5)

‘Quality’ judgements, perhaps more neatly than any other measure, define the stake that each stakeholder has in constructing media childhood. However, few of these judgements take into account what children themselves view as a ‘quality media ecology’ nor are

based on careful research into children's access to range and variety of media choice in their everyday lives.

### **Research into children's access to and use of media**

Large-scale studies of national media use by children have recently been undertaken, and preliminary results are becoming available (Livingstone et al, 1999a, 1999b; Lohr, 1999). These preliminary results suggest that parents in the USA and Britain are more wary of letting their children play in unsafe streets than they are of letting them have free access to a range of media in their own bedrooms. In the popular press this has been tagged the new 'wired bedroom' culture and has generated moral panic over children's access to 'inappropriate material' now that children are increasingly separated from family values and neighbourhood peer play. Even though children are safe in the walled environment of home, they are not safely contained in a 'walled garden' of innocent childhood. The implications of so-called new bedroom cultures for peer-group culture and family life have yet to be researched in depth; however, the rhetoric of policy debate is already using the term to justify positions on 'quality' within children's media culture. For example, those using high policy or public interest definitions of quality media for children can argue that such evidence illustrates the need for more resources to be spent on provision for latchkey children who remain isolated in the home until the return of their parents. If one supports market definitions, thus taking into account children's preference for global animation fare, then the funding of local age-specific children's programmes can be argued to be an absurd use of national resources.

It is important to resist importing culturally specific research data. Research suggests that America and Britain may have increasingly wired bedrooms, but in Germany there is research concern about over-protective mothers who 'smother' their children in response to perceived dangers in the community (Rogge, 1998: 47). In New Zealand, research suggests that children still tend to watch television in the sitting room and have freedom to play outside (Lealand, 2000).

The above discussions on 'quality' and the diversity of children's media use should be kept in mind during the next section. It enables one to appreciate the complexity of drivers within current national children's media policy formations.

## The situation in Europe

A European Broadcasting Union report published in late 1997 (Blumler et al, 1997), at the time that the European Union quota was being mooted, concludes that local 'quality' live children's television programmes were becoming 'dinosaurs; in a landscape dominated by cartoons and cheap foreign imports.' (Fry, 1998a: 11). The study drew on a questionnaire sent to 45 chief executives for children's programmes in public service companies in the European Broadcasting Union. (Only 55 per cent answered and some caution must be attached to results.) Despite the fact that the output of domestic productions has increased, by 1995 only 35 per cent of the output was domestic production; this had decreased in both absolute figures and in percentages, as a proportion of the mix. The study showed that the Nordic countries were most active in their preservation of the public service model, whereas tendencies towards more USA imports and animation were most apparent in Romance countries. Anglo-German public providers lay in between (Rydin, 2000a). Of the imported programmes, half were of American origin and animation was taking an increasing slice of the sales.

It is asserted that in Sweden and Germany public service audiences were cut in half between 1990 and 1995 (Herman et al, 1997; Lohr, 1999). Indeed, it was the rating power of global cartoons that concerned more and more terrestrial regulators during the late 1990s in Europe.<sup>43</sup>

Widespread anxiety over children's indigenous 'quality drama' and educational television culture led the rich nation of Germany to fund an entire public channel for children's programmes. Protective regulatory regimes for free-to-air broadcasting also became a common response in countries such as Ireland, Finland and Belgium, that are more comparable in size to New Zealand. Regulations included the provision of children's programmes in a range of indigenous or minority languages. They foreground

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<sup>43</sup> It worth noting that even when consideration is given to the different ratings systems, a comparative study of children's ratings between Sweden (in 1999) and Australia (in 1998) indicates that in Sweden the 20 most popular programmes for the 3–11 year-old child were from the public service company SVT, and most of the programmes were of Swedish origin. Only one programme block of Disney cartoons could compete with the Swedish programmes. This contrasts with Australia, where 13 out of the 20 top programmes for children in the 5–12 year-old age group were from the USA. The *Simpsons* topped the rankings and *Seinfeld* came fourth (Rydin, 2000a). It would be interesting to explore whether this is a result of language barriers, or due to stronger parental feelings about consumerism and cultural imperialism in Sweden.

cultural objectives like 'quality', 'local culture' and 'education' in their broadcasting policies contrasting strongly with decades-long USA prevarication over defining such terms. Their regulations share in common a wish to ensure continuing national 'quality' programmes for their children on free-to-air television, and limitations to consumerism on commercial channels (Zanker, 2000).

The European Union (EU) has imposed a 50 per cent European origin quota on all genres barring news and sport, binding on all countries. It is designed to protect Europe from the inroads of American culture. In addition, the EU has imposed a 10 per cent independent production quota. This requires that at least 10 per cent of programming, (or at least 10 per cent of programming budgets), must be made by independent producers. It blankets free-to-air broadcasters and all pay and most specialist channels, but not ethnic language channels (Norris et al, 1998: 9). This is a striking protectionist response to cultural and industrial challenges from imports.

### **The situation in Britain**

In Britain the introduction of commercial television at first brought a benevolent form of competition to the BBC whereby lack of competition for advertising dollar saw the BBC become more receptive to the audience whilst the BBC quality thresholds ensured that ITV aspired to high standards of children's programming (Wagg, 1992). Gradually the BBC was asked to justify funding by competing for audience share, as measured in ratings. This saw the BBC adopt increasingly commercial scheduling strategies and come under attack for deserting its high public service mission in order to compete in a market. Competition intensified with the arrival of dedicated children's pay channels in the 1990s.

The BBC's funding crisis during the early 1990s provided the incentive for a new global marketing strategy. In 1996 a BBC head was recruited to spearhead the BBC's international 'quality branding' and competitiveness, both in the pay channel business and in the programme making and licensing businesses. At the time the BBC was already the second most recognised brand name in the world, after Coca-Cola (Herman et al, 1997: 46-50). This strategy was vindicated in 1998, when the BBC gained rights to **The Teletubbies**. As well as this global success the BBC maintained and even increased its market share within Britain. The BBC share for children 4-15 rose from 33.4 per cent to 35.1 per cent between 1997 and 1998. It is important to note that this was achieved with a judicious mix of elements of home-grown programmes and increasing use of imported hits. This contrasted with ITV, which lost viewers. As a consequence, there has been

pressure for the BBC to be regulated to meet similar minimums for local provision and diversity as ITV (Zanker, 2000). The children's head of the BBC argues that by offering children a complete line-up of factual entertainment, animation and drama programmes, (including the 40 year old **Blue Peter**), they have 'the opportunity to introduce new ideas into the mix and give them a chance to build loyalty.' (Fry, 1998c: 50).

Animation on BBC1 had risen from 9 per cent in 1981 to 35 per cent according to a 1997 report for the British Broadcasting Standards Authority (Blumler, 1997). Imported animation was cheap, and there was a great temptation to fill up air-time with it. Cartoons, ranging from adult offerings such as **The Simpsons** and **Batman** to the pre-school favourites **Rugrats**, now made up two-thirds of all terrestrial, satellite and cable television on offer for children' What is not clear from this statistic is how much of this animation was sourced from Britain itself, given the BBC's increasing marketing profile.

New challenges are facing the BBC in 2000, as a growing range of digital-pay platforms threaten the free-to-air universe. The BBC is joining the fray, providing a 'dedicated' early-childhood service (Cox, 2000). The BBC spends 40 million pounds on original children's programming and producers regard commissions from the BBC to be a strong 'calling card' in the international market. Despite this investment in children's programming, the BBC is having to look to more flexible co-production relationships with the like of Disney. Thus the BBC has become a highly competitive commercial hybrid, described by one competitor as the most ruthless marketer of children's productions in the world.

### **The situation in Australia and Canada**

Australia and Canada have evolved very different media policies out of the shared hybrid influences of the BBC model and American commercial broadcasting (Lisosky, 1997). Their media policy frameworks share a belief that local cultural requirements for children on television are not met by market mechanisms alone. Both countries have public service channels that have a mandate to serve local children in their diversity, as well as a range of funding mechanisms for producers, and quota requirements for commercial broadcasters. Both systems have produced hit early-childhood programmes and prestige children's dramas. Canada offers a dedicated early-childhood channel 'Tree-house' Television.

The desire for 'Canadianess' that underpins the Canadian model is expressed in the following submission for increased funding for CBS from a local pressure group:

If programs that reflect their lives and validate the experience of growing up in Kitimat, Sudbury, or Rimouski are not to be found on the CBC, they will not be found on other networks. In their absence, our children will be left to emulate the behaviour and values of the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air or Bart Simpson (Submission from 'Alliance for Children's Television', 1999).

Canada's CBC was hit by massive budget and staffing cuts in the late 1990s but it continues to argue that it offers a point of difference ('non-commodified' children's television) in the increasingly competitive marketplace. In its 1999 submission for license renewal, the CBC asserts that we see a leadership opportunity for CBC-television in both children's and youth programming. Parents are beginning to rebel against the motivation of merchandising now prevalent in children's programs. They are increasingly looking to the public broadcaster for quality children's shows that promote Canadian values in Canadian settings (CBC, web site accessed 12/2/00).

Whilst pay has made inroads for CBC and its affiliates, ratings continue to be high for the ABC. The uptake of pay services has been slower than anticipated by technological determinists who predicted that audiences for public service broadcasting would rapidly whittle away. The media-canny 5–12 year-old audience for the ABC increased between 1994/5 and 1997/9 from 16.1 per cent to 19.1 per cent (Hood, 1998). The ABC achieves its current ratings success with the same scheduling strategy as the BBC: a judicious mix of home-grown and global hits. Commercial competitors are constrained to deliver hefty local content in children's drama and children's genre in a shrinking market. Like ITV in the UK, they accuse the public service broadcaster of unfairly using imported hits and competitive scheduling methods to compete in the market. The ABC still has no requirement to fulfil quota requirements (Australian Broadcasting Authority, 1998).

It has scheduled more consistently in terms of having blocks of time that are kid-safe, it has committed more to children in terms of putting its own money into its own productions, and it has generally made children's programming central to its business (Hood, 1998: 52).

The results achieved by the ABC are all the more impressive given the fact that funding has been cut, and pay channels Disney, Nickelodeon, Fox Kids and Cartoon network have all entered the market. So far, Nickelodeon is the pay service to make the most market inroads. This has been attributed to its close contact with the audience, which it achieves through weekly interviews with groups of children around the country 'to gauge their thoughts and attitudes to the world in general'. The 'kids first, kid tested and approved' slogan, first adopted in the USA, is now as rigorously applied in Australia.

However, local content that it shows is a result of pressure from regulators rather than local children's hunger for local content. It is possibly significant that, given current convergence trends, its games-heavy online 'Treehouse' attracts more than 1.7 hits a week and rates consistently as the top web site for Australian children (McGilvray, 2000: 5).

The ABC, like the BBC, has taken a more entrepreneurial approach to compete in the international marketplace. The organization is increasingly in the business of commissioning productions for sale to the world. The financial sense of creating children's television properties is clear for the ABC, with 70 per cent of its booming merchandising income linked to properties like **Bananas in Pyjamas**. This alone was calculated to have earned A\$100 million in merchandising and licensing fees during the late 1990s (McGilvray, 2000: 4). The ABC spends A\$6 million dollars on children's programmes, and even though they pay less than commercial channels for production, they attract the best producers who can see long-term income benefits from ensuing world ancillary rights (Hood, 1998: 52).

Producers (and commercial broadcasters in more candid moments) acknowledge that without quotas and federal funding sources, indigenous production for children would wither. Producers, like the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF), sound more and more like successful entrepreneurs brokering productions with a range of international partners, using federal money to underwrite commercial projects in the specialized global industry of 'quality children's media properties'.

There are cultural issues for some. Even though cultural optimists claim that local narratives need not compromise cultural objectives to be global in appeal, pessimists and realists note that international co-production and sales has seen a 'blanding out' of cultural particularity. Buckland, from the ACTF, calls this a tendency to make 'international blancmange' (personal communication, 14/2/00) in order to meet the cultural requirements of the largest markets, like the USA.

### **The situation in the United States of America**

The dramatic re-regulation of American children's television (first in 1991, and tightened in 1996) has resulted in commercial broadcasters being required to air 3 hours of educational programming a week as part of requirements for licence renewals. The



network programmes of the 'Big Four' (ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox) reach a mass audience, even though network and pay services such as the Warner Brothers Television network and Nickelodeon increasingly fragment audiences. This has seen a sellers' market, with increasing competition for the types of properties that the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) has traditionally commissioned, forcing them to become more competitive and entrepreneurial. For example, they now put more money into programme development and enter into multi-year contracts with 'key signature properties'. 'We want to have a greater sense of control and longevity...to use them in a significant way to build our brand' (Kirchdoeffer, 1998c: 56).

As competition from pay platforms like Nickelodeon intensifies, the PBS has had to think more like a commercial network, whilst attempting not to compromise its rigid curriculum standards for children's shows. It positions itself 'as the place where parents can find uninterrupted educational children's programming' with 7.8 million children between 6 and 11 years (35 per cent of the available) watching PBS in any one week between 1997 and 1998, according to Saatchi and Saatchi Media Research.

Nickelodeon's viewership climbed in the same year but rose at the expense of Fox rather than PBS, according to *Kidscreen*.

PBS has had a mandate over its 30 year existence to find the best programming it can bring to its audience, whether it's American made or imported (like *Teletubbies*)...more competition is good for PBC because it forces PBS to continue to be aggressive about finding 'that next big thing', programs that provide an experience that begins with a TV series and extends beyond the screen to help children in their development (Kirchdoeffer, 1998c: 56).

Significantly, as its thirtieth birthday approached, the cash-strapped Children's Television Workshop, the doyen of non-profit child-centred production houses, announced a plan to expand its reach and revenues by joining with Viacom-owned Nickelodeon on a new kids' network (Kirchdoeffer, 1998b: 59). Noggin's brief was to become a 24-hour entertainment and education channel, which turned a profit. It promised profits to CTW, as well as a way of exploiting its formidable library of shows, including *The Electric Company*, *3-2-1 Contact* and *Ghostwriter*. Its relationship with powerful cable programmer, Viacom, provided leverage by packaging Noggin with other established cable nets. The benefit for Viacom was to gain access to the 'gold standard' children's production library, which added to its market profile. This venture played the role of a spoiler to an ambitious plan by Fox to set up two kids channels, one for boys and one for girls.

## Summary

National children's production and broadcasting feels under threat everywhere. New global hits attract child audiences and make it increasingly risky for commercial broadcasters to programme untested local material. The verdict remains out on the fate of older forms of full-service public service broadcasting for anything but the wealthiest regulated nations. At the moment, wealthy nations in North America and Europe (and Australia) choose to both regulate their broadcasters, in terms of obligations to the child audience, *and* subsidize their children's producers, in order to enable them to serve local child audiences. This has had the added benefit of enabling them to compete in the international audio-visual market place. The mixed motives of culture and trade, broadcaster regulation and production subsidy, have created successful new contra-flows of children's audio-visual material from Britain, Canada and Australia into the USA. Public service broadcasters are increasingly forced to compete in the marketplace by using commercial scheduling techniques and commercial measurements of market share. Large and successful public service producers are increasingly adopting the same language as marketers as they 'brand' their 'product' appeals. Successful producers, who use public money to underwrite deals, use the language of entrepreneurs as they broker productions with a range of international partners in order to gain success in the global business opportunities provided by 'quality children's media'. The BBC, ABC, ACTF, PBS and CTW have become successful global cultural businesses and argue that the rationale for entrepreneurship is that it underwrites the continued production of a wide range of local television for indigenous children. Critics fear that this new international focus now produces too much cultural production that no longer reflects the idiosyncrasy of local cultures. The successful broad service offered by the ABC and BBC appears to suggest that a modified version of the 'Great Tradition' has a place in the mix of the television market. However, others believe that the new developments of ISP digital media delivery may yet see niche- and genre-specific channel solutions prevail.

## Regulation in New Zealand

We are simultaneously a dumping ground, a laboratory and a franchise for the global conglomerates, led by fast food franchises, Rupert Murdoch and CanWest global systems (Lealand, 1998: 2).

Media deregulation in the 1980s in New Zealand was both sudden and extreme. Why did politicians continue to expose a fragile children's production industry to the full blast of global forces during the 1990s? What happened to the old residual public service organization of TVNZ that could have been used as a seed bed for growing 'quality' children's production (thus emulating the moves of the ABC and BBC) to enter global 'quality' children's markets, thus enabling reinvestment in less attractive indigenous production?

It is extraordinary that the small, exposed, English-speaking nation of New Zealand, with its fragile media market, chose to fly in the face of the pragmatic regulatory 'common sense' of other English-speaking nations.

In this section, the objectives for broadcasting in New Zealand under legislation passed by the Fourth Labour Government during the 1980s are discussed in some detail in terms of their downstream impact on the children's television production environment during the 1990s.<sup>44</sup>

### Legislative changes

The State-Owned Enterprises Act (SOE), passed in 1986, created the mechanism for creating new state companies that were required to compete commercially and make profits for the government. In 1988, TVNZ became one of several such state owned enterprises and was prepared for 'competitive neutrality' in the marketplace, which, in effect, meant that publicly owned broadcasters could not have any advantage (or disadvantage) over private broadcasters. This change occurred just as the Broadcasting Tribunal granted a third broadcasting channel to commercial interests. Even before going to air, TV3 announced that it had a deal with Disney, as well as an innovative slate of local programmes that it wished to make under the creative direction of Rex Simpson, the

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<sup>44</sup> In-depth analyses of media deregulation have been completed by Easton, 1990, 1997; Wilson, 1992; Winter, 1994; Sharp, 1994; Atkinson, 1994, Kelsey, 1995; Smith, 1996; Spice et al, 1996; Hope, 1996; Cocker, 1997.

head of the children's operation. During the 1990s, TV2 and TV3 competed for NZ On Air children's funding, but even more importantly, for ratings in the cut-throat media market of New Zealand.<sup>45</sup>

The government's aim, in broadcasting as in other sectors of the economy, was to move from a regulated to a deregulated environment and to create the conditions that would enable a free market to operate. It was to become evident very quickly that there were contradictory economic and cultural objectives for TVNZ built into the wording of the State Owned Enterprises Act:

An organization that exhibits a sense of social responsibility by having regard to the interests of the community in which it operates and by endeavouring to accommodate or encourage these when able to do so (State Owned Enterprises Act 1986, Section 4 (a), italics added).

The government committee, appointed in 1988 to advise the government on broadcasting matters, argued that a broadcasting SOE might reasonably be required to have the predominant objective of reflecting New Zealand's identity and culture within its statement of corporate intent. This had the advantage of directly reflecting the government's public service objective, but without restricting the in which the SOE could achieve the result (The Coordinating Committee on Broadcasting, 1988). The interpretation of the SOE Act by politicians and the first CEO of TVNZ saw a different,

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<sup>45</sup> The license for a third national broadcasting channel was awarded in 1987 to a local consortium, Tele-vid, after a long, costly tribunal hearing that began in 1985. The acrimonious tribunal hearing had the short-term effect of adding the voice of local independent producers to those supporting deregulation. Few in the industry liked the costly and bureaucratic wrangling, led by monopoly TVNZ, and many producers still remembered, with nostalgia, the creative freedom of South Pacific Television. In 1987, the year leading up to broadcast, there was optimism amongst the local production industry. There was the potential for two commissioners of local content and, in the early days prior to deregulatory legislation, TV3's license came with quota requirements for children. Christchurch, the centre for TVNZ children's production under Huntly Elliott, looked as though it would become the centre of a booming production industry for children's production when TV3 announced its intentions to base its children's operation there, to be headed by Rex Simpson. In the event, TV3 had a catastrophic launch, largely the result of the 1987 stockmarket crash and advertiser conservatism. It was bankrupt within 6 months of being on air, and legislation was passed to permit 100 per cent foreign ownership of media companies in order to entice investment. It is now owned by Canadian CanWest. TV3's quota lapsed with the change to purchasing licensing rights. They have no local cultural requirements on their licence, which expires in 2010.

highly commercial, scenario develop. Julian Mounter succinctly summed up his objectives for the new competitive company in the wake of the SOE legislation:

- Beat the hell out of the opposition
- Hack back even more on production costs
- Exploit new markets in the fragmented market place
- Look for co-productions and facilities sharing (*Televiews* 12/9/89: 13).

Within 18 months TVNZ had hacked its staff from 2,200 to 1,200. Senior children's producers and staff were purged from the Children's Department in Christchurch. By 1990 TVNZ summarized its interpretation of responsibilities under the Act as follows:

*The principle objective of every state enterprise shall be to operate as a successful business ...and to be...an organization which exhibits a sense of social responsibility. TVNZ interprets these requirements to mean the company must be market-led, competitive, profitable, and to reflect and foster New Zealand's cultural identity. (Television New Zealand Planning Department, 1990 (italics added).*

Successive broadcasting ministers have required high dividends from the TVNZ board—requirements that have made managers sensitive to the financial bottom line during the 1990s. The profit requirement, and the resulting management strategies, has had important downstream effects on the scheduling of a mix of imported and local children's television, the shape of the children's television department and the content of its programmes.

## **The Broadcasting Commission/ New Zealand On Air**

The 1989 Broadcasting Act picked up on the 'Official's report' recommendation that

...a grants scheme based on funding from the public broadcasting fee is seen as having more advantages as the main mechanism for funding public service broadcasting goals, given its advantages of competitive neutrality, transparency, targeting, potentially lower costs and responsiveness to consumers (The Coordinating Committee on Broadcasting, 1988: 65).

The Broadcasting Commission was set up to allocate grants to television producers from broadcasting licence fee funds, thus enabling the new broadcasting channel (TV3) to submit proposals for funding from a television fund previously allocated to the state broadcaster alone. This created a bitter relationship between TVNZ and Broadcasting Commission. Old battles were fought by TVNZ over the politics of commissioning and scheduling children's programming throughout the 1990s. The broadcast licence fee, collected annually from owners of television sets, remained static at NZ\$110 a year

through that decade until the National Government cut it as a pre-election sweetener in 1999.<sup>46</sup>

The Broadcasting Act 1989 required that the Broadcasting Commission fund programmes that ‘provided for the interests of women, children, people with disabilities and minorities in the community (Section 36 C(ii)).<sup>47</sup> Horrocks reports that some early critics of the Broadcasting Act wanted the fee ‘to be used to buy BBC programmes directly or to fund the removal of advertising from some days of the week’ (1995: 98). This solution of importing ‘quality’ BBC public service programming continues to thread through debates at forums about children’s programming, illustrating the sometimes discordant discourses of educational ‘quality’ and ‘local identity’ that characterize children’s funding politics. NZ On Air drew up funding criteria for children’s television in 1991 and reviewed these in 1993, in the wake of community consultative events. Funding for children’s programmes was divided into two types: age-specific and prime-time family viewing (see Appendix Three). No more open community consultations were held during the 1990s, despite a requirement built into the funding criteria.

The Broadcasting Commission was deftly renamed NZ On Air (NZOA) in a Saatchi and Saatchi branding campaign to reflect its focus on New Zealand programming. In economic terms, NZ On Air’s cultural objective was to maximise programming outcomes (subject to a budget constraint) and to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of its funding. Defining ‘allocative efficiency’, ‘quality’ and ‘value’ in terms of NZ On Air’s cultural objectives has been more difficult. It is easier to measure, for example, the cost per hour of production within a particular genre, than it is the intensity of preference or satisfaction of viewers, and value to the culture of the nation. These difficulties have

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<sup>46</sup> : Treasury officials had not originally envisaged one agency being charged with the responsibility of achieving a broad range of social objectives in broadcasting. In their submission to the Royal Commission they had outlined that different social objectives could be funded by different agencies including the QEII Arts Council, the Department of Maori Affairs, and the Film Commission. ‘Thus for legislators... the public broadcasting fee was to act as an extremely malleable putty which could be used to fill in many of the cracks which they feared may become apparent in a purely market approach to broadcasting.’ (Cocker, 1998: 2).

<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to note that the category of ‘children’ was omitted in the Bill and added only at the committee stage. The submission from the Children’s Television Foundation to the select committee argued for children’s programmes to be added to the list of audiences that were likely to be failed by market provision and thus required subsidy from the Broadcasting Commission.

seen the instrumentality of ratings increasingly used in deciding funding for children's television production, over more contestable qualitative measures of audience preferences and intensities (Duncan et al, 1997).

The Commission's mission statement read:

To develop the distinctiveness, variety and quality of New Zealand broadcasting that reflects the culture and identity of New Zealanders under the Treaty of Waitangi.

Harley interpreted this task as that of presenting popular images to New Zealand for New Zealanders and championed the cause of entertainment programmes that would attract mass audiences in prime time, rather than specialized shows that few would watch. TVNZ, smarting from having to share the licence fee with TV3, commented that such a policy would see 'non-commercial programming disappear without a trace.' (Jenkin, 1990: 82).<sup>48</sup> NZ On Air has been remarkably successful, by international standards, in funding high rating prime-time local programmes like **Shortland Street** and the popular **Inside New Zealand** documentaries, and these programmes have contributed to a new popular cultural assertiveness in New Zealand (Cairns et al, 1996; Horrocks, 1995; Lealand, 1996). NZ On Air's funding strategy has been compared favourably with the record of low rating, often earnest, publicly funded programmes in countries like Canada (Dann, 2000). However, as shall be outlined, NZ On Air funding of programmes for 6–12 year olds in New Zealand presented particular difficulties that were not faced by those commissioning for the local enthusiasms of adults.<sup>49</sup>

It is critical for the case study that during the 1990s NZ On Air had no official leverage over the scheduling of the programme on either TVNZ or commercial television. Differences of opinion were the source of ongoing bickering and negotiation between broadcasters, producers and funders. NZ On Air and producer clients were in a weak position *vis a vis* the broadcasters, because they had nowhere else to go to deliver cultural funding objectives other than to commercial broadcasters. A 1997 report to NZ On Air asserted that 'Audience ratings are the main yardstick of success of both NZ On Air funded programmes and commercially driven programmes.' It concludes, however,

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<sup>48</sup> This 'prime-time' policy saw networks increasingly unwilling to take risks with new local, potentially commercial, programming without majority NZ On Air funding. It is said that TVNZ's McCready, for example, held out on commissioning a prime-time soap until a commitment of one year's funding was granted in order to cut commercial risk as it build its audience.

<sup>49</sup> This does not apply to early-childhood programmes that are zoned non-commercial.

that 'this may not be the best or only way of measuring the success of NZ On Air's funding, either year by year or in the longer term' (Gascoigne, 1997: 3). It was of the opinion that the ability of NZ On Air to increase the 'overlap between what is good (and risk-taking), and what is simply popular, has been thwarted by its lack of leverage with commercial broadcasters.' (p22).

TVNZ executives railed against a policy environment whereby NZ On Air public money could be granted to a foreign-owned 'margin management' media company. Says one TVNZ executive:

I always found it odd that CanWest could build a commercial television organization on the basis of having their most expensive and profitable shows subsidized by the tax-payer. Millions of dollars worth of NZ On Air money goes to a private commercial organization in order to make prime-time programmes programmes cheaply enough for it to send profits back to Winnipeg. (Shaw, interview, 11/9/98).<sup>50</sup>

In the early years, NZ On Air maintained a pragmatic view that TV3 was more willing to agree to the cultural objectives for children, given that key programming strands rejected by TVNZ were often picked up by TV3. One NZ OnAir manager suggested that TV3 was easier to deal with because it had more stable personnel and focused objectives, a contrast to the turbulent management wars within TVNZ during the 1990s. Prowse said TVNZ executives had 'a hard job reading the government as to its role in life... what degree should it have social obligations and what degree is it just out to maximize its profit and keep Treasury happy.' (Prowse, interview, 11/9/97).

### **A brief overview of NZ On Air funding for children during the 1990s**

What range, variety and content of children's programming did NZ On Air fund during the fiercely competitive environment of the deregulated 1990s? The overwhelming majority of funding during the 1990s has been on an annual basis, traditionally granted at a special round in September/October. This has resulted in an annual review of children's programmes by both broadcasters and NZ On Air throughout the 1990s. During the

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<sup>50</sup> It is a curious fact that in New Zealand CanWest can obtain NZ On Air money without any regulatory requirements or even license renewals, whilst in Canada it is required to fulfil general Canadian content requirements. In Australia, CanWest-owned Channel 10 is required to fulfil 32 hours a year of local children's drama, as well as hours of 'C' classification quota in overall children's programming for right of licence renewal. In Ireland, local licensing requirements apply to CanWest.



decade, NZ On Air gave between NZ\$6 to NZ\$10 million to children's genre (see Appendix Four for graphs).

In 1992 children's local content soared as a result of awarding the new local early-childhood output to TV3 and **You and Me**. Competition between TV3 and TV2 peaked in 1992/3 in productions for both the early-childhood audience as well as the primary-aged child. TV3 produced both a Saturday morning programme (**The Early Bird Show**) and afternoon linking programmes for the primary audience. Both were cancelled in 1993 as part of cost cutting on TV3 under new the ownership of CanWest. Even so, children's was the second largest funded genre (after sport) at 21 per cent of local content. By 1994 there was a decline of 16 per cent of production in the children's area (from 1019 hours to 861 hours) but repeats of early-childhood programmes helped boost the actual number of broadcast hours. TV3 ran a new access news show for young people on TV3 (**In Focus**), and the introduction of TV2's **Son of a Gunn**, **Mel's Amazing Movies** and **Oi** (science) for primary children saw production remain relatively static. By 1995, local children's production over the two channels had reduced to 773 hours. This was still higher than during the 1980s when only TVNZ showed children's programmes, but showed a decline of 10 per cent from the peak hours in 1992. TV3 continued to show most hours but this was mostly due to repeats and the tweaking of an early-childhood programme, **Tiki Tiki Forest Gang**, for primary audiences. **In Focus**, the access news programme on TV3, had been replaced by a new lifestyle youth show, **Ice TV**. In 1996 local programmes increased slightly, still largely due to repeats. The major titles remained constant. **Squirt**, an experimental computer animation linking show on Saturday mornings, and **Oscar and Friends** appeared on TV3. **Ice TV**, a hit, became one hour in length. **What Now?** was shifted from Saturday mornings to Sundays and shortened from 3 to 2 hours. **Get Real**, an information programme for primary-aged children, appeared in the weekdays afternoon slot. By 1997 first-run hours reduced on both TV2 and TV3. **Squirt** shifted to TV2 and **What Now?** absorbed **Get Real** in the afternoon slot and, finally, **Get Real** was shifted to TV1 (NZ On Air Annual Local Content Surveys).

By 1999 funders found they were locked into a funding pattern dominated by commitments to certain big key daily programmes for primary-aged children and early childhood. This left little discretionary funding with which to broaden the range and variety of delivery to the children's audience. By 1998 the chair of NZ On Air expressed the view that children's programming was in danger of being diluted by repeats and

cheaper programmes. First run children's programmes were down 125 hours since 1995 (NZ On Air Content survey 1998). Whilst some of this lowered hours output could be attributed to more expensive genre like computer-generated **Squirt**, most was due to the fact that there had been no increase in the licence fee during a decade of rising production costs. After a peak reached in 1992, as a result of the new indigenous early-childhood programme coming on air, children's broadcast hours during the 1990s were only boosted by early-childhood repeats.

### **Views on the commissioning and funding process**

Broadcasters, producers and NZ On Air have had polarized views about the merits of the funding process, the percentage of overall costs contributed by NZ On Air, and control over the production outcomes and scheduling during the 1990s. Clearly TVNZ resented having to share the licence fee with the new TV3 in the wake of the 1989 Broadcasting Act, but it is worth noting that TVNZ did not have local content as a required objective before the arrival of TV3 necessitated competition for NZ On Air funding. The new competitive environment has seen NZ On Air praised as an efficient and transparent funding mechanism. It has funded the first indigenous early-childhood programme, seen an increase in hours of viewing and been far more successful than NZ On Air in collecting the licence fee. Thus it appeared that deregulation and the unique funding mechanism of NZ On Air had some real benefits for local children's television production and vindicated the view of the architects of the SOE Act and the Broadcasting Act. Corporate efficiency was ensured through a process of competition for scarce advertising dollars between competing channels, and competitive bidding for production funding.

The problem was that NZ On Air was neither the maker nor the broadcaster of programmes and during the 1990s it could fund children's programmes only once they were commissioned by one of the free to air broadcasters. It could respond to ideas for programmes put before it and, on occasion, play go-between in broadcaster/producer negotiations, but under section 42 of the Act it had no editorial say in the creative content of programmes. It could only judge proposals in light of their cultural objectives and provide a proportion (up to 100 per cent) of the funding to make them. Critics point out that the gatekeeping role of commercial broadcasters in the commissioning system for children's genre has seen range and variety defined by commercial concerns, rather than the full range and variety of public service provision. During the 1990s, fiscal 'efficiencies' forced children's producers to operate on yearly contracts (renewed on the apparent whim

of commercial commissioners) and required them to produce 'quality' television on stingy hourly budgets by genre standards. This made it difficult to retain dedicated specialist staff, creating a 'just-in-time' cottage industry of young inexperienced workers.

Duncan et al (1997) noted that it was a realistic assessment to assume that programmes (including those for children) were not designed to be sold overseas. NZ On Air's funding was viewed as a subsidy to the broadcaster to provide for that part of the production and broadcasting costs which the broadcaster could not justify in commercial terms. This subsidy hovered at around 80–90 per cent for children's programming during the late 1990s (boosted somewhat by the 100 per cent subsidy for early-childhood programmes) (Prowse, interview, 5/10/98). In an ideal world the contribution of the broadcaster to production costs was based on a fair calculation of the commercial value of the programme to the broadcaster. So, for example, early-childhood programming attracted 100 per cent funding because it was shown in a non-commercial zone. However commercial broadcasters argued that they were required to manage a portfolio of children's programmes that were funded by the public broadcasting fee—many of these programmes were scheduled at significant net costs to them.

It has not been possible to obtain publishable figures of these costs to broadcasters in the commercially sensitive competitive broadcasting environment, nor has it been possible to find out the income from advertising during children's scheduled time. The researcher has been told on several occasions that arrangements were complex, involving a range of discount deals for advanced purchases and bulk buys. During some seasons in the 1990s TV3 has chose to commission local children's programmes for after school, instead scheduling shows like **Gilligans Island** and imported cartoons. Sales and Marketing TVNZ suggested that children's advertising was difficult to sell except in the months leading up to Christmas, and that advertisers for products like McDonald's often preferred to purchase time in prime-time programmes to reach child consumers. Sponsorship, contra arrangements and other commercial relationships also complicated commercial figures.

NZ On Air has been in the same position of making an informed guess of the value, or cost, of a programme to the broadcaster, in order to require a certain 'licence fee' to be contributed by broadcaster to production costs. During the 1990s, NZ On Air developed a method of modelling commercial 'programme value' to broadcasters in order to maintain a tough negotiating and monitoring. However, broadcasters could gain advantages during

negotiations by presenting a generous 'licence fee' contribution, which was then rapidly recouped (and even more) through the hiring of facilities back to internal and external production teams involved in making subsidised programmes.

### **Summary**

The 1989 Broadcasting Act confines NZ On Air to reactive practices. The Act, significantly, does not mention the word 'quality', and yet politics of funding during the 1990s, and for this case study, circle around battles over defining 'quality'. There was a juggle to find the balance between 'cheap and cheerful' magazine 'environments', interstitial elements around imported programming, and 'quality' higher cost genres and how best to define the needs, as opposed to the viewing pleasures, of the child audience. The answers were negotiated in fierce cultural battles between NZ On Air, the funder of 'cultural presence' and 'public good', and TVNZ, the commercial broadcaster.

# MEET THE TEAM

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## CHAPTER EIGHT - WHAT NOW?

### BACKGROUND

#### A brief history

The history of children's television in New Zealand warrants a more detailed study than is possible here. This short chapter can only alert one to discourses and structural issues that impinge on the case study of **What Now?**

The task of setting up a television network for New Zealand was very expensive for the sparse population spread over two narrow mountainous islands. As a consequence, New Zealand's television system has drawn on both licence fee and advertising revenue since the early days (Boyd-Bell, 1985). As a consequence, advertising has been an element of the after-school and Saturday morning viewing experiences for primary-aged children since targeted programmes began, although early-childhood programmes have been scheduled in non-commercial time. 1960s schedules copied the patterns of the mixed BBC model that developed in response to ITV's entertainment line-up, even though there was no competition in New Zealand at the time. This menu comprised a judicious mix of cowboys, adventure serials, cartoons, animal, puppet and magazine shows (Wagg, 1992). Home (1995) describes the scheduling strategies used more recently in a competitive environment in Britain, which have also been influential in New Zealand.

Just as shows like **Tiswas** caused adult moral panics in 1960s Britain, so too did shows like **Nice One Stu** in New Zealand a decade later. Anxiety was expressed as presenters shifted in style from adult role models who addressed nice middle-class children in standard English, to young presenters in 'gear' who took the side of an audience made up of 'kids with attitude' (Wagg, 1992). For example, Stu adopted, and even exaggerated, colloquial Kiwi schoolyard vernacular—but his show, according to Simpson (the producer) was never as edgy as **Tiswas**. The **Blue Peter** tradition of celebrity guests, interspersed with children talking about favourite books and items showing how to 'make things' that cost no money, continued. Stu was very popular with his child audience, but not with parents. At one point he received up to 1,000 letters a day about his speech from irate parents. Some regarded presentation standards and increasing commercial pressure to be connected and this led to the setting up of a lobby group called Monitor (Hall, 20/2/96). For a while, Dougal Stevenson, a well-modulated TV1 newsreader in the BBC tradition, was invited by Simpson to appear on screen to 'groom' Stu's pronunciation.

This took the sting out of criticism and the furore simply added to the show's popularity and credibility with children (Simpson, 15/7/99).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s a range of tensions existed in children's production that were to have an impact on the evolution of **What Now?** Producers were recasting themselves as advocates for the media-savvy child who enjoyed popular culture, whilst many parents, for example those in *Monitor*, continued to feel nostalgic for the educational 'activity' and purposeful viewing that was inherited from the 'great tradition' of the BBC (Hall, 20/3/96). Programme commissioners required more focus on ratings. A careful balance between so-called 'mindless entertainment' and purposeful educational content needed to be wrought by children's producers (Weston). The Children's Department, under the leadership of Huntly Elliott, managed to produce a wide range of local genres for primary-aged children during the 1980s: **W3** and **Viewfinder** in Christchurch, **Wildtrack** and **Spot On** in Dunedin and **Video Dispatch**, a children's news programme, in Wellington.

### **Development of the What Now? strand**

**Howzat**, the precursor of **What Now?**, started in Dunedin in a Woolstore. Hal Weston, executive producer, described it as a 30-minute show of 'clever things you can do with string with money left over' an echo of the spirit of **Blue Peter**. In 1981 **What Now?** appeared as 30 minutes on Saturday mornings under the creative direction of the flamboyant Simpson. By 1995 it had grown into a 3-hour Saturday morning magazine show around imported cartoons.

In 1981 radio personality Steve Parr presented a programme scheduled from 8.00am to 9.30am on Saturdays, targeting 10–14 year olds in a format called 'radio with pictures'. Parr played the archetypal radio DJ on a set of a stylised radio with buttons to push in order to bring up a range of local items. These included Alison Holst cooking (with child assistants), Helen Brown doing a version of an agony aunt, Eddie Sunderland making things that cost nothing, and Alistair Kincaid as Frank Flash inventing things. It was larded with broad comedy and skits, and Simpson also introduced a club with associated magazine (Simpson).

Simpson, in the much-treasured children's production tradition of 'tinkering', experimented with the first local interactive television with his 'phone in'. There were

bold experiments in multiple layering of the image: base-line crawlers, information running on the left and right hand side of the screen, ‘and this was 15 years before MTV sold it the same to the world as postmodernism.’ (Tyler-Smith, 10/7/99). Simpson recalls Weston telling him that there are two types of producers, ‘those that are inspired and had new ideas and those who are babysitters. The first were allowed ‘to play’ and were then removed from a show before they ‘fucked it up’ (Simpson: 16/8/00).<sup>51</sup>

Tyler-Smith, another innovative producer, took over production of **What Now?** in 1984. It was he who took the brunt of increasing pressure to perform commercially in the wake of deregulation. He stalwartly continued to describe his philosophy as being ‘on the kids’ side’, widening the range of genre inserts to include, amongst other things, ‘Sharky Aardvark,’ the drama of a schoolyard king rat, and John Gadsby presenting a silly sport of the week. Tyler-Smith’s theatre training saw him encouraging ensemble playing and short experimental items. The programme became, in his terms, ‘less frenetic, more disciplined, a team game.’ Audience research (focus-group responses to items and comparative material) became a regular event and he consciously began to hone appeals for both male and female interests in the core audience. In the second half of the 1980s the programme targeted an older demograph of 10–14 year olds, although Tyler-Smith acknowledged that the programme had a huge following in the younger age group, who ‘aspired to the values’ of **What Now?** (1990 Programme Proposal). Catherine McPherson (Nueian and Scottish ancestry) played little sister to a fallible floppy-blond-haired older brother, Simon Barnett. Tyler-Smith expresses pride that **What Now?** provided steady income and early creative experience for future leading scriptwriters, directors and performers during the 1980s and early 1990s (Tyler-Smith, 10/9/98).

### **Growing commercial pressures during the 1980s**

The boom of merchandising cartoons, the result of radical deregulation of USA television in the early 1980s, saw both Hasbro and Mattel offer free cartoons like **Transformers** to Tyler-Smith to incorporate into Saturday morning **What Now?** These offerings were judiciously mixed with other material Tyler-Smith found in trade journals, like the Welsh **Super Ted**—and any American cartoons shown during **What Now?** were

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<sup>51</sup> Simpson left to run the Miss Asia Pacific contest but was to return later to head the new TV3 children’s department, which won the bid in 1991 to produce **You and Me**, the first indigenous early-childhood production.



broken into 'episodes' (Tyler-Smith, 10/9/98). But commercial pressures intensified during the eighties.<sup>52</sup> Kincaid talks of 'the hard sell', and Tyler-Smith comments that his programme was increasingly 'blown apart' every fifteen minutes by 'hugely expensive ads' for cartoon merchandise. This saw him calling for locally made ads that were answerable to local ethical codes (Jenkin, 1988: 22). In the same article, child viewers cite favourite programmes as **Thundercats**, a merchandising cartoon, and **My Little Pony**, an advertisement for a toy. During this period commercial clients grew more vigilant. Tyler-Smith reports there were complaints when presenters urged everyone 'to go and get mum a cup of tea during the ad break' (Tyler-Smith, 10/9/98). Prizes and giveaways (once innocuous boxes of chocolates and the like) were now sought after as valuable on-air exposure by food and toy companies, and a new television department was created to entice prizes and sponsorship from big companies. The anarchic freedom of earlier years, largely a result of benign neglect, was disappearing. A zone with a style described by Tyler-Smith as 'being silly in a fairly serious way' and always pushing against creative boundaries, was now increasingly answerable to programmers as it became valued real estate for marketers. In 1988 the long running Sunday evening show **Spot On** (produced by Ian Taylor) was canned because there was 'no longer a market for a slow moving laid-back programme with a high input from presenters.' (Alas, it's no longer **Spot On**, *Sunday Star Times*, 31 July 1988: B16).

By 1988/9, at the time of the new Broadcasting Act, the programme brief prepared for TV2 managers described **What Now?** as a hugely popular Saturday morning magazine programme with much-loved presenters who were recognized by the majority of New Zealand children.<sup>53</sup> Its short season began in April and finished in December. It targeted 10–14 year olds while recognising both a younger age group earlier in the programme and an older group towards the end. It concentrated on bringing a full spectrum of leisure activities available to children in the country as well as focusing on children who achieve high performance in their particular activity. It was designed to be 'a catalyst and

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<sup>52</sup> See Zanker (1993) for analysis of tensions between advertisers and the monopoly state broadcaster over costs of advertising and lack of advertising inventory prior to competition from TV3.

<sup>53</sup> It was made up of a mix of 35 per cent overseas cartoon material and pop music videos, 30 per cent studio produced material, 25 per cent electronic field-gathered material, and 10 per cent outside broadcast material. It screened 38 times, for 96 minutes each Saturday from 8.00am to 10.00am.

resource to all children by delivering an exciting, high-energy package of stimulating information, participation and entertainment'. It aligned itself with youth culture, in that the

...key point of difference was that it gave special consideration to the particular and specific nature of New Zealand youth culture [note use of youth] and its special nature was that it aligned itself to its audience as a minority group [an interesting term] even when this may run counter to the prevailing adult ethos (**What Now?** Programme Brief, 1988/9).

By 1990/1 the NZ ON AIR proposal described the programme as a 2-hour long Saturday morning magazine programme which appealed to 10–14 year olds with a very large 5–9 year old following. It was made up of a mix of local segments, animated cartoon material and overseas music videos.<sup>54</sup> 'By providing an exciting, high-energy mix of stimulating information, participation and entertainment, **What Now?** seeks to act as a catalyst and resource for its audience' (**What Now?** application for funding 1990/1). In 1992 it expanded to 3 hours on a Saturday morning and had become a sprawling and popular programme that absorbed \$1.3 million of the \$6 million allocated to children's programmes.

The savage restructuring of TVNZ under Mounter in the early 1990s saw the previously semi-autonomous Children's Department in Christchurch shut down (Howell). The Christchurch production centre became reconfigured into a 'Unit' answerable to Auckland's Head of Production. Huntley Elliott, Tyler-Smith and many other seasoned and committed public service children's producers lost their jobs in children's television production. In 1993 a content analysis of children's programmes demonstrated a narrowing of genre types and a shift toward imported animations (Forbes, 1993).

The new executive producer of the Unit, Janine Morrell, was answerable to Auckland's head of programming and headed a young and relatively inexperienced creative team. During the mid-1990s Saturday morning's **What Now?** came under increasing attack from parents and funder for its commercial content (Zanker, 1995). NZ On Air anxiety over commercial content triggered a radical review in 1995, which saw the Saturday show shifted to TV2's non-commercial Sunday morning and cut from 3 hours to 2 for the 1996 season. Agreeing to this was sound politics for the then programme commissioner at TVNZ, Lattin, and NZ On Air, because it satisfied a politically active group of parents

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<sup>54</sup> Field-gathered items 30 per cent (including the very successful 'Mirinda Makes it Happen'); pre recorded, craft/information/demonstration items 15 per cent; competitions 25 per cent; live presentations 30 per cent.

and made the NZ On Air subsidy more transparent, despite continuing difficulty in tracking the internal accounting of facilities hire. To justify the move to Sunday mornings Lattin negotiated an increase in NZ On Air funding to 90 per cent of its costs, funding that continued to be spent in TVNZ facilities. Commercial cartoons continued to be scheduled within its magazine format.

The arrival of Australian Mike Lattin as head of production in 1995 appeared to signal a new cultural agenda for children's programming. His Australian origins had taught him the rhetorical power of cultural assertiveness in terms of branding children's programmes to parents. He appreciated the value of children's programming as a branding strategy for TV2 in its competition with TV3 and imminent online services (Kelly, 1994: 24-25). He was particularly anxious about the ability of CanWest TV3 to buy hits in association with CanWest in Australia (Channel 10) and CanWest in Canada, and was aware that TVNZ was becoming an increasingly lonely and small player at international programme fairs. He indicated that a strong slate of local children's programmes would provide a way of building future loyal adult audiences (Speech to AGM of CTF 1995).<sup>55</sup> But Lattin also intensified competitive pressures for children's programming and 'canned' many of Morrell's ideas. It became clear that, in common with the long tradition of executives with creative aspirations, he wanted to use the Children's and Young Person's Unit to fulfil his own creative concepts for children rather than build on the ideas presented by an independent team (Mahy, 1995). One of his changes was to commission an educational news programme, **Get-Real**, after school. When this did not rate in 1996 it was absorbed into 1997 weekdays **What Now?** This meant that **What Now?** comprised 4.5 hours a week of local NZ On Air funded children's budget costing \$3.8 million out of \$8 to \$9 million allocated to children. In the 1997 funding round for the 1998 production year, the NZ On Air contribution to **What Now?** was increased to \$4.3 million. **What Now?** appeared secure, with a longer run, more funding and more ambitious objectives than ever before, but 1998, the year of data collection for the case study, turned out to be its most turbulent year of all. It is interesting, in light of the difficulties over 'age' targeting that emerge in the case study, to note how broad the target audience was before NZ On Air funding and how, over the next decade, age targets were narrowed and moved downwards.

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<sup>55</sup> Notes kept in researcher's diary.

## Threats to the Christchurch production centre

A second strand to the case study traces how corporate politics and managerialism had an impact on the future of the Children's and Young Person's Unit in Christchurch, as well as the range of creative strategies available to the Unit's children's producers as cultural agents. It is generally agreed that many public broadcasters, including TVNZ, lacked the necessary accounting mechanisms to ensure that managers were fiscally responsible. Budgets were calculated on a variable cost basis and fixed costs (such as salaries, rent, administrative changes, transmission costs and insurance) were never allocated to individual programmes or departments. This was compounded by a degree of creative self-indulgence from producers who were not required to justify their creative decisions through audience measurement (Television New Zealand Planning Department, 1990: 24). There was a change in management culture during the early 1980s, but by the time Mounter closed the Children's Department in the early 1990s managers were finding themselves increasingly accountable for financial performances in order to ensure satisfactory dividends for the government (Tyler-Smith, Howell).<sup>56</sup>

From the mid-1990s the threat to shift **What Now?** from Christchurch to Auckland or Wellington was always on the agenda as the corporation rationalised excess production facilities in line with business imperatives. In 1995 the decision was made to shift north to Avalon, averted at the last minute by CEO Brent Harman, in response to lobbying from CTF and local producers (research diary). Auckland understood that any shift was clearly going to become a political issue for South Islanders, who had not forgotten the scarring purge of the early 1990s that saw Christchurch and Dunedin facilities downsized. The young creative team, with the support of seasoned operational professionals, continued to produce the programme both cheaply and efficiently in Christchurch.

If the arguments for staying were cultural, then arguments for shifting north were symptomatic of Auckland managers' desires for corporate rationalisation. Even if **What Now?** could be produced in a cost effective manner in Christchurch, it could not solve the larger issue of excess production facility elsewhere (T Palmer, 3/4/98). The full

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<sup>56</sup> By 1995 TVNZ was making \$50.9 million profit after tax, up 56 per cent. Advertising revenue was \$279 million (*NZ Listener* 19/8/95). A new CEO, Chris Anderson, encouraged by Norman Geary, 'dry' chair of the board, reinforced this direction. In 1996 70% of TVNZ's profit was given to the government as dividend.

impact of factory rationalization fell on the producers of **What Now?** during the year of the ethnographic study. They found themselves in dual roles: firstly, they were advocates for their staff; and secondly, they were forced by the speed of political events to reversion this creative and organizational rhetoric of production to fit the new requirements of both funders and broadcasters.

## CHAPTER NINE - CASE STUDY PART I: NEGOTIATING LOCAL PUBLIC MEDIA SPACE FOR CHILDREN

Wonderful presenters Happy crew Action and adventure Totally radical Never boring  
Obtains cool competitions Wonderfully awesome.  
(Aaron Carpenter, *What Now?* viewer from Tauranga, quoted in 1998 proposal)

### **What is What Now?**

Dornfeld claims that documentary television is like any product because it is invested with, and 'yields, differing values for various parties' involved with production, broadcast and consumption (1998: 177). Local children's television is no different from American documentary in that it is many things to many adults. This diversity of meaning is, if anything, more complex for children's programmes because adults can never be child viewers, unlike documentary producers who can, in fact, be members of the target audience.

**What Now?** can be described in diverse ways: a nationally defined cultural imaginary space for children; an adult opportunity to enculturate and educate children; a training ground for future local writers, producers and stars; a production strand with multi-media and merchandising opportunities; an advertising environment; a branding tool. Its text is forged out of tensions between the funder's mandate to create a public media space, and the broadcaster's desire to survive in a competitive market place.

The 1998 *Listener* listed **What Now?** as an after-school, and Sunday morning, programme on TV2 that targeted children. **What Now?** at that time had been on air for 16 years in various forms. Between 1996 and 2000 it was on air for 6 days a week. In 1998 it comprised 40 non-commercial Sunday magazine programmes of 2 hours duration scheduled between 8.00am and 10.00am, wrapped around imported cartoons like **Sylvester and Tweety Mysteries** and **Stickin Around**, and 195 commercial half-hour shows of 100 per cent locally produced content scheduled between 3.00pm and 4.00pm weekdays.

For NZ On Air in 1998, **What Now?** was the strand on which most children's money was spent. The entire strand cost \$4,350,000 from the licence fee collected from all television owners, from which \$44.3 million was spent on television—this represented 54 per cent of the licence fee (*NZOA Annual Report, 1997/8*). NZ On Air funded 70 per

cent of the costs of children's television . (Prowse, 11/9/97). **What Now?** was the children's strand to which NZ On Air was 'most exposed' in its task of fulfilling required cultural performance objectives. In 1998 it cost more than half of the funding allocation of approximately \$8.5 million for children during a period when the licence fee had been static for over a decade and production costs had risen. NZ On Air staff felt under even greater financial constraint at the 1997 funding round when the funder faced an administration cut of 10 per cent.<sup>57</sup>

**What Now?**'s production report to NZ On Air for 1998 outlined 100 pages of detailed production outputs in categories for the benefit of the Television Manager and for production auditing purposes. A random sampling of weekdays outputs includes 49 animal field items (including Ruud Kleinpaste 'finding why 'Hotlegs', the Avondale spider, is off her food'), 41 studio visits by (and field items of) top athletes like the Kendalls and Rob Waddell, 37 studio visits by 'famous people' (including the then Opposition leader, Helen Clark, who dressed as Little Red Riding Hood and iced a cake), 47 Super Scooper reports (young reporters from around the country) on everything from owning ferrets to a day in the life of a ferry captain, 33 profiled activities (from luge to ballet) gossip about popular icons in music and film, interactive games, club links, drama (including a mini-drama for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries), skits, animation of children's drawings, performance items from places as distant as Hokitika, Te Awamutu and Kaitaia, and items from a trip when the presenters went to Sydney. Sunday's show included a series of live outside broadcasts from Paeroa, Queenstown and Auckland's Rainbow End.

For channel accountants, **What Now?** was a valuable property because it brought approximately \$4 million of production flow into TVNZ's underused facilities, thus helping the company's turnover and profits. For channel managers and programmers in 1998, weekdays **What Now?** was a publicly subsidized programme in a larger 7-day-a-week off-peak schedule targeting children. This children's schedule also embraced another publicly subsidized programme, **Squirt**, and a range of high rating imported cartoons, such as **Rugrats**. The commercial time after school and on Saturday morning (when **Squirt** was scheduled) were 'tracked' for ratings performance, advertising earnings and (if advertising and ratings were poor) 'opportunity costs' to the

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<sup>57</sup> Money granted included GST, something that had not happened since 1989. (Wrightson, 13/10/97)

organization. **What Now?** was required to rate, even against the best from overseas, and thus build audience flows from mid-afternoon into the late afternoon sitcoms that were used as lead in to prime-time programming. Shows that did not perform to adequate levels were in danger of being shifted further into earlier off-peak time and were under threat of reformatting or dumping. **What Now?**'s Sunday's zone was in non-commercial time, a strategic response to NZ On Air's anxieties and decision that was regretted, given that it rated well and could be a prime spot for promotions and sponsorship deals. TV2 won \$6.2 million funding from NZ On Air against TV3's \$2 million in the year 1996/7. Yet managers at TVNZ continued to feel that NZ On Air favoured TV3, providing it, on the occasion of the early-childhood programme, with 100 per cent funding. Programmes in commercial scheduling zones, like weekdays **What Now?** were negotiated to include a broadcaster contribution that balanced broadcaster contributions against the production costs of making it and the 'opportunity costs' of scheduling it (instead of, for example, a hit animation). This calculation of rates of return was of key importance in decisions to recommission. **What Now?**'s perceived failure to perform in 1998 led to urgings to reformat that are explored in the case study.

For advertising agencies and corporate clients who targeted children, **What Now?** was one programme in a wider off-peak TV2 children's schedule. It was part of an advertising package that also included advertising packages in imported cartoons like **Rugrats**, and Saturday morning's cartoons with the interstitial **Squirt**. In 1998 media buyers could quickly see from online AC Nielson people-meter figures for children aged between 5–14 that the highest rating programmes for children were not children's programmes but broad appeal programmes on TV2 like **The Simpsons** and **Shortland Street**. This did not mean, however, that children's off-peak programmes were without value. Agencies compared the benefits of purchasing expensive advertising, in the broad demographic spread of prime time against the benefits of the cheap off-peak time that only targeted children 5–14 years of age. This group was known to be high consumers of ice-creams, chips, chocolate and sweets, as well as strong influencers in the supermarket purchases of breakfast cereals, school lunch box snacks and other food brands, and were therefore of interest to companies competing for market share in these product categories. Furthermore, experience demonstrated that this was the audience that decided what was 'hot or not' amongst new toys and computer games, especially in higher priced items in the three months leading up to Christmas (Irwin, 10/9/98). At the beginning of 1998, **What Now?** weekdays was a comparatively costly buy because the ratings were not matching the figures predicted at the end of 1997, when the standard rating card costs



were set. **What Now?** Sundays, though commercial-free, continued to rate well. Even though it offered valuable opportunities for sponsorship, it tended mostly to be used for free promotion through give-aways like T-shirts, advertisers product and CDs. Parent lobbyists, who disliked commercial involvement in the show, had frightened away many potential clients for sponsorship, and these opportunities were often taken up in shows targeting youth age groups instead (Irwin, 10/9/98 and Ramage, 14/2/99).

**What Now?** was a familiar icon of local children's television for adults. Many parents (increasing numbers with each passing year) viewed it with affection, having grown up with the show. It was treated as a safe place for children after school and provided parents with Sunday sleep-in time. Some were less satisfied. Members of the lobby group Child Media Watch in Auckland argued that **What Now?** was too commercial and its funding could be better used on children's drama and other educational content (Watching the media, August 1997). The Children's Television Foundation, though more divided over the relative benefits of fewer hours of drama, or more hours of local role models on magazine television, were also increasingly concerned that commercial content in a NZ On Air subsidized show diluted NZ On Air's cultural presence. It appeared that commercial sponsors were influencing the look of the show in return for comparatively few financial benefits for producers (Hayward, 15/3/98). Health professionals (and many parents in Children's Media Watch and The Children's Television Foundation) argued that advertising and on-set promotion for fast food, ice-creams, lollies and drinks promoted poor nutrition and contributed to obesity in children (Hammond et al, 1999).

What **What Now?** meant for local New Zealand children in 1998 is glimpsed in audience responses in studio work, focus-group interviews, crowds at 'events' and emails and letters to the team.

### **Team perspectives**

For Morrell, **What Now?** was one of several children's properties to be negotiated between the Commissioning Editor of TVNZ and the public funder, NZ On Air. She accepted that **What Now?** meant different things for the funder and the broadcaster, and that this was the key problem for her to solve. Content, styling and budgeting were all problems that needed careful strategies and advocacy to ensure that it could ward off attacks from a range of quarters, including its broadcaster. **What Now?** also presented

logistical problems. It was a huge production and required a production strategy that knitted together each creative element of the property **What Now?** within a tight budget (from content themes to talent, graphics and merchandising).

The Executive Producer of children's programmes had an odd role within 1990s TVNZ, but it was a necessary one given that there were several TV2 children's programmes and a great distance between 'headquarters' in Auckland and the Unit in Christchurch. The Executive Producer travelled a lot. She negotiated with the programme commissioner, programmers and NZ On Air and she channelled news from TVNZ and NZ On Air to the team. The Executive Producer had to be a mix of educator, inspirational coach, sounding board and judge, for her team to hold the production together. Her team describe Morrell as having huge energy: 'much of which brushes off, you have to run to keep up with her.' She was viewed as being totally committed to the 'product', a term used by the team to describe the value of the creative concept to the stakeholders. She had earned great loyalty from her **What Now?** team in the years leading up to the 1998 season (Williams, 14/4/98).

Morrell, as Executive Producer, was required to 'watch out' for the audience. As a programme producer put it: 'you can get too involved in the programme and you need someone to watch out for the philosophy. You need someone to argue the point with you', especially over issues of gender, race, age appropriateness, and educational and commercial balances. For example, Anne Williams, a 'Southlander' of Scottish heritage, recalls Morrell's call for brown faces on the screen. 'I look for people as performers, and I am not a children's producer by training, so she had to keep saying it...but the idea of role models is automatic now.' (Williams, 14/4/98).

Children's television in New Zealand, as in Britain, is a place where many young and relatively inexperienced workers gain experience *en route* to 'mainstream' television production (Tunstall, 1993). Williams and Palmer (Producer), both seasoned professionals, saw their jobs as being to 'groom, grow and prune talent' and to cope with rapid staff turnover. 'We have them for a year or two and then, just when we can relax [because they are experienced], they move on.' (Williams, 14/4/98). Palmer, possibly out of necessity, talked of this flow-through of talent as an advantage because it allowed the evolution of the programme and renewed team enthusiasm within the 'sausage machine' of magazine studio production. In his view 'young people have operational and practical

experience, and enthusiasm and initiative but they don't have the editorial nous or maturity to make confident judgements.' (Palmer, 30/6/98).

In 1998 Palmer led a core team comprising the highly experienced Finance Manager Janelle Burns, Sarah Pennock, Jo Ffitch, Jane Palmer (referred to hereafter as Palmer, J). Tony Palmer, as Producer, and Janelle Burns, as the Finance Manager, mapped out the allocations for wages, hire, (including studio costs), field trips, airfares, outside broadcasts, and new components so that budgets were allocated before creative decisions were made. Creative workshops were held late in 1997 to generate content for what both Morrell and Palmer nicknamed 'the sausage factory'. Sarah Pennock's job of Creative Producer was that of advance scout and content generator, which was a new role in **What Now?**, made necessary by the decision to reduce from two experienced producers in 1997 to only one in 1998. Jo Ffitch, as line producer, watched timelines, made sure that resources were efficiently allocated and the production systems tidy. She was, as Palmer described it, 'the facilities police'. Both of these key team members were young and experiencing a management role for the first time. Jane Palmer, an ex-librarian, ran the club and was to have a key role developing a line of merchandise with Morrell in 1998. Steve Downs managed the operational side of the production, which was made up of older, highly experienced craftspeople, many of whom had been scarred by TVNZ restructuring, and who were somewhat cynical about the 'new' ideas of the young recruits. This was the core team that met regularly with Palmer to ensure that systems flowed smoothly.

The rest of the team worked to individual production timelines in a range of work places. Studio and field recording had deadlines well in advance of broadcast. They drew on different operational and creative staff (some full time and others part time; most based in Christchurch, some in Auckland). The large research workload was divided between two highly efficient researchers—Rose Scheyvens, previously a primary school teacher who researched for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday—and Kate Hawkins, who had previously worked in commercial music radio, and researched for Monday, Tuesday and Sunday. They shared the job of preparing content for the weekday daily themes: Monday, music and entertainment; Tuesday, famous people; Wednesday, games/dares/challenges; Thursday, animals; Friday, sports; Sunday, live studio.

The **What Now?** text is shaped by battles over financial, symbolic and cultural capital. So far, the global and national context of 'financial and symbolic capital' (Dornfeld,

1998: 32) that constrain local children's producers agency has been laid out. Chapters Two and Five positioned children's media provision within rapidly changing and fiercely contested discourses of childhood in the west. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight provide a context for **What Now?** within evolving conventions and genres within children's television in the West. Chapter Six described the current shifts in children's audio-visual production and trade that are occurring as a result of globalisation, commodification and convergence. Chapters Seven and Eight described the place of **What Now?** within the organizational turmoil of TVNZ as it adapted to contestable public funding arrangements, deregulation and globalising media during the 1990s. These institutional and ideological constraints shape what Bourdieu calls 'the space of possibilities' for local producers in **What Now?**

New Zealand children's producers were caught in the middle of irreconcilable demands and, as a consequence, became adept at courting allies for their programme concept. They presented, and defended their creative concept in a range of ways for a range of powerful stakeholders. The production concept, and its creative team, was defended by its producer with the intensity of a general of a small fiefdom caught up in the midst of savage cultural wars.

### **The politics of funding**

In September 1997 there were nineteen applications worth \$14.6 million for the NZ On Air's children's budget of \$8.5million. Some properties were 'long shots' for funding, but others had good prospects because they had been designed to meet the requirements of both broadcasters and funders. NZ On Air's pattern of programme subsidy during the 1990s had seen one early-childhood programme and two major primary strands given funds annually. NZ On Air, thus far, had never killed off a strand that was already on air (unlike the broadcasters), unless it could be replaced by something demonstrably 'better' in terms of delivering cost-effective cultural objectives. Commented the television manager of NZ On Air, Jane Wrightson: 'It's very hard comparing a programme that is made, that you can see, with a piece of paper... We have to protect our money and production is a very risky game. We have to minimize our risks' (Wrightson, 13/10/97). TV3 already had a track record with the successful early-childhood programme, **You and Me**, on air since 1992. Whilst it was possible that it was reaching the end of its production life, it had been signalled that Morrell's proposal for an early-childhood strand was unlikely to gain funding at the 1997 round. However, funding looked secure

for **What Now?** because it was the longstanding umbrella programme for primary-aged children and had continuing support from broadcaster, TVNZ. Morrell wanted more money to expand its range and diversity but was aware that it would be hard to persuade NZ On Air to allow more money and additional hours because it already dominated the children's budget. As Wrightson put it, the strand of **What Now?** 'could spend the entire budget very nicely thank you if we gave it to them...but it is unwise to give any more money otherwise we are not getting the diversity of product.' (Wrightson, 13/10/97). However, it was in the interests of Morrell to put a case for an extension of the season, the argument being that it would ensure retention of key creative production staff over the summer. She also knew that the broadcaster, TVNZ, had been concerned about how **What Now?** rated against cartoons on TV3 during 1997 (Morrell, 18/7/97).

NZ On Air had consistently argued that broadcasters should contribute to children's programmes if they were scheduled in commercial zones that attracted advertising, and therefore revenue income. Broadcasters consistently argued that local children's programmes were not worth showing in commercial zones, given their commercial rates of return. There had to be an attractive incentive in the form of funding from NZ On Air. NZ On Air recognized that a delicate balance needed to be struck when judging contributions to **What Now?** on weekdays:

To what degree we can push the broadcaster on their contribution when we know they are moaning and groaning that it's not doing as well in audience numbers as cartoons on Three...If you push them too hard [there is a danger that] they'll push their hands up in the air and say 'it's too hard and we'll pull it.' (Prowse, 11/9/97).

Producers knew, to their cost, that wrangling over the broadcaster's contribution fee had killed many cherished programme ideas in the past. NZ On Air also accepted that cultural content became more difficult to judge as the child grew older:

...they are not going to sit down and watch something that isn't fun, very simple, we have learnt this quite painfully, it has to be fun first, which is what the broadcasters want only (and to some extent the producers), but it also has got to mean something about what it means to be a New Zealander, which is our bit. And how you do this is a constant creative tension (Wrightson, 13/10/97).

The proposal documents for the 1997 September meeting for funding 1998 children's programmes were due on 15 August, but most of the negotiation had begun as early as May, in what Jane Wrightson, the Television Manager of NZ On Air, called the 'musical chairs business' of negotiations between producers, commissioners, NZ On Air and programmers (Wrightson, 13/10/97). NZ On Air is commonly said to 'horsetrade' with programmers at TV3 and TVNZ over broadcaster contributions. As Wrightson puts it:

Before the meeting I'll say...you are only putting this much in and compared to this (other) programme it doesn't look very good, are you sure you want that number? It might get fixed up a bit better before the board meeting. If they can't or won't fix it up, and the board is very rarely likely to be more generous than me, they may say 'well it's only worth this much to us and the problem is yours guys'...well sometimes they roll over and sometimes they fight (13/10/97).

At TVNZ there was continuing bitterness, and a degree of paranoia, that TV3 had been given preferential treatment when it came to children's funding during the 1990s. The shift of Geoff Steven from TV3 to TV2 as Programme Commissioner, during 1997, paved the way for a new relationship between TVNZ and NZ On Air. So, given this new personal interface between NZ On Air and TVNZ, what were the issues that faced broadcasters, NZ On Air and producers in the funding of primary-aged programmes for children in 1998?

By early May 1997, Morrell, had begun discussions with Andrew Shaw (General Manager of Programming and Acquisitions) over the commissioning of the following year's programmes. She knew that she had problems with the broadcaster's enthusiasm for the 4.00pm placement of the weekday programme because of ratings performance in 1997, its first year in this slot. She was relieved when Shaw agreed to commission it for 6 days in its current form. She was still was concerned that the time-slot might be shifted back to 3.30pm, which was, in her view, too early for her audience. Morrell's covering letter to the board, outlining her commissioned slate of programmes, congratulated the programmers for sticking to 4.00pm (Morrell, 12/5/97). She feared that Julia Baylis, programmer for TV2, favoured high-rating cartoons at 4.00pm as a means of building audience to early evening and prime time. Meanwhile, NZ On Air felt secure, believing that TVNZ was unlikely to drop such a large in-house children's production, given the lure of \$4 million worth of NZ On Air production budget passing through its facilities. This sum included the sweetener of the routine 10 per cent overhead and contingency funding to the broadcaster from NZ On Air (Prowse, 11/9/97).

Morrell used the negotiations to bolster the position of the Children's Unit within the volatile internal politics of TVNZ. She believed that she had convinced NZ On Air that making the programme in the South Island helped fulfil its objective of cultural diversity. This might be useful in the event of a TVNZ attempt to shift the Unit from Christchurch to the North Island, closer to TVNZ headquarters in Auckland.

NZOA know that we get kids from Waiouru, Bluff and the West Coast connecting with **What Now?** We have a lot of children out there in the backblocks – 11% of our club members have RD (rural district) numbers – who aren't considered in the major mix of things when they come to

producing shows out of Auckland... It may be that I am a South Islander, and it is a defensive thing to say, but I do actually think that our presenters get down to their knitting and make programmes for children to see. If they were in Auckland they'd be out cutting ribbons, showing off, opening video shops and being celebrities (Morrell, 18/7/97).

The NZ On Air Statement of Intent of 1997 declared that it would 'give preference to applications with a learning philosophy which encourages children to understand and appreciate New Zealand cultural richness.' The real issue for producers was to work out what age appropriate content and educational strategies *were* available to producers wishing to make television programmes for children in the commercial broadcasting environment of the late 1990s. At the TVNZ Children's Television Advisory meeting in early May 1997 (attended by the researcher, at that time a member), Jane Wrightson and TVNZ programmers had a public wrangle over education issues. Morrell commented that, as executive producer she was 'sick of having to explain education and entertainment to them.' (Morrell, 12/5/97). A half-day workshop was held shortly afterwards between Andrew Shaw (General Manager of Programming and Acquisitions), Julia Baylis (TV2 programmer), Jane Wrightson (Television Manager for NZ On Air) and Chris Prowse (NZ On Air) to discuss the range of shows Morrell could put up. She commented before the event, 'I know I am going to put up a lot of stuff that I know is going to be turned down when I think every one of them should be funded for educational *and* entertainment reasons.' She opined that **Squirt** was losing ratings on TV3 on Saturday mornings against TV2 cartoons and she thought it a crime when she could put up an educational programme (**Where in the World is Carmen Santiago?**) for less money (Morrell, 12/5/97). Morrell knew that she had produced a Sunday programme that had rated in commercial terms 'up with **The Simpsons**, **Friends** and **The Nanny**' (that is, within the top 25 programmes for 5–9 year olds), yet she felt 'on the mat' from NZ On Air over educational issues. This felt galling when she believed that the TV3 show (**Squirt**) did not have to jump over the same educational 'quality' benchmarks (Morrell, 12/5/97).

In contrast with **What Now**'s established place in the TVNZ children's line-up, **Squirt**, the other programme targeting children 5–14 years of age, appeared to be in a precarious position. It had been dumped by TV3 in mid-1997 and was hastily shifted to TV2 in a bid to secure the NZ On Air investment in the programme. The story of the maneuvering over broadcasting contributions and scheduling for **Squirt** proves to be instructional when it come to the fraught politics of commissioning children's programmes for 6–12 year olds.

**Squirt** comprised a series of short animated links fronted by a computer-generated penguin called Spike, a talking fish called Hamish, and a real-life youthful male presenter, and it was designed to fit around imported animations. **Squirt** had first appeared on Saturday mornings on TV3 in April 1996. Taylor, the executive producer, had developed the 3D animation techniques with the assistance of a research grant from the Ministry of Technology, and his innovation attracted the favourable attention of the then Minister of Technology, Maurice Williamson. NZ On Air was keen to fund the innovative animation show but couldn't justify paying for software that would have life after the production contract (Wrightson, 13/10/97), as indeed it did. Taylor went on to make a successful business out of creating animations for sports like America's Cup yachting and golf.

The programme was granted an ongoing NZ On Air subsidy for 1997, but Taylor found himself unable to negotiate a satisfactory network contribution from TV3, and **Squirt** was cancelled by TV3 in April 1997. Taylor reports that TV3's programmer, Bettina Hollings, told him that 'it was a take it or leave it option for TV3, given the strength of cartoon purchases...you've got to realize that Saturdays will be Saturdays with or without **Squirt**' (Proposal document for 1997). Wrightson, in an aside to the researcher, noted that Hollings had never liked the concept, even complaining that 'the bloody fish is Scottish'. The official reason given by TV3 was that **Squirt** was not rating against strong cartoons on TV2, but imported cartoon competition were an ongoing problem for *all* NZ On Air subsidized programmes for the 6–12 year-old age bracket. The logical move was for NZ On Air to convince TV2 to take on producing **Squirt**. This was not difficult since Lattin, the Programming Commissioner at the time, was much taken with the animation interstitial format. When Geoff Steven, the original TV3 commissioner for **Squirt**, moved in mid 1997 to be Programme Commissioner at TV2 it strengthened **Squirt's** place in TV2's line-up and gave TV2 control of all local programming for the 6–12 year old audience, a 7-day-a-week local presence for the primary-aged audience, and Janine Morrell more work executive producing an idea that was not her own in the very same Saturday morning slot that had been so recently vacated by **What Now?**.



Morrell had come under attack, in her view, at the Children's Consultative Meeting held in May 1997 over the educational content of **What Now?**<sup>58</sup> Now she found herself being asked to executive produce **Squirt**, a programme with demonstrable lack of educational content that was a 'triumph of style over content' in the view of some in the children's production industry. One graphic artist in Christchurch commented that the entire **Squirt** animation 'looked like Bluebird chip ad', because its 'interstitial' animated links were 'wrapped around tasty imported cartoons' (Wenlock, 15/3/98). This was unsurprising given that Taylormade had used the technology to make an animated advertisement for Bluebird chips starring penguins. Morrell noted, wryly, that 'many in Auckland think the **Squirt** team do wonderful things with computers, and the boys love the technology, but no-one looks at the content.' (Morrell, 26/9/97). She intended to rectify this with some careful audience research and workshopping of content in 1998.

It appeared that NZ On Air was making a special case for **Squirt**, yet again demonstrating the 'inconsistencies that are rife ... when NZ On Air talks education' (Morrell, 26/9/97). Members of the **What Now?** team in Christchurch were unhappy too, remembering how they had been shifted to Sundays to allay NZ On Air's fears of commercialism and now seeing **Squirt**, an interstitial show around cartoons, now placed in the very commercial zone that **What Now?** had been forced to vacate. It was all too easy to conclude that Taylor not only did not meet the educational benchmarks attempted by **What Now?** but would also be permitted to continue with commercial content no longer permitted on **What Now?**

### **Creative challenges**

There were two dimensions to the challenges facing producers targeting children 6–12 years of age: the first cultural, the second commercial. Firstly, how could local and indigenous, cultural, age-specific, educational programming be conceived and produced so it would appeal to savvy aspirant children, who ratings suggested preferred global popular commodified culture? This was not an issue facing producers targeting 4 year olds, where caregivers became cultural gatekeepers, but it became the central issue for the same producers when they targeted 8 year olds within their peer groups.

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<sup>58</sup> These consultative events were held by TVNZ in order to discuss children's television with a range of expert adults. They ended in 1997.]

Secondly, how could commercial broadcasters attract child audiences with popular commercial content whilst not alienating politicians and the secondary market of parents, and thereby putting at risk sources of public money? This was not a problem for those producing for youth, where it was largely accepted that signifiers from global culture were key markers of difference for youth culture, but it was a central issue for those producing for the protected viewing zones for eight-year olds.

Morrell and Taylor were both seasoned and successful children's producers who understood the constrained parameters for manoeuvre within the negotiations with funders and commissioners in deregulated New Zealand broadcasting. In the absence of local quotas or licence renewal requirements, producers were required to solve problems for commercial programmers as well as cultural subsidizers. Both were realistic about the lowly place of local children's programmes within commercial television's priorities during the 1990s. Both recognized the logical appeal of popular imported cartoons for commercial programmers, and the threat that this commercial dynamic posed for any local children's production.

It is instructional to now explore how differently they assessed 'the space of possibilities' presented to them during the run up to funding. Both Janine Morrell and Ian Taylor, highly articulate individuals, used a range of illuminating metaphors as they talked about seeking and constructing the elusive child audience. These metaphors clarified how they prefigured children's cultural pleasures, what children wanted from television, and how to 'deliver' for commercial broadcasters in terms of both content and format.

### **Morrell's vision for children**

Morrell had chosen to work within the turbulent corporate environment of TVNZ for her entire career in the area of local children's production.<sup>59</sup> Throughout the 1990s she had used her insider status to advocate, at all levels of the corporation, for her vision for local children of regional and cultural inclusiveness. She described herself as a 'team player', 'adapter', 'deal-maker' and a 'problem-solver' and she aspired to working 'on behalf of all local children' in a range of content which comprised a 'quality local brand' that stretched from early childhood to youth programmes (Morrell, 5/5/97). Morrell's wish

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<sup>59</sup> In 2000 Morrell left TVNZ as Executive Producer, to concentrate on her own production company, and TV2 appointed John Wright as the new Executive Producer for children's television.]

for **What Now?** was to provide breadth of genre and service, an echo of the ‘full-service’ of the BBC, but an echo constrained by financial and commercial parameters that producers from the ‘great tradition’ would have found intolerable:

[**What Now’s**] a brand. We’re making documentaries and sport and children’s own videos and little dramas and real stories and this and that under an umbrella, and there really isn’t another umbrella available. We work with a lot of people outside the programme and encourage fresh new talent (Morrell, 18/7/97).

As a brand, **What Now?** was designed to become the trusted choice for all children aged between 6 and 12 years of age. Given resources, it could provide a ‘seed bed’ for growing and testing a range of genre under its umbrella. She was aware that such funding was not a possibility in the current environment, but that **What Now?** provided the opportunity to provide *some* higher cost content, especially if she also used commercial resources from popular culture (stars, music, movies and computer games) to draw children to this content. This viewpoint was encouraged by her broadcaster.

The proposal document was designed to create alignments with perceived advocates and, equally, to ward off potential criticism, and thus threats, to the programme. This necessary ‘multiple address’ creates a document that overflows with a surplus of rhetorical appeals.

The first appeal is historical: **What Now?** has been positioned in the ‘middle-ground’ of Kiwi family life and childhood for almost 2 decades, thus establishing itself as part of the national imagination of New Zealand for everybody.

**What Now?** has become a New Zealand institution. It is in the nation’s psyche alongside Christmas in the summer (*What Now? Proposal document*, 1997).

The proposal takes pains to emphasise **What Now?’s** role in providing a pluralist, inclusive national public space which ‘is in touch with New Zealand’s diverse regions and cultures’. The proposal constructs a geographically binding vision of celebratory cultural diversity for New Zealand children. Examples of programme content used to underline this are:

Pitt Island – James Moffat (9) and Travis King (10) take us pig hunting  
Chathams Is – Grace Myer (8) takes us on a guided tour  
Farewell Spit – James tells us about his Dad’s tour business  
Neasby – Emily Wade explains the finer points of ice curling  
90 Mile Beach – Belinda meets some local yachties and kite fishers  
Te Anau – Nepia Tauu shows us his parents’ motor camp (*What Now? Proposal document*, 1997).

The 1997 proposal describes its primary aim as ‘CONNECT WITH CHILDREN aged 5–10 years’ and it claims to do this by being known to children, and parents, as a safe and nurturing environment. It builds on ideas of consistent standards of quality characterized by:

- Continuing to provide high quality, informative, educational and entertaining programmes for young children
- Providing content which encourages participation, is instructive, humorous and creative
- Offering presenters who are positive role models for young people
- Continuing extensive school based surveys and focus groups. Thus

MAKING TELEVISION WHICH IS UNASHAMEDLY NEW ZEALAND TODAY, EXPRESSING THE CURRENT VIEWS HOPES AND DREAMS OF OUR AUDIENCE (*What Now? Proposal document*, 1997. Capitals in original).

The importance of indigenous Maori culture is signalled by a section dedicated to ‘Te Reo’ (the language). Maori language ‘will continue to be fostered by our shows’. In the proposal there is a plan to incorporate a mini drama using Maori with English subtitles (which didn’t eventuate) and continued use of Maori words and phrases in presenter links (which happened to a modest level).<sup>60</sup> Another idea was to have short explanations of Maori place names.<sup>61</sup> Two Superscooper child reporters, Jamimee Gatalu and Katreina Sabin were pictured as ‘bilingual reporters’. Two of the three presenters had Maori ancestry, the other was Tokelauan.

The proposal contains examples of diverse, and arguably contradictory, ways that the team ‘know the audience’. This variety ensures that the range of competing, and sometimes incompatible objectives for funding are satisfied by the team’s ‘expertise’ in ‘knowing’, and thus satisfying, the audience. Thus the team’s illustrates their ‘cultural capital’ to the funder in ways of ‘knowing the audience’.

Alignments with the politically powerful discourses of child development and children’s cultural rights are used in the 1997 Proposal to appeal to NZ On Air’s funding cultural criteria and regular, but somewhat unsystematic, qualitative research conducted over the year by members of the **What Now?** team (Rose Scheyvens, Sarah Pennock and Janine Morrell, as well as field reporters) is presented as evidence of ‘knowing the audience’ and being on its side. In 1997 small-scale qualitative research was commissioned on

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<sup>60</sup> The use of te reo in children’s programmes has been fraught with difficulties for producers during the 1990s. Letters and phone calls from parents complain of both social engineering and political correctness and, at the other end of the scale, cultural tokenism.

<sup>61</sup> Prime time beat them to it, in short items fronted by **Shortland Street** star, Temuera Morrison.]

children's perceptions of the programmes (Lealand, 1997; Murray, 1997). The proposal is well illustrated with verbatim evidence from formative and summative qualitative audience research. 'Weekly direct questionnaires in a broad cross-section of schools are aimed at establishing what viewers like and dislike'. Thus **What Now?** provides a voice for children by respecting their views and tastes (these two aspects are not qualified). Focus groups enable the team to gain perspectives on the 'perceived needs' (which is not qualified) of 5–10 year olds. 'Thousands of letters...help the team sample children's opinions'. Awareness of educational issues and citizen's rights are signalled by the proposal, which notes that surveys tell the team 'what they (the children) learn from each of the many elements that comprise the show'. She also includes letters of support from The Children's Television Foundation and academics working in the field.

The **What Now?** club is described as a method of creating a 'sense of belonging that goes beyond the passive viewing of the programme'. Letters provide intimate feedback and a sense of owning the programme. The order of the club database, and web-site contact, 'provides a vast resource base for both programme content and the needs and interests of our target audience'. Club members provide information on hobbies and interests, and feedback on the content of the programme. This material is put in order and 'collated', thus enabling it to be compared with other 'scientific' measures like ratings. The club statistics of the core audience illustrate both its role as a public space and its potential as a market: 35,000 members, largest percentage 9–11 year old children, 300-500 letters a day (in holidays 1000–1200). The club can be used to demonstrate a panoptic view of its loyal child audience whilst enabling the team to maximize its effectiveness through a feedback loop that orders, categorizes and feeds information on the audience back into the programme.

The proposal also presents crisp statistical ratings data designed to demonstrate the success of the programme in the competitive environment, and thus in terms of NZ On Air's requirement to show cost-effectiveness for money. Industry measures include both the share of viewing audience between TV2 and TV3, and rating points in terms of numbers of children available to watch. **What Now's** Sunday morning programme had 'ratings of up to 85 per cent share of the target audience' in 1997 (though not of the available audience). Less favourable ratings figures for after-school audiences receive more annotation and clarification. For example, it is pointed out that the programmes managed to 'compete effectively on week days against Disney's high budget cartoons' and 'For the first time ever, a daily live local children's production sustained audience

numbers equalling and often exceeding those drawn by animations'. At no stage is there questioning or reflection on the validity of ratings data, even though it becomes clear later that producers were aware, and even critical, of ratings statistics when they were applied to the small sample for measuring children's viewing behaviour.

Qualitative research, as well as giving a range of children a voice as citizens and learners and 'keeping the team in touch with the audience', also provides information on the fast-changing icons of popular culture, thus better positioning them as 'cultural intermediaries' for children within commercially driven TVNZ. The data is 'used to guide production priorities thus enabling us to remain sufficiently flexible in responding to changing trends and accurately focused on the specific viewing preferences of our target audience'. Here, audience agency is expressed in terms of 'consumers' who have 'preferences' and an acute awareness of popular entertainment 'trends'. Nickelodeon's discourse of 'kid power' comes to mind.

The rhetoric of 'play' is carefully honed to take the side of children, whilst tempering the excesses of anarchic play with pro-social messages of an educational nature and being a good sport. Popular games, like gunge (a game originating on Nickelodeon, where coloured ooze is poured out of a 'gunge machine' onto the participant), Fill yer Pants (the same into pantaloons, possibly a Kiwi first?) are balanced by games designed to be fun but educational, like 'Hole in the Rock' and 'Out of the Closet' that require general knowledge.<sup>62</sup> 'While they appear to be purely entertainment, the fun is arrived at via tests of general knowledge' suggests a subtext of educational purpose. Games provide general knowledge or the values of fair play 'simply for the fun of taking part', which carry a subtext of good sportsmanship. There are 'minimal prizes' which carry the subtext of the non-consumerist goals of good fair play. The mayhem of norm-shifting 'carnival', which might trigger parental concerns over wilful and destructive play, are thus tempered by the rhetoric of responsible adult supervision:

**What Now?** is interactive and involves children from around the country. There is a **What Now?** club, a website and live competitions (1997 Proposal Document.)

'Interactivity' is a recurring motif designed to increase the intensity of engagement, and thus the benefits of the programme for NZ On Air. Three rationales for interactivity are presented. Firstly, it ensures that children are not passive viewers. Secondly, children

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<sup>62</sup> 'Out of the Closet' was an ambiguous title which was played on by scripters and presenters, but not intended to be appreciated by the audience.]

*require* the up-to-the-minute interactive phone-ins, outside broadcasts and add-ons of a web site and computer graphics if they are to have a relationship with the programme. Thirdly, it extends the life of the programme brand through the club and web sites with an audience that is already 'interactive earlier than any other audience'. The live studio recordings on weekdays and Sunday mornings encourage phone-ins to presenters and guests ('7 tele-operators field 100,000 calls a week'), and interactive computer games between children in the studio and at home. Its very *interactive popularity* is described as a source of frustration to its audience who cannot reach the programme 'live'. This is used as a rationale for the web site, club activities and magazine. Penpals bring children together, the club's mascot (Shakespeare the monkey) encourages reading and writing, the animated art attack segment encourages art contributions.

However, **What Now's** very hybridity, diversity, longevity *and* poundage of hours work against its best interests. At this time (1997/8), it was hard for anyone to feel a sense of ownership, particularly programme commissioners who wished to make a creative mark. As Morrell said, it can slip 'between the cracks' because it is not 'flavour of the month' like, for example **Squirt**, and because a magazine show for children carried connotations of 'cheap and cheerful' television (Morrell, 18/7/97). Morrell felt it important to demonstrate to supporters of 'authentic' public service children's drama and news, that the programme did things that no other programme could do by embracing elements of innovative higher production quality within its 'poundage'. Indeed, it could be argued that the *virtue* of 'poundage' was that the entire gamut of genres from news to documentary to natural history to cooking shows, could be *infiltrated* into commercial television. Whereas programmers rejected risky genre programme concepts, they continued to accept the mixed environment of the entertainment driven **What Now?** In this way, production *volume and branding* became the strategic means of exposing children to *quality range and variety*. **What Now?**, by dint of a huge number of hours and high awareness with children, permitted the endangered public service genre to lurk within its lightweight entertainments 'for children to trip over' (Morrell, 18/7/97). In 1998, despite such rationales, the half-hour format of **What Now?** faced a terminal attack from commercial enemies. It was argued that the show was out of touch with its audience, and cultural enemies who yearned for something fresher, purer and less commercially compromised.

## Taylor's vision for children

Now it is useful to analyse how Taylor positioned **Squirt** in the cultural politics of funding. Taylor, like Morrell, had begun his career in TVNZ's children's department. By 1998 he was a successful independent producer, known for his technological innovation as a producer of a range of audio-visual material, including cutting-edge animation. Children's television was no longer his core business; indeed he complained that it was a difficult and risky area of production that cost him money in the previous year (Taylor, 18/7/97). His experimentation with computer animation and web sites had positioned him as an expert in new technology in Wellington's political circles during the late 1990s. In 1998 he and the Minister of Communications, Maurice Williamson, shared a vision for computers in schools, in which Taylor hoped that the **Squirt** web site 'Squirt World' would play the role of local portal to the internet for children. The proposal for **Squirt** was a thin document compared to Morrell's rationale for **What Now?** Taylor's vision is better grasped from his verbal rationales for the creative concept. It is worth paying close attention to his expansive use of visual metaphor. These have important resonance later in the case study.

Taylor's vision for children's television had changed radically as the result of a 'road to Damascus' experience in Los Angeles with his son, then 8 years of age:

One thing that has affected my thinking on television and imported programmes happened when I travelled to Los Angeles with my kids. My son, who is deaf, walked down into the foyer of the hotel and got lost. They had one of those basketball franchises in the hotel and I said 'I know where he is', and there he was, standing with this big black guy, talking about the same thing and using the same language...they were talking about Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. Here was this little kid from NZ and this big black guy! The first time I went to America they scared the living daylights out of me (Taylor, 4/9/97).

Taylor had made his name in a range of award-winning children's productions like **Spot On**, a 30-minute magazine show shown on non-commercial Sunday nights at 6.30 and a wild-life show, **Wild Track**, which had won a Prix Jeunesse.<sup>63</sup> He recalls how, for some years after deregulation in 1989, he had spent time 'fighting an all-out war trying to stop the American influx, to hold back the tide', but that 'the American trip' changed him. Whereas once he had 'produced beautifully crafted children's information programmes that kids didn't want to watch' he now no longer wanted to 'make award-winning programmes that will be thumped by Aladdin'(an imported animation). In Taylor's view, the public service ideals of educational information, in which he had trained, were no

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<sup>63</sup> An award for quality children's programmes.



longer working for 'kids'. He confessed to the researcher that he was disappointed that Marion Hobbs, then Opposition Spokesperson for Broadcasting, interpreted this shift in approach as 'waving the white flag' to American imperialism, because what he was doing was 'for Kiwi kids'. There was no longer any point in excluding global media riches, the new job was to get inside the media and show how culture 'mixes together and becomes one.' He was no longer interested in constructions of local national difference epitomized by 'having kiwis and takahas and things stuck on' when local children deserved "'quality' that could be from 'anywhere'", like, he suggested, **Squirt** (4/9/97). In his view children:

...do not differentiate between here and there, local and global, children's and prime time anymore. Kids are *in* the world. New Zealand kids know where NZ is and how small it is, so I don't think it is a big issue (4/9/97).

Taylor had come to the conclusion that 'kids will always watch cartoons over local shows, just like I did' but unlike earlier generations who had no choice but to watch local educational programmes like **Spot On** and **Wild Track**, children were now able to choose animations every time. 'We have the remote and kids go donk, donk, donk. There are no borders anymore, the gate (keeping children inside parental supervision and national provision) is not only open, but the fences are also down... Producers simply have to meet children on their own ground' (4/9/97). It is interesting to note how Taylor's construct of 'child' is male, and a 'kid' is passionate about cartoons (like he was). It is as if these childhood memories, filtered through his son's passions for American basketball, shape what he now views as possible in local children's television.

Taylor's concept appears a radical way of appealing to a funding body charged with making local culture and called New Zealand On Air, but Taylor's metaphors of collapsing national and parental boundaries, which give children greater freedoms of choice, are couched in optimistic terms that empower children. The shrinking world made possible by global communications is bringing the world to children and creating new cultural opportunities and learning, which is why he viewed local television as a local *medium*, rather than as local *content*. Now that local television was in competition with the entire range of media, it was no longer, in his view, the most effective way of delivering content to children, given 'other ways of learning like video and internet at school. Children don't *need* television like they used to.' (4/7/97). He had regular chats with Wrightson about 'looking at the show (**Squirt**) not as an opportunity for *content*, but rather rethinking it as a *vehicle* to take kids to content.' Television, in other words, provided a democratic local gateway to the internet and future media interactivity for

children (Wrightson, 1/7/98) because ‘the richness of the many educational sites in the internet are lost like billboards in the jungle without local television to point the way.’ (Taylor, 1/7/98). Animated characters like Spike the penguin, who watched ‘cartoons with the kids, rather than compete with them’, offered some limited opportunity to add short bursts of local accents and local information, whilst pointing children to the riches of the internet. For example, Taylor describes how **Squirt** encouraged children to use the internet to look at the Mars web site. Instructions for 3D glasses were placed on the **Squirt World** web site, and he argued that children would have turned television off if they had tried to do it on the show (Taylor, 4/9/97). Taylor works on hunches rather than audience research—it would be interesting, for example, to know how many children actually had access to the web and then how many of them settled down to make the 3D glasses described on the web site. Many schools in New Zealand had internet connections but this did not mean that children had access on demand (Lealand, 2000d), or that teachers knew how to exploit internet resources in order to guide children within them. Internet in New Zealand still remained an option available mostly to middle-class children. This group included the children of the TVNZ managers, Shaw, Steven, Smith and Baylis.

The format of interstitial linking programme, **Squirt**, used ‘short, sharp’ elements designed to work *inside* commercial schedules of cartoons, as funders and producers were increasingly required to use subversive means of entering children’s preferred zones of commodified culture.

...now the penguin (**Squirt**) as the Trojan Horse is inside the castle (of popular cartoon television) let’s not throw the penguin out, lets start to look at how we can make a change, like there will be New Zealand accents and just little New Zealand things that told kids on a Saturday morning what was happening in the country...*all* that disappears on The Cartoon Network (Taylor, 1/7/98).

It is interesting to adapt ideas from de Certeau to analyse Taylor’s conceptualisation of local producers as powerless agents who are reduced to using ‘tactics of the weak’ to steal into (as a Trojan Horse would) or rent space (an acceptable solution to media landlords) within global cartoon hits. The animation of **Squirt** provides a way to poach cultural space back from global popular children’s cultural pleasure and use it for small moments of local play, which is better than nothing at all. If de Certeau’s radical view of audience agency casts the act of reading as ‘advances, retreats, tactics and games played with the text’ (de Certeau, 1984: xix) then Taylor’s producer agency sees **Squirt** as providing opportunities for local intertextual games *within* a television cartoon culture. He offers NZ On Air ‘guerrilla tactics’ to provide an effective, though minimalist,

delivery tool for NZ On Air's cultural objectives, to which content can be added once the format succeeds with the twitchy audience. The board of NZ On Air were concerned at **Squirt**'s lack of educational content at the board meeting in 1997, but Taylor argued that any content needed to be 'suck it and see...and not jeopardize the broadcaster.' (Taylor's presentation to the NZ On Air Board).

It is easy to see why **Squirt** won favour with TV2. **Squirt** branded Saturday morning animations as TV2, at no risk to ratings, just as Laybourne had done at Disney/ABC. Its pedagogical rationale was astutely judged to offer a technical means of plugging local children into the interactive future, as well as providing a means of delivering minimal 'local presence' to large numbers of children who would otherwise miss out entirely. Traditional children's local half-hour or magazine genres provided old solutions to new problems (Taylor, 1/7/98).

It is worth noting that both Taylor and Morrell describe a strategy of children 'tripping over' local children's programming. In Morrell's strategy, children 'trip over' short items of public service material packaged the 'cheap and cheerful' commercial television entertainment environment of **What Now?**, but Taylor takes this a stage further, to where children 'trip over' snippets of animated *local* material within global animation flows. The interstitial format can be viewed as an exciting new creative tool for new converging times or the last gasp of defeated national children's television production industry. Taylor's strategy is discussed later, in relation to youth programming.

Both Morrell's and Taylor's creative strategies need to be understood within the context of a deepening dispute between TVNZ and NZ On Air. This dispute concerned whether block local programmes (including both genres perceived to be more risky by broadcasters, *and* cheap and cheerful magazine shows) or short, local interstitials between cartoons were the most effective way to deliver local content to children in the late 1990s. NZ On Air's view in 1997 was that commercial interests should pay for their own interstitial content as had traditionally been the case. Their job was to fund 'block' programmes that made a cultural impact (however defined) with scarce local funding dollars. Commercial programmers argued that such programmes were not succeeding against imported cartoons in the current environment, and were therefore a waste of money because children were not watching them. **Squirt** brought the debate about formatting issues into the political foreground.

At this point, it is important to keep in mind that children had limited choice on commercial television partly because scheduling and programme promotion reflected their value as an audience (Zanker, 1999a). Advocates of public broadcasting continued to argue that the range of choice would increase through regulation because of the way that media markets worked towards ‘the lowest common denominator’ (a slippery but much used term). In their view, it was necessary to shift judgements of value from the bulk audiences of ratings to issues of satisfaction levels of parents and children exposed to range and variety of material over time (Buckingham, 2000a). Old fashioned creative daring (what one might call the public service version of ‘suck it and see’) was disappearing, even within the BBC (Home, 1995). However, programmes like **The Demon Headmaster** and **The Teletubbies**, both risky producerly creations, continued to be made and proved they could win large children’s audiences, even though no ratings evidence in the past could be used to predict it (Davies, 2000; Born, 2000).

Taylor’s strategy in 1997 and 1998 was extraordinary in that he was arguing for public funding to be used to enable a risk-averse commercial broadcaster to ‘suck it and see’ in terms of children’s television content, and that this strategy gained currency within NZ On Air.

### **Summary**

In the 1997 NZ On Air funding round for 1998, both producers were looking beyond television and yet were stuck with a funding model that was restricted to television. Both producers were struggling with how to appeal to a range of demanding stakeholders, a child audience that was gaining power over media choices, a cash-strapped funding agency, and national broadcasters nervous about commercial survival. Morrell chose to provide a large-volume, fast-paced and noisy entertainment *environment* that attracted children to higher production quality elements of drama, current affairs and animation. Taylor chose to provide a minimalist animation *vehicle* that could sneak unobtrusively into the realm of imported cartoon hits. Once there, this local ‘portal’ could point children in the direction of local events and culture, its own web site and beyond. This was, in his view, the only way to build a popular and trusted brand for local children.

### **The NZ On Air funding round**

A week or so before the September meeting, every year during the 1990s, NZ On Air couriered a large box to the board members. This box contained TVNZ’s and TV3’s

children's programme proposals, along with a discussion paper composed by the Television Manager in which each proposal is discussed in terms of NZ On Air cultural objectives, and recommendations made. The board meeting rarely brought huge surprises to those involved with negotiating the proposals to that date, although it was always possible that the board might over-ride the funding recommendation of the Television Manager. Whatever the eventual outcome of the board meeting, most of the important negotiation between the broadcaster, producer and Television Manager over production format, as well as the financial contributions of broadcaster and NZ On Air to production costs, were completed before the proposal was sent to the board (Prowse, 11/9/97).

The 1997 proposal from Morrell's team asked for \$4.7 million to produce 42 x 2-hour programmes and 205 commercial half hours of 'live, quality television specifically targeted at 5–10 year olds'. An alternative proposal was also included, requiring the curtailment of some proposed club activities, fewer local drama pieces, field items and outside broadcasts, with the resulting delivery of 177.5 hours (forty 2-hour and 195 commercial half hours) for \$4.35 million. This was generous funding of approximately \$30,000 per half hour, which compared favourably with the \$4000 per half hour for early-childhood material. It was funded on a level with lower cost adult magazine programmes. TVNZ contributed 1,450,000 million dollars to the production costs, partly through providing facilities. A lot was hanging on the performance of **What Now?** in 1998, for all stakeholders.

In contrast to the **What Now?** proposal, the proposal for **Squirt** was a thin document, which was surprising given the looming challenges to its recommissioning earlier in the year. Not only did **Squirt** face competition from the seasoned children's producer, Rex Simpson, who had submitted a proposal called **Area 22** for TV3, targeting the same age group, but its shift during the previous year to TV2 had displaced Morrell's own idea for Saturday mornings. The odds seemed to be lengthened further when The Children's Television Foundation chair, Bronwyn Hayward made it clear that she didn't like the interstitial format of **Squirt** for three reasons. She felt that it diluted NZ On Air's cultural presence (which NZ On Air themselves had argued in the past), she found it too commercial and, finally, she thought the show 'pretty blokey', saying even though the person who played Spike was a woman, 'she acts like a boy with attitude problems.' (Hayward, 10/8/98). **Squirt** was an animation, and therefore relatively expensive for what was effectively a continuity programme around cartoons. Another

problem for the current proposal to overcome was the perception created during the previous year, that **Squirt** the programme was only the front end of a larger web site concept of 'Squirt World'. This was not a good strategic move for a board restricted to funding television. The web site was downplayed in 1997 but Taylor's views on new technology were well known. He also asked for more money. The first two series of **Squirt** received \$900,000 from NZ On Air, but Taylor argued that the funding, lower than requested, had seen him forced to fund production shortfalls. He asked for \$1 million for 1998.

There were two strong points in **Squirt's** favour. Firstly, it received enthusiastic support from its mentor, Geoff Steven, the newly appointed Programme Commissioner at TV2; and secondly, **Squirt** had the support of Television Manager, Jane Wrightson, who felt that it was important to give the animation concept another year of funding because of its production potential. She made a condition that during the production year the production team would work on content issues with the Executive Producer from TV2, Janine Morrell (Wrightson, 13/10/97). The board granted Taylor \$925,000 for 30 weeks of 35 minutes of interstitial **Squirt 111**, on the grounds that TVNZ had offered to contribute more to the programme.

This background on **What Now?** and **Squirt** during the 1997 funding round helps one appreciate the irony of what happened later in mid-1998 when the format of **What Now?** was dismantled into an interstitial one. It also highlights how astutely Morrell, left with no room to manoeuvre, rhetorically reconfigured the shift and reformatting of **What Now?** into an opportunity for the team and a new set of 'benefits' for local children.

### **Working together on complementary age appeals and content**

Morrell and Taylor had previously worked on 'opposite sides of the fence.' (Taylor, 4/7/97). In a tribute to Morrell, NZ On Air considered her to be 'someone who cared about the product more than her own status' (Wrightson, 13/10/97) and could therefore avoid the power plays that might normally be the legacy of the complex history of **Squirt**. Morrell's audience research was seen as the key, in NZ On Air's mind, for improving the educational, gender and cultural content of **Squirt** (Wrightson, 13/10/97). One wag at the NZ On Air board meeting commented that 'she will Morrell it.' Morrell expressed excitement about working with Taylormade, a production house that pushed the edges of computer animation (Morrell, 12/11/97). Taylor, in turn, said that he looked

forward to tapping into Morrell's acknowledged expertise in audience research with children in order to increase age-appropriate content (Taylor, 14/11/97). He knew that this was the key to ongoing NZ On Air support. There was much optimism about the benefits of collaboration. NZ On Air might be excused for believing that it had neatly solved a programming problem for a publicly subsidised programme, whilst emphasising the importance of improved educational benchmarks.

Morrell and Taylor discussed plans to dovetail the shows, research audience appeals, cross-promote and incorporate them into one club strand in 1998. A major development for 1998 was to be the production of **What Now?** Club strands across 7 days a week, incorporating **Squirt** on Saturdays, thus branding every day of the week. But an interesting decision was made to then define complementary age groups, rather than targeting similar audiences, even though they were not on air at the same time. **What Now?**'s target audience, previously 5–12 years, was declared to be 5–9 year olds and **Squirt**'s was defined as 7–12 year olds. This was despite the fact that both Taylor and Morrell agreed that **Squirt**'s appeal was for a younger audience, and that both of them agreed that appeals for the upper end of the 'tween' age cohort were the most difficult to get right (Taylor, 4/9/97; Morrell, 25/7/97). The Programming and Acquisitions Head at TVNZ, Andrew Shaw, encouraged this age differentiation, which echoed the overseas trend towards age-specific appeals for audiences, sponsors and advertisers. This strategy also provided advantages for the public funder because it refined delivery of range and variety of delivery to age-specific audiences. It also solved a problem for **What Now?** that had emerged during the summative focus group analysis during November 1997. **What Now?** appeared to be skewing its appeal to girls, and was being rejected by boys who were saying that they found it babyish and preferred youth programming.<sup>64</sup> The darling of commercial broadcasters, the edgier **Squirt**, which already had content problems to solve, could thus be workshopped to appeal to both aspirant tweens and NZ On Air.

However, as things turned out, **Squirt** was not workshopped for content by Morrell and Taylor. It continued its cheeky, commercial interstitial address around cartoons, which appealed to boys and, naturally, to its commercial broadcaster, TV2. What eventuated, as

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<sup>64</sup> Evidence from Lealand's research suggests that peer group posturing in focus groups skews results from boys, who still knew surprising amounts about the content of **What Now?** The importance of this became clear later.

Morrell's energy was absorbed in trying to save the production base of **What Now?** (as ratings plummeted and TVNZ management decided to close the Christchurch facility) is tracked in future chapters. It became evident that **What Now?** found it increasingly difficult to please both funder and broadcaster during 1998, despite the positive responses at the 1997/8 funding round. Ironically, the lower age group target exposed **What Now?** to increasing attack from programmers and commissioners who believed that it was increasingly out of touch with 'savvy kids'. In their view such 'worthy' developmentally sound content for 5–9 year olds was rejected by those same 5–9 year olds (particularly males), who increasingly sought out aspirant role models and commodified popular content. In their view, children at primary school were getting older younger.

### **Project Great New Zealand Television**

However, Geoff Steven was reflecting a new spirit in TVNZ when he reassured the board of NZ On Air at the funding round in September 1997 that things had changed for the better since earlier in the 1990s, when 'TVNZ was arrogant and market driven'. He argued that 'now politics and cultural climate won't deal to that, and strength is being defined by growing local product'. As he told it, he was head-hunted from TV3 by Neil Roberts so that 'we can get rid of the cobwebs and get local production as a major player and major element in the schedule of TVNZ'. (Steven, 29/7/97) Indeed it was widely rumoured that he had been poached from TV3 because of his demonstrated ability to commission high-rating prime-time local content. A cultural shift in TVNZ to an aggressive cultural nationalism appeared to be further underlined by the appointment of the cultural populist Neil Roberts to General Manager, TVNZ. He initiated the 'Project Great New Zealand Television' campaign (PGNZTV) a process designed to capitalize on his view that:

TVNZ is New Zealand television ... Great New Zealand Television recognizes that local programming is essential to our future success as more international competitors enter the New Zealand market. It also recognizes that our networks must provide a great schedule of programming, both local and international, to give New Zealanders the television they want (Project Great New Zealand Television, 1997).

The briefing paper for TVNZ staff stated that the objective was 'to put culture back into the television business'. Morrell and Taylor might hope, now that the hurdle of funding was over, to work together constructively (with full support from their broadcaster) on reviewing content, incorporating **Squirt** into 'The **What Now?** club,' and designing on-air cross-promotions to assist in that process. Steven, after all, had gone to the length of



describing their shows to the NZ On Air board as ‘*the* local brand for primary children.’ (1997 NZ On Air board meeting).

But Robert’s culturally assertive campaign also foreshadowed further corporate ‘reconstruction, eliminating duplication, taking the best and making it better, reshaping and re-energising our business’, a thrust supported by then Chair of the Board, Roseanne Meo. There was continuing concern that the TVNZ business compared poorly with the lean operation of TV3 when it came to the ratio of costs to earnings and one solution was to brand TV1 and TV2 in a more strategic business sense. TV3 was successful as a business because, despite lower overall ratings, it had chosen demographic spreads that created an efficient business. It was significant that the core team for PGNZTV included senior human resources and financial staff, as well as consultants.<sup>65</sup> The continued foregrounding of economic rationality within TVNZ corporate structures was never in doubt.

By late 1997, instead of working on new creative strategies for children’s programmes, Morrell, Palmer and the facilities manager in Christchurch found themselves desperately constructing a business plan to counter an international consultancy report that argued cost-effective benefits for shifting their operation north to Auckland over Christmas. Christchurch might have the hardware, the software skills and the space, but the battle was being fought over accountants’ definitions of costs against categories of rates of return, and calculations of the value of the brand and competitive value. If producers could argue that the **What Now?** brand was worth a great deal to TVNZ (much like the costly news genre was perceived to be) it might gain leverage in terms of its disappointing rates of return. One Auckland idea was to produce **What Now?** in a bubble in the atrium of TVNZ Auckland. This was countered by Palmer and Morrell ‘clutching at operational straws’, like the inability to phone-in, and the messiness of gunge in a public space, in order to draw NZ On Air into the politics of the move because any format changes required another full board meeting for approval (Morrell, 15/12/97).

In the event, Morrell won a stay of execution for the Unit in Christchurch, but she knew that it still faced a double jeopardy. Not only did Neil Roberts want the Children’s Unit in Auckland, but Graeme Wilson, by then Head of Facilities, wanted he Children’s Unit

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<sup>65</sup> These were from ‘Tucker and Co, a San Francisco based company who...assisted Winstone Wall Boards and Fletcher Wood Panels to successfully reshape their business.’

in Lower Hutt, a suburb north of Wellington, in order to provide production throughput in the white elephant of Avalon studios. This would make the facility less of a financial drain, and possibly enhance the resource for future sale. It was clear that influential managers viewed the Children's Unit in financial terms, and **What Now?**'s NZ On Air budget as valuable subsidised production throughput for under utilized facilities that brought a further 10 per cent overhead from NZ On Air for use of these facilities. Whilst the Unit remained within TVNZ it appeared that it would continue to be a pawn in the politics of ongoing corporate efficiency. Moreover, the attractive possibility of escaping internal corporate politics by means of TVNZ permitting **What Now?** to be commissioned from a Christchurch independent producer was highly unlikely, given that TVNZ owned the creative concept (Palmer, 5/5/98).

Roberts' words of commitment to local content were framed by a belief that it was through being competitive that local culture would thrive. This view saw a programming strategy whereby *primetime and popular* 'local content' was valued for positioning TVNZ within the globalizing New Zealand media market. What hope did this hold for children's producers? Roger Horrocks, NZ On Air Board member, put it to Geoff Steven that there was a commercial benefit in providing *local* children's programmes in order to gain the loyalty of the next generation of viewers. Steven dismissed this objective as a rationale for local children's programming by commenting that 'children are the first to pick up the remote when bored', thus implying that local children's programmes were just that. 'They follow hit cartoons (imported), not networks' (1997 NZ On Air Board meeting). Thus it appeared that TVNZ's commissioning strategist and cultural populist, Geoff Steven, did not view children's current cultural tastes as indicative of future loyalty to a channel. Children had demonstrated that they were a fickle audience who had little appetite for local programmes that targeting them (as demonstrated by the fact that no NZ On Air funded children's programme rated in the top thirty for children aged 7–12 years in 1997/8) and that children preferred the prime-time programmes viewed by their parents. (See Appendix Five for top programmes and Appendix Six for viewing times) Children's production was not a central interest for Steven—he had made his name with quirky prime-time documentaries that had won popular ratings against first-run American drama, such as **ER**. Nevertheless, he expressed pride in the animation innovation of interstitial **Squirt**.

## TVNZ management perspectives on children's television

In requiring that programmes prove themselves by being popular, Steven was simply reflecting the anti-regulatory position of TVNZ management who believed that the best strategy for TVNZ's business *and* cultural survival was staying within the terms of the media marketplace. This tough form of cultural idealism was shaped by memories of the stultifying regulated culture of state television before regulation:

I am very much against quotas... I say make better programmes and then people will want to watch them. Then no politician can cut the cord [to local content] because it becomes part of the culture because people want and demand it. Ultimately it is my hope that people will demand it because it is relevant to them. ['relevant' is not clarified] If it is not relevant and they turn off, well, why bother taking tax money away? Put the money into hospital beds and things that are more important than filling the gap in the corner of the sitting room, that is a much more mature way of having a culture (Steven, 11/9/98).

Andrew Shaw, more pithily, called quotas 'social welfare for producers' (Shaw, 11/9/98).

In such a culture it was easy for local children's production to be viewed as a ratings liability, even for a broadcaster with the newly declared aspiration to be 'heartland New Zealand'. There was a widespread view that children's production was likely to become even more of a liability if NZ On Air persisted in its demand for more 'educational' content. For example, Julia Baylis, once a media buyer at Saatchi and Saatchi's and now the TV2 programmer, had held doubts about the viability of the half-hour format for after-school **What Now?**, even before the funding round in 1997. At that time she had expressed concerns about recommissioning the half-hour block programme because of ratings problems, and had urged reformatting into a local host introducing imported programmes after school. She argued this was a long-established tradition in children's television in New Zealand, but she reported that it did not happen because 'NZ On Air wouldn't wear it' (Baylis, 9/9/98). By early 1998 she 'had a hunch' that **What Now?** was somehow 'too worthy, the mix was not quite right' and that 'it was important to get to the bottom of it' (Baylis, 10/9/98). Andrew Shaw, General Manager of Programming and Acquisitions, and once a star of children's television himself, was considered by the Christchurch team as 'one of the few friends for children's television', but they also knew that he was a tough 'commercial animal' (Palmer, 17/7/97). Even Shaw was concerned about the effectiveness of the format during 1997, but he had been willing to give it another chance by backing it for the 1998 season. This was partly because he did not subscribe to the standard commercial programming view that held that children had a role to play in contributing to pre-prime-time audience build up, and thus station loyalty.

In his view, children flicked from channel to channel around favourite programmes like *Rugrats* throughout the afternoon schedule, and success for local programming relied on what the opposition put up in competition. His job at international audio-visual trade shows for children's material was to buy hits to win against CanWest. In recent years this had become increasingly difficult as the bidding war swung in favour of CanWest, which had buying clout as a result of its other networks in Canada, Australia and Ireland. He had also observed that New Zealand children were becoming far more sophisticated in their tastes than he had been as a child and would not put up with being talked down to by 'worthy' local programming (Shaw, 19/9/98). These viewpoints echo the 'commonsense' views of American commissioners discussed by Wartella (1998).

Dornfeld's construction of producers 'impersonating various presumptive audiences' has been useful in understanding Morrell's and Taylor's use of metaphor in conceptualizing their visions for children. It is important to ask how and why and in what context a range of other 'producing agents' also structure their statements about the world, and thus children's audiences (Dornfeld, 1998: 62). TVNZ managers use a range of metaphors for children's viewing. Like producers, they are not disinterested in this task because they bring their (gendered) childhood memories and adult perceptions of 'cultural capital' to their corporate decision making in a highly competitive media market, even when children's programmes are of little interest to them, (unless ratings become a problem).

It is widely agreed amongst television executives that the traditional local 'cultural cringe' they experienced as children has disappeared. As Claire Haycock, Sales and Marketing Manager for TVNZ puts it:

I remember when all the best stuff happened in California or Britain. Do you have the sense that kids don't think like that anymore? I don't think they do. I don't think there are borders like we believed that there were borders, and when we felt inferior to what was going on in California... The reductions in import tariffs have made a huge difference. Kids can wear the same T-shirt that they see someone wearing overseas, and in *Shortland Street* as well. Economic barriers are down. For us it was 'no way', the only thing we could afford was 'New Zealand made', and it was never good enough because it wasn't up with the pace. We always felt behind the pace. [But] the cringe factor doesn't exist for this generation. My kids have a real sense of identity from local prime-time television. Once upon a time you couldn't do it because of the cringe factor. Maybe we need to approach what we do in New Zealand programming for children a little differently? (Haycock, 11/9/98)

For Steven, a seasoned producer who prided himself on commissioning and grooming local hits, *What Now?* was a show that was 'of a style and of an era'. Whereas Morrell's stated philosophy was to provide a range of role models and reflect the diversity of New

Zealand children's lives on screen, preferably in their own voices, Steven preferred to trust his 'gut feeling and nose for' popular culture,

Do local kids *need* local TV? No they don't *need* it They don't *need* Kiwi burgers when they have McDonald's. Our challenge is to make local television which isn't there because people *should* watch it but because they *want to* watch it. We are getting out of the public service television thing of *feel good* television that is '*we feel good* making it but it is a pity that the audience has switched over to cooler stuff'. We've done it [rated] with docos and we're doing it with drama and we've done it in prime time (Steven 9/9/98).<sup>66</sup>

Steven suggested that 'politically correct' pressures from NZ On Air's cultural agenda might be one of the problems for **What Now?** forcing it to be:

...an ensemble. [That is] we need a Maori and we need a woman and we need someone from the North Island and someone from the South Island and we need someone who likes whales. And the kids just see a group of people running around shouting at each other. As personalities they will never have cut-through, especially with boys (11/9/98).<sup>67</sup>

He wondered if NZ On Air had ever thought about what was really meant by 'Kiwi culture' and asked 'who wants it to be so New Zealand? Who wants all these kiwis and things?' Steven believed that good ideas were universal, came from everywhere and fired the imagination, 'just like **Squirt**.' (Steven, 11/9/98).

Steven wanted local production (after all, he was the greatest advocate of it), but he also believed that **What Now?** required a radical change in style in order to succeed and he was never afraid to share his creative vision. If Steven was against what he perceived to be 'politically correct' content, he was also wary of 'try-hard' moves to 'empower children'.<sup>68</sup> This was exemplified by:

...let's give the kids the camera and let the kids make the programme. The kids ask 'why aren't real people making the programme? Why are we devalued and patronized? We want to see programmes made by just as intelligent people as anyone'. That's why I killed **In Focus**.<sup>69</sup> It

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<sup>66</sup> It is interesting that McDonalds decided that New Zealand did *need* 'Kiwi burgers' and devised an advertising campaign out of popular Kiwi icons, that is still remembered verbatim by many young adults. It is worth noting as well that Stevens made a reputation partly by cloning overseas hits, especially ones that targeted youth.

<sup>67</sup> For an interesting justification of cultural inclusiveness for children see Roedder John, 1999.

<sup>68</sup> 'Try-hard' is a much loved antipodean term used to describe an outsider who tries to join a group by exhibiting too much enthusiasm, thus demonstrating a lack of familiarity with 'insider' language codes.

<sup>69</sup> A children's news programme with contributions from children's reporters and crews which won an overseas prize.

needed a good creative behind it. It was *try hard* storytelling. It patronized the audience. If we still had **In Focus** we wouldn't have **Squirt** and **Squirt** is the future (11/9/98).

As in the maxim of Groucho Marx, why should 'kids' (who cringed from being called children) want to join the club that was designed to target (and feature) only people like themselves?

'Attitude', a word that denotes wilfulness and rebellion in schools and homes, was now recast by certain executives as the critical quality required of children's programming. Youth presentation styles, formats and content exemplify the virtues of 'attitude' for managers who retained an admiration of risk-taking and subversiveness clearly related to fond memories of risk taking as young 'turks' within the stultifying state television of the 1970s (Steven, 29/7/97). Many managers relished the counter-cultural frisson of youth programmes that played cutting-edge 'guerrilla tactics in the belly of the conservative commercial corporation' whilst still requiring them to suit TVNZ's strategic plan. (Anaru, 14/2/00) Youthful attitude was also tied to cultural aspirations held by the cohort of media-savvy baby-boomers who aspired to eternally youthful tastes.

What do managers like Steven, Baylis, Shaw, Smith and others mean by programmes that appeal to 'kids with attitude', and what implications do these views have for how they define childhood? How does this colour what they want to commission for TVNZ? Their 'commonsense' views are important because they are TVNZ gatekeepers that judge the success or otherwise of proposals for local children's programmes, and thus define the media resources available for identity formation for New Zealand children.

In their production talk, these managers describe 'attitude' (when it is not expressly defined by elements of youth programming,) as being what 'kids buy into' and 'being on the side of 'kids'. 'Kids' in their talk are uniformly male. 'Attitude' separates 'savvy kids' from 'children' and even echoes the phrase 'separating the men from the boys'. 'Attitude' in content and presentation is about being 'sophisticated and mature' as a culture, and open to global material. Programmes for 'children', on the other hand, reflect the cultural and educational wishes of anxious parents, and are too 'try-hard', 'worthy' and 'politically correct'. 'Attitude' appears to have three dimensions: firstly, of *knowledge* of emergent popular culture; secondly, the styles of knowing ironic *behaviour* which viewing that material cultivates; and thirdly, a young male's dismissiveness of maternal culture. In such ways 'attitude' distances one from the worthy cultural projects of middle-class, middle-aged, middle-brow mothers and humanities teachers (the

majority of whom are also women.) It is interesting to note how often managers and producers position themselves rhetorically as advocates for boys against constructs of smothering mothers and the 'cultural police' of schools and NZ On Air.

Of course, the requirement that children's programmes demonstrate 'attitude' was not new and the value of (male) 'attitude' in children's broadcasting had a long history, as Steven's notes:

There has been Stu Dennison, Andrew Shaw, Jase (Gunn), Ollie (Te Hata Ohlson), they all had attitude. They were out there and parents were writing letters of protest about 'how dare they talk like this in the English language'. They were really successful and kids really loved them. They cut through because they were the Rolling Stones when someone else was the Monkees. Now we have Spike and he has attitude and says things that are a bit outrageous and children identify with that...just like with **Nice one Stu** where kids say 'he's mine, I'm with him' (Steven, 11/9/98).

The very fact that Steven brings the long pedigree of young male presenters with attitude to the attention of the interviewer signals his desire to be on the side of male 'kids' who want 'attitude' from role models who had the, possibly, added virtue of being loathed by parents. This is in strong contrast to the view of Bronwyn Hayward, speaking for The Children's Television Foundation, when she comments that **Squirt** had a problem because it was too 'blokey' and that television needed more female role models. What she particularly objected to was the way in which Spike the penguin appeared to be 'a boy with attitude problems' (Hayward, 10/8/98, 20/10/99). It is useful to note how, by way of contrast, Nickelodeon presents a model of assertive, sociable childhood where girls are encouraged to stand up for their values and beliefs, and take pride in displaying civic pride.

## CHAPTER TEN - CASE STUDY PART II: PAYING ONE'S WAY

On the wall of Morrell's office hung a poster that succinctly illustrated the dilemma for the **What Now?** team. It outlined the objectives for **What Now?** in 1998.

### AUDIENCE

Child relevant

Build child self-esteem

Create child knowledge

### COMPANY

Help children value TVNZ

Create TVNZ advantage over TV3/4

Open new markets

Build new relationships

Chapter Ten outlines implications of NZ On Air's objectives of child centredness and educational values for the proposals in the 1997 funding round and the concerns of managers about that cultural agenda. The funding from NZ On Air's did not make up the entire budget necessary to make **What Now?** or **Squirt**, and this complicated the job for producers because they were required to find further sponsors for production costs. The broadcaster contributed to the budget for the programme in terms of the calculated commercial worth of the programme to the broadcaster and this inevitably required the production team to deliver a programme that rated and attracted advertising. However, even this combined contribution to the cost of making **What Now?** was insufficient to deliver the range and variety of material documented in the proposal. They had to find more money.

### Introduction

In late 1997 and early 1998 the senior production team spent time and energy seeking sponsors who could provide benefits for **What Now?** or underwrite some of the cost of the production for TVNZ, thus lessening its burden on the organization. As has been discussed, by the late 1990s a commercial presence in the form of product promotion on **What Now?** had become controversial in New Zealand, and the issue of product placement had seen NZ On Air's request that the Saturday **What Now?** be rescheduled



to non-commercial Sunday morning only a year before. Commercial presence continued to be sensitive for parents, even in weekday afternoons, even though NZ On Air privately acknowledged that money earned from sponsorship enabled the Unit to produce a wider range and more variety in a period when the licence fee was reducing against production costs. Producers knew they had to be sensitive to both the views of parents and their broadcaster, TVNZ, as they negotiated deals. The greatest problem at the beginning of 1998 was to not embarrass NZ On Air, whilst earning the extra dollars in order to fulfil the proposal contract.

Certain episodes during production are used to explore these issues further. They clarify the complex financial environment in which **What Now?** producers organized their budgets in order to earn respect from the commercial broadcaster and guard against censure from NZ On Air. These commercial deals also describe the ways in which **What Now?** became the promotional window for a range of global brands as its crew functioned as cultural intermediaries for children within popular culture.

### **Prizes and contra deals**

Prizes were a problem for **What Now?** Many parents disliked the use of prizes because they viewed them as forms of endorsement and promotion for companies targeting children. But prizes were necessary, in the view of the producers, because the judicious choice of fashionable brands signalled the programme's stock of 'cultural capital', and thus the programme's 'coolness' to brand-conscious children. Prizes were a labour-intensive task because of the time-consuming internal prize system at TVNZ that saw prizes subject to an elaborate vetting system, looping through the 'prize coordination office' in Auckland headquarters. The producers were required to supply a wish list to the office, which would, in turn, negotiate contracts with companies and then instruct presenters on the required exposure to deliver to the brand in return for free product. Presenters complained about how much time was spent 'doing the business with the prize' on-air to meet the contractual requirements. Duties were expressed in precise terms (for example, three seconds visual and verbal and a pack shot). This promotion, in the presenters' view was complicating an already nerve-wracking job of fronting a live programme, because it broke their flow of dialogue within the programme.

In 1998, Palmer made the unprecedented decision to *buy* prizes. This was clearly a risk, because it would be difficult to backtrack to the old contractual system if companies

realized that they were getting *free* promotion with paid-for product. However, in Palmer's view the benefits were twofold. There would be no obligation to provide a specified amount of positive exposure to the brand, thus giving creative freedom back to presenters. It would also have the advantage of keeping the programme 'squeaky clean for the funders' because they were free of contractual agreements and, as Morrell put it, 'there were no obligations to be nice to anyone'. Prizes were no longer designed as sales pitches and could be used creatively. Products could be ignored, or praised, or even 'have the mickey taken out of them', as it took the fancy of presenters (Palmer, 10/3/98).

Some clients were very supportive. Crayola, an art supplier, was happy to support the programme, and even supplied cash for paper and printing. Other companies, like Sony, who made the highly desirable Playstation, were difficult. Jane Palmer, club coordinator explains:

You have to pay for everything before they will supply the product. They won't deal with us directly because they are a big overseas company and don't have a lot invested in New Zealand, I guess. Directives come from the overseas head office and they won't budge. They only deal through an agency in Auckland, so you are dealing through layers and once you are dealing through layers you can't get special deals with prices (Palmer J, 24/2/98).

Sony's marketing interests were therefore protected by these rational financial decisions, but the benefits to local culture (that 'good corporate citizenship' once might be expected to bring) were lost. As local, personal contacts were lost, and off-shore rationality took its place—a meaner version of global capitalism was being brokered. Impersonal bureaucratic layers now dealt with requests from **What Now?** in the insignificant market of New Zealand, attached, as it was, to the bigger but still minor market of Australia. This contrasts with the solutions reached by other corporates like Sanitarium, who had local offices, and thus personal and highly creative relationships with **What Now?**

'Contra' issues were of even wider significance than prizes.<sup>70</sup> These deals also demanded time and energy from the craft team, but they often brought no direct production money, and on scrutiny, often cost time and money. For these reasons, Palmer and Morrell were determined to cut contra in **What Now?** to a minimum. This was in stark contrast to the

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<sup>70</sup> For example, music and food companies regularly approached **What Now?**, **Squirt** and youth programmes with free product in return for free promotion of product on the show. This is called 'contra'.

strategies of **Squirt** and youth magazine shows, which continued to rely on contra for promotions and prizes<sup>71</sup>.

A good illustration of dilemmas presented by contra occurred early in 1998 with the Eta/Tazo furore.

Tazo trading cards were a very successful collectable that was promoted by means of a range of entertainment supersystems. Tazo trading cards were introduced in the USA in 1993, and by 1998 had become an international marketing hit for children in 28 countries. Since the introduction of Tazo, Eta claimed that chip sales had consistently grown—as, for example, in Australia where they grew 41 per cent during 1997 (*Eta/Tazo proposal*, 1998). In 1996 Tazos were launched in Australia, and Australian research indicated that ‘86% of kids in Australia thought ‘Tazo’s’ (sic) were very ‘cool’ and would play and collect more Tazos (*Eta/Tazo proposal*, 1998).

This enthusiasm for collecting Tazos flowed into New Zealand school playgrounds during 1997 and 1998. The first series of Tazos in New Zealand had been brokered in Australia and featured Warner Brothers’ **Looney Tunes**. On one side of each trading card was a picture of a cartoon character and on the other side a Tazo logo. These cards were promoted through several levels of appeal, the primary one being that they colonized the natural stage of 6–12 year old’s peer-group collecting, a point not lost on marketers who tied Tazos into social and developmentally sound constructs of childhood: ‘Kids play with each other to win Tazos from their friends’ (thus signifying pleasurable, competitive, activity); ‘Tazos can also be joined together to build and create things’ (thus signifying creative activity); ‘Wherever kids imaginations take them’ (thus signifying productive activity); ‘Tazos are found in Eta potato chip bags, similar in concept to how marbles were collected years ago’ (thus signifying a continuity with childhood traditions) (*Eta/Tazo proposal*, 1998).

Tazos were first designed for the American food company Fritolay, but were Eta/Tazos introduced to the New Zealand market by the Australian promotional campaign for Griffins. The television campaign, shown extensively on **What Now?** in early 1998, featured the **Looney Tunes** characters. Associated public relations included a Tazo ‘headquarters’, fan club (with newsletter), a web site, tournaments and swap meets. In

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<sup>71</sup> At one stage **Mai Time** had so much contra that it was called ‘label city’ by critics.

January, Eta approached **What Now?** with an opportunity to associate this 'leading edge popularity with the **What Now?** brand'. They asked for 'a regular segment in **What Now?** called 'The ETA Looney Tunes TAZO Zone' for 6 weeks beginning in early March. They requested clear definition within the programme, billboards opening and closing items, and Eta product available on the set. In return, free Tazos would be made available for a club mail-out and a joint 15-second promotion would be produced, preferably screening on Sunday morning. This promotion would give **What Now?**:

...the opportunity to be associated with a leading edge new kids collection game. TAZOS are interactive, and will become the craze for New Zealand kids to collect! Once the **Looney Tunes** theme is over, ETA will be producing more TAZO's with other characters. If this promotion is a success, **What Now?** and ETA could continue with this association....The TAZO promotion could also be cross promoted on both the ETA and **What Now?** Websites (*Eta/Tazo proposal, 1998*).

In return for running a phone-line competition with the audience about the collectable cards (which involved free product) Eta would offer contestants a prize of a trip to Movie World in Sydney. **What Now?** could further benefit through the promotion being screened three times on TV2 Saturday morning, between 7.30am and 10.00am. The value of this was calculated in the contract proposal to be \$9,504, and TVNZ and Eta would split the cost.

But there were problems. Palmer noted that **What Now?** received nothing out of this and, for their pains, would end up with the commercial clutter of pack shots of chips on the screen. This clutter certainly would not help the commercial-free image of **What Now?** with the funder, especially given widely publicized claims of the association between television advertising, high-fat foods, and childhood obesity in New Zealand. Even without this critical image problem, the deal didn't bring financial gains. No money was offered by Eta for services rendered. Indeed, any production costs were to come out of the TVNZ Sales and Marketing earnings. 'We understand there may be a production fee involved with this concept, so this cost would come out of their existing airtime'. The proposal notes that 'ETA have currently placed \$95,000 worth of advertising airtime with TVNZ' (*Eta/Tazo proposal, 1998*) Costs would include, at the most conservative count, time spent by the already stretched graphic artist on logos and pack shots, and presenter time taking live calls for the competition. In Taylor's and Morrell's view, television exposure on children's television was scant and worth a lot more. They turned it down.

The problem was that **Squirt**, when offered a similar proposal, accepted it. Yet again, it seemed easy for the Christchurch based **What Now?** team to conclude that there was one set of strict rules for commercial content in **What Now?**, and another more relaxed set for Taylor's **Squirt**. Morrell, now officially executive producer for **Squirt**, had to sign off the deal. Her response to the **Squirt** team was 'I said I think this is far too commercial', but she then attempted to adapt the idea, as best she could, to **Squirt's** advantage.

I am cool if Eta were going to give production dollars, like money, cash to make something, but even that is selling your soul, but at least it's more than just giving away chips. We can contra chips for trips to Movie World quite easily. That is not a draw card anymore. What really blows me away is that I have had to agree, but they *still* don't know what the competition is. [So we have decided that] **Squirt** will advertise the trip to Disney World, which is fine if it is designed ok, but the minor prizes like the pack shots of chips and the like will be handled on the web site. Eta is fine with this and has agreed to advertise 'watch **Squirt** for the promotion' twice a day outside **Squirt**. So it is good promotion for the show, which at least is a win for the show (Morrell, 17/2/98).

### **Eta/Tazo and TVNZ Enterprises**

It is worth pursuing the Eta/Tazo case study one stage further because this episode provides a window onto the wider marketing strategies of corporations targeting children in New Zealand. The Eta/Tazo incident provides insights in three important ways. Firstly, such a case study shows how **What Now?**, despite the best intentions of the production team, was still drawn into the politics of marketing brands to children because of its role as one programme 'brand' within the larger television brand of TV2. Secondly, this marketing case study illustrates how television fitted into the long-term marketing strategies of one food company (Griffins) and its chip brand (Eta), in New Zealand. Thirdly, this marketing strategy provides a case study of how global entertainment brands are drawn into a local market, and how that local market (New Zealand) fits into the larger global marketing strategies and financial flows of a range of transnational entertainment and food corporations. Central to understanding these wider marketing dimensions is TVNZ Enterprises, an independent corporate profit centre within TVNZ, which functioned as a 'go-between' for global and local marketing campaigns, and thus played the role of a powerful cultural intermediary within the tastes and desires of New Zealand children.

In 1998 TVNZ Enterprises was an entrepreneurial unit within TVNZ Sales and Marketing. It brokered marketing opportunities in New Zealand for a range of transnational entertainment, food and electronics companies targeting adults and children. At that time it was a small and relatively untested team compared with the large entrepreneurial units attached to both the ABC and BBC, but it had already demonstrated

considerable creative flair in the way it managed the licensing and merchandising of third-party properties during that season.

Rights and licensing contracts function across a complex range of rights windows: time, geographic region and media. It was the task of TVNZ Enterprises, as agents for entertainment properties, to negotiate and manage contracts and, in the case of licensing, supervises the appropriate use of 'style-books' to ensure consistency of brand image.<sup>72</sup> In 1998 this unit became the agency for Team New Zealand America's Cup, a glamour deal, but its 'bread and butter' work was for a range of lucrative children's entertainment properties. These included **The Simpsons**, **Banana's in Pyjamas** (and, later in 1998, the entire ABC video catalogue), as well as **Thomas the Tank Engine**, **Ren and Stimpy**, **Goosebumps** and **Humphrey B Bear**.

Licensing deals with international entertainment properties are attractive to advertisers selling generic products that lack marketing impact to children and parents, because 'shelf appeal' and brand market 'cut through' for child consumers is improved by using popular entertainment brands. These brand associations enable a product to stand out from others on the crowded supermarket shelves by becoming 'top of mind' choice for children and their parents. Potato chip, snack bar, breakfast cereal and food companies, in particular, find that entertainment properties are key to their promotions in supermarkets, particularly at the beginning of the school year in January/February. It was TVNZ Enterprise's job to match generic food and drink companies with their choice of international entertainment property on the grounds that the 'hottest' entertainment properties mark generic products as brand of choice in the playground. Eta/Tazos did just this in order to position themselves as number one potato chip in schoolyards at the beginning of 1998. Eta first launched in New Zealand using the Warner's **Loony tunes** cartoon characters from the Australian campaign, but the following huge promotional campaign using **The Simpsons** was brokered by TVNZ Enterprises. Market researchers in Britain describe the Bart 'eat my shorts!' attitude as 'a powerful global cultural marker for 6–12 year old 'tween' peer culture', as well as being a huge hit for their parents. (*Getting older younger*, 2000).

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<sup>72</sup> A style book of characters, graphics, colours and layout ensures that the brand maintains its integrity across a range of territories and products.]

Understanding the role of television within the promotional plan for **The Simpsons** campaign helps one to understand how every aspect of the creative package mattered. The ‘look’ was created from a mix of original and stylebook features because it was considered important to tie the colours and imagery used in the local campaign into the wider international signifiers for Tazos.

Each element of the promotion will be of similar ‘look’, and feature Bart Simpson as the key focus. Art is taken from the styleguide—the ‘bursting Bart’ logo is the feature of the Eta/Tazo logo and is representative of the image they would like to portray. The purple background is taken from the Tazo material used in other territories. The pink clouds are creative and are inspired from the TV series (*Eta/Tazo marketing plan, 1998*).

**The Simpsons** promotion included a Simpsons collectors album that would hold a full set of Tazos, on-pack advertising in various forms, point-of-sale advertising for supermarkets (from A2 posters to pavement signs and four-tier display bins), public relations, including giveaway stickers, bus advertising, trade vehicles, samples and copy for press releases. Events included field product give aways. One special event was an ‘ETA Tazos All-Stars’ sponsored basketball team created to perform alongside ‘costume character Bart Simpsons’ at the October Auckland marketing expo organized by TVNZ Enterprises, ‘Planet 2’. This complex promotional plan was supported with print advertising to the trade, advertisements and sample giveaways for consumer/kids magazines, like *Disney Adventures* and *Simpsons Comics*. Also commissioned were one 30-second and one 15-second television advertisement.

The association of **The Simpsons** with Eta during 1998 was a great success, according to both TVNZ Enterprises and Griffins. It was certainly high profile—in one promotion the entire side of a metropolitan bus was illustrated with the Simpson family on their couch, with pack shots of chips and the Tazo logo. Meanwhile, the widely appealing cartoon of **The Simpsons** continued to be a favourite programme for tweens in New Zealand, out rating the principal local shows, **What Now?** and **Squirt**, for the target age group of children.

There were a couple of other short episodes in the Eta/Tazo relationship with **What Now?** that are worth reporting because they illustrate, again, how easy it was for **What Now?** to become innocently implicated in corporate promotions.

The first episode was used as a cautionary tale by Palmer in his May email letter to the staff, ‘What’s happening dudes’. After explaining the strategic value of being ‘contra free’, as well as the financial cost of the decision to remain independent, he noted that

there would always be pressure from companies to use **What Now?** for product promotion, and that the line between programme and promotion had been recently crossed in an unacceptable manner. The plan was simple and innocent. Tazos were to be used as part of a story on collecting but it turned into something more:

As you'd expect with sales reps employed to maximise exposure...they dressed the kids in Eta T-shirts and caps and had them showing the Tazos, albums etc, all which were commercially branded. I was alerted to this about 20 minutes before showtime...and told them to ditch the t-shirts & caps, which didn't go down very well. I mean no criticism of anyone involved, but ask you to remember that we have gone to great lengths and spent in excess of \$80,000 (on prizes) to keep our shows clean of pack shots, tacky product in the studio and contra this year. If the above scenario didn't raise alarm bells for anyone...it should have. All commercial exposure has a price and we intend doing deals only where there is direct and tangible benefit to our shows...if we don't control it then the exposure we do want to trade has less value. TVNZ Sales & Marketing would very quickly litter our set and fill our shots with product given half a chance. (Palmer, 1998, May).

It's also interesting that Palmer, whilst wishing to remain unsullied by commercial promotion on this occasion, still wants to preserve the value of exposure on **What Now?** in order to have the option of trading it to more lucrative ends.

The final episode in the **What Now?** Tazo/Eta relationship occurred on Labour weekend (October) at the Planet 2 promotional show. This marketing expo initiated by TVNZ Enterprises was held in an events centre in Auckland and was designed to showcase the benefits of marketing with TV2 by creating 'the World of Interactive Entertainment'. The event used **What Now?** presenters, along with stars from **Mai Time**,<sup>73</sup> and **McDonald's Young Entertainers**<sup>74</sup> in the role of 'celebrity MCs for non-stop entertainment.'

The stars of **What Now?** did a Sunday live link from the event on 25 October, during which they toured the displays for a range of products, ostensibly to provide **What Now?** viewers with a preview of exciting new products. **What Now?** presenters, in their 'celebrity' role with children, were useful for TVNZ at several levels. At the most abstract level they were used to grow the market value of the TV2 brand, and thus position it as the desirable advertising brand for corporations wishing to market to children. Sue Brewster, Brand Manager for TV2, hoped that **What Now?** doing a live link would be 'one way we can take TV2 into the streets. The kids will go absolutely

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<sup>73</sup> This youth programme targeted young Maori and Pacific Islanders and featured a mix of imported and local music clips.

<sup>74</sup> A variety show of music and performances by children from all over New Zealand and fronted by Jason Gunn, a previous star of children's after-school television.]



bananas because Jason, Anths, Shav are absolutely fantastic.’(Brewster, 9/9/98). Clearly their tour of displays saw them functioning at the simple level of providing exposure for local global brands at the expo. But it is also interesting to note how knowledge of the ‘breaking news’ of ‘hot’ brands’ (those with cultural capital in children’s peer groups) played a role in a symbiotic process of creating cultural capital both for the brand of **What Now?** and for TV2 with the child audience. The snapshots included in the TVNZ Enterprises’ *Licensing Now* magazine coverage in November/December illustrate the articulations that make for a successful marketing formula. They include a snap of ‘Bart Simpson joining in with the Eta Tazos Basketball Team’ next to one of the **What Now?** team’s outside broadcast held during Planet 2, tagged ‘Live action in production—**What Now?** crew in action.’

## **TVNZ Enterprises and Planet 2**

Planet 2 is an important site in which to track how the hosts of children’s television, (as local cultural intermediaries) are used to promote global brands, and how those global brands are, in turn, used to refine a local image of being in touch with popular culture. Before the event a press release was sent to prospective corporate clients who might be expected to book space for product promotion. Part of it read:

Planet 2 will be an annual event targeting the youth (sic) market 5–18 years. A large promotion campaign will ensure the 25,000+ anticipated visitors attend the show. The show will spread over four pavilions allowing easy flow through the exhibition and entertainment areas.

The Expo-Centre was physically split, with the 5–12 year olds’ section ‘focusing on family fun...and a toyland giving gift ideas for Christmas.’ The 12–18 year olds were served by an ‘Extreme Hall’, the name of which signified the shift in address to ‘attitude’ and the risk-taking play of ‘youth’ culture. The retail hall was stocked with ‘hot’ pre-Christmas specials, thus ‘capturing all visitors as they move between halls.’ Planet 2 was described as ideal for ‘new product launches, sampling opportunities or interactively exposing your products.’ The physical layout thereby ensured the perceived desirability of an ‘easy flow’ between the security of family patrolled ‘childhood’ signifiers and those designed to appeal to youth interest in the subversive cultural pleasures of video games and new technology.

The poster designed to market Planet 2 appeals to the difficult combination of children and their parents, whilst not repulsing the key early adopters within the ‘youth’ market. It illustrates the perceived synergy and power of intertextual associations between global

brands and local icons from television and, as such, is worth describing in some detail. The background is a star-studded night sky, on which photographs of TV2 stars are 'unfolding' into a circle formation around the Planet 2 logo. At 12.00 o'clock there is a young female star of **Mai Time**, at one o'clock there is a photo of the **What Now?** team, followed by other pictures of other TV2 youth presenters, at 3.00 o'clock there is an image of **Bananas in Pyjamas™**, followed by more youth presenters and stars from the local prime-time soap of **Shortland Street**, a full-suited photo of 'Mr Peanut' with smiling children (representing Eta), and at 11.00 o'clock Bart Simpson is bursting out of an animated bubble™. The sponsors' logos run along the bottom of the poster and include: TV2 (come and see the TV2 stars live), Phillips Bomb Bass (have you got the loudest car? Prove it), *Girlfriend* 'Girl Power' (Girls only, giveaways, make overs, retail specials, and judge the hunk!), **Mai Time** Kapa Haka, (Maori cultural performance from intermediate schools, ages 10–12), Pepsi, Nintendo, Griffins, Eta, Barbie, Cadbury, Tommy Hilfiger, Timeout leisure centres (video games), NZ Post, Crayola and many more. 'All brought to you by...A smart service event in conjunction with TVNZ Enterprises.' In small figures in the right-hand corner of the poster there is a note saying 'The image of Bart is trademarked, 1998, Twentieth Century Fox Corporation, all rights preserved.'

The poster illustrates the complexity of arrangements between local and global economic, cultural and symbolic capital, as participants fought for promotion, and synergies of cross-promotion, at the event.

In the late 1990s TVNZ Enterprises also managed retail opportunities on behalf of global firms, and these required sensitive marketing judgements in a small market, with its tendency to rapid saturation. Merchandise from properties like **The Simpsons** and **Rugrats** were considered long-haul brand 'classics' and it was important, therefore to avoid over-exposure. Successful marketing in New Zealand meant that it was as important to choose the appropriate retail outlet as it was to decide how much product to release, and when. The wrong shop (for example one with an image of 'bargain basement'), or too much merchandise released at once could be a disaster, because 'nothing kills a craze like discounting' (Palmer J, 30/6/98). TVNZ Enterprises, for example, negotiated an exclusive point-of-sale deal with Farmers (which was strongly positioned with families) for **The Simpson's** merchandise.

The fortunes of the **Rugrats** brand, cartoon, merchandise and other media formats illustrates the way a brand with high 'cultural capital' for children was strategically cultivated and exploited by both the programmers of TV2 and TVNZ Enterprises marketers during 1998. The Nickelodeon-produced **Rugrats** cartoon had provided strong ratings for TV2 during 1997 when it was scheduled as the audience lead into **What Now?** and so had provided good promotion for **What Now?**. In 1998, **Rugrats** was moved to a slot *after* **What Now?** during the weekday schedule. This demonstrated the cartoon's value (compared to **What Now?**), for the programming team, who were necessarily concerned with building audiences towards later afternoon and prime time. In 1998, according to ratings, it was the highest off-peak show for 5–14 year olds in New Zealand. TVNZ Enterprises who already managed **Rugrats** merchandise, managed the release of the new **Rugrats** movie and associated new licensing rights in October 1998. To launch this event, TVNZ Enterprises hosted a morning event for 'Licensees, Retailers and Promotional partners'. 'Fiona Anderson, a much loved ex-presenter from **What Now?**' (and who still made guest appearances in the **What Now?** comic soap, **Serial Stuff**) hosted the event as the audience was 'shown how to think like a kid' and 'to maximize involvement in an award winning #1 kids show...**Rugrats**.' (*Licensing Now*, November/December) The same issue of *Licensing Now* foreshadowed a pending Krispa chips promotion for the beginning of the 1999 school year using **Rugrats** for 'Attention grabbing packaging...In store displays...Cross promotions with other licensed product...Giveaways in pack.'

Links to breaking international news on new licensing hits were also nurtured by TVNZ Enterprises through a range of relationships with equivalent organizations overseas, and the newsletter kept local clients informed about important overseas launches and promotional events. For example, TVNZ Enterprises had close connections with their ABC equivalent and the newsletter profiled a Sydney conference organized by the ABC (principal) and Gaffney International Licensing (Australian agent and international consultant), held to provide an update of opportunities offered by the **Bananas in Pyjamas** property:

Presentations of the 1999 plans, which include ABC for Kids tours, the **Bananas in Pyjamas** movie and new programming, will be made in a licensee meeting to be conducted shortly. The 1999 plans for the New Zealand territory will continue to be presented to licensees over the next few weeks and include the launch of the brand extension **Baby Bananas in Pyjamas**. (*Licensing Now*, 1998).

Maintaining aloofness from marketing associations in 1998 was clearly difficult, if not impossible, for **What Now?** producers, given that it was being produced within a commercial organization. Meanwhile, TVNZ Enterprises ensured that its global clients were showcased in both prime-time and off-peak schedules, something they were not empowered to do for TVNZ's own brand.

How could **What Now?** position itself within this commercial flow to its own advantage?

One logical possibility was to follow the example of international entertainment properties and offer its entertainment brand to a food company as a way of promoting itself to children. This would bring financial advantages to both **What Now?** and TVNZ Sales and Marketing, as well as provide valued promotional opportunities for the sponsor.

Skill was required to avoid crossing the line in terms of compromising NZ On Air. Pressure on the broadcasting licence fee had intensified—it had remained static throughout the 1990s, while production costs rose. As pressures on production budgets grew, certain commercial arrangements for **What Now?** became increasingly acceptable to NZ On Air, and these were brokered by TVNZ's Sales and Marketing. Sponsorships that could underwrite the costs of regional events and broadcasts, thus reflecting the lives of more New Zealand children on air, were particularly favoured by Palmer, who argued it made the difference 'between one camera, cheap production qualities, shoot and run' and 'value added' diverse content. But he also pointed out that 'sponsors aren't lying around waiting to be picked up in New Zealand, it's damn hard work.' (Palmer, 26/4/98)

The delicate issue for all stakeholders was to define what constituted 'good sponsorship' for all stakeholders, included Sales and Marketing, NZ On Air and parent groups, **What Now?** and sponsors. As Morrell explained some time later, 'good sponsorship is about a long-term relationship with a brand, not a form of product launch. It's about Meadow Fresh Milk, not the push for a newly flavoured yoghurt treat' (20/2/00). This clearly barred endorsements for products like Tazos, whilst opening the opportunity to other 'healthy', parent-approved products. During the late 1990s a range of such 'approved' sponsorship deals were included in the **What Now?** budgets submitted to NZ On Air.

## Defining 'good' sponsorship: the Weetbix Tryathlon

Just such a delicate deal was brokered with Sanitarium, a New Zealand company owned by Seventh Day Adventists, whose managers espoused a philosophy of 'ethical marketing'. TVNZ Sales and Marketing and Sanitarium marketers for the top-selling brand Weetbix negotiated the 'The Kiwi Kids Weetbix Tryathlon'. This was designed to encourage children's fitness and participation in exercise. In 1998 somewhere between 9,000 and 12,000 children aged 8–14 years undertook to swim, cycle eight kilometres and run four kilometres in order to receive a prize.

The Tryathlon campaign is worth contextualizing within the long-lived advertising campaign run by Sanitarium under the tag of 'Kiwi kids are Weetbix kids' which showed children rush inside to eat healthy Weetbix breakfasts and then sing the song of 'Weetbix kids'. A high-concept campaign in the mid 1990s built on this humble, but central, positioning in New Zealand culture. The series of advertisements featured reenactments of New Zealand sporting heroes using child actors and adult voiceovers and was extremely popular with New Zealanders. In one 'episode' Sir Edmund Hillary (played by a child with big ears and teeth) is pictured eating a huge plate of Weetbix before the final climb of Everest in 1953 and saying 'I knew a Sherpa once who could eat ten Weetbix in one go!' Tensing (also played by a child) asks in awe, looking up at Everest's peak, 'Do you think we can do it?' Hillary replies 'I know I can eat eight!', thus presenting Hillary as the quintessential white Kiwi hero and, by implication, Tensing as the survive exotic other.<sup>75</sup> Each advertisement ended with a choral rendition of 'Kiwi kids are Weetbix kids, Kiwi kids are Weetbix kids!' and Weetbix was embedded in the folk history of New Zealand.<sup>76</sup>

All of this patriotic promotional fun formed the intertextual backdrop to the **What Now?** sponsorship campaign. As the national sales and marketing manager put it, the campaign was about something larger than the event, it was about aspiration: 'give children the

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<sup>75</sup> Apparently Hillary did take Weetbix to the Himalayas! (Bell, 1996: 153)/

<sup>76</sup> In a strange twist, given its nationalistic market position, Weetbix was originally an Australian firm that was acquired by the American food group Sanitarium when it bought the Australian firm Grain Products in 1926. Until Weetbix was introduced into New Zealand from Australia during the 1920s, porridge was the breakfast of choice in New Zealand (Bell, 1996:154). Weetbix is an Australasian brand and the Australian Weetbix campaign also features the role of Weetbix in building the unique qualities of Australian kids.

taste of being an achiever and you give them something for life' (Richards, 1999). It also, hopefully for the sponsor, created lifetime customers for Sanitarium in the overcrowded and competitive breakfast cereals market. Sanitarium also hoped that the Tryathlon would function as public relations with parents by providing a challenging endeavour that enabled children to 'dream big whilst elevating the child in the eye of the parent' and thus position the brand in the trusted 'love zone' of the family (Richards, 1999). The Tryathlon's slogan was 'Every kid is a winner'. It was not about competition against others, but rather about setting goals for oneself. To this end everyone was awarded a 'prize' and had a chance to enter to win a range of spot-prizes such as Tryathlon drink bottles, bags, and crash helmets. These were fiercely sought after (Williams, 14/4/98), confirming the event's high status with children around the country. For both parties there were the range of opportunities for in-store promotions, T-shirts, caps and publicity on entry forms. The events themselves, held in a range of locations around the country, even presented occasions for corporate public relations with parents. It certainly fitted Weetbix's marketing objective to position itself as the brand of choice for 'kiwi kids' (and parents).

**What Now?** was involved throughout the 5-month life of the Tryathlon, and Weetbix used the show to encourage entries and give away promotional T-shirts and swim caps. They filmed the events in a range of areas of New Zealand, and then featured them as items on the show. The focus on 'giving it a go', fitness, and participation, not competition, as well as the field events that included children from a range of geographic regions, fitted well with NZ On Air's cultural objectives requirements. Even the product, a low-cost, healthy, high-fibre breakfast cereal, could be seen to be worthy of promotion during a year when children were reported to lack nutritional knowledge about the value of a healthy breakfast. There were clear synergies between the benefits for Weetbix and the producers of **What Now?**. For example, the financial injection of \$70,000 into TVNZ subsidized a range of field recordings and outside broadcasts that would have normally been prohibitive on the tight NZ On Air budget. The footage shot by the **What Now?** crew was collected in such a way that it could be edited and re-used by Weetbix's advertising agency in future television advertising campaigns. TVNZ Sales and Marketing provided extra, free, unsold advertising space to Weetbix for the campaign to play in.

This sponsorship campaign became an exemplar of 'good corporate citizenship' at the 1999 'Capturing Kids' marketing seminar. Here, in the nervous pre-election period, the

strategic value of a distinction between 'proactive' and 'reactive' marketing was clear. Proactive marketing asked what the company could do *for* children whilst exposing its brand (the win-win situation), and reactive marketing worked out what it could get away with. Proactive marketing, in the view of the Weetbix National Sales and Marketing Manager, Jim Richards, and the Sports Marketing Manager of Nike NZ Ltd, was the way to the future (Richards, 1999; Frazerhurst, 1999).

The example of Weetbix Tryathlon can be said to demonstrate how an experienced commercial sportscaster, like Tony Palmer, was able to use 'tactics of the weak' (to adapt de Certeau's felicitous phrase to production strategies) to gain advantage for **What Now?** by solving marketing problems for the larger corporate interests of Sanitarium and TVNZ. In such a way he could afford to transport crews to a range of regional field shoots featuring local children, thus putting more of New Zealand 'on air'.

### **Paying for more of New Zealand on air: the Queenstown live broadcast**

On Sunday 26 July, during the mid-winter snow festival, **What Now?** planned to broadcast live from the tourist town of Queenstown. This was a costly operation involving twenty people but it was hoped that it would provide regional coverage (and thus fulfil the proposal contract for regional cover), as well as a range of other items for later in the year, including clothing merchandise promos. For management, it provided 'an incentive for the team during the long winter months' (Palmer, 4/5/98). Sarah Pennock, Creative Director, was given 3 weeks in which to prepare and do a 'recce' visit to set up contacts. She knew that the broadcast could provide benefits for Queenstown, an international icon for New Zealand that was keen to promote its charms to New Zealand residents. Her job was to negotiate the benefits of the national Sunday morning live show into a range of financial and contra benefits for **What Now?** It is interesting to trace how perceptions of the crew of Queenstown as a holiday resort, as well as Queenstown promotional staff's perceptions of the value of **What Now?** as a promotional tool, shaped the images of Queenstown and its region that were broadcast to New Zealand children.

Pennock and the team drew up a wish-list of the 'unique things to do in Queenstown' that they wanted featured on **What Now?** The 'team imaginary' of what the winter playground *meant* in the wider 'national imaginary' began to shape the content of the final broadcast to the nation's children. Pennock took this list, which included

parapenting, jet boating, playing in the snow, lugging and skiing, to 'Destination Queenstown', who were the key intermediary between media companies and Queenstown tourism businesses. Within a week, local companies began to contact Pennock to set up deals (for example for free use of jet-boats and parapents) and expert staff for the planned grand arrival of the presenters in the show's opening shots. But Pennock had hoped for more. She wanted to set up a competition in which the Queenstown show would be promoted in weeks ahead of the broadcast. 'Kids from around New Zealand are going to phone in to go to the midwinter festival and we fly them down for the show and sort them out with ski passes and a range of goodies'. 'Destination Queenstown', as brokers for regional marketing, were

...very good but at the same time a little bit cynical about what we're [What Now?] are going to supply in exposure (for Queenstown)...most of what we asked for we got but some things we didn't get, for example we wanted them to have a lot of FOC (free flights and accomodation) ...they said they had used up all their FOCs and couldn't do that (Pennock, 21/8/98).

Later it became clear that 'Destination Queenstown' had calculated that the value of promotion on child targeted **What Now?** was not worth the provision of higher valued 'freebies'. It was galling for Pennock to have 'Destination Queenstown' congratulate the production team, after the event, for providing 'basically a 2-hour promo for Queenstown going out to 'family New Zealand' (Pennock, 21/8/98). **What Now?**, in her view, was yet again undervalued.

### **The What Now? club and merchandise**

Another way that Morrell hoped to position **What Now?** within the commodified flows of popular culture was through new plans for the **What Now?** club, magazine and web site, which began in 1997. This had been a dream of Morrell's ever since the hit of the 'J team' club for the after-school linking show of **Son of a Gunn**. She saw its potential for attracting a target age group, characterised by an intense desire to belong to collect and belong to a peer group. The club was designed to offer dual appeals. Firstly, there was the dexterous mix of older club role- models to reassure parents:

- To encourage a sense of belonging amongst our viewers that goes beyond the passive viewing of the programme
- To encourage our target audience to actively participate and communicate using the written word
- To promote viewer interaction both with WHAT NOW? Head Quarters and between children on a local basis (Children's and Young Person's Unit of TVNZ, 1997).

Secondly, there were 'kid'-powered appeals, clearly articulated by Laybourne at Nickelodeon in its 'kids manifesto'.



**What Now?** also had a web site that was ‘designed to keep up with kids who are up there with technology, we need to learn from them’ (Morrell, 24/2/98). Many corporates that targeted children were also building web-site clubs during the late 1990s. Cadbury’s web site, for example, had a colourful jungle featuring ecologically friendly information, whilst showcased a line of chocolate treats that contained Australian (not Kiwi) animals as collectables. It also provided a range of games and opportunities for market feedback and contact, and thus had similar activity-based appeal to the **What Now?** site. The problem for **What Now?** was that neither web site nor club could be part of the NZ On Air funding contract for a *television* programme. Such developments demanded lateral thinking and sponsorship.

By 1998 the club membership was booming and Jane Palmer was planning a line of branded clothing and other merchandise. In the club offices were three workstations, one dedicated to a database and web site. The floor was always covered with mountains of letters (handwritten and word processed), indiscriminate collections of photos of pets, parents, siblings, and piles of new editions of the colour-printed club magazine. The corners of the room were bulging with competition entries: everything from mad inventions made out of egg cartons and glitter, to hand drawn, candid portraits of ‘Mum’ wearing pink fluffy slippers, making breakfast. More than any other space in the old house and adjacent production studios, this room communicated the intensity of the interactive relationship between **What Now?** and its core audience of fans. The overwhelming response to the club in its first year, 1997, had surprised everyone:

We went from 250 entries for competitions at the beginning of the year to thousands of entries a week. We had some dire moments of feeling overwhelmed because we had no-one for a long while to open envelopes. Rose said that if she had to slit another envelope she would slit her wrist next (Palmer J, 24/2/98).

The club, however valuable to the effectiveness of the publicly funded objectives of the television programme, had to pay its way and thus the producers had to negotiate, yet again, a narrow line between what was acceptable commercial association, and what was not, for NZ On Air. The club’s emphasis on writing enabled the newsletter to find a sponsor, a coup for a children’s programme in a small country where sponsorship money was scarce. The sponsor, New Zealand Post, had the added advantage of remnant public service connotations, even though it, like TVNZ, had also been converted into a state-owned enterprise during the deregulatory years, and was required to return a profit to the government. New Zealand Post neatly fitted the **What Now?** philosophy whilst assisting with burgeoning postage costs of the club magazine and birthday notes, which by 1998

was costing \$50,000 for 125,000 post outs. NZ Post was attracted by the benefits of promoting the mail system to future potential customers during a period when it was facing market competition in a deregulating mail market, and threats from growing internet use, especially amongst children.<sup>77</sup> One key objective of the sponsorship was to ensure that ‘children choose New Zealand Post as their preferred communications provider’ (Colenso, 1998). A pen-pal system that matched members through the database, was proposed. It had the merit of fitting both the philosophy to promote viewer interaction with **What Now?** headquarters, and interaction between children, as well as encouraging a sense of belonging that went beyond passive viewing of the programme.

The sponsorship, worth \$120,000, was calculated as being cost-effective against the benefits the same budget would secure through other means, like advertising. Colenso Advertising wrote to TVNZ’s Production Marketing Manager on behalf of New Zealand Post in early December with a calculation that value for New Zealand Post consisted of 2.16 hours of television exposure over the next season. This time would need to be ‘owned’ by New Zealand Post and, thus, go further than just a logo appearance on screen. The time was to be expressed as 3 minutes exposure per week. This was to be delivered in 1-minute segments on three shows. ‘This breakdown of minutage reflects New Zealand Post’s desire to have a continuous and ongoing, rather than sporadic association with Shakespeare and the club.’ (Colenso, 1998). Cross-promotional ideas included a touring art display by **What Now?** contributors in the over three hundred New Zealand Post shops throughout New Zealand. This did not happen, as a result of the unexpected workloads from Auckland TVNZ headquarters falling on **What Now?** during 1998.

New Zealand Post wanted to give Shakespeare, the monkey mascot for the club, more exposure on the show in order to use him to ‘communicate messages about written communication and New Zealand Post—more so than simply putting a logo on something.’ He had already been developed into an animated character on the television show, a ‘very literate little fellow who is into reading and letter writing.’ (Palmer J, 15/4/98). One idea was to use him as a ‘suited’ character to visit primary schools to promote pen pals and written communication. Another was to use his animated character

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<sup>77</sup> Email contact with **What Now?** was also growing fast, with messages often being sent from school computers.

to present topics like addressing envelopes, collecting stamps, writing letters, limericks, poems, designing codes, tips on taking photos and other ideas for contacting pen pals.

The integration of Shakespeare into the television programme proved harder than anticipated, largely because of the difficulties of creating him as a rounded ‘personality’. ‘It’s asking a lot to devise a character and animate it. One person would never be asked to do that overseas: develop something from scratch, creative and ongoing campaign, all between other jobs’ (Palmer J, 30/6/98). Shakespeare, in the event, became a rather annoying little fellow with a high squeaky voice and erudite habits. Yet it is intriguing to note, in light of later anxiety about males rejecting the programme, that there was a steady demand from boys in the upper end of the demograph for the Shakespeare soft toy (Palmer J, 15/4/98).

Club merchandise, launched in 1998, carries many traces of inspiration from Nickelodeon and recent consumer research into children’s culture. In January 1998 Morrell talked of being impressed by the initiative of Saatchi and Saatchi who, at that stage, were setting up a children’s research base in the United Kingdom:

We have the same target audience of 5–14 years. They are the purchasers and the influencers of the future, so Saatchis and other big companies are saying that we need to look into needs and perceptions. They are looking at the psychological development of children. Lots of companies believe that if you just put a jingle in and some cliched phrase it will win, but kids want more than that. And I thought, if the big boys are getting into this then so are we, we are getting more subtle about it (Morrell, 17/2/98).

The difficulties with contra and other commercial presence in **What Now?**, as exemplified by the Eta/Tazo episode, fuelled Morrell’s appetite to create her own, more child-centred, ways of surviving in the marketplace. ‘By having our own product range we have more control over what we give away and can offer items that are good quality, affordable, suitable for our target audience, and encourage Club activities’ (Children’s and Young Person’s Unit, 1998). She believed that wider recognition of the **What Now?** brand was one important goal that could be achieved with her own line of merchandising for ‘Kiwi kids’. The team already knew that there was huge demand for T-shirts and caps, even though ‘we didn’t know if it was because there were so few of them (prizes) or whether it was because kids wanted them’ (J Palmer, 24/2/98). The plan was to produce a line of clothing emblazoned with the **What Now?** logo, which would function as both a promotion for the show and, in time, a financial stream. The latter had to be dealt with sensitively, given the public funding invested in **What Now?** and public

pressure to cut commercial content within it. They went to TVNZ Enterprises for expert advice.

It may appear perverse, at first reading, that TVNZ, whilst promoting a range of global entertainment brands, was unwilling to create a marketing and merchandising strategy for its own signature entertainment property for 6–12 year olds. This seems even more paradoxical given the success of marketing other international children's entertainment brands in the New Zealand marketplace. But these brands brought well-honed marketing histories, licensing manuals and market economies of scale. To develop a completely new line of untested merchandise in the small market of New Zealand primary aged children was a daunting prospect. TVNZ Enterprises pointed out that they did not have the skills to assist TV2's own children's brand **What Now?** because the strategies of designing, manufacturing and costing a line of new merchandise were beyond their skill base. Kerry Atwill, the Entertainment Licensing Executive, was impressed by the initiative but she noted that **What Now?** was developing merchandise from an established property which offered few possibilities for an extended range of soft character toys (other than Shakespeare), or other collectables. All that Enterprises, with the best will in the world, could suggest to **What Now?** was to *sell on* licensing rights as commercial opportunities to established manufacturers of lunch boxes and pens. This conservative path was certainly out of step with the expansionist strategies employed by marketing wings of larger public service organizations like the ABC and BBC, which took a vigorous entrepreneurial role in developing their own properties, both for domestic and international distribution.

Morrell and Jane Palmer, the club coordinator, embarked on a rapid self taught course in merchandising strategy. The clothing required dual appeals: it needed to be 'cool' and it also needed to appeal to thrifty parents. Morrell had long expressed admiration for Nickelodeon's astute management of children's cultural rights as a way of appealing to both children and parental purse strings and the following quotation expresses the spirit she wanted for her merchandise:

...kids, not children. 'Children' is the term adults use to talk about kids. 'Kids' is the word they use to talk about themselves. (At least in America. "Kids' doesn't translate well into other languages. In international usage, this rule becomes 'Nick is for you, by you, and about you and your world' (Nickelodeon, 1998).

The merchandise was promoted to parents as 'robust and hard wearing—good quality and good value for money.' (Children's and Young Person's Unit of TVNZ, 1998). 'We

wanted a reasonable price, not Nike label price, so it was within the range of average families and we wanted a product that was useful, that parents already purchased for children anyway.’ (Palmer, J, 30/6/98). Thus any merchandise was aligning with public service objectives of equality and utility rather than expensive branding designed to elevate a buyer from common taste. Weaving these multiple appeals was central to marketing success or failure.

They were fortunate to approach the clothing mail order company of ‘Postie Plus’ that ran a mail order Business from Westport and had retail outlets in larger centres. This low-key family business, committed to ‘family values’ (undefined), had developed partly as a response to the depressed economy and unemployment on the western coast of the South Island. They had considerable expertise in clothing; both in sourcing material from Hong Kong and retail markets. Says Jane Palmer ‘We luckily found the right company and they were looking for a challenge.’ (30/6/98). Postie Plus encouraged them to change the programme logo and limit colour range to make the brand stand out, and thus be more marketable on television. During 1998, **What Now?** gear contributed two pages to Postie-Plus’ merchandising catalogue eight times a year, in exchange for promotional support on television. This, yet again, was a commercial arrangement that had to cut a fine line when it came to endorsement of a product and advertising, which were not permitted. This difficulty was solved by giving **What Now?** product away as prizes and providing Postie Plus with promotion by providing the Postie Plus 0800 number for product (or the brochure in the case of children phoning).

The next stage of merchandising was to promote club activities that promoted peer-group activities. These were constructed to have a double appeal: to children for the peer-group camping adventure, and to parents, with memories of a simpler, outdoors Kiwi childhood, thus avoiding the accusation of promoting ‘rampant commercialism’. Jane Palmer planned a range to include torches, sleeping bags, secret code kits, overnight essentials kits, back-packs, tuck-boxes, and Shakespeare the monkey (for luck). As Palmer emphasised:

The merchandise is not there for huge profit. All it does is give kids what they want. The merchandising range is there to support the programme in philosophy. We want to get things like sleeping bags and torches and backpack which supports the idea of a club where you can go to your clubmate’s place and have a sleepover...and use your torch to read at night (Palmer J, 24/2/98).

But this line of club gear proved more difficult to organize. Postie Plus knew clothing but did not have experience in other lines of merchandise, and Morrell and Palmer were

disappointed at the ideas on offer in New Zealand, that were limited to yoyos, balls, pens and suchlike. The enormity of developing a diverse line of merchandising became increasingly clear. Buyers, some from Postie Plus, were contracted to take club ideas to Hong-Kong and bring back samples. Only then could artwork be designed, and only after that was it possible to work out whether items could be put into the small New Zealand children's market at a cost that was in the price range for families. Palmer tells what happened to the lunch box:

We had the idea of a metal tuckbox. Postie Plus sourced one for us on a buying trip. But the costing ruled it out because the box is big and full of empty space. Shipping it down would make the cost of selling it completely out of range (Palmer J, 30/6/98).

Children, however, responded to the promotions on the show, and the merchandise became a success (both as prizes and as catalogue items). New clothing lines were created twice a year as walking billboards for **What Now?**

### **Paying for rights**

There is one final illustration of the ornateness of financial management within **What Now?** that is necessary to lay out to complete this section. This relates the costs of creative and performance 'rights', and their consequences for creative decisions in **What Now?** In 1998 the much loved **What Now?** theme was dropped, despite the claim in the NZ On Air Proposal that this theme was as 'familiar to Kiwi kids as the theme of Coronation Street is to British kids'. The reason was cost. In 1998 the Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA) renegotiated music rights agreements in New Zealand to ensure that all music featured in programmes, including title music, was attributed to the correct rate. Palmer commented that music had been 'a bit of a fudge in the past, with many people in television using the wrong categories to do music returns... Sports were the worst, they used to cut to the beat and use the lyric in context', instead of drawing on cleared library CDs (Palmer, 30/6/98). It was possibly no different in children's television because the team discovered that the appropriate rights payments for the title song, written and performed by an American group, which played top and bottom of the programme and as stings, was approximately \$85,000 for one year. This clearly threatened a budget blowout. Palmer solved this by commissioning a replacement theme tune from a young New Zealand music school graduate. Thus **What Now?** became even more New Zealand on air by promoting a local musician's craft (Palmer, 30/6/98).

At one level, this story provides a cautionary tale about the rational economic interests of global capital—in this case, the tightening up of international rights agreements which work overwhelmingly in the favour of American rights owners. However, in this instance the policing of international rights saw the humble zone of magazine children’s television in New Zealand become *more* New Zealand on air as an *American* owned signature tune was replaced with a Kiwi original because of cost. It demonstrates that it is dangerous to generalize about the one-way impact of global processes on local culture.<sup>78</sup>

## Summary

This discussion of a series of negotiations over product presence, sponsorship and commercial rights in **What Now?**, illustrates how much **What Now?** remained, necessarily, embedded in commodified commercial television culture, despite NZ On Air funding. Producers organized their budgets with several objectives in mind: to maximise value for the child audiences, earn respect from the commercial broadcaster, and guard against censure from NZ On Air. These deals illustrate how the production team promoted the show’s cultural and symbolic value for the child audience, and how these deals, in turn, saw **What Now?**’s environment assessed for value and exploited as a promotional window by a range of local, regional and global brands. The Designated Marketing zone of early radio in America, which Minow saw shifting understandings of ‘community’ from older organic cultural ties to the new market communities defined by the signal radio signals, is now reversioned. In **What Now?** national public media space for children is increasingly configured by new consumption communities, brought into existence by commercial contractual arrangements of sponsorship, cross-promotion and creative rights.

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<sup>78</sup> The tune was commissioned for \$10,000

## CHAPTER ELEVEN - CASE STUDY PART III: THE ELUSIVE CHILD AUDIENCE

### Introduction

At the start of the end-of-year programme review in 1997, Morrell and researcher Rose Scheyvens (an experienced primary-school teacher) were faced with a problem. (Morrell, 26/9/97). People-meter ratings suggested that **What Now?** had performed disappointingly all year and it became a matter of urgency to work out why and, if necessary, adapt content and format for the same slot in 1998. Network bosses were interpreting disappointing ratings as a sign that the current creative strategy was not working for child audiences. These poor ratings results were keenly felt, and angrily rejected, by many in the team who believed that the true picture of children's appreciation of the programme was demonstrated by the overwhelming personal responses of children to the club, and that these responses demonstrated that the programme was very important to far-flung children. What was more worrying than the fact that the ratings measures contradicted club evidence (J Palmer, 15/4/98) was the fact that they came in the wake of content changes made earlier in the year as a result of focus-group responses. (Pennock, 27/2/98). These responses had been read as indicating that children wanted to see more children on screen. As Morrell put it:

I pushed more kids on screen, connecting with the idea of children seeing themselves...but do they really want to see themselves? We are really looking at it because it is a really tricky one. Rose feels that kids do like the kids' stories and do have some memory of them and stuff like that, but we need to hold our hand on our heart and say, we might say these words but do they *really* want to see themselves? (Morrell, 26/9/97).

Scheyvens was asked to use the results from end-of-year focus groups and questionnaires, gathered from a range of primary schools, in order to find out why ratings had dropped in spite of the production team's responsiveness to findings from children. If ratings evidence was to be believed, an awful, barely voiced possibility lurked for Morrell. ('We might say these words but do they *really* want to see themselves?') What if the role of television in 'empowering' local children, through incorporating local voices, was simply a romantic adult affectation which had grown organically and uncritically out of politically correct readings of modernist children's media rights (as managers, for example, believed)? What if children, as consumers, showed little desire for national media narratives, or spaces in which to tell each other stories about their lives? A range of important speculations about the **What Now?**'s audience runs through



production debates in 1998, as the core team grappled with how better to know and incorporate the child into the programme, in order to prevent a terminal ratings verdict.

### **The audience problem**

Of course it is impossible to ever know ‘the truth’ about the fluid diversity of children’s audiences because all constructs of the audience are reductive and flawed (Ang, 1991). This is as much the case for the qualitative humanity of focus groups, which promises to provide insights into ‘the pristine state of the natives’ (Born, 2000: 416), as it is for the crisp graphs of ratings. However, Morrell had invested much time and effort in the human face of focus groups; she had staked her reputation on advocacy for children and a wish to enable them ‘speak’, a belief that drew on current children’s media rights documents, as well as Nickelodeon’s ‘kid-power’ philosophy. Evidence from focus groups had always been an important element in her rhetorical battles with her broadcaster in the past, because the qualitative evidence demonstrated that she knew her audience intimately, and was in touch with what they wanted. They provided her with the cultural capital to be the favoured cultural intermediary for children with both NZ On Air and TVNZ. Any withdrawal from the use of focus groups in the current circular process of content generation and qualitative formative assessment would be a blow for Morrell’s hard-earned reputation that was built on listening to, and responding to, ‘views of children’ in **What Now?** Clearly it would be a calamity for the team’s credibility with stakeholders if focus-group evidence could be proven to be unreliable, but it would be worse still if they were to provide information that worked against her inclusive cultural agenda. During 1998 she was to find less and less comfort in what the focus-group results told her, as her broadcaster turned evidence to its advantage in order to dismantle the **What Now?** format.

The findings from the end-of-year focus groups were not helpful. Boys in focus groups showed a disturbing bravado and desire to ‘slag off’ **What Now?** The frustration of Morrell and the core production team was intensified by the knowledge that qualitative research with so-called ‘non-viewers’ of **What Now?**, (conducted by Dr Geoff Lealand in Hamilton and Annie Murray in Ruatoria) indicated a surprisingly wide knowledge of the format, programme details and personalities of **What Now?** (Lealand, 1997a; Murray, 1997). The researchers hypothesised that many of the children who said that they were non-watchers were, in fact, regular viewers or, at very least, watched

sufficiently often to answer content questions about the episodic 'Serial Stuff'. Indeed, some of those interviewed (including boys), pleaded to be invited on to the show.

If it could be shown that they did watch, as the team increasingly surmised they did, why did they need to pretend to their peers in focus groups that they did not watch? Why was it uncool, particularly for boys, to say that they watched, and let alone liked, **What Now?** What did this say about the effectiveness of focus-group research? Furthermore, if boys peer groups rejected **What Now?**, what implications might this have for the politics of survival when broadcasters were already so enamoured of **Squirt** and material that appealed to boys with 'attitude'? How could the team justify the female appeals required by NZ On Air when boys rejected such material in focus groups? Was there a case for NZ On Air to fund gender specific programming for girls, as a minority failed by the market?

Morrell's public response in 1997 and throughout 1998 was astutely political and pragmatically opportunistic. She was not naïve about the benefits and disadvantages of different research methodologies. She was well aware of the criticisms of ratings methodology, just as she was aware of how dangerous it could be to generalize from even large qualitative samples. She accepted that the issue of how best to demonstrate knowledge of 'the audience' was, ultimately, a political one. As a seasoned producer within the bowels of commercial TVNZ she was well aware that survival for **What Now?** depended on fulfilling her commercial remit to deliver children's ratings in numbers that would satisfy sales and marketing, thus justifying a place for the programme in the afternoon schedule. (Morrell, 12/11/97) She knew that ratings were the corporate benchmark for success despite other credible measures of *intensity* of audience satisfaction, like focus groups, bags full of mail, telephone calls and web-site hits from primary schools. In the end the programme lived or died according to ratings. The nervous business of 'streamlining' the anarchic, fickle, unknowable variety of the child audience underpinned all battles in 1998 over funding and constructing children's television culture.

Geoff Steven visited the Christchurch studios in early 1998 and whilst there he made it clear to the core production team that continuing broadcaster loyalty to the format for weekdays **What Now?** was dependent on an improved 1998 performance, after some disappointing ratings in 1997. Sarah Pennock's response to the visit was that 'We need to

make it more ‘Nickelodeon’, ‘create more attitude,’ ‘go for Nintendo-look graphics’ (Pennock, 17/2/98).

Morrell’s anxiety about juggling commercial performance with the demands of the NZ On Air educational ‘agenda’ were deepened further with news in February that the new channel manager for TV2 was Steve Smith. Recruited from Sales and Marketing, Smith was widely tipped to ‘take a far more hard-nosed market view about whether there is any mileage at all in making local children’s programmes’. (Palmer, 30/6/98).<sup>79</sup> Morrell was aware that he would be attracted to the commercial good sense of opting for cheaper cartoons in the afternoon in 1999, rather than continue to commission the culturally worthy and risky ratings project of after-school **What Now?** (Morrell, 24/2/98).

But even as she adapted the programme to meet the perceived wishes of her commercial broadcaster, Morrell was also considering the educational demands placed on her by NZ On Air. She commented, ‘I hope that we don’t have any recriminations with NZ On Air (over the entertainment focus)’ and then rhetorically reassured herself, ‘but they are as much concerned with getting value for audiences as anyone is, after all’ (Morrell, 17/2/98). The question became who was defining ‘value’ in the production moment: the broadcaster or NZ On Air.

### **The scheduling disappointment**

By the end of January, programme concepts had been transformed into fixed routines and the anticipation of the first on-air date grew. When the news broke that **What Now?** had been scheduled at 3.30pm on weekdays, not 4.00pm, which is the time Morrell had requested of the TVNZ board, there was general dismay. (Pennock, Gunn, J Palmer) Rose Scheyvens’ research had indicated that many children were not back from school or, if they were, they were only just home and making snacks. The slot was made even less attractive by its ‘lead-in’—28 minutes of infomercials (in the first weeks featuring ab-trainers and vegetable dicers). In 1997 during the hit cartoon **Rugrats** (between 3.30pm and 4.00pm), there had been a promotional jolt in the form of a 15-second cross-over to alert kids to ‘what was coming up’. Now **Rugrats**, a hit cartoon with the audience, was given the better position, and was on immediately *after* **What Now?**

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<sup>79</sup> In the event, he turned out to be helpful in promoting **What Now?** later in the year.

These scheduling decisions were viewed, by many in the team, as yet another example of Auckland's indifference to local programming.

In fact, it was the direct result of the programmer Julia Baylis' anxiety over the ability of **What Now?** to perform in ratings that had driven the shift in playing time back from the contracted 4.00pm to 3.30pm, where it was deemed to cause less of a problem. The argument from 'headquarters' was that if **Rugrats** could rate in the 3.30pm timeslot (in 1997 it received an average rating of 10) then **What Now?** should manage the same (Baylis, 9/9/98). In fact, programmers were increasingly concerned about **What Now?**'s ability to rate against the opposition, and the audience inheritance that might create for later in the afternoon.

NZ On Air shared the concern of the **What Now?** team over the shift in scheduled time:

Last year we waved a big stick and said that we would not give funding until **What Now?** was scheduled at 4.00pm. ...do we jump up and down for joy? No, but we are giving them the benefit of the doubt. They said that **What Now?** was being pummeled at 4.00pm by TV3 last year...in 3 months time there will be a performance discussion with the network (Wrightson, 13/3/98).

### **The launch disaster**

The launch of the 1998 season in February was also a disaster. The first programme was delayed a week from the advertised opening, which cut across a strategic promotional plan struck between Sanitarium (sponsor of the hugely popular Tryathlon sporting challenge) and TVNZ Sales and Marketing. The planned 2-week promotion for **What Now?**, in conjunction with Sanitarium, ending in a prize draw on the fifth day of the first week, was dropped. It was hard for the team to believe that programming had not talked to Sales and Marketing about the shift in start date, even though a promotion deal with the company had been struck. Almost as unbelievable to the team was the fact that *TV Guide* was not informed of the programme's changed start time, consequently listing it at 4.00pm. (Gunn) To compound these disasters, the lovingly scripted and directed promotional clips directed by Robin Shingleton, a young director with drama aspirations, were screened on low rotates in advertising breaks at off-peak times for the target audience and one, a Spice Girls take-off, held back until music rights were cleared.<sup>80</sup> The final blow came when the TVNZ publicity department was unable to organize any press

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<sup>80</sup> Accomplished with one phone-call by Palmer to the music distributor who was thrilled with the promotional exposure.

coverage because they were short staffed and had power shortages.<sup>81</sup> These initial promotions were particularly important for **What Now?** because other promotional routes, like finding magazine publicity, were almost impossible for children's programmes. As Jo Coleman from publicity put it:

People, a lot of people, don't like to admit that they do the whole big TV thing with their kids. 'No I do books and take them to exercise in the gym'. It makes them feel better as a parent that they are doing things (Coleman, 9/9/98).

The low cultural capital of children's television for parents that Seiter discussed in the USA appears equally in evidence in New Zealand.

Regardless of the unavoidable and unintentional reasons for poor promotions for **What Now?**, the team in Christchurch believed that Auckland ignored them as a creative force in TV2. The response of NZ On Air, who were watching \$4 million of investment going to air unheralded, was dryly expressed by the television manager: 'Be it on their own heads if they want to kill one of their own programmes dead'. (Wrightson, 13/3/98). This, in light of future developments, was a prophetic statement.

Meanwhile, creative producer Sarah Pennock decided to generate her own promotions for the programme. She rang the media to try to get a presenter photographed at Auckland's 'Teddy bears' picnic' and she drew on residual public-service sentiment attached to **What Now?** She rang 200 principals of schools in the North Island and was pleasantly surprised at their willingness to accept flyers for distribution, for a programme that was a 'New Zealand cultural institution' (Pennock, 24/2/98). When asked by the researcher what she would do with an unlimited budget if she wanted to position **What Now?** as 'cool' within the larger cosmos of popular culture entertainment, she responded:

I would run a huge promotional campaign...I would put the programme on when children are watching...I would have a gunge machine on the road permanently in malls...I would get satellite links with people like Michael Jackson...wouldn't kids be in awe if we could get Will Smith? I've already tried contacting TVNZ's LA publicist to talk him into getting the **Friends** cast to wear a **What Now?** T-shirt and say 'Watch **What Now?** at 3.30 (Pennock, 24/2/98).

She was not to know that TV3 was about to schedule the BBC's early-childhood programme targeting 2–4 year olds, **The Teletubbies**, at 3.30pm, and that even TVNZ's One Network News would have a hand in promoting it.

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<sup>81</sup> The old power-grid in Auckland's central business district overloaded and plunged the centre into power failures.

**What Now?** came to air on Monday 23rd February, preceded by infomercials, which rated at an asterisk (too few viewers to be measured), or a '1' (1 per cent of the sample hooked up to people meters and tuned in at the time). The programme was followed by the 1997 high-rating lead-in, **Rugrats**. In the first weeks **What Now?** was scheduled against **Brand Spanking New Doug**, followed by **The Jungle Book**, on TV3. It was not a great surprise to Palmer that **What Now?** did not rate in the first week, given its lack of promotion in its new backwater 3.30pm slot after infomercials. It earned ratings ranging from a 2 on the first day to a high of 5.3 in the second week. However, he did not disguise his disappointment, given that it had done better in the previous year, except when scheduled against Disney's **Aladdin**. According to Andrew Shaw (when interviewed about these events later in the year) any disadvantage due to promotion should have been self-correcting within a week:

There is little point to promote a show that has been on for 14 years. Frankly, if you do not know that it is there, you are either Ray Charles or you are deaf and the weekday ones are their own promotion and are promoted on Sundays (Shaw, 11/9/98).

Shaw appreciated (from his own time working as a presenter in children's programmes) that 'it is very easy to feel marginalized and not loved', but it was important to invest promotional budget on prime time where the company earned money. He pointed out curtly that 4.00pm had not worked for **What Now?** in 1997, when it was put up against **Aladdin**.

In the fourth week (17 March) TV3 scheduled **The Teletubbies** against **What Now?** As Palmer put it:

Bettina Hollings is a very clever and instinctive scheduler. She knows when she's got something that works with a given target and she will flog it there. She doesn't have any hangups. She has a very good instinct for what fits where (Palmer, 20/3/98).

On the 20 March Palmer issued the following to staff, in the regular email communication called '*What's happening dudes*'. 'Dudes, the best rating days have been the least slick and worst ratings were Wednesday and Friday which were our best shows'. He wanted to reassure his young team that ratings did not relate to 'production quality'. Ratings, in his experienced view, were a fickle measure of success in off-peak time. He went on:

Auntie Bettina [Bettina Hollings, programmer at TV3] has put **Teletubbies** against us during the week this week – the hottest pre-school show in history—but good for us in the long run because it

is being watched in equal numbers by the under four's and drug crazed twenties. As expected, it outrated us on day one, but by mid week we overtook it (Palmer, 5/5/98).

The question in the first few weeks appeared to be simply how long a fad for 2–4 year olds could distract 5–14 year old viewers. The results of this scheduling of a global hit against local content was 'deeply predictable' to Wrightson at NZ On Air. 'Gosh the ratings went down when **What Now?** was shifted to 4.00pm because it didn't provide a cost benefit, and gosh, the ratings went down when the competition intensified [with a global hit]' (Wrightson, 25/3/99).

Soon, though, as the ratings 'glitch' extended into weeks, questions shifted. Palmer, who had confidently announced that ratings were only useful to create an awareness of a trend had to admit that the trend was relentless. The broadcasters already nervous about the format of **What Now?**, asked themselves a question. Had the half-hour experiment in after-school local block programming reached the end of its life cycle on commercial television? The ratings trend from March until June showed that **What Now?** was in a 'chronic dive' against **The Teletubbies**. (Gubbins, audience researcher for programming, 11/9/98). On 10 June Gubbins ceased tracking it against **The Teletubbies**. A terminal ratings verdict had been given for weekday **What Now?** In September he noted, 'weekends are still beautiful', but they were of little interest because they were non-commercial (Gubbins, 11/9/98).

### **The problem with The Teletubbies**

The meaning of 'ratings' requires analysis, but this is left aside for a little longer in order to explore how **The Teletubbies** (targeting 2–4 year olds) became a problem for 5–14 year-old rating samples in New Zealand. **The Teletubbies**, launched in Britain in March 1997, was a hit in many countries. Just prior to its release on PBS in the USA, Britt described it as:

Beatlemania for the 2 to 5 year olds...after a single by England's new Fab four – Po, Laa-Laa, Dipsy and Tinky Winky—rocketed to No 1 on the UK pop chart the first week it went on sale in early December (Britt, 1998: 12).

The show had a wide cult following in many countries, but in New Zealand the fad appeared to engulf the attention of all ages with astonishing speed (Noone, 1998: 16). It is worthwhile investigating this short, parochial, but startling episode in the cultural history of television, because it offers an excellent illustration of how global and local marketing to children articulate with each other, using the television medium.

Paul Greaney, who was, at the time, Managing Director of Hasbro New Zealand, (distributor for **The Teletubbies** merchandise) observed that ‘we knew about the success of **The Teletubbies** in the UK and what we were keen on doing was not over-hyping because we were restricted in stock in the initial stages’ (Greaney, 14/2/99). He was, he adds, appalled when TV3, the rights holder to the programme, decided to put **The Teletubbies** on air in a clear ‘spoiler’ for **What Now?**, without consulting the distributors of merchandise. Greaney knew, to his cost, the chaos caused by earlier lack of coordination between media and toy licensees and retail distributors. Firstly, TV3’s programming decision hurt Hasbro financially because the merchandising appeal of a toy property, depended heavily on the exposure provided by the programme launch. Greaney quoted one expensive February toy launch for **Mummies** that flopped when the broadcaster decided, without warning, to shift the cartoon start by 6 months (Greaney, 14/2/99). If a cartoon or early-childhood programme appeared when there was no product available to be sold, the fad was likely to have waned by the time the container loads of imported merchandise arrived. Timing was extremely critical in New Zealand for toy marketers because new crazes saturated the small New Zealand market within 3 weeks of a television launch, rather than the months or even years that were commonly reported in larger countries. Greaney gave **Barney** as an example—**Barney** took 4 to 5 years to ‘take off’ in America and when Hasbro gained the merchandising rights to it in New Zealand the Australian rights holders advised them to have a 2-year promotional plan. But it was put on New Zealand television and became a hit within 3 weeks.

It’s getting the networks to realize how our markets work. But we don’t have a lot of influence over the networks, they are not close enough to the suppliers and toy retailers and their needs (Greaney, 14/2/99).

Unfortunately, there was a lack of merchandise in New Zealand when **The Teletubbies** was launched on TV3 and this created a parental panic. ‘We said to TV3, if you put it on in March it is going to be an absolute nightmare. They still put it on at the beginning of 1998, and we couldn’t sell any product until August’ (Greaney, 14/2/99). What made the unsatisfied demand on toys an even greater problem for marketers was that **The Teletubbies**, targeting 2–4 year olds, was scheduled by Hollings after school on TV3.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> This was a non-commercial programme slotted into a primary targeted commercial zone. Some attempts were made to show advertisements until complaints resulted in them being withdrawn. This meant TV3 was in the extraordinary position of giving away advertising inventory in preference for a ratings win, which, according to ratings, was lost back to TV2 with **Rugrats!**



Parents, pestered by their primary aged children, or bullied by the two-year-old siblings of those children and panicked by other parents, frantically sought merchandise.

The demand was amplified by a steady stream of international news stories picked up from satellite feeds by TV3, and even TVNZ's **One Network News**, about the consumer frenzy for merchandise prior to Christmas 1997 in Britain. Long after the launch, Sarah Pennock exclaimed 'I do not believe TVNZ news gave (TV3's) **Teletubbies** so much coverage!' (Pennock, 2/12/98). It has been impossible to trace the sources of these public relations/news stories. However, Greaney states that public relations was successful in generating a range of stories in Britain for **The Teletubbies**, and comments further that 'public relations' in various forms was 'becoming a preferred form of marketing' (Greaney, 14/2/99). For example, **The Teletubbies** 'public relations' kit and video material had been demonstrated to be more cost-effective than advertising in New Zealand.

The British stories also demonstrated the strange imaginative hold that the show gained with youth who were catching the show on return home from all-night raves. *Sky International Magazine* in Britain, for example, trumpeted in headlines, 'Tubby-thumping: They said that **Teletubbies** was just for kids, they were wrong, Sky unveils **The Teletubbies** merchandising range—for 18 year olds and over. Don't be afraid.' (*Sky International Magazine*, 1997).

New Zealand experience echoed the British experience. Despite no television advertising for **The Teletubbies** in New Zealand, the television show and astute public relations were sufficient promotion to ensure that as container loads reached New Zealand stores, a parental buying frenzy broke out. Andrew Shaw commented that 'there was hysteria out in the shopping malls with mums throttling each other to try and buy the dolls' (11/9/98). The voracious parental desire for toys appeared to be a vindication of the marketing strategy of 'pester power'. This homegrown frenzy over merchandising became a story in its own right in New Zealand. Local press and television filmed guards on the doors of retail outlets, and then filmed the parents as they stampeded to reach stands of **The Teletubbies**. A case could be made that the craze for **The Teletubbies**

constituted a weird form of media panic, this time one where *parents* were driven to buy.<sup>83</sup>

## Ratings

One commentator has observed that measuring television use in the 1990's 'is like trying to shovel smoke' (*American Demographics*, 1997), but there appears to be no such self-doubt amongst television programmers in New Zealand. Ratings are the reified measure used to make life and death decisions over renewing programme contracts, and thus the livelihoods of production teams. For those with contracts in local television, September to November is always a season of nervously tracking ratings figures.

Ratings became the daily shorthand audience evaluation within 1998 **What Now?** An outsider to the television industry sitting on the old couch in the production offices of **What Now?** would be puzzled about the daily banter about 'aiming at '14s and 15s like **Rugrats**' and 'improving on last weeks 2s and 3s', and 'the asterisk for the infomercials doesn't help our lead-in.' If a programme managed '14s and 15s' after school it was a cause for celebration, one rating 2s and 3s was a disappointment, an 'asterisk' alarmed everyone, because it indicated an audience too small to rate. It is important to analyse what is meant by this discourse of ratings and the way that tracking ratings defined the perceived commercial success of a programme within 1998 season.

'War' metaphors characterize programmers' talk about 'winning the battle' over ratings, even in off-peak children's television. Programmers are constantly plotting from daily ratings on line spreadsheets, which offer comparisons between the current year and past years for the same time slot, as well as compare track record against opposition ratings (see Appendix Seven). 'Winning the slot' in terms of ratings points and share is viewed as critical for channel advertising revenue. Ratings printouts become strategic tools for programmers and sales and marketing during the year of production, as well as for use in

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<sup>83</sup> Andrew Shaw, overseas programme purchaser for TVNZ, rejected buying **The Teletubbies** on the grounds that he did not 'think it was particularly educational', and that the BBC was asking 'an arm and a leg for it. 'I thought that if it was an educational programme designed for pre-school audiences in a non-commercial environment it should be priced accordingly. The BBC has 2.1 billion [unclear if dollars or pounds] to run its business. They get another 400 million from programme sales and their new boss expects them to raise BBC's worldwide sales income by 35-40 per cent in the next 2 years. The BBC is a public service broadcaster at home and a robber baron overseas' 11/9/98.

plotting future scheduling strategies. All producers in commercial television know their programme is judged by ratings performance.

Ian Gubbins, audience researcher for TV2's programming team, used a range of visual metaphors of movement when he talked about children's ratings points.

You can see when a show is gaining momentum and tracking positively against the opposition or, alternatively, diving. Children can suss out a new show with lightning speed. Children are great switchers (Gubbins, 11/9/98).

Of daily children's viewing habits he says, 'The viewing pattern tracks like a kind of bell curve...the final peak finishes about 7.30' (see Appendix Six). Children, unsurprisingly, recorded most viewing at 7.30pm on people meters, the time when children could be expected to be at home watching with their parents and when hit programmes, like **The Simpsons** and **Shortland Street** were on. In response to a question about the scheduling of **What Now?** at 3.30pm, rather than the team's (and NZ On Air's) desired 4.00pm of the previous year, he concedes that the availability of children to watch after school is constrained by family patterns, sport, and travelling time to home. 'In Invercargill a child may reach home 5 minutes after leaving school, in Auckland they may have to attend after-school care and then drive 40 minutes or more in peak-hour traffic.' But he also points out that he could demonstrate that children switched from **The Teletubbies** back to **Rugrats** on TV2 with pinpoint accuracy and that **What Now?** had problems gaining momentum after school in 1997 at the 4.00pm slot, even with the lead in of the hit **Rugrats**, especially when **Aladdin** was placed against it. 'Opposition is an enormous factor in the success of a local programme', he claimed (Gubbins, 11/9/98).

When asked, Gubbins defended the sample size for children as 'a small but proven and robust sample.' The 440 households that had meters in New Zealand were 'a statistically valid cross-section of socio-economic groups, geographical locations, age groups and population mix' which were independently audited to ensure the validity of their multi-variate analysis of viewing for free-to-air television and video recording.<sup>84</sup> Two key numbers can be found at the bottom of daily ratings charts. The first measure is the *potential* audience, which, in the case of 5–14 year olds in New Zealand in 1998, equated to approximately 588,000 children. The second was the *sample*, which is the number of people in the 5–14 year old age group in households with people meters. Palmer calculated that if the second figure was between 195 and 200, it would mean that there

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<sup>84</sup> This coverage was increased to 470 in 2000.

likely to be fewer than 100 'people metered' households with two, or even fewer, children tuning in after school. In his calculation that would mean that one rating point for the 5–14 year old audience represented the tastes of 2,900 children. This made him angry:

Doubtless the statisticians will have a million reasons why this is a perfectly valid method and base from which to extrapolate everything...but jeez mate!! What a bloody fickle way to judge a few million bucks worth of production ...I'm told that there is a provision for households who have kids visiting that day to include the extras in their sample. To get the guts of it, a rating point in our timeslot equates to two people registering on a meter. A birthday party in one household could really boost the ratings for the day (*What's happening dudes*, 13/6/98).

Whereas most in the industry express some confidence in the broad 'robustness' of prime time ratings figures, they are far more cautious when it comes to off-peak minority audiences, where the tiny sample reporting on their people meters might become highly unreliable. The average sample size for all 5–14 olds is usually around 123 children. This fickleness of ratings figures for off-peak-time child audiences was, embarrassingly, illustrated by events on the 26 July 1998 when CanWest found unexpectedly high ratings in the 5–9 year old demographic for TV3's youth programme *Ice TV* and infomercials on TV4, as well as late night television broadcasts on 31 July and 1 August. This anomaly was tracked to one Northland people-metered home in which a home-handyman had tinkered with an antenna and assigned channels incorrectly. A press story commented that 'According to ACNielsen this household was unusual in as much as it contained *four* children aged from five years to nine years', thus skewing the ratings' (Lewis, 1998).

Those producing children's programmes were disheartened that citizens paid for them from a licence fee *because* they could not attract commercially attractive audiences. The very reason that children's programmes had an assured proportion of NZ On Air's annual budget was because of market failure for children—they would not be made otherwise. As Palmer said in one of his emails to the team:

Your licence fee is compulsory, a tax, so NZOA gathers and distributes tax payers money...TVNZ is a taxpayer owned company...much of the dividend TVNZ is required by the government to pay (theoretically back to taxpayers)...you could say is simply reissued through NZOA, not just to pay staff but also to use facilities owned by...guess who? Confused? (*What's happening dudes*, 13/6/98).

Lealand (1997b) argues that ratings cannot be used to answer qualitative questions about satisfaction levels and intensity of engagement, nor can they take into account how much viewing is influenced by peers or family; or the haphazard way that children and families view programmes; nor can they be used to assess the effectiveness of advertising, or the worthwhile impact programmes might have on children's values and future choices as

citizens. Key questions (such as intensity of engagement) that matter to advertisers, children's producers, and parents, simply cannot be answered by using the prime decision-making tool of broadcasters. Yet quantitative ratings evidence continues to be the prime tool used for making judgements about scheduling and advertising costs, as well as whether to recommission a programme. Ratings discourse is enormously powerful and decides the future livelihoods of dedicated production teams. But some in the industry are angry about ratings power because they believe that it has a deeply conservative effect on content. Ratings, in their view, discourage experimentation and encourage the cloning or replication of successful overseas formats, just as critical economists have argued. Lealand comments dryly that 'Like many a report, a 'people meter' audience report skillfully confounds truth and banishes ambiguity' and programmers themselves are happy to concede that, in the words of Bettina Hollings, 'Ratings are the myth we all believe in' (Lealand, 1997: 3).

The last word on ratings should go to Palmer, who wryly commented to the team, 'now about those poor ratings...stop shagging around and get em back up guys. But isn't it funny how we believe them when they're good though?' (*What's happening dudes*, 13/6/98).

In March Morrell returned from London where she had attended the Second World Congress on Children's Television, convinced that the only way to ensure diversity of local children's television was through re-regulation. She compared the situation in Britain, Australia and the USA with the dire situation in deregulated New Zealand. 'I had to laugh when Lorraine Heggeseey said 'the BBC share from children has dropped to 60 per cent with pay television and a key issue is getting promos played in prime time, cor, I can't believe it' (Morrell, 19/4/98).

At the top of her agenda for Screen Producers and Directors Association (SPADA), an industry group already lobbying for local quotas in New Zealand (Mogridge, 1998), was a recommendation for children's quotas and requirements for key public service genres for children like news and drama. 'I think something peculiar has to happen for children's [programming] because broadcasters are about broad audiences and profit. New Zealand is an anomaly in all this. We are like a developing country, but we are not developing' (Morrell, 19/4/98). She planned a visit to Broadcasting Minister Maurice Williamson to convince him of the need for a news programme for children.

[Even though] it is probably flogging a dead horse knowing how our government is so dry. This [news programme] should be non-negotiable and should exist by right and not be contestable. Politicians in other countries don't question the need for high quality news or drama for children (Morrell, 19/4/98).

She wanted to go even further and inspire him to work on providing a news service on-line into schools, which, interestingly enough, was also the dream of Ian Taylor. But she also continued to ponder on the paradox of 'children speaking' that had begun to vex her during the 1997 focus-group summative review, especially as April ratings continued to erode, along with broadcaster loyalty to the programme. One returns once more to the ways in which research constructs the viewing child. Nowhere does the capital of 'knowing the audience' become more apparent than during the seasonal reviews of content and performance conducted by the creative team of **What Now?** The next section analyses April's 6-week formative review as a case in point.

At the time of the April formative review, Sundays were consistently rating highly, and Thursday was the best weekday. Palmer commented that he didn't know if it was the day or the animals that provided the healthy rating. However, the bad news now was that they had been beaten, or at best equalled, every day for six weeks by TV3 on weekdays and, in Palmer's pithy words, 'by and large we are being slayed.' He reminded the young team not to lose sight of the fact that 'the formats have been rebuilt from the ground up and that overall the shows are looking lively, fresh, energetic and cool. We can't despair about the dismal ratings...everyone can feel proud of what's going to air' (*What's happening dudes*, 3/4/98). But it was becoming clear to the core production team, including Palmer, that if ratings did not improve soon, both format and content would need to be radically reviewed.

### **March and April focus-group results**

In late March and early April Pennock conducted a series of what Palmer called 'intense sessions with small target audience groups in which they tell us directly what they like, expect and don't want.' as preparation for the review. Palmer noted that early feedback indicated that:

We're not very good at knowing instinctively what kids want and like...some of the stuff we've collectively sweated blood over...they don't really give a shit about and conversely some of the stuff we thought were marginal...they love (*What's happening dudes*, 3/4/98).

These focus groups traditionally provided children's responses to the programme after six weeks on air in order to groom and tweak content. In 1998 the core production team

was also interested in finding answers to some of the troubling questions raised by the audience research conducted in late 1997.

Pennock drew focus groups for weekdays from a mix of higher and lower decile schools in Canterbury, including one Catholic school. She conducted them in separate groups of boys and girls and attempted, not particularly successfully, to keep age bands narrow, with some in the upper age range and others in the lower age range. She had no pretensions as to the role of the groups. They were designed to be a rough and ready sample of current opinion in the target audience. Pennock conducted the majority, each time within the school environment and using the same set of video clips from a range of elements.<sup>85</sup>

The biggest 'gripe' was that of fans complaining about the difficulty of getting through to the programme on the phone. The majority thought 4.00 pm was the better time for the weekday programme to be scheduled, and many of the self-described non-viewers mentioned sport clashes as a reason for not watching. The clips shown to focus groups often received a rapturous response. The **What Now?** merchandise and programme promos, which had been shot by Robin Shingleton, a young director with drama aspirations, were very popular, particularly the promo constructed to show the Spice Girls doing a take-off of a deodorant ad, with boys in Spice Girl drag (Jason with a belly tattoo and Anthony licking lipsticked lips). Shavaughn Ruakere was popular with boys and girls for her beauty and cool clothes. 'Fill yer pants', the gunge quiz show with siblings, was a hit. Field items were much enjoyed, (including one in which Dean eats Wasabe and another where Bee pays a birthday visit to a club member).

Again, just as in the 1997 summative reviews, gender preferences were quite marked and skewed towards female viewers in the focus groups. Focus groups were conducted in separated boys and girls groups because it is widely accepted that boys silence girls in such situations. This strategy tended to reify gender, thus amplifying gender differences at the cost of exploring common cultural ground. Girls consistently demonstrated more

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<sup>85</sup> In April the project consisted of five focus groups comprising 33 children (in total) from Christchurch primary schools for weekdays; two focus groups comprising 15 children from one country and one city school, and a focus group with non-viewers and material collected from others during field trips. Later focus groups widened the net to include children from a range of regions, often conducted by journalists on field trips and Pennock on 'recces' for research.

knowledge of the show, and games in particular. As Hodge and Tripp had noted years before, this could be attributed to the observed fact that girls enjoyed showing off their detailed knowledge, in contrast to boys who very quickly became restless and preferred to posture to their peers. Ominously, a significant number of boys continued to joke to their peers about how **What Now?** was ‘old’ and ‘babyish’. This was especially galling since many of the same boys confessed to watching **The Teletubbies**, which had a target audience of 2–4 years of age. Girls tended to want better music, pop groups and ad take-offs. Boys wanted better cartoons, stars and sports heroes and repeatedly commented that they thought **What Now?** was a ‘girls show’ with ‘too much talking’, and that watching **The Teletubbies** and cartoons was ‘more fun’. ‘Cartoony’ was an adjective used, on more than one occasion to describe ‘good’ content. This was a concern. The team knew that the Auckland managers continued to maintain the view, long held by American broadcasters, that boys were the critical audience to attract and keep, because girls would watch boys’ cartoons but boys would not watch girls’ preferences (Schneider, 1987; Wartella, 1997: 55). It appeared that focus groups were providing more ammunition for TVNZ managers to use in attacks on the programme. The frustration for the production team was that they believed that boys watched much more of **What Now?** than they admitted to in focus groups (Palmer, 26/4/98).

### **The April review**

At the April review, held over several early workday mornings in the Christchurch studios, the Unit was presented with the report on ratings, a report from Auckland programmers and the summary of the focus groups as the first agenda items. The discussion over what the team was managing to do—or not do—for children, took into account the negative ‘reality check’ of these formal audience reports. The team’s ‘gut instincts’ about the programme and the child audience, as well as the evidence provided by ratings and focus groups, were expressed freely during the discussion of the programme elements that followed the formal reports. In these animated discussions the ‘team talk’ confirmed their advocacy for children and so defined ‘what children want’.

In 1998 members of the team had contact with large numbers of children in the course of live productions and filming field items. In fact, the informal contact with children provided by studio audiences, club mail and phone contact outnumbered the so-called ‘representative’ children involved in ratings or even focus-group research. For example,



by September 1997 the club had approximately 35,000 members and membership was rising daily. The largest group of members consisted of children 9–11 years of age, and children at the upper end of the demograph and boys were not in a significant minority. Competitions drew up to 5,000 entries (for animal jokes!) and there were 4300 for ‘Easter Good Deeds Friday’. When mobile club desks were placed in shopping centres ‘only for a few hours’, ‘700 new members were signed up (thus demonstrating the show’s overwhelming popularity)’ (*Proposal document*, 1997). These patterns had continued in the early months of 1998 and it was clear that the club database and web-site contact opportunities provided a vast interactive resource for both programme content and the needs and interests of the target audience. Club members provided information on hobbies and interests and feedback on the content of the programme, and each letter to the club expressed the views of a loyal audience member, often in expressive detail. The club magazine, which re-enforced the content of the programme, was a way of providing kids feedback ‘one to one’, given the difficulty of reaching the studio by phone. The club appeared to offer a powerful panoptic form of surveillance of its loyal child audience that felt far more ‘effective’ than ratings to the team, partly because the results could be used to groom the television programme for the audience.

The team also found it hard to accept the ratings evidence on the basis of their own experiences with children. Each cameraperson, editor, TPA, scriptwriter, director and presenter watched countless children reacting to items and responding to content, and field items involved children from a range of regions in a diversity of contexts, many suggested by children. Thus each team member expressed a passionate ‘commonsense’ view of the child audience, based on personal experiences, and these were expressed during the review. Comments such as ‘You cannot go into a school in the country without being mobbed’ (a cameraman); ‘they’re crazy about Serial Stuff’ (presenter); ‘what about those bags and bags of mail?’ (club coordinator); were typical of frustration over the cold rationality of ratings being viewed as the currency for success. Paranoia about Auckland programmers’ treachery palpably intensified, but it is also interesting to observe how this advocacy role ‘for children’ at other times, also saw them in disagreement with other stakeholders, like NZ On Air and parents.

The team’s ‘commonsense’ views were also, naturally, drawn from personal memories of childhood. Given their youth, many in the team drew on pleasurable childhood memories of popular music, advertising and cult television programmes like **McGyver**, and as a consequence, the judgements of middle-aged parents and NZ On Air board members

about children's culture were viewed with some scepticism. Some team members aligned themselves with children who, quite understandably in their view, rebelled against after-school educational television. 'Kids don't want to be sat down and educated after school' (graphics); 'My theory is that kids want to come home and blob out...they want to watch something funny and entertaining' (programme researcher); 'The most important thing is good role models, school is hard enough' (production assistant). Even those who would like to have more information and education on the show were realistic about what was possible (a mix of belief in ratings and political good sense). 'I'd like to do more on country towns and history but that wouldn't work because **Get Real** (an information show) bombed' (scriptwriter). It is clear that pleasure in commodified culture expressed by the young team, stood in contrast to the rejection of commercial culture by many middleclass parents attracted to lobby groups. Parents could be allies when they supported the need for children's programmes, but parents were also perceived to be dangerous when they expressed their ill-informed judgements about content 'on behalf of children'. Parents, and lobbyists like The Children's Television Foundation (if known at all), were even viewed by some as misguided and dangerous. Parents, even those not rigidly on the side of 'just high culture', expressed fond memories of public-service driven children's television, and slower, less commercial, television styles. They criticised the hectic pace and popular culture in **What Now?** They were powerful with NZ On Air and asked deeply threatening questions, the most worrying of which was 'what is **What Now?** *without* its elements of commercial popular culture'?

Critically for this case study, in 1998 NZ On Air drew on dual measures for success. On the one hand it drew on measures of *non-commercial* culturally diversity, as outlined by objectives under its Broadcasting Act, and brokered by lobby groups like The Children's Television Foundation and Child Media Watch. On the other hand, it also placed some emphasis on the clean instrumentality of ratings because they facilitated judgements over cost-effectiveness with the target audience.

As Palmer had predicted, some of the elements that the team had lovingly constructed did not appeal to the focus-group sample of target audience. Indeed 'Muesli', the resident rock group, when not described as a cereal, was variously described as 'not very cute', 'don't like the music', 'Oasis do it better', 'they are not much good' (focus-group results). Replacement suggestions included the Backstreet Boys, Aqua and Savage Garden. The band was dropped shortly afterwards, along with many new graphics and some of the games (like the sheep trial, 'Get in Behind', which was considered 'as

interesting as watching paint dry' by one of the team). Action was taken to tighten production and technical systems, as well as improve and streamline the current weekday themes and strands. Whatever the team felt about the unfairness of current ratings, they agreed they had to be considered seriously; there was a general consensus that the show needed only minor tinkering and that ratings would improve once the cult status of **The Teletubbies** waned with the target audience. The group discussion, congratulations and creative brainstorming had boosted team morale, after the pall of poor ratings.

Many New Zealand producers struggling in the deregulated environment of the 1990s expressed a natural nostalgia for the BBC tradition of 'let adult creatives drive the bus'. They believed that both quantitative and qualitative audience research worked against creativity because of its conservative use by broadcasters as a risk assessor. Born, discussing the BBC during the late 1990s, argues that the apparent 'humanism and holism' of focus groups:

...may appear progressive when compared to ratings, in fact focus group research was employed to yield new forms of reified and reductive representations of audiencehood. It functioned partly as a disciplinary tool by which strategists and commissioners could chastise producers for failing to meet what were described as audience wants, but which more accurately involved charges of failing to match the genres and successes of the competition (Born, 2000: 415).

Several producers opined privately that research dampened creativity because it only measured audience responses to what had already happened, and could never enable producers to engage imaginatively with the audience (Simpson: 2000). If children's opinions were limited to what they had experienced then, under deregulation, this experience was, ipso facto, only of programming that was commercially driven. As one producer commented sardonically 'in New Zealand **The Teletubbies** would never have got the nod'.

The discussion now shifts focus to illustrate how the team was organized to make magazine television for children and how they engaged imaginatively with their future child audiences. Underlying the practical business of putting the 6-day monster of a programme together (5 days live) lurked three recurring themes that signify wider cultural battles over shaping children's media culture. The first is best described as the battle over production 'style'. The second is the vexing problem of what is meant by role models and being 'famous in New Zealand'. The third relates to shaping the cultural geography of **What Now?**

## CHAPTER TWELVE - CASE STUDY PART IV: MAKING MAGAZINE TELEVISION FOR CHILDREN

### Introduction to the format and team

A live broadcast children's magazine studio show has every appearance of spontaneity. It is full of ad-libs, personalities directly addressing viewers who phone in, visible signs of 'rushed' construction and 'unexpected' events. In semiotic terms, its textual seams and sutures are visible, with many 'accidental' events arguably performing the task of demystifying how television is made. But this format appears free and spontaneous only as the result of the discipline of intermeshing factory production lines. The overarching disciplines of budgets, staffing, technical resources and the limits of the live studio space, already constrained the content possibilities for **What Now?** The proposal took these into account in its formatted architecture, as well as proposed diversity of content for the year's programme.

The details of format, style and content were refined at 'Project 1998', a series of workshops held late in 1997, and designed by Morrell to be 'brainstorming' sessions:

We were told to aim for the sky and not to worry about the budget, just think big so that they could water it down later. A lot of the ideas on the show came from this 'Project 98'. I worked on music day with Kate (Hawkins), who is a real music buff, Jason (Fa'afai) who is in a band and Neil (operational staff) who could inform us that live recording wasn't going to work easily. My job is now to make it all happen (Pennock, 27/2/98).

Jane Palmer, club coordinator and ex-librarian, worked on the games theme with a group drawn from a range of crafts. Ned, the graphic artist, came up with the idea for games called 'Stunt Sausages', where children were dressed as sausages to complete obstacle races, and a 'Fill your pants' item, in which gunge filled large plastic bloomers each time a child could not answer a question about their sibling. Jane Palmer commented 'You might think it disgusting but kids think it is a hoot'. She commented how much she enjoyed working with young graphic artists, 'who live in those little dark curious holes in their imaginations.' (Palmer, J, 20/2/98). This collaborative effort, which might see technical, scripting and research staff working together on one daily theme (Monday, entertainment; Tuesday, famous people; Wednesday, games; Thursday, animals; Friday, sports) and then reporting back to the full team for input. This encouraged the teams' 'ownership' of ideas and ongoing chat about the content of the daily live broadcasts. It

encouraged an atmosphere of experiment, playfulness and pride, as well as hard work and openness to peer review.

Pennock described the creative freedom of working in children's television after her experiences in news:

The people in news were quite arrogant about feeling they were on the cutting edge of television and that no other television was important. The attitude down here is 'well how can it be done?' whereas in news it was 'oh well it can't be done'. If you asked someone to do something in news you felt a closed attitude, whereas down here people are very open minded and creative. For example Pat the props bloke has sixty dollars a week but he comes up with whatever we ask for. They beg, borrow and make things and have lots of generous contacts in Christchurch who do it simply for the sake of **What Now?** (Pennock, 27/2/98).

Morrell took on young inexperienced workers, knowing that the trade-off for inexperience was strength of ideas and motivation to accomplish them (Morrell, 17/2/98). A key skeleton of experienced people, and older, highly experienced technical staff enabled this to happen. For example, Tony Palmer, the producer, brought a wary political canniness to the team from his freelance work in sportscasting and sports journalism. He took laconic pride in the creative achievements of the young team members, noting that a young team 'don't know the limitations of the industry and believe that they can make it work and make Ben Hur on five dollars. If you manage it right they are a huge injection of enthusiasm for all the tired hacks' (Palmer, 30/6/98).

Palmer, as producer, was keen to prevent the 'idiotic levels to which demarcation goes in this industry.' He knew that if each person had the opportunity to gain a good working knowledge of the other bordering crafts, they were likely to collaborate and make successful television 'on peanuts' (Palmer, 30/6/98). He acknowledged that the low prestige environment of New Zealand children's television provided low wages (indeed almost sweatshop conditions for new recruits) and long hours, but he also knew that experience in New Zealand children's television brought certain fast-tracking benefits for those who survived. Children's television, long a seed-bed for good producers in New Zealand, still provided the freedom to explore rather than feel constrained, in contrast to adult lifestyle programmes, where 'a genuinely creative person' would be 'bored shitless in a couple of years' (Palmer, 30/6/98).

Pennock experienced her sudden promotion from the studio floor to Creative Producer in 1998 as a challenge because she felt that many of the older technicians were saying behind her back 'well we haven't had a creative producer here for a while—let's see

what she's made of!' (Pennock, 24/2/98). Television still required hierarchical decisions when it came to editorial content, and her promotion over older staff inevitably alienated some old hands. This constant pressure of having to prove oneself as a young manager, in Palmer's view, accelerated the toughening up that made children's television a seed-bed for creative young producers. Whereas Pennock described herself as feeling 'like a little puppy amidst the old guys', she also recognized the value of the opportunity. believing that 'in England, at this stage of my career, I would still be delivering tea' (Pennock, 24/2/98).

Tony Palmer argued that:

There is nothing new in telly whatever anyone suggests, every new format you see has been done before—different people, different camera angles, some of it really intriguing. Young people continually reinvent what they didn't know about because of their age (Palmer, 30/6/98).

Sarah Pennock summed up Palmer's philosophy as 'its always been done before, it is just regurgitate and make it fresh and package it up for a different bunch of kids' (Pennock, 24/2/98). Both Morrell and Palmer referred ironically to the production as the 'sausage machine' because it is:

... high volume and low budget. You've got to set up systems to make a bunch of these and a bunch of those sausages where the flavour of the sausages is not constrained. You have a market of people whose taste buds are not as rigid and who are willing to taste other flavours. You also have an audience that is turning over every 5 years...there is no other audience which turns over every 5 years (Palmer, 26/4/98).

Palmer's notes to the team during the year move between encouraging freedom and experimentation, and being forced to tighten craft disciplines and structures when the crew pushed ideas and style experiments too far.

This brinksmanship, which saw him giving considerable latitude to junior staff whilst maintaining budget and management control, is well illustrated in an ambitious promotion planned by Pennock for the end of the year so that the programme wouldn't never repeat the promotional fiasco of February 1998. It illustrates how Pennock rose to the opportunities offered by **What Now?** and could, by the end of 1998, think imaginatively about how to exploit the complex public service and commercial objectives of **What Now?** for marketing purposes. Even though the promotional event did not eventuate (partly because of pressure caused by the pending format change and shift), it nevertheless illustrates how the 'marketing imagination' of a young creative producer created a plan for a wildly ambitious promotional event that would position

**What Now?** as a national icon. The episode also illustrates how such a promotion could be taken seriously by a range of potential corporate sponsors.

Pennock decided that she would promote **What Now?** in an open air event that would claim the Guinness Book of Records entry for the largest display of a logo made up of people. This was held by a Massachusetts military camp which, in 1981, put together 30,000 soldiers to form their military emblem (filmed from the air much like the famous British Airways 'face' ad had been). Her plan was to convince school principals to support an event designed to promote the 'flagship NZ On Air publicly funded children's programme' as well as convince a range of sponsors to foot the bill in return for onscreen mentions. Forty thousand Auckland primary-school children were to gather in Western Springs entertainment centre (40,000 was its maximum capacity) to form the **What Now?** logo. The timing, in the last week of the school year, was chosen to provide teachers with a special occasion for their children.

By October Pennock was negotiating with 4-6 companies for the use of 200 buses. Each company was to provide 30-40 buses for 3 hours during the middle of the day to do 3-4 trips with 40-50 kids, in return for on-screen credits. City Line were interested for \$150 for each bus, but they had just merged with a fleet of 640 buses and she was arguing that they do it for \$75.00 per bus and huge publicity. Chup-a-Chups<sup>86</sup> wanted to give 40,000 of their sweets in return for naming rights. She countered with an offer of verbal thanks and mention on the 40,000 attendance certificates. She was also negotiating for coloured pieces of card (at a cost of 10,000 dollars) to be sponsored by two paper companies. The plan was to negotiate with companies like Milo, Ripples, Cookie Time and an Auckland milk company to provide food and drink while the children waited. She planned that Western Springs would do the entertainment under the baton of two adjudicators and that the Prime Minister Jenny Shipley would adjudicate, which would make a soft public-relations story for her in the major television news bulletins and daily papers. By late August Pennock had 'talked Tony Palmer into getting some glossy art folder printed to present our show to companies for sponsorship strands, saying "Come on board with **What Now?**" and posters will go in those'.

Once the commercial arrangements were underway, Pennock planned to approach school principals with a plan to transport, feed and keep children safe. For example, St John's

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<sup>86</sup> A popular lolly on a stick.

ambulance would be convinced of the value of using the event for self-promotion, as would the police and even, possibly, the army (who were at that time advertising for recruits on television). Each child taking part in this bit of New Zealand folk history would donate \$1, which would provide \$40,000 to go to the Princess of Wales Heart Unit for the purchase of two defibrillators (Pennock, 21/8/98). But, like many great ideas, this one never happened.

The production team worked on meticulous interconnected planning details needed for a smooth production in 1998: graphics for new strands; club merchandising, magazine and web site; field work and post-production; promotions and focus groups; script writing, skit rehearsals and contacting of talent. Just one example of the myriad zones of specialized activity saw upstairs technical production assistants (TPAs) overseeing the constant paperwork necessary to track production. They were required to make the judgements that ensured that human creativity met operational requirements, such as curbing the tendency for one young reporter to make items longer than the stipulated length. Over the year they assisted a range of studio directors who often had quite different studio styles. Some directors were meticulous and liked to run a 'tight ship' designed to the last detail, they were therefore known to resist any last minute changes and required nursing through such crises. Other directors had a looser style and their scripts needed to be carefully checked for continuity and timing. Music returns and rights issues also required careful attention with the tightening up of performance and copyright rules. The sense of TPAs and researchers upstairs was often that:

You sit upstairs and half the time you don't see half of what goes on in the show. I will come home and ask myself what went out on that show, you do see them on the roll before it goes out to air but quite often what happens in the show can change because of the live aspect -fire alarm, you have to drop items and get timings all changed—it happens (Leslie, 11/11/98).

Palmer accentuated accessibility *and* interactivity for studio audiences as objectives for the programme style in 1998. However, he emphasised that accessibility remained paramount and this depended on a range of team disciplines: technical excellence, clean story-telling and a lack of self-indulgent style.

### **Issues of style and pace**

The first challenge that Palmer threw the team for 1998 was to integrate the field and studio components of the programme into a far more fluent look, integrating the studio and field items into a more interactive environment. As Palmer put it, 'why not experiment?' when that was not possible in prime-time shows. He observed that the



‘staid and stodgy’ news conventions were the result of old studio technology from the era when videotapes required an eight-second roll and scripted conventions to match—but now there were new technical freedoms there was little point in not experimenting with other forms. He directed the team to play with the studio conventions of ‘a host sitting in a lovely set and throwing to the field in such a way that assumes that it is a totally different world.’ (Palmer, 30/6/98).

Kline (1995), Wagg (1992) and Buckingham all allude to a tendency for children’s television to degenerate into ‘a kind of postmodernist nightmare of endless consumption.’ (Buckingham, 1995: 51). Certainly production experimentation created a television text that exhibited elements of what has been described as ‘post-modern sensibility’. **What Now’s** style emphasised moving cameras in the studio: for example, shots might include other cameras, lighting grids, ‘hijacked’ presenters, scriptwriter and crew, cameras moving between studio and outer rooms, chat between studio and outdoors, and casual chats to camera about the technical processes—all added to this fragmented style. There was an outside set in a car park, a wallowing in extremely messy games, bare walls, live inserts, and many digital effects. The fact that **What Now?’s** programme elements were sandwiched either between popular imported cartoons (**What Now? Sunday**), or languished after infomercials (**What Now? weekdays**) simply accentuated the team’s imperative (largely implicit but occasionally verbalized) to crank up this visual and aural energy wherever possible, so as not to lose the audience to the opposition. This was particularly apparent on the hectic Wednesday studio-based theme of ‘Games, Dares and Challenges’. It is, of course, ironic that ratings indicated that they lost audience to the novelty of the slowest and most repetitive show on television, **The Teletubbies**.

At the beginning of 1998, Pennock, the creative director, was well aware of the concerns of Morrell and Scheveyns about boys ‘slagging off’ **What Now?** in the end-of-year focus groups. She came to the conclusion that **What Now?** had been too slow in 1997. Her response was to support the inclusion of daily themes in 1998 and she sought ways to incorporate the recommendations that Steven had made during his January visit to the team in Christchurch. As she recalls it, he said that ‘having more ‘attitude’ is about keeping in touch with where kids are at, not necessarily where we think they are at, but where they *are* at’ (Pennock, 24/2/98). She interpreted this as meaning a push to ‘make us more entertainment driven...in a programme with energy and pace’ (Pennock,

24/2/98). This was one reason that a resident band called Muesli had been included in the line-up for 1998.

Pennock felt it incumbent upon her in early 1998 to make sure that the **What Now?** team kept in mind that the look needed to be 'pacier and faster cut.' These requirements were emphasised during early pre-production meetings between Jo Ffitch, the presenters, and the studio directors, as they work-shopped the 'need to be pacey' and add 'an element of chaos so that kids don't expect it when they see it.' There were requests to the front people to 'funk it up' and 'play with the camera.' (quotes from February production meetings). Considerable experimentation and energy was invested in new computer-generated graphics and signposting. Just as the programme went to air Pennock commented proudly that the titles and animation used to signpost sections and competitions, were 'right up there with technology, we can say 'hey kids we're right up there with the Nintendo look'.' (Pennock, 24/2/98). Ironically, pace and digital effects were not, as it turned out, elements much commented on by children Nor were they, as it turns out, what Steven had meant.

Concerns over 'style and pace' kept reappearing throughout the April review discussions. For example, it puzzled the team that Thursdays, the most successful day of the week according to ratings, was the day that the team felt to be the slowest and most awkward production day. This disparity was troubling, particularly given the largely successful effort, undertaken since the beginning of the year, to tighten the pace and energy of the show on weekdays. The slower Thursday show's theme was 'Animals', which had, from the start, presented particular production problems. On Thursdays the crew had to work with *both* animals and children, often in inclement conditions in the car park as Jason, for example, learnt how to do a uterine examination of a cow on live television. The Thursday show was, necessarily, uncompromisingly local in content, paced by the needs of nervous animals and co-presented by a middle-aged vet. None in the Unit felt it to be the strongest show. Tony had surveyed a range of reasons for the relative strength of Thursday ratings, factors like after-school activities and even weather patterns. What was going on?

Sarah Pennock continued to review her earlier decisions over style throughout 1998. In August she reported that she was interested in the view expressed by one experienced cameraman, that **What Now** 'felt like Telethon' and was 'sometimes a bit too full on and

in your face'. Maybe that was why some children liked the slower pace of Thursdays (Pennock, 21/8/98).

Last year I thought the show was really slow and didn't keep the attention and we put themes into weekdays and that older kids wanted to see themselves so that is what we went for this year and then paced it up as well. When you are on the studio floor outside the control room the half hour is just a blink. I really took Graham (the cameraperson's) views on board, when you step back and look at the show and compare it with Telethon it has similarities (Pennock, 21/8/98).

In November, after her Australian trip, she notes again that Australian craftspeople also commented negatively on the hectic quality of the show (2/12/98).

### **Contextualizing style and pace**

It is clear in hindsight that what Steven had in mind as improvements for **What Now?** in January were not necessarily what the **What Now?** team interpreted as his meaning:

What I suggested doing at the beginning of the year (1998)...was to film it all in the big house so it looks like **The Big Breakfast**. You go into rooms rather than have these people with big smiles on their faces running around in the studio being wacky, we're having a good time, gunk in your face. This was too radical, and too much of a shock, but it did actually get them all excited for a while. It would become an environment, like **Squirt** (Steven, 11/9/98).

Buckingham compares the hectic, fun-filled **Wacaday**, which he loathed, to **The Big Breakfast**, which began in England on Channel 4 in 1992, and which he preferred for the way it defined 'the child' and 'the adult', and thus the forms of 'entertainment' and 'education' on offer. He objected to the relentless *serious* wackiness of Timmy Mallett, which filled **Wacaday** with self-referential in-jokes, running gags, decontextualized content. In Buckingham's view, it appeared to 'invite the viewer into a kind of pleasurable complicity, a membership of a club...' He preferred the element of irony in **The Big Breakfast** which saw 'adults masquerading as adolescents in order to address both adults and children (Buckingham, 1995: 57-59). But Buckingham is the first to admit that his son loved to watch **Wacaday**, and that adult responses to television may well miss the point. Children's pleasure may well derive partly from adults being excluded *by style*. This makes 'power' to commission children's television even more problematic, especially when the power lies with adults prefer to make programmes that they *themselves* would like to watch.

It is interesting to see how closely Taylor echoes Steven's views as he describes his creative vision for **Squirt**. He wanted:

...to avoid making it noisy like What Now?, with cameras that rocketed around and shot up people's nostrils and a frenetic pace that says you can only catch kids attention is by being loud

and flashing things all over the place. Big hunks of it (What Now?) are people yelling and screaming in a studio like a Telethon. Our programme is bright and shiny but if you run them side-by-side you would realise that What Now? is a hell of a lot more noisier (Taylor, 1/7/98).<sup>87</sup>

Tensions over appropriate 'style' and 'pace' (regardless of content) go to the heart of children's broadcasting politics. Public-service television has traditionally favoured uncluttered narratives, linear story telling and literal editing, and many parents in the Children's Television Foundation expressed a desire for a return to such narrative styles. Singleton-Turner, BBC Children's Producer, explains the public-service cutting style: 'if you are cutting with a spade, then show a spade...if it moves, show it in motion...the zoom lens or the unmotivated pan were discouraged, and time transitions were indicated with a fancy wipe and a musical sting.' (Children-media-uk Listserv, accessed 31/3/98). Public service television is designed to suit (albeit in an entertaining way) the developmental needs of the 'learning child'.

Davies, commenting on the research she undertook on children's responses to **The Demon Headmaster** reports, tantalizingly, that her informants, a large number of British children aged 7–10 years of age, appeared to want television to slow down. She comments that this contrasts with the way that 'producers assume that 'kids nowadays' (that much-favoured concept) want everything to be pacier and faster cut.' (Children-media-uk Listserv, accessed 31/3/98). She questioned the current broadcasting orthodoxy of increasing the speed of editing for children.<sup>88</sup>

Hectic intertextuality and pace began to characterize USA television in the late 1960s when the alleged shortened attention spans and rough-and-tumble playing styles of boys were translated by American producers into a need for high-action, high-paced children's

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<sup>87</sup> Taylor contrasts this presentation style with **Squirt**, which had, by contrast, relatively few cuts, but this was partly for technical reasons. A parent focus group run by the researcher in 2000 (when she was recruited by the Children's Television Foundation), by contrast found **Squirt** noisy and brash. 'Attitude' in the computer-generated show was signalled as much by the medium of animation, and its liberating tradition of edgy style and content as it was by camera work, cutting and effects.

<sup>88</sup> A year later saw the funding of a slow-paced, single-camera science programme targeting 4–7 year olds, starring an early-childhood icon, Suzie Cato, and produced by early-childhood-trained Mary Phillips. **Suzie's World** (for TV3 in 1999) was described by the chair of The Children's Television Foundation at the time as 'a minor creative miracle for NZ On Air and TV3' and it went on to rate well for TV3.

fare (Schneider, 1987). By the 1990s the 'MTV style' of restless intertextuality was being emulated as the appropriate style for restless channel hopping youth and children' (Wartella, 1997). Pace, and a range of energy-boosting stylistic devices, became the 'commonsense' production solutions used to hook restless young viewers. It was also widely agreed that it was important to use 'cool' young presenters who could participate in the pleasurable bombardment of visual and aural hooks and intertextual jokes (Wagg, 1992). The children's magazine style evolved to incorporate stylistic devices that played with, squashed, crushed, sped up and talked over content, and camera work and presenting styles were freed from cinematic and studio conventions.

### **Technology and style**

Roger Singleton-Turner (producer of **The Demon Headmaster**) likewise suggests that the speeding up of editing is a fad that is driven by a desire to play with technological possibilities. He asserts that many stylistic conventions have much to do 'with fashion and the latest gizmo from Quantel and Avid', and little to do with academic research into appropriate camera and editing work for children (Children-media-uk Listserv, accessed 31/3/98). This has consequences for other creative processes as 'everything comes in shorthand sound-bites.' Programmes become shorter but scripts don't because actors talk faster and editors cut tighter. Caldwell (1995) discusses at length the implications of stylistic *possibilities* offered by new technology for the so-called 'post-modern' style of both adult and children's programming.

On the occasions that this researcher sat and watched the interactions between creatives and digital editors, a creative shorthand and complex layering of visual and sound connotations became apparent. For example, one simple item shot on Ninety Mile Beach featured Dean Cornish and Belinda Simpson (both roving reporters) and comprised a simple and silly tale about fooling around on a wide empty beach and conspiring to steal items of clothing from each other. The cameraperson had shot material to enable a variety of decisions to be made at the shot list and editing stage. Establishment shots, close-ups, flash pans and still shots were available for use. Dean, did a rough shot list to take to the edit session. It was completed on Digisphere, a digital editing system which permits an observer the luxury of the visual cues, much like the days of editing on 16 mm film. This was complemented by a visual layout of multiple sound-tracks, permitting second-by-second editing decisions over how to mix sound and image, as well slow down and speed up motion and add effects and enhancements. This technological 'playfulness' was unthinkable even in the mid-1990s. Dean the reporter was thus given

considerable latitude to tinker with his rough creative sequence. For example, some shots were not adequate because of sun position, so these were ditched and the editor suggested other shots that could be slowed down to fill in the sequence. Then the editor and Dean began to play together over intertextual visual and musical possibilities. A decision was made create a '70s cop show feel' and the editor drew (within seconds) on a CDROM with cleared rights to a short piece that was a homage to 1960s **Hawaii 5 O**. The editor then cut a range of shots to the music and added effects. The duo then moved on to further sequences that included other intertextual elements (one being **The Sound of Music**), all within the span of the short item. Here it is evident that style is emerging out of a process of creative play with technical possibilities, as much as storytelling. On this occasion this saw the incorporation of a range of obscure cultural signifiers from 1960s and 1970s for an audience of 5–12 year olds who were not alive at that time and were unlikely to know the originals, even through repeats or their parents. It can be argued that **Hawaii 5 O**, and even **The Sound of Music**, thus enter the playful repertoire of viewing children with a new set of pleasurable connotations of rock-music clips, and Bee and Dean's sparring relationship. Thus a new cohort of viewers are 'taught the media', but not the history of the culture.

On other occasions, enthusiastic experimentation with new technology caused Palmer, as producer, headaches. Some of the 'Nintendo-style' graphics, so loving put together in February, were ditched in April because the items they were created for felt like 'all headlines and no middle.' The tendency of the crew to play with new technology for the sake of it is perhaps best illustrated in Palmer's stern note to the young team, pointing out that the temptations offered by the lightweight DV mini-cams were changing the style of the show, for the worse:

The DV mini cam is second camera device and must not be used for whole items...it is *not* another studio camera. A camera without a horizon is as much use as the stud book for a steer farm...several times in 2 weeks we have had seasick, badly framed, poorly controlled shots which I thought detracted from what we were showing and served absolutely no purpose... If you need crash zooms, dutch tilts, whiz pans and nodding horizon all the time...there's something wrong with the content (What's happening dudes, 22/5/98).

### **Vulgarity and style**

How was children's love of vulgarity incorporated into the programme? Children's television has a long tradition of appealing to children through bodily functions and messy activities. Several such much-loved stylistic conventions had developed on **What Now?** For example, one highly experienced studio sound-technician contributed virtuoso sound effects under pre-recorded, and even live studio, material. Farts, burps and silly

bird noises appeared miraculously in the soundtracks and his disgusting sound effects for the gluttonous Polynesian Viking on 'Serial Stuff' were greatly appreciated by the target audience (focus-group results, April). Gunge, which had first appeared as a statement of revolting difference on Nickelodeon, was a slimy liquid poured on hapless visitors to the **What Now?** set. This was a hugely popular tradition and children queued to be thus favoured. In 1998 the 'Fill yer pants' element took gunge an 'anal' stage further, and a mobile gunge machine was designed to tour provincial centres, thereby permitting more children the privilege of being gunged, including, on air, 'the first card-carrying **What Now?** club member' found in any mall (Children's and Young Persons Unit of TVNZ, 1997).

Other attempts to be disgusting failed, illustrating the narrow line that such judgements required. A good case-in-point was Vernon, who was a vile green latex puppet creature, with even worse manners. He was described by a script-writer as a 'rude little blighter' (Gunn 6/5/98). He had been conceived to open the show with a dozy puppet called Snail and then tell a very bad joke (much in the tradition of the critics in the balcony of **The Muppets**). After the joke, Vernon lurked on set, being sarcastic and rude to participants. This attempt to introduce sarcastic subversiveness, in the tradition of other children's favourites like **Ren and Stimpy**, **South Park** and **Beavis and Butthead**, backfired. After the review Vernon had to go 'into hiatus for retooling, to get his brief sorted out because he was dumping on kids—which was not right. Now he only has Jason on' (Gunn, 6/5/98). Judging how to deliver 'attitude' proved to be an ongoing headache for **What Now?**

### **The issue of fame**

During the April review it was noted on more than one occasion that nothing was more of a problem for the programme than content being judged as 'slightly famous' by its audience. The team believed that, in terms of the child audience, fame was a black-and-white issue. Any wrong judgements cast long shadows over the credibility of **What Now?** and its presenters with its audience.

The presenters were famous in their own right because they were on television. Focus-group responses even included a suggestion that two reporters, Bee and Dean, marry each other, 'like other famous people do.' But presenters' credibility was also a process of building a 'persona', with values and tastes, and their perceived relationship with a range of popular cultural icons.

## **Cultural capital: sources of fame and celebrity**

The issue of 'fame' highlights the ways the team distinguished between two forms of cultural capital. The first was 'educational capital' provided by local cultural role models (emphatically from minority cultures), who could inspire and instruct the young audience. The second was the 'symbolic capital' as defined by 'breaking news of popular culture'. Here the challenge facing the team was to ensure that **What Now?** could position itself in the reflected cultural capital provided by famous icons featured on the programme, as well as supplying the required educational capital for New Zealand on Air.

Three of the weekdays day themes in 1998 relied heavily on recruiting famous people to the show: Monday's theme was 'music and entertainment', Tuesday concentrated on famous people, and Friday celebrated sport. Practical issues facing the team included finding enough publicly spirited 'famous enough' people to come to appear on the show for nothing. Another problem was that the famous people in New Zealand appeared to be 'reduced to the cast of the soap **Shortland Street**, athletics, rugby and netball players. What is New Zealand celebrity culture other than a bunch of people that appear on telly?' (Gunn, 6/5/98).

The second practical issue was whether to differentiate between a New Zealand famous person and other famous people. Was it important to make special efforts to signpost local heroes when their cultural origin made very little difference to the audience, according to focus-group reports? Furthermore, many of the crew believed that children deserved more than small New Zealand could offer. The media had already taught them that they were global kids and **What Now?** was obliged to share their fan pleasures, as well as bring news about popular culture. The problem for the team was two-fold, the news that children craved was supplied by corporate marketers and PR companies, and even if it might be argued that using these resources was responsive to the cultural pleasures of children, using them brought the thorny problems of product endorsement. This was even more so if contra was handed out in the studio. At what point did this global commodified material become a problem for NZ On Air? How could the team balance the tempting offers of contra and easy access to global commodified 'famous people' with home-grown modest, but famous-enough, role models and versions of Kiwi fame? These questions are explored through the music choices made by Kate Hawkins, the resident music buff, on behalf of children in her role of researcher for Monday's music and entertainment and Tuesday's famous people day.



Kate Hawkins was not surprised when the resident **What Now?** Band, Muesli, was dumped in the April review. She knew from her background in commercial radio that keeping up with changing tastes in music genres was a difficult task and that bringing music to children was made even more difficult by children's peer-group pressures. Now in her early 20s she recognized that her taste in music was already vastly different from those of her passionately musical **What Now?** Audience, so she kept up regular conversations with informants in the age group. She believed that 'kids' were better informed than she had been as a child (because of the media, including the internet), and were keenly aware of the latest new groups emerging in popular culture. Nor were they particular about where music came from, because 'New Zealand kids know where NZ is and how small it is, but that no longer matters. Kids live in the world' (Hawkins 11/11/98).

According to Hawkins, the Spice Girls were waning in New Zealand during 1998 and being surpassed by groups like B\*witched, Back Street Boys, All Saints, Soap and Aqua.<sup>89</sup> She viewed Brandy as a 'crossover girl/guy thing' whilst Will Smith was particularly popular with boys.<sup>90</sup>

She saw the music market fragmenting 'age-wise and gender-wise', as pre-adolescent girls (8–11 years of age) became a significant part of the music market for singers like Billy and bands like B\*witched, Lolly and BreZe. 'Girl Power' appealed to Hawkins because it was about 'empowerment' but she also saw its potential for marketers. By 1998 'Girl Power' appeal, which had been developed by the manager of the Spice Girls to sell everything from chocolates to computer games to girls, was being used by a range of young female groups (Bauder, 1998:17). For a decade research has shown that children begin to prefer Top 40 chart music around the age of 9 (Cristenson et al, 1987), and market research shows a pattern of ever-lowering demographics for 'bubblegum music' in a range of countries. For example, there is now a booming market for music

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<sup>89</sup> Aqua's 'Barbie Girl' was particularly popular with **What Now?** It is interesting to note that Barbie took action against the band for breach of rights.

<sup>90</sup> : 'Getting Jiggy' was particularly popular and, by coincidence, featured a Maori dancer. However, this doll referred not to New Zealand, but rather to Disneyland's 'It's a small world' which contains a Maori doll. Intertextuality can be complex!

posters with 3 and 4 year-old girls ('Pop scene plays to the pre-teen card' in *The Guardian*, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1999). 'Girl Power' was increasingly:

...used to express the empowerment and freedom of young females from gender stereotyping, the term has been quickly adopted by girls, and even more swiftly by marketers who want to get the attention of these young consumers (Mesbah, 1998: 26).

The marketing surrounding the 'Girl Power' of 'empowerment and freedom' saw notions of 'body projects to younger and younger girls as merchandise broadened to include hair products, nail polishes and perfumes as 'bubble gum' music provided ways of 'eavesdropping' on the adolescence culture to which they desperately aspired. Hawkins, although expressing personal distaste for the brash marketing by music groups to young girls, felt loyal to her viewers and believed that the extreme commodification was off-set by messages of assertiveness from girl bands. 'Girl Power' is worth further analysis in light of the recent construct of 'mediated girlhood' as a complex product of the partial success of feminism, and feminism's commercialization in girls 'pop music' and merchandise (Eisenstein, 2000). Certainly Hawkins et al provide evidence that 'bubble-gum' girl-bands, designed to appeal to very young girls, are becoming highly commodified.

Hawkins viewed record companies as a key contact because they provided contra T-shirts and CDs for the show. Record companies also provided access to interviews with the likes of All Saints, Aqua, Soap, and B\*witched when they visit New Zealand. These interviews became highlights of her Monday show. Record companies:

...are very cooperative and receptive but at the same time you have to play the game. You get some of the established artists but you are required to help them launch new artists as well. This worked well with Billy [another 15 year old, female, stage-school find]... She has really taken off in New Zealand and she has big merchandise—the T-shirts, nail varnish, stickers and stuff. Her first single came in at number 12, which for a debut single for an unknown artist is really cool. And then the second record came out and came in at number 5. The record company gave us her single to play first—that was a real coup (Hawkins, 11/11/98).

For Hawkins, Natalie Imbruglia and Savage Garden were 'break-through groups' and the white rap group from New York, Beastie Boys, were an unlikely established band who became popular with boys in the **What Now?** target audience as a result of one CD, 'Hello Nasty'. This reflected a trend for boys to aspire to groups approved of by elder siblings and disapproved of by parents.

Which bands do you like I'll ask and they'll say Korn, Radiohead, Verve, Jamiroquai and Oasis. There are 13 and 14 year olds that are plausibly into that music but they are not our audience. You start questioning them about the bands and they won't know the songs and the names of the albums. They say it because it is cool and pushing the boundaries. Bleu had a huge hit with a song

called 'Song Two', the song they sing every rugby match, and a hell of a lot of the kids are into it, but they have absolutely no context for the band. [The song] is not typical of the group (Hawkins, 11/11/98).

Hawkins describes a matrix for cultural capital, which differentiates 'celebrities' and 'now music performers'. For example, by 1998 Spice Girls were moving across from being music performers into the celebrity bracket, where their fame was becoming a global commodity that was larger than their music:

Pretty much most people are into the Spice Girls, even if you're not generally into the Spice Girls music you are still interested in what they are doing. They're are a real commodity thing. Even boys wouldn't switch off a Spice Girls video-clip, they would watch and joke about it (Hawkins, 11/11/98).

This might explain why the Spice Girls promo for **What Now?** was huge hit with both boys and girls.

Local music stars were usually also 'celebrities', simply because magazines were already interested in every aspect of their lives. For example, Bic Runga (a local musician who had overseas hits) and Che Fu were especially popular in 1998. Both reflected a new Maori/Pakeha/Polynesian/Asian 'cool street culture that is becoming huge', especially in Auckland, but Hawkins was also keenly aware of cultural differentials between metropolitan and rural zones of **What Now?**'s audience:

We are dealing with kids from all over New Zealand and there will be kids in Auckland who are hip and cool, but there will also be kids from Hokitika who are nowhere as street smart, saying 'we don't see gear like that in Hoki' (Hawkins, 11/11/98).

In her view the 'imaginative space' of a rural boy in the South Island would include music markers that appealed to someone years younger in metropolitan Polynesian Auckland.

Tony Palmer monitored, with some anxiety, the ease with which music contra reached the screen, but Hayward, from The Children's Television Foundation, was unequivocal. Merchandise for the Back Street Boys on a non-commercial Sunday morning constituted commercial endorsement of a brand and was banned by codes. It appeared that multinational music companies, who could well afford to pay for advertising, were getting free promotion in public space (Hayward, 1999). Media Aware went further by arguing that all adolescent and adult targeted popular music was inappropriate on a show targeting children under 12 years of age (even more so if the new demograph ended at 9 years of age). They claimed such material exposed children to inappropriate role models, sexualized acts and, often, violent sexist language (*Watching the Media*, August 1998).

The issue of 'fame' presented quite different problems on Tuesdays and Fridays. For example, it was difficult to explain to younger viewers that, just because Leonardo di Caprio was on mainstream television, it didn't mean that he would visit **What Now?**

Little kids sometimes don't know the difference between local and international, the kids might not have seen the movie, but they saw the hype that surrounded it on telly and that becomes bigger than the event itself basically (Hawkins, 11/11/98).

This confirms the power of intertextuality within commodified supersystems. It is also indicative of the lowly status of **What Now?** within the promotional values of the TV2's business that it was not viewed as a vehicle for promotional material for di Capprio's latest films, given its fan base. Children who understood the difference between local and global stars still did not understand the role of **What Now?** in the hierarchies of promotion, nor its role in the larger brand of TV2. For example, children who asked to see the New Zealand actress Lucy Lawless, who played Xena in **Xena Warrior Princess**, were unaware that she could not appear because she was a TV3 'property', and viewed by TVNZ as commercial competition.

Each week, Tuesday was tailored around a (generally) local famous person. Sportspeople, such as Barbara Kendal and Aaron McIntosh, and local television 'stars' were frequently used as 'talent'. Even politicians were invited:

Helen Clark was great as Little Red Riding Hood. Richard Prebble got gunged, barked like a dog (his nickname was 'mad dog'), danced around the studio and bobbed apples with Jason. He was completely mad and really funny (Hawkins, 11/11/98).

It is interesting to note that Prebble also conducted 'an educational tour of Parliament'.

It was difficult for Scheyvens and Hawkins to find enough 'sufficiently famous' people to spend a day in Christchurch 'for nothing'.<sup>91</sup> The appeal of cross-promotion for other TVNZ shows made the stars of those shows a valuable stop-gap measure. For example, Tom Robins, the human presenter from **Squirt**, was 'a hit', because he knew how to work the camera and audience, and was familiar with the target audience. The use of television stars as 'role models' often worked at several levels. For example, Bernadine Oliver-Kirby, sports journalist on One Network News, appeared on 27 October. She talked about her job (subtext: 'girls can do anything'), was shown a clipping of herself as

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<sup>91</sup> This, of course, might also provide another reason for shifting north to the commercial centre of Auckland.

a 17 year-old school-girl doing a news item for a children's show (subtext: 'you can do it too'), was 'gunged', and then retaliated by 'gunging' Jason, a presenter (subtext: girls can be good sports but enjoy the rough and tumble too).

**Shortland Street**, another TV2 show, and a prime-time hit with the age group, provided many other 'stars', as did the presenters on a crop of new local prime-time TV2 shows like **Garage Sale**, **Guess Who's Coming to Dinner** and **Trading Places**. 'Anthony Ray Parker, Suzanne Paul, and Lianne Clark—all those kind of people we have poached this year. It's great cross-promotion'. (Hawkins, 11/11/98). **McDonald's Young Entertainers** was also a source of 'talent'. This weekend show, much loathed by Media Aware for its 'blatant sponsorship and commercialism of prizes' (*Watching the Media*, August 1998), showcased children performing popular music. It rated well with children and older people, and was therefore viewed as a source of young and instantly 'famous' performers for **What Now?** For example, Drew Nemia, a Young Entertainer, 'had so many letters, because the girls thought he was very cute singing and dancing a Hanson song' and Hawkins had been 'incredibly impressed with all the Young Entertainers that had been on the show'. The universe of being a famous was largely defined by prime-time TVNZ television 'properties' (Hawkins, 11/11/98).

All local sports heroes were popular with the audience, but male sports heroes were invaluable because they were good role models and, critically, very popular with the seemingly elusive male audience. After a week of promotions about the appearance of Chris Harris on a Friday programme, **What Now?** achieved a 14, which was a top rating for weekdays in 1998. Sports heroes appeared regularly on Tuesdays and were the focus of Friday shows. This was a problem for Hawkins because many sports stars were training for weekend events. However the good will of sportspeople appeared boundless, and their public-service wish to be part of the show was demonstrated with repeat visits by the likes of Jonah Lomu and Bernice Mene. But visits by sports heroes also brought commercial issues for **What Now?** This is best illustrated by one visit by the gigantic, and hugely popular, Samoan-born footballer Jonah Lomu to a non-commercial Sunday morning show:

The presenters asked Jonah 'Where are you going afterwards?' and he said 'well, I'm going to McDonald's.' That was a good commercial for McDonald's! (Leslie, 11/11/98).

Floor managers had to watch that home-grown sporting heroes did not come on set emblazoned with corporate sponsorship logos for beer companies. Incidental advertising

continued to be a sensitive community issue, especially when it came to alcohol.<sup>92</sup> Nike bargained on free exposure wherever an All Black appeared in an official capacity, including on the humble vehicle of **What Now?**<sup>93</sup> Looking down the production records of Tuesday and Wednesday visitors, it is difficult to list many heroes who could claim total freedom from brand association, whether it be for TV2 entertainment brands like **Shortland Street**, or for products, like sports equipment and sportswear. Even politicians gained an updated version of ‘baby-kissing’ public relations from appearing on the programme. Good keen Kiwi icons, like Sir Edmund Hillary, were hard to find in the 1990s in New Zealand.

It is in teasing out what being ‘famous in New Zealand’ means within **What Now?** that the dimensions of local, regional and global cultural capital can, perhaps, best be mapped. Judgements about ‘fame’ are key cultural transactions that define the cultural space within **What Now?** The problem of ‘famous enough’ foregrounds the role of the creative team as cultural intermediaries who judge ‘cultural capital’ on behalf of children, in order to position **What Now?** favourably with children within the flows of popular culture. But judgements of fame also illustrate *who* defines the ‘favourable’ cultural flows for local children as future citizens, intent as they are on ‘growing up’ and using television as a resource for playful identity formation. **What Now?**, positioned as it was within children’s cultural pleasures in popular culture, could not help but become inextricably enmeshed in the self-interests of networks of local and transnational marketing.

However, **What Now?** offered, arguably, a carnival space where the rules of mainstream commercial television were undermined, and its meanings ridiculed. Humour provided an incisive commentary on the conventions of commercial media. For example, the competition ‘Square eyes’ asked children to guess the answer to dramatic take-offs of a range of imported and local TVNZ programmes. Sometimes these were loving skits of children’s favourite programmes, like **The Fresh Prince of Bel Air**, but on other

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<sup>92</sup> With some reason, given that research conducted for a review of the Alcohol Codes in 1992, attended by the researcher, had revealed that primary-aged children in New Zealand could name more beer brands than New Zealand mountains.]

<sup>93</sup> It is interesting in terms of global/local issues to note that once the All Blacks became internationally recognized, and thus an increasingly valuable sporting property to sponsor, the local clothing sponsor Canterbury were outbid by Nike.

occasions the slot offered an opportunity to spoof programmes that children loathed and were forced to watch with parents, like TV1 programmes **Coronation Street** and **One Network News**.<sup>94</sup> Other much-enjoyed elements of the show were the take-offs of current advertisements, confirming overseas evidence that children enjoy advertisements, and are able to appreciate their visual and aural style conventions.

We take the mickey out of ads on **What Now?** and the kids love it, which gives me the sense that they know a bit about what's going on. They are our best critics if we get anything wrong, and they love it if we get it exactly right, as in the 'Scratch and Win' ad with the older woman (played by a hyper-glamorous Jason) kissing the bloke in the train tunnel (Gunn, scriptwriter, 6/5/98).

These skits employed conventions from both high vaudeville and the carnival mardi gras, especially in the use of recurrent cross-dressing. On occasion, the male presenters dressed in the tradition of the grotesque pantomime dame with hairy chests and deep voices, and at other times they relished vamping the style of the hyper-glamorized drag queens in **Priscilla Queen of the Desert**. These skits were extremely popular with children in focus-group comments. (April Focus group results).

It is worth analysing a bit further how gendered rhetoric is reconstructed through these techniques of cross-dressing within a short promotional item for **What Now?** and how these parodies are used to poach cultural capital from a global supersystem. The promotion consists of a spoof of an Impulse deodorant advertisement originally made by The Spice Girls. This was a huge hit with both boys and girls in April focus groups. The three presenters play the Spice Girls, Shavaughn in a glamorous straight take-off, and Jason and Anthony in glorious drag of mini-skirts and short tops. The original advertisement shows the Spice Girls creating sensual havoc in a city street as they dance along singing a clip to camera. This concept was milked for humour by the director, Robin Singleton, and underwent some imaginative styling, framing and editing while remaining faithful to the many cultural signifiers of the Spice Girls, as well as the stylistic conventions used in the original advertisement.

One shot that especially appealed to focus groups was a close up of a (coy) Jason and his tummy tattoo, which was in the form of a **What Now?** logo. This was a knowing bit of scripting that, arguably, offered a range of pleasures for the audience. Firstly, it drew on children's fascination with the transgressiveness of 'real tattoos' and the flaunting of

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<sup>94</sup> A *skit* of the British sitcom **Father Ted** drew a complaint from a parent on the curious grounds that it was irreligious.

them by rock groups like The Spice Girls. Secondly, the clip referred to a club joke, the temporary tattoos of the **What Now?** club logo that had been sent to club members, which exploited the current craze for temporary tattoos (Dreaver, 1998). Thirdly, it confirmed Shavaughn's beauty and stardom. Fourthly, the grotesque male parody of female flirtatiousness defused any residual sexual anxiety that was likely to 'disgust' young people. Fifthly, the careful reversioned clip, which lovingly used the genre conventions of the original was praised for its 'accuracy'.<sup>95</sup>

### **Defining 'us' and 'them'**

Holloway et al (2000a) discuss how children negotiate mediated versions of 'us' and 'them' using television texts. In their research example they explored how New Zealand children's understandings of British culture were mediated by shows like **Coronation Street**, just as British children's understandings of the antipodes were coloured by shows like **Neighbours**, **Crocodile Dundee** and **Home and Away**. They also illustrate how images of 'us' and 'them' drift towards common understandings of relatively undifferentiated affluent, *whiteness*—which often stands in stark contrast to the actual cultural diversity in children's home communities. It is worth exploring these ideas further, this time not in terms of how children use television texts to imagine others, but from the production end in terms of how producers decide what to include in children's programmes about 'other places'. It can be argued that **What Now?** producers construct media scripts (in truth, real scripts) which later become the resources for the 'cultural scripts' of geographic place and space. Children's programmes are one of many media scripts used by children individually and in peer-group play, as they negotiate a sense of 'us' and 'them'.

The Queenstown outside broadcast was discussed earlier in terms of 'deals' struck with local businesses, but it also illustrated how the production team's wish list for content was guided by their understandings of the position of Queenstown in the larger national imaginary. Here it is used to illustrate how the 'imagined Queenstown' of the director was groomed for television by his preordained script, despite the difficulties involved.

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<sup>95</sup> Advertisers, in turn, poach aspects of style and content from children's programmes and even spoofs of adult genre-like news, in order to slip into the entertainment stream of children's television, but that is another story for which there is no space.



No significant snow had fallen in time for the mid-winter festival in 1998. This created a crisis for the planned script because Queenstown without mid-winter snow 'was not Queenstown' (Pennock, 21/8/98). The director still wanted shots of children playing in snow for the opening of the live broadcast, so Pennock asked Coronet Peak to ship snow down to Queenstown. Coronet Peak refused, on the grounds that they were also having trouble meeting tourist expectations. They could not afford to part with any snow, given that their *own* snow was man made and therefore very expensive. The energetic Pennock, delegated producer/problem solver, then contacted a more distant ski field, Cardrona in Wanaka, who agreed to ship in snow, in exchange for the crew shooting a promotional story on the ski field later in the week for broadcast on a future **What Now?** She managed to convince the company to dump it at 6.00am in Queenstown, to avoid the risk of mardi gras drunks 'weeing in it' the night before. In her words:

As it happened it was the coldest night they've had in Queenstown so far and when the truck tried to tip the snow out it was one solid ice-cube. It just sat there and nothing slid off. So at 6.00am in the morning I was on the phone to the fire and the police in Queenstown saying 'have you any shovels there?' Of course they didn't care. In the end I got the cablers, sixth-form students, to form a chain from a local restaurant with buckets of hot water. I HAD to get that snow off. The snow cost \$400 in the end, which was a bit ridiculous but the director said 'I definitely want it'.' (Pennock, 21/8/98).

The director was adamant: Queenstown without snow was not the Queenstown of the national imaginary of New Zealanders.

Another example of cultural 'map-making' was the occasion of a live broadcast one Sunday morning, was set in front of a three-storey model of a soft-drink bottle on the main street of what was, otherwise, a sleepy North Island country town. The bottle, erected in Paeroa in 1969, is one of many 'big things' erected outside small towns to signify their uniqueness (ranging from huge carrots to fish). This 'bottle' has become a famous piece 'kiwiana', and represents something 'familiar, unique and nostalgic' about New Zealand for all Kiwis (Bell, 1996: 114). Paeroa was the birthplace of a soft drink called L & P (Lemon and Paeroa), although the drink is no longer made there. The intertextual gag for children, who were more than likely to prefer Coke, was that the bottle featured in a wry L & P 'World famous in New Zealand' advertising campaign which positioned L & P as the local drink against global giants like Coke. In the advertisement small-town youth trawl past humble local institutions in a souped-up old car and as they slide past the institutions they make comments such as 'It ain't famous for its restaurants' (the camera cuts to the fish-and-chip shop); 'It ain't famous for its bowlers' (and the camera cuts to the bowling green frequented by elderly ladies); '...but

it is famous' in New Zealand'. **What Now?** (which could perhaps equally claim that it was 'famous in New Zealand') used this local icon as a focus for its visit to the children of the town, in order to celebrate their regional uniqueness and their place on the map of New Zealand. Interestingly, the same live broadcast illustrated how effectively children's sense of similarity and belonging to the rest of New Zealand was created by live television. Bee in Paeroa, and Anthony in Christchurch, played with the actual live broadcast and a series of tapes to both squash the distance between Paeroa and Christchurch, and enable viewers at home to be aware of the prodigious distances involved in the live link.<sup>96</sup>

The occasion of a trip to Australia by the presenters provides a case study of how understandings of another national culture were mediated by the decision to use celebrities from Australian shows broadcast by TVNZ. In September Pennock did a 'recce' for a planned **What Now?** visit to Australia in October. This became a huge learning curve for her in the business of rights, and the place of **What Now?** in the broadcasting hierarchy. Early in the planning Pennock overstepped the mark because of her inexperience:

I was told off by Publicity for making contact with the **Water Rats** producers in Sydney, that was for Auckland to do, which is a bit rich given their lack of support' (18/9/98).

**Water Rats** was 'ditched' as an idea when children's focus groups indicated that 'it was all about dead bodies and dredging Sydney Harbour', so instead Pennock chose to pursue shows that were, in her words, 'huge with the audience'. The Australian soap **Home and Away** proved tricky. The agents were elusive because someone had recently given a story line away, but luckily, the agent for the **What Now?** child superscooper in Sydney was also the agent for the show's stars. Also 'huge with the audience' was **Who Dares Wins**, a show where people are nominated by their nearest and dearest to undertake a dare. Sarah took a **What Now?** 'Square eyes' take-off of **Who Dares Wins** to Sydney and presented it to Mike Whitney, the star. It finished with the line 'If you don't want more take-offs, come'. As it happened, he was already planning to visit New Zealand because of a series of Kiwi dares designed to weave the Australian programme into a trans-tasman format. Bee the Auckland reporter, caught up with him as he was filming someone climbing the Auckland Sky tower and filmed him filming his show. Pennock

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<sup>96</sup> It is curious to note that the L & P campaign, and in particular the bottle motif, was closely associated with TV3's youth programme, **Ice TV** during 1998. Was this accidental or was this icon poached intentionally by Bee, the Auckland journalist/presenter?

arranged for his co-host, Tanya, to walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge with personalities from **What Now?** Even 'Serial Stuff, the puppet mock soap, visited Sydney where a puppet Mel Gibson joined them in a Harbour bridge heist. The final line up of featured events illustrates the highly mediated version of Australia presented to New Zealand children, spiced with rivalry that related to the approaching Olympic games (and a plan to flash **What Now?** up on the new Olympics score-board).

We are visiting the **Home and Away** set, and we are going out with **Who Dares Wins** for a date, we are diving with sharks. **The Wiggles** (a pre-school band) are showing us around Sydney and we have **The Bush Tucker Man** talking to us, and some aboriginals will teach kids how to play the didgeridoo. I am really excited (Pennock, 21/8/98).

This mediated view of Australia is homogeneous and white (even when it comes to bush tucker), except for the iconic tourist symbols of the didgeridoo and the shark.

### **Teaching Halloween**

An ongoing dilemma faced the production team. How much should **What Now?** reflect popular culture and how much should it guide children's tastes? This issue is clearly illustrated in creative decisions made about covering Halloween in 1998. As recently as 1995, a television critic reviewed the TV2 schedule in Halloween week and noted:

This is the first year local television has acknowledged Halloween, and if you are looking for an example of cultural shift—New Zealand leaning more and more towards American culture—it is as good as any...Driven from the ground up, too—instigated not by parents but their children, who make more and more consumer choices (Matthews, 1995: 22).

Matthews suggests that children's exposure to popular American narratives of Halloween has seen this exotic festival overtake Guy Fawkes in the minds of New Zealand children during the late 1990s.<sup>97</sup> In 1998 the **What Now?** Morrell asked the production team to include a series of items about Halloween. In her view **What Now?** 'needed to catch up with children's culture and reflect it' and in 1998 this included Halloween. Discussing the decision after the event she argues that she rang magic shops and found out that El Grego The Magic Shop (in Christchurch) had huge Halloween business in 1997 and 1998. This reflected USA trends where the Halloween product category grew from an estimated US\$1.5 to US\$2.1 billion retail in 1998, according to Jeff Coppens, senior marketing manager of 'Disguise inc'. Approximately 80 per cent of sales in the USA occurred in the mass market, and 'each year retailers seem to devote more space and

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<sup>97</sup> He is quick to acknowledge that this cultural shift may have been accelerated by the banning of sky-rockets in 1995, and the allure of free 'treats'.

marketing muscle to the category' (Heller, 1999). Halloween provides a family-friendly marketing peak in the run-up to Christmas. In New Zealand in 1998 there was extensive broadsheet and television advertising for Halloween 'gear' at discount shops like The Warehouse and it was obvious that such outlets had invested heavily in Chinese-made imports of Halloween product.

Morrell's view was clear:

I may think that TV is leading it, but is it that kids are looking for events in which to celebrate together? Isn't that a good thing? It's about belonging to a community and celebrating and all those things (Morrell, 9/11/98).

The series of items shown in the week running up to Halloween illustrate the delicate line to be drawn between celebration and education. Each item was styled for entertainment: child presenters made up as a witch and skeleton, subjective shots, a range of sound effects (screams, doors slamming, dungeon echoes, dogs howling). The opening line of 'Hey it's not that scary. It started in Ireland when...' cued educational content. The child presenters 'educated' the audience about the *European* history of the traditions, before describing its wildly popular form in the USA. Any sobriety provided by this educational content was upset by wild intertextuality. For example, a recipe for Irish 'Soul Cake' was given in an African American accent to a background of 'soul' music. Each item contained a short scenario that taught children 'safe' tricks they could play on horrid old people who did not provide treats (like cellotaped doors 'no paint was injured in the filming of this trick' and honey on the door knob). Each item concluded with 'a guide to trick or treating': 'take a big person with you, have fun, don't be *too* mean to your neighbours', thus signifying educational social responsibility. One of the directors, who against the idea from the beginning, still grumbled that 'if someone came and put honey on my doorknob, I wouldn't be too thrilled.' These items were offered to Sales and Marketing as community messages during advertising breaks in **The Simpsons** in the week running up to Halloween. This was a prime promotional spot for children because **The Simpsons Halloween Special** had become a much-anticipated event amongst the age group (focus group on Halloween conducted by the researcher with primary-aged children).

Acknowledging Halloween on **What Now?** was far from a unanimous decision for the team, some of whom thought the idea 'too American'. Others didn't want **What Now?** to lead the way with popular culture and preferred to concentrate on reflecting local culture 'because there is plenty that is ours out there to reflect what's ours and our culture.'

Others thought that 'Jack o' Lanterns, witches and pumpkins are for dark autumn days.' Still others were 'wary of encouraging children to be forward by knocking on strangers' doors' (diary notes of conversations in the office pre-Halloween). The programme received letters from parents complaining about the items (Gribble) and Child Media Watch's newsletter after 1998 Halloween awarded all channels 'a brickbat' for 'the enormous hype about Halloween, this is an American import, not a New Zealand cultural ikon (sic).' (*Watching the Media*, November 1998). In their view, Halloween represented just another business opportunity for shops to take money from parents.

New Zealand, a country that celebrates Christmas in mid-summer by decorating windows with aerosol snow, and forces old men to wear Father Christmas suits in the heat, now sees its children celebrating a festival of impending winter darkness during the long early summer twilight. These are the cultural scripts that antipodean children adapt and play with in the post-modern way of things. But it is yet to be investigated how New Zealand children translate a northern-hemisphere early-winter festival of darkness into their own antipodean early-summer twilight 'script', and whether seasons matter anymore.

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN - CASE STUDY PART V: CRUNCH TIME

## Introduction

The discussion now returns to production politics. The months after the April review were politically fraught. A campaign for local content quotas for music and television was gaining momentum at the national level (Mogridge, 1998; Snowden et al, 1998). Irish broadcasters, invited by the Green Ribbon quota campaign committee made up of industry workers, were given wide press coverage in New Zealand to talk about the merits of quotas. This was a political campaign designed to influence the Alliance and Labour party platforms prior to the next MMP election. Of more immediate concern to producers in the Unit was the rumour that the government was preparing TVNZ for sale. The 100 per cent overseas ownership ruling meant that the flagship network could be sold overseas before the next election, with no regulatory requirement to make local children's television. In May it was announced that Rick Ellis, an Australian with extensive experience in the airline business (Campbell, 1998: 22–24), was to become the new CEO. His appointment was read as signalling a continued business focus for TVNZ.

These overarching issues were of global importance, but two immediate crises faced Morrell in the months after the review, and they both threatened the future of her Unit. The first was a new bid by TVNZ accountants to shift **What Now?** north, this time by July 1998. The second crisis was that the weekday format was still failing to win ratings. The displeasure of the broadcasters was signalled as early as Easter, and Morrell took the precaution of having informal discussions with Wrightson, the television manager, about the situation. It became increasingly clear to Morrell and Palmer that there was only one possible response: a pre-emptive radical reformatting of after-school **What Now?**

## Format change

It has been discussed how the review had produced no radical changes for the format, and any changes that had been made did not to halt the chronic dive in ratings against **The Teletubbies**. During May the 5–14 year-old ratings share averaged 30–35 per cent compared to TV3's 55 per cent. During some afternoons TV3 was winning viewers on a ratio of 3: 1. The programmers were convinced that the poor ratings were not the result of the 3.30pm time-slot as Unit members argued, and they cited as evidence the fact that

during the previous year **Rugrats** had earned a regular 70 per cent share of the viewing audience at 3.30pm. Yet, on Sundays **What Now?** continued to perform very satisfactorily, with a 75 per cent share of the audience, in a format wrapped around imported cartoons. The conclusion was simple: a block half-hour programme did not work. In 1997 programmers and commissioners in Auckland, already sceptical about the **What Now?** format, had conceded to NZ On Air's desire for 'cultural presence' and block programming for the sake of the \$4 million funding input the show brought the organization. Now it was patently not delivering the audience, and they saw an opportunity to reformat to their commercial advantage, whilst selling the solution to NZ On Air as the only way of ensuring cost-effective delivery of local content to children. Pressure was put on Morrell and Palmer to design a package which redeployed current NZ On Air funding in more strategic ways for the commercial TV2 channel. The original wish of programmers was to present a reformatting solution to the board of TVNZ in early May in order to present a ratified plan to NZ On Air in time for a mid-year shift. It was hoped to avoid a full board meeting of NZ On Air to consider format changes. That would slow things down by a month. In the event, the deadlines were too tight to consummate this first plan.

The alarming possibility for both TVNZ and the Unit producers was that NZ On Air could threaten to pull all remaining production money out from the contract. It was already widely acknowledged that **What Now?** consumed a large proportion of the children's budget and was seen as a relatively expensive children's programme. NZ On Air could also argue, as the broadcasters did, that it was not delivering cost-effective local content for children, at least in terms of ratings. Indeed, it could be viewed as an increasing liability in terms of NZ On Air's requirement to deliver cost-effective cultural objectives. It might look as though NZ On Air was acting like a commercial investor, after all it could be construed to be withdrawing funds from a poorly rating programme.

However, any threat to withdraw funding was not a direct response to ratings, but rather a measure of the extent to which NZ On Air felt thwarted, and politically exposed, by the peremptory decision of TV2 to shift from the agreed scheduled time of 4.00pm. NZ On Air considered that **What Now?** had rated adequately in 1997, and changes promised to see it performing even better in 1998. Now, shifted to 3.30pm, it was rating dismally against the cult hit **The Teletubbies**. The source of TVNZ's panic was the unprecedented move by NZ On Air to include the agreed 4.00pm scheduling time in the written funding contract. This clause enabled NZ On Air to threaten to cancel the

contract with TVNZ and withdraw funding from **What Now?** Palmer surmises on the reasons for this:

TVNZ had not noticed that the funding letter contained that wording [about time slot] until pointed out by Janine and me. It looks very like it was a condition, but what is interesting is that it is like a backstop position. If the programme had gone on at 3.30 and had dominated the ratings slot, I don't think it would have ever become an issue. Because the low ratings, and the performance of the programme, is far more of an issue for the scheduler on behalf of the broadcaster, than it is for NZ On Air. But it became an issue. NZ On Air don't ring up the broadcaster and the programme maker after a Tuesday night doco and say 'you won't get funding for a while because you only did a 9.' (Palmer, 4/5/98).

Any TVNZ panic over NZ On Air's right to withdraw funds simply reflected the ongoing power struggles between the state-owned broadcaster and the statutory funder over the power to schedule NZ On Air funded material. NZ On Air wished to gain 'bangs for bucks' by being scheduled appropriately for the child audience after school. This was considered an unrealistic expectation by those in the commercial industry who were required to maximise their advertising revenue with high rating cheap programmes in order to ensure return on revenue. Prowse, an accountant and executive officer for NZ On Air, was not unsympathetic to the plight of TVNZ in 1998. He observed that the desirable rate of return on revenue for broadcasters should be between 20–30 per cent on net profit to revenue and that a well-established broadcaster should manage a percentage margin to revenue of 30 per cent. In 1998 TVNZ had dropped down from the previous annual report to hover around 20 per cent, whereas TV3, who only used NZ On Air money for prime-time programmes and non-commercial programming slots like early childhood, was hovering in the high 20s (Prowse, 5/10/98). Wrightson, however, suggested in early 1999 that she was almost certain that TVNZ was undersubsidizing **What Now?** during 1998 because their cash contribution gave a far lower rate of return than the company thought was acceptable. The question was 'are we giving them too much money for what they are delivering?' (Wrightson, 25/3/99).

In Palmer's words, the battle had become a catch 22, NZ On Air were charged with making programmes that would not survive in their own right in the commercial environment, and commercial broadcasters could not afford to schedule them except in off-peak or non-commercial time. Steven's success in commissioning prime-time documentaries with NZ On Air funds had led to a growing expectation from NZ On Air for local material to be placed where the desired audience traditionally viewed in numbers. In this particular episode they demonstrated that they were becoming aggressive, proactive advocates for their own strategic view of scheduling. They wanted **What Now?** on at times they believed that children could see it.



Meanwhile, Steven continued to be adamant that **What Now?** lacked attitude and was 'too worthy'. As he expresses pithily:

If I had a choice I would watch **Teletubbies** over **What Now?** because the danger of a show like **What Now?** is that it becomes too earnest...it's like a Christian rock and roll band...you don't rock and roll for Jesus, you rock and roll for the devil and as with Christian rock and roll bands there is a naughtiness there (Steven, 11/9/98).

By May, Steven Smith had taken the helm as Manager of TV2 and his view was that all programmes had to prove themselves to earn a place in the schedule (Smith, 11/9/98). He had a hunch why **What Now?** would never become cool with older aspirant boys in the demograph, despite all the ingenious attempts to create a children's brand of belonging in the Club:

Look at the declining success of things like Brownies and Boy Scouts. It is less about joining a club and more about joining a tribe. Clubs are about things you put on the wall. A club is about names and membership forms and subscriptions. Tribes are about attitudes and values. I think there is a subtle difference. Being part of a tribe is more of an exclusive statement. Anyone can join a club. Not anyone can join a tribe. Clubs are organized by grown-ups and are good for you. Tribes are 'wow'! (Smith, 11/9/98).

The Christian rock-group, and boy-scout metaphors employed here by hard-nosed commercial broadcasters illustrate cultural, as well as commercial, embarrassment about the politically correct appeals of **What Now?** They accused NZ On Air of not delivering on 'the relevant issues' for children running the 'huge risk of being irrelevant'. (Smith, 11/9/98). Both Smith and Steven believed that older children rejected the 'safe zone' of children's television *because* it was mother-approved and educational. They agreed with Buckingham's observation that children enjoyed calibrating their maturity by distinguishing themselves from younger children, and it was in the differentiating values and attitudes of brand tribes that children were enabled to become agents in their own sub-cultures. Kids simply wanted to play out on the edges of popular culture.

By contrast, **Squirt** met the expectations of programmer Baylis because 'it is cutting leading edge technology' and 'we are very happy with it' (Baylis, 10/9/98). Youth programmes, like **Mai Time**, **Havoc** and **Ice TV**, had already proven that they were able to 'deliver the economics' as well as critically acclaimed experimental hybrid/local content. Indeed, youth programmes were a matter of pride for cultural intermediaries, like Geoff Steven, who felt that they were able to 'take the pulse' of popular youth culture.

By May Auckland managers were unanimous in their view that the current weekday **What Now?** block of local children's production was a ratings disaster with the 5–14

demograph and in its place they wanted hosted afternoons, still subsidized by NZ On Air, around imported hit material. The problem was to find a package that would convince NZ On Air to fund what was, effectively, a commercial programming strategy, before they pulled millions of dollars from TVNZ for their breaching of the funding contract.

It was Morrell's job to craft a solution but this was made a daunting task by the need for the solution to be a 'win-win'—one that saw increased delivery of range and variety to New Zealand children, whilst holding audience and budget. Only then would the funding, and the livelihood of members in Unit, be safe. There were several unnerving months from April on, as Auckland management pushed for the show to reformat during 1998. Only in mid-year, once it became too late to implement the strategy in 1998, did it become the strategy for the September/October funding round for 1999.

Not to be daunted, Morrell intended to use this testing occasion of negotiations between TVNZ and NZ On Air as an opportunity to bargain for the commissioning (and scheduling) of local drama and news programmes by TVNZ. These two genres had been a dream for Morrell, and key genre objectives for NZ On Air and the pressure group CTF. She knew that within CTF there was opposition to the idea of hosted afternoons and she hoped to use the promise of news and a later drama initiative to get them to accept the idea. She also believed it was important to be able to tell Wrightson, the television manager, that she had consulted with CTF from the start, 'rather than an afterthought and tick the box'. Her first move was to bargain for a commitment from TVNZ to commission a once-a-week late-afternoon local children's news programme. She also successfully negotiated for an early-childhood programme to be independently produced in Christchurch, as well as a promise to commission a future drama. These were the range and diversity genre sweeteners for the NZ On Air negotiation. They were also ways of convincing CTF to support the breaking-up **What Now?** and spreading it, as cheaply as possible, from 3.30pm to 6.00pm.

Her first line of argument with NZ On Air was that of cost-effectiveness:

NZ On Air wants to maximise minutes per dollar. Funding studio-based **What Now?** club throughout weekday afternoons will keep minutage per dollar, whilst enabling the production of more expensive genres such as news and drama. Drama, though costly, is highly repeatable (Morrell, 24/6/98).

Her second line of argument was to defend the funding of a local linking programme, even though NZ On Air had a long expressed dislike of the format because it diluted

New Zealand presence on air. First she notes that the funding of **Squirt and Ice TV (Mai Time)** was different, given its kaupapa for young Maori) on TV3 formed a precedent. These programmes rated well around imported material. She bolstered this funding precedent with overseas evidence that such formatting was effective for children:

Giving children small bites of reality television within animation television makes appointment viewing...Fractured narrative works for children—it isn't throw away television and, as proven at the Second World Summit on Television for Children, it is a credible storytelling device (Morrell, 24/6/98).

Wrightson, the Television Manager of NZ On Air, made it clear that she was not 'against the branded strand per se in terms of holding together the afternoon', but the key concern continued to be that such a strategy diluted New Zealand content a great deal (Wrightson, 26/2/99). To which Morrell countered that New Zealand had a history of much loved local presenters linking imported material.

Our country has quite a strong history of doing 3.30–6.00pm and I still feel that New Zealand children felt a New Zealand presence and seen New Zealand on screen. I am quite excited about doing 3.00–6.00pm because it is still a half hour of local presence, it's more available to children, and we may even get more time (Morrell, 24/6/98).

There would be no opportunity for live interaction on the show anymore, but that bolstered the case for the interactivity provided by the club.

Morrell's final trump card for NZ On Air was that the reformatting using existing funds provided opportunities for much desired expanded range and variety. She again draws on her recent attendance at the Summit, which 'convinced her that while total output and total hours were adequate, range and diversity were not.'

In our view **What Now?** has suffered from trying to be the umbrella for all genres. Children want individual sports, news, drama, comedy, games and entertainment shows rather than a cover-all magazine format, which serves no genre well (Morrell, 1998).

This appealed to Wrightson, who hoped that 'higher viewing levels drawn by valuable overseas material will hopefully flow on to the New Zealand product' (Wrightson, 26/2/99). By the time of the round, she was convinced by Morrell's arguments, which were now echoing aspects of Taylor's minimalist strategy. The funding strategy for NZ On Air shifted to 'wrap-around' that it had less to do with content, and more to do with 'what we were being delivered in return for our money... in terms of 'the infiltration strategy, Ian Taylor calls it' (Wrightson, 26/2/99).

During this time, leading up to the funding round in 1998, it was important for Morrell and Palmer to keep an eye on other stakeholders. It was essential to sell the idea of the

news programme to NZ On Air as a show that could *only* be produced by the children's Unit, because they were aware that they needed to pre-empt a bid by **TVNZ Network News** to take control of the concept. Network News had long planned a cut-down version of the news for children—it was to be a natural extension of cost-effective use for their news feeds and resources.

### **The shift**

During this already tense time, Morrell, Palmer and Downs (Facilities Manager) were confronted with the new plan to shift the Unit north. Morrell, Palmer and Downs now began to acknowledge that the shift this time to Avalon, was becoming inevitable. TVNZ would be required to reinvest in Christchurch facilities in order to broadcast in stereo (at the time **What Now?** was the only TV2 programme not broadcast in stereo) and the pressure from accountants to fill the underutilized existing resources and staffing at Avalon was growing irresistible. It made good business sense for TVNZ management to rationalize the inefficient three-factory operation into two more viable factories. The only strategy left for Christchurch producers and managers was to protect the team from the unsettling news until the situation became absolutely clear (given four previous aborted threats), and work hard to stall the shift in order to protect Christchurch jobs until the end of the year. Yet again, they presented financial evidence on the costs of shifting mid-production to counter the paper cost savings calculated by accountants. They also argued that it made strategic sense to wait until the end of the year to reduce the 'political fall-out of staff turbulence.' Continuity until the end of year would mean that contracts could be pegged to the NZ On Air funding decisions, thus minimizing political opposition through renewing contracts for creative staff after the funding round in September/October, as part of a pre-production process designed to shift north over Christmas. But whatever the outcome, Downs, Palmer and Morrell knew that it would be a personal disaster to the many operational and Unit staff who relied on the Christchurch Unit for steady work.

In an ideal world the producers hoped that NZ On Air talks with TVNZ would reach a satisfactory conclusion in August, prior to an uneventful September children's funding round. October would see the announcement of a raft of new programmes, as well as the continued production of **What Now?** and the Club. Only then would the CEO of TVNZ come to Christchurch to explain the merits of the northern shift to Avalon. Dunedin would have **Squirt**, teenage programmes would be based in Auckland, the news

programme would be made in Avalon, and a TVNZ early-childhood programme would be proposed to NZ On Air for Christchurch.

In the real world, wild rumours about the shift north became rife during May, many spread by elated technicians at Avalon. Palmer's email of 5 June describes the atmosphere in the Christchurch studios.

Heard in the dunnies...which may have influenced the worth of their contents...Neil Roberts is coming back to take over the children's unit while Janine takes maternity leave...and...the entire Christchurch facilities are being sold to the Koreans to make cheap game shows...More rumours...with a germ of fact have also been circulating...yes the old 'now we are here – now we are not' story has raised its ugly head again... nobody will be surprised to learn that the chaps who count beans in Auckland haven't gone away. ...the comparative arithmetic is being done, *contrary to popular belief...no decision has yet been made as to whether or when*. Janine & Steve & I have vigorously and vehemently supported continuation here, we are sick to death of arguing the same case for a fourth time...but it is likely that Rick Ellis and the board will decide on broader company finance grounds rather than the immediate issues we're arguing (What's happening dudes, 5/6/98).

On 15 July Rick Ellis (TVNZ CEO) visited the Unit and the Christchurch mayor to announce the shift north for the unit and plans to mothball the studios, a logical business decision. This decision fermented political fury on Christchurch talkback radio. But it was NZ On Air that felt the backlash of Canterbury public opinion. South Islanders had been signing up to a citizen-organized boycott of the NZ On Air licence fee and this was fuelled by the news. As Palmer put it, 'the punters construe that everything they see on television is contributed to by their licence fee and the South Island isn't there.' (Palmer, 17/7/98). Those who had spent their work lives in the Christchurch studios, and who had a memory of jobs for life under the old bureaucratic TVNZ, felt great bitterness towards Auckland. As loyal staff, who had demonstrated high efficiency and loyalty beyond the call of duty, they naturally mourned the loss of the secure income that **What Now?** had provided for 15 years. However Palmer, ever the realist, also observed that the shift had advantages for the young, mobile members of the Unit who were being groomed for production, like Sarah Pennock and Jo Ffitch. It offered a new start, a sloughing off of inexperienced mistakes and their sharp learning curve with the seasoned Christchurch operational staff. Institutional memory was mercifully short in the evolving post-fordist, just-in-time, production processes of children's television.

Both the shift north and the reformatting forced the core team to draw on reserves of nerve and stamina. In the interviews conducted during the processes of reformatting and negotiating the shift north it becomes clear that Morrell was adept at drawing on a compendium of different resources to make her strategic moves. During the crisis

occasioned by poor ratings she drew on a range of interpretative repertoires. She constructed new cohesive narratives for formatting changes. She used these to underline benefits for a range of stakeholders. She drew on the research capital of international research evidence, as well as local sentiment about earlier presenters. Whereas the proposal for 1998, presented to NZ On Air and TVNZ just over 6 months before, had made its strength the inclusion of range and variety *within* the **What Now?** umbrella brand, now a new narrative justified the value of *fractured narrative*, as well as the need for *stand-alone* programmes like news and drama. During the reformatting crisis, she constructed logical arguments, moral justifications, and appealing new narrative backstories for local children's television, in order to convert the powerful stakeholders to her new 'vision' for children's production. This 'vision' was used to enable those in the production Unit, who faced the dismantling of a programme to which they had been fiercely loyal, to find redeeming features in those changes in the negotiated result of a news programme, and promise of drama to come.

During the crisis of the threatened shift she used a range of rhetorical devices to deflect attack from powerful stakeholders, and thus defend her Unit from being broken up during 1998. To help her team adjust to the new realities of the shift north, she constructed new benefits for spreading production bases around the country, rather than concentrating them in Christchurch. This was a radical shift from her siege position during the previous year, which argued the benefits of production in Christchurch to NZ On Air and fought NZ On Air accounting procedures.

However, mid-year, faced with these daunting tasks, Morrell was happy to admit that she wished that the unsettling shift and reformatting decisions were over so that she could concentrate on growing programmes. The rest of the year was spent dealing with the taxing issues of human resources that inevitably flowed from the TVNZ management decision to move north, and felt like marking time waiting for the result of the next proposal and the possibilities for 1999.

## Postscript

The story is almost over, but it is still necessary to tie of thematic threads and sketch what happened at the round in 1998. It is also important to describe certain critical events in 1999 and 2000 that have a bearing on the story.

Mid-year, Steve Smith, the new TV2 Manager, sent a directive to on-air promotions in Sales and Marketing to schedule the lovingly crafted Christchurch promos for **What Now?** during unsold prime-time adult viewing slots during August and September (Palmer J, 1/9/98). This adult prime-time exposure was enormously cheering to the **What Now?** team in the Christchurch Unit. In mid-year, the Marketing Manager for TV2, Liz Fraser, launched a third quarter 'special kids' airtime packages' to improve the revenue flows in off-peak children's viewing zones. This was necessary because the revenue was way down from last year. She attributed this dip, not to the content of **What Now?** but to an general dip in revenues from advertising. Toy manufacturers' advertising budgets, in particular, had been cut by corporate headquarters based overseas and, naturally, cuts were taken out of off-peak advertising buys. As she puts it, 'Kids [programming] has taken more of the brunt' (Fraser, 11/9/98).

There were also seasonal ratings card factors. Again, they had less to do with Unit decisions and more to do with the overarching environment for sales that had seen the **What Now?** advertising zone languishing with unsold space. Earlier in the year advertising slots had been topped up with 'run of station' ads for a range of adult targeted products like double beds, recruitment ads for the army, and soap. Put simply, the published rate card for **What Now?** (and children's programming generally) had been set too high early in the year because projected ratings had been set to the higher ratings from ratings the year before. The softening of the general advertising market, accentuated by **The Teletubbies** phenomenon, made it necessary to adjust rating cards sent out to agencies and clients to ensure better sales. This could have been simply done by lowering the cost per advertising slot but the disadvantage of this move was that it would mean that those companies already committed to bookings would expect to pay less, and TV2 would lose even more money. The strategy chosen was one of strategically designed 'bonus packs' (Fraser, 11/9/98).

If it is not selling, we have airtime to use for bonus packs in there and it has a higher value than it really should. The agencies are not stupid. They know exactly what we are doing, but it is fine because there is a benefit for them as well ... So what we did was to put together two packs so that if you spend a net of 10,000 dollars you get this discount and some bonus spots. The bonus spots went into **What Now?** It sells OK, but it is usually the last programme to sell, because it has a high

rate on it because of low ratings. The value of the bonus spots goes into **What Now?** and that's a good story because we are providing X amount of dollars and they are getting 1600 dollars worth for 1000 (Fraser, 11/9/98).

Packages were not necessary in the fourth quarter leading up to Christmas because, as Fraser noted, that was when toy manufacturers predominantly spend their money.

The colourful TV2 'Kids' Fun Pack' was designed to appeal to busy media buyers. Its 'cut through' gag was that it looked like a children's games book, complete with 'with free coloured pencils'. This was sent to selected children's media buyers in agencies, and selected businesses targeting children (like bike shops). The introduction sets the tone:

Some of you will already be smart kids and have snapped up some of the weekday afternoon kids airtime. Five shiny stars to you! This is your chance to top up to the minimum spends by taking advantage of these special deals. And just like chocolate hail, these deliciously, delightful packages can be sprinkled out right across July, August and September. You may even be on-air for at least an extra week by benefiting from the package discount and bonus elements (TV2 Kids' Fun Pack).

In Fraser's words it was important to 'get across little bits of blurb about the programmes because marketing manager and advertisers don't sit down and watch these programmes' and so the kids' fun pack included a videotape that sampled the range of programme content, with a focus on imported hits. **What Now?** was featured briefly late on the tape, after a range of imported material including **Rugrats** and **The Fresh Prince of Bel Air**.

Another objective of the offer was to communicate to companies that they could sponsor kids [programmes] in the afternoon by constructive 'time-zone deals'. 'People were really quite scared about sponsorship for kids programmes and nobody was coming with ideas, so everything just stopped. Once this 'Kids' Fun Pack' was in the market everyone started asking 'what can I do? I've got this client and...' (Fraser, 11/9/98). Burger King, for example, was booked for a two-week special scheduling of **The Mask** during the Burger King in-restaurant promotion of their Burger King kids club using **The Mask** spin-off characters.

This is yet another illustration of how the boundaries of television programming, advertising, promotions and events management were blurring as marketing strategies moved out from simple spot advertising into carefully crafted events. Liz Fraser, as TV2's marketing manager, ensures that the brand of TV2 children's off-peak is sold to the key media buyers in the business of children's marketing, because, in her terms, even off-peak counts for the corporate bottom line.



Much had changed in the funding strategies for children's television by the time of the 1998 funding round for the 1999 television season. In 1997 **Squirt** was funded, grudgingly, as an interstitial programme by NZ On Air because of its innovation in cutting-edge technology, but only on the condition that it research educationally appropriate content with Janine Morrell Now, at the 1998 funding round, **What Now?** weekdays was broken up into interstitial content between cartoons. The benefit for commercial broadcasters was won at the price of commissioning a once-a-week late-afternoon news show for children. It was a compromise solution, which brought merits of 'New Zealandifying' the afternoons and providing an after-school 'friend'. The new formatting concept maintained the active involvement of children with games, competitions, club activities, reviews, performances and reports and the overseas cartoons provided the 'drawcard' to bring local children to any local content that could be funded by NZ On Air. The NZ On Air contribution to the same number of hours dropped by \$500,000 of forty 2-hour Sunday programmes and one hundred and ninety-five 30-minute, weekday elements. **Wired** received \$650,000 towards the production of twenty-six 24-minute episodes, subject to TVNZ holding to a 5.00pm scheduling for the duration of the season. This ensured that **Wired** had the maximum opportunity to grow its audience in the preferred late-afternoon slot before broadcasters deemed it a ratings failure. What had originally been devised as a sweetener for breaking up the block format of **What Now?** was now to remain throughout the 1999 season in a late-afternoon slot generally treated as lead-in to prime time. This was the format that was produced from Avalon during 1999 and 2000.<sup>98</sup>

**Wired**, the news programme, was viewed as a coup by NZ On Air, which had wanted a children's news programme for some years. They were pleased that, out of the **What Now?** reformatting crisis, they could salvage such a commission scheduled against popular sitcoms like **Full House** in the late afternoon. But several daunting creative challenges faced the programme. Perhaps its greatest challenge was the general perception of the broadcasters and researchers (Buckingham, 1997, 2000) that children don't like news. Steven had already openly declared his dislike of child reporters in access programmes like the cancelled **In Focus**. Focus groups, completed by Pennock and Morrell in preparation for the proposal, certainly confirmed that children associated

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<sup>98</sup> **Wired** was dropped in the slate presented to NZ On Air in 2000. This was made public when NZ On Air announced funding after a late funding round just before Christmas and was a great disappointment to the Children's Television Foundation in terms of children's media rights.]

news with ‘wrinklies’ and compulsory family viewing. ‘What do you think of the news’ elicited responses like ‘its boring, stink, presenters too old, gloomy, they talk too much, and too serious’. Nevertheless, given overseas research, it is curious that all 44 children involved in focus groups in 6 schools thought the idea of a special news show for kids was a good idea and commented that they would watch it. However, little weight was put on declarations of interest, given the actual behaviour of child viewers. Several children noted, ominously, that it would clash with a favourite sitcom, **Full House**, on TV3. Decisions over style were believed to be critical. Morrell tested overseas news programmes like the BBC’s **Newsround** with children. They responded with ‘boring, boring environment, stories too long and too much like adult news’. What they did like was a story on computer effects. The decision was made to use a virtual set of a computer into which young reporters provide inserts at the demand of computer characters.

### **Full circle**

In the 1999 National Budget the broadcasting licence fee of \$110 was scrapped. This was a political sweetener used to offset widespread anger over student fees and associated interest rates. The licence fee had been unpopular with many and provided the beleaguered National Party with the public-relations coup of offering voters money in the pocket, whilst pushing through National’s budget package, all prior to the next MMP election. NZ On Air’s market intervention was still out of favour with the dryer members of the National caucus (as well as the Act Party who it relied on for votes). Its funding decisions were still considered too politically correct by other National supporters.

Certainly there was public confusion over the role of the broadcasting fee.

Dissatisfaction with local broadcasting news coverage and the cloning of cheap ‘reality shows’ spilled over onto NZ On Air. The great fear of supporters of NZ On Air was that the loss of a dedicated television tax would see broadcasting competing with health and education for their funding vote from government.

Meanwhile the Green Ribbon publicity campaign, designed to put pressure on Labour and Alliance to include broadcasting regulation and quota in their platforms, intensified during the pre-election period. In this they succeeded. In October 1999 the Labour Party came to power with a platform of government intervention and anti-privatisation that included foreshadowed action for television. This is the same Labour party that embarked on the deregulation of broadcasting in the mid-1980s, in the name of ‘consumer sovereignty’. There is, therefore, narrative irony in this story ending just as the Labour Broadcasting Minister, Marian Hobbs, and her officials, faced the job of

moderating the commercial objectives of the state-owned enterprise, TVNZ, to enable delivery of public service television to New Zealand citizens, including children. They were faced with a thorny dilemma. How to intrude into the highly efficient, but small and fragile, New Zealand media market in order to reclaim old public service spaces? It was far more difficult to carve out local public space on local broadcasting channels in 2000 than it might have been in 1989, before the decade of geopolitical shifts in media organization and finance had changed national media landscapes forever.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN - CONCLUSION

### Introduction

The thesis has explored battles over production agency in children's television. This study set three core tasks: a study of children's television production decisions, analysis of stakeholders hypothesized consumption of the text (and the implications of these for the children's television text) and, finally, speculative exploration of how a children's television text engages with a child's emerging sense of identity. To accomplish these tasks the thesis focuses on the competing cultural, economic and political discourses in production talk. The study moves from mapping a range of global contexts, to the intimacies of the production moment and audience reception. It moves between parental concerns about diminishing public spaces for local children, to celebrations of children's pleasures in consumption, and how liberal economics and rights discourses have politicised children's media provision during the 1990s. It draws on cross-disciplinary theorizing of culture, power and media agency, choosing frames that are sensitive to new readings of identity formation and the situated pleasures of consumption. It remains critical, analysing the unequal command over material resources and power for different producing agents, and the consequences of such inequality for the nature of the symbolic environment for children. Certain conclusions can be drawn from the data, but the data also suggests many more questions for subsequent research.

The choice of grounded research in one site of children's television production has provided unique advantages. It has permitted the researcher to get close to the object of research by gaining an empathy with the production team and in the process learning much about the particularities of day-to-day children's production, in terms of both industrial processes and creative decision making. The original intention was to apply fine-grained discourse analysis to the site but this had to be reviewed during the year as the pressure of political events in broadcasting created a highly unstable research site. It was decided that a narrative linking political economic changes, interspersed with discourse analysis to enable further cultural speculation, was more appropriate because it better oriented the reader to the profound shifts in local production politics, and their articulation to key global shifts in the media. Nevertheless the disciplines of discourse analysis have provided the methodological distance with which to analyse disparate moments of talk about production processes and moments of observed 'micro-production'. These experiences have enabled a spiral research process where 'data' and

observation have informed theoretical frames, and vice versa. The researcher has interrogated a wide range of political, economic and structural readings of the media with her data and, as a consequence, problematised the 'taken for granted objects' of research: childhood and television, as well as, it turned out ultimately, the object of 'local children's television' itself.

This spiral research process has seen a deepening of engagement with the objects of research, with the consequence that it is appropriate to discuss the conclusions in three discrete sections.

The first section relates to the original aims of the research. It discusses findings that have policy implications for New Zealand broadcasting. These are drawn from political economic analysis, and analysis of local policy and production talk.

The second section discusses cultural findings that challenge current national policy assumptions about children's culture. These findings are speculative and point to a range of possible future research on New Zealand children's mediated cultures, possibly in tandem with comparative research in other national broadcasting systems. The frames raise important questions about commodification, branding and the role of emergent media forms in children's culture. The 1990s was an uncomfortable decade during which a range of much-cherished 'commonsense' assumptions about media and children that shaped national media policy were being challenged by technological, cultural and economic changes. This grounded research provided data with which to interrogate taken-for-granted binaries in debates over children's media provision, like global/local, public-service/commercial, creative/manufactured, art/commodity, culture/consumption, consumer/citizen.

The third section considers the role of both academic and production 'intellectuals' in future policy debate over what constitutes cultural value for local children. It engages with a British debate in *Screen* about recent scholarly embarrassment about issues of 'cultural value' during a period when 'the market' has become an increasingly powerful 'default mechanism' (Frith, 2000: 35) in all cultural production.

## Policy findings

The first findings relate to the global political economy of children's media in the late 1990s, and its implications for children's producers in the deregulated broadcasting environment of New Zealand. The researcher's access to a wide range of trade magazines and net resources enabled her to track patterns emerging in global children's audio-visual flows during the late 1990s, thus demonstrating how change accelerated during the late 1990s as the result of the compounding effects of technological convergence, market fragmentation, economic liberalization and successful advocacy for global free commercial speech. These changes have been contradictory and complex, and confirm the tensions between cultural homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity posited by Appardurai (1990, 1996) and Hall (1991a, 1991b, 1994).

What is the political economic picture mapped in this thesis? Children today grow up in an overwhelmingly branded and mediated cultural world. In response some first world countries like Germany, Britain and Australia have long subsidised local public service productions and are now moving to preserve non-commodified, free, public service, digital channels for children. At the same time these governments are not altogether disinterested in their future visions for children. They recognize that the children's audio-visual sector has hot-housed a range of exemplary 'weightless' products that have global markets. Such creative industries are now deemed highly desirable by western nations transforming from commodity to knowledge-based economies. Meanwhile digital delivery is ensuring that huge variety and choice for children is becoming available to all children in the west if their parents can pay, but poor children in all countries where there is no provision for public service local indigenous production are likely to be offered only global marketing hits defined by the self-interest of a few entertainment conglomerates. (Goonasekera et al, 2000). Small nations like New Zealand, in particular, find it hard to balance the cultural intangibles provided by costly local production against the benefits of calls on public money from health and welfare.

It has been found that nation states have considerable political leverage, despite the rhetoric of globalisation, over shaping flows of audio-visual resources for their children through national industry incentives, trade barriers and tariffs, regional treaties and regional programme swaps. Both rich and poor sides of the global divide have a role in ensuring all children have rights under United Nations conventions, to their own heritage and a rich and diverse audio-visual environment.

What are the policy conclusions for New Zealand? An optimistic reading of overseas evidence suggests that with strategic planning and financial leverage, children's production could still become a valuable 'weightless' product that English-speaking *and* Maori-speaking New Zealand could grow and export. Small local market size still remains a problem for first rights investment returns. A pessimistic reading suggests that our opportunity for co-production alliances with larger players came in the early 1990s and was lost because of inward looking deregulated broadcasting policies. The local production case study makes it clear that deregulation of New Zealand television does not foster a rich and diverse audio-visual environment for local children. Mid-1980s neo-liberalism, characterised by the dropping of trade barriers and openness to foreign ownership, was intended to provide the means of freeing up capital to enable business innovation. This policy has resulted in a beleaguered, cash-starved and conservative children's production sector during the 1990s.

Chapter Seven demonstrated that the New Zealand deregulated broadcasting environment stands in stark contrast to regulatory frameworks put in place in other English-speaking nations. In Australia, Canada and Britain, and more recently Europe and the USA, a mix of regulatory measures has ensured that children have been provided with a range and variety of local television material during the 1990s. Regulatory protection, production investment, subsidy and adventurous co-production have seen the growth of competitive flows of children's audio-visual trade and associated merchandise from these nations, and innovative co-productions between them.

It has been demonstrated that the deregulation of broadcasting in New Zealand has been extreme by comparative standards. Local children's producers were the ones to most keenly feel deregulation during the 1990s, as they were required, on small budgets, to compete in ratings against the huge capital investment of hit imports. NZ On Air, charged under the Broadcasting Act 1989 to ensure the production of genres deemed to be failed by the market, was forced, during the yearly rounds of the 1990s, to grant money only to children's productions commissioned by commercial broadcasters. It was inevitable that formats, styles and content of children's television targeting 6–12 year olds constrained commercial broadcasters in their choices during the 1990s. The case study data demonstrates that, by western standards, the policy matrix for local children's production was irrevocably flawed by the late 1990s.

During the 1990s the managers of the state owned enterprise TVNZ, even if they saw merit in the strategy of the BBC, were unable to invest in saleable ‘quality’ streams of English-speaking children’s early childhood or drama product (as once had occurred with export successes for 1970s kidult drama). This lack of investment strategy was brought about by the political decision to emphasise commercial profits for the state owned broadcaster, in order to generate dividends for government, rather than pursuing cultural objectives. Thus, in the decade that state-owned public-service broadcasters in English-speaking nations were positioning themselves within the specialized global media marketplace, TVNZ cut all drama commissions and lost early-childhood programming (and later a drama commission) to the overseas-owned opposition, CanWest. Meanwhile NZ On Air was required to subsidize, not invest, and was tied to funding only programmes commissioned by broadcasters unfettered by local content requirements for children, or ‘quality’ thresholds. There was no national strategy to invest in children’s production as ‘cultural capital’ (Harley, 2000), nor as a specialized industrial niche in which New Zealand had particular market advantages in terms of language and international pedagogical profile. The detail in the case study illustrates the implications of this inward looking cultural and commercial strategy for local children’s television producers.

TVNZ decisions in the last years of the twentieth century were driven by business accountability and profits. This saw the rationalization of ‘factory processes’ and increased centralization of power. Ratings became the tool with which to streamline commercial schedules for maximum advertising income. Dividend requirements accentuated managerialism at every level of TVNZ during the 1990s and, as a consequence, the Christchurch production centre, an efficient and specialized production centre for children’s television, was closed down in 1998 on the grounds of surplus ‘factory’ capacity. This saw producers’ energies redirected to managing change rather than production innovation. The case study tracks how, in 1998, producers of **What Now?** were chastised by their Auckland managers for poor ratings against **The Teletubbies**, a cult programme targeting 2–4 year olds, even though CanWest, which scheduled **The Teletubbies** in an after-school programming slot, was an overseas channel obliged to make no programmes for 6–12 year old children at the time. TVNZ Enterprises, a profit centre within TVNZ, managed rights and merchandising for the Australian Broadcasting Commission property of **Bananas in Pyjamas**, Nickelodeon **Rugrats** and Fox’s **The Simpsons** whilst being unable to guide a marketing strategy for TVNZ’s own children’s product **What Now?** As TVNZ developed into a highly



commercial organization, hit imports and the interstitial local content around them were preferred for children's viewing schedules. The case study describes how TV2 programmers convinced NZ On Air during 1998 to break **What Now?** up into an interstitial format around cartoons, making it just like **Squirt**.

Evidence has been provided which suggests that the current regulatory system failed producers in two ways. Firstly, it failed to provide strategic industry vision or subsidy during a decade when industry subsidies elsewhere were ensuring that specialized English-speaking children's production industries were gaining leverage into world markets, thus providing profits to reinvest in local specialized children's productions. Secondly, the regulatory process, captured as it was by commercial commissioners, failed to ensure that the broadcasting fee was spent on fixing 'market failure' by providing non-commercial range and variety of television for primary-aged children. The gatekeeping role of commercial broadcasters, intent on attracting advertising revenue and sponsorship money, used the licence fee to support only formats, content and styles that furthered the competitive goals of commercial broadcasters.

However a small market of 580,000 local children could never provide economies of scale for local productions. All broadcasters in the small media market of New Zealand broadcasters faced particular problems in the fight for market survival. This was particularly so for TVNZ, the national broadcaster now forced to compete with the purchasing clout of global CanWest's TV3 and new specialized pay services like Nickelodeon. By the late 1990s it was widely agreed, by industry and academic experts alike, that the television industry in New Zealand was small and fragile by international standards. There were anxious reasons behind broadcaster arguments that the national children's audience in New Zealand was too small to make local production profitable, and that children were well satisfied with global animations.

Thorny problems facing the Labour Government when it gained power in 1999. The simple answer in the flush of campaigning was to radically re-regulate children's television in the old national policy model, to ensure television range and variety for local children. In the run-up to the election there was considerable political will to re-regulate. The Labour Party platform in 1999 had foreshadowed possible quotas, a charter for state television, as well as reduction of commercial content for children. The inability of NZOA, lobby groups and politicians to calculate the actual costs of children's programmes to broadcasters stymied what little debate there was over regulatory options

for children. During this post-election policy process, public debates over children's media remained grid-locked over definitions of what was meant by 'quality', 'value' and 'good' television in terms of the old debates outlined in Chapter Five. The researcher returns to the issue of cultural quality and value later.

Of course there were continuing economic questions, with a range of political answers, about what New Zealand could afford in low-cost local programming, let alone investment in the infra-structure for a specialized 'quality' children's production industry that could compete in global audio-visual trade. Even if investment were viewed as desirable in the long term, how could politicians justify this investment in comparison to urgent calls for money to be spent immediately on run down children's hospitals and schools?

After Labour came to power national debate was largely dominated by the options facing the state broadcaster in the digital age of technological convergence. There were technical questions: What did digital delivery mean for New Zealand, and what would it cost for the state broadcaster to be part of the new landscape? There were delivery questions: Was the current full broadcast mix of TVNZ best 'value', or was there merit in offering dedicated niche channels (as a BBC head suggested at the Banff television conference in 2000)? But the place of children's provision in this new landscape was neglected in all these debates. Wealthier nations like Britain, and even Australia, might decide to dedicate entire public-service digital channels to children's material, much of it locally made, but this was utopian for tiny New Zealand. It was hard enough to claw back local space on state owned national channels.

The problem of creating a 'local non-commodified space' for children, both in the interim competitive broadcast period, and in the digital interactive converged media of the near future is increasingly daunting for those with no economic stake in the global industry. Options for children's producers narrowed rapidly in New Zealand during the 1990s, but even more so in many poorer Asian countries (Goonasekera, 2000) as global animation hits dominate free-to-air schedules.

However in the interim of policy hiatus NZ On Air has moved in new 'producerly' directions for mainstream children's broadcasting. In 1999 it dedicated money to an ongoing 'quality' drama strand that has potential for overseas sales. Both free-to-air channels that carry children's programming (TV2 and TV3) pitched for the commission,

won by CanWest-owned TV3. In 2000 it dedicated money to an experimental series of local interstitial strands. It was argued that modest investment in interstitial programming offered several benefits. It could be used to ‘tag’ overwhelmingly imported media flows with elements of ‘the local’ educational and entertaining material and promised benefits of cross-media connections to web sites. Thus it can be said that local English language programming is being designed for international sales in the case of prestige genres, or being designed to operate as viral attachments to global hosts in popular culture. Meanwhile Te Mangai Paho has continued to fund Maori language programmes that currently show in off-peak time slots. It has commissioned cutting edge animation (**Moko Toa**), studio and a drama and these have potential for sales to other indigenous broadcasting systems. The government has an election promise to create a dedicated Maori television channel. This may see such programmes scheduled in after-school and even prime-time slots.

### **What is the ‘child audience’?**

Audiences provide the bridge between the ‘outside’ structures of political economy and the ‘inside’ experiences of the production moment and audience reception. Chapters Nine, Eleven and Thirteen track the commissioning process for children’s programmes targeting 6–12 year olds over 1 year, and outline how children’s producers negotiated between conflicting stakeholder constructs of the child audience. The irreconcilable demands placed on them are clearly illustrated in anxious production talk. Dornfeld’s conception of producers as key audiences for their own work is critical for this stage of case study analysis. This conception of producers as very special audiences enables the mapping of how creative possibilities were constrained by producer imaginings of child audiences. Producers’ self-reflexive arguments with themselves over how to articulate between the requirements of their powerful commissioners and funders enables the mapping of discursive articulations and conflicts over the child audience, and how, on one occasion, a misreading of one powerful stakeholder’s intentions had downstream implications for ‘style’.

In Chapter Nine the ‘creative courtship’ of NZ On Air by producers Taylor and Morrell is discussed. Their distinctive appeals ‘on behalf of the child audience’ are designed to capture the imagination of the funder, but are at the same time, circumscribed by the needs of commercial broadcasters. Morrell constructs a rationale for a pared-down version of ‘full-service’ public television that is inclusive of all children. Her format of

fast, high-energy, low-cost, entertaining magazine environment enables children to ‘trip over’ elements of more expensive public-service elements of drama and information desired by NZ On Air. Her local half-hour provides a safe club *environment* on after school for all local children to join. Taylor, by contrast, presents his programme as a ‘Trojan Horse’, delivering short sharp shocks of local animation presence into the imported cartoon genre that children demonstrably prefer, and is targeted to retain a restless male audience. He takes the side of risk-averse local broadcasters by pitching his programme as a *vehicle* or *virus*, rather than risky ‘politically correct’ local content. He presents NZ On Air with the appeal of animation research and development, a ‘innovative’ educational opportunity as a portal to the internet, and the possibility of growing local content later, once audience loyalty is won. Taylor’s justification of this minimalist format to NZ On Air is a turning point of funding politics in 1998.

A striking finding from analysis of commissioner talk is the continuing salience of old ‘commonsense’ notions of the audience, first discussed by Cantor in 1974 (Wartella, 1998: 39), and the way that these ‘commonsense’ notions provide the most direct feedback to producers during each stage of the production process. For example, the ‘commonsense’ belief that children prefer content that targets youth and adults saw commissioners arguing that programmes that targets the narrow ‘developmentally correct’ age-targets loses the very audiences the NZ On Air-subsidized programmes are designed to reach. The concern of NZ On Air for ‘cultural presence’ sees them convinced, on ratings data, that half-hour block television is an ineffective use of the broadcasting fee in terms of cost-effective cultural presence for NZ On Air.

What is clear is that half-hour children’s magazine television tottered uncomfortably on the edges of youth culture and was terrorized by the instrumentality of ratings when it failed against **The Teletubbies**.

In Chapter Eleven the range of reductive and reified versions of audience are analysed. The powerful instrumentality of ratings in rationalizing the children’s schedule and commissioning process is critiqued. Ratings are used to chastise the team (Born, 2000: 415) for not producing a winning programme against a global cult hit, **The Teletubbies**. Ratings are also used to confirm the ‘commonsense’ notions (held by programmers, managers and commissioners) of what the audience wants. Ratings evidence, collected from individuals in less than 200 homes, is used to justify the reversioning of **What Now?**

A second 'commonsense' notion of broadcasting managers is that whilst girls will watch content targeting boys, boys reject 'girls' content. This had critical implications for what was viewed as successful content in **What Now?** The rich qualitative data from focus groups, which promised insights into 'the pristine state of the natives' (Born, 2000: 416), is also critiqued, this time as a reductive view of the audience that amplifies gendered cultural tendencies into polarities. The way boys respond in focus groups is problematic for the **What Now?** team's defence of gender-inclusive creative strategies. Research outcomes emphasize differences between boys and girls, divisions that are already policed by peer-group behaviour, and increasingly gender-polarized marketing appeals. Of particular importance is the way focus group material is used by risk-averse broadcasters in 1998 to defend their commonsense view that boys reject **What Now?** as a girls show. If, as commissioners believe, girls can be relied on to continue to watch 'boys' fare, but boys cannot be relied on to watch material targeting girls, then boys' content requires particular attention and provision, and girls targeted material is defined as a problem for **What Now?** to solve. Thus it can be conjectured that (as feminists argue) female cultural pleasures continue to be marginalized by powerful commissioners, despite the value of 'girl-power' for marketers. There is also a suggestion that the very objectives of 'inclusive' age-targeted 'middle ground' children's media is in the process of being viewed as too 'feminised', because it is 'politically correct'.

During the April review, the production team confirms their 'commonsense' understanding of the **What Now?** audience based on a wide range of production experiences with children. This leads them to query the validity of ratings statistics, whilst remaining hyper-aware of the power of ratings in decisions to recommission the programme. Broadcaster definitions of 'attitude' encapsulate the battles between NZ On Air and TVNZ over defining childhood. TVNZ commissioners argue that children reject 'childhood' provision, whilst embracing the 'attitude' of 'youth' provision. Their talk emphasises being 'on the side of children', freeing them from constricting parental (read restrictions of middle-class, maternal and educational) control. Their 'commonsense' view appears to be supported by ethnographic evidence from both marketing and cultural studies research that demonstrates that children use youth targeted television, videogames, advertising and music products in their 'projects' of identity formation at younger and younger ages. This presents dilemmas for children's production teams. The raw cultural politics over the place of commercial culture in publicly funded children's programming is a case in point. Some adults identify themselves with children in their

desire to have access to the cornucopia of global commodified pleasures; others speak in a parental tone that accepts responsibility for funding local programming that guides children into commodified culture in gradual age-stages. It is clear that adults, themselves, are engaged in a 'generational war'. Children's media rights are being used both to justify their access to commercial free speech, *and* to sanction parental definitions of non-commercial cultural provision for children.

### **What is 'children's television'?**

Future media policy requires brokering across a range of axes: government ministries (media, education, welfare); interest groups (parents, children, politicians and commercial stakeholders) and properties and rights windows (television, video, web, books, toys, clothes, educational kits).

This thesis illustrates how 'children's television', as a clear object for research, is disappearing. Once the pre-eminent entertainment and marketing medium for children, television is now just one of many promotional media platforms for corporates and new branded entertainment supersystems. As the case study progressed, the researcher found herself increasingly exploring public relations, marketing, rights windows and promotional strategies for the ways that they shaped children's media culture, rather than the television production process itself. For example, in the mechanics of the marketing campaign for Eta/Tazo television shrank to just one exploitable window for exposure within a larger intertextual and marketing universe. Commercial free-to-air television's continued existence relies on its ability to provide a premium window for marketers to local audiences of children, and by the late 1990s was no longer the only means of doing so. In Chapter Ten the case studies of TVNZ Enterprises and Planet 2 illustrates how brands, including TV2, designed cross-promotional and associational deals that created synergy in terms of promotional exposure to children. These ranged from simple advertising deals, to elaborate promotional and cross-promotional, contra and sponsorship arrangements for music, entertainment, and food brands. Arrangements, designed in theory to benefit both parties, enabled commodified products to be circulated within the locally subsidized environment of **What Now?** This chapter also explores how cash-strapped New Zealand producers were innovative, using corporate money to fund more spaces for local culture. For example national and regional businesses were approached to subsidize or sponsor **What Now?** in order to promote their brands to New

Zealand families. Children's producers manoeuvred, creatively, using a range of cultural and economic resources, to carve out their own local, and particular, creative spaces.

### **A discussion of cultural power**

This returns one to issues of cultural power in the moment of cultural production. Born has called for a reconsideration of the 'imbrication of power and knowledge' in production moments where 'the power to represent and to create—in sociolinguistic terms, to speak, to engage in the struggle for the sign—is foundational for cultural politics'. (2000: 406). One can argue that New Zealand children's producers are important media 'intellectuals' who, in their most idealistic moments, dream of creating new imaginative horizons for children rather than cautious reversionings of what has rated in the past. It is clear that producers in New Zealand during the closing years of the twentieth century were required to delimit their creative visions for children to the desires of commissioners within the default mechanism of deregulated broadcasting. This returns one to the judgements of cultural value.

Bourdieu fires a broadside at cultural studies when he critiques post-structuralist scholars as 'double access' intellectuals who have access to both high and low culture and thus wield a form of symbolic violence over those who cannot choose between forms of culture. It is interesting to adapt this idea to the case of children's media culture. In terms of his argument, a scholar like Seiter can be viewed as 'double access' intellectuals, privileged by life histories, education *and* wealthy national cultural milieu. This stands in contrast to children in New Zealand, who are reliant on commercial television provision for their cultural pleasures. Children, it can be argued, suffer from the symbolic violence of powerful programmers who programme *only* what will rate, usually animations, and post-structuralist scholars like Seiter who are complicit with commercial programmers in their celebration of *only* animations and popular culture. Hodge and Tripp, Buckingham, and Davies are unified in their support for media diversity and complexity for children, and critique of unqualified celebrations of textual agency that confuse the power over the text with power over the agenda of children's television and other media.

In Chapter Seven it is discussed how Raboy reduced the strands of 'quality discourse' to market assumptions, high policy assumptions, professional assumptions and public interest assumptions. (Raboy, 1996). Frith reduces these quality discourses to three: 'quality' as a regulatory discourse, 'value' as economic discourse and 'good' television

as aesthetic discourse. (Frith, 2000). Born (2000) argues that, as useful as these may be as a crude taxonomy of institutional discourses in broadcasting, they do not take into account new overlaps between discourses, as for example in the example of the BBC's entrepreneurial success. Furthermore, she rejects the relativism implicit in these 'quality' judgements on the grounds that:

...whilst it is possible for producers and commissioners (as intellectuals) to be aware of past audience reactions to programmes, it is not possible for audiences, nor their representatives in audience research, to imagine the future in a way that can be practically realized – to make good television (Born, 2000: 416).

The skill of producers in 'judging how to progress a set of generic possibilities in given conditions and how to balance the enhancement of the entertainment, pleasure and education of the audience' (Born, 2000: 406) is well demonstrated in the case study. The risk-averse New Zealand TVNZ commissioners constrained the television text in extreme ways during the 1990s, yet producers still managed to carve out unexpected creative spaces, often using corporate money. It is useful to contrast this with the creative strategies available in more financially cushioned and/or regulated environments. Davies, for example, describes how an idiosyncratic drama that appealed to few adults (**The Demon Headmaster**), given time, earned cult status with girls and boys in the United Kingdom. (Davies, 2000). Likewise, Laybourne, as CEO of market leader Nickelodeon, described a deliberate policy to model assertive girlhood, personal rights and civic pride in Nickelodeon as an aspect of its market appeal to parents. (Laybourne, 1995). So it is interesting to note how commercial broadcasters in New Zealand vied to commission a drama when NZ On Air ring-fenced drama money during the period of post election broadcasting review. There is a role for regulatory intrusion and assertiveness in the marketplace.

The problem, as Born sees it, is how to develop a positive analysis of cultural value, in order to explore the positive possibilities of cultural production, rather than be constrained by reactive, anti-inventive, forms of cultural production. Key to this particular analysis of children's production is the power of discourses to form the practices that shape production and thus bring into media texts the childhoods they espouse, which for Born highlights:

...the importance in television research of engaging in a combined analytics and an intervention: to recognize that critical analysis cannot be disengaged from an attempt to intervene in the struggle over discourses being employed in the media industries and institutions themselves (Born, 2000: 408).



She argues that critique and intervention are far from mutually incompatible, as long as the researcher is willing to consider public and specialized public knowledge *performatively*. It is important to understand how ‘external’ discourses and knowledges are folded into the reflexive processes of cultural production. Funding crises, and the need to find extra corporate funding, define the geographic and cultural understandings of New Zealanders now as much as the public-service goals of early radio did then. In such ways, the exploration of institutional forces like funding, sponsorship, licensing, promotion create an openness to unexpected ‘discourse coalitions’ between children’s producers and sponsors. It also demonstrates how these creative deals increasingly transcend television as a medium.

The researcher has learnt much from ethnographic insights into the ‘labile moments of power and potential agency in cultural production’ (Born, 2000: 406) in New Zealand children’s television. These observed production moments shatter the possibility of studying ‘local children’s television’ as a discrete object of research. Local children’s television production serves as a portal to wider exploration of agency within children’s cultural formation. The question has become not what is post-modern culture, but rather where it is, and why, and which groups have the most interest in constructing and promoting it. Post-modern metaphors of play were useful because they provided shorthand which preserved ‘thick description’ of text. This has generated the ‘delicacy of distinctions’ that made the difference in cultural and social interpretation (Geertz, 1993: 27). Textual connotations provided indicators of ‘sociocultural contradictions’ and demonstrated that ‘exhibition’ and ‘excess’ in **What Now?** are, as Caldwell asserts, the result of forms of global and local corporate behaviour, anxieties about restless viewers, and stylistic possibilities provided by new digital technologies (Caldwell, 1995:337).

Reflection on the discursivity of production moments, reaches a point of ‘*both empathy and distance*’ (Born, 2000: 409), thus enabling moves beyond relativism towards future possibilities of grounded advocacy. As Buckingham (2000), Davies (2000) and Sefton-Green (1998) assert, the problem now is how to define what matters culturally within new media environments for children, and find ways of enabling such choices to happen.

Children are devoted fans of the brands of global popular culture. Children have no concept of non-branded media space or content. Research evidence presented suggests that parents, politicians, teachers and producers should acknowledge these facts whilst listening to children so as to not be captured by a new equally romantic construct of

children's audience agency that subscribes to the rhetoric of a democracy of brands and how new technologies empower children and put an end to the older culturally stifling 'walled garden of childhood'. Children continue to be both media savvy and media dumb and the challenge is how best to enable them to grow into insightful future media critics. Children need to be proud of their origins as well as being confident, independent media users/ producers. When local mediated imaginative horizons become shrunken by the market synergies of global brands, children (and the adults in their lives) have less to play with in the serious business of growing up into a rich sense of cultural identity.

I want children to know that they can weave their global pleasures into the weft of history and geography of their own place and its cultures. I hope that some children here in Aotearoa/New Zealand will carve out new mediated versions of our precious place. I hope that others, like Peter Jackson, may be able to reversion 'old world' narratives through visions of our place for the world.

The next question is where I, and others who share this vision, should put our energy.

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## INFORMANTS

### What Now? The Production Team

Jo Ffitch, Kate Fraser, Emma Gribble, Andrew Gunn, Kate Hawkins, Barbara Nolan, Melanie Richardson, Mike Ritchie, Shavaughn Ruakere, Anthony Samuels, Jason Faafoi, Rose Scheyvens, Robin Shingleton, Nick White, Ned Wenlock, Belinda Simpson, Alan Henderson, Dean Cornish, Janelle Burns, Margaret Leslie, Anne Williams, all children who sent letters, photos and jokes to the club.

### Interviews

Andrew Gunn, Script Writer, 6/5/98

Andrew Shaw, Production Manager TV2, 11/9/98

Anne Williams, Producer, 14/4/98

Briar Harland, DDB Prime Advertising Agency, 13/10/99

Bronwyn Hayward, Chair of The Children's Television Foundation, 1995–2000, 15/3/98, 10/8/98, 20/10/99, 12/2/00

Chris Day, Research Manager TVNZ, 18/9/00

Chris Prowse, New Zealand On Air, 11/9/97, 5/10/98

Clare Haycock, Sales and Marketing National Manager TVNZ, 11/9/98

Dave Howell, various from 1996–2000

Dave Walker, 17/9/00

David Hawker Colenso 14/2/99

David Innes, Executive Director of the Advertising Agencies Association, 10/9/98, 17/9/00

Geoff Steven, Head of Programme Commissioning TVNZ, 29/7/97, 11/9/98, 17/2/00

Greg Mayor, Producer

Hal Weston, 4/5/96, 6/6/97

Huntley Elliott, 19/2/96

Ian Gubbins, Audience Researcher for Programming TV2, 11/9/98

Jane Wrightson, Television Manager for New Zealand On Air, 13/10/97, 13/3/98, 26/2/99, 25/3/99

Jeremy Irwin, Executive Director of the Association of New Zealand Advertisers 10/9/97, 6/6/98, 10/9/98, 17/9/00

Jeremy Scott, Monaco, agent for Nintendo merchandise, 18/9/00

Jill Desborough, Group Manager Commercial Affairs, 17/2/00

Jo Coleman, Publicity Manager TV2, 9/9/98

John Ramage, Colenso, 14/2/99, 27/7/00

Jude Anaru, Producer, 3/3/99  
Julia Baylis, Programme Manager TV2, 9/9/98  
Kate Hawkins, Researcher, 11/11/98  
Keith Tyler-Smith, Producer, various from 1996–2000  
Kerry Attwell, TVNZ Enterprises, 10/9/98, 15/2/99, 15/3/00  
Kim Gabara, Producer 15/3/96, 10/6/99, 17/5/00, 15/5/00  
Liam Jeory, TVNZ Public Affairs, 7/9/98, 14/2/99, 2/3/00  
Liz Fraser, Advertising Agency Manager TV2, 11/9/98  
Margaret Leslie, Production Assistant, 11/11/98  
Mark Callaghan, Cadbury New Zealand Manager, 12/2/99  
Michelle McClean, Marketing Assistant Toys Hasbro New Zealand, 18/9/00  
Mike Chunn, APRA, 24/10/98  
Ned Wenlock, Graphic designer 15/3/98  
Nicole Hoey, Producer, 9/11/00  
Paul Greaney, Hasbro New Zealand Manager, 14/2/99  
Peter Worrall, 3D Productions, 3/3/00  
Pru Ellis, DDB Prime Advertising Agency (account manager for McDonalds), 14/2/99  
Rex Simpson, Producer, various from 1996–2000  
Roger Hall, 20/2/96  
Steve Smith, Manager TV2, 11/9/98, 15/10/99,  
Sue Brewster, Brand Manager TV2, 9/9/98  
Sue Woodfield, Head of Production TV3, 16/2/00  
Tainui Stevens, Executive Producer, Maori programmes, 11/9/98, 15/2/99

And particularly:

Ian Taylor 4/7/97, 18/7/97, 4/9/97, 14/11/97, 1/7/98  
Jane Palmer 20/2/98, 24/2/98, 15/4/98, 30/6/98, 1/9/98  
Sarah Pennock 17/2/98, 24/2/98, 27/2/98, 1/7/98, 21/8/98, 18/9/98, 2/12/98  
Tony Palmer 7/7/97, 10/3/98, 3/4/98, 26/4/98, 5/5/98, 13/6/98, 30/6/98, 17/7/98, 8/10/98  
Janine Morrell 5/5/97, 12/5/97, 18/7/97, 25/7/97, 26/9/97, 12/11/97, 17/2/98, 24/2/98,  
19/4/98, 4/5/98, 24/6/98, 9/11/98, 20/2/00.

## Measuring Media Giants: The Big Guys...

The following information was published in *The New York Times* on September 8, 1999, following Viacom's announcement of its plan to buy CBC.

	<b>TIME WARNER</b> Total Rev.: \$26.8 billion	<b>WALT DISNEY</b> Total Rev.: \$22.9 billion	<b>VIACOM (incl. CBS)</b> Total Rev.: \$18.9 billion	<b>NEWS CORPORATION</b> Total Rev.: \$13.6 billion	<b>BERTELS-MANN</b> Total Rev.: \$12.7 billion	<b>SEAGRAM</b> Total Rev.: \$12.3 billion	<b>GENERAL ELECTRIC</b> Total Rev.: \$100.4 billion (\$5.3 billion in media revenue)
<b>MOVIE &amp; TELEVISION PRODUCTION</b>	REVENUES: \$8.0 billion INCLUDES: Warner Brothers and New Line Cinema	REVENUES: \$10.3 billion INCLUDES: Walt Disney Studios, Buena Vista, Miramax, Touchstone Films, Disney Feature Animation	REVENUES: \$4.8 billion INCLUDES: UPN, Paramount Pictures, Spelling & Viacom Productions	REVENUES: \$4.5 billion INCLUDES: Twentieth Century Fox & Fox Animation Studios		REVENUES: ~\$2.9 billion INCLUDES: Universal Pictures movie studio, video & animated film production	
<b>CABLE PROGRAMMING</b>	REVENUES: \$5.4 billion INCLUDES: Turner Broadcasting and Home Box Office (HBO)		REVENUES: \$3.2 billion INCLUDES: MTV, Nickelodeon, Showtime, TNN and CMT (country music stations)	REVENUES: included above INCLUDES: Fox Family Channel, Fox Kids Network & Fox News Channel		REVENUES: included above INCLUDES: USA Networks (46%) & international broadcasting ventures	REVENUES: not available INCLUDES: CNBC (with Dow Jones), MSNBC (with Microsoft) & Rainbow Holdings (Bravo & AMC)
<b>PUBLISHING</b>	REVENUES: \$4.5 billion INCLUDES: Time, Inc., DC Comics, & Little, Brown and Company	REVENUES: included above INCLUDES: Fairchild Publications (magazines), Hyperion (books), Disney Publishing Worldwide	REVENUES: \$565 million INCLUDES: Simon & Schuster	REVENUES: \$4.8 billion INCLUDES: The London Times & the New York Post (newspapers), Harper-Collins (books)	REVENUES: \$6.8 billion INCLUDES: Bantam Doubleday & Random House (books), Parents & YM (magazines)		
<b>MUSIC</b>	REVENUES: \$4.0 billion INCLUDES: Warner Music Group, Atlantic Group, Columbia House (50%) & Elektra Entertainment	REVENUES: included above INCLUDES: Walt Disney Music Publishing, Buena Vista Music Group	REVENUES: not available INCLUDES: Copyrights to more than 100,000 songs		REVENUES: \$4.4 billion INCLUDES: Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG), Arista Records & RCA Victor	REVENUES: \$3.8 billion INCLUDES: A&M, Def Jam, Geffen, Island, MCA, Motown, Phillips & Verve labels	
<b>BROADCASTING (TV &amp; RADIO)</b>	REVENUES: \$260 million INCLUDES: WB Network (75%)	REVENUES: \$7.1 billion INCLUDES: ABC TV & Radio, 10 TV & 30 radio stations, ESPN & History channels	REVENUES: \$6.3 billion INCLUDES: CBS Network, Infinity Broadcasting & 17 TV stations	REVENUES: \$3.8 billion INCLUDES: Fox Television Network, British Sky Broadcasting & Star TV of Asia	REVENUES: not available INCLUDES: Largest TV & radio group in Europe	see Movie & TV Production	REVENUES: \$5.3 billion INCLUDES: NBC Network & 13 owned & operated TV stations
<b>THEME PARKS</b>	REVENUES: not available INCLUDES: Six Flags	REVENUES: \$5.5 billion INCLUDES: Parks in California, Florida, France & Japan	REVENUES: \$421 million INCLUDES: 5 amusement parks			REVENUES: \$0.8 billion INCLUDES: Parks in Florida & California	

## Selected conglomerate interests in children's entertainment

	Disney	AOL/Time Warner	News Corporation	Viacom
<b>Hollywood distributor</b>	Disney Buena Vista	Warner Bros	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox	Viacom Paramount
<b>US Networks</b>	ABC (1995)	Warner Bros television network	Fox Network	United Paramount Network (50%) (1999 CBS)
<b>US Cable And international pay markets</b>	Disney Channel Toon Disney Walt Disney TV	TNT Cartoon Network	Fox Family Channel (Boyz and Girlz channels) Nickelodeon UK (50%) Nickelodeon Aust (25%)	Nickelodeon cable services America and overseas
<b>Programming</b>	Disney	Warner bros Hanna Barbara	Saban Entertainment Fox animation	Nickelodeon studios (movies and animation)
<b>Investment</b>	Part investment in TiVo			
<b>Publishing</b>	Disney Magazines Disney adventure Disney comics	Time Life books Children's Book of the month club Time for kids Mad magazine	Harper Collins Children's Bookgroup	Simon and Schuster book deal for Nickelodeon imprints Block buster video Nickelodeon Books Nickelodeon Magazine Lisa Drew series
<b>Licensing and merchandise</b>	1996 signs 10 year deal for use of film merchandise in McDonalds outlets worldwide 660 Disney stores world wide	170 Warner Brothers shops (1997) MerchandisingHit: rebranded Loony tunes	MerchandisingHits: Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, The Simpsons	Nickelodeon shops Merchandising hits: Rugrats Startrek
<b>Theme parks</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sourced 6/7/01 from <http://www.cjr.org/owners/>

## THE CHILDREN'S TELEVISION CHARTER

1. Children should have programmes of high quality which are made specifically for them, and which do not exploit them. These programmes, in addition to entertaining, should allow children to develop physically, mentally and socially to their fullest potential.
2. Children should hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their language and their life experiences, through television programmes which affirm their sense of self, community and place.
3. Children's programmes should promote an awareness and appreciation of other cultures in parallel with the child's own cultural background.
4. Children's programmes should be wide-ranging in genre and content, but should not include gratuitous scenes of violence and sex.
5. Children's programmes should be aired in regular slots at times when children are available to view, and/or distributed via other widely accessible media or technologies.
6. Sufficient funds must be made available to make these programmes to the highest possible standards.
7. Governments, production, distribution and funding organisations should recognize both the importance and vulnerability of indigenous children's television, and take steps to support and protect it.

May 29, 1995

*The Children's Television Charter, was presented by Anna Home, Head of Children's Programmes, Television, BBC, at the first World Summit on Television and Children in Melbourne, Australia, March 1995 (see the Clearinghouse newsletter, News on Children and Violence on the Screen, No 1-2, 1997). The charter was revised and adopted in Munich in May 1995. It is actively used by many organisations.*

*A session at the Second World Summit in London, UK, March 1998, was devoted to the progress of the charter. For more information on this progress, see Anna Home and Amy B. Jordan (1998) the Second World Summit on Television for Children 1998. Final Report. University of Pennsylvania, The Annenberg Public Policy Center.*

### **1993 CRITERIA FOR CHILDREN'S FUNDING**

1. Age specific, indigenous and cost effective television which avoids duplication or funding similar programmes that reach their target audiences in similar ways. Competitive selection will ensure this.
2. Family audiences... NZ On Air is committed to ensuring that New Zealand programmes are well represented in the prime time mix and that specific thought is given to young people when these programmes are made....family drama and comedy programmes
3. New Zealand Programmes: funded programmes reflect the diverse range of people in Aotearoa/New Zealand and that Maorilanguage and culture are included as a natural part of indigenous programme making relevant to all New Zealanders. Programmes will reflect an appreciation of our bi-culturalism.
5. Quality: funded programmes represent quality television in terms of the final product and the use of well informed and creative personnel
6. Value for money: ...produced in a cost-effective manner and reach their intended audience
7. Continuing Research: including development of programme evaluation Instruments.
8. Continuing Consultation:
8. Promotions:
9. The final funding criteria gives due consideration to changing standards and regulations.



# MISSION STATEMENT

To produce high quality New Zealand children's programming which:

- supports young peoples' positive sense of self and surrounds
- reflects New Zealand's cultural diversity
- fosters imaginative and creative thinking
- encourages young people to participate fully in life
- is entertaining and informative.

## LOCAL CONTENT HOURS ON TV ONE, TV2 AND TV3

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Drama/Comedy	39	59	55	86	223	264	283	357	357	336
Sports	509	691	1653	1283	1735	1075	1531	1545	1077	865
News/Current Affairs	550	709	997	924	1009	1023	1087	1045	1198	1440
Entertainment	292	458	528	525	886	588	364	454	302	482
Children's	325	440	534	739	1264	1019	861	745	783	806
Children's drama	12	21	25	20	33	27	2	28	12	0
Maori	131	144	143	111	163	170	156	173	218	256
Documentaries	43	36	107	139	175	190	207	257	252	269
Information	213	253	208	213	226	431	477	415	867	1147
Total NZ Content	2112	2804	4249	4039	5715	4788	4969	5018	5066	5601
% of Schedule	23.9%	31.8%	24.2%	31.7%	30.2%	23.2%	23.2%	19.7%	19.2%	21.3%
Total Prime Time	686	943	1189	1281	1640	1769	1821	1546	1586	1636
% of Schedule	23.5%	21.6%	27.2%	29.3%	37.5%	40.5%	41.7%	35.4%	36.3%	37.5%

- Notes:
1. TV3 commenced in November 1989
  2. Figures have been rounded
  3. Prime time hours for all three channels are calculated as 4368 in total

ACNIELSEN DATALINE SERVICE  
Top Programmes Analysis

Date : Mon 09-01-97 - Mon 08-31-98  
Target Audience : All People 10-12

Potential : 130000  
Sample : 53

Results in Percentages

Programme	%s	CPT \$	Cost
1 Richie Rich	TV2 1 114	42	228.80 9500
2 Sabrina The Teenage Witch	TV2 1 114	38	198.80 7600
3 The Best of Trading Places	TV2 1 60	38	272.87 10300
4 Miami Spice	TV2 1 31	36	300.70 10800
5 Blank Cheque	TV3 1 120	35	156.72 5500
6 The Flintstones	TV2 1 112	35	174.16 6050
7 Bingo	TV2 1 113	34	193.84 6650
8 Spice Up Your Life	TV2 1 31	34	204.86 6950
9 Andre	TV2 1 112	32	318.40 10300
10 Forrest Gump	TV2 1 172	32	393.82 12500
11 The Witches	TV2 1 120	31	217.95 6650
12 Rent-a-Kid	TV2 1 113	30	155.97 4750
13 Mrs Doubtfire	TV2 1 152	30	312.52 9500
14 The Wizard of Oz	TV2 1 126	30	157.00 4750
15 3rd Rock From The Sun-IN 3D	TV3 1 58	30	214.69 6400
16 Speed	TV2 1 142	30	356.95 10600
17 Far From Home-Adv. of Yellow Do	TV2 1 91	29	149.14 4350
18 How the West Was Fun	TV2 1 118	29	208.83 6050
19 Little Giants	TV2 1 132	28	196.47 5550
20 April's Angels	TV2 4 34	27	337.80 9150

Sample Size Warning: Information shown based on samples of less than 75 for single observations should be treated with caution.  
Caution Small Sample Size: Information based on samples of less than 75 should be treated with extreme caution. This applies to both single and multiple observations.

All People 10-12 = AGE[10,11,12]  
TV1 = TV1 National, TV1 North (Pre 9508), TV1 Central (Pre 9707), TV1 South (Pre 9707), TV1 Auckland, TV1 Hamilton, TV1 Palm. Nth., TV1 Wellington, TV1 Christchurch, TV1 Dunedin  
TV2 = TV2 National, TV2 Auckland, TV2 Hamilton, TV2 Palm. Nth., TV2 Wellington, TV2 Christchurch, TV2 Dunedin  
TV3 = TV3 National, TV3 Northern, TV3 Waikato, TV3 Central, TV3 South (Pre 9805), TV3 Christchurch, TV3 Dunedin  
TV4 = TV4  
Mon 09-01-97 - Mon 08-31-98 = Mon 09-01-97 - Mon 08-31-98

Copyright : ACNielsen

Mon 09-28-98 17:33

ACNIELSEN DATALINE SERVICE  
Top Programmes Analysis

Date : Mon 09-01-97 - Mon 08-31-98  
Target Audience : \*5-9\*

Potential : 293000  
Sample : 111

Results in Percentages

Programme	%s	CPT \$	Cost
1 Bingo	TV2 1 113	44	152.20 6650
2 The Wizard of Oz	TV2 1 126	30	156.40 4750
3 The Flintstones	TV2 1 112	30	204.31 6050
4 Andre	TV2 1 112	29	355.59 10300
5 Monkey Trouble	TV2 1 124	29	232.22 6650
6 Richie Rich	TV2 1 114	27	349.24 9500
7 We're Back-A Dinosaurs Tale	TV2 1 79	25	287.75 7300
8 Chitty Chitty Bang Bang	TV2 1 178	25	162.85 4050
9 How the West Was Fun	TV2 1 118	24	253.09 6050
10 Rover Dangerfield	TV2 1 86	24	177.80 4250
11 The Witches	TV2 1 120	24	280.99 6650
12 The Pagemaster	TV2 1 85	23	203.58 4750
13 Free Willy 2	TV2 1 122	23	171.71 4000
14 McDonalds Young Entertain(Sun)	TV2 21 46	23	260.80 5993
15 Little Giants	TV2 1 132	23	243.31 5550
16 Hook	TV2 1 179	23	206.05 4700
17 The War Of The Buttons	TV2 1 117	22	271.71 6050
18 Across the Ditch	TV2 5 30	22	473.42 10440
19 Lassie	TV2 1 119	22	192.73 4250
20 Prince's Trust Party in the Pa	TV3 1 159	22	183.79 4000

\*5-9\* = AGE[5,6,7,8,9]  
TV1 = TV1 National, TV1 North (Pre 9508), TV1 Central (Pre 9707), TV1 South (Pre 9707), TV1 Auckland, TV1 Hamilton, TV1 Palm. Nth., TV1 Wellington, TV1 Christchurch, TV1 Dunedin  
TV2 = TV2 National, TV2 Auckland, TV2 Hamilton, TV2 Palm. Nth., TV2 Wellington, TV2 Christchurch, TV2 Dunedin  
TV3 = TV3 National, TV3 Northern, TV3 Waikato, TV3 Central, TV3 South (Pre 9805), TV3 Christchurch, TV3 Dunedin  
TV4 = TV4  
Mon 09-01-97 - Mon 08-31-98 = Mon 09-01-97 - Mon 08-31-98

Copyright : ACNielsen

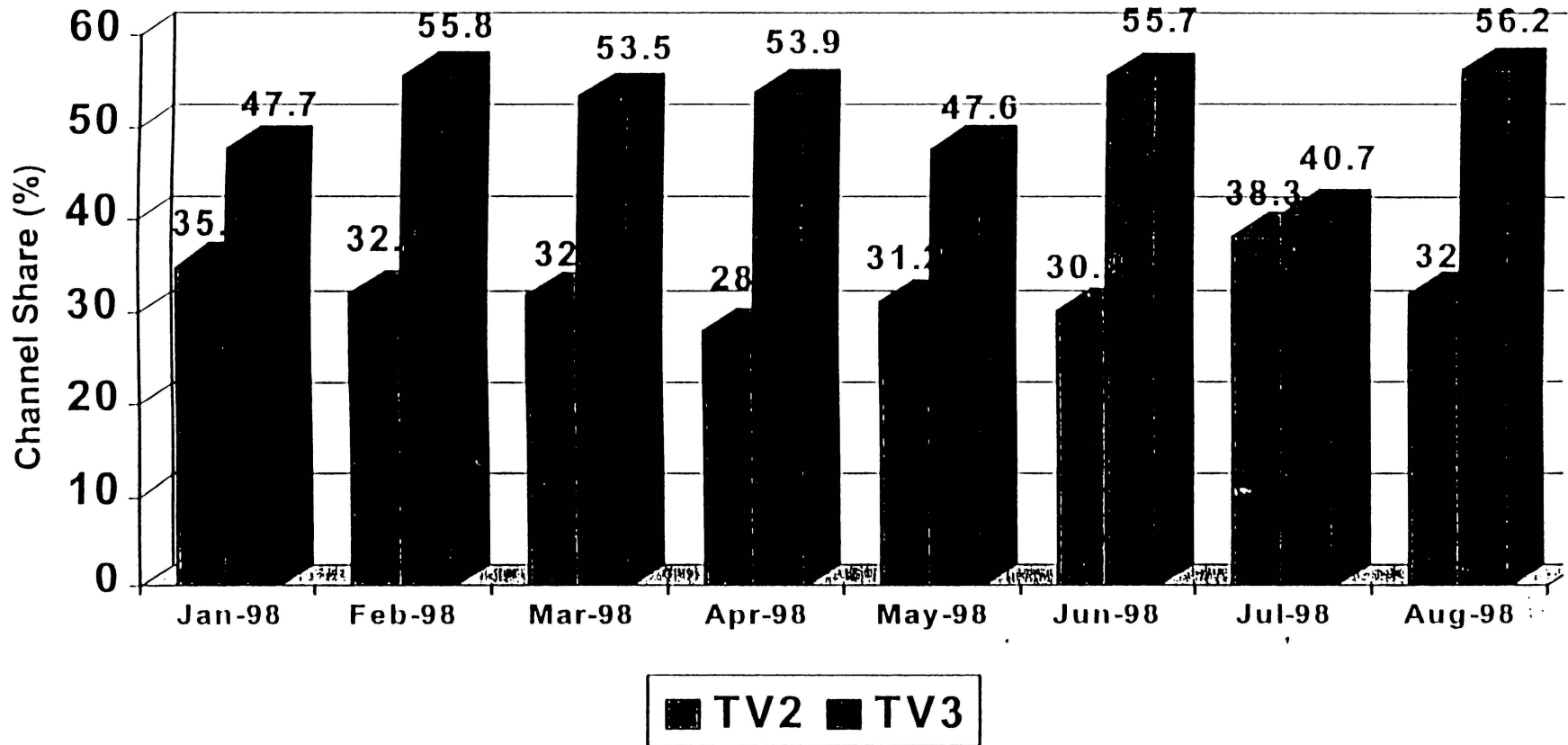
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# Channel Share Analysis

## Monday-Friday 1530-1600

### 5-12 yrs



# Channel Share Analysis

## January-August 1997 v 1998

### Monday-Friday 1530-1600

#### 5-12 yrs

