Constructed Childhoods: A study of selected animated television programmes for children with particular reference to the Portuguese case

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To my dear grandparents

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must start by expressing my gratitude to *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*[1] that has funded this research from its beginning in 2001 through the programme *POCTI*[2], co-financed by the European Social Fund, and the Portuguese Ministry for Science and Higher Education.

A number of people have also helped to put this project together whether by being directly involved in it, or by offering me their friendship and words of comfort and encouragement. This is my humble tribute to them:

Thank you to Prof. Máire Messenger Davies, my supervisor, who has always been there for me. Even after well-deserved winds of change took her across the Irish Sea, to the University of Ulster. Your contribution to this work goes beyond your invaluable expertise; believing in me was a precious gift.

Acknowledgements are also due to academic and support staff at the *School of Jornalism, Media & Cultural Studies*. In particular, Prof. Terry Threadgold, the kindest Head of School; Ms Jo Marshall, for her promptitude in helping; Mr Colin Larcombe, for arranging the appropriate video version of *The Tale of the Three sister who fell into the Mountain* for dubbing; Mr. Jon Adams, for his time, patience, good humour, and technical skills in organising the dubbing with a team of three hopeless Portuguese amateurs (in which I am included).

Several television and animation professionals have contributed to this research. Mr Cris Grace, former S4C representative, and the team from *Right Angle*, producers of *The Animated Tales of the World*; as well as Mr Humberto Santana from the Portuguese *AnimaNostra* have provided me copies of their films to analyse and use in the children's tasks. Laura Tey; Thomas Scnehider; Aidan Hickey; Virginia Witts; and Fernando

[1] Foundation for Science and Technology

[2] Programa Operacional "Ciência, Tecnologia, Inovação" (Operational Programme "Science, Technology, Inovation"

Galrito, have all dedicated some of their time to my interviews. Anonymous people at the public relation department at RTP have answered my inquiries about the channel's programming.

My deepest gratitude to the Portuguese children from the *Centro Social de Esgueira* and the local primary school that, in 2001 and 2003, participated in the fieldwork - I hope you have all enjoyed the tasks, and that the results from this research will contribute in some way to the quality of your television. Thank you also to their teachers and educators who have welcomed me.

My Portuguese friends have also helped me to accomplish this project. Ângela Ribeiro-Throp and Tiago Soeiro were my partners in the dubbing session of *The Three Sisters who fell into the Mountain*; Ana Martins, was a crucial contact that has opened the doors to my work with children in the day-care centre, together with Sérgio Tavares, and Teresa Martins, she has aided me too in preparing the gifts for the children. Above all, their priceless friendship has made this journey smoother. Inês Pires de Lima, though not directly involved in any of the activities, has been a true companion.

Yan, Xinyi and Zahera, my fellow PhDs and dear friends. With you I have shared sorrows and joys, and in your friendship I have found strength to carry on.

Thank you to my loving parents from whom I know I can count with unconditional support.

And finally, Savvas, who has constantly encouraged me, and in whom I always find comfort and love.

SUMMARY

This thesis addresses the broad question: To what extent is children's animation culturally specific?

Despite the criticism and concerns about the lack of quality imprinted by globalisation and commercialism, children's animation is still a relatively marginal subject of analysis. Thus, the need to perceive what characterises a programme aiming both at home and international markets; the mechanisms underlying the globalisation of the genre; and its implications on cultural identity.

The research is based on a triangular model that considers three levels of communication: production, message and reception. It makes use of semiotics, interviews and task-oriented techniques to analyse different moments in the communication process. The aim is to understand how animation professionals construct child audiences, and how such constructions are reflected in the media texts they produce and/or broadcast; while, at the same time, assessing how a group of Portuguese children 'use' animation.

The results suggest that creatives of children's animation are aware of the importance of cultural relevant products, but may lack an informed knowledge of the child audiences. As a consequence, children do not always decode cartoon messages accordingly – particularly signifiers of 'cultural specificity'. In relation to the globalisation of children's animation, the data shows that market oriented productions can be made relevant for local audiences, and that their contents are often re-invented by children. The study calls for further research into animation contents and for a greater inclusion of young audiences both in academic studies and in programme production.

The history of the study of childhood has been marked not by an absence of interest in children (...) but by their silence

A. JAMES et A. PROUT (2000, p.7)

Introduction

a) The object of study - Children's animation and Cultural 'Specificity'

Recent debates about children's television have been concerned with the impact of global media on children's lives, and the extent to which big conglomerates are contributing to the homogenisation of children's culture. This study aims to contribute to the debate by looking at children's animation, a genre frequently criticised for its commercialisation. Media tycoons, like *The Walt Disney Company* and *Viacom* control the market, whether by dictating styles and contents, or by acquiring smaller production studios that present alternative and successful products. The need for cultural relevance and specificity is an argument dear to the hearts of local producers, as it stresses the pertinence of their contribution within particular cultural contexts; but I came to realise that 'specificity' is a concept often loosely used.

It is precisely the relation between the concept of cultural identity, or, in the producers' words, "cultural specificity", and children's animation that has led me to this research. I will approach globalisation's impact on children's culture by trying to answer to the broad question: *To what extent is children's animation culturally specific?* Addressing this question raises other interrogations that help in defining the focus of this research: In what ways do animation creatives perceive cultural specificity, and how do they convey it through the cartoon? And what does this say about their constructions of childhood? What meanings do children derive from animation, and how relevant is it in terms of children's own identities? How do children in a given cultural context interpret and position themselves in relation to such texts? In answering these questions I will be trying to understand how, through animation, producers construct the child audience, and how children construct and present themselves as audiences; ultimately I will be dealing with the distinct, and perhaps contradictory, constructions of childhood.

b) From the artist to the child - a multi-directional analysis

Buckingham (1993) argues that a social theory of television literacy should be concerned with the relationship between cognitive and linguistic processes, and the

specific social practices within which they are situated. He suggests that such theory must acknowledge the social and historical determinations of television literacy. The emphasis should be on considering televiewing as a integral part of children's social lives; children should be seen as members of different 'interpretative communities', having different orientations to television and using it as a means of negotiating social and cultural identities. Such an approach indicates the existence of multiple 'television literacies', each with different social and ideological functions. However, in relation to the strategies for studying children's television, he asserts that while it is important to see children as competent social actors rather than passive victims of media, it is also important not to over laud the sophisticated 'media-wise' child. Buckingham asserts that researchers must go further than simply interpreting children's experiences with media, and should be looking into ways of examining how producers, children, parents and media researchers themselves construct notions of childhood in relation to media.

In order to answer my research question(s), I propose an approach inspired by contemporary semiotics. Semioticians view the communication process as resulting from a process of encoding and decoding meanings into messages; inevitably framed by the social contexts of meaning production and reception. The study of children's animation, or any type of children's texts for that matter, can only benefit from an inclusive research strategy that will enable the researcher to place animation into context. The aim is to see animation as a media product, part of an ongoing communication process, on which meanings are affected by what individuals bring to the communication process, and by their assumptions of what childhood and children's animation should be.

Hall's Model of Mass Communication (1999, pp.507-517) highlights the importance of considering the communication process both at the production and reception end. Borrowing from semiotics' terminology, he suggests that televisual signs are complex ones. He states that they are not only constituted by the combination of visual and aural discourse, but also by iconic signs holding strong resemblance to reality. However, as televisual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes, reality is, therefore, constantly mediated through language. What television thus offers the viewers are narratives of reality; discourses intelligible through the operation of codes, which may be so familiar that they appear not to be constructed. The television

communicative process can be seen as a circuit of communication, where institutional structures of broadcasting produce programmes in which messages are constructed. These are framed by meanings and ideas about, amongst other things, routines of production, technical skills and assumptions about the audience. The message is then received and decoded by the audience. The codes of encoding and decoding may not, however, be perfectly symmetric, as Hall argues that 'distortions or misunderstandings arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange' (ibid, p.510).

As a science concerned with the ways in which meanings are socially produced by the existence of sign systems, semiotics is relevant to the understanding of the messages coded in animated programmes. Meaning does not exist per se, it is constructed by the communicating agents. In this sense an animated programme is a meaningful discourse constructed by the agents of the communication process; resulting from their efforts to both encode and decode the message conveyed. Semiotics tells us that communication in society is established through codes, through organised signs that carry meanings for those involved in the process. One of the basic assumptions of structuralist semiotics, however, was the idea that researchers could actually 'discover' the true meaning of messages, something that was not always achievable by the communicating subjects. By disregarding the communication process as a whole, this approach is likely to produce results that are highly subjective, mere assumptions about the meaning of the message.

Based on Hall's proposed model of mass communication, I will be considering the production of children's animation; how do animation creatives perceive the child audience; the animation programmes as encoded texts, and the ways in which programmes directed at both global and local markets address the audience; and, finally, the ways in which the child audiences decode the animated messages.

Research (Hodge & Tripp, 1996; Davies, 1997) has shown that children's modality – the judgement about the reality of things – changes with age; that children learn to distinguish between what is real or unreal on television, as they also learn about the conventions of media and about the environment surrounding them. More importantly, they suggest that such skills can be acquired by watching television.

It is precisely animation's weak modality that makes it an interesting object of study, if children's perception of reality changes with age – the same research has shown, for example, that older children have a preference for realism unlike younger children – it can be expected that their understanding of the message contained in the cartoon will differ. It is common to hear references to the child audience as if it was a uniform mass. Children's television, for instance, targets individuals between four and fourteen years-old, and attempts to maximise audiences through programmes that may appeal to a wide range of ages. This fact raises questions about the programmes' content and suitability, as well as questions about how broadcasters and creatives (in a broad sense that includes those involved in the production of the programme) conceive and construct the child audience.

According to Hodge & Tripp (ibid), a television show is not a single stimulus but a 'vast meaning-potential complex'. They consider that meaning cannot be made out of texts without taking into consideration the communicating agents. The authors acknowledge the multitude of meanings that a programme can convey, and use semiotic concepts to provide possible meanings of a particular cartoon. This is then compared to children's own readings of the programme. In so doing they work not just at the level of the message, but also the contexts in which it is produced, including variables such as the environment where discourses are produced; age and psychological development, gender; and socio-economic and ethnic origins.

Children's animation cannot be read according to the same parameters used to understand animation for adult audiences. What might appear to be senseless to parents, and adult viewers in general, might be meaningful to children. As referred, I start by asserting that texts do not have a fixed meaning waiting to be deciphered by the privileged and enlightened researcher. From this perspective, two questions emerge in relation to children's animation: To what extent do the messages conveyed by children's animation reflect the programme-makers' constructions of childhood? And, to what extent can programme-makers and children's understanding of television messages be said to converge?

Childhood is not simply a natural stage in the human biological development; it is also a product of historical and social circumstances. This is not to disregard the importance of

considering the psychological aspects of televiewing; on the contrary, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which meaning is mentally constructed. But even when drawing this argument one must realise that it is itself a product of a particular social construction of childhood. It was only during the 1980s that developmental psychology shifted from the idea of the child as an 'active scientist' working on its own, to the notion of the child as a 'social being' who learns through interaction with others. As other researchers have argued (e.g. Davies, 1989; Lesser, 1974), televiewing can be one of those social activities. Research in this line of thought (Bruner et al, 1987; Dorr, 1986) asserts that learning about the world is a constructive process in which children process information collected from the physical and social environment, interpreting and evaluating it. Such perspective, as I will have the opportunity to discuss in a later chapter, provides insight into how meaning is mentally constructed when children watch television.

By watching and debating television, children become media literate. Television uses codes that are not unique to the medium, but it also makes use of a set of symbols, which are specific to screen language, both at the production technique level (cuts, zooms, fades), and at the level of narrative (for e.g. the diversity of genres and their inherent narrative structures). Such sign systems need to be learnt in order for the messages to be understood. In relation to television and children, a recurrent example used to illustrate the importance of being familiar with television's codes is the lack of perception young children have of the size of objects on screen – a teddy bear can look like a monstrous creature, without another object or a person next to it to give the sense of its size.

I suggest that some approaches to children's television are somehow unsatisfactory because they fail to recognise the complexity of the communication process and of the production of meaning. Undoubtedly, many criticisms of television and children's programming are due to a certain resistance in exploring new angles to the relationship between children and television. Such a stance often results in regarding television as having a life of its own, with the power to affect family relationships and the development/ behaviour of children, without questioning the conditions of viewing, producing and broadcasting.

c) The meanings of animation

Animation is frequently seen as the children's genre *par excellence*, the assumption often being that children will watch any cartoon uncritically. As such, children's animation has been the target of parents, educators and academics, who criticise it for the effects that its violent contents and market orientation have on the child.

On what concerns academia, much research has been conducted on children and television but few have taken an interest in children's animation beyond an 'ill-effects' perspective. Research on animation appears to be mostly concerned, with few honourable exceptions, with Disney's legacy, concentrating on issues like the industrialisation and commercialisation of animation, and on its contribution to the globalization of American popular culture. The deregulated American broadcasting environment has actually opened a way to critique American cartoons for being market-oriented, and for producing toy-led characters.

The problem with such approaches is that they are limited to the effects of television on the child audience, revealing no real effort towards understanding the ways in which the audience relates to, and uses animation. It seems reasonable to suggest that such approaches provide an analysis resulting from the dissociation between the genre and the audience. The emphasis tends to be on the content of certain types of animation, or on the broader structural context from which such types have emerged.

A similar suggestion can be made in relation to children's cartoons marginal status within the *artworld* of animation; once more the emphasis is put on the legacy of Disney's empire and industrialisation. Children's animation acquires an inferiority status and is seen as *non-art* due to its links with mass production and commercialism. As a result it is often seen with disdain within film studies. Disney's animation is also criticised for its eagerness to reproduce reality, an obvious contrast to most *artworld* definitions of animation, which tend to emphasise its potentialities in subverting the world around us. If, however, subversion is a key element in the definition of animation as a form of art, then I would argue that children's animation cannot be so easily dismissed. Subversion, as suggested later on, can be found in some children's animation, perhaps not so much in its style, but rather in the narrative.

A distinctive character of animation, even if one chooses to talk about 'high' and 'low' forms, is the ability to tell stories through film; stories in which the characters are never bound to the laws of physics. Indeed, Disney's characters may be drawn in such a way as to mimic human and animal motion, but they are still fantasy. In reality, ducks do not talk, brooms do not dance, elephants do not fly, and the princess does not return to life with a kiss. This transformational character means that animated films are not graphic representations of reality, and the awareness of this may influence the ways in which the audience perceives events.

It is common to listen to programme-makers stressing how important it is, in children's television, to relate the stories to children's experience and, when possible, add something that will be valuable to the child's daily life. Elaine Sperber, at the time head of CBBC drama[1], stated in a debate on children's drama and fiction that she prefers issue-driven programmes dealing, in a responsible and even humorous way, with situations that children are likely to face at some point of their lives. Recommending that producers and broadcasters should be aware of the reality children live in and prepare them for it. A similar argument was also drawn by Finn Arnesen[2], at the time Vice President of Programming, Development & Acquisitions for Cartoon Network Europe, who said that the channel looks for shows relevant to children's lives, approaching subjects with which they deal with on a daily basis such as sibling rivalry. If one of the purposes of children's programmes is to prepare them for live, who then decides what should children learn about? And according to whose standards of living are decisions about programme content made?

Being a medium that produces and divulges readings of reality, television can be said to have a mythologizing character; its narratives are mythical, they are particular ways of reading, interpreting, and explaining the world. More than a means of entertainment, children's television is also generally expected to teach something useful to its viewers. Thus, television should provide child viewers with skills that might help them face the more or less complex situations that they will encounter in life.

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[1] September 11th 2002, *Children's Television Drama and Fiction*, Chapter, Cardiff
[2] April 27th 2001, *Bristol Animated Encounters*, Watershed Media Centre, Bristol

As Bird and Dardenne (1988) put it, myth's primary function is precisely to explain phenomena and provide acceptable answers that do not necessarily reflect reality, but convey this through an imaginary world and in so doing they become reassuring. Television is, according to Campbell (1995), the contemporary expression of myth, defining and reinforcing society's cognitive, moral, and aesthetic structures. The medium can be seen as modern societies' way of replacing the ancient forms of storytelling whose purpose was to reduce life's contradictions and complexities.

Because of its role as a producer of social meaning, television is also a producer and divulger of ideology. According to Grossberg et al (1998), media are one of society's most important producers of meaning and codes of meaning; they portray assumptions about values and norms that reinforce their unquestionable character. The authors suggest that, whilst they might not overtly support the dominant elites, media take for granted a set of relationships that are in agreement with social relations of power. Ideology is the means of those who control power within a society to seduce people into seeing the world according to their own terms or codes. Applying such a view to the relation between children and television, Bazalgette and Buckingham (1995) stress the impossibility of children's television, saying that it is a world made for children but created by adults - whose texts, though far from being simply coercive, have implicit power relationships. The authors argue that, because of the widespread belief that children are somehow alike in their tastes, interests and aspirations, it is just as important to understand what adults want and demand from children through television texts.

The question of children's tastes is even more pertinent in the present context, as the production of children's television for young audiences suffers the constraints and the pressures of international markets. According to Claire Jenkins, Executive Producer at *HIT Entertainment*[3], the high costs involved in the production of animated programmes mean that producers have to look at international markets both for profit and funding, and that international co-productions are increasingly becoming the solution. She acknowledges that in the international market producers risk 'watering-down' the original idea in order to please everyone. Still, the producer's belief is that it is possible to try and maintain cultural specificity whilst compromising in other aspects essential to

[3] September 11th 2002, *Children's Television Drama and Fiction*, Chapter, Cardiff

international appeal. What characteristics, then, are able to convey cultural specificity; and what can be said to have international appeal? How can we define cultural specificity in a multicultural country like the UK; or even in Portugal where communities of immigrants from former African colonies, or from Eastern European countries are increasing in numbers? And to whom is cultural specificity relevant? To the audience, or to the adults who determine what children should or should not see?

The study of children's animation has been marked by an emphasis on its commercialisation, particularly in the US since the de-regulation of children's television in the 80s, the consequent increase of toy-driven cartoons; and the globalisation of American Culture. However, there are different ways from which these media products may be approached revealing how children use and mediate the programmes' messages. Zipes (1995), for instance argues that Disney's movies have racist and patriarchal agendas. Richards (1995) suggests that the context of home viewing videos allows little girls to learn and appropriate the powerful fantasy world created in the song and dance sequences of Disney's *Little Mermaid*, and to explore adult roles through their own dancing. A more recent programme, the Japanese *anime* series *Pokemon*, has proven to be an international success. It was undoubtedly one the most popular, if not the most popular, cartoon amongst the children in my pilot study. Its success appeared to be related to the series' playground possibilities; children enjoyed reinventing the series in their play, and this was something to which merchandising contributed to. Some will say that this is a result of the commercialisation of children's culture, but is it not the case that children tend to imitate the world around them in their play? What is the difference between the girl that chooses to imitate her mother by putting on make-up, and the girl that chooses to similarly groom her *Little Pony*? Or, for that matter, the difference between the boy who during the 1950s played with a wooden sword pretending to be a pirate, or a little boy who in the 21st century plays with a Jedi's lightsaber inspired by the *Star Wars* movies? Of course one can always argue that the wooden sword has a different value because the chances are that the child had made it, but on the other hand, the lightsaber will most definitely be complying with safety regulations being less likely to cause serious injuries. One thing those two little boys have in common is the way that they can play roles that they are not usually allowed or expected to play.

In the context of a semiotic approach, animation for children emerges as a mythological representation of reality. Cartoons are thus ideological constructions; products of programme makers' assumptions, values and normative standards, which are 'imposed' on the public. Here it is possible to consider children's agency as deconstructions of cartoon meanings in a way that it is not necessarily coincident with that intended by the programme makers. Semiotics allows us to consider contextual determinations that can be of a varied nature; the construction of meaning will depend on variables such as gender, age and socio-cultural context.

This study will place an emphasis on issues of identity. How these are addressed in children's animation; how creatives construct children's identities, and how children use such programmes to construct their own identities.

The media play an important role in constructing cultural identity. Television allows the audience to become familiar with a diversity of cultural identities, and define themselves in relation to those. Individuals learn about their culture and about their place through a process of acculturation in which different agents like the family, school, media and peer group play a part.

Increasingly responding to the international market, producers of children's animation feel the need to justify the originality of their work and its relevance by referring to 'cultural specificity'. Such an abstract concept indicates that it very clearly translates into the concrete characteristics of the product. However, it appears to derive from the producers' own knowledge of the country where they work, and the international market within which they operate. How is this knowledge acquired, and how is it reflected in the programme itself? Is cultural specificity a synonym for 'cultural identity'?

Cultural identity is commonly defined in relation to both geographic and historical references, often linked to nationality. Such an approach is certainly problematic in a context of globalisation and Diaspora. Cultural identity can be better understood as a result of people's perceptions of class relations, gender, sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity; these will determine the ways in which individuals position themselves in the surrounding world(s).

Global television disseminates of particular forms of narrative in which western assumptions about the world are embedded. This can easily be synonymous with cultural imperialism. But global television can also be a mean for the circulation of multiple cultural discourses at a global scale as long as diversity is respected. UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity stresses precisely this point: "...the process of globalisation, facilitated by the rapid development of new information and communication technologies, though representing a challenge for cultural diversity, creates the conditions for renewed dialogue among cultures and civilizations". Hall (1992) also defends this argument; he suggests that television should respect a diversity of representations and programme types, as well as public debates on quality. Here, in my opinion, lies a crucial point in relation to children's television, created by adults often without much consultation with or empirical knowledge of their audience.

d) This thesis

In this thesis I will present a study of animated programmes that results from the triangulation of three different moments of analysis: **a)** on the creatives' own view of children's animation, their perspectives on what animated programmes for children should be, the challenges they face in the global market and how important they consider 'cultural specificity' to be; **b)** on the texts themselves, using semiotics to understand how the child audience is addressed. I have chosen to focus on four animated programmes. *Pokemon* and *SailorMoon*, both Japanese animations. At the time of the pilot study the first was an example of success in the global market, achieving popularity among children from different countries; and the second, appeared to be popular among the girls. The other two programmes are, from the creatives' point of view, characterised by a strong cultural 'specificity'. *The tale of the three sisters who fell into the mountain*, which is an episode from a series of world folktales, the international co-production *The Animated Tales of the World*; while the second is an episode from *The Quest for The Enchanted Islands*, a rare example of children's animation produced in Portugal – I have chosen Portugal not just because it is my native country, but also because here there is a general belief that investment in national programmes for child audiences is not worthwhile. The story is based on a myth from the time of a 'proud' period of Portugal's, widely known as 'the discoveries'; **c)** and

finally, I will be dealing with issues of audience reception through the results of fieldwork conducted with a group of Portuguese children, trying to perceive the extent to which they are able to read the texts' messages in similar ways as those intended by the creatives - as well as to understand how children use animation to construct their own identities.

In this study I will be testing these hypothesis: **a)** Cartoons for local markets reflect a greater concern with cultural relevance and diversity; **b)** Animation professionals' constructions of childhood reflect different interpretations of children's roles within society; **c)** Children's readings of the cartoons differ from the ones adults expect them to have; **d)** Gender, age and social context influence children's talk about cartoons; **e)** Older children are be less interested in commenting on animation due to its low modality; and **f)** The familiarity with the text's cultural signifiers favours children's interest in culturally relevant animation when this is available.

The research is presented in eight chapters. Chapter I is devoted to a review of the existing literature relevant to the study of childhood, and the relationship between children and television. Chapter II continues to explore the subject from a developmental perspective, looking at the ways in which meaning is mentally constructed.

In Chapter III I present the theoretical model of analysis that informs this research. Drawing from theories of mass communication and semiotics to design a triangulated analysis that considers how meaning is produced in the circuit of communication between producer, text, and receiver.

The following chapter discusses theoretical approaches to animation and how they can be said to relate to children's animation. It also considers the influences of globalisation on the production and distribution of children's animation.

Chapter V covers the methodological aspects of the research, explaining how the research methods were employed. In Chapter VI I discuss how the child audience, and cultural specificity are constructed through the animated text, using the results from a

semiotic analysis of the four animated programmes mentioned above, and the interviews with animation professionals.

The data from the fieldwork with Portuguese children is analysed in Chapter VII, which is organised according to the different moments and tasks of the fieldwork with the Portuguese children.

The final chapter is a conclusion that gives an overview of the results in relation to the research question, the theoretical background, and the initial hypothesis, also looking at further directions for future work in the area.

CHAPTER I – Constructing television's young audiences

> States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child[4].

> The child 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 the child's choice[5].

1.1) Childhood has a construction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child places children on a competence platform. It recognises them as competent human beings who hold, therefore, the right to participate in decisions concerning their own lives. Whatever rights are allowed to children, Article 12 still limits the child's position by referring to a somewhat abstract measure of allocated importance, stating that the child's views should be given due weight according to age and maturity. Thus the Convention itself is providing arguments against children's rights to decide.

Davies (2002, p.6) says that through Article 13 the 'universal child' is constructed in two ways: on a social-psychological bases, children become competent individuals whose opinions do not necessarily coincide with that of adult caretakers; and politically, where children become agents independent of caretakers while, simultaneously, having the right to claim the adults' protection and sustenance. The author argues that:

> The construction of the child as a free agent, while clearly humanistically enlightened and disinterested, also fits well with the view of the child as a consumer: an independent operator in the market place capable of free 'choice'. The modification of the construction of the child as agent – that the child also has the right to be protected by adults – underlies attempts to regulate media production and promotion to children (ibid)

It is now a common place concept that childhood is not merely defined in biological terms, but is seen as a product of historical and social circumstances. As the above

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[4] Article 12, point 1, Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF
[5] Article 13, point 1, Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF

interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child reveals, the ways in which societies understand childhood has a profound impact on the child's social role.

Confronted with the question 'What is a child?' it is likely that most of us would provide a reply based on age characteristics, competence and occupation. Perhaps the answer would be something like: 'A child is a very young, dependent human being who demands constant guidance and protection, and who spends most of his or her time at school and playing'. However, a differently equated question such as 'What is a child able to do?' might not provide such obvious or consensual answers.

The concept that adults have of what children represent can be influenced by factors such as economic conditions; social, political and cultural background; and historical context. Being a child nowadays does not have the same meaning it had during the medieval ages, or in the industrial revolution when child labour was a norm. Ariés (1996, p. 125) argues that during the medieval period, for instance, the child's nature was not distinct from an adult's, and as soon as the child could live without the constant need of an adult's attention he or she would become a part of the adult society.

Elsewhere (1992, p.36) the author suggests that:

> [i]n medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children; it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In Medieval society this awareness was lacking (p.36)

Nowadays, subjects such as child labour are constantly brought up. Some argue it should be unconditionally forbidden, some are in favour of considering the cultural, social and economic contexts in which the child is raised, and others having total disregard for the child's well being, and employing children from a very young age in extreme working conditions. This illustrates that there might be a diversity of approaches to childhood, which can be seen as a result of constantly evolving social constructions. Ariés (ibid, p.126), suggests that the concept of childhood suffered a

great change during the 16th century, when "[a] new concept of childhood had appeared, in which the child, on account of his sweetness, simplicity and drollery, became a source of amusement and relaxation for the adult (ibid)".

According to DeMause (1992), between the 14th century – one that saw an increase in the number of child instruction manuals - and the 17th century, there was an 'ambivalent mode' in which the parents' task was to mould the child. Popular images of children often portrayed them 'as soft wax, plaster, or clay to be beaten into shape' (ibid p.57). From the 19th to mid-20th centuries, raising a child was more about training and guidance, teaching and socialising. Recently, in DeMause's opinion a new mode has emerged, the 'helping mode', which is based on the idea that the child is better informed than the parents of his or her own needs at different stages of life.

Warner (1994) argues that, in Britain, early Victorians kept Romantic theories of 'the child as a free spirit' though the reality of the 19th century's industrial context was one of exploitation and cruelty in the factories and mills. Concerns with this reality lead to reforms on the employment laws - seeking to protect children and educate them but, at the same time, increasing children's dependence on adults. In modern times, the 'separate sphere of childhood has grown – as a social concept, as a market possibility, as an area of research, as a problem' (ibid, p.5).

Buckingham (2000a) asserts that collective definitions of childhood result from social and discursive processes, which are not always consistent or coherent but are often characterised by resistance and contradiction. To illustrate his argument the author looks at the contradictory nature of institutions like school and family that expect children to 'grow-up' and behave in a responsible manner, while denying them privileges because they are not old enough to deserve or to appreciate them. Though such institutions hold the power to define the rights and responsibilities of children, the author suggests that children are constantly challenging and renegotiating those definitions. Even when law defines children's roles, contradictions still emerge; childhood is defined in contrast to adulthood. To be a child is not to be able to do a number of things that belong to the adult sphere; nonetheless, the age limit at which children are legally allowed to do 'adult things' varies in relation to different issues, even within the same country. Buckingham points out that in the UK teenagers are allowed by law to *have*

heterosexual sex at the age of sixteen, but cannot *view* explicit scenes of sexual behaviour on film until they are eighteen.

Boyden (1999) stresses this separation between childhood and adulthood, stating that in the 20th century, it contributed to the discourse over nostalgia for the lost happiness of youthful innocence. However, the author believes this has hardly been the case for many children around the world as news about violence, sexual exploitation, physical and emotional abuse constantly remind us. The ideal of a 'safe and protected childhood' has been given great impulse, Boyden suggests, from the social preoccupations and priorities of capitalist countries in the Western World. In its initial stages industrialisation relied greatly on child labour, but the increased mechanisation and consequent need for skilled workers lead to a realisation that youngsters subjected to hard working conditions would not constitute such a labour force. 'Schools then became a training ground for industrial workers and a place for containing and shaping childhood' (ibid, p.192).

Notions of childhood from the industrialised North have been exported to the South, firstly through colonisation and more recently, through organisations like the United Nations. Boyden explains that such notions created a 'fixed childhood' mainly informed by biological and psychological traits rather than the recognition of the social and cultural context. However, there are great contrasts in the way different countries perceive children's competencies and incapacities. The author gives Britain as an example of a country where young children cannot be left in the care of juveniles under fourteen years of age, and Peru where six to fourteen year olds are frequently the heads of the households. Similarly, the AIDS pandemic in Africa is increasing the number of parentless children. A report issued by UNICEF[6] at the end of 2001 explains how it orphaned eleven million African children – half of the orphans are less than ten years old, and the other half is between ten and fourteen – UNICEF estimates that this number will increase to twenty million by 2010. Though there is still a relatively low number of households headed by children under eighteen, 61% of the households are headed by grandparents - a fact that, along with the increasing numbers of children living on the

[6] 'Africa's Orphaned Generations', http://www.unicef.org/media/files/orphans.pdf

streets, does not make it difficult to understand how specific the needs and circumstances of childhood in those countries affected by the pandemic are.

> The majority of the world's children today do not live according to 'our' conception of childhood. To judge these alternative constructions of childhood – and the children whose lives are lived within them – as merely 'primitive' is to display a dangerously narrow ethnocentrism. (Buckingham, op.cit., p.10)

As constructions of childhood evolve distinctively according to social contexts, so does academic research approach subjects related to childhood in different ways, and indeed, with quite diverse outcomes. Bazalgette and Buckingham (1996) stress that

> Childhood has been the subject to a particular division of labour within the academic study. While sociologists have concerned themselves with 'youth', children have predominantly been seen as the province of psychology, as if they were effectively devoid of social experiences. Children, it would seem, are implicitly regarded as asocial, or perhaps pre-social (ibid)

Psychology's concerns with child development resulted in an emphasis on the inadequacies of children in relation to adults, on their lack of maturity compared to fully developed adults. Similarly, cognitive approaches focus on what the child can or cannot do due to their immature and irrational ways of thinking. Changes have come, from constructivist approaches (Dorr, 1986; Ariés, 1996; James and Prout, 1997, 2000) showing concerns with how age is constructed as a social category, and how this impacts on the different meanings that childhood has acquired historically and socially.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ibid) recognises children's rights to freedom of speech and choice, but ultimately gives adults the responsibility to decide how to cater for them at the different stages of the child's life. How adults construct childhood is thus, of great importance in defining the role children play and the ways they exercise their rights.

In relation to media texts produced for children, Bazalgette and Buckingham suggest that they are bound by a 'power-differential' between children and adults, and that the study of such texts must go beyond concerns of what children want or need from them,

to include the understanding of what adults expect and want from the child through those same texts.

The question of how adults 'imagine the child audience' is an important one. Thornborrow (1998), for instance, discusses children's participation in television genres aimed at young audiences. Looking at the discourse of children's television and at the role children play in its production through their involvement and participation, the author argues that the child's world is often constructed as wild and anarchic, though, in contrast, children's roles are often conditioned by adults.

> The actions of children themselves are strikingly restrained and controlled in all the interactive sequences analysed (...), while the presentation of the children's worlds as wild, uncontrollable and disorganised remains by and large an adult construction of what childhood is about. There is little evidence in these programmes of children being given the space to display discursive competence in anything other than their ability to participate in adult forms of mediated talk (...) (ibid, p.152)

The constraints on children's participation in media texts for child audiences led Bazalgette and Buckigham (op.cit.) to suggest that children constitute an 'invisible audience', in that they have very few opportunities to participate. It is frequently assumed that child audiences are somehow similar in their tastes; gender tends to be the main subdivision in terms of this audience but even so it is often turned to a single male category, as it is assumed by the industry that girls will watch boys' programmes but the opposite does not occur (see for e.g. Seiter 1995). The authors want to make a case for difference, appealing in favour of the many ways in which the child audience may be differentiated culturally and historically, and also on the grounds of ethnicity and gender.

1.2) On the importance or ignorance of age: childhood as a methodological construction

Developmental perspectives stress the importance of considering age when researching children; their focus is on the steps the child will walk towards adulthood. A common way to research the relation between children and media, and in particular television, is the influence of age on the cognitive and behaviour functions of the child. For example,

What are the implications of pre-school television programmes on the child's social and personal development?. Research projects based on this approach will prioritise the influence of biological and genetic features to understand the child's relation to its surrounding environment.

There are, however, some critical voices of the developmental theories. Harden et al (2000) suggest that:

> [d]evelopmental studies of childhood stress the difference between children and adults. Children are, at different stages, in different stages of development towards adulthood – the older they become, the more adult they become. One indicator of this is in terms of language. Moreover, the assumptions that such differences are inherent has encouraged the development and use of standardised tests to assess child development.

The authors consider that belief in natural and age-related differences has, indeed, influenced the ways in which childhood is constructed in modern societies. They argue that the developmental paradigm has practical effects on social organisation and interaction. School and family activities are organised in age specific ways, and it is the authors' believe that this is likely to produce behaviour, defined as age specific within particular settings. Referring to possible research methods, though not dismissing age-related issues, they assert that

> [t]here are many factors other than age which are central to research strategies and outcomes, including other forms of social differentiation, the situational contexts of interviews, and the subject area explored (...). [I]t is children's social location rather than anything inherent in being a child, which merit our attention. (ibid)

In adopting such a perspective, the authors favour questions of self-presentation while underlying the importance of considering the social context around both the research and the subjects.

When arguing that childhood is a dynamic arena of social activity, authors such Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (1998) also criticise developmental approaches, which they suggest, see children as less competent than adults. To the authors, the assumption that children are in a position of inferiority in relation to adults must be avoided, as it

deflects attention from the children's daily experiences. The competence paradigm prioritises precisely the present, collective experiences of children.

Methodologically, this implies a recognition of the primacy of empirical research. If children are understood as social agents, their competencies must be studied in the empirical circumstances of their everyday lives. These circumstances have the potential to be both constraining and enabling in a child's capacity to display social competencies. When considering what methodological approaches would be more appropriate to study children's social competencies they assert that, so far, the most popular of the 'methodologies of competence' has been ethnographic research, using techniques such as participant observation, interviews, and the analysis of children's documentary accounts of their own lives. But ethnography can be problematic in this field. The fact that the researcher is an adult is a clear obstacle to participation in the social world of children.

Mandell (1991) has approached this problem, and advocated that the researcher should take the 'least adult role' that can be achieved - by attenuating all adult-like characteristics except the obvious physical size. Nevertheless, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis (op. cit.) alert us to the fact that the results accomplished cannot be considered as authentic, as they are an explication of what people appear to be doing. Another 'methodologies of competence' is, according to them, the 'conversation analysis', which focuses on the study of language as a resource that allows children to display social competence[7], particularly when combined with ethnographic methodology. For them:

> [e]thnography is useful in allowing children more voice in social scientific accounts of their lives, and can provide much needed ways of linking the micro-level details of agency to the macro-level constrains of social structure. Conversation analysis, on the other hand, provides a means by which we can see into the details of children's social worlds in situ, as they are being negotiated and constructed. Together with suitable ethnographic data this represents the closest we can yet come to viewing how children themselves competently organise their lives and accomplish the activities involved in 'doing' childhood. (ibid, p. 14)

[7] See as an example E. Sanders et al, 1998, 'Children's neo-rhetorical participation in peer interactions' in Hutchby et Moran-Ellis

While the 'competence paradigm' has raised the feasibility of studying children as research subjects in their own right, it is legitimate to question its detachment from the implications of adult control on the child's life. That is, though arguing that children's competence can either be enhanced or constrained by the social context where their actions take place, Hutchby and Moran-Ellis' argument concerning the 'methodologies of competence' seems to overlook the ways in which these enhancements and constrains occur.

Buckingham (2001) comments on the shift from the 'effects' model to a growing recognition of children's agency and competency in relation to media. Though valuing the importance of seeing children as competent social actors rather than passive victims of media, he stated his concern over celebration of the sophisticated, 'media-wise' child. The author considers that both views; the one that constructs a dependent and vulnerable child, and the one that constructs children as spontaneously and innately 'media-literate', are equally sentimental and patronising. Hence, he argues that when studying children and the media, a researcher must go further than simply interpreting children's experiences with media and examine how notions of 'childhood' are constructed in relation to producers, children, parents and media researchers themselves.

Solberg (1996) draws from her own experience as a child researcher to explore ways of obtaining valid knowledge about the everyday life of children. Her main concern is the adult-child interaction, not only in a research situation but also on a daily basis, and how this may provide an understanding of how childhood and age are constructed in contemporary societies. According to the author:

> [t]he study of children and childhood seems to confront us with a twofold challenge with regard to the problem of ethnocentrism. Like other researchers sharing a culture, we risk being ethnocentric. Because we are positioned within that culture as occupying adult roles, notably in families, we may have difficulty obtaining the necessary distance to reflect on adult ways of conceptualising children and childhood. (ibid, p. 53)

Without disregarding the existing differences between adults and children, Solberg describes how she came across the importance of using the 'ignorance of age'

technique during her own research, and its significance on further work with children. During a study on children's work in a fishing community in northern Norway, Solberg had the opportunity to take part in the activities herself. By observing and imitating others, the researcher joined community members, adults and children included, in the baiting of longlines and she realised that, despite age, everybody did similar kinds of work. Children were dismissed from work during school time, but apart from that they were assigned the same obligations as adults. The author exemplifies this with an episode she observed:

> A boy of about 11 years was complaining to his parents about work. He repeatedly asked what time it was, and I learned he wanted to leave the work and to join in Bingo at school. When no one seemed to take notice, he turned to his mother and asked her to complete his tub. To me his voice sounded 'child-like', and I noticed he was rather thin and considerably shorter than myself. Had she heard him? She obviously had. By continuing her work she demonstrated to all of us, what we (including her son) already knew, that if she took over his tub she could not at the same time complete her own, and the entire baiting work would be delayed. In relation to this, she implicitly said, our different ages do not matter. At the moment I saw him grow. I asked myself (...) whether childhood existed in this situational context. (ibid, p. 57)

Childhood might be overlooked in the situational context of work, but to say it did not exist is not accurate for the eleven year-old boy wanted to be elsewhere and take part in the school activities. However, as a child, the parental authority limited his actions.

Solberg goes on to describe how she administrated questionnaires, and interviewed children. Rather than adjusting the techniques to particular qualities of her young informants, her team designed the former to fit the setting where the research took place. Again, the emphasis is on the situational context admitting its influence on the behaviour of the children and, therefore, on the interaction between researcher and research subject. Also, the author believes that, whether researching children or adults, it is important to remain as a researcher and not to move to that of an 'ordinary adult' or, in the case of child research, an educator.

In terms of alerting us to pre-established assumptions of what 'childhood' is or of comparing children's competencies with those of adults, Solberg raises some interesting questions. Still, it seems to me that the author dismisses too easily the

importance of considering the existence of different stages of development of children, and I would argue the same in relation to Hutchby and Moran-Ellis' approach (op. cit.).

Solberg fails to reflect on the structuring of research techniques, by focusing only on the moment of interaction between researcher and child. Is it the case, from her perspective, that a questionnaire or the structuring of an interview for school children on a specific topic could be reproduced for an adult population? Questions as simple as the language to be used can be raised. It seems reasonable to question whether the assumptions regarding childhood are or not influencing the researcher at the initial stages of a research project. Most certainly they are.

Hutchby and Moran-Ellis tend to consider children as a homogeneous group, emphasising different competencies in relation to adults but overlooking differences between children. Though it appears to be a risk to attribute standardised competencies to children according to developmental stages, it is perhaps equally dangerous to ignore that these differences do exist.

Regarding this subject, Davies (1997) argues in favour of considering age differences when studying childhood, and of using the existing body of knowledge about the biological development of human beings. From the author's point of view, developmental approaches to childhood are not to be used prescriptively, but as a valid form of knowledge about how biological features strongly interact with educational inputs that surround the child. In her own study on children's literacy (ibid, p. 9), Davies used age difference as a variable to suggest that:

> [i]f a 5-year-old proves to be as articulate and knowledgeable as an 8-year-old, and an 8-year-old shows more imaginative reasoning than a 10-year-old, this tells us something about the potential capacity of 5-year-old, 8-year-old, and 10-year-old: maybe they can cope with more advanced books and lessons than we are giving them. But we cannot make this discovery without having some general expectations drawn from large numbers of observations of different-aged children.

Indeed, one of the conclusions of this study was that younger children tend to focus on the immediate, the concrete, the personal and the idiosyncratic when dealing with mediated representations such as those seen on television, and they can still view the

world as one populated by fantasy and magic. Around the age of seven or eight, the author asserts, there is a developmental shift towards rationalism as children's media tastes move away from fantasy and cartoons to more realistic genres. As Davies found, '[o]lder children (...) recognised the importance of magic, including the special magic of television techniques and effects, for the little kids' such as Sesame Street, 'but not for themselves' (ibid, p.145).

Acknowledging age differences is not an obstacle to the study of childhood; on the contrary it can actually be a departure point for a deeper understanding of children's culture. Approaches that like Solberg and Hutchby and Moran-Ellis' raise valuable questions regarding how research can be guided by the researcher's own assumptions on what childhood may be. However, researchers - being themselves social actors - cannot achieve a total detachment from any kind of pre-established assumptions. The recognition that these do exist may be the best way to reduce its effects on the research itself.

1.3) The helpless child

> Moral panics are often sparked off by one particular dramatic and newsworthy event that crystallises and distils a range of latent social fears and concerns (Murdock, 2001,p.158)

Neil Postman's (1994, p. 24) work is marked by a heavy criticism of television. He asserts that this medium has led to the disappearance of childhood as it blurred the separation between childhood and adulthood. According to him these two spheres had been separated by the invention of printing with movable type in the middle of the fifteenth century. "Literate Man had been created. And in his coming, he left behind the children (ibid p.36)".

The distinction, according to the author, did not exist in the medieval world, where a great part of the population was illiterate and shared the same social and intellectual environment. From this point onward, the young would require reading skills to enter the adult world, European civilisation reinvented schools, and childhood became a necessity. Schooling is essential when attempting to define childhood in modern Western societies. It is a well-established idea (unfortunately not always true to life)

that children have the right to education, and it is in a school environment that they should spend most of their time. But simultaneously, their right to leisure and entertainment is also recognised, and associated with childhood.

Nowadays, along with other media like the Internet and video games, children's leisure time has become inseparable from television, of the programmes it broadcasts, and the products it offers. The screen heroes have jumped into the children's hand as toys allowing stories and adventures to be reinvented by them; they have been given bodies, weaponry, wardrobes, and all sorts of accessories essential to the remaking of the screen's fantasy world. Television's role as a form of children's entertainment, however, is not restricted to those programmes specifically designed for younger ones; it broadens to other more family oriented genres. The analysis of children's preferences regarding television contents in a study about the role of television in the daily life of Portuguese children (Pinto, 2000) suggests, for instance, that one of their favourites genres is the 'telenovela', the Portuguese and Brazilian equivalent of soap-operas.

Through the years television has been the target of varied criticism, as well as public and academic debate. Some of these critiques, undoubtedly due to television's success among children, has been directed at the relation between the child audience and this popular medium. Neil Postman (op. cit.) believes that television is the main reason for the loss of children's innocence, arguing that "[i]t is in television that we can see most clearly and why the historic basis for a dividing line between childhood and adulthood is being eroded (ibid, p.75)". The idea is that television has opened the secrets of adulthood to children, being responsible for the end of a 'golden age' of family values that has been replaced by a decay of morality as children loose respect for their elders. Before television, children could not so easily access printed information, they were protected from knowledge about adult behaviour that, Postman believes, is bad for the child.

Whether television has in fact contributed to the disappearance of childhood may be questioned. Access to information has historically evolved both for adults and children. Nowadays the new technologies of communication in general, not just television, provide opportunities to obtain knowledge about a diversity of subjects that otherwise would not be so easily attained. Children and adults do have different spheres of action

and forms of social interaction. Even if one was to accept the argument that access to a variety of information sources leads to children's loss of innocence - can the existence of a children's culture, as well as of childhood as a particular stage of human development, be so quickly dismissed? This argument seems to reduce childhood to a stage characterised exclusively by some sort of naivety, with childhood and innocence being the same thing. If such was the case, childhood should then be an a-historic stage, somehow frozen in time and prevented from making any kind of evolution and transformation. As society changes, so does the child's role and place within it. 'Innocence' cannot be understood as the only dimension of childhood. It is within specific socio-cultural contexts that childhood needs to be understood.

Others have shared the unconditional view that television cannot contribute in any way to the child's well being. Though from a different perspective, Winn (1986) asserts that television has had such a powerful effect on children that it works as an addiction, depriving them of play and of sharing family life, and thus, existing in a sort of 'living-dead' condition. Moreover, she believes that it retards the physical development of the brain, encouraging mental laziness, impairing attention span and linguistic abilities, as well as depriving child viewers from their own identity. The idea that television is a drug derives from the author's argument that images do not convey the kind of meanings carried by words, and that visual stimuli do not involve mental information-processing activities. Suggesting that visual messages are devoid of meaning is an argument that cannot be accepted without criticism. Afterall, research has shown how images carry symbolic meanings, and how television messages are texts that result from the combination of two symbol systems (verbal and 'filmic'), which viewers need to know and decode[8]. Winn presents an account of desperate parents and educators struggling to win a battle with television over their children's attention, and of their attempts to 'regain control' over the young ones.

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[8] M.M. Davies (1987), researched the effects of television editing techniques – such as cutting, close-ups, fades - on understanding and memory of verbal information. She suggested, for instance, that the transformational function of the cut to close-up was analogous to sentence transformations such as the passive sentence, in the sense that both can be used as syntactic rearrangements that will give more prominence to the patient.
S. Calvert (1988), assessed children's temporal comprehension after viewing a television programme containing a flashback marked or not with sounds effects, either using dreamy camera dissolves or abrupt camera cuts, and concluded that formal production features affect children's comprehension of time.

Such approaches are mainly concerned with the negative effects of television, which the authors believe to be harmful. Their analysis expresses a point of view that does not allow any space to consider the child, and the child's own perspectives on the medium. Children are constructed as vulnerable and incapable of assessing what television offers, passive consumers in need of protection. Television messages are understood as having a fixed meaning, one that will affect the child audience in similar ways, moulding their behaviour and consciousness.

Media violence has greatly influenced the debate over the ill-effects of television. Meyrowitz (1985) for instance, in a similar argument to that of Postman (op.cit) shows his concern with the effects of electronic media on social behaviour, arguing that the transformations on communications media have merged adulthood and childhood. Television allows children to participate in events once exclusive to the adult sphere, which will inevitably have consequences in social behaviour. Sanders (1995), suggests that watching television is an activity that retards children's ability to develop their own creativity and imagination. Therefore, this medium has created an illiterate youth as it cannot provide the true orality possible only by book culture. The false oral culture provided by television leads to a lack of selfhood and, consequently, an absence of consideration for human life, leading to violent behaviour. The author's ultra-conservative approach concludes that only by the return of mothers to the home and the rehabilitation of the nuclear family can literacy be guaranteed.

Other authors' opinions on the effects of television and media on children result from more systematic, though not totally convincing, approaches to the subject. Behaviourist studies conducted with children seem to demonstrate the influence of the medium on the child's behaviour. In the 1960s, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory asserted that viewers learn which behaviours may be punished and rewarded through watching television, thus imitating the media model for rewards. He did a series of studies, famously known as the 'bobo doll studies', in which a young woman aggressively attacked a bobo doll painted as a clown. Bandura then showed his film to groups of small children who were given access to a room filled with bobo dolls that they then attacked in a similar way to the person they saw in the film.

Cantor (2001) explains that research on children's behaviour after watching distressing scenes on television shows they do experience fear and horror. This might even have long-lasting consequences, he argues, on their conduct and anxieties post-viewing, such as avoiding activities that may place them in similar situations. Bushman and Huesmann (2001) argue that viewing violence on television has not only a short-term stimulating effect on aggressive behaviour for viewers of all ages, but it also has a long-term socialising effect that makes lifelong aggressive behaviour more likely for children who watch a lot of it while growing up. According to these authors, children imitate aggressiveness; they become more condoning of violence; they believe the world is a hostile place; they are emotionally desensitised to violence; they use televised violence to justify their own violent acts; and are more likely to have aggressive ideas. Elsewhere, Huesmann (1986) suggested that social behaviour is controlled by 'programmes' stored in memory during childhood; repeatedly watching violence on the screen would lead to an 'encoding' of it on the cognitive map of the child, thus helping the maintenance of aggressive thoughts and behaviour patterns. Viewing violence contributes to the formation of the child's own cognition of how to behave in response to violence and what the outcomes are likely to be. The bottom-line argument is that heavy diets of television violence trigger a cognitive process that results in aggressiveness, and an increasing interest for programmes of that type.

Such arguments could only be credible if resulting from a life-long research project accompanying the children's development and behaviour, and then assessing it in relation to their viewing habits. The problem is that behaviouristic approaches tend to adopt an experimental methodology, whereby children are subject to a series of laboratory experiments designed precisely to assess the influence of violence on television. The main problem is that they tend to isolate children from their social environment, thus producing artificial situations, which raise questions as to whether children will behave according to the experiments' results in their day-to-day interactions.

Wartella et al (1998) conducted a content analysis of programmes on American television from 1996 to 1998, and found that there was at least one violent act on the majority of the programmes. Usually such violence occurred in a sanitised context and was very rarely punished (in more than 70% of the cases, the perpetrators were not

punished), and the negative consequences on the victim were rarely portrayed. Nonetheless, the authors do not consider this as something that will unconditionally lead to viewers' violent behaviour, and alert us to existing variations on the depiction of violent scenes, as well as on the viewing context. According to them (ibid, p.59), reactions to media violence vary in relation to a number of contextual factors such as the nature of perpetrator; the nature of target; the reason for violence; the presence of weapons; the extent and graphic detail of the violence; whether the violence is rewarded or punished; the consequences of violence; and whether humour is involved.

To put violence and the viewing experience into context helps to understand of how children perceive and come to use what they see on the screen. In a review of research into media violence in Japan, Kodaira (1998) shows that in the late 1970s the amount of violence in Japanese animation was comparable to that showed in the USA, though its nature was different. According to the author, Japanese animation shows actions and consequences in a more vivid way, with greater emphasis on the victims' suffering. Western media, on the other hand, show violence in a more sanitised manner, with little or no blood, and with heroes suffering less than villains. In relation to child viewers, Kodaira suggests, it appears that Japanese children tend to watch more violent programmes when under stress – even parents seem not to be so strict at home with what children watch on television - but the author considers that there is no valid evidence indicating that this results in violent behaviour afterwards; what appears to be the case is that more aggressive children tend to prefer the more violent genres.

In Buckingham's (2000a, p.125) opinion, moral panics about media's contribution to violence and crime such as child pornography, paedophilia, and child murders carry two distinct constructions of childhood: the first is that of the innocent child in need of protection; the second being that of the sinful and savage child with drives towards violence, sexuality and anti-social behaviour, instincts that the media seem to unleash.

Barker (2001) recalls the James Bulger case, a two year old murdered by two ten year old boys who beat him to death and abandoned him on the railtracks. At the time the media linked the incident to the movie Child's Play III, though no evidence was found that the boys had in fact watched it. The author argues that a closer analysis of the movie suggests it is a moral tale, in which a misunderstood and abused teenager does

the right thing regardless of the cost to himself, gaining courage and an emotional stability through the process. In Barker's view, the movie criticises adult exploitation, including corporate exploitation of children's culture. To the author, uninformed criticism of violent movies -making claims and assumptions about audiences' readings and to its bad influences - is not an innocent process.

> Histories of censorship, for instance, show how repeatedly the censors act in self-serving ways to limit or bar materials which might embarrass them. Yet, in attacking them, they always do so by calling them 'harmful' (ibid, p.35)

In 1994, shortly after Bulger's death, the Newson Report[9] was released. News articles at the time said it had conclusively established a link between video violence and real-world violence. It consisted of an overview of international research linking these two types of violence; concluding in favour of a strong connection between the violence children watch on television, and their aggressive behaviour. According to Barker, Newson's argument was informed by the effectiveness of advertisements, but Barker points out the fact that the latter usually work with positive feelings, and that negative feelings do not appeal to the viewers. Thus the use of negative imagery in educational adverts, aimed at making viewers think critically. To the author, 'media violence is the witchcraft of our society' (ibid, p.42) as studies on it have repeatedly failed to describe it properly, considering everything from cartoons to horror and news as belonging to the same category. Barker instead proposes that research should be done on the history of anti-media campaigns, and that different approaches to the subject be centred on the viewers, such as considering how different segments of the public develop and characterise their own categories of 'media violence'. One could also study how children develop their interests and how this relates to their liking for certain materials that critics may worry about; as well as the media preferences, and understanding of delinquents.

A similar view is shared by Gauntlett (2001), who suggests that much of the discourse about children and the media places the first as potential victims, an assumption often left unchallenged by children due to the methodologies used in such approaches. Laboratory and field experiments adopted by psychologists tend to place children in situations where little space to show their independence is given; violent scenes are

[9] Newson E, 'Video violence: direct causal link', in *Social Science Teacher* Vol 24 1, Autumn 1994

isolated, and quantified rather than interpreted. This type of research involves a 'distinctly ideological interpretation of what constitutes antisocial action', often expressing concerns with a perceived challenging of the status quo (ibid, p.53).

The methodological problems of research that focuses on the ill-effects of television has also been referred to by Gunter and McAleer (1998), who argue that television violence has been quantified by counting the violent scenes in programmes which researchers consider violent. This raises some problems as viewers' perceptions of violent events can indeed differ. According to the authors, research conducted to understand how children and adults rated violence has shown that some programmes viewed as extremely violent by 'objective' content analysis were seen differently by children, particularly in the case of cartoons. Once again the importance of context is stressed, since viewers can and do discriminate between types of programmes and the way in which they depict violent scenes. These capabilities are what the authors call 'perceptual discriminations'. Gunter and McAleer suggest that the debate on television violence is an ongoing one, and that:

> it is a subjective question as much as a scientific one: the answer lies, to a large extent, in prevailing public taste and opinion. Values change constantly and are reflected in what is deemed to be acceptable viewing fare (...). Much depends on the type of effect (...) and on the method used to measure TV's impact (ibid, p.116)

1.4) Children as consumers

> In the midst of consecrating innocence, the modern mythology of childhood ascribes to children a specially rampant appetite for all kinds of transgressive pleasures, including above all the sado-masochistic thrills of fear. And these child heroes – and heroines – now enjoy a monopoly on all kinds of unruly passions which adults later have to learn to control in themselves. (Warner, 1994. p.7)

The role of television in defining childhood has also been equated by departing from a particular feature in society to which television is intrinsically associated - consumerism. Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997) saw the media as an 'evil corporative ideological instrument' to which children are particularly vulnerable, with the power to destroy imagination and critical thought, homogenising the masses and stripping them

of social criticism. In the authors' view, media corporations are powerful enough to destabilise children's identity.

Kline (1993) adopted a similar approach, describing the 'homogenising' and 'labelling' influence of commercialisation in a context of massification. According to the author, there has been a decline in the quality of children's cultural products since what he calls the 'Golden Age' of classic children's literature. To him, children's culture, once an Eden like place, is being corrupted by commercialism that has gradually destroyed the traditional activities of childhood. He considers television viewing a passive activity even in a family environment, and believes that street play, peer and family conversation have been hopelessly replaced by electronic games.

This process of destitution of meaning started in the 19th century market's communication activity, and the Victorians' construction of childhood. Elsewhere (1998), Kline suggests that an awareness of the domain of children's commodities could be witnessed in the children's sections of the new department stores. The toy was seen as a symbol of the distinctiveness of children's world in relation to the social world of work.

> The Victorians awakening to the preciousness of childhood helped ensure that children's goods would expand along with other markets. Childhood was being increasingly characterised by specific behavioural traits and products (Kline, 1998, p.102)

Hendrick, who has investigated the historic constructions of childhood in Britain from the 1800s to the present, adopts a market-logic to analyse the relation between parents and children in modern societies. The author considers that parental authority is largely based on their control over consumer goods.

> [W]e know that adults have far greater control over the meaning and availability of consumer goods, which subordinate children's choices towards patterns that do not seriously conflict with those of adults. Moreover, since toys usually reach children as 'gifts', and we know from anthropological studies that 'gifts' are a very special form of exchange which require their own reciprocities, clearly gifts are not given 'freely'. Some return is expected. (1997, p. 59)

Kapur (1999) perhaps, better develops the argument that childhood in modern societies is constructed on a market basis. The author considers that children have been constructed as consumers, particularly in the USA, ever since the Second World War. She suggests that "there has been an active effort on the part of industry to transform the twentieth-century notion of children as innocents in need of protection to one of children as sovereign, playful, thinking consumers (ibid, p. 125)".

For her, television with its close relations to the toy industry is at the centre of the construction of children as a market segment with particular lifestyles and, therefore, distinct desires from those of other similarly constructed categories. The process provides formats, themes, narratives and characters that become central to the construction of a child's social identity in contrast to adults'. The author argues that the rapid disappearance of the world adults knew as children is a major factor creating the knowledge gap between them and the younger generations:

> The gap between the narratives, games, skills, and technologies that we knew as children and what our children know is vast, and the distance continues to grow rapidly. Children are no longer so dependent on parents for guidance in the world (ibid, p. 129)

This unfamiliarity with children's consumer culture has led to a loss of adult authority, and television has often been the scapegoat. However, Kapur considers that this medium is not a cause but, instead, a symptom of capitalistic expansion, and the new technologies are altering the relation between the public and the private realms on which the institutions of family and childhood rest. To the author, the notion of children as autonomous and sovereign consumers makes us forget that they are vulnerable, and likely to be exploited by the market.

Seiter (1995) had previously suggested that television does not only contribute to the construction of children as consumers, but also to their construction as audiences, and that this implies age and gender-based assumptions about what they like and what they should see. The analysis of children's television programmes, together with other genres such as game shows, news and general entertainment for children is a means to understand how the media constructs childhood, and can also reveal how those involved in the production and selection of television programmes construct their audience. The author examined some animated American series that appeared in the

1980s targeting the girl's market, such as *My Little Pony* and *The Care Bears*. In such programmes the characters' structure was rooted in no myth, fairytale or even cartoon, but on the manufacturer of products for this specific market. The shows tended to borrow from popular women's genres like romance, soap opera, and the family melodrama, and made critics speak out against the lack of 'creative integrity' in the programmes (ibid, pp. 150 – 151).

Comparing boys' and girls' cartoons (ibid, p. 175), Seiter argues that there are differences in the form of narrative construction. While boys' cartoons tend to emphasise chase and combat, girls' cartoons focus on the 'twists and turns of fate'; also the generic codes differ, for example, horror, science and fiction in the first, with romance and melodrama in the second.

> The girls' programs take cognisance of work behind the scenes, the work that adults do, and sometimes express an admiration for discipline, order, and hard work that constantly occur. This workers-behind-the-scenes motif is exclusive to girls' cartoons. On boys' shows magic, bravery, weaponry, and combat produce the result, no imagination is wasted on the boring, sacrificial, repetitive work that adults might do (ibid, p. 160).

These differences illustrate assumptions behind the production of the programmes, regarding masculinity and femininity. Not only inspiring their tastes but also their roles, and emotional and educating needs. Despite this, most children's programmes are not aimed at specific sections of the child audience; on the contrary sex and age differentiation tends to be ground down. Programmes are produced to appeal to a broad audience. As a result, stories tend to be centred on male characters and more male-oriented narratives. This is because it is believed within the production medium that girls will respond positively to such stories, but boys will not 'buy' female characters, romance; or family saga (ibid, p. 147).

In relation to toy advertisements, Griffiths (2002) claims that during the last quarter of a century the former have not suffered a clear change in terms of content and composition. They still rely heavily on stereotypical understandings of what roles males and females play; and those advertisements perceived by child audiences as being neutral and having mixed appeal are the product of a conscious effort to create

the 'illusion' that gendered structures do not exist. From her semiotic analysis of toy advertisements the author is able to conclude that

> In fact, however, the mixed ads were consistently 'masculinized' in terms of their formal features, even though this was not obviously apparent to an audience (...) who were effectively 'tricked' into thinking that the texts were gender neutral.

Seiter believes that 'pink and sugary' series like *My Little Pony offer* "representations that historically belong to 'low culture': flamboyant colours and hairstyles; wide-eyed, babyish animal figures; and a baroque flair for decorative detail" but, nevertheless, and in spite of their market-oriented profile, they have achieved something, which is to provide a choice to the feminine child audience 'not made out of identification with an insipid and powerless femininity but out of identification with the limited sources of power and fantasy that are available in the commercial culture of femininity (op.cit, p. 171)'.

The work of authors like Kapur and Seiter illustrate how the relation between television and the child audiences does not necessarily need to be represented as intrinsically negative. However, one must consider some limitations to their approaches; the first of which relates to the fact that both analyses focus on the specificity of American television during a period when the deregulation of children's television allowed the emergence of toy-led programmes guided by gender and age-based marketing strategies (see, for example, Kline, 1995, 1993). This perspective might not be so easily applied to other contexts, like the British, where children's television is characterised by the protection of young audiences. The 1990 British Broadcasting Act required, for the first time, that commercial channels (Channel 3 and 5) should devote "a sufficient amount of time"[10] to children's programming, defined by the ITC[11] (Independent Television Commission) as ten and three and a half hours respectively, per week. It was also stated that these must include a range of entertainment, drama and information programmes. Furthermore, the ITC Code of

[10] http://www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts1990/Ukpga_19900042_en_1.htm

[11] References to ITC are previous to the creation of the Office of Communications. At the time they were taken from links that are now deactivated:
http://www.itc.org.uk/itc_publications/itc_notes/view_note.asp?itc_note_id=27

Advertisement Standards and Practice incorporates a section on advertisement and children, which includes guidance on toy advertising. Among other things, it rules that:

> Advertisements in which personalities or other characters (including puppets, etc.) who appear regularly in any children's television programme on any UK television channel, present or positively endorse products or services of particular interest to children must not be transmitted before 9pm (...).
> Advertisements for merchandise based on children's programmes must not be broadcast in any of the two hours preceding or succeeding transmission of the relevant programme or of episodes or editions of the relevant programme[12]

The second point to be made relates to the way the child audience is constructed, and in this case both approaches cannot be said to greatly differ from those of Postman and Winn, in the sense that, when equating the relationship between children and television, they fail to consider the role played by the viewer. Emphasising the child as an active viewer, rather than merely addressing the issue from an outsider's point of view, could be achieved by adopting other levels of analysis - such as pondering the cognitive processes that occur when children watch television. One could also examine the child's understanding and knowledge of television messages, and thus their 'literacy'; or by contemplating children's own views on subjects such as programme content, regulation and television consumption, aiming to understand in which ways television is meaningful to them; and by so doing incur a lower risk of speculating about this medium's relevancy. The following sections discuss ways of understanding the role of children as 'televiewers'.

1.5) The 'uses' of children's television

1.5.1) Theoretical approaches

The 'ill-effects' perspective, according to Davies et al (2000) has at its core a concern with children's vulnerability and ignorance. This assumes that, in matters of taste, children will choose to watch material with poor morality and low cultural value, almost as if children have an innate preference for vulgarity and sensationalism. What to say, then of all those presumably, 'informed' adults who, more or less consciously, choose

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[12] http://www.itc.org.uk/itc_publications/codes_guidance/advertising_standards_practice/appendix_1.asp

to watch 'low culture' shows like Big Brother? It seems that adults' legitimacy to watch meaningless television programmes with little or no educational or cultural content is widely accepted. Arriving home after a day's work, switching on the television and sitting down to watch whatever poor quality programme is on appears to be recognised as a leisure activity adults are entitled to; switching on the television and switching off the brain is a relaxing activity to some, a deserved reward. With children, though, this is not often the case. Many academics, educators and parents, stress the need to give child audiences with programmes which provide educational and moral value, attacking 'mindless' shows; criticising animation programmes which, in some cases, they have never bothered to, watch and discuss with children.

Hodge and Tripp (1986) stress the importance of analysing not only the content of television but also the 'content' of viewers' response to it. The content of TV is not just the product of an encoding process, but is also a product of its interpretation, and this is because 'meaning is not a self-evident property of the image itself'. Responses to television's content are, therefore, a communication process to be decoded. '[J]ust as the television message is transmitted by different media and codes, so responses are communicated by different media and codes' (ibid p.43).

Decoding children's responses to television requires, in the authors' opinion, a prior theory of how television has 'content', considering the different levels of a message, as well as different codes and media. They stress the need to consider different codes and differences between distinct kinds of viewer and sender, also taking into account the social dimension of children's responses, and its effects on the language used. This is why Hodge and Tripp choose to pay detailed attention not just to the verbal responses of children, but also to non-verbal responses, to the body language of children as a form of performative and significant discourse.

> If one child says something and the rest nod approval, the single utterance has the status of group assent; but if a child says something and the others are all looking away, that indicates their distance from the utterance, though not necessarily their dissent. Laughter is another important though ambiguous and complex indicator. Sometimes it indicates that the statement is completely ridiculous, and is disowned by the laughter. Sometimes it signals great enjoyment and endorsement of what is said (ibid, p.51)

In response to Winn's argument and other similar ones that television has a narcotic like effect on children, Hodge and Tripp emphasise that concerns about fantasy's effects on children have a long history. This goes back as far as Classical Greece, where Plato in his work The Republic makes a plea to ban epic tales like Homer's Odyssey for 'telling false stories to children', in favour of tales designed to produce the best possible effects on a child's character. The philosopher's concerns derive from a belief that children cannot understand these stories' allegorical character, and thus they will have a strong impact on the individual's character as an adult. Such arguments derive from the idea that children do not have the capacity to distinguish between reality and fantasy; Hodge and Tripp consider the development of tools that will enable adults to understand how children make such distinction to be of primordial importance. The authors suggest two main factors that influence children's ability to make sense of television's content; understanding of myth, and modality judgements.

In relation to the first, Hodge and Tripp suggest that, in the case of televised animation, from an early age children are capable of some comprehension regarding the formulas underlying different episodes or versions of stories. This they refer to as children's capacity of 'understanding the myth'. The authors conducted research based on the analysis of *Fangface* and on children's readings of the story. They concluded that children had a good grasp of the stories' structures; being able to establish comparisons within the genre (in this case both Scooby-Doo and The Hulk) which Hodge and Tripp consider an important unit of meaning as child viewers go from the general – the genre, to the particular – the series and episode, in order to decode meanings. The participants in the task were also clear in the understanding that the episode would end with the triumph of good over evil and that the villain would eventually be caught. The children could also provide theories regarding who the monster in the story was, a fact that the authors see as the children's capacity to project the character's dual identity. Another finding was that children were able to give comments about stereotypic characters and their expected behaviour, as shown by this group's conversation:

> Interviewer: What's the difference between goody-goodies, and just plain goodies?
> Chris: Well, the goody-goodies real good-good. [loud laughter from the whole group]
> (...)
> Alan: The goodies might not solve the problems – the goody-goodies would. [whole group laughs] (...)
> The main characters do not drive the car. And the not so main characters do not – do. Ha!
> (...)
> Interviewer: The one that was driving. Mm. What sort of person was he?
> Alan: Oh, a person that agrees with anyone. [smiles; so do the other boys]
> Chris: Kind of a boring person. [Smiles; as do the other boys](ibid, pp.54-55)

As to modality, Hodge and Tripp describe it as the reality attributed to a message, and the degree of certainty it contains. The authors insist that it is not a fixed property of a message but, on the contrary, it is individually constructed; it is a subjective and thus a variable, relative and negotiable judgement that individuals, when making sense of television, constantly compare with their knowledge of reality. For that reason,

> (...) it is very likely that the modality judgements of children will be systematically different from those of adults, leading to very different responses to the same message compared to what adults assume is necessarily and objectively 'there' (ibid, p.106)

Hodge and Tripp point out a number of markers in messages that influence individuals' modal judgements that weaken the degree of reality in a message. These are: negation and doubt; contradiction; accumulation of indicators of certainty; laughter, non-verbal and paralingual cues (such as a shrug of shoulders or tone of voice), which shows that modality is multi-semiotic as it is conveyed in a variety of codes. As children become aware of the unreality of various programmes (e.g. when horror movies become exciting rather than disturbing because of their implausibility) changes take place in the ways children feel about television messages (ibid, p.106). This is why, for example, younger children prefer cartoon characters, whereas nine to twelve year-olds in the study reveal a shift towards stronger modality in their favourite characters. But even younger children were able to make distinctions between cartoon characters and 'real' people, as this six year-old boy shows (ibid, p.123):

> George: This one, Shaun's most real and Yogi Bear is less real.
> Interviewer: Okay, and why is that?
> George: Because Yogi's a film and Shaun was born.
> Interviewer: Can you give me another reason why Shaun is more real?
> George: Because God made him.
> Interviewer: I see. Didn't God make Yogi Bear?
> George: No.
> Interviewer: How did Yogi Bear get created?
> George: Um he... um a man or a boy ...
> Interviewer: Who made Yogi Bear?
> George: He was just a film by a camera and they're moving him but you can't see the hands. I don't know how they make the cartoons.

Similarly, older children seem to have their own particular judgements of reality, which Hodge and Tripp observed to be quite distinct from those of adults; they revealed, for example, that they ascribe different degrees of reality to things or people they consider real, and that these judgements are based on different criteria than those employed by adults. Lisa, a twelve year-old, for instance, explains how her mother feels more real than her father:

> Um, my Mum seems more real than my Dad because, my Mum's a lady as well, and my Dad's a boy. And my Mum, she's always, we always go out together and my Dad, I always see him too but my Mum she always picks out my clothes and she just seems more real than my Dad (ibid, pp.122,123).

In Lisa's case proximity, or a sense of identification with her mother were relevant on her assessment of reality. George's judgement resulted from his understanding of cartoons as man-made products. Though admitting his lack of knowledge about the technical aspects of producing animation, this young boy was indeed showing that he was capable of separating what goes on inside and outside the screen, based on his own 'theories of creation'. It seems to me that, far from Winn's amorphous child, these children are actively constructing meanings from the world surrounding them, television included.

David Buckingham (1996) also refers to the relevancy of understanding how children respond to television. Unlike a great deal of research done to study the relationship between children and television, the author's main concern was not with the effects of television, but with the ways in which child audiences responded to the medium. By

using the term 'responses', Buckingham emphasises an active relationship rather than a passive one between receiver and transmitter, which is to say that children do have strategies to assess and redefine television's content. The author suggests that children are not passive subjects but active viewers, and he sees the viewing experience as a dialogue. The idea of an existing dialogue results from the argument that when watching television children develop viewing skills, which they will use each time they see a programme. Not only that, but he also suggests that children will bring knowledge from their daily lives, as well as a set of influences deriving from the social environment where they are being immersed in the televiewing experience.

Another point of interest for Buckingham is the social dynamic behind the strategies children use to talk about their experience as viewers. The author argues that when talking about television, children position themselves in relation to others. To express his thrill when watching horror movies and his contempt for fairytales may be a question of status to a teenage boy, who wishes to distant himself from 'babyish' stuff, and to assert his maturity by displaying indifference towards the 'scariness' of the horror movie genre. The author suggests that:

> [i]n describing how they feel about television, and in passing judgement on what they watch, children (like adults) are also making claims about themselves, and thereby constructing relationships with others (ibid, p.7)

Elsewhere (1993), the author displayed an interest in children's media literacy; adopting a definition of literacy that takes into consideration the social practices within which it is embedded, and the specific cultural and institutional contexts. He argues in favour of existing 'literacies' rather than 'literacy', these are 'defined by the meanings they produce and the social uses they serve' (ibid, p.34). Buckingham states that children bring with them different levels of competency when making sense of television, originating from distinct social and cultural experiences, and subject to historical change and development as media languages and technologies evolve. According to him, a social theory of television literacy would see children:

> as members of 'interpretative communities' (...) which have different orientations to television, and may use it as a means of negotiating social and cultural identities in quite diverse ways. In this sense, different social groups may employ different 'television literacies', or different modalities of literacy, which have different social and ideological functions and consequences (ibid, p,34).

The author is particularly concerned with the ways in which children talk about television, and suggests that television is not an anti-social activity; on the contrary it seems to be primarily an activity that involves discursive engagement. Very often people will watch television in the company of others, but even when that is not the case, it is likely that television's contents will be discussed outside the viewing experience.

> Talk about television is a vital element of our social lives (...) What we 'think' about television and how we use it in our daily lives depend to a great extent on how we talk about it with others, and the contexts in which we do so. At the same time, talk about television is instrumental in constructing and sustaining our social relationships, and thus our sense of our own social identity (ibid, p. 39).

Buckingham, applies Fairclough's (1989) basic framework to the analysis of texts. This is based on a distinction between three sets of constrains that operate in discourse: contents (what is said or done); relations (the social relations between people); and subjects (the subject positions they can occupy). As Fairclough argues: "power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" (Fairclough, 1989, p.46). It is also suggested that the formal features of texts (vocabulary, grammar, and larger-scale textual structures) have three types of value corresponding to the above constraints. 'Experiential' values reflect the ways in which the speaker/ writer represents his experience of the natural or social world; 'Relational' values indicate the social relationships that are being enacted via the text; and 'Expressive' values reflect the way in which the speaker/writer evaluates the aspect of reality to which the text refers.

Buckingham's analysis pays close attention to four related discourse constraints. The first assesses how the interview situation is defined, looking at the relations established; that is, the ways in which the children perceived the interview situation, and how they judged what would be appropriate to say. The second relates to the importance of

context and social class - though Buckingham has noted differences in the ways children from middle-class families and working-class families talked about television, he is not prepared to see 'social class' in a deterministic manner. He suggests that middle-class children (though the author actually fails to provide a detailed description of how he determined the social class of the children) in the suburban school approached the activity much more formally than working-class children in the inner-city primary school. Nevertheless, he states that to see this as proof of social class determinism is to neglect the context in which the interview takes, place and the power relationship between interviewer and interviewees. He suggests that if the working-class children were less likely to elaborate on their answers or to offer general statements, it does not mean that they were incapable of doing so, but may simply suggest that they perceived the context in a rather different way. In this respect it would be much more accurate to explain these differences not merely in terms of social class, but in terms of the relationship between the school and home (or peer group) cultures. Thirdly, Buckingham considers how the subjects define themselves and others, by looking into issues of age, race and class. Finally, the author refers to the importance of considering how texts themselves determine children's talk, or how content also determines relations and subjects; to talk about soap operas will bring up different issues than those arising from talk about other genres like news or horror. Different themes direct the interviewer to ask different questions, and this in itself is a strong discourse determinant.

1.5.2) Children's television by Children

a) Contexts

> Judging from children's talk, much of the pleasure of television lies in the relationship between text and context. The younger children in particular would often introduce their preferences with phrases like 'me and my mum like...' or 'my brother always says...'. In many cases the pleasure of particular programmes seemed to be intimately connected with the discussions and games that took place around them – guessing the solution of a detective story or the answers in a quiz show, for example. Television was often described as part of a family ritual or routine (Buckingham, 1993, p.110)

Livingstone et al (2001), in a comparative study about the changing media environment for European children, emphasise the importance of considering the location, the 'where' and 'how'<of research context when analysing the data. The pilot study revealed that the context of the interview influenced children's positioning as to their relationship with the media, thus calling for an understanding of the social contexts (domestic, school, leisure activities, media usage) in which children interact:

> At home alone with their family, the impact of parents and siblings on behaviour is most easily observed. Group interviews in schools give the opportunity to witness peer pressure in action, whereas interviews in the classroom may reveal more academic efforts to 'explain' or 'understand'. (ibid, p.35)

The importance of understanding the different contexts of interaction is also stressed by looking at Pasquier's analysis (2001). Interpreting data from the same research, the author argues that television appears to be a major focus of family interaction, despite the fact that many families own a number of TV sets that can be watched independently. Leen d'Haenens (2001) found that there is a similar level of access, between the 12 countries considered in the study, to television and VCR in the home; concluding that television is the most pervasive medium in European homes. It is also the medium with which children spend most time with, as well as the medium children and parents are more likely to talk about, reinforcing Pasquier's (op. cit.) argument that most children say they watch their favourite programme with other family members. Also, together with music, television emerged as the main topic of debate with friends.

Buckingham (1993), analysing the data from research conducted in an East London Primary School, suggests that children seemed to perceive the context as one where a critical response seemed appropriate, providing them with the opportunity of placing themselves as 'adults' for the benefit of each other and of the adult interviewer, as well as a means of refuting what they might suspect adults believe about the influence of television on them. By this he does not mean that children are not usually so critical in other contexts and that they were trying to please, but that they have a multitude of speeches available to them, a "range of discursive possibilities, or repertoires" (ibid, p.44).

Context, however, the author says, cannot be seen as a variable of equal weight and significance for all individuals. Its relevance is not constant or easily predictable, and cannot be simply 'subtracted' from the findings. The children in the study did not consistently adopt a critical discourse. The author considers that a crucial factor influencing the children's speech is that they were talking simultaneously to a group of peers, and to the adult interviewer. Referring to Hodge and Tripp (1986) Buckingham suggests that 'non-television' meanings might sometimes be powerful enough to swamp 'television meanings'. That is, the existing social relations between group members and the ways in which these are negotiated will significantly determine the meanings produced. For example, in debating the 'Cosby Show', a sample group of children showed that they were aware of racism in the media, but at the same time they were concerned that they would themselves be seen as 'anti-white' if they raised race-related issues.

b) Likes and dislikes

Quantitative research indicates a certain uniformity of tastes in terms of children's preferences in relation to television programmes, both between same-sex children, and across cultures. This, however, is not necessarily evidence that global television is not problematic and that its concerns with cultural specificity are to be dismissed. Although children's tastes are conditioned by the limited offer of programmes for young audiences, when asked to point out what they like or dislike about TV schedules children can only elaborate on what is out there to assess, and their preferences are linked to what is on television at the moment.

Valkenburg and Janssen (1999), aimed to assess the extent to which children's views of children's entertainment television are universal across cultures. They conducted a comparative study of Dutch and US children, in which they investigated which programme characteristics six to eleven year-olds most valued. They concluded that, overall, the most important characteristics were comprehensibility and action, followed by humour, interestingness, innocuousness, realism, violence and romance, respectively; though US children placed greater emphasis on realism, innocuousness and interestingness, results that the authors related to the heated debate on television ratings, the V-chip, and the new FCC regulations happening in the US at the time of the

research. Gender differences emerged in both samples, as boys showed a preference for action and violence, while girls stressed innocuousness and comprehensibility.

An ITC report (1998) looking at British children's preferences in relation to cartoons reached similar conclusions in terms of gender differences, but it also showed that even same-gender likes vary with age. In relation to 'action', for instances, the report concludes that it appeals mainly to the younger boys (five to seven year-old). Girls, in turn, were interested in 'action' cartoons that had an on-going story-line, featuring strong girl characters. Another interesting finding relates to children's comprehension of story, the report concludes that younger children do not always have the ability to relate events in cartoons to real life being, thus, less frightened by certain storylines than older children, while feeling more scared by other elements of the plot like the music. Such results suggest that communication gaps are likely to occur when children's television slots do not take into consideration the heterogeneity of child audiences.

Garitonandia (2001), asserts that in recent years there has been a decline in the production of children's programmes in Europe. This broadcasters have justified with the increasing provision of thematic commercial channels for younger children, as well as with the fact that audience figures for older children indicate a preference for adult, or family programming. However, the author argues that audience figures may not give an accurate picture of children's preferences, and this is because the choice of programmes offered to children is often restricted. Also, preferences for adult programmes may be a result of viewing choices made by other family members.

In relation to the genre tastes of European children (the data revealed television as the most common medium used to follow any of the interests, followed by books), the data presented by Garitonandia shows that, asked to select from a list of 14 topics, children from different countries proved to have similar tastes: Sport (24%), music (17%), and animal/nature (9%) were at the top of the list. The tastes were also similar regarding their favourite programmes: a majority of six to seven year-old children chose cartoons (most popular in Israel and least popular in Sweden); while narrative genres such as soaps were the favourite among nine year-old or older children (though in Germany, Finland and Spain this age group mostly liked cartoons).

In terms of cross-cultural differences, British and German children like sports more than children in other countries; British, German, and Israeli children are particularly interested in soaps; and Spain is the only country where children show a great interest in quizzes and family shows. The author concludes that many of these differences are likely to be attributed to the context of viewing, namely differences in availability (UK and Germany have each a highly popular national soap; while in Israel a number of Latin and American soaps are very popular among teens). In other cases, however, discrepancies may be due to the researchers' coding decisions. In general, the author was able to conclude that the interest in music and romance increases with age, while adventure/action and animal/nature diminishes with age; and science fiction peaks at twelve/thirteen; sport remains high and stable, as does a moderate interest in comedy/humour, and a low interest in travel.

In terms of gender, boys' interests are more uniform (they tend to like action/adventure and sport) and generally more action-oriented, while girls' interests are more diverse and people-oriented (animals/nature, sport, romance), but interestingly, romance only appears in the top five favourites for girls aged fifteen to sixteen. Music does not feature in the main options for nine to ten year-old boys and appears second in girls' preferences after animals; but it emerges as a favourite for girls in older stages, and begins to appeal to older boys (though sport is always their favourite).

The tendency is for tastes to change in relation to age. Overall, girls' preference for soaps peaks between the ages of nine and thirteen; older children are less interested in cartoons; boys' interest in sport increases with age, while girls' interest remains low and stable; a taste for situation comedies increases with age, above all after the age of nine; interest in serials increases with age, although by fifteen boys' interest tends to decrease. The research found that, from a list of child, family and adult-oriented programmes, the majority of children preferred adult or family-oriented, with the exception of the younger children.

> From 9 years old onwards, (...) the overwhelming majority prefer programs aimed at adults. Moreover, where the youngest children have named a children's program, in the majority of cases (80%) these are cartoons. As children get older, narrative programs account for an increasingly large proportion of favourite children's programs. In short, although the youngest children prefer cartoons, as they grow older children rapidly develop a preference for family and adult programs over those made specifically for children. Those children's programs that remain successful tend to be narrative-based (ibid, p.154).

Pinto (2000), in a study of primary school children in the north of Portugal, reached some convergent results - concluding that there seems to be a significant relation between television preferences and age, and especially, gender. Girls' preferences were centred on soaps and game shows; while boys were keener on sports, movies and serials. An interesting fact is that, when asked to name their favourite screen heroes, both boys and girls preferred male characters, though girls chose more sensitive characters with a sense of humour, whereas boys identified themselves with heroes who had physical power and special gifts. Moreover, children in rural areas appear to have distinct preferences to those in urban areas, a distinction reflected by a preference for MacGyver, the creative, in the former, and Rambo, the violent, in the latter. This preference for male heroes is still relative, as it could only be properly assessed in a context where the representation of both genders on television could said to be balanced, the case is still that, and in relation to children's television, male characters are perceived by producers and broadcasters as having universal appeal. Another question relates to the definition of the word 'hero'. In Portuguese, 'herói' is a masculine word nom but can be used to refer to the both female and male heroes. Had Pinto included the two words 'herói' and 'heroina', children's understanding might have been different (though the lack of heroines on television might still lead to similar results). Also, the word 'hero' has connotations of bravery and extraordinary events, so choosing 'main character' instead might have widened the options in terms of characters to choose from (soap-operas, for instance, frequently feature 'heroines').

Garitonandia (op.cit.) nonetheless, concluded that children's preferences for television programmes or electronic games cannot be seen as primarily media-led, as children and young people appear to select programmes and games that are in line with their general interests, and may be seen to follow those interests across different media. However, the influence of broadcasters' provisions and the media industry on children's interests

still needs to be considered. Also, the popularity of national soaps among children in countries where local productions are available indicates that young people are likely to respond well to narratives that reflect their own culture.

c) Gender talk

The gender differences noticed by quantitative studies are strengthened by qualitative work on children's discourses about television tastes. Here, gender emerges as an important element in defining one's identity. In classifying a particular programme children often use gender as a measure of comparison, and in doing so they are not simply categorising, but also constructing and presenting their own social persona. In discussing what makes a good programme, a group from an Oxfordshire primary school interviewed in research conducted by Davies (2001) suggested the following elements:

> Boy 2: Lots of violence.
> Boy 3: Action packed and bloodthirsty.
> Girl 1: Problems and how the characters work through them...
> Interviewer: Who is your favourite character in Eastenders ?
> Girl 1: Joe, because he's a bit nutty.
> Girl 2: Grant and Phil because they are a bit rough, they can be nice but they are alcoholics and things like that

Such statements tally with Garitonandia's findings that boys prefer action-oriented programmes, while girls' preferences are for people-oriented programmes where narrative is emphasised. Similarly in the findings of Pinto (op.cit), the girls chose male characters as their favourites; and from the girls' explanation, one can deduce that these are not likely to be shallow characters, but complex characters whose personalities have strong outstanding features. Could the absence of suitable complex female characters explain this?

An extract from Buckingham's (1996b) study reveals girl's frustration at the lack of females in children's animation:

> Serena: You should talk to boys. Because cartoons are for boys. Because they've got most boys in it, and men.

This eleven year old girl revealed her awareness of the limited representation of heroines in children's television, not just in relation to their appearance as main

characters, but also to the roles usually played by females, as this conversation illustrates:

> DB: So, what is it you like about She-Ra?
> Sharon: I just like the way she acts, for a girl. Like He-Man, they wouldn't let a girl be it, I thought. They wouldn't let a girl be so strong, and she's strong.
> DB: So she does all the things He-Man can do?
> Serena: Makes a change. 'Cause most of the boys thinks that girls are a wimp and everything. But I don't think that's right, so let them shut their mouth. The girls should take over the boys so they know that they're a wimp.
> Sharon: Like they feel like we're feeling now.
> [General agreement]
> Serena: Because they always say that because they play football every single day that girls can't play with a ball. Because the boys just takes over the ball and keep it.
> (ibid, p.239)

In another of Buckingham's works (1993, pp.211-212), it is possible to find more evidence of girls' interest in strong female characters:

> Navin: Well, I like her [Bobby from Home and Away] because she's always sort of stubborn and she's sort of um / I don't know why I like her, she's always sort of like, doesn't act so feminine sort of thing, and everyone is always thinking oh you know they're girls, they're all dainty, but she isn't like that and / and sometimes she's wrong and she has, and she admits it, like thing. I don't know why I like her.
> (...)
> Sally: I think she's really bitchy. [laughter]
> (...)
> Susan: I think she's really sick actually.
> Sally: Yeah, she, I just hate the way she storms in on everything.
> Navin: That's why I like her, she storms on everything.
> Sally: And like that she thinks she can get her own way just 'cause she's Bobby and everyone has to bow down to her.
> Susan: I like, I like how she stand up.

Further into the discussion it is possible to understand that Sally's disliking of Bobby has to do with what she sees as a lack of credibility in the character's behaviour, as in her own words she is not very 'lifelike'. Such a position, though from a negative point of view, only reinforces the fact that this type of female character is not common, and does not conform to her expectations as a viewer. The debate on the representation of female role models does not escape the boys either. Debating the relevance of *The Demon Headmaster* for nine to fourteen year old children, a group from a Cardiff inner-city primary school displayed their awareness of anti-sexist discourse:

> Boy 1: It's a bit sexist. It's got a Demon Headmaster, why not have a Demon Headmistress instead?
> Interviewer: Were there any scary female characters?
> Boy 1: There was Rose and Eve – in the current series...
> Girl 2: Can I just say that he made the point that it was sexist because the Demon Headmaster is a man. But if there is only going to be one main villain then either way it's going to be sexist. (Davies, op.cit., p.181)

The term 'sexist' is less skilfully employed by a group of young boys debating the cartoon series *Thundercats*, but possibly this is significant (Buckingham, 1996b, p.214):

> Rodney: Have they [the girls] got My Little Pony cartoons to watch, same as us, we've got...
> DB: No, they're going to watch Thundercats as well.
> Boys: Oh...[...]
> Richard: They ain't for girls.
> Anthony: Anyone can...They can watch it!
> Robert: Yeah. It can be for girls and boys.
> Rodney; Yeah, girls can watch it.
> Gareth: It's sexist. It can be for girls and boys. Like, a girl... Like, girls are in it. Like Cheetara's in it. Cheetara's in Thundercats. Cheetara's a girl.
> Rodney: She's a woman you idiot.

It's clear that the boys in both groups are choosing a 'politically correct' approach to the issue of gender representation on television; talking to an adult interviewer they are clearly displaying a sensitivity to issues of gender equality and gender role models in the media. However, particularly in the second group, it is still possible to see from the initial spontaneous reaction, that some programmes are clearly assigned to girls, and others to boys. It would have been interesting to see what direction the conversation would take if it was suggested to the second group that *My Little Pony* was also a boys' programme, as some of the ponies are actually meant to represent male characters.

d) Age as status

Rodney's last comment raises another interesting aspect in matters of social identity arising out of children's talk, that of age as status. When Rodney makes the point that Cheetara in *Thundercats* is not a girl, he is not simply making a correction, but he is also saying that he knows a woman when he sees one.

Children in Davies' (2001, pp.176-177) research used age as a justification for the selections made when designing television schedules for children; the author argues that this is part of a strategy of differentiation whereby children define their social identities. This was something that the author had also come across in previous research (1997, p.134,135) as these extracts on Sesame Street illustrate:

> Int: Who would like to watch it?
> Ryan (third grade): Like 4 years old.
> Int: Would you watch it?
> Ryan: Not Sesame Street.
> Int: What do you think of it?
> Ryan: I don't like it.
> Int: What do you like?
> Ryan: I like movies like fighting.
> (...)
> Ruth (third grade): Older people don't like watching a lot of little cartoons and young people do.
> Int: And when do they change and stop enjoying it?
> Ruth: Around 6 or 7.
> Int: Why do you think that is?
> Ruth: Because then you like watching regular things that aren't cartoons.

Though the comments were originally about the use of illusion on television - illustrating, as the author suggests, children's own theories of maturation, they are also examples of how children detach themselves from certain programmes considered childish in order to establish their own position as 'older people', as Ruth puts it. Davies et al (2000, p.14) refer to 'aspirational tastes' in what they noticed to be an effort by older children to project their future identities into 'cool' teenage lifestyles:

> Int: Do you think it [Sister Sister] is a programme for teenagers?
> All: No.
> Int: Why is that? Aren't the characters sixteen?
> Sharon: Yes, but they're the sort of age where, you know, we can understand...
> Annie: I think teenagers can like it as well.

The decision to detach oneself from certain programmes while adopting others also emerged in studies considering the perceived effects of television (Buckingham 1996; Davies, 1997, Davies 2001). As parents tend to displace the effects of television on themselves into anxieties about the consequences for unaware children; so older children argue for their own 'maturity' and for younger children's 'vulnerability':

> Girl 1: The Queen's Nose has got magic in it.
> Int: And is that good?
> Gilr 1: Some people don't think it is very good, because small children think there is magic everywhere.
> Int: These are all small children: Do you think there is magic everywhere? [addressing a group representing 4-8 year olds]
> Group leader: No.
> Int: Would you if you were four?
> Group leader: Yes.
> (Davies, 2001, p.177)

'Cool' and 'older' are not to be mistaken, however, with boring 'granny' programmes as Davies et al's (op.cit., p.16) research suggests:

> Int: Why do you think it [the quiz show Countdown] is so boring?
> Annie: Because it's full of all these words that you have to make.
> Int: Who do you think would like those kinds of programmes?
> Julia: Grannies.
> Annie: Yeah, grannies!

This opposition, the authors refer, is often translated into the opposition between 'action' and 'talking', which was also noted in the research itself. Children, particularly younger children, were keen to participate in activities resembling games, but more reluctant when it involved the rationalisation of answers.

e) Cultural adaptations (ethnicity, class, social self)

If children's understanding of age and gender in relation to television are subjects, which have now been extensively researched, the same cannot be argued for issues around ethnicity and class. The most common approach to these issues is by stressing the differences between the discourses of children from different social and ethnic backgrounds. Even so, a proper group classification is often missing. In terms of class, for example, the studies so far outlined in this sub-section have not considered the complexity of class belonging, which in studies like Almeida (1986) has involved extensive information about the parents' education, job categorization, wages, and so on. Distinctions are often generalised, around working/middle/upper-class; not from the individual children and their families, but from the majority of children in a given area (usually the school area). Attempts to assess class differences in children's discourse have been superficial not only because of little investment in the categorization of children's socio-economic backgrounds, but also in relation to children's own

assessment of class issues. This is probably a consequence of deriving indirect conclusions from research tools aimed at evaluating other issues.

Buckingham (1993, p.274) argues that the debate about the power of media tends to be characterised by the opposition between 'structure' and 'agency', between the determinant power of the text and that of the individual reader. For the author, the discourses readers employ about media, as well as the production of meaning, are beyond this rather limited opposition. He suggests that they will depend upon the institutional contexts in which the activity of reading is itself defined; his emphasis is on 'being an audience' as a social practice. The argument bares a contradiction in itself, in the sense that Buckingham's own research sample was in fact based on broad definitions of class belonging – a 'working-class' and a 'middle-class' school; in doing so, the author is already admitting that social class is an important determinant of context. It may be the case that his failure to reach any significant relation between class and children's discourse results from his failure to approach the subject in a methodical way.

Nonetheless, the author suggests that the ways in which children perceived the tasks differed mainly according to social context; explaining that, generally, 'middle-class' children approached the initial interview more formally, as if it were an educational event. The older children in this school took the opportunity to display their critical judgements and 'good taste', while children in the 'working-class' school took fewer risks in expressing their views. Buckingham's reference to class emerges in other passages of his research He suggests, for instance, that 'middle-class' children made a larger number of modality judgements. They also appeared to make these judgements in terms of what they know or believe to be truth about the world, as well as employing a more extensive vocabulary. However he is quick to dismiss these findings, attributing them instead to the ways in which the children perceive the interview contexts – but even if one chooses to allocate any determinism to the findings, are not these different perceptions significant on their own? The author also found that certain programmes or genres emerged as 'class tastes'; 'middle-class' children seemed to prefer 'alternative' comedies and factual programmes, while horror, mainstream comedy and 'entertainment' programmes seemed to appeal more to working-class children. The British soaps *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* emerged as the only programmes to be

dismissed in class terms, and were considered 'depressing' and 'boring' by middle-class children (ibid, p.79)[13]:

> Nigel: Yeah, but East, Eastenders [laughter] East, Eastenders, is really dreadful, though.
> Petros: Yeah I know.
> Nigel: It's, it's not colourful, it's all grey houses.
> (...)
> Pradesh: [Yeah, I mean, with burnt wallpaper and things like that/ [laughter] [and it's all brown.
> Nigel: [laughing] [Yeah, yeah, yeah.
> Sally: People live in places with burnt wallpaper.
> Petros: It's a bit like=
> Pradesh: =and the carpets are all yeugh.
> Nigel: [laughing] Yeah, [it's, it's=
> Int.: [Is it why you don't watch it?
> Nigel: [It's, it's=
> Pradesh: [No, it's just boring, I mean, [the way (&)
> Sally: [well Howard's Way is more your style
> Ruth: Yeah [laughs].
> Pradesh: (&) everything's set out, it's made to not [watch it
> Nigel: [It looks, it looks like a, it's it, it just looks, it looks [really horrid, you'd never want to live there (&)
> Pradesh:
> [With the man from the fish and chip shop.
> Nigel: (&) and they don't seem to put any colour into it.
> Petros: No, but [some people do live there, that's the only thing=
> Nigel: [It just seems to be all grey.
> Sally: = Yeah, I know, but about [laughs] half the people in Britain live like that.

Though claiming not to watch the programme, these children do seem pretty confident in the comments they make about it, revealing a familiarity that they maybe try to conceal, by distancing themselves from the reality shown by the programme.

The fact that the only insights on class are related to *Eastenders*, a long-running and popular British soap, is not surprising as it is about people living in a specific area of London, carrying high modality markers and making it easy for children in a suburban London school to establish comparisons with their own families' lifestyles. In terms of animation programmes, though, it is likely that children will not be quick to make class based assessments. The low modality levels in animated programmes mean that signifiers of class are not often that obvious, and possibly children may attribute

[13] Transcription conventions as used by Buckingham

differences in lifestyles to the fact that such stories take place on the plane of fantasy. And this argument is probably just as valid to issues of race and ethnicity; for not only do animated characters not always resemble real people but the programmes are also frequently devoid of obvious cultural references - so that they can be appealing to the international market and adjusted to local specificities[14].

This does not mean that children are not aware of issues of cultural diversity on television; those emerged in Davies (2001, pp.196,197) when a group of Welsh children discussed whether or not to keep S4C pre-school Welsh programme *Slot Meithrin* on their children's schedule:

> Boy 2: I think it would be Slot Meithrin [to be eliminated]. Because this is a channel across Britain, lots of children aren't going to understand Welsh.
> (...)
> Girl 2: Not everyone speaks Welsh and even the Welsh children, not a lot of them will watch Slot Meithrin. I'm not sure how many of them watch the Welsh television.
> Boy 3: The popularity of Welsh, is like even if the families are Welsh,...
> Int: Suppose I'm the supreme channel controller and I say your channel should represent different language groups in the country, what would you say?
> Girl 1: I would say get rid of Top of the Pops first.
> Boy 1: I agree with what you're asking but a lot of people don't... I don't read many Welsh books either.
> Girl 2: I think the same really, you should represent as you said, different countries, but it doesn't really matter if one Welsh programme goes...
> Boy 3: We've got to have these English programmes; even though I wouldn't watch Slot Meithrin, some people would.

More than illustrating children's awareness to the diversity of audiences' needs, this discussion also suggests that it is not enough for a product to be culturally relevant for children to consume it. None of the children in the group admitted watching or having watched *Slot Meithrin* – a likely reason being that it is a pre-school programme – or even knowing someone who actually watched it. And even if their discussion was limited by a list of programmes from which to choose, so they could still have mentioned another more appealing Welsh programme.

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[14] See Chapter IV for further details on the global appeal of animation

In relation to race, Buckingham (1993, p.86, 87) assesses that, in general, it was an issue children actively chose to suppress; though the author noted that particularly black children brought up racial identity in some inner-city school groups. To the latter, the author argues, racial differences are much more salient, in a context where white culture dominates, and children are permanently confronted with difference. From the examples given by the author, it is possible to conclude that children adopted a discourse of consensus, whereby when questions of race were approached, balanced media representations would be advocated. The fact that black children were more likely to debate race may result from white children's awareness about how delicate the issue is, and from a conscientious effort not to be termed as racist. In the same way, black children were prompt to appropriate black representations on screen, but were also careful not to dismiss the presence of other ethnicities, as this black girl's discourse illustrates:

> Serena: I think it's right to have a lot of white people AND black people AND Chinese people AND Indian. This is what my granddad said, now, 'cause he's on his on own, he says that there should be MORE black people, more / all different colours in films, and whatever. 'Cause that's not right, just putting white people, white people, white people. They think about more white people than black people. But I don't think that.
> Newton: But that [The Cosby Show?], it's all black people.
> Serena: But you think about just white Neighbours, and like
> (&)
> [
> Others [interrupting]: [No, I don't, Serena, I don't.
> Serena: (&) everything white this, white that, But I don't.
> [Confusion of voices]
> Kerry: Not all persons=
> Newton: Most of my friends are black.
> Interviewer: So, what you like, Serena, is not to have a white programme and a black programme, but to have programmes that have a mixture of people in it?
> Others: Yeah.
> Serena: But we've only got three black girls and two black boys. I don't think that's fair/
> Kerry: That's bad, if you have a programme for black people and [one for] white people. Because the black people would feel ashamed if they got white friends. They should just mix it.
> Kate: But in most programmes they just base it on one colour. Like Cosby Show they just base it on black people.
> .
> .
> .
> Serena: But it makes a change, makes a change.

> Kerry: I know, but they never usually put them together. It'd be nice if they did.
> Serena: But I'm happy about The Cosby Show, because they put. There's always white people and never black people, or many black people.

This chapter shows that academic efforts to consider children's own constructions of childhood have contributed to demystify notions of young audiences' passivity. The latter are capable of critical discourse, which is revealing of young people's tastes, but also of their constructed social identity. The emphasis is placed on the ways in which children's discourse can be influenced by social dynamics.

James et al (1998) assess that new social studies of childhood place an emphasis on 'being' rather than 'becoming'. The child is conceived as a social actor who evolves in time and history and, as such, efforts need to be made to develop strategies to study the 'experiences of being a child'. The authors argue that this paradigm is characterised by four main approaches to childhood: the social structural child; the minority group child the socially constructed child; the tribal child.

The 'social structural child' has metaphorical links with the analysis of social class. Childhood is not a historical invention but an integral part of any social system, a recognizable state that must, therefore, share some kind of global identity. James et al compare the 'minority group child' to the 'women movement' in that it sees childhood as a universal category in relation to its rights, needs and identity. Children everywhere are exploited and subject of discrimination through gender and age. The child has limited agency, though in different societies they experience different degrees of institutionalised oppression. The authors see these two approaches as dichotomy considering that, frequently, empirical work moves between the two boundaries.

A second dichotomy is between the 'socially constructed child' and the 'tribal child'. The former is based on the argument that there is no essential child, and that childhood is constructed through practice. James et al include in this perspective, historicism that sees childhood as a product of material conditions; and discourse theory, which argues that childhood is constructed through dominant modes of speech. By contrast, the 'tribal child' places agency over structure. Children are 'a social category of their own',

sharing a 'system of signs, symbols, and rituals' that enables them to resist against the normalizing effects of adult world.

My research moves across these different perspectives. I am concerned with children's agency as audiences in a localised setting, while also considering the institutionalised constructions of childhood that determine the contents of children's television watched by those same children. At the same time, this cannot be dissociated from the structural level; from the external conditions that constrain social interaction.

The next chapter deals with yet another dimension of the study of children's television; the importance of the body. Chapter II addresses the developmental issues and the cognitive processes that work together in the construction of meaning.

CHAPTER II - Televiewing as cognition

> Obligations specific to operators holding the public television service concession:
> 1 - Operators holding the public television service concession shall assure quality programming that is balanced and diverse and which contributes to the cultural and civic development of viewers, promoting political, religious, social and cultural pluralism, and allowing access by all viewers to information, culture education and quality entertainment.
> 2 - Operators referred to in the previous paragraph are specifically obliged to:
> a) Provide pluralist programming which takes into account minority interests and promotes cultural diversity; d) Ensure the production and transmission of educational and entertainment programmes destined for young people and children, which will contribute to their education[15]

The above is a section from the Portuguese *Law of Television* referring to the general programming obligations of public broadcasters. It is implicit that television audiences are not uniform on what concerns their tastes and needs; the section above refers to questions of cultural and geographic diversity, as well as language, citizenship, and national identity. An emphasis is also put on young audiences, and the need for public broadcasters to promote their education and cultural enhancement. Despite this recognition it is not specified who these different audiences are, what is meant by 'culturally enhancing and educating programmes', nor how much these should figure in the schedule of each broadcasting channel. Perhaps because of these ambiguities, and particularly regarding young audiences, it is sometimes difficult to perceive how the law is being applied. For example, national production in the area of science fiction, documentary and animation for a young audience is virtually nonexistent. And who are these 'young audiences'? Infants? Children? Adolescents? Young adults? These are all very different stages in life, in which the ability to understand and the knowledge possessed varies widely, and are factors influencing, along with the individual's social and cultural background, educational and entertainment needs. Aiming to offer quality television to these audiences requires a comprehension of their dynamics that goes beyond the recognition that they have special needs.

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[15] Television Act: Law no. 32/2003, of 22 of August, Article 47

Woodhead (2000) draws attention to the extensive use of the expression 'children's needs'. In his opinion, such expression serves only as a veil for uncertainty and disagreement as to what is in the best interests of children.

> "(...) I have argued that concealed beneath the apparent simplicity and directness of 'need' statements is a highly condensed combination of both empirical and evaluative claims. They are often not fully specified, but depend on a consensus of knowledge and values between author and reader (...). A more explicit statement of the sentiment 'A child needs love' might read: 'It is desirable for a child to grow up emotionally secure. A child who is not given love will not grow up emotionally secure. Therefore the child should be given love (ibid, pp.67,68)".

The author suggests that the use of 'needs' often specifies something the child should have without elaborating on why the child should have it i.e. what will it do for the child, and who should provide it. The question the author poses is whether these needs are part of human nature, or cultural constructions. He suggests that in a homogenous society where the findings of psychological research derive from and are fed back into a shared normative framework of cultural values and practices, such concern with notions of childhood needs may not seem too important. However, if considering culturally diverse societies, and especially when it is a group of societies as diverse as the United Nations, simple generalizations about children's needs are much more problematic. Nevertheless, Woodhead believes in the importance of achieving an agreement on the boundaries of minimal adequacy regarding children's needs; and he does not dismiss the fact that perspectives of childhood are not only informed by cultural constructions, but also by biological features of human nature. According to him, "[t]he challenge is not to shy away from developing a perspective on childhood, but to recognize the plurality of pathways to maturity within that perspective (ibid, p.76)".

This chapter aims to give a brief account of the developmental and cognitive approaches to children's understanding of information. Though my own research does not follow developmental psychology methods - I consider, nonetheless, that it is important to be aware of such a body of knowledge, as it can inform the analysis of data gathered, and allow a better understanding of the results through a comparison with existing research.

2.1) Piaget's egocentric child

Research on how the child thinks and understands the world emerged in the early 20th century through the work of Jean Piaget, whose main concern was to explain the normal development of human intelligence. Margaret Donaldson (1987) presents briefly the main themes of Piaget's theory, highlighting its credits but simultaneously, addressing some issues brought up by subsequent research. As the author recounts (ibid, pp. 129 – 145), Piaget sees human development as an adaptation and conquest of an extended environment, unlike animals, which can only adapt to things close to them in space and time. A child's development is thus characterised by the capacity to be knowledgeable and think about remote environments. This occurs gradually, in stages that are unified by a particular mentallity and re-shaped when the move to the following stage occurs. Piaget's developmental stages succeed in an order that is common to all children. Each stage builds up on the one before; the speed in which this evolution happens can however differ and the ages between which he estimates the transformations will take place are approximate.

Knowledge is not something humans are born with; it is by means of constructing knowledge that development takes place. This occurs through the child's capacity for assimilating and constructing what the socio-cultural environment offers; and by the awareness of others' points of view, strengthened by exchanging ideas. A central idea is that of the 'egocentric child'. In the early stages of its development the Piagetian child does not have the capacity to understand that what it sees is relative to its own position, and is bound by an 'egocentric illusion' when it needs to form a mental representation of an unfamiliar view. Such conclusions emerged from experiments conducted by Piaget, like the '3 mountains model' in which children are shown a three-dimensional model and are asked to describe the view that a doll, which was placed in a position different to that of child, would have of the 'mountains'. The experiment showed a tendency for children below the age of six or seven to give answers which match their own point of view.

Egocentrism can also be illustrated by analysing the way a child communicates. In his book first published in 1923, *The Language and Thought of the Child* (2002), Piaget

reports and analyses his experience at the *Maison des Petites de l'Institut Rousseau*[16], where he and a colleague each followed a boy for about a month, writing down in detail everything said by the child. The author presents extracts from the conversation records of talk during a group activity. Apparently there is active conversation going on between the children in the group, but a closer look at the data reveals that the children seem not to pay too much attention to what the others are saying, and that much of it is what he calls *ego-centric speech* in which:

> (...) the child does not bother to know to whom he is speaking nor whether he is being listened to. He talks either for himself or for the pleasure of associating anyone who happens to be there with the activity of the moment. This talk is ego-centric, partly because the child speaks only about himself, but chiefly because he does not attempt to place himself at the point of view of his hearer. Anyone who happens to be there will serve as an audience. The child asks for no more than an apparent interest, though he has the illusion (...) of being heard and understood (ibid, p.9).

This type of speech is characterised by the *Repetition* (*echoalia*) of words and syllables with no particular intention other than the child's own pleasure; *Monologue,* that has no social function and serves only to accompany and command the child's action, deriving from the process of learning to command and speak to others; and *Collective Monologue* when the child talks aloud in front of others without really addressing them. The child is only engaged in what Piaget calls *Socialised Speech* in those situations where *Adapted Information* is actually exchanged with others; when *Criticism* is addressed to somebody's actions; when *Commands, Requests* and *Threats* are placed or followed; when the *Questions* posed ask for an answer, and when *Answers* are given to real questions.

In another experiment at the *Maison des Petites*, children were asked to listen carefully to a story and tell it to another child who, in turn, would reproduce the story to the researcher, aiming to see how the explanations would evidence ego-centrism, and the extent to which it would affect understanding between subjects[17]. A number of instances suggested the existence of an 'ego-centric character of childish style' (ibid,

[16] This was a morning class where children were free to choose from a range of activities offered to them, as well as whether they would work individually or in groups.
[17] The researchers verified whether the explainers had themselves understood the story by questioning them.

p.101); i.e. a lack of effort to make oneself clear to the other and assuming that the listener will understand the explanation just as well. For example, pronouns, personal and demonstrative adjectives (he, she or that, the, her, etc) were used regardless without any concern to specify what they were referring to[18]. There was also an absence of order in the account given, and a scarcity of casual relations that reflected a lack of concern with explaining the events of time or the cause that united them, with the emphasis being on the events themselves. Piaget asserted that this happened although the child is capable of understanding the story himself. The results also show that, in the case of describing the order of events, children between the ages of six and seven invariably tended to ignore it in their descriptions, while seven to eight year olds seldom overlooked it. This would indicate a transition to the second sub-stage of the *concrete operational period*. In fact, the author argues that:

> [before the age of 7 or 8] understanding between children occurs only in so far as there is contact between two identical mental schemas already existing in each child. In other words, when the explainer and his listener have had at the time of the experiment common preoccupations and ideas, then each word of the explainer is understood, because it fits into a schema already existing and well defined within the listener's mind. In all other cases the explainer talks to the empty air (ibid, pp,121, 122).

The *concrete operational period* is a long stage divided into two sub-stages, the *preoperational* (up to around seven-years old), and the *concrete operational*. The operations that children perform at this stage are mental, and have originated from the physical acts of the *sensori-motor period* (from birth to approximately eighteen months). These periods exist in an organized system, or 'grouping'. Initially, the child begins by representing things to him/herself and then starts internalising them, rebuilding the group structure that existed in the previous developmental stage. The child is now able to think about doing things, the building blocks of the *concrete operational period* are 'acts of thought' rather than 'acts of the body'. Still, the new symbolic acts are closely tied to the performance of physical acts, for doing things with

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[18] Here are some extracts from children's explanations presented by Piaget (ibid, pp102,103):
«Gio (8 years old) tells the story of Niobe in the role of the explainer: " Once upon a time there was a lady who had 12 boys and 12 girls, and then a fairy a boy and a girl. And then Niobe wanted to have some more sons. Then she was angry. She fastened her to a stone. He turned into a rock, and then his tears made a stream which is still running to-day."»
«The reproducer (8 years old): "There was a lady once, she had 12 boys and 12 girls. She goes for a walk and she meets a fairy who had a boy and a girl and who didn't want to have 12 children. She fastened Niobe to a stone, she became a rock.»

concrete objects. This new stage represents an improvement on how children deal with transformations between states and their relation to each other; a greater interest in understanding things and explaining them; and a capacity to deal with greater abstraction and to act on objects in a wider space and time.

It is in the *formal operational period* that intelligent adult thought processes are consolidated. The child is now capable of logical thought, drawing logical conclusions from the initial hypothesis through an ability to deduct from and test them. The concern is not to mentally manipulate things, but to manipulate ideas.

Yet, Piaget's perspective should not be accepted without criticism. Donaldson (op. cit., pp. 20 - 24) calls our attention to the fact that some experiments on children as young as three and a half revealed that younger children are indeed capable of understanding other people's point of view; the author bases her criticism on the work of researchers like Martin Hughes (1975), who conducted a similar experiment to that of Piaget's 'three mountains'. In its simplest form, the model consisted of two 'walls' intersecting each other and forming a cross, with two dolls representing a boy and a policeman. After carefully introducing the model and the task to the child the researcher placed the boy-doll in one of the sections of the model, and asked if it could be seen by the policemen (the question was repeated for all the sections); next the child is asked to hide the boy from the policeman. If the child made a mistake, the questions were repeated until a correct answer was given. In the second stage of the experiment, another policeman was introduced and the child asked to hide the boy from both of them, a result that could only be achieved by the co-ordination of two points of view. According to Donaldson, the results were, in her own words, dramatic; 99% of the thirty children aged three-and-a-half to five were able to provide correct answers, and so could 88% of the ten youngest children, aged in average three years and nine months. Why is it, then, that the children in the 'three mountains' experiment failed to appreciate a point o view other then their own? Donaldson ascertains that the child's emotional empathy with the task he or she is asked to do plays a major role in his performance. Children know what it is to try and hide, and can easily conceive that a boy who had done something bad would want to hide from the policemen.

> The point is that the *motives* and the *intentions* of the characters are entirely comprehensible, even to a child of three. The task requires the child to act in ways which are in line with certain very basic human purposes and interactions (escape and pursuit) – it makes *human sense*. (...) [I]n this context he shows none of the difficulty in 'decentring' which Piaget ascribes to him. (...) In respect of being humanly comprehensible, the 'mountains' task is at the opposite extreme (...) 'the mountains' is *abstract* in a psychologically very important sense: in the sense that it is abstracted from all human purposes and feelings and endeavours (ibid, p. 24).

The author continues to criticise some crucial points in Piaget's theories based on further illustrations of experiments conducted with young children. She concludes that the ability to assess the child's deductive inference[19], which Piaget believes not to exist before the age of seven, likewise the reversibility capacity, varies according to the success of the experimenter in communicating with the child. This Donaldson calls a 'failure of communication' between researcher and child, implying that researchers themselves can display egocentrism, when they are unable to realise that a child's bad performance may be due to the researchers themselves being unable to communicate their goals in an understandable way.

2.2) The egocentric child watching TV

Nevertheless, Piaget's theory seems to be a useful departure point for further research into children's understanding of the world. Grant Noble (1975) makes use of Piaget's developmental stages to assess how children of different ages understand television programmes. The author states that a child's egocentric thought, characteristic of the *pre-operational* sub-period, will influence the televiewing experience in five main ways. First, children aged between two and five years old are likely to think in a binary way and so will perceive no shades in television characters; these will either be good or bad. Also, a child is unable to perceive events from any point of view other than his own, up to the age of five:

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[19] The author gives some examples of children under the age of six commenting on stories told to them (ibid, p.55):
'What a lot of things he's taking! He wouldn't have...he's only got two hands and he wouldn't have space for his two hands to carry all these things' (...)'I think you've missed a page. You didn't say that he cut out the leather (Premises: (I)There is a page on which the story tells of cutting out leather; (2) No reference has been made to cutting out leather. Conclusion: A page has been missed).'

> (...) children cannot differentiate between internal experiences, such as dreams, which they think everybody can see, and external experiences such as television. Young children may be expected, therefore, to consider television as reality because they are not capable of imagining that people can act dramatic parts. (...) Similarly, both puppet and cartoon characters are likely to be thought of as real and alive (ibid, p.83).

Thirdly, the child imagines being involved in television programmes where events occur because of his or her intervention. Another issue is that of classifying objects and events, as these are classified in a unique way; an object is defined by its location so, for example, when a scene changes in a television programme and an object or character appears in a different situation or size, the child may understand that this is different from the one previously seen. One last way in which children may view television content relates to their incapacity to reverse the constituents in a chain of events. Noble exemplifies this point by referring to Piaget's 'jug and water' experiment, in which children appeared unable to realise that the amount of water passed from one jug to another with a different shape remained the same, and argues: "Young viewers, who cannot reverse operations, are unlikely to recall the beginning of a TV programme, nor be able to predict what will happen next. They will not perceive that the story of a TV film has a beginning, a middle and an end (ibid, p.84)".

Noble is, thus, inclined to agree with Piaget's notion of a 'cognitive revolution' that occurs between the ages of five and six, the *pre-operational* and the *concrete operational* sub-periods. The author exemplifies (ibid, pp. 92, 93) with the results of an experiment in which 40 five year olds and 40 eight year olds saw a short cartoon film (*Scarecrow*) in which a scarecrow protects a baby bird from a cat. The film was stopped at a critical moment, and the children were asked, 'Is that the end?'. 30 five year olds and 16 eight year olds replied affirmatively. Those that replied 'no' were asked why they thought it was not the end; the younger ones answered, 'It has broken down', while the older children were able to predict what would happen next. While this account might show how children in different age groups do not equally understand similar events, and in this case, how younger children focused on a particular physical event while the elder were able to elaborate on further developments; it seems to fail in demonstrating the sudden 'cognitive revolution' that the author alludes to. If nothing else, it overlooks the whole idea of sudden change by comparing not five and six year

olds, but five and eight year olds. Noble does however refer to another exercise, this time with twenty-seven Canadian children between two and twelve in which a similar methodology was applied. On this occasion two versions of a *Hercules* cartoon were shown, and the first cartoon was stopped when a large rock threatened to kill the hero. Three-quarters of the children aged five or less thought this was the end, while only one of the older children believed so. Also, after viewing the two different stories, the children were asked, 'Was that all the same story?'. Only two children aged five or less said otherwise, while all but two children aged six or more acknowledged that the stories were different. The author believes this is evidence of the critical difference between the two age groups, and that this is due to the fact that younger children are unable to use operations such as *reversibility* prior to the cognitive revolution mentioned earlier. However, one cannot help but wonder about the significance of Noble's experiments, and the way he reports his results. For instance, the reader does not know how many children belong to which age group out of the twenty-seven children questioned; nor if the children in the older group who gave answers similar to the 'five or less year olds' were, in fact, aged six. Some clarification of these points would, undoubtedly, strengthen (or not) the author's argument.

Table 1 – Piaget's developmental stages applied to children's televiewing style*

Concrete Operations		
Pre-operational	**Concrete operations**	**Formal Operations**
- Children see a series of separate and fragmentary incidents rather than the TV story as a whole; - Children see either good or bad characters; - 3 and 4 year-old children are likely not to recognise the identities of the main characters throughout the film; settings dominate this perception; - Children tend to believe that TV events are real; - Incidents and events may be imagined into the plot; - They are likely to use TV as the basis for social play; - Young children mimic television events and acquire their future how-to-behave models from TV watching. - Children are unable to comprehend the emotional interplay between TV characters	- Perception that films have a story; - Children still have some degree of difficulty reconciling the story as a whole with isolated events in the plot; - Slow awareness of characters' motives and feelings, but still incipient;	- Children in this stage can be expected to recall films as well as adults; - Rejection of fantasy programmes, the children prefer 'life-like' genres; - Children can respond in non-binary ways to the films; - Their increasing reflective thought, and interest in the opposite sex is reflected in their ability to comprehend motives and feelings of TV characters, and explain inconsistent behaviour;

* As in Noble (ibid, pp. 94,102, 104, 108)

2.3) Children's construction of meaning

Noble's (op. cit.) contribution to the understanding of children as television viewers considers not only the ways in which progressive developmental changes influence the child's perspective, but also elaborates on the idea that television is a medium by which 'art' – as someone's expression of feelings – can be conveyed whether through fantasy or reality, allowing the viewers to have a broader experience of life, different than the one they are physically and social constrained to live. Television programmes have the potential to replace traditional forms of storytelling through which myths are conveyed, providing charters for social action. To the author the loss of extended kin family, and

of their role in the socialisation of the child, can be compensated by television, in what he calls 'para-social interaction'. Such interactions show the viewer how to behave in different situations, compensating for the lack of real life interaction.

> (...) [H]uman animals, by dint of evolution, need to interact with stable extended kin group which is representative of the larger social grouping in order that the individual learns how to behave in future roles. It is suggested that the motive for para-social interaction is to allow the viewer to converse with the screen community, which in turn is representative of the larger social grouping (ibid, p. 39).

'Para-social interaction' occurs if children recognise characters on television as similar to people they are familiar with. Children respond to these characters in the same way as they would have done to the extended kin, by learning how to react and behave with others outside the family unit. Noble asserts, «children learn how to interact in larger social groupings by dint of their interactions with regularly appearing TV characters, who also became 'generalised others' (ibid, pp. 46, 47). This type of interaction is achieved by the creation of what the author calls an 'illusion of intimacy'. Some television characters, such as *the persona,* are particularly successful (*the persona* is a character who speaks directly to the audience; in chat shows and similar programmes, the *personas'* illusion of intimacy is aided by the use of close-up camera techniques).

To the author, television influences a child's understanding of society to such an extent that 'a French child exposed to French cartoons is going to acquire a different perspective on the world than the American child exposed to American cartoons' (ibid, p. 80). This perspective seems to be somewhat reductive and generalist since Noble's child is deprived of extended kin relations, and appears to be stripped of any other form of socialisation, or social interaction, rather than televiewing. If French cartoons differ from American cartoons then one needs to consider the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which these were produced, how this will contribute to the child's view of the world, as well as to the child's understanding of television content. Can it not be the case that viewers recognise television characters and identify with them because they find similarities with parents, siblings, schooling, and peers? Though the author considers that para-social interaction occurs when children recognise television characters as similar to people known to them, his emphasis on television's role as a

socialising agent relegates other institutions to a shadowy backstage role when it comes to children's apprenticeship in the world, including learning about television itself.

During the 1980s, developmental psychology begun to conceptualise the child as a 'social being' – playing and talking with others; learning through interactions – and through social life acquiring a framework for interpreting experience; learning how to negotiate meaning in a manner congruent with the requirements of cultural context. This was a move away from the idea of the child as an 'active scientist' working alone when constructing the world. According to Bruner et al (1987, pp.1-5), making sense of the world is a social process, an activity that is always situated within a cultural and historical context. A child's social world is one where language, interaction and cognition are interwoven.

Dorr (1986) suggests that childhood is a time when

> (...) individuals learn what must be known if they are to function in their culture. They learn what others believe about how the physical, human, and ethereal worlds work and how to behave with people, animals, plants, objects, ideas, and spirits in them. They become complete human beings, recognizable members of a cultural and subcultural group. But until this process is complete, children are marked by their incomplete knowledge of a world that adults around them take for granted (ibid, p.13).

Learning about the world is thus, a constructive process in which children manage information from their surrounding physical and social environment, interpreting and evaluating it. In similar ways, a child will learn about television content created by adults who are in an advantaged position since they know more about the world. Dorr pinpoints some differences between child viewer and adult creator in the child's transactions with television (ibid, p13): (1) Children may fail to understand or misunderstand program content if they lack the background knowledge required to understand it; (2) children may accept program content as accurate "information" when other more knowledgeable viewers know it to be otherwise; and (3) children may evaluate content without taking proper account of the means and motives for producing and broadcasting that content. The author illustrates the interpretative problems that can emerge from this knowledge gap, using an example from a study of an animated segment from the pre-school programme *Sesame Street* that intended to teach young

viewers about binoculars. It featured Thelma Thumb, a girl who could magically make herself small, who uses the binoculars to magnify and reduce images. When magpie Cyrus flies off with the binoculars and drops them, Thelma has to make herself small in order to retrieve them, and by doing so she is once more demonstrating the binoculars' function. Pre-schoolers who knew the use of binoculars before watching the clip were able to assess correctly whether Thelma was playing with them, or using the binoculars as a tool. In contrast, children who did not know the purpose of using binoculars understood that people used them either to make things big, or to make them small.

a) Information Processing

The construction of meaning is an individualised process, but one that needs to be placed in context. Dorr argues that, in regard to televiewing, we need to consider that individuals as social beings have access to the same television signals. Thus, when they share a cultural experience they are also sharing a set of construction tools and processes of interpreting these signals. At some point in Televiewing, the individual will be involved in information-processing, and also interpretative and evaluative activities (ibid, pp. 27-40). Information-processing activities involve picking up auditory and/or visual signals from the set, sending them to the brain, decoding them, and storing them in the memory for later reference. The author tells us that a single 30-second advertisement for action figures is likely to contain lots of motion, several camera angles, quick scene changes, music and sound effects, a narrator, and sometimes a disclaimer such as 'Action figures sold separately'. This is more information than a child can process at one time, so choices need to be made as to what to listen to, and what visual material to look at. Having made a selection, the child needs to decode the content to establish meaning in the material explicitly presented by television - for example, to understand that the message at the bottom of the screen means that the action figures in the ad are not sold together; or to recognise the cartoon hero represented by the action figure. After picking up these signals, by transmitting them to the brain and decoding them the child will make a selection of what information to keep, or not, in the long-term memory.

One indicator of the developmental differences between children is the increase throughout childhood and adolescence in the amount of information acquired. According to Dorr (ibid, p.46), this has been demonstrated as early as the 1930s, when

Holaday and Stoddard studied information acquisition from entertainment films. They found - by asking adults, adolescents and children to write down the ideas contained in a film – that at all ages viewers recalled both factually correct and incorrect ideas, but the proportion of incorrect ideas decreased with age. In a similar way, other researchers have demonstrated age-related differences in children's recall of television content. Leifer and Roberts (1972) found that, in relation to understanding the motivations and consequences of aggressive acts in entertainment programmes, 5-year-olds correctly answered about 33% of the multiple choice-questions, whereas 8-year-olds answered about 50%, 11-year-olds about 75%, and 18-year-olds around 95%. Another aspect of developmental differences is an increase in recall of the incidental – i.e. events that are not relevant to the development of the main.

Van den Broek et al (1996) examined how children and adults recalled events from *Sesame Street* stories. They used a Network Model to represent the events in the story, and the casual relations between them. Through this they determined the role played by each event in the story structure. The results suggested that there were developmental differences regarding children's sensitivity to causal and motivational structure of events portrayed in television stories.

With age, the overall number of events recalled increased, and the patterns of recall varied; although all groups more easily recalled events that had several causal connections to other events, their recollection became stronger with age. Also, older participants more strongly emphasized idea units, which were part of the causal chain that led from the beginning to the end of the story. This suggests that, with age, recall of televised stories increasingly centres on events that play a central role in the causal structure of the story.

As to the story-grammar, the two groups of children focused to a greater extent on the actions that occurred in the stories, while adults were more likely to include information about goals and motives of the protagonists. In respect to the story's hierarchical episodic structure, children tended to recall idea units at superordinate levels more often than those at subordinate levels; while adults focused on the intermediate levels.

Nevertheless, the authors stress that there are similarities between the age groups, such as the fact that units, which played an important role in the causal structure of the stories were generally recalled more often than those that were casually peripheral. This indicates that children's memory of televised events is not unsystematic, and 'with age the memory representation increasingly becomes a casual one, resembling a network of interconnected idea units centred on the protagonists' goals and the events that precipitated these goals' (ibid, p.3024).

The attention given to television content is varied of course. Dorr mentions work by psychologists Andersen and Lorch (1983) who did research on the guiding principles and structures of information-processing activities. They suggested that children as young as three could guide when and how much they look at a television screen by how understandable the material is likely to be. The children seemed to have associated incomprehensible material with such features as men's voices, extended zooms and pans, and eye contact; while women, children, and puppets appeared to be associated with comprehensible content. These abstract knowledge structures operate as prototypes, as a schema or schemata. As such, they develop and change according to experience, providing an internal structure for the selection or storage of content and recollection – a 'story schema' is a prototypical structure for a narrative; an 'action schema' is the idealised form of a single act such as reading a book; and a 'script' is a representation of a stereotyped event sequence, such as attending classes.

Dorr argues that age-related changes of children's schemas around the structure of television genres may influence their content recall:

> Children's schemas for plots improve with age. Young children have very simple schemas, usually involving little more than an initiating event, an attempt at resolution, and the consequences of that resolution. Motives, plans, feelings, context, orientation, history, and nature of participants are infrequently part of narrative models of children eight and younger. With increasing age, however, more elements (especially motives and feelings) are added to children's schemas for a plot and there is more expectation that plot elements should be related one to the other. These improved schemas for narrative structure should help children select and recall more altogether and more that is important to the plot (ibid, p. 47).

Calvert et al (1982) describe the formal features of television production that guide children's visual attention, assessing the ways in which children's selective attention is related to their subsequent comprehension and recall of story content. He measured the visual attention of 128 children from kindergarten and third to fourth-grade classes to the formal features of a prosocial cartoon, considering the *salience* function of features, and their *marker* function. 'Perceptual salience' refers to those features embodying a high level of intensity, movement, change, contrast, incongruity or novelty (e.g. rapid action, visual and sound special effects). Marker function features are formal features used by children as signals to mark which content will be comprehensible or incomprehensible.

The results revealed that salient features had a positive effect on children's attention; they paid attention more in the presence of rapid or moderate character action, vocalisations, sound effects, pans, and visual special effects; while music and zooms were linked to lower attention levels. Nonsalient features produced variable effects, for example, children attended more in the presence of child dialogue, but less during adult narration. Overall, the authors did not find significant age differences regarding attention patterns to formal features, which may be due to the fact that such features were used to carry important content. This may suggest that older children attend to salient features, at least when they are informative. A strong developmental difference in attentiveness relates to older children's preference for moderate action, often used to convey educational messages, and in programmes with complex plots.

From their results, the authors argue that salient forms could help comprehension by drawing attention to important contiguous content and by providing a representational form readily encoded by children. Salient features, for example, appeared to be of great importance in drawing younger children's attention to relevant content. They gained information primarily from nonverbal auditory cues, vocalisations and sound effects. These features appeared to call their attention to relevant child dialogue. Older children also seemed to use salient features as guides to central content, but they were more skilled in selecting features that provide information in symbolic forms as well; they gained information by attentiveness during child dialogue and vocalizations, and were not put off by camera zooms. In fact the latter may indicate well-developed viewing skills, and a relatively mature pattern of selective attention.

Fish (2000), is another author interested in how children comprehend television content, particularly that of educational programmes. His concern is with how children extract and comprehend content from such programmes, and he proposes a model, called *capacity model*, to illustrate children's allocation of memory while watching television. Specifically, this is how working memory is allocated in programmes that contain both narrative and educational content. The proposed model has three basic elements: *processing of narrative*, *processing of educational content*, and the *distance* between the two; the degree to which the educational content is integral or tangential to the narrative.

The processing of a narrative, according to the author, may be affected by the characteristics of both the television programme, and the viewer. Viewers' characteristics may include: a) prior knowledge of the narrative's subject matter – research has shown that, for example, children's comprehension was enhanced when their ethnic background matched that portrayed in the television programme – this allows the narrative to be assimilated into memory more easily, reducing the demands of information processing; b) knowledge of the story structure, including general schemas as to how stories are structured; c) knowledge of television conventions; d) cognitive abilities, including verbal ability and visual short-term memory; e) and finally, an interest in the subject matter of the narrative.

As for television programmes' characteristics, Fisch suggests that the processing of narrative can be influenced by: a) the complexity of the narrative – narratives containing long or complex chains of events are likely to place greater demands on working memory processes; b) the degree to which the narrative conforms to the prototypic structure of known story schemas; c) the degree to which the narrative's information is explicit or needs to be inferred; d) linear and temporal organisation of its content; and e) the use of advanced organisers or cues presented early in the programme to alert viewers as to its subject matter, such as previews of upcoming material – this can help the viewer by indicating what type of information will be central to the narrative.

Processing of content, for example, is influenced by the children's prior knowledge which, in turn, varies as the child grows older and gradually accumulates more knowledge about the world. Also, increasing prior knowledge will further facilitate children's ability to draw inferences from televised narratives. Knowledge about the formal features of television also increases with age, and children are able to allocate less effort and resources to understand television. As cognitive tasks become more practised, the more automatic they become requiring less working memory resources.

Working memory itself will develop with age, for as children mature they are able to hold increasing amounts of information, this being due to an increase in the speed of information processing in the working memory:

> Particularly within the realm of television where the input of information is not self-paced, an increase in processing information speed clearly would provide a great advantage. Such an increase would allow for more efficient and effective management of the parallel processing of narrative and educational content, and potentially, for deeper processing of each while viewing (ibid, p.81).

One last factor is the development of the ability to manage multiple goals, a skill that can be taught, and which allows the child to shift from a single channel processing to a 'parallel processing'. This allows them to coordinate their attention on several sources of information at the same time.

b) Interpretive Activities

As previously mentioned, interpretive activities involve the usage of schemas. These will allow the viewer to 'integrate', 'infer', and 'attribute' meaning to television content. Dorr (op.cit.) describes 'attributions' as people's explanations of behaviours and feelings. These can also refer to the individual's interpretation of the creator and broadcaster's motives. A viewer may judge a music competition differently if he believes that the programme is meant, for example, to be a charity event or, on the contrary, a marketing strategy to promote a singer.

'Inferences' also refer to decisions made by viewers, but this time about events that were not shown, requiring life knowledge of comparable situations. It is likely,

particular with children who have not had the chance to learn as much as adults that misinterpretations will occur. The third interpretive activity is 'integration', and it refers to the capacity to integrate together sequences of television content in order to construct meaning.

Again, research has shown age-related differences in interpretive activities, for example with children attributing motives and feelings to television characters. Collins et al (1974) have shown how, in a study where children had to retell a plot after seeing it, children younger than ten did not mention characters' motives, while half of the 10-year-olds and two thirds of the 13-year-olds did so. This, however, does not necessarily mean that young children are totally unable of understanding the feelings and wishes of others.

According to Dunn (1987), there are two methods that researchers use to comprehend children's awareness of others' emotions. One is based upon giving the child experimental tasks that require him or her to take the perspective of another; e.g. to ask the child to report on the feelings of a storybook character, or to identify an emotional state from a picture or drawing. The author argues that a range of contradictory findings has emerged from this approach, which has been unable to clarify how children under three understand emotions. The second approach, in which Dunn's own work can be situated, attempts to make deductions about children's understanding of another person's feelings from their natural responses to others' behaviour or actions, and from their spontaneous conversations. Dunn suggests that the social world where children first begin to develop an understanding of others' emotions is the family. He states that research on 4-year-old children has shown clear differences between a child's intellectual power and curiosity within the family and in a school environment. The fights, disputes, conversations and games of a child's family life provide a better context to study its growing understanding of other people.

Observing the responses of firstborn children in relation to their siblings, the author concluded that 'children of 3 were skilful at reading, anticipating, and responding to the feelings of their baby siblings – aged only 15 month – and 15 months-old children were beginning to grasp how to comfort and how to provoke their older siblings (ibid, p.29)'. Dunn found indicators of children's capacity to understand the feelings of others in a

diversity of family interaction situations. During family conflict, for example, the author observed that in the course of the second year of life child's behaviour changes dramatically. 'Teasing behaviour' emerges, indicating a perception of what annoys other people. By 14 months children were knowingly destroying others' favourite objects. Between 20 and 24 months children were now able to anticipate their mothers' reaction to physical aggression and teasing acts.

Also, analyses of conversation between child, mother and sibling showed that children were able to discuss the causes of feelings, and to use their understanding of these states for a wide range of social functions – e.g. by attempting to reassure, comfort, provoke, prohibit and restrain. In a similar way, these conversations during storytelling and television watching revealed the child's interest in other people's emotions. In fact, this type of family interaction appeared to be related to the child's concern and altruistic feelings towards the distressed. Dunn provides an example of a 2-year-old looking at a book with her mother:

> Virginia L and Mother
> Child: Great big bonfire.
> Mother: Big bonfire, yes, it is a great big bonfire. What is it burning up the bonfire?
> Child: Burning birdies. All hungry.
> Mother: They've got to fly away because they've burned the tree that the birdies used to live in, haven't they? And look at all the little bunny rabbits crying.
> Child: They sad.
> Mother: That's right, they're sad.
> (ibid, p.29)

Finally, the observation of children's play indicated that at 24 months children were exploring social roles and rules when playing. At this age they also played with feeling states, involving discussion and negotiation about pain, distress, sleepiness, anger or sadness.

As to inferring from implied events, some research reveals that children younger than eight or nine will very rarely display such an ability. This age group typically understands less about explicit content, and has less background knowledge needed to make the appropriate inferences. Collins et al claim that even when they had all the knowledge about explicit content needed to make correct inferences, children below

these ages performed at a chance level. Finally, Dorr argues that integration of content is also linked with development.

> Throughout childhood there is a steady improvement in sequencing the main events of a program (...). Pre-schoolers tend to ignore plot or content continuity and to focus instead on isolated, interesting events in their recollection of television content. By about age seven children prefer plotted programs to segmented, magazine-style programs and continuity to discontinuity (...) they have developed a rudimentary model for plots that apparently helps them encode, integrate and recall television content. Even 7- or 8-year-olds, however, find integration of the elements of standard prime-time programs challenging, and their performance can be notably diminished by placing irrelevant content (e.g., commercials) between the central elements of a plot (ibid, p.49).

Shapiro et al (1991), while researching the ability pre-school and first-grade children to produce stories that were both coherent and cohesive, showed picture sequences of two familiar events to children (baking cookies and going on a trip to the beach), and then asked them to tell stories about those sequences. In addition, they varied the type of picture sequence viewed so that, half the children were shown pictures with an embedded problem-resolution sequence. Meanwhile, the other half saw similar sequences, of typical but uneventful, occurrences. The authors argue that children must contend with coherence and cohesion when constructing stories. The first task is related to a child's ability to draw on culturally shared knowledge organise a narrative temporally and causally, both to himself and his listeners.

In relation to the second task, story cohesion, the results indicate that young children, though knowledgeable about story structure, are still developing story schema and therefore have difficulty creating a problem-resolution plot structure on their own. First graders, on the other hand, were more capable of introducing and describing story characters, including goals, and developing plots on the basis of problem-resolution sequences, thus organizing their stories into a higher level of narrative complexity. They could supplement the available story structure presented to them with basic narrative components (beginnings and endings, settings, character descriptions, and actions), as well as enriching them with episodic components (goals, internal responses, obstacles, and repairs). Despite this, they did not provide the detailed descriptions of the plot, the event setting, the characters' physical appearances, thoughts, and feelings, that other research as shown to be characteristic of 8 or 9-year-old children.

Developmental differences were also found in story cohesion. Children mainly made use of additive connectives (e.g. 'and'), but with age, they were able to use more complicated conjunctions (such as the temporal connectives 'then', 'first', 'next'), and to tell more linguistically complex stories.

> First graders' stories contained more complex language, and the temporal sequence was marked both with explicit temporal connectives and past tense, whereas the stories by preschoolers more often included simple, continuative connectives and were identified as using confused strategy of pronominalisation (ibid, p.970)

In another study, Low et Durkin (2000) aimed to investigate developmental patterns in children's recall of television-based narratives. They presented, a total of ninety-six children aged 5, 7, 9 and 11 years with one version – either a canonical or jumbled version – of a programme. The latter was edited and abbreviated to emphasise the key components of a routine, testing the children's responses to immediate and delayed recall tests.

The results showed that first grade children were able to recall a lot of the content when this was presented in the canonical version, but did markedly less well when it followed the jumbled structure. Though performance improvements were found with age, it was only with seventh grade children that recollection of the jumbled version matched that of the canonical structure. Regarding the accuracy with which children remembered the sequence of events younger children handled canonical television narratives well, but struggled with the jumbled version. Seventh graders had a good performance in both. The analysis of children's inclusion of additional information, once again, revealed developmental differences. It was discovered that children in the two younger groups were likely to include additional information when recalling the canonical version, whereas children in the older groups did precisely the opposite. An analysis of the type of additional information introduced suggested to the authors that young children find the canonical story patterns interesting and strive to recall them in detail; while older children may find them less exciting, thus providing fewer story inferences. Low et al. conclude:

> (...) what develops with age is that children become less dependent on the canonical organisation of their event knowledge and become able to deploy their representations more flexibly to process departures from standard routines. (...) The evidence (in the study) supports that conclusion that while the younger child's main goal is to seek out regularity in the environment (...), the older children can accommodate to the unexpected, eventually handling it as skilfully as more familiar scripts. It is important to note that these developing competencies are unlikely to be independent from other developments – such as improvements in inferential capacities, memory strategies and the acquisition of more knowledge about the medium and the real world. (...) [T]he (...) findings underlie the importance of compatibility between the scriptal structure of the television narrative and the child's events representation (ibid, p.266).

c) Evaluation Activities

Making sense of television content also involves evaluation, assessing what is seen and emotionally reacting to it. These are not obligatory and can occur with little or no thought from the viewer, as some images may simply be evocative of real-life experiences and provoke a reaction in the individual. The emotional responses that involve a greater activity are those in which the viewer does not immediately recognise the character's feelings, and needs to think about what those might be by assessing the character's attributes and actions. Dorr (ibid) argues that liking and admiration for characters are themselves constructed responses. These are influenced by the moral code and the criteria for evaluating actions typical of the individual's cultural background. Evaluative activities depend, to different extents, on the information-processing and interpretative activities, requiring recognition of what is being seen on television, as well as attribution of feelings and motives to characters, inference, and anticipation of events. This, however, is a double-sided influence. One way in which evaluation can affect information-processing and interpretative actions is by influencing their quality; when evaluative activities produce moderate amounts of arousal, mental activity is improved:

> Children pay more attention to content, process it better, and remember it better. Information processing and interpretation are less good when arousal is very low because children fail to invest enough energy in making sense of television content and when it is very high because they are distracted by whatever aroused them (ibid, p.39).

Another, way is by focusing on the content processed and interpreted; bad feelings when watching television, whether caused by the programme or by external events, are likely to lead the child to remember negative content, and vice-versa.

A part of these evaluative activities is allocated to the child's understanding of the reality, purpose, or accuracy of television content, usually referred to as the child's perceptions of modality, as suggested in the previous chapter. Once again, Dorr sustains that there are marked changes throughout childhood in children's ideas about the reality of television programmes' content. According to her, it is about the age of seven or eight that children begin to understand that what they see on television is not necessarily an exact representation of reality. As such they start to appreciate 'the ways in which it may be unreal, inaccurate, biased, misleading, or false; while for content that makes no such claims for itself, there is an increasing appreciation for the ways in which it can be realistic (ibid, p.49)'.

This chapter addresses the mental processes that occur to construct of meaning. The argument is that children's psychological development influences their understanding of television content. Children have less experience of the world and, thus, have less developed mental schemas to make sense of it. Television content needs to be planned in order to cater for the diversity of young audiences. This can only be done properly by an informed knowledge of who these audiences are.

In the next chapter I look at theoretical approaches concerned with how meaning is carried by audiovisual texts, suggesting that these are ideological constructions that result from their producers' assumptions about the audience.

CHAPTER III – The animated text as communication

The complexity of the subject(s) of study and the lack of research dealing with children's television as a process of communication, interpreting it as a whole rather than isolated parts, lead me to look at ways to understand the threads connecting the elements of this process.

Chapter I and II show that children's discussions about media are not simply reproducing adults' discourses. They are producing rational and complex arguments resulting from the consideration of the subject, from the circumstances of viewing and debate, and from their mental schemas and life experiences. If a teacher chooses to show a video during a class asking children to comment, it is likely that responses will be different to comments made among a group of friends with no adult in sight. Classrooms are guided by a meritocratic system, where children know they are being assessed on their performance. Similarly, an animator working on a children's programme will have to bring into consideration a number of issues concerning the target audience; the context of viewing, the purpose of the programme as well as broadcasters and carers' demands. Ideally, the professional animator would also be aware of the cognitive processes that occur when children watch television, and how these change with age.

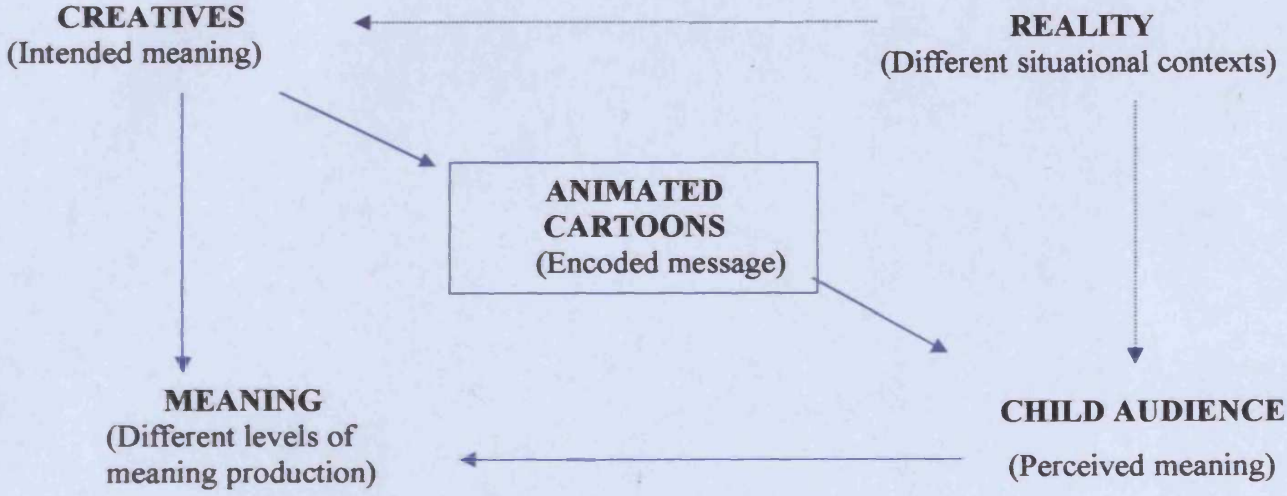
Thus there is a need for strategies of analysis that allow an understanding of the conditions in which a media text is received and debated. Also, a consideration is required as to how young audiences are constructed, and the influence these constructions have on media texts – in the case of this research, children's animation – looking at the ideological meanings carried by the texts and to the ways in which narratives are constructed.

Semiotics is at the centre of this research; its theoretical-methodological approach tells us that social communication is established through signs that carry meanings for those involved in the process. 'Semioticians search for the systems which underlie the ability of signs like words, images, items of clothing, foods, cars, or whatever to carry certain meanings in society' (Bignell, 1997, p.9). These systems are codes into which the signs are organised.

3.1) A model of analysis

I am considering three levels of analysis: the production of animated cartoons for children; the animated cartoon itself; and the audience of these programmes. The aim is to try and address the ways in which meaning is constructed, from the production of the programme to the moment of viewing. Animated cartoons are messages conveyed through television, messages created and sent by the animation professionals to a specific group of receivers, the child audience. What interests me is to assess the similarities or discrepancies between the original encoded message and the ways in which its primary receivers decode it.

Bearing in mind that the acts of producing and viewing a programme generate a communication process, I will start by studying the narrative structure and semiotic features of animated programmes for children, moving on to look at how creatives and children, agents with their distinct referential backgrounds, perceive the message communicated.



3.1.1) Hall's Model of Mass Communication

Meaning does not exist per se; it is constructed by communicating agents. And, in mass communication, as Hall ([1973] 1980) proposed, the process is a meaningful discourse resulting from both 'encoding' and 'decoding' as signifying practices.

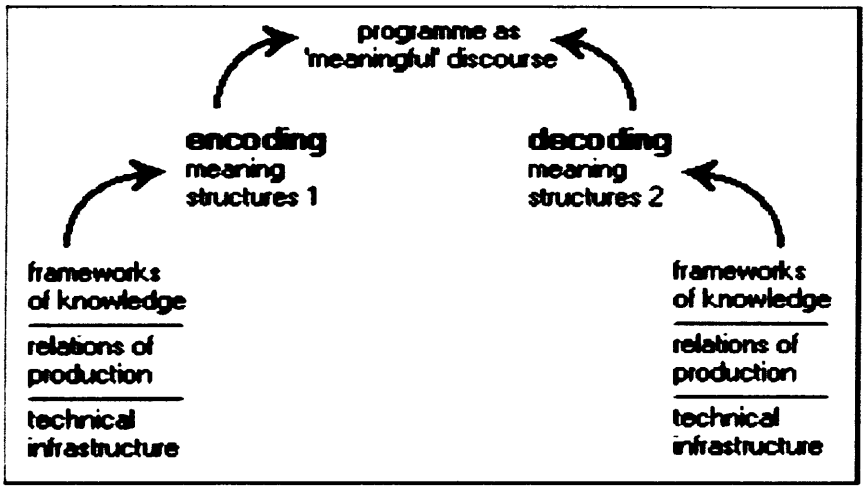


Table 2: Hall's Model of Mass Communication

Hall (1993) suggests that the traditional mass-communication model conceptualised the process of communication in terms of a linear circuit – sender/message/receiver. However it concentrated on the level of message exchange, and failed to recognise the complexity of the different moments of the process. Hall asks us to recognise that the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange, and that the moments of 'encoding' and 'decoding' that message are determinate moments.

Exemplifying the processes of encoding and decoding in terms of television messages, the author states that the communication circuit begins when the institutional structures of broadcasting produce a programme. That is, when they construct messages already embedded with 'knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience' (ibid, p.509). In the case of children's programmes these assumptions are likely to be based on what the adults have idealised as 'childhood', and their own memories of it. Furthermore, they also draw feedback from other sources and discourses within the wider socio-cultural and political structure of which they are a differentiated part. Thus, reception of the television message is itself

incorporated into the production process in a larger sense. Television messages are then decoded and appropriated as meaningful discourse:

> It is this set of decoded meanings which 'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences. In a 'determinate' moment the structure employs a code and yields a 'message': at another determinate moment the 'message', via its decodings, issues into the structure of the social practices (ibid)

There are, however, different degrees of understanding and misunderstanding, as well as different degrees of symmetry in the communicative exchange. They depend on the symmetry/asymmetry established between 'encoder-producer' and 'decoder-receiver' (in this case adults and children). Distortions arise from the lack of structural equivalence between the structural relations and positions between broadcasters and audiences and also from the different codes used at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. It is because of this that Hall advocates the importance of the semiotic paradigm, towards a comprehension of mass communication.

The televisual sign is a combination of visual and aural discourse; as well as being an iconic sign. As visual discourse, it translates the three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes not being, therefore, the referent or concept it signifies. Reality is mediated by and through language, so discursive knowledge results not from a transparent representation of reality but from the articulation of language in daily life. In this way, Hall suggests that all intelligible discourse is produced through the operation of a code, thus, iconic signs are themselves coded signs.

When codes are incorporated into a specific language community or culture, they become naturalised and are not understood as constructions.

> The operation of naturalised codes reveals not the transparency and 'naturalness' of language but the depth, the habituation and the near-universality of the codes in use. They produce apparently 'natural' recognitions. This has the (ideological) effect of concealing practices of coding which are present (ibid, p.511).

Societies or cultures tend to impose classifications on the social and cultural political world. This constitutes the dominant cultural order, that may nonetheless, be contested.

Hall argues that different areas of social life appear to be organised into dominant or preferred meanings. It is possible to decode events within different mappings, but there is a pattern of preferred readings that have become institutionalised.

A recurrent example is the industry's belief that girls will watch programmes with male characters in the lead role, but that the opposite does not stand. In my research, as discussed in a later chapter, when the children were shown *The Tale of the Three Sisters who Fell into the Mountain* whose protagonist was a little girl, boys still enjoyed watching the film. Even when they state otherwise, boys do watch shows about girls (to which their informed criticisms are obvious clues).

The process of encoding can influence the decoding, but this does not mean that it will guarantee it. What it will do is to construct some limits and parameters within which decodings will operate, for if this was not the case audiences would freely interpret any message. Though there is a degree of misunderstanding, there is also a degree of reciprocity between the two moments, without which there could not be effective communication. When watching a cartoon whose narrative is based on Portuguese mythology, the children interviewed did not decode straightforwardly the signs of 'Portugueseness' encoded in the message. Likewise, in the pilot study, children were asked to comment on a clip from *Rotten Ralph* where Ralph the cat eats too many sweets before dinner, despite the family warnings, and at the dinner table throws the pasta away while pretending to eat it. Children's first reaction was to laugh at Ralph's wittiness, and only when the teacher asked them if there was any moral to the story did they refer to the cat's punishment – being sick, thus complying to the adults expected meaning.

Hall suggests (ibid, pp.515-517) that there are three hypothetical positions from which decodings of televisual discourse may be constructed: The dominant-hegemonic position; the negotiated code or position; and the oppositional code. The first is the case of 'perfectly transparent communication' and refers to moments when the viewer decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded. A hegemonic viewpoint, as Hall understands it:

> defines within the mental horizon, the universe, of possible meanings, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and, second, (...) it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy – it appears coterminous with what is 'natural', 'inevitable', 'taken for granted' about the social order (ibid, p.516).

Negotiated codes result from acknowledging the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to communicate views when these are considered beneficial, but transgressing the rules when necessary. Finally, oppositional codes are those when the viewer understands the discourses but decodes the message in a contrary way and within an alternative framework of reference.

Considering briefly the results from this research, I would suggest that the animation professionals interviewed operate within a negotiated position when producing uncompromising 'culturally specific' animation that can still appeal to the international market. The children's position, however, is less clear. As the results presented in Chapter VII demonstrate, on the one hand children created stories that conform to stereotypical representations of gender. On the other, those stories revealed that children were able to reinvent global characters and plots.

In this way, Hall avoids deterministic ideas about the fixed meaning of texts, opening it to audiences. Fiske (1987, p.260) argues that the concept of negotiation is central to Hall's model. It alerts to conflict of interests and to the idea that audiences are not limited by pre-established meanings, but active in their interpretations of the text. Still, one needs to understand the extent to which audiences are able to extricate themselves from dominant media meanings. Grossberg (1987) addresses this question by emphasising the importance of context as a variable to be considered; audiences are constantly articulating texts to construct meaning. As I have explained in Chapter I, new approaches to the child audience delve precisely into children's practices and their skills in interpreting the semiotics of television.

3.1.2) Ideology in mass communication

According to Tudor (1999, p.123) Hall explores Gramsci's concept of hegemony by extending the politics of signification to the 'class struggle in language', and the struggle over meaning. Ideology and ideological struggles have 'relative autonomy' and cannot be simply understood in terms of the economic base. Hegemony depends on a

cultural leadership that controls the form and level of culture and civilization, in such a way as to sustain the dominant 'social and productive system'. It is accomplished with some level of legitimate compulsion but mainly by means of winning the active consent of those classes and groups who are subordinated within it. The 'production of consent' is the key role of media within a given social formation.

Hodge and Kress (1988) suggest that in capitalist societies as in most other social formations, there are inequalities in the distribution of power and goods that cause social divisions. The dominant groups attempt to represent the world in such a way that their own interests will benefit, thereby sustaining the structures of domination. Dominated groups however, are not always blind to this domination, and they sometimes attempt to resist the dominance. It is from these relationships within social structures that contradictory ideological forms emerge; these are contradictory views of the world, 'coercively imposed by one social group on another on behalf of its own distinctive interests or subversively offered by another social group in attempts of resistance in its own interests' (ibid, p.3).

Grossberg et al(1998) argue that the media are important producers of meaning in society. Media texts are ideological. This does not mean that they overtly support the dominant elites but that they take for granted a set of relationships, which are in agreement with the social relations of power. Media portraits are based on assumptions about values and norms that reinforce their unquestionable character.

> Ideology is then about trying to get people to see the world according to the terms or codes that have been set by one or more groups of people, usually those who control the power within a society (ibid, p.83)

Individuals are often unaware of ideological codes because these are unconscious and, therefore, difficult to challenge. Ideologies are mystifications that present themselves as natural and universal, hiding any connections to specific social groups, as well as creating the 'reality' they represent (ibid, pp.192, 194-195).

This is a view shared by Schriato and Yells (2000, pp.164-165):

> the first function of ideology, then, is to create a notion of community where everything is harmonious, just and workable as long as different groups stick to their natural place [...] a second function to ideology [...] is to conceive and demonstrate to groups in a culture that the value that is assigned to certain signs or markers of difference (skin colour for instance) is just natural. This allows the members of privileged groups to behave as if they were naturally superior to other groups

For the authors, ideologies are addressed to all social groups. Ideology works to erase differences by legitimising the interests of those who produce it. The perpetuation of narratives that contain ideas and values, which constantly reassert the elite's dominance, explains the efficiency of ideologies. This is done through the repetition of such narratives in different media, fields and genres.

Television products, for instance, are aimed at large audiences, and distinctions between the viewers' cultural and social backgrounds are frequently under-represented. Child audiences in particular, are quite often 'homogenised' by broadcasters who offer children's programming to a group whose ages range from four to fourteen years. Bazalgette and Buckingham (1995), state that '[t]he idea that children, like other subordinate social groups, are somehow all alike in their tastes, interests and inspirations is powerful and widespread'. The authors allude to the 'impossibility' of children's television, arguing that although it is made for children, adults control it. In their opinion, the texts produced by adults for children have implicit power relationships, though these are far from being simply coercive. Still, it is important to understand what adults want or demand from children through these texts. Semiotics is a useful strategy to look at who is speaking, to whom, what is being said, and how.

3.1.3) Semiotics and Children's television

> Myths deal with aberrations, with 'monsters', deviant beings, transgressors. They reflect rather then display in a direct form the logic of a culture, the primary systems and categories that organize thought and behaviour in the society which creates and maintains that culture. (...) Semiotics is important because it provides the possibility of a method of analysis which can deal with the messages of myths, and in so doing it can throw light on the meanings of television for children (Hodge and Tripp, 1986, p.15)

In terms of television, specifically children's animation, Hodge and Tripp argue that the understanding of 'myths' involves understanding the transformations and plot structure that are maintained throughout a series. Understanding a myth, the authors suggest, is the ability of a viewer to predict plot developments and appreciate the ingenuity of any twists in it (ibid, p.32).

The authors approach the study of children's television through semiotic analysis of a cartoon for children *Fangface*, combining this with the children's own readings of the programme, and taking into account the contexts where meaning is produced. The authors acknowledge the need to extend the research to the viewers as an attempt to overcome any level of subjectivity. They extend the use of semiotics to the analysis of data collected from the interviews with children, while considering variables such as children's psychological development, gender; socio-economic and ethnic origins. Hodge and Tripp also use semiotics to assess the children's responses to *Fangface*.

In the cartoon they started by examining visual (pictures and text) and aural (speech, music, sound effects) codes by which the message was organised; moving on to identify what they call the 'building blocks' of the message, or the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures. These structures, they argued, allowed them to unveil the ideological contents of the message. For them, '[ideology] is a coercive and general version of social reality, originating from a specific site in society' (ibid, p.22). So, ideological formations carry, on the one hand, contradictions managed through systematic paradigmatic transformations; and on the other, a syntagmatic dimension related to the interface of individuals and groups in society (ibid, pp. 20 – 22).

The authors' explain that:

> a television show is not a single stimulus, it is a vast meaning-potential complex, an interrelated set of verbal and visual meanings. But this potential is only abstract until there is someone to realise it. Interpretation is an intensely active process. Meaning is always constructed, or reconstructed, by the interaction of a set of signs with an overall code (ibid, p.7)

To understand how different elements were combined in the cartoon, Hodge and Tripp based the analysis on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures, identifying a number

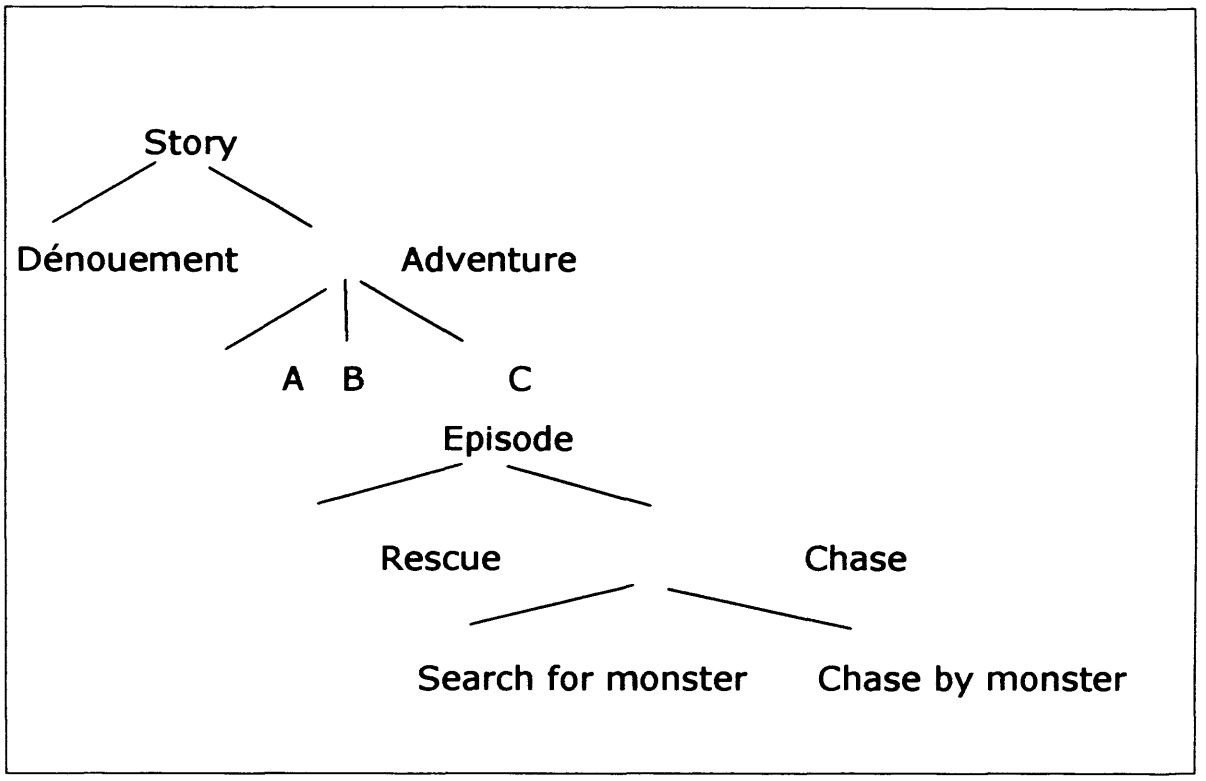
of syntagmatic types categorised into three variables: time; space; and continuity. In relation to time they point out the existence of 'synchronic' syntagms existing in the same time; and 'diachronic' syntagms, which exist in a different time. Thinking, for example, of Warner Bros's *Roadrunner* series, they classify an imagined sequence when the audience simultaneously sees Roadrunner approaching the site where Coyote prepares his ambush as 'synchronic'; and 'diachronic' when presented with two sequences. The latter might be Coyote receiving his ACME package, taking out some assorted pieces, and reading the assembling instructions when the sun is still high in the sky, followed by a scene of Coyote still trying to assemble the pieces, but this time with the sun disappearing behind the horizon. Similarly, there are 'syntopic' and 'diatopic' syntagms, which are those existing respectively, in the same and in a different space.

The use of these different strategies can influence the way that text is understood by the viewer, depending on the viewer's own knowledge of cinematic codes. It could be hypothesised that cartoons for young children would make more use of 'synchronic' and 'syntopic' syntagms, since these would convey the text's continuity in a more fluid and simpler way; and therefore would be less likely to create confusion for young audiences less familiar with such codes.

Finally, regarding continuity, the authors have classified structures either as hypotatic – each pair of paradigms being subordinated to a more general option - or as paratatic, existing alongside. A hypotatic structure is one that allows a certain text to tell a coherent story, in the words of the authors "[o]nly through hypotatic organisation could a story be said or understood to have a single meaning or 'point'. Without hypotatic structures a 'story' would simply be an endless succession of '...and then...and then...'(...), the story must have both an adventure and a dénouement, and so it may be seen to be hypotatic" (ibid, p.36).

For Hodge and Tripp *Fangface* has two main parts: the opening sequence that includes the title, the credits, and a background on *Fangface's* myth; and the story, which follows a 'seek and chase' formula.

Table 4 – **Hodge & Tripp schematic representation of Fangface's episode formula** (ibid, p.35)



In turn, these syntagmatic structures are divided into paradigmatic categories, often organised as binary oppositions. For example, the characters maybe split into categories such as male/female; younger/older; middle class/working class, etc (ibid, pp. 23 – 25,35).

The meanings of the series are given in a compressed for by the opening, which as an introduction, presents details about the main character and also about the significance of myth. The verbal components of the opening sequence function as 'anchorage', limiting the choice of a multitude of meanings given by the visual elements. Through the verbal signals it is possible to identify the main character and his function; as well as to understand other abstract concepts like time and causality not directly given by the visuals. To understand the visuals, the authors divide the sequence into shots and then analyse it in terms of binary oppositions; in this specific case, the image of a werewolf wearing a hat and nappy suggests an opposition between nature/culture, or animal/human.

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Then they draw attention to the fact that the werewolf is wearing his hat backwards - signalling an opposition between conformity/unconformity, or normality/abnormality. Of course different readers may read these differently. It might for instance, be seen as a sign of youth and 'coolness', in which case we could identify 'conformity' to certain behaviour within youth culture instead of 'unconformity' to a generalised rule that hats should be worn forwards. Hodge and Tripp recognise this polysemic character of meanings, stating that:

> It is doubtful whether there can ever be such a thing as an exhaustive semiotic analysis, not only because there is so much to analyse, but because a 'complete' analysis would still be partial because it would still be located in particular social and historical circumstances (ibid, p. 27)

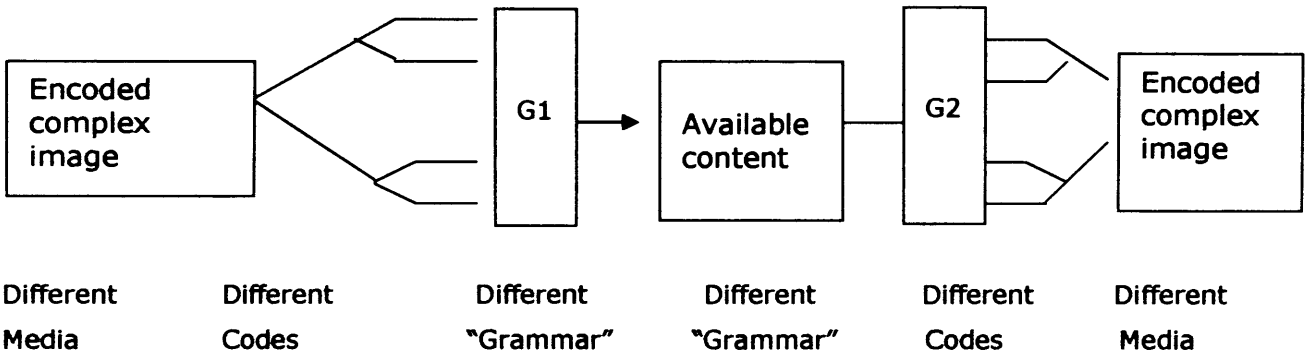
From their point of view, mechanisms can be used to construct a message and reinforce its meanings. With this particular cartoon, viewers are shown in every episode an opening that tells the story of Fangface. Such repetition is effective in communication because it emphasises crucial parts of the message. A viewer is constantly reminded of the hero's origins, allowing for a different understanding of particular episodes. Repetition is also evident in the choice of aural and visual paradigms (e.g. the verbal, 'only the sun can change him back' is accompanied by the display of different images of the sun that, in the authors opinion, reinforce the idea that Fangface's life is controlled by the sun).

The attention Hodge and Tripp pay to aural and visuals signals adds to the narrative analysis. In an audiovisual medium like television it is crucial to look at elements like language, accent, familiarity/unfamiliarity of settings, to understand the ideological and mythological messages,

As previously stated, Hodge and Tripp not only consider the importance of analysing and understanding the contents of television as texts, but they also see the significance of analysing the 'contents' of viewers' responses to it (ibid, p. 41). One of the models they propose is based on the concept of 'grammar', which they describe as:

> a set of rule systems which interpret the full range of signs of a language (...) [it] is like a theory of how language works (...) on which everyone's competence as a speaker is based, yet it is mostly unconscious. In our conception grammar consists of **four components**: a set of rules which produce a system of options (**paradigms**), a set of rules for combining those options into structures (**syntagms**), and changes to and permutations of these options and combinations (**transformations**), together with ways of situating messages in relation to an ostensible reality (**modality**).

Table 5 – **Hodge & Tripp's Grammar Model** (p. 41)



From the production of a cartoon, to its broadcasting, and the viewing by children there is process of constructing, sending, receiving, and deconstructing meanings. The authors use markers like loudness or energy; rising or falling intonation; presence of laughter, to code the interview transcripts to distinguish the different kinds of 'self' in the child's discourse. This is to see to what extent the children's responses are conditioned by parental discourse (ibid, p. 48)[20].

The authors do not see a need to use the full-range of data for every project, but a spread of data-types should provide a more reliable basis of judgement than only one or two. In their study they used video cameras and transcribed details such as the non-verbal communication going on between the children while another child was speaking. The limited resources of my research made it impossible to gather such an exhaustive collection of data. When possible, pauses, laughter, peer interaction, should be recorded to try and assess moments of hesitation, self-confidence, peer approval/disapproval,

[20] See Appendix 1 for Hodge & Tripp's Principles to guide a semiotically informed research strategy into children's television

happiness, fear, and any other reactions relevant to the interpretation of children's discourse; Hodge and Tripp suggest that such records are useful to understand the levels of certainty in children's responses.

The modality of a message is not fixed, rather it is individually constructed and, as the authors suggest, 'it is very likely that the modality judgements of children will be systematically different from those of adults, leading to very different responses to the same message compared to what adults assume is necessarily and objectively there' (ibid, pp.104-106). This is a relevant concept when studying children's programmes, as it raises questions as to what judgements children will make, and how these will differ according to the developmental stage of the child. The authors refer to some markers that affect modality: negation (also doubt and fantasy express weak modality, e.g. 'It might be a magic door'); contradiction; the accumulation of indicators of certainty; the spatial and time distance between speaker and reality; as well as laughter, non-verbal and paralingual cues such a shrug of the shoulders or tone or voice, and sound.

When analysing children's talk about the clips from the series presented to them, the authors conclude that the 'understanding of the myth' seems to be an important stage in the beginning of the decoding. They suggest that children are not wasting their time in front of the television; they are in fact building a cultural background that will affect their social understanding. Children were, for example, after viewing the first five minutes of the cartoon, able to predict how the story would end, and that the monster in the episode would be unmasked. This shows their understanding of the character's dual identity and of the structure of the programme, as this extract from an interview with a group of twelve-year-old children shows (ibid, p.52):

> Gordon: I think – I've worked out what, what – who's Fang – I mean um The Heap, er, or whatever it is, um, you know, the man who got discharged or or something most probably he's he's dressed up or something to just ah scare the men that, yeah.
> Interviewer: Did anyone else think that might be something to do with it? (...)
> Kara: Oh I just thought I reckon that, um, that they'd catch him and then they'd get off his mask and pull it off. They always do.
> Mabel: Yeah, like in Scooby-Doo.

Thus the relevance of studying the context where the message is received and of hypothesising how they present reality to young viewers. One can also aim to perceive how much children relate the texts to their own knowledge about reality and cinematic conventions. My assertion is that, due to cartoons' weak modality, children will look primarily for entertainment and will not necessarily make any connections to reality, unlike with other genres like soap operas. This does not mean that they are not benefiting at a more subconscious level, as Bettelheim (1976/1991) suggests, from cartoon narratives.

3.1.4) Analysing the narrative

Television cartoons are modern storytellers, often presenting versions of traditional fairytales. To understand their texts, meanings and structure, I will use Propp and Berger's models of narrative analysis. Berger (1992, 1997) looks at the mechanisms and functions of the narrative as authorial devices used to convey messages. His work is inspired by authors such as Propp (1968) and his Morphology of the Folktale; Bal and the distinction between narrative and story; Chatman's fundamental elements of narrative theory (the concept of 'kernels' and 'satellites'); and Bettelheim's psychoanalytic perspective on the uses of fairy tales on a child's psychological development.

One major influence in the development of what Berger calls 'Bipolar Oppositions' is Propp's morphology of the folktale. Berger's particular interest is the analysis of fairytales as 'Ur-narratives' – the basic story from which other kinds of stories can draw sustenance. Berger uses some of the characters and functions also used by Propp, and applies them combined with insights from semiologist Ferdinand de Saussure - specifically the idea that meanings are created by relationships based on polar oppositions.

In the 1920s, Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp (1968) proposed a morphology of the folktale; the underlying idea being to study the structure or form of the folktale, looking at how the components of the system relate to each other. The emphasis was on the attempt to produce standard classifications in the elements of the text, which would enable comparisons to be drawn between tales. From his analysis of the Russian 'Heroic wondertale' he concluded that in all folktales it is possible, despite surface differences,

to identify eight character roles (spheres of action) and thirty-one functions, which are both the actions and the consequences of a character in a story. These appear in a more or less predictable order, that is, there is an identical structure, and a sequence of functions in all folktales[21].

Berger argues that Propp's functions can be applied to modern narratives, but they need to be adapted to modern reality. Also, contrary to Propp, he suggests that functions will always occur in a particular order. The author exemplifies how the functions can be adopted to modern narrative texts by applying them to the Bond film Dr. No (1992, p.24):

Table 3 - **Proppian Functions of Dr. No**

Proppian functions	Symbol	Events in the text
Initial situation	α	Agents introduced in Jamaica
Villain causes harm	A	Agents killed, dumped in the sea
Mediation	B	Misfortune known, hero dispatched
Hero gets magic agent	F	Bond gets a new gun
Hero leaves home	↑	Bond flies to Jamaica
Hero is attacked	H	Poison fruit, centipede, etc.
Hero led to object of search	G	Bond and Quarrel go to Island
Hero is pursued	Pr	No's men search for Bond on island
Difficult task proposed	M	Escape by traversing shaft
The villain is punished	U	Bond kills Dr. No
Hero(ine) new appearance	T	Honeychile's nose is fixed
Hero is married	W	Bond and Honeychile make love

[21] See Appendix 2 for Propp's functions

In Berger's opinion,

> (...) Propp's system can be applied to genres other than fairy tales and to other media that carry narratives – novels, plays, comic strips, films, and television programmes. We learn from Propp, then, that many modern narratives borrow not content per se, but structure from fairy tales. (...) Of course, in contemporary times, we need to make modifications to some of Propp's functions; for instance, instead of the hero getting married and ascending the throne, he may get married and get a good job with his father-in-law (...) (1997, pp. 24,25)

The author rethinks Propp's functions in terms of polar oppositions, arguing that each time we think of a villain, we must also think of a hero because concepts gain their meaning by relationships. Likewise, every time we follow a character's action, we interpret this action in terms of counter actions by opposing characters. Berger, borrowing from Saussure's considerations of how language codes are understood, suggests that people make sense of concepts, notions or ideas by contrasting them with their opposites. 'That is why when we read or hear the word rich, we automatically contrast it with poor (...) If everyone has a great deal of money, rich looses its meaning; rich means something only in contrast with poor' (ibid, pp.29-30). The emphasis should not be on the syntagmatic structure of the tales, but on the text's central binary oppositions, since these are the elements that allow the reader to make sense of it. This seems appropriate when conducting research with young children whose understanding is often structured in terms of binary oppositions (Noble, 1975). The author draws on Chatman's (1978) classification of the fundamental elements of narrative theory, to separate the essential components of the plots from secondary matters. Chatman considers that, in a narrative, some elements are more important than others. There is a logic hierarchy in which the 'kernels' are the major events of a story, forcing movement into a variety of paths; and the 'satellites' are all other minor events that simply add details to the kernels, but not influencing the logic of the narrative.

Berger's analysis emphasises the importance of the various oppositional relationships; the binary oppositions revealed by a paradigmatic analysis. This approach, the author suggests, will help to understand the meaning of what characters say and do in the texts. The author rethinks the primary characters presented by Propp; the basic actions of these characters and their goals, and rearranges them in terms of bipolar oppositions, suggesting that when readers see and interpret texts they do so in terms of such

oppositions. Although he realises that some of these oppositions may be a bit forced, they give nonetheless, a sense of how our minds work when reading texts[22].

> (...) modern popular culture genres can be thought of as involving variations, modifications, camouflaged versions, and so forth of what Propp called fairy tales. Large numbers of the functions that Propp found in his Russian fairy tales can also be found in contemporary spy stories, science fiction stories, soap operas, westerns, and the like. This is probably because what Propp did, really, was discover some of the functions found in all narratives, even though he was investigating one particular kind the fairy tale. (ibid pp. 21 –22)

Propp's model provides objective tools to help comprehend how narratives are structured; Berger is more concerned with the process of deriving meaning, but how can we assume that the readers actually find similar meanings to those of the author? Both models are helpful as a starting point for the comparison of narratives, but are somewhat limited in the understanding of how or what meanings can derive from texts. Thus, I consider that there is a need to adopt a model of analysis that makes use of different strategies towards the understanding of the communication process as a whole.

[22] See Appendix 3 for Berger's proposal of actions, goals, and primary characters

CHAPTER IV – Approaching children's animation

The relevance of animated programmes to children's television cannot be dismissed; whether on public or satellite television, children's schedules are bound to include a great deal of cartoons. Such programmes are a privileged medium for storytelling, offering infinite possibilities regarding plot, characters, and settings. They are considered to be the children's genre par excellence - no television channel or programme grid for children is complete without a dose, or sometimes overdose, of cartoons. This raises, as does all material aimed at children, concerns regarding content: Is it too violent? Does it have an educational value? How does it benefit the child's social and psychological growth? And one would expect these considerations, if at all present at the moment of creation, to be somehow reflected in the programme itself.

Children's cartoons have thus been a target for criticism by parents; academics interested in subjects such as the effects of television on a young audience or the commercialisation of children's culture; and from those close to the world of animation for whom such programmes are a lower form of animation.

Despite this, not many academic studies can be found that focus specifically on children's animation. This chapter approaches children's animation in a diversity of ways. First of all by defining animation as it is understood in this research, and placing children's animation within the broader field of animation studies; secondly by presenting an overview of the debates surrounding the commercialisation and globalisation of children's animation, looking at how these are understood to be influencing issues of identity; and finally, by considering approaches to children's animation where the main reference is child audiences and the uses they make of cartoons.

4.1) Defining children's animation

The Association of International Film Animation (ASIFA) defines animation as 'not live action' (Pilling, 1997, p.2). Paul Wells (1998, p.10) suggests two different approaches, both from a working and an *artworld* perspective. His working definition is based on the technical aspects of creating animation: 'A film made by hand, frame-by-frame, providing an illusion of movement which has not been directly recorded in the

conventional photographic sense'. As the author himself recognises, definitions such as these are appropriate to traditional cell, hand-drawn and model animation, but are becoming less adequate with the introduction of new technologies that allow animation through the use of computer generated images. The author then looks to other types of definitions within the artworld of animation, which are concerned with its aesthetic and philosophical aspects, stressing animation's potential as a means of subverting reality. Wells cites some film-makers whose definitions of animation are precisely based on the idea that animation is at its best when transforming reality.

The Zagreb School:

> Animation is to give life and soul to a design, not through copying but through the transformation of reality (ibid, p.10).

British based animators John Halas and Joy Batchelor:

> If it is the live-action film's job to present physical reality, animated film is concerned with metaphorical reality – not how things look, but what they mean (ibid, p.11).

Czech surrealist animator Jan Svankmajer:

> Animation enables me to give magical powers to things. In my films, I move many objects, real objects. Suddenly, everyday contact with things which people are used to acquire a new dimension and in this way casts a doubt over reality. In other words, I use animation as a mean of subversion (ibid, p.11).

Viewers' perceptions in relation to animation seemed to have changed in recent years. Going to the cinema to see an animated film is not just a task of parents accompanying their eager children. In fact, some screenings are highly populated by adults who do not bring any children with them. Films like Tim Burton's *Nightmare before Christmas*; Aardman's *Chicken Run*; *Japanese* anime like Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* or more recently, *Spirited Away*; and of course television programmes like, *The Simpsons*, the American family from Springfield created by Matt Groening, and Comedy Central's *South Park* These are all attracting adult audiences' attention, and changing the generalised idea that animation is a 'kids' thing'.

Nonetheless, the association with child audiences appears to have imprinted a status of low culture on animation, which has resulted in a lack of critical or theoretical writing. According to Pilling (op.cit.) this has not always been the case, certainly not during the 1920s and early 1930s in Europe and Russia when animated short films were discussed as part of the modernist film movement. The author argues that the marginal status of animation is, to a great extent, a result of the 'Disneyfication' of animation.

> Following Disney's audacious gamble on the animated feature film, animation became defined by the Disney model – that of the cartoon as a child/family entertainment, and, as such, a no-go area for most film critics and theorists other than as material for ideological/sociological analysis. (ibid, p.X1)

It is this critical attention to animation that Pilling wants to recover, though she recognises that few film critics or theorists may feel equipped to approach animation's aesthetics.

Disney has strongly contributed to the development of animation and - in particular, to the emergence of cinematic storytelling. Not only did he make the first colour movie - in 1932 Disney signed a contract that gave him exclusive rights for three years over the Technicolor three-colour process, and in 1937 he released the feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Bendazzi, 1994, p.63, 67) – but he was also the first to study and perfect the technique of lip synchronisation. He pioneered the development of what Raffaelli (1997, p.116) calls 'animated satire on behaviour', exploring characters' movements and their physical expression of emotions. Wells (op. cit.) applied Eco's term 'hyper-reality' to refer to Disney's eagerness to reproduce human behaviour. Such a concept covers all animation that aspires to the 'realism' of live-action films.

> For Disney, and others working in this way, to connote 'reality', however, the construction of, and the contexts created within, the films, must necessarily aspire to verisimilitude, even when making films with fairytale narratives or using animals or caricatured humans as the main characters (1998, p.25).

Disney has been 'blamed' for two major impacts on animation. As already suggested, the consequences of his work on the status of animation as an art form brought, as Pilling argues, critical disdain to animation - though the author does acknowledge that

other factors, such as its widespread use on instructional films, might have contributed to animation's low status as an object of study.

The second impact is the standardisation and imposition of creative limitations to animated storytelling. Disney studios have, for an extended period, dictated stylistically the adaptation of fairytales to the screen. Zipes (1995) suggests that:

> (...) the Disney studios have been able to retain a market stranglehold on fairytale films up to the present. Consequently any film-maker who has endeavoured to adapt a fairytale for the screen, whether through animation or other means, has had to measure up to the Disney standard and try to go beyond it (ibid, p. 109).

As an apologist of subversion and adaptation of traditional storytelling, the author considers that Disney's productions aimed neither at the exploration of stories or the education of children, but instead, at uniformity with the sole purpose of creating an identifiable brand, together with the celebration of individualism and male prowess. However, there is a need to consider the differences between child and adult audiences, as Wells (2002, p.76) points out:

> It is inevitable that adults viewing the same texts [as children] will in many ways be watching something entirely different. The scale of adult socialization distances the cartoon from 'reality' in another way (...). The adult viewer watches differently, articulating sub-texts, and other levels of meaning (...).

The problem with artworld approaches to animation, I would suggest, is that they dismiss too easily animation aimed at child audiences. Children's animation is seen as 'non-art', acquiring an inferiority status due to its links to mass production and commercialism, considered to be a legacy of Disney's empire and, as such, a no-go area for animation artists. In fact, children's animation only seems to deserve some attention when it becomes an object of appeal to adult audiences.

From Pilling's reader in animation studies (op. cit., pp. 143 - 159), a paper by Langer discusses the animation series *The Ren & Stimpy Show* by the creator John Kricfalusi. The paper discusses the conflict that emerged between Nickelodeon's (the American children's cable channel who owned the programme and its characters' rights) strategies in creating and marketing products for a mainstream audience, and Kricfalusi's

alternative animatophile aesthetics. I will not discuss the paper in detail, but what interests me is the fact that the series, though being a children's programme, is of interest to the author because of its appeal to a particular group. The animatophiles, whom Langer describes as a 'taste group characterised by a high degree of knowledge about animation' and with an interest in 'certain graphic styles, limited animation, the use of public domain music or formulaic advertising jingles, etc – still hallmarks of cheapness and bad taste within the total culture – (...) now icons of rarity and desirability among animatophiles' (ibid, p.146, 150). The author suggests that the animatophiles have had an effect on the production of *Ren & Stimpy*.

The paper almost dismisses the programme's appeal to the child audience to whom it was originally commissioned, despite the fact that early market research indicated that the programme doubled the channel's rating among children aged two to eleven, increasing audiences to 1.2 million. If, as the author suggests, *Ren & Stimpy* was mainly of interest to an audience with a particular and 'expert taste' in animation, then why did it rate so well amongst the child audience? The assumption seems to be, as Karen Flischel, at the time vice-president of research at Nickelodeon, put it, that children will be captivated by the programme's 'gross look' (ibid, p.150). As insufficient as this explanation may seem, it is pretty much the only time the children's interest is mentioned.

For Langer (ibid, p.147), 'hipness', understood as a group's exclusive code is a sign of cultural value, which disappears once it becomes mainstream. When looking at children's culture, though, exclusiveness acquires, as Davies (2001, p.230) argues, a different value:

> Hipness as a badge of cultural specialism is a valued category for adults, but it is the very opposite of the value of a plaything for children. Children's play is often based on crazes for particular toys, but exclusivity is much less the appeal than inclusivity is. When something becomes a craze for children, it has to catch on among everyone. Being part of a minority group, with exotic tastes, would not carry the same cachet of street-credibility at all.

The pilot study done for the present research also indicates this different value in particular relation to boys' preferences, which seems to be linked to the existence of merchandising that gives them 'pleasures' outside the viewing experience. Series like

Pokemon provide common experiences such as play and debate; in the interviews conducted with different groups of Portuguese children where cartoon preferences were debated, this value emerged when boys would start displaying their knowledge of the series. They might try to name all one-hundred and something *Pokemon* creatures, or go into detailed descriptions as to how a flip-card game illustrated with the characters was played. As a third grade boy said: 'I prefer *Pokemon* than *Digimon* because in the *Pokemon* there are always new characters appearing and there are toys to play with'.

The need for accreditation of animation within the artworld has pushed children, animation's audience *par excellence*, away from any relevant debates; children's animation only emerges from its marginalized place whenever it captivates an adult audience. This concern with adult interest is present even when producing children's animation. Humberto Santana, a producer and animator from *Anima Nostra*, a Portuguese production company specialising in children's animation, referred to *Dragon Ball* - a Japanese animation widely criticised by its violence but, in his view, more captivating in terms of style – and compared it to *Pokemon*'s success:

> I think it's like a snowball effect. There is a series of secondary products... In Portugal I think it was a bit the effect of Dragon Ball, its predecessor. This was a series with some violence but with a sense of humour, and a peculiar style that managed to please the adult audience, and to captivate children for the boldness of its contents. I consider Pokemon less interesting, but it is a mediatic process. In terms of content I see no justification. (Humberto Santana in an interview with the author, October 2001)

Similarly, Elliot and Rossio (2001) in an article about *DreamWorks*'s production *Shrek*, suggested that in creating a movie for child audiences the main concern is not so much with children's tastes but with what the adults will make of it:

> What 'This movie is intended for children' really means is: 'This movie is intended to appeal to children but contains nothing which parents would deem inappropriate for children' (what kids might actually want to see in the movie is not a consideration. Besides, if there's one thing that children absolutely positively want to see, it is something their parents do not want them to see).

In the *Bristol Animated Encounters 2001*, Finn Arnesen, of Cartoon Network, Europe (a theme channel for child audiences), makes the point that there is a fine line between children's and adults' animation. When talking about what the channel was looking for

in terms of new animated products, he mentioned the importance of producing programmes that are relevant for children's lives, approaching subjects such as sibling rivalry, as well as comedy. At the same time, Arnesen stressed the importance of producing programmes with two levels of appeal such as *Dexter's Lab* - a children's programme, but one with an intertextuality which also makes it appealing to young adults.

The opposition between children and adults' television does not bring any contribution towards a definition of children's animation, if anything it reinforces the idea that this is a low form of entertainment, or 'kiddies' stuff'. It also points to a dissociation between animation and the child audience. As a genre, audience rather than its intrinsic characteristics defines children's animation, though it is adults who actually have the power to say what children's animation, and children's television in general, is. Institutionally, regulation defines children's television, where quality provides protectionism (no sex, no violence) and education. Simultaneously, 'quality' acquires a broader meaning, i.e. that of appeal to an adult audience. The conclusion seems to be that quality programmes are those capable of attracting both child and adult audiences. These perspectives became apparent when in the beginning of 2002, the British broadcaster Channel 4 asked its viewers to vote for their favourite children's programmes. The programme was broadcast late at night and all of the guest speakers were adults; then most of the programmes were from previous generations. Good programmes were those said to have 'adult appeal'. Even *Sesame Street* was praised because it had Jim Henson's talent behind the creation of its puppets a condition, as one of the guest speakers put it, to appeal to adult audiences. Finally, the number one programme was *The Simpsons*, the subversive American cartoon that legitimised adult audiences as cartoon viewers, and this is a programme that is not even broadcasted during children's slots on British public television (it usually goes on air on the BBC at 6 o'clock rather than on the earlier CBBC's slot).

If, however, subversion is a key element in defining animation as an art form, then children's animation cannot be that easily dismissed. Subversion can be found, as discussed in later chapters, in some children's animation - perhaps not so much in the style of animation, but rather in the narrative. Japanese *anime* for children, for example, tends to create worlds where adult and parental guidance only very rarely feature.

According to Raffaelli (1997, pp.124 – 134), it is typical for anime heroes to be not supra-human beings but humans, often children, without a family; adult and parental guidance is replaced by the children's capacity to believe in themselves, and fight their own battles with determination and self-confidence. The *anime* hero is determined to change his or her life. In so doing, he or she invariably gains society's respect – by stressing the individual *anime* is also eliminating the religious theme. It seems to me that in Western societies, children are considered to be dependent beings whose agency is often questioned. Conversely, *anime* is a clear subversion of this same adult world and of adult authority.

Series that have lots of marketing paraphernalia attached to them can still be comparable to the traditional fairy tales that, according to psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim (1976), play an important role in the psychological development of children. The author asserts that fairy tales offer fantasy material, presenting children with a symbolic form of their battle to achieve self-realisation. Initially, the author argued that televised versions of fairytales do not have the same function, and that even illustrations in books are not beneficial, as they tend to be distracting rather than helpful. Bettelheim suggests that:

> most children now meet fairy tales only in pettified and simplified versions which subdue their meaning and rob them of all deeper significance – versions such as those on films and TV shows, where fairy tales are turned into empty-minded entertainment (ibid, p.12)

In a posterior article however, the same author reassesses his position in relation to television storytelling, arguing that:

> Television is truly an ideal medium for the purpose of fantasising because it permits the child to return immediately from the fantasy world to real life, and also to escape as quickly into the television world when reality becomes too much to handle (1999, p.6)

Bettelheim asserts that compared with a couple of decades ago, children have lost the freedom to wander about without adults' supervision. In many western societies, today's world is no longer considered safe, and the need to protect children has somewhat limited the range of experiences from which to learn and grow. Choosing television programmes that will spark the child's dreams 'has become a way for the

modern child to exercise self-determination, an important experience of growing up' (ibid). However, it is the author's belief that television rarely offers examples of characters that experience personal growth; most often the characters remain predictably the same, and the challenges they face usually have simple solutions that provide deceiving role models to the child audience. This limitation is of course typical of the medium itself, as television formats tend to simplify matters in order to hold the viewers' attention. In the author's opinion it is therefore, up to the child's family to accompany the viewing experience, and helping the child to learn from it.

Bettelheim recognises that television as a 'storyteller' provides opportunities for children to express their fantasies. Contrary to the belief of those who see childhood as a time of innocence, the author argues that children harbour violent and sexual fantasies that are far from 'innocent'. Television programmes provide an opportunity for children to daydream and manage their disappointments and frustrations, which often result from their lack of opportunity to participate in decisions governing their own lives. Through aggressive fantasies the child can project his or her own aggressiveness without hurting close relatives; this is why cartoons where the small and weak characters defeat the big strong ones can be so gratifying to children.

A distinctive character of animation, even if we choose to talk about 'high' and 'low' forms of animation, is the possibility to tell stories through film where the characters are never bound to the laws of physics. Indeed, Disney's characters may be drawn in such a way as to mimic human and animal motion. But the transformational character of animation means that all animated films are not graphic representations of reality. Bettelheim suggests that, in certain cases, story transformations solve a relationship the child cannot comprehend or manage. Events like the one in *Little Red Riding Hood,* where the wolf replaces the grandmother, help a child to preserve the good image about the latter. That is, when a child is surprised by a negative response from the usually kind grandmother, the story helps in the sense that it reinforces the idea of two different identities - the granny and the wolf (ibid, pp.67, 68).

Defining children's animation is a task that can draw on the artworld definitions provided at the beginning of this chapter, which are based on animation's ability to

subvert and transform reality. In a 1997 report for the Broadcasting Standards Council, Davies and Corbett concluded that:

> When it comes to intrinsic programme quality, too, animation is often unfairly dismissed as generically inferior. Animation as a technique permits experiments in storytelling and effects which can be more innovative and imaginative than much live action programming. (Davies et Corbett, 1997, p.170)

This is in fact something that children themselves acknowledge, as the following comments in a discussion about the quality of Klasky-Csupo's animated programme *The Rugrats* reveal (Davies, 2001):

> Boy 1: I like cartoons, then you can do more stuff with it, like if things come out of your head, you can't really do it yourself, things coming out from you.
>
> Boy 2: Cartoons are better because if, say, they do a mistake they can just rub it out but if it is real people and they do a mistake they can't like just rub it out, they have to get another tape and do it again.
>
> Class: [If it were real people] the voices would be different, it wouldn't be so good.
> If it were real the colours would have changed.
> It is like a black and white film years ago.
> If it were real it wouldn't look very good, because of the colours and if it was real there would be buildings and cars...
> If it was real they would need more money so it wouldn't be as good.

Kanfer (2000, p.15) asserts that:

> They [American cartoons] seem to be bright, brittle entertainments without much substance or importance (...) that assumption is often very wrong. To be sure, a lot of animated films are no more than a series of chases, outrageous puns, and spectacular pratfalls. Yet many more defy the studio labels of Silly Symphonies and Looney Tunes. In their own eccentric way, they provide an extraordinary reflection of the society and politics of their time. They also reveal a great deal about the psychology of the people who made them.

In my opinion, animated filmscan also reveal a lot about those who watch them. A definition of children's animation, I suggest, can include the same elements proposed by artworld definitions of animation oriented to adult audiences: the magical transformation of reality, as well as its metaphorical presentation and subversion. However, the parallel needs to go further in that it has to reflect on how animation's

transformational magic and subversion operates at the level of the child audience; i.e. realising children's differences in terms of needs and readings of reality. The possible artworld definition of animation for a child audience could be framed along these lines: all animated films which enable the magical transformation and subversion of children's particular socio-cultural contexts in a way that is meaningful to children themselves.

4.2) Globalisation and Identity

4.2.1) Issues of production

Though the history of animation is rich with worldwide references (see Bendazzi, 1994), it is in the USA that the mass production and distribution of animation to the public has been forged. Given that a considerable amount of academic analysis of children's animation has focused on the contribution of American mainstream animation to the commercialisation of children's culture, it seems important to devote some attention to its genesis as a genre and an industry. The next sub-section looks at Bendazzi (ibid) and Kanfer's (2000) approaches to history of animation and the American animation industry. It will pay special attention to the rise of Walt Disney, one of the most well known names in animation; but it will be looking at other factors such as production studios that in specific moments of time were influential both in propelling competition for box office hits and setting a pattern for the small screen.

4.2.1.1) Not only Disney

Windsor McCay can be considered the first American artist of 'classic' animation (see Bendazzi, op.cit; Kanfer, op.cit.). A self-taught cartoonist, McCay showed his first animated movie in 1911. It was entitled 'Little Nemo of Slumberland' and was based on the author's comic strip of the same name, which had started in the same year. In 1905, Sigmund Freud presented his argument that dreams are a compromise between and defence against, the unconscious emotions. Nemo, the main character inspired by the author's seven-year old son, 'strode, rode, or flew through the illogical world of Slumberland' (Kanfer, op. cit, p.22). According to Bendazzi (op.cit, p.16), 'without plot or background, it [the movie] was little more than a sequence of images, materialising and than vanishing as if to prove their ability to exist on screen'. McCay created ten animated movies; his masterpiece was *Gertie, The Dinosaur*, which he incorporated into one of his vaudeville acts and where the author himself interacts with

Gertie commanding her actions. The newspaper for which McCay worked eventually claimed exclusive rights to his performances of the movie and, to avoid confrontation, he brought his theatrical career to an end. In the 1920s at a dinner for New York animators, he declared: 'Animation should be an art, that is how I conceive it (...) But as I see what you fellows have done with it is make it into a trade... not an art, but a trade...bad luck' (ibid, p.18).

After 1910 the stage was set for the birth of an industry and New York City became a major centre for animation. This was where thriving studios with the most efficient systems of production where created. The three most prosperous companies were the *Fleisher Group*, creator of *Koko*, a cartoon character that emerged from an inkwell, and second only to Disney until 1942; *Pat Sullivan's Group*, creator of *Felix the Cat*, the most important cartoon character in America before *Mickey Mouse*; and Paul Terry's *Aesop Fable Studio*, creators of *Aesop's Fables.* The latter was populated by animals of all kinds which in Bendazzi's (ibid, p.57) view, were to be a great influence on the then debuting Walt Disney - whose Mickey Mouse character bore strong resemblances to the mice in the fables.

In the early 1920s, self-taught Walter Elias Disney took his first steps into the art of the animated picture, and founded *Laugh-O-Gram Films Inc.*. Kanfer (op. cit., p.52) suggests that his first cartoons are undoubtedly influenced by the work of the Fleisher brothers, with characters jumping in and out of inkwells; and by *Felix*, as one of his first characters was a cat that used his tail for a diversity of tasks. It was soon clear to Disney that his films did not have the support he expected; he had produced a pilot for a series *Alice in Cartoonland*, he eventually declared bankruptcy and in 1923 moved to Hollywood expecting to pursue a career in cinematography. Then a stroke of luck Margaret J. Winkler, a New York distributor, showed an interest in the *Alice* series and placed an order on it that lasted four years. When he created a new character – Oswald the Lucky Rabbit - Margaret's husband Charles Mintz was entrusted with its distribution; he was later to hire the studio's best animators, and appropriate the characters' rights. It was after Disney's disagreement with Mintz that *Mickey Mouse* was born, drawn by Ub Iwerks. *Steamboat Willie*, Mickey Mouse's debut, was a huge success on its release date in 1928. The following production was *Silly Symphonies*, a combination of music and animation, and got the company's first Oscar awards. From

the beginning, his movies were characterised by what became known as 'Disney's realism', which, has explained earlier, became his trademark.

Mickey Mouse's success allowed the company to be expanded, including new building additions, and the creation of an art school for animation apprentices, to overcome the refusal of renowned animators to adapt to his philosophy of work. He introduced new methods of production along the line of Taylorism, where specialised teams worked on different stages of the production process. However, this interest was never much concerned with the art of animation. His main aim was in appealing to the middle-class audience with which he himself identified:

> Disney never lost his awareness of the fact that he was just making products directed toward a consumer's world. This commercialisation catered to the largest number of buyers, and as a consequence, was ultimately limiting for the film, the producer and the public. Although this 'entertainment' cinema could be made 'artistically', Disney himself recoiled from the idea of 'art' cinema, defending his choice and describing his movies as being made without cultural or intellectual ambition (...). (Bendazzi, op.cit, p.69)

Walt Disney died in 1966; his last full-length cartoon was *The Jungle Book*, featuring Mowgli's adventures in the jungle amongst a diversity of anthropomorphic animals. According to Kanfer (op. cit. p.193):

> The spirited songs could not disguise a banality of ideas and a vulgarisation of animal and human personalities. It could hardly have been otherwise after Walter instructed a writer, 'Here is the original by Rudyard Kipling. The first thing you want to do is not to read it.

In his latter years cartoons had become a small part of the enterprise, and investments in production turned to live action films, a tendency which the major studios would follow. His main interest became the creation of *Disneyland*. His death coincided with the beginning of a period of depression in the American animation industry.

Three existing broadcasters ABC, CBS and NBC presented for the first time cartoons on Saturday mornings; quality productions were neglected in favour of inexpensive and low cost animations, many imported from Japan. As a consequence, production houses tried to lower their costs by reducing the number of cells per minute, and moving away from realism. Television formats were to impose some changes on traditional

animation. In the USA, as Wells (2001, pp.106) points out, censorship brought about limitations to the contents of animated film; a new protectiveness towards the perceived child audience meant that programmes were monitored for any contents deemed inappropriate, and the artists themselves, conscious of television's constraints, practiced self-censorship.

In terms of format, the reduced length of the programmes asked for an emphasis to be placed on narrative, rather than on visual appeal. Animators could no longer afford to explore drawing in order not to slow down the programme; television audiences had different expectations, and constant repetition was necessary to avoid breaking the story, the latter forced by constant interruptions from commercials and channels switching. In the early 1960s, sponsored by *Kellogg's*, the series *Huckleberry Hound* was produced by Hanna & Barbera and became a model for future television productions; the studio became the leader in the field with such productions as *Yogi Bear*, *The Flitntstones* and *Scooby-Doo* these seemed to be successful due to their similarities with live action series for the small screen, rather than through their originality or quality. Bendazzi (op. cit., p. 235), suggests that the studio's founders might have felt somewhat nostalgic for their days of more careful animation using a citation from Bill Hanna referring to their work: 'Actually, I feel like I should crawl under a seat sometimes'.

Another successful formula at the time, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, was that of the adventure series; heroes like *Superman*, *Space Ghost*, *Aquaman*, *Captain America*; and *Batman & Robin*, displaced from comic strips into the animated world. As Bendazzi suggests (ibid, p.237), such series displayed very low standards from an artistic point of view:

> Due to limited budgets as well as to the repetitiveness of series, production companies have adopted standardised actions and physiognomies. Previously used cells are used again and again with minor changes (...). With the neutralisation of inventiveness as far as a movement, graphics, acting and character building are concerned, the series has been a true straitjacket for American animation.

In terms of business, however, one needs to realise that the market for adventure and comic series was expanding, with great investments in merchandise. Collaboration between production companies and toy companies were primarily responsible for the

success of animated series. Nonethless, production costs were such that a large part of the animation process was contracted to foreign-based companies. The creative department remained in the home studios, but the other more technical aspects of production took place in countries like Taiwan, South Korea, Mexico, Spain and Australia, where labour was cheaper.

However, Hanna-Barbera's success was, from Wells' view due to the ways in which the studio re-invented animation. In order to adjust it to television, not only did they adopt a new minimalist aesthetic through limited or planned creation of their animated characters, but they also

> 'had to necessarily re-invent the nature of personality animation, as well as graphic and iconic visualization, and crucially, move from the notion of a soundtrack as a set of aural signifiers (...), to a model more in line with radio, and the primacy of voice as a determining factor in the suggestion of movement and action'(2003, pp.23,25).

According to the author, the emphasis on the dynamics of voice and the primacy of the script was to determine the way in which audiences were to see animation thereafter. This work influenced generations of artists producing animation for television, at least as much as Disney's anthropomorphic hyper-realism. Wells (ibid) stresses that 'recombinancy' – the recombination of drawings, music, gags, elements of previously successful shows and so on – in Hanna-Barbera's shows are not simply a profitable way to produce appealing low cost animation; they are 'a way in which the language of animation is used to reconfigure genre, draw cost effectively upon cultural resources, and progress its own definition and agenda'. In a context of crisis, recombinancy allowed animation to 're-invent' itself and to appeal to mass audiences.

The 1980s witnessed a revitalization of the animated feature film, of which Steven Spielberg's production *An American Tail* was. Spielberg and George Lucas were behind the box office hit *The Land Before Time*. These movies were not characterised by much innovation in relation to what Disney had previously produced, in fact Kanfer (op.cit., p.214) argues that the latter's director 'not merely paid homage to Disney, he had practically photocopied it'. *The Walt Disney Company*, however, was not doing too well in the mid-1980s, suffering the effects of box-office failures and a stagnation of the theme parks' profits. In 1985 it produced *The Great Mouse Detective,* where computer

animation was used for the first time and was progressively introduced thereafter. It's next success came with *The Little Mermaid*, followed by others like *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*. *Pixar* – sold in 1986 to one of the founders of *Apple* computers – was a company that revolutionised animated feature films in 1995 when it released the first of the *Toy Story* films, the product of computer rather than hand-drawn animation.

4.2.1.2) The global animation market

> A new media landscape and a new media order are emerging. Media cultures are changing, in both the public and the private sphere. (...) Information flows ever more freely, and with looser ties to time and place National frontiers are, for that matter, fading away (...). The new order allows people all over the globe to hear sounds and see images from many different places, near and distant. (Carlsson, 2000, p.9)

This new media order mentioned by Carlsson (ibid) results not just from new technology such as the world wide web, cable and satellite technology, but also, as the author points out, from changes in the media markets around the world. As once distinct national markets are becoming integrated into a global power structure, so a minority of global media corporations, principally headquartered in the USA, Europe and Japan, is delivering products of mass culture to larger, broader and more distant audiences than ever before. It is worth noticing that globalisation does not necessarily mean an equal access to the media, and there are still great differences between developed and developing countries.

Table 6 - **Television, computers, telephone lines, cell phones and Internet hosts, world total by income classification of countries, 1999-2000**[23]

	Television sets per 1000 inh.*	Personal computers per 1000 inhs.*	Main telephone lines per 1000 inh.	Cellular mobile subscribers per 1000 inh.	Internet hosts per 1000 inh.	Population 1999 per cent
World Total	253	—	158	85	15.1	100
Of which:						
High income countries	674	315	591	373	95.2	15
Medium income countries	258	—	122	55	2.1	45
Low income countries	145	—	27	3	0.1	40

* Data from 1996-98
- Data not available

Barker (1997, pp.18-19) suggests that globalisation is a phenomenon that can be understood at different levels. On one level it is an economic phenomenon, economic activity on a global scale, with one-half of the world's largest economic units being nations, and the other half transnational corporations. It is the process of creating a world economy that has in reality grown in an uneven way. At another level, globalisation refers to issues of cultural meaning, including issues of texts, representation and identity. Space is no longer a determinant in terms of familiarity, and assimilation of different cultures takes place via the different mass media. Cultural artefacts and meanings from different periods and places can also mix together and are juxtaposed.

Concerning television, the author argues that globalisation can be understood by considering the various configurations of public and commercial television that exist within the boundaries of nation-states and /or language communities; and by reflecting on the question of transnational television. Transnational television is that which operates across the boundaries of nation-states and language communities. As such, it is perceived as a threat to the more bounded television of nation-states in terms of the

[23] Source: *Human Development Report 2000* and 2001, http://www.undp.org

economics of television, the regulation of television and the identities, particularly national identities, which are deemed to be a product of national television services. Unlike national television, transnational television is not concerned so much with public service, as it is driven by profit motives (ibid, p.27).

Nowadays, and in relation to children's television, media conglomerates like *The Walt Disney Company* – which in 2001 was rated second, after AOL-Time Warner, in the top largest world companies by revenue[24] and followed by Viacom - have a strong impact on local media industries.

Table 7 – **The largest entertainment companies world-wide, by revenue 2000-2001** (in billions of US$)[25]

Media company[26]	**Domicile**	**Revenue 2000-2001**
AOL-Time Warner	USA	36.2
Walt Disney	USA	25.4
Viacom	USA	23.4
Vivendi-Universal	France/USA	22.1
Bertelsmann	Germany	19.1
News Corp.	USA	13.8
Sony (music, film, TV div. Of Sony Corp.)	Japan/USA	9.3

In the 1990s about fifty television channels targeting children were introduced, amongst which were the so called 'global children's television channels' like the Disney Channel, but also Cartoon Network and Fox Kids Network. Following their popularity, many national television services in different countries have kept low investment levels on the production of programmes for children. An outlook on recent trends in children's programming produced by UNESCO (von Feilitzen and Bucht, 2001) states, for example, that in most Asian countries only a very small percentage of the programmes broadcasted is intended for child audiences, and that nearly 47% of

[24] Source *Variety*, August 27 – September 2, 2001
[25] Ibid
[26] Publishing companies without major holdings in film, TV or music do not qualify for *Variety's* Global 50. In the case of conglomerates that derive significant revenue from non-entertainment sources, *Variety* has broken out combined entertainment and/or media assets, such as Sony Corp.'s music, film, TV divisions. Figures are rounded

those are of foreign origin. In South Korea, for instance, and according to Kim and Lee (2001, pp.182 – 201), since the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games the government has opened up the market of several cultural industries to the products of transnational companies, one of which is The Walt Disney Company that now dominates the animation market. The authors claim that previous to this, changes the Korean film market had been sustained by the import of foreign films that were then reinvested in domestic production. However, the dominant Walt Disney Korea sends more than half of its profits back to the USA.; and furthermore, Korean manufacturers are not willing to produce animated films at high costs to a small domestic market. An attempt was made by a group of anti-commercialist animators and cartoonists to produce local animation reflecting the Korean culture, however they were unsuccessful as the audience was unsatisfied with the poor quality and unfamiliarity. Even in Europe, domestically produced children's television has diminished; in 1995 only 37% of children's programming was European, the majority being imported mainly from the US, particularly in the Latin countries.

Garitonandia et al (2001, pp.141-142) show that in most European countries generalist channels have steadily reduced the production and broadcasting of programmes made especially for children. According to them,

> traditional time slots are under threat, and budgets for more expensive series are ever more difficult to secure, as even public broadcasters come under pressure to maximize their audiences. Consequently, in many countries, programs made especially for children are likely to be limited on terrestrial television channels to cartoons around breakfast time during the week, and later in the morning at weekends (ibid)

The authors suggest that broadcasters justify this trend by alluding not only to the increasing provision of dedicated commercial channels for younger children, but also to the fact that audience figures show that older children often prefer adult or family programmes. The latter argument, however, may not give an accurate idea of audience preferences since it is often the case that the choice of programmes for the latter age range is limited, and that children's exposure to family programming might result from viewing choices made by other family members (ibid, p.142).

In this context, smaller companies have been turning to international co-productions. This option keeps them economically viable but it has implications in terms of programme contents. Co-productions imply a great effort to achieve a balanced consensus; different countries have different interests, and assumptions on what is or is not appropriate for children. Cultural specificity is compromised. If companies like Disney can be accused of disseminating American capitalistic ideology; smaller companies are suffering from market pressures to conform and from the need for a wide audience appeal in order to make their products profitable.

One of the animated programmes analysed later on – the episode from the *Animated Tales of the World*, entitled *The tale of the three sisters who fell into the mountain* – provides an example of the necessity to reach a consensus. The producers told me that this episode had to be treated with particular sensitivity as one of the characters – a Troll who captured three little sisters by asking each of them if they would like to be his sweetheart - could have been perceived as an allusion to paedophilia.

There is yet another tendency to be considered, what Tobin (2002) refers to as 'glocalisation'. Through the latter animated programmes are scrubbed of any obvious cultural reference, and transformed by local teams in different countries - the 'localisers' - in order to appeal to local audiences and achieve success in different foreign markets. The author refers to its relevance in the *Pokemon* phenomenon:

> The artful manipulation of the Japaneseness of Pokemon in both its domestic and export versions has been crucial to its success. The terms 'global localization', 'glocalization', and 'glocal' were coined (...) to refer to the need for a product that is to succeed globally to be modified to be sold in foreign markets. The process that allowed Pokemon to be successful overseas began (...) with another factor (...) 'de-odoration', which involves developing cultural products designed from the start to be scrubbed of any obvious Japanese 'cultural odor' (ibid, pp.57-58)

'Glocalisation', as Tobin correctly suggests, deprives the programme of any obvious elements that identify with Japanese culture. However, as I hope to demonstrate later when analysing my research data, it is still possible to find elements in Pokemon that are characteristic of the Japanese culture. Also, 'glocalisation' allows local teams to imprint culturally specific elements relevant to children in different countries, possibly

contradicting the idea that global products are either too blunt or they are cultural impositions.

In the UNESCO International ClearinghouseYearbook 2002 on youth and media, Wescott (2002) provides an overview on the globalisation of children's animation. The author looks at the strategies of what he calls the 'Big Three' – the three US based companies leading the business of making and broadcasting children's programmes (Cartoon Network, Disney, and Nickelodeon). Wescott argues that, for the time being, the 'Big Three' are still able to achieve global domination. Nickelodeon, the first children's cable channel, created in 1979 in the USA is now part of *Viacom*, and launched its first international outlet in the UK in 1993. In the same year, Cartoon Network, part of AOL-Time Warner, started satellite feeds to Latin America and Europe, launching an Asian service a year later. *Disney* set up its first international venture, *The Disney Channel*, in the UK and Asia in 1995, acquiring in 2001 Fox Family Worldwide.

Despite the fact that they all look to the possibilities of expansion in the global market the 'Big Three' face a number of obstacles to global domination. These companies are operating under strict financial control, which means that investment only takes place in those markets where establishing local networks will make a return on investment within the next few years. Their investment in local production is still reduced; in 2000 for example, as shown by a BBC internal analysis of cable channels in the UK, only *Nick Junior* acquired just over 53% of its programmes from British producers, while all the other channels were below 10%. At the time of writing, cable and satellite penetration of the major European markets, Asia and in Latin America is below 50%, and advertisers are reluctant to invest in thematic channels.

It is terrestrial channels that dominate children's viewing. Wescott suggests that competition from the 'Big Three' has actually galvanised broadcasters to combat thematic channels; some have even entered the thematic channel business themselves (in 2002 for example, the BBC launched the digital channels *CBBC* and *CBeebies*; *Canal J* and *Teletoon* were launched in France; and *Kika* in Germany). Public policy initiatives, namely in France and Canada, have increased the demand for programmes in the international market by financing the development of domestic production; and

content quotas have favoured European productions in the European region. Finally, international hits like *Pokemon* have shown that the US based companies do not have the monopoly of creating successful programmes.

Nevertheless, in a different report from the same UNESCO Yearbook, Zanke (2002) underlines the fact that expenditure on original programmes by children-only pay channels has boomed, while the audience share of free-to-air channels has decreased as pay options increase. Zanker also alludes to changes in the direction of children's programmes by referring to Ragdoll's *The Teletubbies*, originally commissioned by the BBC and a huge hit in the USA for PBS, as well as to *Pokemon*'s success for Warner Bros Kids. The author argues that this changing flow still has its impact on small national media markets, and illustrates her argument by referring to a New Zealand production *What Now?*. This is a children's programme that has struggled to compete for audience ratings with programmes like *The Rugrats*; *The Teletubbies*; or *Pokemon*. *What Now?* was moved to a less appealing schedule in favour of the international productions which attracted higher ratings for the home channel. At the same time, it had to face direct competition from programmes broadcasted simultaneously on other channels.

4.2.2) Issues of content

> Television is primarily a narrative form, that is to say a story-telling form. The appeal of global television lies in its ability to tell stories in ways and about subjects that have resonance with its audience. Indeed the transition to electronic media has involved the proliferation of narrative form so that today we may see television as the primary 'story-teller' of western societies (Barker, 1997, p.73)

In Barker's opinion (ibid, pp73, 183) it is important to understand the different types of narratives, as they provide explanations for the world we live in; they supply answers to the question: how shall we live? They also offer frameworks of understanding and rules of reference about the way the world is constructed. Global television is thus significant due to its discursive content and, even more important, because it spreads particular narrative forms across the globe in which western assumptions about reality and action are embedded. In this way, global television is often a synonym of cultural imperialism, usually linked to the purchase of American programmes; international co-productions

dominated by American themes; American-dominated information services, and local adaptations of American formats for domestic consumption.

> "[C]ultural imperialism is understood in terms of the imposition of one national culture upon another and the media are seen as central to this process as carriers of cultural meanings which penetrate and dominate the culture of the subordinate nation." (p.183)

The globalisation of television adds to the list of concerns regarding children's television, not only as an economic phenomenon but also because of its cultural implications; and animation seems to be particularly vulnerable to both. Economically, globalisation refers to the fact that a small number of transnational corporations dominate global networks of production and consumption. On what concerns animated films, the high costs involved in their production mean that producers need international markets both for profit and for funding, and have sometimes to compromise their initial ideas in order to make them more attractive in such a context. This in turn may result in an orientation of the programme towards the cultural specificities of the dominant market. International co-productions are increasingly becoming a solution but, again, the risk is that the imbalance of money may result in one country exercising greater pressures of conformity to its own interests.

One of the main criticisms of children's animation, where the *Walt Disney Studios* appear as the main target, is its commercialism and industrialisation. But another accusation landed on the *Disney Studios*, that of contributing to the global dissemination of American culture, likely to be translated as promoting white, conservative, middle-class, American culture.

The most common analyses are those centred on Disney productions. Work such as Bell's et al (1995), and Smoodin's (1994), looks at Disney's legacy, concentrating on issues such as the creation of the empire; on the industrialisation and commercialisation of animation; on the global impact of American popular culture through its movies, and its politics and ideology.

In the 1970s Dorfman and Mattelart (1971) strongly criticised Disney's comic books for imposing the 'American Dream of life', whereby a certain way of life and expectations

in relation to it are celebrated and imposed on other cultures. Using a Marxist approach the authors suggest that the stories represent the oppressive social relations established between the bourgeoisie and the working class; as well as the 'superiority' of industrial societies over 'third world' countries.

> The industrial bourgeoisie impose their self-vision upon all the attitudes and aspirations of the other social sectors, at home and abroad. The utopic ideology of the tertiary sector is used as an emotional projection, and is posed as the only possible future. (...) The only relation that the centre (adult-city folk bourgeoisie) manages to establish with the periphery (child-noble savage worker) is touristic and sensationalist. The primary resources sector (the Third World) becomes a source of playthings (...). (ibid, p. 96)

More recently Giroux (1995) argues that the films combine an ideology of enchantment with an aura of innocence, while narrating stories that help children understand who they are, what society is about, and what it means to construct a world of play and fantasy in an adult environment. These stories, however, are far from innocent, for the author they construct a commercialised and politically reactionary culture of childhood. Giroux considers Disney's representations of gender and race to be quite problematic, as they tend to present narrowly defined gender roles as well as stereotypical representations of the foreign 'other'.

On what concerns the construction of gender identity, the author argues that in Disney's animated films the female characters are constructed within narrowly defined gender roles. In movies like *The Little Mermaid*, the female characters are ultimately subordinated to males, defining their sense of power and desire almost exclusively in terms of dominant male narratives. Ariel the mermaid, though initially engaged in a struggle against parental control resulting from her desire to explore the human world, is, at the end, reduced to her desire to be with the human, Prince Eric. Giroux suggests that 'While children might be delighted by Ariel's teenage rebelliousness, they are strongly positioned to believe in the end that desire, choice, and empowerment are closely linked to catching and loving handsome men' (ibid).

Racial stereotyping is another major issue. Currently, the most controversial example is the 1989 animated feature-film *Aladdin*. Though other examples could be given, the author suggests that this particular movie is of great importance because it was one of

the most successful Disney's films ever produced. The winner of two academy awards, it reached massive audiences of children. In Giroux's opinion, from the beginning the movie depicts the Arab culture in a racist tone. The film's opening song, *Arabian Nights*, for example, states: 'Oh I come from a land-From a faraway place-Where the caravan camels roam. Where they cut off your ear-If they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but hey, it's home'. The author argues that such representations reinforce the popular stereotypes of Arab culture reproduced by the media in the portrayal of the Gulf War. Physical looks and strong foreign accents in the American version depict the Arabs as violent and grotesque. The same argument is shared by Felperin (1997), who explains that *Alladin* is as informed by the discourse of Orientalism, broadly defined as a set of readings and writings that Western institutions impose on what used to be called Orient, 'the oriental world it depicts is one of despotism and irrationality' (ibid, p. 138).

To Giroux,

> What is astonishing in these films is that they produce a host of representations and codes in which children are taught that cultural differences that do not bear the imprint of white, middle-class ethnicity are deviant, inferior, unintelligent, and a threat to be overcome. The racism in these films is defined by both the presence of racist representations and the absence of complex representations of African-Americans and other people of color. At the same time, whiteness is universalized through the privileged representation of middle class social relations, values, and linguistic practices.(ibid)

Not whishing to dismiss the importance of understanding cultural imperialism in children's animation, a couple of balancing issues should still be considered. Firstly, this analysis focused only on the original American version, not considering how it has been adapted by the 'localisers' in different countries, considering for example, that the characters are speaking in dubbed versions from round the world. Secondly, a unilateral point of view is expressed - that of the researcher. But would it not be a stronger argument if the analysis were to include the perspective of the child audience, trying to perceive what the child's understanding of who the characters in the film are, and what they represent?

Criticisms of Disney's empire derive from its cultural imperialism, and capitalistic profile, its market-oriented productions, and from the commercial apparatus surrounding the brand: the theme parks, the character-based toys, the clothing and many

other goods. But this kind of concern, particularly the latter, is not exclusively related to Disney; in reality, many American cartoon productions are generically linked with the toy industry. In an essay on cartoon characters, Kline (1995) outlines three sub-genres, which have emerged from the American cartoons for children. These categories reflect the gender and age-based marketing strategies of toy-led programmes, made possible in a deregulated broadcasting environment[27]. According to the author,

> In a period when American public television production experienced cutbacks, deregulation opened children's television to whoever was willing to take the business risk of producing children's programmes (...) new animated TV series have been produced (...) thanks to the licensing and toy-merchandising interests who became involved in using '30-minute commercials' as the flagship of the promotion of toys, clothes, and related leisure product lines (ibid, pp.152 –152).

In a study of eighty-five series that made their appearance during the 1980s the author identified some regular characteristics that allowed him to formulate three categories of cartoon programmes: the *Action Teams*; the *Imaginary Companions*; and the *Female Heroes*; all of which had obvious signs of market orientation. The first sub-genre, aimed at 5 to 9 year-old boys, resembled the action-adventure narratives of movies and television. It revolved around conflicts solved through physical confrontation, usually involving a fair amount of fighting and power struggles featuring well-known action toys (for example, *G.I. Joe* and *He-Man*). The second sub-genre featured cuddly characters (such as 'The Smurfs' and the 'CareBears') whose life was centred on domestic challenges. These cartoons had a pro-social function, and as such were considered suitable for a pre-school audience. Finally, the *Female Heroes* referred to those programmes where, as the name indicates, female characters played the leading roles in stories developed around fashion and complex social relationships deemed appropriate for the older girls, as in the series where the *Barbie* doll was brought to television as the leader of a *rock* band (ibid, pp. 158 – 160).

More recently the *Pokemon* series has attracted attention. It is an example of how successful the liaison between the toy market and children's television can be. The series have an unusually wide appeal, interesting not only boys and girls of different

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[27] In 1982 the US Federal Communication Commission allowed more commercials every hour and casted aside restrictions on programme content and market tie-ins (Kline, 1995, p.151)

ages, but also children with distinct cultural and social backgrounds, from America to Europe and Asia. It became a global phenomenon in children's entertainment, whether on the screen (the series were also adapted to cinema); in the playground (card games and other character-related toys have also resulted from the series); or on the World Wide Web. Seiter (1995) stresses the uniqueness of this broad appeal because, as a Japanese cartoon, it deviates from the traditional Hollywood action stories where 'violent action adventures have the best legs'. Seiter suggests that *Pokemon* points to shifting patterns in a globalised children's mass culture which migrates from Japan to the USA. This raises new questions for the study of children's culture, and the impact of global media economy on their lives (ibid).

Global television contributes to the dissemination of particular forms of narrative in which western assumptions about the world are embedded. This can easily be synonymous with cultural imperialism. But global television can also be a means to circulate multiple cultural discourses at a global level, as long as diversity is respected. As I have suggested in the Introduction to this thesis, the UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity stresses precisely this point. This argument is also defended by Hall (1992), who believes that quality television is one which respects a diversity of representations, a diversity of programme types, and any other forms of quality to be debated in the public sphere.

Television is probably the primary contemporary source of storytelling in western societies and its globalisation contributes to the dissemination of western forms of narrative. Still, as in the case of successful *anime* series, the door is open to other forms of narrative that do not necessarily reflect westernised values and life-styles. Also, television texts are polysemic as they carry multiple meanings, each bounded by the way the text is structured as well as by the domestic and cultural context of viewing. The construction of meaning and the place of television in daily life differ from culture to culture, and also in terms of gender, class and age within a same cultural community. Animation's success on a global scale rests on the possibility not just to translate the programme into the language of the different countries where it is broadcasted, but also on its ability to transform into something closer to the system of reference used by the viewers. The original narrative and visuals can be adjusted and supported by culturally specific allusions when dubbing is possible. Local accents, names, locations, jokes,

historical references, and social comments are some of the elements that can add to the specificity of the programme.

4.2.3) Issues of consumption

> (...) identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather then being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (S. Hall, 1996, p.4)

Stuart Hall (1996) defines identity as a relative concept located in history, being constructed in opposition to what it is not. Identity is constructed through difference, from one in relation to the 'other'. It functions as: "points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected" (ibid, p.5). Identities are thus narrations of the self, constructed within the play of power and exclusion. In late modern times, these are increasingly fragmented, resulting from a multitude of intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions, in constant change and transformation. 'The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure' (ibid), the author argues.

In a world where technology and economy are shortening distances, 'identity' can no longer be defined on a geographic and political basis, Hall emphasises the need to consider both the migratory phenomena of the 'post-colonial' world, and the process of globalisation; developments and practices that have transformed the previously 'settled' character of many populations and cultures. Elsewhere (S. Hall, 1992, p.191), Hall implies that the unity of the nation is a product of shared meanings of nationhood, which is represented by stories, images, symbols and rituals emphasising the traditions and continuity of the nation. National cultures are discursive devices that represent difference as identity; a unity that is 'cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and unified only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power' (ibid, p.297).

> People in modern societies may watch a lot of television, but they do many other things besides, and to overemphasise the representational aspects of cultural action and experience is, perhaps, to end up with a rather narrow view of culture.(J. Tomlinson, 1991, p.23)

Most approaches to children's animation tend to dissociate the programme from its audience. Though a concern with the audience is clearly identifiable in most of them, there is not an actual effort to pursue the issues tackled by considering the viewer's perspectives. Relevant as they can be, attempts to theorise children's television can only be enriched when confronted with questions as to how viewers read and understand a certain programme; their attitudes, and the 'uses' they make of what television has to offer them. The study of the relationship between institution, text and audience appears to have greater potentialities than an isolated emphasis on either of them.

As previously presented, Hodge and Tripp (op.cit) acknowledged the need to extend the research to the viewers. A key idea in their work is that meanings vary according to the individual's background and context of reading. It is thus unsurprising that studies like Davies's (2001) reveal that children are not simply a homogeneous audience. They are individuals who are conscious of their identity, and their place in the social web. Davies suggests that popular media and storytelling both reflect and shape identities. This happens particularly in childhood, and children's responses to television reveal features of their identity, as to how they see themselves and how they wish to be seen by others in relation to aspects such as age, gender, class, and cultural identity.

A similar argument is made by Buckingham (1993), for whom television does not deliver meaning. Meaning is something that the viewers construct. Also, he does not consider television as an anti-social past-time, or as an isolated encounter between an individual and the screen. on the contrary, he suggests that television is predominantly a social activity that usually takes place in the company of others. Viewers, by and large, are not simply passively absorbing what they watch, for they talk to each other, and may even use television programmes as a topic of conversation in other contexts:

> Talk about television is a vital element of our social lives (...). What we 'think' about television and how we use it in our daily lives

> depend to a great extent on how we talk about it with others, and the contexts in which we do so. At the same time, talk about television is instrumental in constructing and sustaining our social relationships, and thus our sense of our own social identity (ibid, p.39)

Referring to Hodge and Tripp (op.cit.), Buckingham suggests that 'non-television' meanings might sometimes be powerful enough to swamp 'television meanings'. That is, the existing social relations between group members and the ways in which these are negotiated in the process of discussion will significantly determine the meanings produced.

The relevance of the social in the televiewing experience appears to have had a strong contribution to the success of children's programmes. In analysing the success of *Pokemon*, Buckingham and Sefton-Green (2003) suggest that the series does not just have an individual appeal - whereby the child is compelled to find, process, remember and apply the varied information available; but also an interpersonal appeal, as such information provides topics of conversation and interaction among peers. Texts like *Pokemon* are designed to generate social interaction, helping to both create and dissipate its success. As with many other programmes, *Pokemon*'s craze is long past its peak.

> To some extent, it might even be argued that phenomena like Pokemon are bound to become the victims of their own success. Initially taken up by the 'cool' kids (the early adopters), they are quickly espoused by others (the aspirational consumers) who are keen to use them to acquire 'cool' status. Yet, once this happens, and the unique cachet of the product – that is, its ability to confer 'distinction' – is diluted, the cool kids inevitably move on. Likewise, new generations are bound to 'discover' cultural practices that they can claim as their own, and that will serve to distinguish them from the generations that have preceded them (ibid, p.385)

If there is more to cartoons then simply sitting down in front of a screen, then the analysis of global television needs more attention. Assuming that it is imposing a particular set of values and cultural references does not suffice. In 2001, Wasko and others published the results of *The Global Disney Audiences Project*, which sought to assess the global expansion and reception of Disney products amongst consumers of eighteen different countries. The study paid particular attention to the impact of international media products across cultures, revisiting the issues of 'cultural imperialism' and 'global culture'. The study shows that issues of cultural imperialism

and the effects of globalisation on local cultures present a complexity that goes beyond the standardised assessment.

In the case of the Danish young adults who took part in the research, it appears that Disney's values had not been accepted without reservation. Drotner (2001) suggests that, at least in retrospect as the research relied on young adults' memories and constructions of their childhood experience, the products may have served as 'eye-openers to reflections about cultural identity' (ibid, p.115). The author quotes one of the interviewees who establishes a comparison between what it means to be Danish and what it means to be American. The interviewee refers to a contrast between two Disney characters' personality – Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. To him, Donald Duck comic books defined the readers' cultural identities by opposition to what they perceived as being American. Unlike Mickey Mouse, 'Donald Duck suits Danish mentality' because he so 'very politically incorrect, that he seems Danish' (ibid, p.102).

This idea of mediated globalisation is also presented in Lemish's (2002) work with Israeli children. In the author's opinion, globalisation and localisation should not be understood as a dichotomy, for while globalisation may involve the linking of children's own locales to the wider world, it simultaneously incompasses localisation into trends of globalisation. Lemish suggests that Israeli children's media world provides some evidence of the emergence of a hybrid culture, where both local and global influences can be noticed through three different forms of mediation:

> First is the consumption of original local texts saturated with local values and world-views (such as ethnic music, national holidays' ceremonies, or news coverage) along side with the transnational, sometimes ideological clashing, types of texts. The second (...) refers to the consumption of local media texts that exemplify the Israeli version of another culture's product (such as a local soap opera or all-boys pop group). Finally, there is a consumption of global texts within a local context and the process of endowing them with meanings that are relevant to one's own situation (...) (ibid, p.128)

It is possible to illustrate this once again from *Pokemon*. The children with whom Lemish worked were able to impose local meanings on to this global product; they singled out that the series communicated the importance of friendship, love, devotion, self-sacrifice, assistance, comfort and concern, values of primal importance in human relationships. For example quotes from children (ibid, p.132) show that:

> The most important thing is not to win and earn medals and stuff. The most important thing is to be loyal, to appreciate the things your Pokemon wants, and to love him. To win is not everything, the first thing is to be with friends (nine-year-old girl)
>
> (...) they are friends who go everywhere together, play together, feed their Pokemon together, share their experiences with each other, they do everything together (nine-year-old boy)

The author believes the main idea captured by children is that group identity is empowering. This is facilitated by the children's upbringing and socialisation within Israeli culture, which extols the value of group identity known in Hebrew as 'gibush'. Moreover, the prioritisation of 'collectivism' over 'individualism' is something children are taught, by an emphasis on 'national consciousness' and 'responsibility'. This raised children to perceive themselves as part of a collective devoted to their society.

As I have illustrated, there is more to the study of children's animation than a simple critique of Disney's legacy. At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned how television programmes for children are the source of many anxieties, many of which are not always justifiable. Global television can condition children's perceptions of the world by presenting it in stereotyped ways. But looking at the data from this research, and as later explain in this thesis, it is possible to understand that children can be critical viewers when watching cartoons. For instances, and in relation to television animation, Disney's cartoons were not at the top of children's preferences, and though the children did make references to them it was possible to see how their contents were locally adapted.

Because animation plays such a prominent part in children's television, because of its increasing globalisation, and because despite its relevancy, few animation for children has yet still been object of study; I believe that there is a need for further developments in this field. The following chapters consider ways of expanding this research.

CHAPTER V – Method

This chapter presents the research techniques used to analyse the different moments of communication – from the production to the reception of messages. Explaining why the choices were made; how the techniques were applied, and pointing out the difficulties encountered.

5.1) Creatives

In order to give an appropriate account of the creatives perspectives on children's animation, and of what those say about the animation professionals' constructions of childhood, I combined a semiotic analysis of animated programmes with interviews. In doing so I aimed to reduce any degree of subjectivity. The interview would help in giving an account of the programmes' goals; target audiences; expected readings and outcomes; and messages conveyed. This technique has been used before in analysing television programmes for child audiences, Créton (1994), for instance, interviewed producers of television news bulletins for children; I have also used it in a similar context for my research on this type of programme (Leitão, 2000)[28].

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2000, pp.122-124), in-depth interviews use small samples to provide extensive information about the reasons beyond respondents' answers, allowing insights on their 'opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings obtained'. An advantage of this technique, the authors suggest, is that it provides a wealth of details; allowing, for example, longer conversations and, therefore, a greater amount of information about the respondent's views, and to observe the respondent's non-verbal reactions to both the questions and situation. This was the strategy used when interviewing Portuguese animators, since I was able to meet and spend time with them.

I could not meet the other professionals in person as I did not have the means to visit them. The easiest way of communicating with those involved in the production of The Animated Tales of the World was by email. I produced an interview guideline, which I

[28] See Appendix 4 for a summary of the thesis as presented in the 4th World Summit for Children and adolescents, Rio de Janeiro, April 2004

sent to people in different countries. My technique was no longer the in-depth interview, but a hybrid between the questionnaire and the structured interview. I provided the respondents with a set of standardized questions that, though in a predetermined order, could be answered freely. The advantages were saving time transcribing the interviews; and giving the respondents as much time as they liked to think on the answers without the pressures of face-to-face interviewing. However, there were some disadvantages such as the impossibility to ask respondents to elaborate on particular aspects of their answers; not being able to benefit from any contributions resulting from an informal conversation prior or posterior to the interview itself; and some interviewees' difficulties in writing in English. Another problem faced was the reluctance of some professionals to collaborate. Only a small number of those contacted was willing to express their views.

The answers were analysed according to interest topics (Hansen, 1998, pp. 278-282) to help me understand how creatives construct child audiences, looking at the ways in which programmes are conceived and constructed for both local and international production contexts.

5.2) The text

The animated programmes are analysed as texts with encoded messages. The narrative and semiotic analysis pay particular attention to the ways in which the texts addresses the audience; assessing what audience is being targeted by answering to the basic questions: What is being represented? How is it being represented? By whom, and to whom? The focus will be placed on issues of identity through the construction of gender, age, and cultural specificity.

Audio-visual texts incorporate verbal and visual elements, thus the need to comprehend the use of both image and narrative. In analysing the moving image I consider technical[29] and symbolic[30] elements. According to Hansen et al (op.cit, pp132-163), the technical elements include things such camera angles, camera movement, shot duration,

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[29] See Appendix 5 for a table based on Hansen et al (1998) and Branston and Stafford's (1999, pp.37-39) Technical Elements of Moving Images and Appendix 6 for table indicating the symbolic elements is based on Hansen et al (1998) and Bordwell and Thompson (1988)

lighting, depth of field, editing, sound, sound effects, music, special effects, framing, among others. While symbolic elements are related to the choice of colour, costumes, objects, setting, location, stars (in the case of animation we have both the animated character and the artists who give it voice and personality). Meaning is produced not from the isolated elements but from a combination of both types of devices.

The use of technical and symbolic elements is subordinated to the construction of narrative, which, as described in Bordwell and Thompson (1988), is a chain of events in a cause-effect relationship occurring in a time and space. It typically has an initial situation; a series of changes deriving from a pattern of causes and effects, which lead to a new situation, a final resolution. The whole set of events in a narrative, both the ones explicitly presented and those that can be inferred from the narrative cues make up the story. The narrative's plot include diegetic elements (the total world within that story action); and nondiegetic elements (everything that is presented to the viewer; the story's events directly depicted, as well as external elements to the story).

There are two basic approaches to examine narratives: the syntagmatic approach; and the paradigmatic approach. According to Hansen et al (op. cit., pp.142-143), the first is better illustrated by Propp's analysis of the sequential development of narrative plot, and it 'is useful since it identifies the structures that narratives have in common, and may be used to identify underlying assumptions and structures in all stories'. In my research as it will allow me to identify the elements of plot (including structure and characters' roles and functions), and to understand the extent to which they can be said to be universal or, on the contrary, if there are differences depending on the socio-cultural contexts of productions.

The paradigmatic approach is based on the idea that meaning can be better understood when analysing the deep structure of narratives, focusing on the categorisation of bipolar oppositions. According to the authors (ibid, p. 152), 'binary oppositions are useful in helping us to tease out or define the essence of a text, be it for the analysis of myths and ideologies or simply to identify the core points around which a text evolves'. In my research it will allow me to identify possible 'hidden' meanings of the messages; and provide clues as to whom is the programme targeted, and to how is the child audience perceived. It will also enable me to tackle questions of identity through the

assessment of the relationships between characters and their roles in the narrative, decoding, for example, how gender and ethnicity are represented.

5.3) The child audience

Prior to the pilot-study I had no experience of research with children. Once I had the opportunity to work with young people, but most were aged twelve to fifteen; the main concern was their job expectations. Those young people had abandoned school before finishing the compulsory education to work (even thought the legal age for full-time employment in Portugal is sixteen), or because of their lack of interest and/or poor achievements. The techniques used were the questionnaire, for a characterisation of their socio-economic status, and the in-depth interview. It was not difficult to establish rapport with the interviewees, they were available and enthusiastic to participate, and the age gap between interviewers and interviewee was small. So, a considerable amount of data was gathered.

The main problem at the time was how to analyse the data. We had all recently graduated from a five-year degree in Sociology, and had similar experiences regarding research. We had a fair amount of knowledge about quantitative methodologies, but we knew little about qualitative approaches, as such we struggled to produce a significant analysis of the interviews.

When I started thinking about my current research, I considered using quantitative methodologies to analyse the influence of socio-economic status on children's views about animation. While reviewing research such as Roe's (2000), I realised that such approach was not the most appropriate.

Roe's research was designed to investigate the relationship between children's use of television and the socio-economic status (SES) of their parents. The author collected data from questionnaires administrated to 890 school children, and their parents, from the Flemish Community of Belgium. The sample was built according to geographic location and types of school (Catholic, Local Government, and Flemish Community Government).

The Children were asked to indicate the amount of time they normally spent using media, and to rate their preferences. The data was analysed considering the father's occupation and the mother's educational status. Reflecting on the results the author concluded that:

> a number of important qualifications and refinements need to be made when discussing the relationship between parental SES and children's television use. First, the results obtained vary according to the indicator of SES employed. (...) Second, these results indicate that any effects that socio-economic background can be postulated to have on children's media use are at best indirect (...). The results presented (...) suggest that, rather than treating social class as a macro-concept to be operationalized at a high level of aggregation (and thereby continuing to produce the weak, spurious and inconsistent results so common in the literature), we need to narrow our focus to the level of specific groups of children (...) and analyse the use which these groups make of specific media. (ibid, pp. 18 – 19)

So, Roe himself recognises that using the SES per se does not appear to be a successful formula to analyse children's use of media, and that it is better applied in combination with other variables such as gender, age, school achievement, family characteristics, among others (ibid, p.18).

The main aim of my pilot study was not to find how children's tastes were constructed, but what these tastes actually were. To consider the use of age and gender as the main variables seemed more appropriate at this stage.

I came across other research strategies, some of them unfamiliar to me. Alderson's (2001) article on 'research by children' stressed the significance of involving them in research looking at their needs and views. The author suggests three ways in which children can be involved: By doing research in school; by being involved in projects designed and conducted by adults, helping to plan questions, to collect, analyse, and report evidence, or to publicise the findings; and by initiating and directing research. An example given by Alderson:

> Bangladeshi young people researched the play and leisure needs of Bangladeshi children in Camden, London, taking account literally of a low-down child's eye (...). They discovered why so few children used public play facilities and recommended how to make them more safe and attractive. In another project, children aged 3-8 years used cameras and did surveys and interviews about children's views on improving their housing estate. They published an illustrated report, which they discussed with local authority officers who used some of

> their recommendations, such as putting the playground in the centre of the estate, not on the edge and beyond peripheral roads as the adults had planned (...). (ibid, p.145)

As appealing and ideal as it might seem, this methodology asked for material and human resources, that I did not have.

Valkenburg and Janssen's (1999) study was the model for my pilot-study. It focused on children's preferences regarding television programmes, and it offered perspectives of further research at a later stage of my project.

The authors conducted focus groups interviews to investigate what children value in television programmes. They interviewed 37 Dutch and American children from six to eleven years old; and boys and girls were interviewed separately to avoid the shyness that, the authors argue, occurs in mixed-sex groups. From the analysis of the interviews twelve categories emerged: Humour; violence; suspense; mystery; action; romance; credibility-realism; identification role models; comprehensibility; instructiveness; originality; and innocuousness (ibid, p.9). Based on that list the authors prepared the second stage of their research. They built a 'paper and pencil' questionnaire using a three-point-scale (agree - kind of agree - disagree).

Valkenburg and Janssen concluded that, for both Dutch and American children, comprehensibility and action were the most important characteristics. Followed by humour, interestingness, and innocuousness. Realism, violence and romance were the least important. There were not many differences between the Dutch and the American children's opinions. The latter valued more innocuousness, interestingness and realism, a result that the authors attribute to American children's exposure to debates on the quality of children's television. In relation to gender differences, both American and Dutch boys valued action and violence; while American and Dutch girls valued comprehensibility and innocuousness of the programme.

5.4) The Pilot Study

I followed Valkenburg and Janssen's methodology and used the pilot study to understand what children think makes a good animated programme. Rather than

defining characteristics of quality a priori - risking creating categories which children wouldn't immediately think of - I asked the children to talk about it.

The pilot study took place in April 2001, and a total of 45 children took part in it. They were aged between six and ten-years old - from the first to the fourth grade of the educational system[31] - and attended a daycare centre, *Centro Social de Esgueira*[32], in Aveiro[33]. For the focus groups interviews, the children were divided in same sex groups.

Initially, I planned two distinct strategies to be used with different groups, and see the extent to which the use of specific techniques would influence the children's answer. First I would be screening eight short clips (with a duration of three to eight minutes each) of cartoons previously recorded from the Portuguese public channels – RTP; SIC; TVI . The clips were to be shown to individual groups so that, after viewing each cartoon, the children could express their opinions.

The clips were recorded during December 2000. The selection was made according to animation technique (puppet animation and cell animation were the two types found on Portuguese television at the time of sampling), and broadly organised according to the sub-genre proposed by Klein (1995). The latter were: the *Action Teams* (here action is more important than narrative, and the dramatic moments are defined by power struggles and fights); the *Imaginary Companions* (the central figures are friendly cuddly creatures; the narrative assumes a pro-social role and the action develops around domestic challenges, trickiness, social inaptitude and emotional states typical of family life); and the *Female Hero* (specifically oriented to a female audience, these stories are action-dramas with strong lead female characters, and tend to be fashion oriented).

The first clip was from *Rotten Ralph*, a puppet animation that may be included in the 'imaginary companions' sub-genre. The central character is Ralph a cat that talks and walks like humans. He lives in a family of human-like characters that he torments with

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[31] In Portuguese this educational stage is called *Primeiro Ciclo do Ensino Básico*
[32] A possible equivalent to the British after-school clubs
[33] A fast-developing city in the mid-coast of Portugal with a population of approximately 74.000 inhabitants

his trickiness. In the clip, Ralph eats too many sweets just before lunch despite a little girl's warnings. The cat lies to the family and ends up with a strong stomach ache.

The second was from *The Secret World of Santa Claus*, where Santa Claus and his helpers get into several adventures, and help in solving other people's problems. The clip places the heroes in the context of the tale of King Arthur.

SailorMoon is a Japanese animation where the main characters –girls - protect the Earth from evil forces. The clip shows a fight, and finishes with the heroines saving a male friend in a somehow romantic atmosphere.

Digimon, also a Japanese animation, was next. The heroes and their *Digimonsters* have to save the *Digiworld.* The clip is from the ending of an episode; it shows a fight between digital monsters, while showing the heroes' concern with their monster's faith.

Dexter and Didi, brother and sister, feature in the fifth clip from *Dexter's Laboratory.* It tells the story of a boy-genius who has a secret laboratory in his bedroom, and his noisy, feeble-minded sister. In this clip the family is at a coffee shop and the 'dad' gets in trouble with other customers.

A clip from *The Little Mermaid* (not Disney's version) showed a mask-ball in a palace, where the villain tries to uncover the Little Mermaid's secret, ruining the dress of an evil princess in the process. *Pink Panther* was next; the action took place in a circus where the lion master is chasing Pink Panther who is disguised as a clown. Finally, a clip from *Bob Moraine* shows the heroes escaping from an earthquake.

The second strategy was to ask each group general questions about the cartoons on television at the time. Questions like 'Which did you usually watch?'; 'What were your favourites?'; and 'Which channels have the best cartoons?'. In this way the children would be able to choose what programmes to talk about without being limited to comment on clips of cartoons perhaps unknown to them.

Afterwards, the children would be asked one of two questions: "Just suppose you could be an assistant to a producer of children's programmes and help in making a new

cartoon. What would it look like?" or "Just suppose you were asked to create a cartoon for other children to watch. What would it look like?".

The idea was to understand children's likes and dislikes regarding things such as narrative; character's characteristics; colours used. At the same time, I wanted to see if their opinions would differ when talking about programmes for other children. For example, if a ten year-old boy would consider that the programmes he liked were also suitable for girls or younger children.

However, it was not possible to use these strategies exactly as planned. The work proposal was well accepted by the director of the daycare centre, by the teachers and by the children, but there was no opportunity to discuss how to best conduct the research. There were some problems to arrange interview timings and place. Only one room was equipped with a television set, and the task of coordinating the interviews with the activities of each group was not easy.

Initially the teachers asserted that the children would be more at ease after viewing the clips, so the second research strategy was set aside. They suggested that all the groups (except two groups of 4^{th} grade boys and girls, whom were only available in the afternoon) should be taken to the television room at the same time, view the clips, and be interviewed after each cartoon. To have all those children in a relatively small room waiting to be interviewed was not an appealing ideal. I predicted that the children would be feeling bored, as would any adult, and loosing their patience, but I was left with no option. After watching the first clip and having interviewed only two groups, it was obvious that it was not going to work (the audio recorded data of these first groups was partially lost due to background voices and noises). The children were impatient and too talkative, which made the conversation with the groups virtually impossible.

The clips were then shown at once. The interviews continued afterwards in each groups' working room. It was a challenge both to children's memory (not all groups were interviewed that morning, and some were actually interviewed two days later), and to my capacity to improvise. The interviews proceeded without strict guidelines. I tried to focus on the children's preferences; their impressions about who would like to watch those cartoons; the type of cartoons they liked; and their ideal animated cartoon. Overall

the children reacted well to the interview situation and gave their opinions quite enthusiastically.

The strategies used during the pilot study helped in understanding the children's responses to the topic of debate, to the researcher, and to the context of the research. As I previously referred, the children, particularly the younger ones, were very enthusiastic and keen to talk about cartoons but some fourth-grade groups were slightly reluctant and made clear attempts to distant themselves from a genre they said to be for younger children - stressing that they did not see cartoons and that they watched other programmes like sports' or soap-operas; or even refusing to comment at all on the clips shown like the afternoon group of girls. From these reactions it seemed to me that to ask them to expose themselves in front of an adult and their peers by displaying, and thus admitting to watch, any knowledge of the genre raised questions of status. Thus, I opted to use different task-oriented research techniques that would allow different ways to contribute. By asking the children to create and criticise a cartoon the emphasis was not their viewing habits but on their creative competencies.

I had the opportunity to test children's reaction to a prompt question that asked them to imagine themselves as part of a team producing a cartoon. The children were happy to have an opportunity to express their views and to make suggestions. From the data gathered it seemed to me that I could further explore their contribution by directing the question to issues of identity, prioritising matters of gender, age, and cultural specificity.

In relation to the context of research it was clear that any interview situation needed to be conducted in a controlled environment without distractions from other children and possibly the teachers. The first attempt to show the clips simultaneously to all the children showed that some teachers tended to call for their students' participation by asking questions which were out of the scope of my research – such as questions about the morality of the stories.

Finally, the fact that I was based in Wales meant that my contact with the children was limited to a few possible trips to Portugal. As such, using different research techniques

to approach the same subject seemed to me like the most appropriate way to gather a variety of useful data in a very limited period of time.

5.5) The Fieldwork

The fieldwork was inspired by discourse centred approaches like Buckingham's (1996a). It was designed to complement the findings of the pilot study, and to address issues of cultural identity in children's viewing. It took place in April 2003 in the same community as the pilot study and it was divided into three tasks. Children from both the daycare centre and the local primary school participated in it. The children were given symbolic tokens for their participation in the study[34].

The children who took part in the first two tasks attended the first and fourth grade, and they were aged six to seven and eight to nine years old. The choice of the location was based on my familiarity with the school and teachers. Since the fieldwork involved travelling from the UK to Portugal, this option simplified the process.

I employed two research techniques – the questionnaire and the small-group interviews – that in my view produce better results when complemented. The work was mainly done with a class of twenty-two children from the first year of primary school education and a class of twenty-four fourth year children.

Task I - The Questionnaire

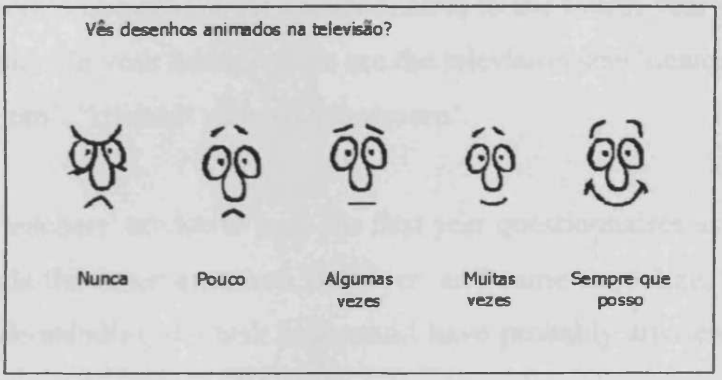
The questionnaire, according to Wimmer and Dominick (op.cit, p.161), is appropriate to describe conditions or attitudes. Considering the different ages and development stages of the children, two different questionnaires[35] were elaborated following Messenger Davies' strategy (1997). The contents were similar but the layout was different. Previous meetings with the teachers indicated that the questionnaires for the younger children should be very simplified and not include open questions, since at this stage they were able to read but still struggled with their writing skills.

On the questionnaires for the younger children[36] each sheet included one question visually aided by drawings. Table 8 shows one of the questions: 'Do you watch cartoons

[34] See Appendix 7 for the certificates of participation given to children
[35] See Appendix 8 and 9 for the complete questionnaires
[36] Appendix 8

on television?'. It then offers a choice of answers in a scale, from left to right respectively, from 'Never' to 'Whenever I can', the middle being 'Sometimes'. The use of drawings with emotional expressions serves not only to aid the child's understanding of the type of answer required but also to make the questionnaire more appealing.

Table 8



I did not have the opportunity to pre-test the questionnaire, so I need to admit that there is a degree of ambiguity in the drawings. One thing that occurred to me after the task is that the children might have unconsciously chosen the happy face.

Characterisation questions like age and place of birth, were complemented with the questionnaire to the parents, which also included one open question regarding their opinion on the provision of public television for children. Both questionnaires were given a code number so that they could be matched for the purpose of characterising the family unit.

Another question included on the children's questionnaire was 'How many televisions do you have in your home?' (Table 9)

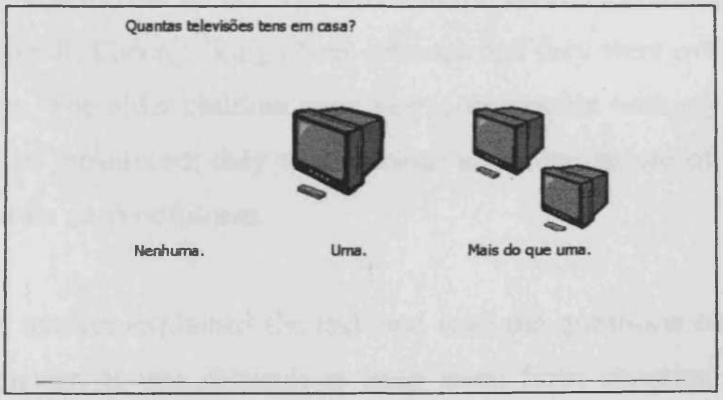


Table 9

This was to perceive the extent to which children had a choice to watch different programmes from those preferred by parents. Other factors such as parental control may influence children's choices. In the questionnaires to the fourth year children I included another question: 'In your home, where are the television sets located?' and the options were 'living-room', 'kitchen' and 'your bedroom'.

Following the teachers' advice to keep the first year questionnaires as simple as possible I did not include the latter question. However, as I came to realize, they had no major problem in understanding the task and would have probably answered quite easily the more elaborate questions.

The questionnaires were given to the teachers. I explained to them that they were not meant to assess the children's knowledge about television but to perceive their opinion about children's programming. Therefore, there was no 'correct' answer, and the children should not be pressured to give any answer. The teachers told the children that only their opinion mattered so they should not make comments or ask their colleagues' views.

Given that the task took place in an educational context, I must take into consideration the roles that both children and teachers are expected to play; and the fact that the tasks normally performed are 'assessment' driven. Still, the children did not seem to consider this as an assessment exercise. They were quite at ease and enjoying the exercise; they laughed and showed eagerness to talk about the programmes. The only concern was to get the spelling of the cartoon titles right. The younger children might have been a bit uncomfortable with the researcher's presence in the class. According to the teacher, the previous day they had been talking about cartoons and they were even keener to display their knowledge. The older children were very comfortable with my presence from the moment we were introduced; they were curious about the nature of the task and asked questions about its purposefulness.

The first grade teacher explained the task and read the questions out loud, waiting for everyone to answer. It was difficult to keep them from shouting their answers and

making side comments, but overall they seemed to be concerned that their answers were not copied – they warned each other not to do that. The fourth grade children, already quite proficient in writing and reading, were given a questionnaire[37] with open-end questions and with a short explanation of the task.

To perceive if the children were able to identify the country of origin of animated programmes, the following questions were included: 'Do you know any cartoon made in Portugal?' (Table 10); 'If yes, which?' and 'Do you know any cartoon made abroad?'; 'If Yes, which?'.

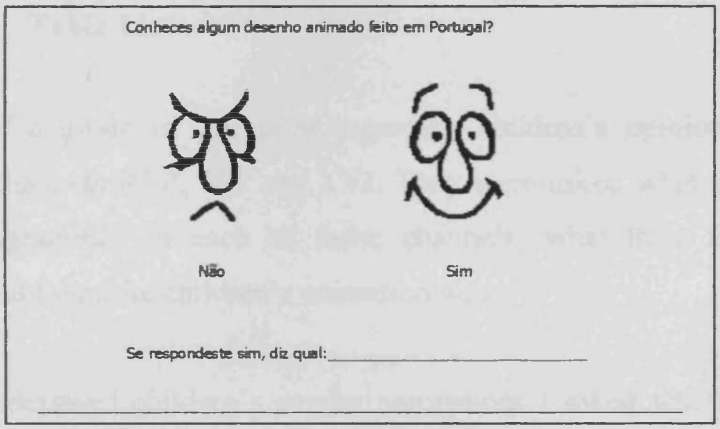
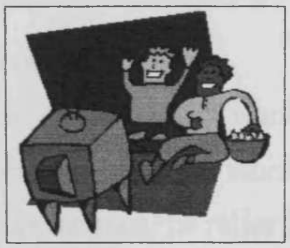


Table 10

The first grade children's reaction to this question indicated that this is a subject they had not yet thought about. They were surprised. Some looked for the teacher's confirmation that their answer was correct. The questionnaire did not ask them to explain the reason behind their answers; this is to be tackled by Task III.

Table 11 refers to the question 'What is your favourite television programme?', which in the fourth grade questionnaires was followed by the question 'why?'

[37] Appendix 9



Qual é o teu programa de televisão preferido?

_____

Table 11

It was part of a group of questions regarding children's opinion about the public broadcasting channels RTP, SIC and TVI. They were asked what they thought of the children's programmes in each of these channels; what their favourite television programme; and favourite children's animation was.

In order to understand children's gender perceptions I asked whether they knew any cartoon programmes specifically for boys and others for girls, and to name them. Again the questionnaires for the fourth year children went a little further and asked for a short explanation of why that was the case.

Another question was asked regarding tastes: 'What cartoon do you dislike the most?'. This was the last question for the first year children; the fourth year children were asked 'What type of animation would you like to see more often on Portuguese television?'. This question was intentionally vague to see whether the children understood the concept 'animation' as opposed to the more specific term 'cartoons', and whether they were also able to comment on their preferences in relation to animation techniques (cell animation, clay, computer animation, etc).

Task II - Create your own cartoon

By asking children to create their own cartoon I wanted, firstly to look for signs of both Portugueseness, and global references in their stories. Could elements such as place, settings, and characters' visual appearance, be related to Portuguese cultural identity? Secondly, to assess how children constructed their social self while debating animation.

Belton (2001) looked at the influence of television and videos on children's imagination. She analysed the stories written at school by ten to twelve-year old children. This strategy was not appropriate for my particular study as I was working with younger children whose writing skills are not yet as developed. I considered that they would be able to express themselves better through 'talk', freeing them from the stress of producing a written piece of work. Also, the fact that children worked in groups would give me the opportunity to see how they interact and negotiate ideas.

Griffiths (2001) asked children to design their own toy advertisements to understand how children perceived technical production features, and gender in advertisements. I asked children to produce some drawings of their ideal cartoons but, as I found later, this lead to frustration. Some children did not think they were able to draw what they had imagined for their stories. Also, this strategy asked for more time than I could afford; time to let the children perfect their drawings as they wished and not just produce something under pressure.

As an alternative I produced samples of cartoon characters from programmes not shown on Portuguese television. The pictures were taken from the Internet and represented a variety of styles, and character gender. The idea was to, at the end of the group interview, ask children to select the pictures which they thought better described their own characters. This, however, created some problems and did not produce significant outcomes. At the sight of the pictures the younger children precipitated themselves on top of the table making it difficult to even understand and register their comments. They argued not so much about which characters to choose but about who was to pick-up which picture. The older children were not so excited and did make some efforts to choose characters, though they were not very enthusiastic about the limited choices on

offer. One of my aims was to understand to extent to which the children would choose characters similar to the style of animation they said to watch most frequently – in this case *anime* characters. Interestingly, this was not the case. The children choose a variety of styles even for characters in the same story. This may indicate that children' cartoon tastes are not so much related to style as they might be with content. If so, this would reinforce the idea, suggested in Chapter VI, of children's appreciation of story, in particular the 'child's quest' storyline.

Focus groups, or group interviewing, is a technique frequently used in mass media research to understand audiences' attitudes and behaviour. In most cases a moderator leads the respondents in a relatively unstructured discussion about a topic. An advantage of this technique is that it does not collect rigid information, giving the moderator the possibility to follow-up on important issues raised by the group (Wimmer and Dominick, op.cit., pp.119-122). Hansen (op. cit., pp 257-284) asserts that it creates opportunities to analyse how audiences create meaning through conversations and social interaction. Focus groups offer dynamics that are not present in individual interviews.

Regarding the disadvantages of this technique, Hansen refers to the possibility of some individuals exerting influence over others, leading the discussions or pressuring towards a consensus. The author alerts to the need for researchers to realise that the participants are not representative of the population; that may or may not have had such conversation otherwise; and that that this is an artificial situation where the subjects are playing a certain role. The moderator should, therefore, ensure that the interest topics are covered during the course of the discussion; maintain a reasonable balance of contributions; and keep the discussion on course avoiding conversations on subjects of little relevance to the research (ibid). Because the amount of data resulting from group interviews can be so extensive, the researcher must be methodical, examining and categorising the answers according to different topics covered by the research framework, coding the answers in terms of themes and sub-themes (ibid).

I asked the teachers to, on the day prior to the interviews and before the afternoon break, explain to the class that someone would visit them and ask them to create a story for a cartoon. I also told the teachers to divide the children into groups, and ask them to elect

a spokesperson. This, however, did bring some problems regarding the spontaneity of the group interaction and the originality of their ideas. Nonetheless, there were also some indications that the task might not had been as successful if the children were not aware of it; this was clear from the response of some groups who did not actually put a lot of thought into the matter before the interviews.

At school children are used to having their performance constantly monitored and assessed and this might have influenced their task performance. Some children did not seem very comfortable in debating the task as a group; rather they tended to articulate their opinions directly to the interviewer. The school system in Portugal is more oriented towards individual performances than to group interaction within the classroom. The children are, thus, more likely to respond to the teacher than to discuss the subjects as a class. The tendency towards egocentric speech at younger ages might also have influenced the way they expressed themselves.

In relation to consent, my first concern was to obtain the teachers' interest and approval to approach the children. Then it was explained to the children that their participation was not compulsory and that they could simply say no. None of the children refused to take part, in fact, they were keen to participate. The parents were not directly asked for consent. The classroom in Portugal is pretty much the teachers' domain, and they are trusted to decide whatever activities are to happen inside it. The only situations where the parents are usually consulted are those when the activities involve children's leaving the school. Their consent was, nonetheless, implicitly given by answering the questionnaires addressed to them. In fact, some parents took the opportunity to praise the research and to call for more projects assessing the provision of children's television.

The classes were divided into groups of 4 or 5 children - one group was to be made of girls only, the other boys only, and three mixed groups – to which slightly different tasks were ascribed. The basic question was: 'Imagine that you are working for a television channel and the director asks you and your team to create a cartoon'. The second part of the question varied according to the nature of the group. The single sex groups were asked to create a cartoon for Portuguese children of the opposite sex in order to understand children's constructions of the other and, by opposition, their own

gender identity. The mixed groups were asked to create a story taking place in Portugal; a story in Portuguese for foreign children; or a story for boys and girls of their age.

The interviews were semi-directive. Broadly, the children were asked to decide upon a story and make a brief summary; to decide who was the main character, or main characters, and to describe them (decide on a name; on the age; the place they lived and with whom they lived); what does the main character do and why; who are the supporting characters (friends, enemies, etc), and why; where does the story take place; what language do the characters speak; how does the story end; what sound effects would be necessary (voices; soundtrack; environment sounds, etc); how many episodes would the series have, and what would happen in different episodes; at what time would it be shown on television.

I was looking for any references to national symbols; national culture; history; local specificities such as accents, places, traditions; or any other contemporary aspects of Portuguese culture. In general, I wanted to perceive if there was any emphasis on signifiers of Portugueseness or foreignness. As well as to understand children's preferences in relation to animated programmes, their story structure, and main events.

The school made available one classroom. I took each group at a time to this room and asked children to sit with me around a table. I introduced myself and explained how I would like them to help me. I needed to be seated, as they were easily distracted with my activities, and even stopped talking when I stood up. Possibly due to the classroom context where the children are usually requested to follow the teacher's instructions and to behave accordingly – i.e. not to speak unless asked to.

The children were asked if they agreed on the use of a tape recorder so that I could remember what they said afterwards. No one disagreed and they were all interested in listening to the recordings of their voices at the end.

As they had been thinking about their stories, the children had some difficulties when asked to create a story for a particular audience. I found out that the first year children had actually debated the task in the classroom with the teacher - one group told me they

had thought of a story but the teacher had told them that it was not appropriate. Nonetheless, they did tell their story.

All the other groups felt strongly about the stories they had created, insisting that each group member should tell their bit of story as previously agreed. This was not simply something the teacher had told them to and how to do it. The children were disappointed when asked to tell story for a specific audience. So I decided to allow them to tell their initial story and then ask them whether they thought it would be suitable for other children, and why.

The election of a group leader proved to be quite useful among the first year groups. The children looked at the leader whenever consensus could not be reached, but they saw it as a mean of organisation rather than a mean of dictating the decisions. In most cases the group leader emerged as a 'manager', organising who was to speak and when. The other group members did not tolerate the rare occasions where the leader wanted to impose his or her will. An example of this was the first year boys' group. At a point the group leader wanted to impose his views arguing that he was in a position of control, but he was quickly put back in place by another boy who asked 'So what? What does that mean?'. Assigning a leader proved quite useful in one of the first year mixed groups, where the boy who was the leader was also the most disruptive element. I was able manage his behaviour by calling his attention to the fact that he had responsibilities within the group.

Task III - Reviewing two cartoons

This task was initially designed to be part of the research with the children from Esgueira's primary school, the same who collaborated in previous tasks. However, and this is one of the problems of doing research in different countries, I left the videotapes containing the films the children were to review in Cardiff. The task had to be postponed to another time, to another trip to Portugal.

This took place later in June but I was again faced with yet another problem. The children who took part in Tasks I and II were now in their last week of school, preparing the end of year celebrations. There was little time to conduct the research and,

as an alternative, I left the tapes with the teachers along with a short questionnaire hoping they would find some time to show them to the children.

Meanwhile, plan B was put into action; I returned to the daycare centre where the pilot study had been done. This time I had to count on the teachers' availability to help. Those interested in taking part worked with children aged seven to eight and eight to nine years old. The children were told about the task and only those who volunteered took part. In the second year groups, Group D had five girls, and Group E four girls and a boy. In the third year groups, Group A had three girls and a boy; Group B two girls and two boys; and Group C three boys and one girl.

Many children were already on holidays with their families, so very few were coming to the centre.

The groups viewed 2 'non-commercial' animated films, one episode from the Portuguese production 'The Quest for the enchanted islands' and one Norwegian film from the international co-production *The Animated tales of the World*, the 'The three sisters who fell into the mountain'. Each group viewed the clip separately. The children were asked to comment on things such as the story; the country where it was produced; where the story takes place; target audience; story's modality; and gender and age preferences[38].

The children's answers were audio taped after explaining why this was needed and asking for their consent.

In the following chapters I will provide the results of the fieldwork. These will be presented according to each of the research moments from which they emerged.

[38] See Appendix 11 for interview guidelines

CHAPTER VI– The Making of Children's Animation

In this chapter I delve into the process of making animation for young audiences. I start from a general outlook of the processes of producing and directing animation; then I analyse how animation professionals see the child audience, and how cartoons may reflect their perceptions.

The making of animation can be divided into two moments – the process of producing, and the process of creating. The bigger the organization the more likely it is that these moments are distinct, as the division of labour is greater. In smaller projects, with low budgets, the roles of directing and producing can be ascribed to one and the same person, who will be both a creative force, and a manager of the human and material resources.

Before starting the analysis of the sampled animation series, I will briefly characterise the production and directing processes by referring to literature from professionals working in the animation industry.

6.1 – Producing Animation

> A gag in a current magazine, a joke you hear, some offbeat conversation with a very drunken person you meet at a cocktail party, or a scene you witness on the street may spark an idea. (Shanus Culhane[39], 1990, p.47)

The role of the animation producer is that of a work manager. From the moment the original idea is developed to its commercialisation, within and outside the process of animating a story.

Dowlatabadi and Winder (2001, p.63) assert that comic books, graphic novels, classic tales, songs, toys and children's books are common sources for ideas. According to the authors original characters and concepts are more difficult to sell (p.64). They suggest that it was only after the advent of *Nickelodeon* that original ideas have been more commonly accepted. The channel revolutionised the look and the contents of children's

[39] Shanus was the artist responsible for animating the dwarfs in Walt Disney's *Snow White*

television. Series like *The Rugrats*, and *The Wild Thornberries* are inspired by real-life experiences, and this seems to be crucial to their appeal to children.

Talking at the 4th World Summit on Media for Children and Adolescents (Rio de Janeiro, April 2004), a representative of *Klasky Csupo* (production house for *The Wild Thornberries*) suggested that sibling rivalry and saving the family (as in a clip from *The Rugrats* where Chucky and the babies prevent his father from marrying the wrong woman) are central to the series' appeal.

The programmes present subversions of the adult/child relationship - children face difficult, sometimes dangerous, situations that they are able to resolve mostly without adults' intervention. *The Wild Thornberries,* for instance, deals primarily with environmental issues caused by adults. Its subversive character goes even further by having a girl[40] featuring in the main role; when it is a common believe in the television/cinema industry that boys are reluctant to accept that.

Seiter and Mayer (2004) suggest that in comparison with other American networks, Nickelodeon has a more open attitude not only towards gender, but also ethnic and racial representations. The channel addresses issues of representation through audience research techniques such as focus groups to which children from minority groups are invited to participate and debate their daily-life.

The *Cartoon Network* is another channel that has invested in originals with programmes like *Dexter's Lab* and *The Power Puff Girls*. The difference between the two channels is that *Nickelodeon* is a children's channel, whilst the *Cartoon Network* is family oriented having a greater concern to appeal to adult audiences.

Nonetheless, Dowlatabadi and Winder argue that it is still a gamble to invest in programmes that offer little guarantees of profitability. Children's programmes often rely on basic, previously proven, formulas diminishing the investment risks. Examples

[40] Eliza travels with her family as they shoot their nature television show, exploring wild jungles, deserts, and forests. She loves animals and, in one of the trips, she was given the gift of being able to talk and understand animals which she must keep secret, and with which she has been able to save many animals

of this are the numerous adaptations of the 'super-hero chases alien/monster' in American animation, or the 'technology game competition' in Japanese animation.

The reluctance in accepting innovative projects appears to be a result of a 'gut' knowledge of the targeted audiences. Work like Dowlatabadi and Winder's, and Culhane's (op.cit.) explore the processes of producing and animating, but they do not approach audience related issues in depth. In Dowlatabadi and Winder (p. 69-71) a short reference is made to the necessity of defining a target audience prior to the production process. While they advise prospective producers to do market research before investing in a project, their main concern is with the possible buyers not with the potential viewers. As Culhane's quote in the beginning of this section suggests, the ways in which ideas for stories spring do not depend so much on considering the audience, but on the author's artistic inclinations.

> Producing animation is based on the ability to think logically, practically, and creatively. It is a cerebral act that combines a technical knowledge of the animation process with individual style, experience and gut instinct. (Dowlatabadi and Winder, op. cit., p.1)

According to Dowlatabadi and Winder (ibid, pp.21-29), producers can either be entrepreneurs or employee producers. In the latter case their job is subjected to the authority of an employer. Such is the case in the major animation studios where the company's executive group sets up and oversees the projects. In big corporations this labour division can be extended to different countries; subcontracting work to other studios is a practice that economises time and, consequently, money.

Entrepreneur producers, on the other hand, usually own smaller independent studios with reduced budgets. This means that the division of labour is likely to be smaller, and that the producer has to take up more responsibilities like managing the production budget. Executive producer, co-producer, line producer, and associate producer are job titles commonly associated with the task of producing animation.

Dowlatabadi and Winder contacted a number of industry professionals to find out their opinions on what makes a good animation producer. Overall, the view is that a good producer needs to be a skilful professional, as well as a sensible communicator. He or

she needs to be able to manage the team, gathering the best professionals for a specific project, and to co-ordinate both artistic and technical staff in order to develop the animator's vision in the most cost effective way. Here are a few opinions the authors gathered:

> A good producer must have the ability to maintain the delicate balance between good filmmaking and a good business. The producer must pull together a creative team that works towards the common goal of producing a film with a clear, unified vision. The producer draws on the strengths and supports the weaknesses of the assembled crew, making judgement calls as a continual basis, ensuring the timely delivery of an excellent product on budget and above expectations (Laura Hume, Senior Vice-President, Worldwide Production, Walt Disney Television Animation, in Dowlatabadi and Winder, 2001, pp.32-33)

> Breath. The scope of a producer's skills must encompass the entirety of the show: what you make, where you do it, how you finance it, who you hire, when to say enough (Chuck Richardson, Senior Vice-President and General Manager, Blue Sky Studios, ibid, p.33)

> A producer's essential role is to nurture each individual contributing to the project so that the end product is the absolute best it can be creatively. Animation is an artistic domain in a commodities market-place. This makes for a constant care and control of the balance between artists and making the numbers work. Financing animation independently is a sincere challenge. The result is inevitably several financial contributors who are all entitled to input. So the juggling begins. In the case of international co-productions, there can be really fun things like language barriers and cultural differences. For example, globally, everyone has a different belief in 'what's funny'. The producer's task is to ensure that all parties are satisfied with the end product and that the creator's vision has not been compromised (Beth Stevenson, Partner/Vice-President, Production and Development, DECODE Entertainment Inc., producer of, among others, *Angela* Anaconda, ibid, p.35)

According to Culhane (op.cit.,p.15), the job of an animation director focuses on the management of the creative process itself. It includes developing and supervising ideas with the story department; approving character sketches; directing dialogue and music; handing out work to the animators; giving the final approval for photography; as well as discussing with the producer the staff's performance and efficiency. Apart from creative input, the director has to co-ordinate the different stages of the film at an artistic level.

In brief, cell-animation is created from the combined efforts of the director; the writer; the storyboard artist [41] (who interprets the story graphically and produces initial sketches); the character designer; and the animator who draws the main movements of the characters on an exposure sheet, along with instructions of movement for the camera operator, which will then be developed by an assistant animator. The drawings are photographed under an animation camera that shoots one exposure at a time. The team reviews the resulting footage until a final version is approved. Afterwards the drawings are transferred to acetate sheets either manually or by a machine, and are then ready for colouring, background drawing, and colour photography. The final footage is sent to a laboratory to be combined with the soundtrack, including dialogue, music, and sound effects (ibid, pp.12-13).

In this research I am analysing cell-animation and puppet animation. The first technique, as suggested by Laybourne (1998, p.171) got its name from the transparent celluloid sheets. It is usually known as the 'traditional American animation', or 'character animation'. For the purposes of this work I do not need to consider in depth the different techniques of animation - Culhane and Laybourne's work are good departure points to explore the subject. For now it suffices to state the obvious, that the main difference between cell and puppet animation is their dimensionality. Cell animation results from bi-dimensional drawings; puppet animation from working tri-dimensional puppets.

> Animation puppets share certain basic features. They are freestanding and able to support their own weight; they have movable points that can hold any position; they are all well executed, with remarkable detail; and they can be viewed from 360°. (Laybourne, 1998)

Unlike cell-animation, this technique has been identified mostly with the work of Eastern European animators, though it is widely used in other Asian and Western countries (a story of success is Henry Selik, responsible for *James and the Giant Peach* and Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas*).

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[41] The storyboard is a panel where story sketches are put together; writers and storyboard artists draw sketches of the entire story so as to provide a description as accurate as possible of the scenes, as well as short camera instructions (ibid, 45-47)

As previously suggested, the process of making animation seems to be primarily guided by a creative instinct and the ability to translate it into animation. Still, there are, some limitations to it, particularly when commercial animation is concerned. Advertisement agencies and broadcasting networks have a great influence regarding the style and contents of the final product. Culhane (op.cit., p.63) argues that "[t]hey have more constrictions and restrictions then the Inquisitorial rack and these are not less painful".

How does commercial animation differ from programmes that claim to be concerned not so much with market profits, but with the child audience? In the next sub-section I present the results of the analysis of two market oriented programmes – *Pokemon* and *SailorMoon*; and two programmes concerned with cultural relevance, one is an international co-production, the other a Portuguese low budget production mostly targeting the internal market.

6.2- *Pokemon* and *SailorMoon* – commercial animation made relevant?

> The whole 'Global Village' thing...Globalisation...Multi-culturalism...The need for broadcasters to sell their productions in as many territories as possible...is flattening-out differences and, in practise, leading to standardisation... No efficient production system can do without it!" (Aiden Hickey, interviewed in January 2004, Brown Bag Productions, Republic of Ireland).

6.2.1- *Pokemon*

Pokemon first made its appearance in Japan, as a hand-held video game produced by Nintendo. It quickly developed into a variety of other products, from cartoons, to collectable cards, computer games, and other merchandise. Its creator, Satoshi Tajiri, is a game designer. It was his childhood love for insects and his wish to reconnect Japanese children living in urban areas with nature that inspired him. He wanted to create a game that would bring children close to nature through learning and identifying insect-like creatures.

The cartoon tells the adventures of Ash a teenage boy who, along with his group of friends, pursues his ambition to become the ultimate *Pokemon* trainer. 'Pockemons' - pocket monsters - are creatures that Ash collects during his journey. He nurtures and trains them so that they can compete in championships.

The pilot study showed that most children preferred *Pokemon* to all the cartoons on public television. Their preferences were gendered; nevertheless the series emerged as a favourite for both boys and girls.

> Int: Which are your favourite cartoons?
> All: 'Pokemons'
> Int: (...) Why? Because of the fights?
> B1: No...
> (children talking at the same time)
> Int: Why is *Pokemon* good?
> B2: Because they fight.
> Int: Because of the fights? There are a lot of characters, aren't there?
> B2: Yes.
> B3: And it takes longer.
> Int: It takes longer, right, here we only saw a little bit, not the whole cartoon.
> B1: It has more drawings.
> (...)
> Group of 2nd grade boys, 7/8 year-old

Though other cartoons were mentioned as favourites, *Pokemon* was the most common reference, the exceptions being the 1st grade girls and the 4th grade groups.

In the series Ash is a young teenager from a small village 'Pallet Town'. His usual travelling companions are Brock (an older boy, leader of a *Pokemon* gym in another town); and Misty (a girl, also a gym leader). His enemies are Gary (professor Oak's grandson and Ash's lifelong rival in the battle for the title of best trainer); and Team Rocket (a heartless society of trainers bent on controlling all *Pokemon* creatures and, ultimately, the World), of which Jesse and James are the prominent members, working with their mischievous Meowth. Ash relies on the teachings of professor Oak, a *Pokemon* expert.

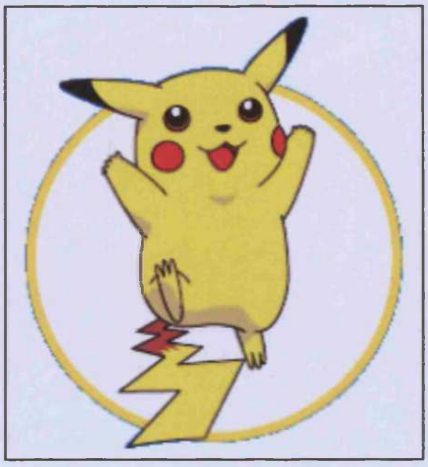
The series was broadcasted by the Portuguese independent channel SIC, and it was dubbed into Portuguese. It enjoyed success for a good couple of years, but at the time of writing it had already started its decline, though it is still possible to buy merchandise like videos and computer games.

The battles fought are neither deadly nor bloody, and the creatures are not fearsome monsters, they are mostly cute, cuddly creatures – who come in soft colours like

yellow, pink, green, a sign of femininity in contrast with the masculine gender they acquire in Portuguese language – to which trainers are emotionally bound.



Picture 1: Ash



Picture 2: Pikachu

Buckingham and Sefton-Green (2003) suggest that the series is a phenomenon designed to maximise its appeal to wide sections of the audience:

> Albeit at the risk of being reductive it would be possible to track the ways in which particular *Pokemon* products have been created to fit in with the toys or media genres most characteristic of particular (overlapping) age groups: Soft toys for the under fives, television cartoons for the four- to nine-years-old, trading cards for the six- to ten-year-olds, computer games for the seven-to twelve-year-olds, and so on.

In the episode I analysed, Ash returns to his home town where the journey begun, accompanied by Misty and Tracy (a teenager whose expertise is to draw the *Pokemon* creatures). He reencounters his mother; Brock, who at some point had decided to stay and work in a health recovery centre where he fell in love with the nurse; and Professor Oak at his research centre. The episode's kernel event is Team Rocket's attempt to steal all of Oak's 'pocketballs' (devices that contain the creatures), accomplishing a temporary victory over Ash. It is the arrival of another character – whom the viewer later finds out to be Gary – that changes the events as he defeats Team Rocket. This triggers a confrontation between him and Ash, who feels like he needs to prove his superiority. The episode has an open ending, questioning Ash's performance as a trainer.

In this episode it is not possible to recognise all of Propp's functions[42]. This is probably due the cartoon's format – a series where episodes are not isolated, but a continuation of the story. The hero does not defeat the enemy; in fact, he is saved by his rival in the quest to be the ultimate trainer. The story is a moral tale that reminds viewers that things cannot be taken for granted as even the best can be defeated. Ash's superiority is still reinforced by the powerlessness of Brock and Misty who, despite being gym leaders, make no attempt to fight the villains. The appearance of Gary in this episode adds to the suspense of the series, leaving open the possibility that Ash may not reach his goal. If he does not work hard his rivals may defeat him.

> Ash: I won the leader of the Orange league and I have the trophy to prove it.
> Gary: Congratulations, but that trophy didn't help against Team Rocket.
> Ash: Well, I did better than you in the last *Pokemon* league, remember?
> Gary: That was a long time ago Ash, now I'm a stronger coach than I was back then.
> Ash: I would like to see all that strength in a *Pokemon* battle with me. What do you say?
> Misty: A battle?
> Gary: You will not win!
> Ash: That we shall see!
> Misty: Will he win?
> Brock: Misty, I don't know...
> Narrator: On his return home Ash is at the verge of a battle with his enemy, Gary, and it seems Gary is stronger than ever. Will Ash have the advantage of playing home? Or is he about to become a loser?
> (Final dialogue and narrator voice-over)

The primary goal of the hero is to succeed in his quest. He has to face a succession of tasks that include having his creatures winning a battle over the opponents', or overcoming the bad actions of the villains.

[42] See Appendix 2

This episode's basic actions are as shown in the table below:

Table 12 – Characters' basic actions in *Pokemon*

Ash	Deliver a magic object to Oak (GS Ball) Defend Oak's *Pokemon* and 'pocketballs' from Team Rocket Compete with Gary
Gary	Rescue the group from Team Rocket
Team Rocket	Threaten the safety of the *Pokemon* Attacking and imprisoning Ash and his friends
Misty	Cooperate and help Ash in his quest Tell the truth by making comments about others' behaviour
Tracy	Dispatch Ash to the Professor's centre Show his drawings to the Professor
Brock	Care for others Love
Mrs Ketchum (Ash's mother	Tell Brock's story Feed the group Humiliate Ash (pretending she doesn't care for his achievements, promoting like this his growth as a person)
Prof. Oak	To assess Ash and Tracy's work To teach about *Pokemon*

The diversity of characters caters for the audiences' different interests and social identities. It is possible to find both female and male characters with distinct personalities and functions within the story. Those functions are generally divided into emotional; educational; 'evil-doing'; and leadership.

Cartoons for children are often criticised for lack of female role models. In this cartoon it is possible to find strong females. However, feminine behaviour is ridiculed through the behaviour of a male character, Brock who is different from the other males. He has a distinct physical appearance; he is the only one with brown skin and Asian shaped eyes. In terms of behaviour he is a boy in touch with his 'feminine side', always looking for romance; in this episode, he is emotionally vulnerable because a girl rejected his love. Also, he is living with Ash's mum, helping with the house chores and he even wears an apron. Such characteristics add an element of comedy. A character like Brock may, indeed, appeal to young children; as I could observe, first graders were not at all indifferent to the 'laws' of gender attraction; a fair amount of gossip was

going on about their schoolmates emotional dramas, despite the fact that they tend camouflage any interest by ridiculing the situation and others.

The series combines elements that, according to the pilot-study, children were not very interested in. Boys said they disliked female characters and romance; and the girls disliked fights. But this cartoon appears to mix those elements in such a way that it does not compromise children's gender identity. Its diversity of characters and sub-plots leaves space for children to relate with it in different ways. As previously suggested, this ambiguity is characteristic of children's programmes, which aim to appeal to both genders and to a broad range of ages. The children's interest goes beyond the screen appeal. They enjoy it because it gives them possibilities to interact with their peers in a variety of ways – debating the series; playing related games; role-playing inspired by the cartoon; and memory games.

The diversity of characters allows different internal responses to the events; thoughts and emotions such as happiness for reencountering friends and family and meeting role models (arriving at Ash's mum's house; meeting the Professor; finding Brock); traumatic love experiences (Brock's seizures due to love rejection); rivalry (Ash and Gary); insecurity in relation to one's work (Tracy and his drawings). An interesting aspect is the apparent indifference of Ash's mother to his return and achievements, while secretly rejoicing. This stresses the cartoon's relevance within *anime* tradition; the hero goes on to pursue his goals regardless of family support.

On the surface, *Pokemon* does not seem to reflect any concern with the representation of a particular cultural context. The story takes place in imaginary places oscillating between countryside and small cities, where nature and human constructions are not obvious referents of specific geographic locations. The 'human' characters are mostly Caucasians, and the urban spaces point towards Western societies with predominantly white inhabitants - this imbalance of representation can, in fact, be read as a misrepresentation of ethnic diversity.

Nonetheless, one needs to consider the context where it was originally created, as well as the story's intrinsic mythological power. Stylistically the cartoon is similar to other Japanese *anime*. One main feature is the lack of fluidity due to the economy of

intermediate movements, leaving the extreme ones fixed through several poses. *Anime* cartoons are characterised by a series of more or less perceptible jerks (Raffaelli, 1997, pp.124-134). This does not mean that there is a loss of emotion or of the understanding of characters' feelings. *Anime* relies on signals such as a drop of sweat fixed on the characters' forehead and a mouth wide open when they are faced with terrible situations; the use of the characters' thoughts or a narrator's voice-over to describe the emotions; as well as attention-grabbing music binding the narrative.

> In Japanese cartoons each emotion exists in time. Time is often, in fact, slowed down, offering us the chance to follow the thought that comments on, transforms and experiences that particular moment of emotional perturbance. This slowing down, however, is also an indication of the extreme concentration of the central character with regards to the situation being experienced. It shows, therefore, the perception of daily life in a timeless dimension, in certain respects as meditative. Japanese culture is particularly sensitive to time and to the steadiness of waiting for something, for a clash with the enemy, for a match, for a love encounter (Raffaelli, 1997, p.129)

Another important characteristic is the notion of 'cuteness', which first emerged in Japan in the post-war period when *manga* publications:

> encouraged the aesthetical appreciation of the 'cute' revolution. In this light the minimum requirement for something to be considered *kawaii* lies in its stylistic simplification, especially in terms of roundness. Thus, round contours abound in Japan among cloth items, accessories, stationary, packaged foods, furniture, houses, cars, and so on. Indeed, it is very hard to find commercial products devoid of cuteness in Japan today, just as it is nearly impossible to find a Japanese who has never been exposed to *manga* (Kanako Shiokawa, 1999, p.93)

Thematically it follows children's *anime* storytelling tradition in which child heroes, not supra-human beings but humans with special characteristics, pursue their destiny on their own without the support of a family (family which is usually represented by a mother, the mother-child relationship being of primary importance in Japan). The morality of the stories is based on the reinforcement of the children's self-confidence. By believing in themselves characters accomplish their dreams and gain society's respect (Raffaelli, op.cit). Other

> identifiable Japanese plot elements include (...) the master disciple relationship between the *Pokemon* characters and (...) Professor Oak and Ash's quest in the Japanese martial arts tradition, to climb the *Pokemon* trainer ranks until he reaches the level of *Pokemon* master (Tobin, 2002)

This is the case in the songs of two different opening credits from the Portuguese version:

> My way of life has never seen anything like it, always doing good and defeating evil. Through the world I'll travel and when I find the *Pokemon* with its power all change. *Pokemon*, I'll catch them all, I'll make it only to follow you, *Pokemon*, I'll catch them that I know with you I'll learn. Make it, I'll make it. *Pokemon*!

> We all want to be fast, to get there first. You have to try, each time you're a bit stronger. You have to climb the next step. This world is ours, we like to live; our youth has a new attitude but you have to catch them all and I know that all will win! *Pokemon*!

These are direct translations from the Portuguese version. They seem to be suffering from the consequences of 'glocalization', of having to adopt, possibly the English version, to Portuguese. A few sentences are not that coherent, but the overall message can be understood. Both versions talk of personal achievements though in somewhat different ways. The first version is sung in the first person, and the underlying message is that of friendship, and the strength and knowledge that derive from it. The second addresses the viewer in the second person – 'you have to' – and it is sung by an adult male who commands all the viewers, the millions of young *pokemon* trainers, to be strong and keep on wanting to go a bit further. While the first talks of achieving a better world, the second version talks of competitiveness, though it ends by saying that, in the end, everyone will be a winner.

The main messages are of personal effort and belief in oneself though respecting the others and, above all, friendship. If such is the case, are series like this that different in their mythological value from recognised traditional fairytales like *Hansel & Grettel* or *Little Red Riding Hood*? I would suggest that they are not, as they all portray children on a quest for a better life, fighting against evil, recognising them as capable human beings.

Television is the primary source of storytelling in Western societies; the globalisation of the media contributes to the dissemination of particular forms of narrative. Still, as the success of some *anime* series suggests, the door is open to styles of storytelling that do not necessarily reflect westernised values, life-styles, and cultural traditions. Television texts are polysemic, they carry multiple meanings, which are bound by the way the text is structured as well as by the social and cultural context of viewing.

The construction of meaning and the place of television in daily life can differ from culture to culture, and in terms of gender, class and age within a same cultural community. Language is a very important signifier of cultural identity. Animation's success on a global scale rests, to a great degree, on the possibility not just to translate the programme, but also to transform its contents into something that can be closer to the viewer's systems of reference. The original narrative and visual elements can be adjusted and supported by culturally specific allusions when dubbing is possible. Local accents, names, locations, jokes, historical references, social comments are some ways in which language can add specificity to a programme.

The challenge is, on the one hand, to go beyond deterministic views of globalisation and to take advantage of its potential as a phenomenon of cultural exchange, whilst recognising the audiences' capacity to negotiate the meanings of cultural products offered by television. On the other, to complement adults' concerns about educational value and commercialisation with a recognition and comprehension of the role children play as active audiences, capable of appreciating diversity and narrative quality.

6.2.2 – *SailorMoon*

This cartoon's narrative is a bit more complex. Here the heroines have magical powers that allow them to transform into more powerful girls in order to fight evil. This is the story of Usagi Tsukino, a fourteen-year old girl who became the warrior *SailorMoon*, protecting the Earth and the Universe. Thousands of years ago she was Princess Serenity, the princess of the Moon, and her lover, Prince Endymion, was prince of the Earth. The evil forces of Queen Beryl destroyed the peaceful Moonkingdom. Princess Serenity's mother used her magical crystal to send everyone to a new future on Earth thousands of years in the future. The princess became Usagi and met her friends and battle companions, called the inner-scouts, who used to serve in the court. Meanwhile,

the prince reincarnates as Mamoru Chiba and falls in love again with Usagi, helping her to fight evil by transforming into Tuxedo Mask. Usagi is also helped by Luna, her black guardian cat, and Chibi (formerly her daughter). There are about five seasons and three movies, each with new enemies and characters[43].



Picture 3 – *SailorMoon* cast

This series has inherited some aspects of Japanese culture like the appreciation of 'cuteness'. In the 1970s there was a boom of *shōjo manga*, comic books for girls from which *anime* adopted some of its thematic and stylistic characteristics. In addition to the post-war idealised western physical features (round eyes, blond, red, and brown hair, long legs, and tall thin bodies); they employed other features like sparkling eyes (particularly heroines'); flowers in the background to signify romance; and strong heroines in stories for boys. Some of these elements are present in *SailorMoon*.

The series can also be related to ancient Japanese cultural traditions, as Grisby suggests:

> In SailorMoon, female characteristics and symbols associated with ancient organistic ideas and those of modernity are combined. SailorMoon is a fierce fighter and protector who uses the crescent moon and her cat assistant to defeat evil, but she is also a crybaby who has crushes on boys and uses make-up and jewellery. Thus SailorMoon has appeal for modern audiences with cultural memories of life before the world died. She touches memories

[43] www.angelfire.co/ca/smoonam

> from the time when the female principle was not given lower status than that of male, but an equal footing in constructing the world. SailorMoon offers the magic of the market entwined with memories (Mary Grisby)

Napier (2000, p. 29) addresses the 'apocalyptic' nature of some *anime* which portrays dark forces threatening to destroy society and the planet by linking it to Japanese cultural specificity. On the one hand, the author links it to the country's history, in particular the atomic bomb and its effects. On the other, she alludes to other social phenomena that have lead to a generalised disillusionment. Among these, Napier counts the alienation of its industrialised society, the generational gap, men's gradual loss of dominance, the increasing role played by women outside the family sphere and the disenchantment with the post-war values, after the economic problems caused by the collapse of the stock market in the late 1980s.

In the episode analysed an organisation called 'Kingdom of Darkness' is trying to steal all the energy from the humans for unknown reasons. Their first target is Raquel, a tennis-player. The Queen of Darkness chooses Nefrite to perform the task; he enters the tennis-court by pretending to be a trainer, and places an evil spirit in Raquel's tennis-ball in order to absorb the player's energy. Bunny (as Usagi is nicknamed in the Portuguese version) and her friends need to fight and defeat them. When Raquel's energy reaches its peak the evil demon is unleashed and Bunny decides to face it alone but realises it is more than she can handle. Eventually, Tuxedo Mask ('Mascarado' in Portuguese) comes to her rescue and together they defeat the forces of evil.

Once more, it is difficult to apply Propp's functions to this episode's narrative. The initial situation (α) is given by the opening credits and repeated every episode, constantly reminding the viewer of the main focus of the series:

> Hello, I'm Bunny Usagi! I transform myself in order to fight evil people. I'm SailorMoon, fighting for love and justice. These are my friends: Amy, she's a genius and she's friendly; and Rita (laughter), with a character. Are they better than me? (laughter)

Other functions present in the episode are villainy (A), struggle (H) and victory (I). The reason why Propp's functions are difficult to apply are likely to result from the fact

that, like in *Pokemon*, the episodes are pieces from a wider narrative. The basic syntagmatic organisation of the episode can be represented as:

Evil action → Hero pursuits villain → Fight → Help → Evil overcome

The main goal of the heroine is to succeed in her quest to save the world from villainy, fighting for love and justice. While the villain's aim is to create a lack – as in Propp's categories - by removing all the energy from humans; for that he needs to overcome Bunny and Tuxedo Mask. Bunny's basic actions are to save the World and to love Tuxedo Mask; while the latter is in the story to rescue and protect her, in this sense he is an aide.

The episodic components are complex due to the main character's internal responses, her thoughts and emotions, to the events. Bunny's personality is marked by immaturity, this is clear both from her behaviour, and her friends' comments and criticism of her actions. From the opening credits the viewer is told about Bunny's insecurity about her performance when compared to that of her friends. Often she questions her own capacities. Throughout the episode, excess of confidence in one's performance is discouraged, while the need to work hard in order to achieve personal goals is stressed. Though Bunny is not an average human she is also not a flawless super-hero, she is aware of her limitations and often needs the help of others to succeed. The heroine is affected by other human and more mundane feelings like jealousy and the pains of love. Like in *Pokemon,* the underlying message is that no one is perfect, and that people should be hard working and value friendship to ensure a successful life.

SailorMoon tries to appeal to both male and female audiences by offering a combination of elements like romance and fights. The cartoon has a variety of characters but, contrary to the first cartoon analysed, the majority are females, which is possibly what made the boys in the pilot study reluctant to show any interest in the series. Though they were far from being unfamiliar with it, they generally dismissed it as girly and silly. When questioned why it was girly when there was a fair amount of fighting this 2nd grade boy explained:

> B: It's boring, I don't like it, it's for girls. I like fights!
> Int: But don't they fight as well?
> B: The way they fight... They would be all dead by now! To fight like that...I'd touch them with my fingers and they would be on the floor!

The fight scenes in the episode are, in fact, more aggressive than in *Pokemon*. The cartoon is darker and possibly scarier as in most episodes it is the characters' lives that are endangered. However, the heroines are very feminine; Bunny, for example, is a tall teenager who has a high-pitch feminine voice, with very long blond ponytails. Her standard outfit is a navy-style school uniform (a very short skirt and a white blouse with red ribbons), but at times she changes clothes. In this episode she changes from her school uniform to a more casual outfit, something that is not common in most cartoons - outfits tend to remain the same throughout a serial. Her super-hero clothes are similar to the school uniform but they have extra details like pink high-leg boots and extra accessories. The demon is also a female figure, wearing a black cat suit, long earrings golden bracelet and a red necklace. Even the main male characters are a bit feminine; Nefrite, for instance, is an androgynous character whose facial features resemble those of the Queen of Darkness. He has very long wavy brown hair; wears a blue uniform, and some jewellery; and when he makes his appearance in the tennis-court he has a different outfit, a beige suit. This contributes to the 'femininity' of the programme, and may be the reason why boys feel the need to distance themselves from it.

6.3) The 'child's quest' sub-genre – The importance of narrative or a market's construction?

Earlier I have mentioned Klein's (op. cit) categorisation of animated programmes for children into Imaginary Companions, Action Teams and Female Hero, which was built considering the market strategies behind certain cartoons aimed at specific audiences. Having in mind the sample of clips used in my study I suggest a fourth sub-genre, the Child's Quest. As the section that presents the data from the pilot-study shows, this sub-genre is rooted in a formula that seems to please both boys and girls of different ages: a quest of a child for an identifiable goal.

Klein's sub-genres refer to series in which every episode is a story in itself (the heroes are faced with an enemy or problem that they always overcome by the end of the episode), allowing the endless production of new adventures. The Child's Quest sub-

genre is based on continuity, that is, there is an identifiable beginning and, more important, a targeted end. Each episode tells a little bit of the main character's struggle to reach his or her goal.

Anime has recovered classics from western children's literature creating series in which children, quite often orphans in search of a long-lost relative, are at the centre of the story. Drawing from such classics like *Tom Sawyer* and Heidi, and placing the plot in contexts more or less familiar to audiences other than the Japanese children, *anime* found a place in western markets.

Pokemon's popularity is greatly due to well-planned marketing strategies and to the fact that its narrative structure is adjustable both to television and to electronic media, appealing to children and to the entertainment industries. As Seiter (2001) argues: 'To hold an entertainment property with such powerful global appeal is the common dream of the new electronics/ entertainment industry conglomerates'.

Such stories of success raise a question: Are these tastes a product of marketing strategies?

A glance at the offer of cartoons broadcasted on Portuguese public channels during the period when the pilot study took place shows a diversity of choices. The programmes varied from the more educational BBC pre-school productions (e.g. *Yoho-Ahoy, Noddy, Tweenies*); to Disney programmes (*Timon and Pumba; Doug; Pepper Ann*); action series (*Transformers, Johnny Bravo*); and Japanese anime (*Pokemon, Digimon*). Considering this, it would be reasonable to expect that Disney productions and action series like *Transformers*, which are also related to a variety of merchandising, would stand the same chances of emerging as favourites. Instead, such programmes were not even mentioned. The groups consistently referred to the same animated programmes as favourites, some of which not even shown on the pre-selected clips. Conscious choices have been and the structure of the narrative is of great importance in this decision.

The argument can be illustrated by comparing the children's favourites. Chapter VII shows that children preferred *Pokemon* to *Digimon*. Both are based on the same principle, children holding power over creatures of which performance and evolution

the children's destinies depend. The creatures' performance is a result of the child's own responsibility and capacity to take decisions and relate to them. This format enables similar market outcomes, offering possibilities to the toy and electronic game's industries, as well as to its development over the Internet. Both have sites with quite exhaustive information about the episodes and characters, allowing children with access to the medium to update their knowledge and keep up with the series.

Pokemon, had the advantage of being a novelty. It was the first to appear on the Portuguese screens, the first where the idea of children having 'pocket monsters' was explored. *Digimon*, however, has a wider range of characters of both genders and of different ages being potentially more appealing (though it can be argued that the characters are given more or less stereotyped roles, the girls being loving, protective, caring, stylish, while boys are strong, clever, adventurous, leaders). Also, the children-like characters in the latter are designed to be trendy. Unlike most animated series where the dress codes are somehow neutral (jumpers and shorts combinations; T-shirt like dresses) or, otherwise, portraying an historical context. I would suggest that diversity is precisely what seconds it when compared to *Pokemon.* It makes the story more complicated, demanding a bigger effort to follow it, and making it more difficult to identify with the characters' goal. The variety of semiotic signs such as the most intensive use of music and the combination of computer animation with cell-animation in *Digimon*, should also be taken into consideration as a factor possibly influential on the children's perception, understanding and attention.

I would suggest a number of narrative characteristics, which lead to the success of some series among the children. There are: the existence of a restricted and constant number of characters; an easily identifiable lead character; a plot that is easy to follow with a well-defined beginning and, more important, a clear end; the relevance of centring the narrative on child characters to whom autonomy and responsibility is attributed to attain their goals in life; and a voice capable of challenging adults' opinions in a logical and coherent way.

Besides the quality of the narrative other aspects such as the position on the channels' schedule, and the number of times the programme is aired, are also variables to take into consideration in the construction of tastes. A final line of analysis, and perhaps the

one where marketing strategies have more straightforward consequences, is the influence of a programme on peer-interaction, particularly the possibilities it creates to reinvent games and other forms of playing. The audience research results indicated that the children in this study, particularly boys, used cartoons and related merchandising as themes for playground games, this has previously been found by, for instances, the ITC research (op. cit., p. 20) about children's perceptions of action cartoons.

6.4 – Culturally specific animation

6.4.1 – *The Tale of the Three Sisters who fell into the Mountain*

The tale of the three sisters who fell into the mountain is a puppet animation inspired by a traditional Norwegian tale. The initial narration introduces the viewers to the story:

> Sometimes even the land where you live may surprise you. A long time ago, in the shadow of a mountain, lived a poor family, a sick widow and her three daughters: Carrie, Mary, and Mai.

It is a tale about how a little girl, Mai, saves her two sisters from a Troll who lives inside a mountain. The family is poor and makes a living by selling their hen's eggs in the market, but one night the hen disappears. The older sister (signified by being the taller of the three) goes out looking for it. Ignoring her mother's warning, she goes beyond the big tree falling into a hole, straight into the Troll's hands. The same happens to the middle sister. Mai, however, escapes this fate when, hiding behind a wall she sees what happens to her sister. She appears deliberately to the Troll and accepts his request to become his sweetheart. Uncovering the Troll's secrets Mai manages to save her sisters and to return home safely. She runs away from the Troll who, in the rush of the chase, forgets that being exposed to the sunlight he will turn into stone, and so he becomes a mountain.

Picture 4 and 5: Sketches of the sisters and Troll





This is a puppet animation. The main settings are the family's wooden hut; the dark forest, and the Troll's cave. The characters' outfits are inspired by Norwegian folk, indicating a distance in time. The sisters do not look alike, the oldest sister is tall and thin, has long, straight brown hair; Mary is fat and has curly red hair; and Mai is blond.

This cartoon is part of the international co-production *The Animated Tales of the World* produced by S4C and *The Right Angle* on behalf of *The Children's International Television Foundation.* In the ATW newsletter of July 1999 Chris Grace, formerly of S4C, suggests that the need for cultural diversity in children's television was the driving force for the production of the tales:

> Amongst all of you the concept struck a cord. I sense your concern at the end of this millennium that the World's may be lost to your children and their children. You believe that through the sharing of your talent and an under exploited art form, you can make a contribution to that diversity.

From the interviews with a few individuals involved in the production of the tales (Spain, Republic of Ireland, Namibia, and Germany) I would suggest that cultural diversity is equated as traditional storytelling. Though most of the interviewees did not directly address the question regarding their understanding of 'cultural specificity', they did emphasise the importance of looking into their own country's traditional tales and to retell them. Mostly they believe that it is important to take their country's cultural traditions to different parts of the world, and they see the tales as a stimulus to children's pride in their cultural legacy.

> They can see tales from all over the World. How fantastic is that? They can see how different cultures and countries can be and they will see how close a lot of tales are to each other. They can learn a lot about the different artistic styles, images, colours, etc. They learn something about the history of that country, the nature, the kind of people. (Thomas Shneider-Trump, Clay Art / Scopas Medien AG, Germany, January 2004)

> In Namibia it will instil pride. It affords young Namibians the opportunity to have aspects of their culture seen globally, in a more positive light, generating a little more understanding. This particular story is great because it also tells other kids 'look we feel just like you about many things, we are not so very different'. (Virginia Witts, NBC, Namibia)

This production aims to promote cultural diversity while promoting animation in poorer countries and countries where its production is incipient. The original idea was that the richer partners would subsidise the production in countries with fewer resources. Paradoxically, the concerns with wider audience appeal are still present. In the interviewees' opinion a good story is one that will be appreciated in whatever context

of viewing. This means that there are some 'universal' ingredients that will appeal to children regardless. The generalised idea is that stories for child audiences must have positive messages, focusing on children's own capacities to bring it to a happy ending.

No matter what the local variations in plots, the interviewees all said that their stories had a child as a main protagonist who needs to overcome a number of different obstacles. This, they believe, will make child viewers identify with the story:

> I think the main part of it will make children react in a similar way – a little girl assuming a responsibility; the discovery of magic creatures; these are quite universal and understandable issues. (Laura Tey, January 2004, Tomavistas, Spain)

This is the case in the Norwegian tale, it is the younger sister who never ceases to believe that things will get better and the one who 'saves the day'. A typical character from Norwegian folklore, the Troll, inspired the tale[44]. Its narrative structure is closer to Propp's functions than the previous stories, but it is not quite the same. In the end, for example, Mai's reward is to have her family reunited, whereas heroines' endings in the tales Propp analysed usually involved a wedding.

Mai has a very active role in the story; she unravels the Troll's secrets. She finds the magic dust that reverses the spell cast on her sisters, and she realises what his vulnerable spots are - his fear of thunder and, above all, the effect the sunlight has on him. She is capable of deceiving and defeating him; conquering his trust by pretending to like him. By contrast, the mother has a passive role; her suffering due to illness prevents her from providing for the family. Because of that she has to dispatch her daughters to the woods giving them a valuable warning that they ignore 'Don't go beyond the big tree'.

The villain is a complex character; he punishes Mai's sisters and imprisons them but he does so because he is lonely and wants a 'sweetheart'. His appearance is scary but once Mai pledges her friendship to him he is caring and vulnerable. He gives her new clothes; brings her hen back to life; and takes what he thinks is a bag of food to Mai's sick mother (a bag where her two sisters were hiding). More than dislike, the Troll

[44] The puppet in the film is, itself, inspired by the illustrations of Norwegian troll-illustrator Theodor Kittelsen

inspires pity. While Mai shows her feelings clearly to the audience (by telling her hen she trusts her; by crying and feeling sad about what happened to her sisters); the Troll's main feelings are presented to the viewers indirectly. When he asks the girls to be his sweetheart, for example, one can only guess that what drives an ugly creature living inside the mountain to commit bad actions is loneliness. He is somewhat likable; one reason being the young age of the target audience. One the one hand the tale already has a number of signifiers of the horror – the dark forest; the sounds of night creatures; creepy music. On the other hand, being the only male character, he needs to appeal to the young boys in the audience so that they can relate to it in a non-compromising way (as was the case with the Portuguese boys interviewed).

Due to its plot the tale was problematic in the context of the series' production, particularly in the UK where issues of paedophilia were emerging in public debates. As Chris Grace told me, there were concerns that a tale where a big Troll enslaves a little girl so that he could have a sweetheart would be seen has having connotations with paedophile acts.

Similarly, Aidan Hickey from *Brown Bag Productions* in the Republic of Ireland, said in the interview:

> It was pointed out to me, when the script was selected as 'the Irish story' that I would have to cut all references to religion. Although I'm agnostic, I found this to be 'strange'. For better or worse, Christian beliefs of various kinds were, for many centuries, an essential part of the lives of people of Ireland. So, even though 'Sean Sleammon's dream' is a comic story, it includes many references to saints, churches and ideas about heaven. But these all had to go...

Such concerns are similar to those of market-oriented productions, where obvious cultural references tend to be scraped. In the case of *The Animated Tales of the World* this is limited to elements that are seen as delicate subjects, and which producers consider as potentially offensive to different audiences, not just children. I would argue that these concerns are more problematic because of certain adult agenda, rather than children's. From the interviews it is possible to conclude that there is no informed knowledge of child audiences and whether they would feel offended by some issues; rather, theirs is knowledge about market rules. The following extracts from the

interviewees' answers to the question 'which age groups are the tales targeting?' illustrate the argument:

> It's for the 5 to 7 year-olds. The series itself aims to that audience, so it had to be that – maybe the Welsh producers can tell you why they've made that decision; my guess would be that it's a very sensitive age group for the purposes of the series: telling stories and showing the variety of cultures and lifestyles (Laura Tey, op.cit)

> The age group is up till 11 (maybe a bit older). The story is told about a 11 year old girl (...) the story we made is just right for the target group and reflecting the problems a kid of that age could have. It's about finding her strength and freedom (Thomas Shneider-Trump, op.cit)

> Six/seven to ten/twelve years of age. Well...That's what we believed to be the target for animated shows of this kind (Aidan Hickey, op.cit)

The lack of informed knowledge is noticeable in the reluctance to comment about the importance of cultural specificity on children's programmes and about the ways in which children will interpret signifiers of culture. The confidence on the series' success comes mostly from a commitment to good storytelling, rather than from a confident knowledge of the audience.

> This particular story is great because it also tells other kids 'Look, we feel just like you about many things. We're not so very different' (Virginia Witts, op.cit)

> We did not look too much to the diverse audience since we don't really know anything about them. For us it was important to tell a typical story from the region here. It should give something special, something unique to the other children in all countries. Something they will remember about our history (Thomas Schneider-Trump, op.cit)

> I suppose the obvious ambition for the series is that it will cause children in one part of the world to recognise, in stories from another part, that these are basic truths and emotions in life, and experiences that we all share. However, there is also the possibility that the cultural differences in a tale from some remote place will make the story impenetrable... and so confirm suspicions that 'They are weird!' (Aidan Hickey, op. cit)

'Good storytelling' may indeed be the key to capture the audiences' attention. Looking for inspiration in local storytelling tradition may captivate children if not for its cultural relevance, for a wider appeal that comes from stories focusing on human emotions and

celebrating the power of the self. In the following chapter I suggest that the Portuguese children rather then concentrating on signifiers of cultural specificity, stressed the actions of individual characters and the quality of the animation.

The underlying message of *The Animated Tales of the World* is that television is a universal storyteller, with rules that are globally applicable. Thus the main concern being not so much the audiences' tastes but the quality of the series as a product for television. The main difference from commercial animation is that it does not depend so much on the pressures of being produced by a big profit-seeking corporation. This allows for an emphasis on storytelling traditions; for a variety of styles of animation; and for opportunities, to develop animation in countries with fewer resources.

However, in terms of how the audience is constructed there might not be a great difference. The basic idea is that of similarity within the difference. As television audiences, children are pretty much the same regardless of their living circumstances. Children all over the world will find meaning and enjoy stories with happy endings and positive messages about children.

6.4.2 – Producing animation for a small national market: *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands*

> From the producers to the authors; from the directors to the animators; from the technicians to the administrative secretaries; there is no other way to do it, without the dedication, without the low wages, the love, the sacrifice and the exemplary commitment that all bring to the making of each work. But the fruits can already be seen. Today nobody can say that it is impossible to leave from animation in Portugal. In the north and south of the country people work for the production of movies and animation series, born speaking Portuguese and reflecting our culture and soul, which characterise us as People. (Humberto Santana, in A. Gaio, 2001, p.124)

6.4.2.1 – Animation in Portugal

The history of animation in Portugal is not that of an easy road to success. It is a history made by those who believe in it as an art form; whose passion has lead them through a constant struggle with lack of funding and, in the case of children's animation, a lack of interest from TV broadcasters whose concern with audience ratings and profit clashes with any interest to invest in local productions.

The first reference to Portuguese animation dates back to 1920 when a news report announced that *Nunes & Quintão* had produced the short animated clip that was also the first international publicity movie. The claim was that the company had created the famous dog from *His Master's Voice*, though there is no further record than Nunes' testimony. The first official records date from 1923, linked to the same author, a short movie entitled *O Pesadelo de António Maria*, a satire of a politician of the period.

Nowadays Portuguese 'filmes de autor'[45] are known internationally due to the work of artists like Abi Feijó whose film *Salteadores* (1993), based on a tale from the writer Jorge de Sena about the Spanish Civil War, won fourteen international prizes; José Miguel Peixoto author of *A Suspeita* (1999), which won the *Cartoon d'Or* prize; and Regina Pessoa, director of *A Noite*. As Gaio suggests (op.cit) their work goes further than aesthetic concerns. They look for narrative depth, ranging from political issues, social satire, and personal memories.

Regarding animation produced for television's young audiences, it is only in 1975 (almost twenty years after television broadcasting started in the country) that RTP commissions a series based on Portuguese folk tales produced by TOPEFILME. Originally the series was to have thirteen episodes, one representing each of the Portuguese provinces, but they only received money to produce four. In the same year *A Lenda do Mar Tenebroso* was the first Portuguese animation to be part of an European series *La Favolistica Europea.*

In 1979 the production of *Ouriços*[46] starts; eight episodes of seven minutes produced at a rate of one per year. The programme had environmental concerns. With no dialogue, it was commercialised to twelve different countries (including Japan and the UK). It was also sold to the PALOP[47] when they started television broadcastings in the 90s, expanding the Portuguese language market to over 200.000.000 people (Ponte, 1998). The series is still the most successful Portuguese animation in terms of commercialisation, a result of the absence of spoken language. Another production, *O*

[45] author movies
[46] Hedgehogs
[47] African countries where Portuguese is the official language

Romance da Raposa, based on the literary work of the Portuguese author Aquilino Ribeiro, had limited reception abroad mainly because it did not have a separate soundtrack making it impossible the dubbing into a different language impossible.

In the early 90s with EU funds for the development of animation, the Portuguese institute of cinema (IPC) increased its investment in local production. More than one hundred short-films were commissioned for the Portuguese version of *Sesame Street*[48] , and for *Jardim da Celeste*[49], both pre-school shows. In 1991 the IPC commissions *The Quest to the Enchanted Islands*[50]. Investment, however, decreased in later years. Humberto Santana, from 'Animanostra', responsible both for the latter and *O Romance da Raposa*, commented:

> With the Enchanted Islands we were full of illusions that things would change quickly, but it didn't happen. When we finished the project and the series went on air, it coincided with the appearance of the private channels and this destabilised the investment market. What happened was a lack of interest from the broadcasters that, as we know, look for products for big audiences. (Interview in November 2002)

By the end of the 90s RTP commissioned another series from 'Animanostra', *Os Patinhos*, originally a short-film integrated in *Jardim da Celeste*, inspired by a traditional children's song. It became an animated song to be shown at bedtime and it was a huge broadcasting and merchandising success that, nevertheless, was cancelled by a new board of directors.

> It is to me a profound mystery. I don't understand how a channel with an investment of about £3000 which got more than 100% return... I don't know... The fact is that we were given the information by the new board that the broadcasting of the film broke the programme grid, that is, people, adults, would change channel when Patinho was on. I don't believe it, honestly I think it was a lack of sensibility towards a phenomenon. (ibid)

6.4.2.2 – Local production on public channels

Nowadays, each public channel broadcasts daily around four hours of animation. *Anime* series; Disney productions; *CBBC* shows; and *Nickelodeon*'s dominate the national

[48] *A Rua Sésamo*
[49] Celeste's Garden
[50] A Maravilhosa Expedição às Ilhas Encantadas

scene, but there are no signs of Portuguese animation. It is possible to see a trend of investment – on the rare occasions – in the local production of series with cultural and educational relevance while at the same time, there appears to be no particular criteria or similar concerns as to the choice of the foreign series broadcasted.

Since RTP's first broadcasting in the 50s foreign products have dominated the spaces for children's animation. American series like Hanna & Barbera's *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *Top Cat*, and Warner Bros' *Bugs Bunny* were the first to be shown. The majority of children's programmes, however, were local studio productions of theatre plays, puppet shows, circus, music shows, and story-telling spaces. As Ponte (op.cit) suggests until the late 60s the 'birthday party' atmosphere prevailed. In this period national animation was called 'desenhos movimentados' (moving drawings), as motion was the result of drawings being moved by a collaborator's hand against a background, while the camera recorded the images.

In an interview with Ponte, Melo Frazão who started working for RTP's children's programmes in 1959, remembers:

> ...we weren't conscious that there was a need for constructing TV for children; there was this idea that television for children was about taking to the screen the children's party environment: we would get a film, a couple of clowns, some accordion moments. Along this line children's programmes were seen as minor projects (Ponte, op.cit, p.50)

From 1969 to 1974 the pedagogic discourse ruled and teachers were called to recreate the playschool classroom, dividing the space into 'interest' centres. As one of the directors admits, 'it was highly pedagogic but also very boring, the language and the classroom environment cannot be taken directly to a medium like TV' (ibid).

Three decades have passed and the panorama has not changed dramatically. Broadcasters are still reluctant to invest, and the care put into choosing the programmes does not seem to be that different. In fact, one of the commercial public channels, TVI, has *Batatoon* as its main space on children's schedules, this is a programme presented by a clown and inspired by real circus. If any change has been noticed is the decrease in interest in national production. Not only in relation to animation but also to other studio

productions, which despite being praised for their quality when first broadcasted - series like *Jardim da Celeste*; *Rua Sésamo*, and the news bulletin *Caderno Diário*- have, at the time of writing, been cancelled.

6.4.2.3 – *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands*

In 1991 'Animanostra' started a project inspired by the Portuguese historical period known as 'Descobrimentos', namely on the legend of the islands of São Brandão, the enchanted islands. During D. João II's reign the myth is discredited but a small influential group in the court insists that an effort should be made to find the blessed islands. The king endorses a small maritime expedition. However, plans for more lucrative journeys are underway (like Vasco da Gama's trip to India by sea); few means are available for the expedition to the islands, the crew is made of the least esteemed individuals in the court and the caravel is one of the worse to leave the Royal shipyard.

The narrative is based on this quest since its departure from Lisbon, passing the many 'new lands', until the crew's arrival at the Enchanted Islands. In the episode analysed the crew arrives to Australia and meets an aboriginal who makes them regain confidence in their journey by using magic. He shows them a vision of a pink dragon and of the islands. The general syntagmatic structure is as follows: Journey → arrival at new land → help from locals → departure. In this particular episode the structure is similar: Journey → arrival at a new land → found by aborigine → confirmation of the existence of the enchanted islands.

The journey takes place on board of a Caravela[51] and in locations where the crew arrives. There are ten characters aboard the ship: Captain Crispim Boavida, known as 'calminhas' (evoking his relaxed personality); Mestre Damião, the educated scientist; Libório and Oliveirinha who, along with Simão, a young boy, are the sailors; D. Fuas Fradinho, the friar; an orange cat, and Alfacinha, a crow-like bird; and two anthropomorphic mice, Micas, the female, and Gaspar, the male.

[51] a small light sailing ship used by the Portuguese and the Spanish during the 15th and 16th century



Picture 6: Main cast

Round shapes prevail in the drawing of the characters. Their outfits are simple but inspired by period costumes.

The references to Portuguese culture abound: The music in the opening credits has influences from Portuguese folk. There are several references to Portuguese cuisine, particularly by D. Fuas, the friar who represents the catholic church's importance at that period and the christianisation missions, a reference to the important place Catholicism occupies in Portuguese history and society - in the 'Descobrimentos' in particular the presence of religious man reassured the sacred character of the journeys. Also, convents have contributed considerably to the country's gastronomic tradition, and D. Fuas can be related to a character from a Portuguese folktale *O Caldo de Pedra*[52], about a friar always struggling between the sacred and the mundane pleasures of food:

[52] The soup with stone

Simão: Mestre, do you still believe we'll ever find the enchanted islands?
Mestre: Simão, we cannot loose hope. In any case think of all the lands you've already seen. They weren't the islands but they almost seemed enchanted.
D. Fua: Oh, my sons, now I would be satisfied by an enchanted ham...

Mestre: Will we find anyone? These lands don't' seem inhabited.
D. Fua: Relax. Soon Crispim and the others will be back with a bunch of people. Meantime ... We could catch one of those fishes[53]...
Mestre: Catch one of those monsters, D. Fua?
D. Fua: Yes, yes! I don't know why but I have a feeling that they must go very well with 'molho de cebolada'[54].

D. Fua and Libório have similar accents, with connotations of both religiousness and geographic origins. Their accent is usually linked to that of priests or of people from the mid-country. Language is an important aspect that reinforces the cultural specificity of the series. Besides the use of different and identifiable accents, there are terms from Portuguese folk mythology like 'Belzebu' and 'Santanás' both references to the Devil[55].

D. Fua: Oxalá (I hope) we can find a guesthouse where we can eat a 'cozidinho'[56]. A weakness is taking over me... Ah!! It was 'Belzebu'! I saw the teeth of 'Santanás'![57]

The characters are iconic representations of what the adventurous crews from that period might have been like. Oliveirinha is a 'fadista', a Fado[58] singer. Fado is a traditional form of Portuguese song; one theory relates its appearance precisely to the Portuguese crews who would sing to the sound of a guitar remembering their home and family. The cat evokes *O Velho do Restelo* (the old man from Restelo) - a character from the XVI century epopee *Os Lusíadas* written by Luís de Camões[59] - a reactionary preaching doom when the ships departed from Lisbon.

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[53] Sharks which the crew hasn't seen before
[54] Cebolada, a sauce based on onions
[55] See, for example, the work of Consiglieri Pedroso for interpretations of the devil in Portuguese folklore
[56] Reference to 'Cozido à Portuguesa' a traditional dish
[57] D. Fua's reaction at the first sight of sharks
[58] http://www.fe.up.pt/~fado/por/index-port.html
[59] a poem telling the story of Vasco da Gama's journey to India, the Portuguese equivalent of the Greek *Odyssey*

> Cat: It's awful... Another land of savages! These fools are lost and don't know the way back to Lisbon. Oh sadness...

Libório is a sailor with 'olho para o negócio' (an eye for the business), an image that prevails of the smart person with a great instinct for business. The captain, Crispim Boavida also known as 'Calminhas' , from the expression 'levar tudo nas calmas' (take things easily), representing the calm, patient person who never worries too much in the face of adversity .

The episode's narrative can be divided in two. The main narrative about discovering a new land and getting reassured that the enchanted islands exist; and a domestic drama played by the mice couple who have decided to join the trip in search of a new life. In this episode, the couple argues about their uncertain future as Micas reveals her pregnancy to Gaspar.

The story's mythological value is given in four different ways. Firstly, the story conveys the idea that one should believe and pursue his or her dreams because through effort dreams will come true; in this respect it is similar to all the other programmes. The main difference, however, is that it does not tell a story from a child's perspective. This is a quest of the whole crew, mainly adult male characters.

The second point is the emphasis on teamwork and friendship. There is not a hero with outstanding powers or special gifts; the story is centred on a group of characters with distinct personalities that complement each other, and well-defined hierarchic roles in which guidance, not control, prevails. A third issue is the respect and trust for different cultures, different references and types of knowledge. Finally, the mice stress the importance of family; this second narrative compensates for the lack of information on the private life of the crew (I did not find references to the lives the sailors left behind in any of the sampled episodes).

The parallel narrative allows for a wider audience appeal, introducing a female character and an element of romance. Looking at the pilot study's interviews it is possible to predict that the girls will be captured by the romance and family life, while also being pleased by the absence of violence and fights, and some elements of magic

and fantasy - though the girls in the pilot specifically referred to tales of knights and princesses - offered by the aborigine.

The boys will possibly be displeased by the lack of fights, the absence of 'special effects' and the short length of the episode, while appreciating gags like the comic moments offered by facing the unknown sharks and, on land, the kangaroos. The next chapter will deal with these issues and discuss in what ways the film appealed or not to the children. Still, in retrospect, Tiago Soeiro a Portuguese journalist who was a twelve-year old boy when the programme was broadcasted in Portugal, recalls how he enjoyed it and how he never missed an episode because it was so captivating:

> What captivated me the most were the settings, the drawings, the colours, the voices, and the characters' versatility. I was very pleased by all these elements and, due to that, I never missed an episode; for the first time I managed to follow an animation series until the end (...). A peculiar aspect was the sea, it's shine, colour and contrast gave the series an absolutely realist composition. (Tiago Soeiro, interview with the author, May 2004)

Asked about what he thought were the elements that appealed the most to children in terms of style and narrative, Humberto Santana said he personally preferred simplicity both in relation to the drawings and the characters' psychological traits. To him children's animation needs to captivate the audience by leading the audience to identify with the characters and settings, which should be friendly and of immediate perception, particularly with films aimed at young children.

> Personally I like simplicity, not to create complex situations and complex characters. The characters need almost to be like a mirror for the little ones so that they can identify with the dummy. The graphics' simplicity is essential, though today we can see that in international productions the graphics have changed substantially; there are many more bets on aggressive animation even for the very young children. However, I think that what achieves greater success is the character... The dummies being round, in the case of younger audiences, afterwards things change a bit. (Humberto Santana, interview with the author, November 2002)

To the concerns with simplicity Humberto Santana adds concerns about basic cultural patterns with which children can identify, something that he cannot find in the Portuguese broadcasting market, dominated by foreign animation. He believes that cultural relevance is the reason why, even today, people remember the *Quest*. Some of

the people working for *Anima Nostra* were children when the series was first shown on TV; they cherished it precisely because it had to do with Portugal and Portuguese things. Nevertheless, he worries about market appeal stating that, though 'Animanostra' has concerns with cultural relevance, they also try to be moderate so that the products are internationally viable.

6.5 – The programmes' semiotics

The analysis of the five minute episode of *The Quest* confirms its author's concerns with simplicity. Medium shots and level angles signalling the conventional gaze create a visual simplicity that will be favourable to young children less familiar with cinematic conventions. The semiotic analysis showed that the long shots of the setting provide a sense of slow pace characteristic of long sea journeys, but are uncharacteristic of children's programmes where fast editing tends to be the norm as a way of imprinting dynamism. Close-ups – usually a connotation of intimacy and involvement - are used in the scenes featuring the mice, confirming the idea that these anthropomorphic characters serve to convey feelings and might have been introduced to appeal to the female audience.

Stylistically *Pokemon* is more complex. From the all the cartoons this was the only that presented a diachronic and diatopic syntagm – when Ash's mother recalls the moment when she found Brock, abandoned, lying on the floor; the viewers are transported to the past and to a different location. The episode analysed is approximately fifteen minutes long in which there is a diversity of camera shots, angles, and editing. In terms of camera angles the most common is the level angle, the straight-up position in which the viewer is given a direct view of the subjects on screen; the high-angle was mainly used to give a panoramic view of the subjects; while the low-angle was a signifier of power or, indeed, powerlessness (e.g. when Gary makes his first appearence; when Tracy nervously waits Prof. Oak's comments on his work; when Ash and Misty witness their *Pokemon*, Muck, succumbing to the enemy's attack). The cut was the editing technique most frequently used, though there was also use of the fade, dissolve, wipe, and split-frame; the latter used mainly to stress tension (like Gary and Ash's confrontation). Variations of the close-up shot (MCU and XCU) help the audience to identify with a character's feelings (each time, for example, someone would mention the name of Brock's lost love a CU was used to emphasise his pain), and often heighten the

dramatic tension of a scene, and direct the audience to particular aspects (the details of Ash's trophy, for instance). Variations of the long shot were more frequently used in action scenes; along with low-angles, they gave a perspective of the 'battle field' and helped build up the intensity of the scene. Transformation was another device used; backgrounds would suddenly change either to heighten comic and dramatic moments, or to imprint motion to the static drawings (during Brock's tantrums the background would disappear replaced by dark lines; when Ash's mum fantasises about using his trophy as an exercise weight the living-room's background becomes orange with colourful circles; during the battles colourful movement lines give the impression of speed while, in reality, the characters stood still).

In *SailorMoon*, also a fifteen minute episode, transformation was used for similar purposes; for comedy (as in the scene where Bunny becomes jealous of Sara's friendship with the tennis player, her eyes transform into two spirals, and her mouth's size increases); action (to simulate the speed of the tennis-ball, for example); and drama. In the latter situation, transformation was used to create much darker environments and high-intensity scenes evoking the thriller genre (foggy, dark woods emerge from an uncharacteristic street during day-time; Nefrite in a haunted-mansion like house receives some kind of magic strength in a dark room with stained windows, like a church's, where a dark blue background gradually changes into black with hints of pink and yellow; while the character is hit by a light-beam that turn his eyes red).

Overall, the series' style is similar to *Pokemon*'s (if somehow more elaborate, with frequent use of complex shots and more camera movement); though it is likely to be targeting an older audience. This is a 'darker' cartoon, where violence is directed towards the main characters and not imaginary creatures; the scenes of suspense and action are in obvious contrast with the colourful and feminine daily-life world of the main characters – highlighted by the use of soft colours; CU shots of details like the finger-nails' polish, the jewellery, and the hair-styles.

The intensity of *The Three Sisters who Fell into the* Mountain's narrative and its gloomy settings (dark forest; dark underground cave; cold night), and scary Troll are lightened up by a frequent use of long-shots that help the viewer to have a better understanding of the scenes and, in a way, to be placed 'outside' the events. This is

reinforced by high-angles which not only provide a panoramic view of the scenes, but also make the characters smaller and more 'under control' in the eyes of the viewer (the scenes when the sisters fall into the mountain, for instance, are achieved by using LS and VLS, and the few occasions where low angles of the Troll are used they are combined with MS). There are not many CUs and they are mostly employed to show details rather than heighten emotions.

In this tale the transformations are integrated in the narrative and are not devices to speed the action or stress characters' reactions. They result from immediate actions (the girls being turned into stone by a movement of the Troll's hand; the girls and hen coming back to life by a sprinkle of magic star-dust; the sun light turning the Troll into a mountain). As such these transformations are likely to be more easily understood by the child audience (even because some are actually explained through words) than those characteristic of *Anime*. The extent to which they may influence children's understanding of the story was, however, not tackled in this project and may be worthy of further research in the future. What it, nevertheless, indicates is the creatives' concern to employ techniques that facilitate children's understanding of the story, and soften its dramatic charge and intensity, which are already emphasised by suspense background music, and sounds of night animals (owl, wolf), prevailing over lighter and happier music. In *Anime* music is a constant element, an integral part of the narrative, reinforcing oppositions between good and evil, happy and sad, relaxed and thrilling moments; while sound effects stress object and body motion, and emotional responses. *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands* makes less use of background music; sound effects are mainly signifiers of nature (sea, wind, birds, motion of boat in the water).

Conclusion

The first part of my research question referred to the production process: how is cultural specificity perceived and equated during the production of children's animation, and how is it conveyed through it? Due the lack of theoretical background on the meanings of cultural specificity within the sphere of production of children's animation, the hypotheses were not direct answers to the research question. They served as indicators and result from existing literature in the field of childhood studies; those were a) Cartoons for local markets reflect a greater concern with cultural

relevance; b) Creatives' constructions of childhood will reflect different social interpretations of children's roles in society.

In relation to issues of cultural specificity in productions aiming the local market, I would argue that it is a hypothesis that can be confirmed but to a limited extent. Small production houses like the Portuguese *Animanostra* struggle to survive in the national market. The way they find to captivate the national broadcasters interest and justify the value of their existence is making a strong bet on cultural relevant products like *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands*. However, the interest they generate is limited and the aspiration to appeal to the international market is always present. There is an inherent contradiction in this process; market dependence leads to a conscious effort to produce culturally relevant films, but only to an extent that will not hinder sale opportunities abroad. A similar concern is present in *The Animated Tales of the World*, where the emphasis on local production and local storytelling traditions walks hand-in-hand with a greater concern, that of avoiding any issue that might result in controversy in different cultural contexts. I would suggest that the cultural specificity of television animation is always conditioned by a consideration of the prospective buyers, and a familiarity by the economics of broadcasting, rather than by an informed knowledge of the audience.

As to the second work hypothesis, similarity rather than difference characterises the way in which animation professionals construct the child audiences. In the analysed programmes there is a move from the classic 'American Super-Hero tale', where adult super-human beings save the day, to a standard belief on the empowerment of children. A common idea is that children are alike in their preference for stories about brave, common, young people, whose inner strength makes them heroes and heroines. This is possibly a result of a shift, in western societies, in the ways in which childhood is constructed. DeMause (op.cit) identifies this as the 'helping mode' whereby, from the mid XX century, there is a tendency to consider children better informed than parents and educators to assess their own needs. It is then likely that more portrayals of independent and opinionated children will appear on television, even if mostly on children's schedules.

Is there than an impossibility of cultural specificity in a context of a global market? From the results of this research, cultural specificity emerges at two different levels: at

the level of narrative - equated as traditional storytelling and historical relevance; and at an artistic level - such as the stylistic uniqueness of Japanese *Anime*, and the semiotic signifiers of culture like the signs of 'Portugueseness' in *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands*. In a context of globalisation it is possible for any cartoon to have a certain degree of specificity. This is made possible by processes of 'glocalisation'. Language adaptations allow foreign products to be adapted to the social and cultural contexts of viewing.

Globalisation is not the only limitation to cultural specificity; its ambiguity as a concept can be limiting. Though it is seen as a good thing in children programming, creatives do not necessarily have a clear idea of what cultural specificity means. It inevitably appears linked with some form of folklore, of past traditions. In reality it is much broader than that, having to do as much with the past as with the present. People in a geographic and political context are not isolated, in a global context their cultural identities are evolutionary. Cultural specificity is about a country's cultural heritage,but also about the daily-lives of its people. Simple things like what one has for breakfast; how birthdays are celebrated; the clothes worn; the nation's favourite TV shows, among many others, are all elements that built-up this 'specificity',

It seems to me that it does not suffice to look into the history books, or into local folklore, produce a programme and say 'Here, this is a culturally specific show, it will make our children proud of their country and know about others'!'; while not even knowing what children will recognise as theirs. In the 4th World Summit for Children and Media, a representative from Multirio Brazil, Humberto Avelar, presented a project on an animated series inspired by Brazilian folklore, which gathers education professionals, producers, but also children in the process of creating the stories. For him, the idea of quality media involves an approximation to the child audience, helping them to understand how television and animation is done, making them 'better spectators'. They asked children aged four to eleven years old to talk about the story and its characters, idealising them through debate and through their drawings. Talking about the first story Solange Jobim[60] explains

[60] http://www.multirio.rj.gov.br/multirio/noticias/noticia.asp?var_rs_id_noticia=3354

> We worked with diversity on different aspects: adults and children and, among children, different age groups, always looking for the exchange with the other, understanding that everyone, from his or her position, has something extraordinary to say.

The children retold the story, drew the characters and accompanied the production of the cartoon. The importance of their participation was such that, as Patricia Alves Dias (ibid), Director of Animation recalls:

> It was the children's decision to give the story a message of love for the nature (...) *O Curupira* is about the environment, about how human beings relate with other living beings and it shows how children would like it to be.(...)
>
> It was the children who came up with the idea of not killing the hunter but, instead, transform it into a wild-pig the same that, in the tale, the hero usually rides in the wilderness. The facial expressions of the hunter's helper were not only inspired by the character *Macunaíma* played in the cinema by the actor Grande Otelo, as well as one of the students in the team (...)

Another example of how programmes can be made relevant for children was presented to the Summit by *The Sesame Street Workshop*; in the South Africa's version of *Sesame Street*. They introduced Kami, a puppet representing a HIV-positive little girl that was created to approach young children and tackle the problem affecting so many families. In the Egyptian version, *Alam Simsim*, one of the main concerns is the education of young girls, given that only half of them get the opportunity to learn how to read and write.

The *Pyalara* project from Palestine also recognised the importance and role of media, particularly in conflict zones, both to educate and entertainment. The project brought together young people and NGOs to produce a television programme dealing with the problems, fears, and expectations of children. Similarly, the project *Golden Kids Club*, from TV2 Malaysia, presents the world as seen by young people. In the Summit they showed one of the most impressive clips, directed and presented by adolescents it was a documentary about the lives of Iraqi children. They showed that young people have the capacity to understand the deprived situation in which Iraqis live, but also that they do not always want to be sheltered from events. On the contrary they consider that it is necessary that young people be given the opportunity to discuss serious issues affecting their lives in order to raise public awareness and actions. One of the pieces they

presented showed a female teenager reporting from inside a building that used to be a shelter. It had been destroyed during a bomb raid; sadly a group of schoolchildren had gathered there for protection. Struggling to control her emotions, the reporter showed and explained how the explosion was so strong and the heat so intense that on the walls and sealing marks of small hands were engraved on the concrete.

I am not suggesting that children's animation should deal with such serious subjects. It is a different genre and, in my view, one that is primarily aimed at entertaining. The argument is that, if cultural specificity is to be a fundamental issue in the production of cartoons, then a diversity of angles must be considered. Whether inspired by a country's storytelling tradition, or by children's everyday lives, cultural specificity needs to be understood from the children's point of view. The following chapter attempts to approach animation from the children's point of view, addressing questions of taste, quality, perceptions of cultural specificity, and children's performed identities when talking about cartoons.

CHAPTER VII – Children's views

It makes me happy (Margarida)
Run a lot and always fall (Bernardo)
They're funny (Gonçalo)
It makes me joyful (Rita)
They help me to wake up (Ema)
They're amusing (Miguel)
They have sad stories (Daniel)
I like it a lot (Helder)
They're pretty (Abilio)
Through pies to the faces (Tiago)
Distract me for time to pass (André)
They are neat and children like them (Diogo)
Make you laugh (Filipe)
They help time to pass (Ana Sérgio)
They do wicked things (Marta)
Put me in a good mood (João Carlos)
I like it a lot (Ana Catarina)
They're witty (Tatiana)[61]

7.1) Pilot Study

7.1.1) The clips

As referred in the methodology chapter, the children were shown eight clips to comment upon. At the top of the children's list of preferences was *Pokemon.* The were other anime series, *SailorMoon*, and a clip from *Digimon.* The latter is about a group of children who control digital monsters that meet in battles [62]. In the series' first episode Tai and his friends are on a summer camp when, suddenly, strange climate changes occur and it starts snowing. The friends realise something is wrong and in the confusion they find seven *Digivices*, small devices that will transport them to a different dimension, a new world, the *Digiworld.* On arrival they meet their new companions, the *Digimon* that have the power to *digivolve* and become great champions. Their goal is to fight the monsters corrupted by evil forces that want to bring eternal chaos to the *Digiworld.* The human characters have strong and different personalities, and work as a

[61] Comments from the first grade children completing the sentence 'I like cartoons because…' written by them on a poster that they gave the researcher on the last day. Here presented as a translation from the Portuguese

[62] The series and characters' description was based on the information on the following websites www.foxkids.com/tv_shows/digimon, http//zsys.xk5.org/digimon , www.uol.com.br/abriljovem/digimon

team. Tai, for example, is an eleven-year-old boy that attends elementary school, his special gift – arm - is courage and his first *Digimon* is Koromon. He is the group's leader and he is the most adventurous member always ready for action. Because of his aggressiveness he sometimes puts his friends in danger but he slowly realises that in order to become a leader he has to gain his friends' trust. Mimi, on the other hand, is an absent-minded person and sometimes too self-absorbed. She loves all that is 'chic' and so always complains about the *Digiworld.* Nevertheless, she is a tender and tranquil person. Her *Digimon* is Tanemon and her arms sincerity.

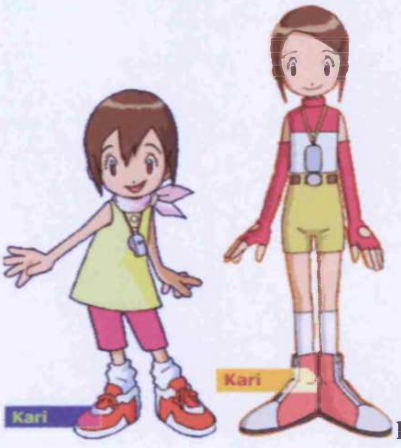


Picture 7: Digimon characters

Picture 8: *Digivolution*



At the time *Digimon* was in its second series, Almost like a family saga the initial characters have given place to new ones but the idea is that of continuity. The first children to go to the *Digiworld* are now teenagers and they went back to Earth, to be replaced by younger children, but sometimes still appear to help the younger ones in their task. Such is the case with Kari who was eight-years old in the first series and in the second appears as an eleven-year-old.



Picture 9: Kari aged 8 and Kari aged 11

Five other cartoons were mentioned by children, but to a lesser extent. Two of which are *Pink Panther* and *Tom & Jerry*, both based on a 'run and chase' model, spiced up with sequences of gags with little or no dialogue. The first consists on *Pink Panther's* pranks on its eternal enemy, Inspector Clouseau; the second is about:

> [a] cat, large, grey and devilish, a Machiavellian glint yellow-irised eyes, and a mouse, small, brown, cherubic yet cheeky, chasing each other around the kitchen, demolishing the ice-box, ironing board, plate rail, a whole sink full of dishes and littering the floor with egg shells, dripping yolks and oozing jam.(...) Tom is a fiendish opportunist, always anxious to ingratiate himself with the powers that be, whether housekeeper, dog, or even, on occasion, a mouse; while Jerry, the impish schemer, is happy minding his own business until cornered, piqued or generally provoked[63].

[63] www.tomandjerryonline.com

The other three cartoons the children said they liked were, once more, Japanese animation: *Doraemon; Atari; and Cinderella.*

Nobita is the main character in *Doraemon*, he is a naughty boy, very lazy, who often gets low marks, sometimes zeros, in his school work. *Doraemon* is a robotic cat sent back from the XXII century to help *Nobita* escape poverty in adult life. Everything *Nobita* needs *Doraemon* gets from his magic pocket[64]



Picture 10: *Doraemon* (Doraemon is in front and Nobita is the second child from the right)

Atari, as a third grade girl described, *'It's a Ninja and he has powers, he transforms into things and there's also a smaller Ninja. They have a dog.'*

Finally, Cinderella is an adaptation from the original tale of the Grimm brothers. In this version Cinderella is faced with different problems every episode, which she solves with the help of her friends: a lady who, unknown to the girl is her good fairy; a dog and a mouse sent by the fairy to be Cinderella's companions; and Prince Charles who hides his real identity and appears in Cinderella's life as an ordinary village boy.



Picture 11: Cinderella



Picture 12: Stepmother

7.1.2) Ingredients for a 'successful recipe'

Valkenburg and Janssen's (op. cit) list of characteristics most valued by children in television programmes include humour; violence; suspense; mystery; action; romance; credibility – realism; identification-role models; comprehensibility; instructivness; and innocuoussness. According to their content analysis these were the most frequent categories, but they did not equally please children. For instance, only girls mentioned

[64] http//members.tripod.com/~bebeto_07/nobita.html

characteristics like innocuousness and romance, whereas male children mainly mentioned others such as violence.

How did the children in the Portuguese pilot-study feel in relation to the animation genre? What did they value? The categories created from the children's comments were: **humour** (mainly from gags and characters' trickiness); fights (this was not necessarily linked to '**violence**' in the sense of deadly combats or bloody scenes but, I believe, to specific forms of action such as the ones in *Pokemon* where technology and special powers are used in action between 'non-human like' characters); the importance of the **characters' gender** (which, as we will see, varies with the gender of the children themselves); the **technique of animation** (cell-animated cartoons were preferred to puppet animation); the **quality of narrative** (this was defined by sub-categories such as the diversity and the introduction of new characters in the series in a coherent and simple way); the **characters' personality** (this was mainly defined in a negative way, that is, childish and hysterical behaviour were criticised); the **characters' physical appearance** (varying between the preference for animal-like to human-like cartoons); **merchandising** (that is, the possibility of having toys and games inspired by the series); **romance** (love-stories between the main characters); **fantasy** (which varied between the technological devices and the main characters, and the fairy-tale type of magic); **domesticity** (preference for domestic environments and family life stories). Instructiveness was not seen as a relevant feature for a good cartoon but some children did mention the educational function of cartoons, in particular the clip from *Rotten Ralph*.

7.1.3) Age and gender differences

Distinctions between boys and girls were evident from the children's discourse as were, although to a lesser extent, age differences. However, some cautions must be taken, as what the children said they disliked was not an impediment to the actual viewing and knowledge of a cartoon. The fact, for example, that some of the girls have said not to like fights does not necessarily mean that they would not watch cartoons where they are central to the action.

The first graders [65] were very enthusiastic to talk about cartoons. I got the sense that I could stay the whole morning debating the subject without them being bored. They were the ones with whom rapport was better established. We were all sitting on the floor in a corner full of toys and, at a point, one of the girls sat on my lap holding my neck. They were also the most inquisitive about the reasons why I had chosen these clips and not others, which they obviously preferred, an indication that their tastes were well defined. One of the boys was particularly interested in knowing why the clips were from old episodes, especially *Digimon* his favourite but he could not see it due to its schedule time on television.

> B1: Why didn't you videotape all the Digimon?
> I: because we didn't have time to see everything. This was just for me to see what you would think about it.
> B1: That one (the Digimon on the clip) is the strongest of them all.
> I: It's the strongest? So, you've seen that episode?
> B2: yes, but now it shows in the afternoon quite late.
> [After a while and some conversation about SailorMoon, B2 comes back to the subject]
> B2: That was shown a long time ago. You could have videotaped today's episode.
> B3: She couldn't have guessed what today's episode was.
> B2: You could leave it for tomorrow.
> B3: But tomorrow / B2: You should leave it for the afternoon!

On this occasion girls and boys were interviewed together because, initially, only boys had arrived at the centre, later when the two girls arrived they joined the group. The girls did not have the opportunity to view the clips but that, and their numeric inferiority, did not prevent them from actively talking about their preferences.

The children tendency was to lead the interview away from clips to the debate of other programmes more appealing to them. Both boys and girls in the first grade group, though they said to have liked all the pre-selected clips, preferred to talk about their own favourites. One of the girls saw in my answer to one of the boy's question about the purpose of my work the opportunity to express her views. Not waiting to be asked she immediately said she liked Cinderella. Realising that the boys were overcoming her speech she adopted a strategy to be listened to, as soon as a cartoon was mentioned she would shout her opinion.

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[65] On the quotation I will not use the children's name, instead I will use B1 / G2. These will only refer to the order in which each child came into speech, and will not refer to the same child in different quotations.

I: From the cartoons we saw, which did you prefer?
Boys: Digimon!
B1: There were no Digimon...
B2: There were, there were!
B1: When?
I: Well, after the SailorMoon, you know the one with the girls with longhair / G1: Oh! I like that. Me I like SailorMoon.

Boys and girls stated different preferences. The first were consensual, their favourites were *Pokemon*, *Digimon*, and *Dragon Ball*, while the girls preferred *Cinderella*, *Nobita*, and were not consensual about *SailorMoon*. For the boys humour (expressed by the character's trickiness such as *Rotten Ralph*'s); quality of the narrative (expressed by the diversity of the characters), and merchandising were the elements that contributed to a successful cartoon.

I: And why do you prefer them (Pokemon)?
B1: Because they are neater.
I: They are neater? And what do you like, the characters, the story?
B2: The story.
I: Why?
B2: Because it has the Pokemon.
B1: And there are the toys. I have...
I: Both Digimon and Pokemon have toys to play with isn't it?
B1: So, you prefer cartoons that have toys to play with, right?
All: Yes.

As for the girls they revealed their preferences for cartoons where girls feature as main characters, and where domestic environments and daily-life 'drama' were central. They referred to household chores, going to school and the interaction with the peer group. The following extract illustrates the gendered, and constructed nature, of tastes:

I: You said you liked Cinderella, how is it?
G1: Erm...
I: It's a girl that, that... Her stepmother makes her clean the house, wash clothes...
(Background noise)
I: Do you prefer cartoons with girls?
G1: Yes. I like Cinderella and I also like SailorMoon.
(silence)
G1: Boys prefer those with fights.
G2: Fights and animals. I don't.
I: What do you like about SailorMoon? Tell me what's it about.
B1: I know! It's these girls fighting against... against the bad guys.
(children talk at the same time, some commotion)

I: You don't like it?
B1: I like!
I: Do you think there are some cartoons more suitable for girls and others for girls?
B2: For boys, for example, Pokemon, Digimon. The girls they like those... Those with women.
B3: Like SailorMoon.
B1: I like SailorMoon!
B2: Who likes it?
B1: I do!
G1: I like them too.
I: They also fight.
G1: They fight but / it's only with magical powers.

In relation to the second year groups, again the girls referred to fights as the unwanted element and boys the presence of female lead characters. The girl's favourites were *Pink Panther*; *Tom & Jerry*; and they also said they liked *Pokemon* and *Doraemon.* Humour, gags in particular, is the most significant feature of their favourites.

I: Your favourite cartoons?
G1: Pink Panther! I have a Pink Panther videotape and an activities' book.
I: Why Pink Panther? Because of all the silly things she does?
G1 & G2: yes!
G2: You haven't shown Tom & Jerry.
I: Do you also like T & J? It's similar isn't it? They're always chasing each other.
G2: Why haven't you shown it?

The girls' attitude towards fights in cartoons are complex, they are not simply a result from the inclusion or non-inclusion of certain elements:

I: From those clips we've seen, which did you prefer?
G1: Digimon and Pink Panther.
G2: Pink Panther.
G3: Pink Panther.
(Background noise)
I: Do you usually see SailorMoon?
G1: We see.
(laughs)
G2: I don't like it.
I: Why?
G2: Because I don't like things with fights.
I: You don't like fights? But you were telling me you like Digimon.
G2: But...
G1: Because it's fun.
I: What do SailorMoon do?
G1 & G2: Fight.

I: What about Digimon? How is the story?
G2: There are some good and some bad.
I: And then?
G2: Then there are several adventures.
I: What are the Digimon?
G2: Characters... They look like animals.
I: They look like animals? And what do they do?
G1: Fight.
G2: Fight the bad ones.

The boys' said to like *Pokemon* and *Digimon* and to dislike *Rotten Ralph, SailorMoon*, and *The adventures of Santa Claus*. *SailorMoon* because it had many female characters, was identified as a girl's cartoon, while *Rotten Ralph* was seen as a boring cartoon 'for babies'. Again, there are some discrepancies. In regard to *Rotten Ralph*, for example, the boys' first reaction was to say they had liked the clip, only afterwards did they elaborate on the cartoon in general.

I: What did you think of Rotten Ralph? Did you like it?
All: Yes.
I: Have you seen it before?
B1: I had.
I: have you seen it many times?
B2: Yes.
I: Do you usually see it or you don't pay too much attention to it?
B3: I don't pay too much attention.
Others: Nor do I.
I: No? Why is that?
(Silence)
I: It's not fun?
B1: No, it's not fun.
I: No? Do you think it's for children of your age or, perhaps, younger?
B2: Younger.
B3: Younger.
(Silence)
Teacher: For what ages?
B1: My brother, he's 5.
T: And he understands it?
B1: No.
B2: It's for babies.
(Background noise)
I: Which clips did you like the least?
B1: The one with the cat.
B2: Me, the one with the girls.
I: Why?
B2: It's boring.
B3: It's for girls.
B2: What I like is fights!
I: They also fight.
B2: The way they fight they would be all dead! To fight like that... I'd touch them with a finger and they would be on the floor.

Pokemon is a good programme 'Because they fight'; because 'It lasts longer' (than Rotten Ralph); and 'It has more characters'. Another advantage, according to children, is the type of animation, the fact that it is cell-animated. This, though, may be a consequence of their familiarity with the style since puppet animation is not shown as frequently on television. Nevertheless, this extract illustrates their views:

> B1: This wasn't an animated cartoon (Rotten Ralph).
> I: It was puppet animation, not animated drawings. Do you know any other programme like that?
> (....)
> I: Which do you like the most? Puppet or drawing animation?
> B1: Animated drawings.

The fact that a programme is puppet-animation had, as well, an influence on third grade boys. For some it determined their opinion regarding to whom the cartoons were addressed. Although they said they had liked the clip, they considered it more suitable for children between two to five years old. But among the girls there was some divergence as to which audience those cartoons were meant for. Some considered it to be appropriate for children of their own age, others for older children. In both cases, the question was not only the type of animation but its comprehensibility and educational character.

> G1: The... The one with the kitty.
> I: It's for children of your age?
> G1: It is.
> G2: And for some older ones. To learn.
> I: Do you think older children will learn from those?
> G2: Yes.
> G3: Younger children won't understand... They move in a funny way.

The girls saw younger children as having less capacity to understand certain cartoons, and for this reason they would like programmes like Pink Panther and Rita Catita (an interactive programme where children call Rita, an animated character, and take part in a telephone game) where the narrative is very simple.

> I: Smaller children what will they like?
> G1: Rita Catita.
> I: Do you like it?
> G1: I don't.
> G2: Neither do I.
> I: Why?
> G1: It's a childish girl, with a huge head and a tiny body.
> (laughs)
> I: She's not fun?

G2: No.
G1: She's always talking, always talking! She tells others to shut and she talks.
I: What about Digimon?
G1: It's for our ages.
I: Why?
G1: The characters...
G2: Younger children won't...
G1: Won't pay attention.
G2: They won't understand very well what is it about.
G1: Well, I have a sister who likes it.
I: How old is she?
G1: 2.
I: And she understands?
G1: She just says: 'Look! Pikachu! Pikachu!'

The boys seemed to assess the younger ones' capacity similarly:

B1: (Digimon and Pokemon) They have many characters, it's difficult for them to memorise the names.
B2: You don't know the names either.
B1: I do.
B2: Then say them!
B1: They're 150!

Yet again the children attempted to establish a distance between what girls and boys liked. The girls tried to dismiss the importance of fights:

G1: Atari ia a ninja with special powers, he can transform into things, and there's also a smaller ninja, there's a dog and then...they...
I: Is it like Pokemon, do they fight?
G1: No, I don't like fights.
G2: Me neither.
I: Do you like SailorMoon?
G2: Yes.
I: They fight.
G1: I don't like it.
I: Why?
(no reply)

Boys, on the other hand, set aside romance and, as did the younger ones, female lead characters.

I: What clip did you prefer?
B1 & B2: Digimon!
I: And which did you least liked?
B1: That one with the Sleeping Beauty
B2: It's too romantic.
I: And you don't like romance?
B1 & B2: No.

One of the boys assumed that the semiotic signs from the *Little Mermaid*, such as the palace and the royalty characters, were from some fairy-tale like *Sleeping Beauty*. Though the scene was not particularly romantic, he related it to romance and said not to like it.

Another group of third-grade boys considered that the poor quality of *SailorMoon* was a result of its gendered nature:

> B1: I don't like (SailorMoon) because it's just girls and they do lots of attacks and stuff.
> B2: I don't like it either. It's girls' fights.
> I: How is that?
> B2: They fight against women.
> B1: And they say: 'Oh SailorMoon and the Power!' and stuff. It's really boring, it takes them a year to do that.

Romance and fairy-tale environments were the ideal scenarios for one of the fourth grade girls' groups. These nine to ten year-olds entailed in a vivid conversation about how they would create a cartoon:

> I: What story and characters would you create?
> G1: Some girls, princesses.
> G2: And magic.
> G3: And a family.
> G4: It would be a romance. First they would break up but then they would start again.
> G2: There would be fairies, good and bad, and some fights, but not like boys' like. It would be with swords and so.

In contrast, the second group of girls who came to the centre during the afternoon were not enthusiastic at all about the subject. They said they were not keen on cartoons and that they preferred programmes such as soap operas. I was told by one of the teachers that there were some evident differences in socio-economic status between the children who came in the morning and those who came in the afternoon. According to her, those who came in the afternoon were from middle to upper class families and, furthermore, there were also differences in their school achievements. I have no other evidence but in this case it appears that it would have been worth exploring the influence of SES.

The boys in the afternoon, though much more willing to collaborate, were also less interested inn cartoons than all the others. It was also possible to understand a shift towards more realistic genres such as sports programmes. Still, *Digimon* and *Pokemon* were mentioned as favourites but they stressed that they did not follow the episodes on a regular basis.

In the morning group, one of the boys talked enthusiastically about his favourite cartoon, one that had not yet been mentioned. Its particularity was the richness of intertextual references. It was about 'Three squirrels that have several adventures. One was when they were at the Berlin Wall giving a rock concert and they put down the wall'. Again it shows a move towards reality. This boy was obviously able to place the cartoon into context and he appreciated its references to a crucial moment in the history of modern western societies. Such programmes that transform and fantasise about facts, may not be as appreciated by children whose mental schemas are less developed.

When asked about unwanted elements most fourth year boys referred to leading female characters and romance.

> B1: (about SailorMoon) It's for girls.
> I: Is it only for girls?
> B2: It's more for girls.
> I: Why? Because the characters are girls?
> All: No!
> B3: The one with the cat also had a girl and it was fun.
> B1: Yes, but this one only has girls.

This group was also displeased with the romantic innuendo at the end of the *SailorMoon* clip.

7.2) Task I - Questionnaires

7.2.1) Characterisation of the population

For this task I distributed questionnaires to forty-six children from the first and fourth grade. Nineteen first grade children filled the questionnaire; they were aged between six and eight years old; 57.9% were boys and 43.5% girls. As to the fourth grade students, a total of twenty-four children answered the questionnaire, 56.5% of whom were boys, and 43.5% girls, aged nine to eleven years old.

The vast majority of children were white Caucasians born in Portugal; only one of the children had been born in another country. The parents were also mostly white and with Portuguese nationality (only one had been born in an African country).

The typical family structure is the small nuclear family, mostly with married parents and two or three children (50% of the families had four to five elements). Only 4.3% of the children lived in an extended family including grandparents or other family kin. Job wise, carers were in full-employment, and their degree of education varied between the completion of primary school (in Portugal education is compulsory up to the 9th grade), to higher education (17.4% of the mothers had the 6th grade, followed by 15.2% for both 9th and higher education; 19.6% of the fathers had a higher education degree, followed by 15.2% with the 9th grade).

Though mainly meant to provide a general characterisation of the family unit, the questionnaires to the parents included one open question regarding their opinion about the quality of children's programmes on public television. A minority admitted that they did not actually watch any children's programmes; and one parent said that due to the amount of cartoons on offer it was difficult to follow children's viewing habits. Lack of familiarity or interest might have been the case for many parents since they criticised the contents of programmes but gave little, or no, concrete examples.

Among a total of fifteen different categories, five referred to the levels of violence in cartoons – 'Contains violent scenes'; 'Need to be more selective and less violent'; 'Lack cultural content and have too much violence'; 'Should give priority to information and contain less violent cartoons'; 'It has few national programmes and too much violence' – representing, all together, 34.7% of the total number of answers. Other categories included 'Not much variety'; 'Could be better'; 'Can improve based on entertainment and citizenship'; and 'Lack of relevant content and not suitable for all age groups'.

A minority of answers was positive, 'Good'; 'Reasonable'; 'Public channels are better and less violent'; and, more interestingly, 'Fine provided that parents accompany their children'. Constructive criticism alerts to the need for improvement. Public television should be investing on national production, on a diversity of programmes for different

age groups, on the education for citizenship through entertainment, and on information programmes. Another important message was the need for carers and educators to take responsibilities in making television better for the child audiences. They should join children when viewing and discuss television's contents with them, making television viewing a social activity.

The majority of children said they had more than one television in their homes. In 21.7% of the 4th graders' homes, televisions were distributed by the kitchen, living-room, and the children's bedroom; though the latter in a smaller number of cases.

In general, children said they liked television a lot, but there were some differences when comparing the replies given by both grades. The younger children all said they liked television a lot, while the older children divided their answers from 'so-so' (8.7%) and 'Like it a lot' (60.9%). This might mean that the older children are more critical of what they watch on television, but it might also be linked to the child's psychological development and their capacity to be judgemental. Research[66] on children's perception of characters has shown that younger children tend to see things in a more straightforward manner – things and people are either good or bad.

The same argument can explain their opinions about the quality of children's programming on Portuguese public channels. In relation to RTP[67] older children mostly had a positive idea but on different levels of the scale – 30.4% answered 'so-so'; 34.8% 'Good', and 26.1% 'Very good'. Similarly, in relation to TVI, 30.4% answered 'so-so'; 34.8% 'Good'; and 26.1% 'Very good'. SIC appeared to be their favourite channel in terms of children's programming since 56.5% said it was 'Very good'. However, when asked which channel they watched most frequently, 39.1% answered TVI; 21.7% SIC; and only 4.3% referred RTP that, in fact, appeared below some cable channels specialising in children's animation.

Younger children have a clear preference for TVI; 68.4% said this was the channel they watched the most, while 26.3% mentioned SIC, and only 5.3% RTP2. Still, 94.7% said that both TVI and RTP's children's programming was 'Very good'. It was in relation to

[66] Refer to Chapter II of this thesis for children's psychological development
[67] RTP is the Portuguese public broadcasting channel; both SIC and TVI are commercial channels

children's programmes in SIC that opinions varied a little. The majority did say that it was 'Very good' but 10.5% suggested it was 'Very bad' and the same percentage classified it as 'so-so'. Interestingly, both *Neco* and *Uma Aventura* (live action Portuguese productions for family and young audiences, respectively), which emerged as favourites for some children, were broadcasted by SIC. The favourite cartoon, however, *Beyblade*, is shown on TVI. As the question referred specifically to the quality of children's slots, this indicates children's awareness of their space on television.

7.2.2) Cartoon viewing

1st year students were more enthusiastic about watching cartoons, 78.9% said they viewed cartoons whenever they could; the same category scored 34.8% among 4th year students who mostly said they watched cartoons 'Sometimes'. At a first glace, this finding is in line with the argument that, with age, children will increasingly prefer real action programmes on TV.

However, when questioned about their favourite programme, 64.7% of the 1st year children mentioned live-action programmes, a category that includes *telenovelas* and series directed to a broad audience, their favourite, and other real action series directed at young audiences. *Saber Amar* and *Ana e os Sete* were the *telenovelas* they mentioned. The first is a Portuguese prime-time soap opera, and the second is a Portuguese series with a 'fairytale-like' plot, about seven children orphaned by their mother whose relationship with a loving but strict, workaholic father is very distant. Unknowingly, the father hires a female stripper to be their tutor. Ana, the tutor, rapidly wins the children's love and manages to bring them closer to their father. Eventually, after an 'evil' wife-to-be is uncovered, Ana will marry him. Girls were the big fans of the *telenovelas* (50% of the girls mentioned one as their favourite programme), while boys were more inclined to watch youth live-action series (25%) and Japanese animation (30%).

The live-action series said to be favourites appealed differently to children. The 4th year students mentioned *Uma Aventura,* while the 1st year's referred to *Neco*[68]. The first is

[68] *A minha familia e uma animacao* in the original. 'Neco' is the name of the cartoon character, and children used as the programme's title.
http://sicprogramas.sapo.pt/sicseries/index.php?article=41&visual=7

inspired by a very successful collection of children's books[69] written by Ana Maria Magalhães and Isabel Alçada, both history teachers, in which a group of friends solves mysteries that grownups are unable to. I still remember reading the books (they were first published in the late 80s) and thoroughly enjoying them, not just because of the group's adventures, but because they took place in familiar locations, offering the reader the opportunity to learn about different aspects of Portuguese culture. The narratives evolve in different geographic locations, historical events, or daily life activities (titles include *An adventure in the stadium*, *An Adventure in the Supermarket*, *An Adventure in the Azores*).

Neco is about the daily life of a family where one of the children is a cartoon character. Because of this original feature, many of the children categorised this series as a cartoon; referring to it both when stating their favourite cartoon and a cartoon of Portuguese origin. The hybrid character of *Neco* did lead to some confusion during the questionnaires and during the interviews when some children referred to it as a cartoon and others insisted it was not.

Some of the older children did not refer to a specific programme but to a channel 21.1%, said that their favourite channel was either 'Cartoon Network' or 'Panda' both cable channels specialised in children's animation. Adding up to the categories of 'Japanese animation' and 'Other cartoons', 36.9% of the 4th year children have mentioned a cartoon as a favourite programme, a percentage slightly higher than the one for the younger group.

The appeal of cartoons and live-action programmes, though similar in terms of percentages, differs in terms of content. Though this was the case only for a small minority of children, older children had more diverse tastes, mentioning, besides *telenovelas* and youth live-action series, news, music and wild life programmes.

At least up to the age of ten children can still be interested in cartoons. Though both from the questionnaire and interviews, it was possible to notice their need to distance themselves from animation, which usually has connotations of 'childishness'. This had

[69] http://www.uma-aventura.pt/

already emerged from the pilot study, where some of the 4th year children were not too keen to comment on cartoons saying they preferred other real action programmes.

In the questionnaire to the 4th year children I included some open questions. In relation to their favourite programme I asked them to state why they liked it the most. The variety of answers produced eleven categories the most frequent being 'It's amusing' and 'It has good cartoons', the latter corresponding to those who had said their favourite programme was a television channel. The other categories, all with similar scores, were: 'They always win'; 'They catch the bad guys'; 'Interesting and amusing'; 'Moving'; 'Funny characters'; 'Age appropriate'; 'Love for wild life' and 'Nice music'. I thought of condensing the categories even further to produce more significant results, however not doing so allowed me to be fairer to the variety of answers and to children's ability to come up with their own reasons as to why a programme deserves their attention.

Neco appeared as the favourite 'cartoon', showing that the series is actually more popular than cartoons among a good part of the children (30% overall mentioned this series). As to 'real' animation, the most popular were *anime* series such as *BeyBlade*[70], *Digimon*, *Yo-Gi-Ho* and *Ninja Hatori*, most of which follow *Pokemon*'s formula where violence is transferred to a 'magic object' that the main character (or characters) needs to master in order to win some kind of championship. The main character is usually a boy, thus in this context I have categorised them as 'Action Japanese Boys' as opposed to other anime action series that feature girls. Other categories that emerged from the children's list of favourite cartoons were 'Run & Chase' (cartoons like *Tom & Jerry*); Adventures (*Simsala Grimm; Max*); Daily life (*Arthur*); Disney Classics (*Dumbo; Mickey*); Humour (*Garfield*); and football (*Super Champions*).

The 4th year children, in their open question, presented ten different reasons for considering the above their favourite cartoons; 'It's funny/ amusing' was the most common answer (30%). Other categories were: 'It's nice'; 'Adventurous'; 'Appreciation for the main character'; 'Showed in real life' (referring to *Neco*); 'It's cool and it gets us used to it'; 'It's about football'; 'The main character doesn't create problems'; 'Extreme' and 'Amusing and has pretty characters'. Only girls used the

[70] http://www.beyblade.com/

latter category; they allocated greater importance to the characters' good looks than boys. In fact, the group interviews done with 2nd and 3rd year children, showed that girls did empathise more or less with a character depending on whether they thought the character was pretty or not.

When analysing the cross between the list of favourite cartoons and gender *Neco* appears as a girls' favourite (41.2%) while boys prefer anime series (39.1%).

The generalised assumption both among girls and boys that *SailorMoon* is a girls' cartoon was, in practise, disproved. Only a minority of girls have said that '*SailorMoon*' was their favourite cartoon. When asked which cartoons do girls like, 40.9% of the 4th year children indicated that cartoon; while 64.7% of the 1st year students referred to 'Barbie' - presumably Barbie videos, such as *Barbie Rapunzel* where Barbie (the doll) appears as a cartoon character playing lead roles in classic fairytales, since there are no Barbie cartoon series on Portuguese television). This finding illustrates the scarcity of cartoons for young girls.

Other cartoons mentioned were Disney classics like *Snow White*; *The Power Puff girls*; and *Sitio do Pica-Pau Amarelo* a Brazilian live-action series based on the books by Monteiro Lobato, where fantasy and reality come hand-in-hand as the Sitio (farm)'s children live naturally among humans and fictional characters from Brazilian folklore. The Sitio is described as a democratic place where children's opinions are as important as adults'[71].

Being 'about a girl' was the most common explanation given by the 4th grade children to justify these series' interest to girls. This was followed by 'It has more girls than boys'; and 'It has girls and girls like it', along with 'Appropriate and funny', these were the main reasons pointed out by girls. Other reasons, mainly stressed by boys, included 'It's all stars and hearts'; 'Teaches things'; 'Nice story for girls'; 'Not for boys'; 'Girls talk about it' and 'Because of the songs and characters'.

In contrast, most of the children did not use the opposite argument (the existence of male characters) to explain why boys would like certain cartoons. 'It has some violence'

[71] http://sitio.globo.com/

and 'It has action' were the most frequently referred categories (together adding to a total of 35% of the answers); followed by 'It has a lot of boys' (10%); 'They like it'; 'It's about football'; 'It's adventurous and boys like it'; 'Teaches things'; 'Girls don't like it'; 'About competition'; 'It has monsters and magic'; and 'I like it'. Both girls and boys used action and violence as good attributes, which BeyBlade the most frequently referred cartoon for boys with 39.5% of the total of answers, had.

The least appropriate cartoon for boys was *Sailormoon* (33.3%) because 'It's too girly' and 'It's all hearts and stars'. Being 'too girly' was an answer given mainly by girls who themselves pointed out *SailorMoon* as their least liked cartoon. This is an interesting finding, three years ago when I did my pilot study *SailorMoon* was a girls' favourite. At the time, as today, it was one of the few cartoons featuring girls in the main roles. Some years later it is not surprising to find that the older girls are no longer interested, but the questionnaire revealed a lack of interest also from the younger ones. At the time I did find the results from the pilot study contradictory because, though having romance at its centre, it contains regular scenes of violent fights.

The number of female role models on cartoons does not appear to have dramatically increased. What has slowly been increasing is the number of Portuguese live-action programmes and I have already talked about the appeal they have for the children who participated on this study. This is not to say that children, and girls in particular, will not watch animation. They look for other options outside public television such as the home video market, like the *Barbie* movies.

Dragon Ball came second on the least liked list and was suggested both by boys and girls who thought it to be too violent. Being too violent was the most frequent reason for disliking a cartoon despite some of the boys saying that a good dose of action and fighting was a requirement for a good programme. Other reasons for a cartoon not being liked included: 'Not interesting'; 'Confusing and violent'; 'Too sad'; and 'Repetition of programmes'

The cross of data between school year and least liked cartoon, showed that it is mainly 4th year children who refer to *Dragon Ball* and *SailorMoon*, while the younger ones mention a different range of programmes. These two animated series have been on and off the Portuguese broadcasting scene for a considerable number of years. The older

children grew up with them and might even have liked them at some point, perhaps when these series were trendier and a topic of conversation and interaction in the playground, but have then been replaced by other programmes. Like *Pokemon* did at the time of writing.

7.2.3) Cultural Specificity

To understand whether or not the children related to a cartoon because they could identify certain signs of Portuguese cultural specificity, I asked them to give an example of a Portuguese cartoon they knew. I hoped the question would allow me to understand what the children thought was a sign of 'Portugueseness'.

A great number of the children (76.1%) in both years said they knew a cartoon made in Portugal - 13% did not answer this question, and (10.9%) did not know any national cartoon. 48.6% of the children said *Neco* was a Portuguese cartoon; apart from the language, the children would have been able to decode other signs such as the nationality of the actors, most of whom are very familiar to the Portuguese audience for taking part in numerous *telenovelas*, series and even movies and theatrical plays (though the children's access to the latter is probably very limited).

31.5% of children suggested that some foreign cartoons were Portuguese. Among those figure Disney cartoons like *Mickey*, *Cinderella* and *Tarzan*; and Japanese animation (*SailorMoon; Pokemon*; and *Doraemon*).

Some 4th year children also suggested that the youth live-action series *Uma Aventura* is a Portuguese cartoon. Though this might seem as an error of judgement, I think this is probably due to the broad sense in which the term 'desenho animado' (the Portuguese designation for cartoon) is used. Normally people refer to the children's space on television as 'desenhos animados' regardless of its actual content – a child is likely to say 'I'm watching cartoons' even if what they are really watching on television is a youth series.

This question was a bit unfair to children since, until quite recently, there was no Portuguese animation being broadcasted - at the time of writing RTP is showing *A demanda do R*, a cartoon produced by *Anima Nostra* a decade ago. Also, animation is a genre with characteristics of universality; it is not that easy to assess the country of

origin of a cartoon that is dubbed into one's own language. One needs to be paying attention to the programme's credits; to be familiar with the characters (like in Disney's programmes); or be somewhat knowledgeable of animation art to understand the style of animation (like Japanese *anime*). Even so there are a number of issues related to the production process that could lead to a debate regarding a cartoon's nationality. On the one hand, studios commission certain stages of the production to studios in different locations; on the other, we have the international co-productions.

A smaller percentage (63%) of children said they knew a foreign cartoon, though this number is still a majority within that category; 23.9% suggested *Mickey*, and 19.6% different Japanese series.

7.3) Task II – Create your own Cartoon

7.3.1) Storytelling[72]

The first grade children were the first to be interviewed. The 'all girls' group entitled their original narrative 'The Easter Bunny and the children ...and a dog'; it tells the story of an Easter Bunny who carried eggs for the children but before accomplishing his mission he was robbed by an old man[73]. The children and the Easter Bunny were sad, as he had no eggs for them. Together, and with some extra help from a horse, the children and the Easter Bunny went to find the old man and:

> G4: They held his hands, they held the eggs, and they left.
> G1: And the Easter Bunny was happy

The girls' story for boys was about a boy, who had some sisters, who was learning to play football, and scoring a few goals, in a pitch in the northern city of Porto. One time he was playing but left the pitch to go to the loo. When he returned his ball had burst. Fortunately:

> G3: (...) He had his brother's ball and his sisters gave it to him.

The boys' group had five elements. Caught by surprise, their attempt to create a story for girls resulted in 'The Enchanted Flower'; a story about a girl living in a forest who

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[72] Appendix 14 shows some drawings made by children

[73] 'Velhinho' in the original. From the word 'velho' meaning 'elderly man' but used in a somehow patronising way. As it was employed by a little girl it probably has connotations of respect attached to it

found an enchanted flower, which she picked up, planted in a vase, and nurtured. There was also an evil witch, but the connection between the girl and her is not clear as, after suggesting her role, the boys finished the story:

> B3: (...) It's like this...The evil witch...no...Was pealing an apple for herself...
> B5: And then there was a ball, and...
> B3: And then the witch ate the apple and died.

Their story for an audience of boys was more elaborate, as they had already prepared it. It was entitled 'The golden dolphin', and it was the tale of a dolphin that hurt himself when caught in a fisherman's net. While the fisherman pulled the net out, the dolphin, managed to torn it apart with its teeth and escape. On the run he entered a cave were he found a shining crystal, which was one of a group of powerful crystals that evil sharks wanted to get hold of in order to dominate the Earth. The boys said their story was a series, about the struggle between the dolphin and the sharks, between good and evil.

The first mixed group, made up of three boys and two girls, had their story 'censored' by the teacher, though I could not understand why, as they shied away from commenting. But after some insistence the story was told, 'Toto, the Little Bear', who lived with his mother and father in a forest; together with his animal friends, Toto has adventures such as:

> B3: There were also animal friends and then the evil ones would come wanting to catch them, and then they dug a whole and put grass for them to fall into the hole (...) Green sticks! Then they do the hole and put a net on top and fall inside and PUMBA[74]!
> G2: He played with his friends... Sometimes he would fall into the traps and sometimes he tripped on some stones and...
> Int: He would get out of the traps on his own?
> G2: His friends went there. (...) They would tell his parents and they would pull a rope and then throw it down and pull.

The second mixed group, two girls and three boys, told a story pretty much like Disney's *Dumbo*; 'Dumbo and the Mouse' is about Dumbo, a young elephant who worked in the circus, one day he caused an accident in which his mother was involved and, because of that, ended up bringing the circus tent down and being arrested.

[74] Sound referring to the fall

Eventually Dumbo and the Mouse saved her, and mother and son live together ever after.

The Magic Wall was the title of the fourth grade girls' group (five girls) about a boy who finds a magic wall inside which there is a treasure. The group had previously created a story thinking of a girl audience but, when asked to conceive a cartoon for boys, they decided that their original story would be appropriate.

> G3: It's like in Alladin, that he goes inside a cave, only that it is closed, but not the magic wall, it will always open.
> G5: It always opens.
> G3: He touches something...He touches...
> G4: It could be that the boy finds the wall and then he would tell some colleagues and they would go there.
> G3: No! It's like this, the magic wall should have the shape of a hand that people tried but only the boy could do it.

This boy was poor and lived alone in the countryside. For sometime he stayed with a foster family because his mother died when he was young, and his father moved away. But, in this family, there were some bad boys who were his enemies, so he had to leave. He went to live inside the Magic Wall where he could have all the food and shelter; his best friend was *Senhor* Artur, a fifty something year-old neighbour. Eventually the boy's enemies realised he was lonely, and became his friends.

The boys' group was not too enthusiastic about creating a story for girls. They preferred to talk about their story conceived for a boys. It featured a 'cast' of heroes: *The Mask*; *Capitão Cueca*[75]; *Lucky Luke*; *Megabot*; and *Obelix*. Living together in a tropical island these characters would play, make jokes, and have fun together, and defend the islands from any possible intruders.

The mixed group (two boys and two girls) that was asked to create a story for foreign children based their narrative on an existing live action youth series *Uma Aventura*. As the conversation progressed the group added their own twist; the heroes would be fighting 'horrible monsters', chasing and, eventually, killing them, something that does not happen in the original stories.

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[75] Meaning 'Captain Underpants'

Mixed group number three (again two boys and two girls) told a story about two brothers living with their poor family in a village on the hills. They would have adventures in the forest, sometimes getting lost, always with the help of their animal friends. The story's resolution involves the parents dying and the children receiving money, moving to another country, to a more civilised village:

> B2: From the parents. The parents would die and they had some money and they would give it to the children.
> Int: Would they stay in the same house?
> G1: Yes.
> B2: They would buy a new house.
> G1: A new house.
> B2: Or something like that...
> G1: In another country.
> B1: More clothes...Clothes, food... (...) At the end they got rich.
> G1: They had developed...
> B1: More civilisation.
> G2: With people; more houses.
> B2: It was a bigger village, it was a city.
> G2: More streets.
> B1: Richer.

The last mixed group (one girl and three boys) created *The Orc Farm*. A farm in France, where a character named Pinocchio lived with his grandparents. The boy had adventures with tigers, with the farm's ox, and other animals that were his only friends. He was in charge of taking care of the animals while the grandparents were working the fields; sometimes the neighbours would come and steal eggs from the farm's chickens when Pinocchio was distracted. The story ends with the parents returning and living happily with him.

7.3.2) Constructed identities

As hypothesised, gender was used by the children to present their social identities. With the exception of the fourth year girls, the single sex groups reacted strongly to the idea of creating a story for the opposite sex. The first year girls, for instance, were quite happy when asked if they had thought about a story for a cartoon, promptly delivering their title, but reacted with expressions of repugnance, and disappointment to the researcher's request to deliver a story for an audience of boys:

> G3: Yuuuck!
> G4: You could have told us to do a cartoon for girls.

Their original enthusiasm was quickly replaced by a change of focus. They avoided elaborating on the task by diverting their attention to the blackboard, where some writings from a morning class had not been erased, and asking questions as to what was written there and who would have written it. They quickly regain their enthusiasm when asked whether they preferred to talk about their story.

The Easter Bunny story does not present very strong elements of femininity; in fact, 'bunny' is masculine in Portuguese, and the girls never specify the gender of the two children to whom the bunny should deliver the eggs. The group's negative reaction shows an effort to distance itself from anything boys might like. The second story, however, is much more revealing of the girls' constructed identity. Having been asked to think of a story for boys they immediately mentioned football:

> G1: Football!
> Int: Who would be the main character?
> G2: Football.
> G5: Beyblade.
> G4: Football.
> G4: Oh! Football is better!
> Int: The main character would it be a boy or a girl?
> G4: Boy.
> G1: Boy.
> G4: And he had some sisters. I saw it in *Panda*[76] but it was in Spanish.

Though wanting to distance themselves from boys' culture they have actually displayed a great interest in football, showing they were knowledgeable about the sport and even having strong team preferences:

> Int: Where does the story take place?
> G5: In Porto[77].
> G2: In Porto!
> Int: Who were the characters?
> G1: (Ignoring the question) It's Benfica against Porto.
> G3: Hey!
> G5: Porto wins! Porto Wins!
> G3: Then it's Porto against Benfica, there.
> G5: Erm... Then it's my team... With my team... Against my team!

[76] Panda is a cable channel specialising in children's programmes; she is probably referring to a series with a similar plot shown on this channel

[77] FCPorto and SLBenfica are two of the main football teams in Portugal, the first based in Porto, in the north, and the second in Lisbon, in the south of Portugal

Their eagerness to show their team preferences is in clear contrast with the girls' first reaction. It was also girls who, in one of the fourth grade mixed groups, brought the subject of football up following a question of where the story would take place:

B2: They live in Lisbon.
Int: You would place it in Lisbon?
G1: No!
G2: No...
G1: In Porto (...) There, in Porto, and they really were from Porto, of Porto[78]
G2: No, some were Sporting's.
G1: No, Porto's.

This interest in football can, as later will be discussed later, be interpreted as an issue of cultural identity. However, on this occasion it is a performance played by the girls to say that they also know about football and it is not just a 'boys' thing'. In none of the groups did boys mention this sport. This group's boys did not take part of the girls' argument keeping the distance between boys and girls; but also avoiding a direct confrontation with G1 who emerged as the leader. She is seen differently as her interests, like football, are usually associated with boys' tastes. The 'all boys' group even referred to her:

Int: Do you think the girls would like your story?
B4: No.
B2: I think they would.
B2: Inês (G1) would like it! (laughs)
B5: Inês would like it.

It might be the case that boys have no need to talk about football to reinforce their identity, as this is a field traditionally ascribed to them; while girls feel that they have to claim the sport for themselves. G2, when challenging G1's team preferences is also trying to confirm her status. From G1's confidence and proximity to the boys it was clear that her status among the opposite gender was somehow distinct. Throughout the task G1 kept taking the boys' side while G2 had to keep up with the opposition and some teasing. She oscillated between trying to keep up with G1, and reacting to her comments.

Int: How would the characters look like?
G1: The heroes[79], they were like, they were all *Dreads*. Like...

[78] Direct translation from the Portuguese 'do Porto' that refers both to an individual's home town and to his or her team preferences

G2: With spiked hair, full of gel (laughs) Like, with those chains that you hang out here, like, with bracelets (...) And ear piercing and then on the thong.
Int: And the girls?
G2: The girls like this, little dolls.
G1: No! No she wasn't!
G2: She could be!
G1: No! (laughs) Tattoos and shoes and hats! (laughs)
G2: High heels!
G1: No!

At the end the differences between the two girls' constructions of 'girlhood' collided. Though they agreed regarding the male characters they confronted each other in relation to the female characters' appearance. The idea they had about what it means to be a 'cool' girl was obviously different. G1 reacted strongly against G2's description of a heroine in high heels, and an agreement was not reached. As the above interview extract suggests, G1 is distancing herself from stereotypical notions of femininity but she is also presenting an aspirational identify by supporting a 'cool' look that only older individuals, teenagers, would be allowed to have as it is unlikely that parents would consent on a 9 year-old to have tattoos and body piercing in any other area than the ears.

Gender differences in terms of tastes are much more complex than commonly accepted. Tastes vary between same gender and same age children. The ways in which the children present themselves in front of their classmates and the researcher do not necessarily coincide with what they will do and watch in their own private spaces, where they do not have the same concerns with the presentation of self.

The fourth grade boys commented on stories that might be appropriate for girls. It was clear that they tried to distinguish themselves from girls' tastes. They started by saying that the girls would not like their story, that they would like stories like *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, *SailorMoon*, *Barbie*, *The Nutcracker* (a *Barbie* version). When asked if they themselves liked those cartoons they said no, and that they had never watched then, but they were able to list and identify them as girl's products.

[79] Masculine word in Portuguese

Int: Do you like those cartoons?
B1: No!
B3: And we never saw them anyway.
Int: You never saw them?
B1: When my sister is watching and I don't have anything else to do...
Int: Which is your favourite animated movie?
B4: That one... *Toy Story*
B1: The... No... *The Ice Age*
B2: *Toy Story*, *Mulan*.

Mulan is a Disney movie where the main character is a girl living in Imperial China. She decides to dress up as a boy and enlist in the army to keep the family's honour. It appears that a girl in the main role does not present a problem or threat to the boys' male identity provided that she is playing a non-feminine type. In the same way, they considered that only an 'exceptional' girl would enjoy their story. Towards the end of the task, though, I again asked the question of whether the girls would like it and B3 gave the following answer:

B3: I think they would find it funny. They are not always forced to like girls' cartoons, they might like boys' cartoons as they like girls' cartoons.

He did not mention, of course, that the opposite could be true, even if boys do know about the so called 'girls' series, and can even bring themselves to the ultimate sacrifice of watching them if there is nothing better on television. The fact that some girls are seen as enjoying masculine activities like football and certain cartoons is seen as positive by the boys, raising her status to 'one of the lads', as a first year boy puts it:

B5: Some like the things men like, *à man*! (laughs)[80]

Similarly, the first year girls subverted the male identity by suggesting that they could create a love story for boys:

G5: Ah! A love movie!
Int: A love movie for boys?
All: Yes! (hysterical laughter)
Int: Do they like that?
G4: They do... [81]

[80] *à man* is an expression sometimes used in Portugal to refer to male like activities

G2: Uhmm...
Int: But they say they don't like it.
G5: Ah-ahm...But they do!
Int: They do?
All: Yes.
Int: Do they talk about it?

At this point the G5 attempted to develop the subject by mentioning that 'love affairs' conversations did go on between boys and girls but she was told off by G3 'Oh girl! Don't say a word!', so they talked about how boys like to gossip behind their backs, and about how their older brothers fancied girls. While at first the girls tried to conform to stereotypical representations of tastes 'Boys like football', as the conversation flowed other representations of masculinity and femininity emerged. Though they started by talking about an Easter Bunny delivering eggs, towards the end of the task there were some references to another genre not usually linked to little girls' tastes – the horror story. When asked what sounds to include in the cartoon G3 started a story of her own, referring enthusiastically to ghostly sounds; G1, rather more shyly, added 'Spider sounds'; and G3 exclaimed 'It was a horror movie!'. Judging from G2's reaction 'Right, there we go...' horror stories were a well-known preference of G3.

The 1st year boys' constructions of femininity were more conformed more to the generalised stereotype of 'pink worlds', they mentioned elements like 'enchanted'; 'flower'; 'pink'; 'mermaid'; girls caring for flowers; and 'evil witches' living in the forest, as central to the action. Looking into their story, the adaptations are clear, the mermaid replaces their dolphin; the enchanted flower the magic crystal/diamond; the forest a substitute for the sea; and the evil witch takes the place of the blue sharks. The 'sea' theme is also present in the older boys' story, where they placed the heroes in a tropical island attacked from time to time by pirates.

Both boys' groups based their main narratives on action and adventures; while the girls' stories had a pro-social character; a bunny giving eggs to children; siblings returning helping the brother to recover his ball; and issues of loneliness, friendship, and orphaned children mixed with magic.

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[81] This answer was given automatically and with no conviction, as a 'zombie answer' whereby the students answer in conformity to the teachers question and expectations without even thinking, usually comes in the form of 'mass answer' as all the class formulates it : 'Do you like cartoons?' 'We do'

As to the gender of the main character, the boys chose males for their own stories, and females for girls'. The girls, however, did choose male characters both for a boys' audience, and for the story they originally planned for themselves. It is possible that this is a result of their familiarity with male characters in leading roles.

In terms of age differences, the most obvious was the younger children's preference for anthropomorphic characters, human-like animals; whereas the older groups chose children around nine and ten-years old, the same age as themselves. This is probably a result of older children's inclination towards genres and stories with higher modality.

Aspirational tastes were not very clear in this task. Only in two groups could they be perceived. In one of the mixed gender fourth grade groups, where the children were inspired by a live action youth series featuring teenage characters that they transformed into ten-year old children, possibly as a means of identifying themselves with the interests and live-styles of the teenagers in the original series; also adopting an aspirational look for their characters.

None of the first year groups ascribed an older age to their characters, on the contrary, the few time age was brought up they chose to make their main characters younger than themselves. On one occasion though, a girl from the group who created a story about Toto, the little bear, suggested that Toto should live with his wife. This, however, was dismissed by all the other members of the group who preferred him to live with his mother and father.

When the fourth grade teacher introduced me to the class she commented that her students would enjoy the task because they were really keen on cartoons. She showed some concern with the fact that, in her opinion, they spent too much time watching *Canal Panda*, a cable channel specializing in children's programmes, mainly cartoons; a concern that she had already brought up with the parents. As a conversation prompt when working with the groups I asked them about *Canal Panda* and if they really liked its programmes as much as their teacher had said. Most children denied, some said they did not have cable television any more and others showed little interest in its

programmes. The group who had displayed more aspirational tastes was the one to dismiss the channel as something for younger children:

G1: No, I don't really like *Panda.*
B2: I like *Sol*[82] better and stuff...
G2: It's cartoons for babies and...
G1: It is.
Int: What about public television?
G1: *BeyBlade.*
B2: Not cartoons, no...
G2: Right, no. It's more things like *Saber Amar*[83]
Int: Do you prefer soaps? And Series?
G1: Yes, more.

But while they said they preferred soap operas, G1 mentions *BeyBlade* a cartoon that was also quite popular among the younger children. Similarly, one of the other fourth grade mixed groups after an initial reaction to the argument that they watched *Panda* revealed that they did watch and like a few cartoons, such as *Arthur*; *Noddy*, *Doraemon*, *Tom and Jerry*. He said he watched *The Cartoon Network* an attempt, perhaps, to display a certain degree of sophistication as a viewer as this is an English speaking channel; but also a possible indicator that the contents of national television are not enough to satisfy these young viewers, something that I did not have the opportunity to explore:

B3: *The Cartoon Network.*
Int: And do you understand it?
G: I only see the images.
Int: But do you understand the story?
G: (pause) Oh, from the images, yes.

7.3.3) 'Portugueseness'

The stories were rich in elements of cultural specificity; cross-cultural references; and intertextuality. The children talked about Disney characters, while placing them in imaginary scenarios that evoke remote scenarios of Portuguese culture, such as the ever more deserted countryside, or the Portuguese Diaspora. They also used elements perhaps more closely related to their cultural references like the sea (not only is Aveiro a coastal city; but also the sea is a powerful reference in Portuguese culture, as the country's history and economy is closely related to it).

[82] Cable channel featuring both Anglo-Saxon music and Iberian and Latin-american
[83] Portuguese soap opera ('To know how to love')

The lonely child living in the remote countryside was a recurrent theme in the children's narratives. Not long before the fieldwork took place there was a story on national television about a little boy shepherd that a television research team had met during a piece about the desertification of the interior of the country. He and his sister were the only children in the village. The broadcasters fulfilled his dream of going to Lisbon to see Benfica, his favourite football team, play.

Also, during the Portuguese Diaspora to countries like France, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, and Venezuela, it was not unusual for parents to leave their children behind with the grandparents, while they settled down in the new countries. Some of these children's relatives, and even parents, could have experienced this. It is also possible that the fourth grade children, in particular, have studied the phenomenon of desertification.

In their stories children present the countryside as a distant place where life is hard and children have to struggle more or less on their own. It is a place where fantasy - things like magic walls and talking animals - unlike in the familiar urban landscape, can really happen. Hodge and Tripp (op. cit.) have stressed the importance of the 'remote' in children's animation. For instance, they argue that children remained unthreatened by moderate violence in cartoons because of its remoteness from reality.

On one fourth grade narrative the end coincided with the heroes achieving better living conditions; 'civilisation' symbolising the end of fantasy. The remote countryside appears as an ideal place for children to succeed in a manner similar to Bettelheim's argument about the uses of fairytales in the child's psychological development. As allured in previous chapters, the lonely or orphan child is a common theme on traditional fairytales, as well as in *anime* series frequently shown on Portuguese television.

The fourth grade girls' group took *anime*'s influences further than the story's narrative. They displayed their knowledge of cinematic conventions in a way that none of the other groups was capable of, or even attempted to:

Int: What music would you chose for your series?
G5: When he's alone on the street, and then when he finds it (the magic wall) something like this (starts singing a suspense tune).
G4: Yes.
G3: Yes.
G5: And then they passed to the other side, another (music) more surprised... And then he's at home, with his friends it would be a happier one!
G3: Erm...And when he goes for a walk a sad one... Meantime the parents can die, starving (...) like a very sad sound...Very suffocated.
G5: Very ligh...
Int: According to his emotions?
All: Yes!

Their awareness was also present in the choice of background colours:

G4: Green, a light green.
G5: And blue.
G3: And, I mean, when he was sad it became, like, darker colours.
G1: Yes.
G3: And inside (...) The walls could have, like, the colours you said, normal, when he was happy, but when he was sad the colours / G2: It would start raining!/ G3: Right, or then the walls would become darker, very dark...
G5: Or then, for example, the sky would get darker.
G3: When he was inside the magic wall, erm...
G1: Inside the magic wall...
G3: When he was living there, the colours would get, like...
G1: Happier.
G4: Happy.
G3: Happier, everything...
G4: Happy.
G3: All in a good mood! They weren't...
G1: It was like he was in heaven, he...
G4: Yes, with bright colours.

Such changes of colour to stress the characters' emotions and state of mind, heightening the dramatic value of a situation are strategies that characterise Japanese animation.

The references to existing cartoons and characters are evidence of television's influence as a global medium, and of the common imagery that it allows children to share. With the exception of one group who talked about *Dumbo's* story, the narratives are examples of local appropriations of global references, as the children borrowed the characters and transformed them. Rather than limiting children's imagination, the

media references were reinvented. The older boys' group, for instance, made use of intertextuality, gathering a cast of heroes from their favourite cartoon texts, taking advantage of each character's personality traits, and placing them on a pirate's story scenario. The fourth grade girls' group chose the *Alladin* storyline but adapted it to a rural setting, where the hero did not have to fight villain's or save princesses.

The mixed groups who were asked to think of stories for Portuguese, and foreign audiences did not elaborate on the appropriateness of cultural signifiers. Nevertheless, throughout the group discussions cultural references were made. Allusions to football, for example, are also powerful signifiers of 'portugueseness'. Portuguese people, as a joke, sometimes say that their country can be described by three 'F' words standing for 'Fado'; 'Football', and 'Fátima'[84]. This is a country where debates over football go hand in hand with politics, in fact, one is more likely to listen to discussions on the weekend matches, the referees, the club presidents' and coaches' media statements, when entering local 'cafés'[85], than conversations on politics. Even the recently appointed Prime Minister, Mr Pedro Santana Lopes, frequently participated in television programmes debating football and was, between 1995 and 1996, the president of one of Lisbon's main clubs.

Language was another relevant marker of Portuguese culture in the discussions; not just regarding the choice of language for the cartoon, but also in relation to music. In this respect media globalisation does not seem to have exercised a great influence on the children to the point of them choosing foreign references for the stories. Though foreign music is heard more frequently on local and national radio, particularly in English the children did not select foreign music to use in the cartoon's soundtrack.

On the one hand, the choices made revealed the groups had not necessarily thought of integrating the soundtrack within the narrative. On the other they show the appeal of Portuguese products. The first grade girls sung loudly 'As Meninas da Ribeira do Sado', a folk song that had reached the music charts at that time, and they claimed that the boys were always singing it.

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[84] A reference to the countries religiousness, Fátima is a location where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to three shepherd children in the early 20th century

[85] Coffee shops

The song belongs to a category of popular music with easy and catchy lyrics that emerged in the 90s. A growing number of artists in the country have become extremely popular by playing what is now known as 'Pimba' music, which usually plays with sexual innuendo[86] in a sanitised manner. Among some of the most popular is Saul, who started singing these kinds of songs when he was only nine. This type of music is often labelled as low culture; a style that people laugh about but that has achieved great success.

The fourth grade boys' group considered similar choices. This was the highlight of the discussion as, thus far, they had not been at ease; they started singing and laughing, ridiculing the songs they seemed to know so well:

> B1: We'd put the one from *Obelix and Asterix.*
> B4: No... João Cabra or whoever he is...
> B5: Zé Cabra? (laughs)
> B4: One from a fado singer! Lágrimas! (gets closer to the microphone and starts singing).
> (laughs)
> B3: (singing) Deixei tudo por ela![87]
> B4: The *Bomba* one!
> B1: *Bomba*?
> B4: Boooombaaaa![88]

I did not explore the meanings that children derived from those songs, as I was not prepared for such reactions and choices. Having been away from Portugal for a few years I was not aware of their popularity among children. It is likely that the children are not really aware of the innuendo of some lyrics, and enjoy it simply because they are usually happy, with fast rhythm, and easy to learn and sing being quite repetitive, and played often in the media and popular street celebrations. 'Pimba' music is a phenomenon worthy of a in-depth analysis so high is its status in Portuguese culture.

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[86] In fact, when surfing the net searching for its lyrics I came across websites with adult contents that appeared on the search engine results under precisely the same title as the song.
[87] The chorus from a 'Pimba song': 'I left everything because of her!'
[88] *La Bomba*, sung by Ricky Martin in Spanish

7.4) Task III – Criticising Cartoons

7.4.1) Context

The task took place in the television room, which I had used in the pilot-study, where only the children and I stayed. Like in 2001 this room was used to put the toddlers to sleep. On several occasions the class assistants came into the room during the interviews to arrange the beds, disrupting the task and breaking the group's dynamics.

Because of that Group A viewed the clips on two different days. On the first day they saw *The Tale of the Three Sisters who Fell into the Mountain.* During the morning they went to the beach, but in the afternoon they were very enthusiastic, they worked well as a group and were comfortable with my presence. This was the first group to be interviewed and I had some problems setting up the equipment. The children were present while me and a member of staff fixed the problem, and they were talking to me and trying to help. The second film was viewed the following morning; they were less excited, a bit moody, and less concentrated. They even asked to watch the cartoon a second time because they could not understand what it was about.

The morning was, indeed, a more difficult slot. Group B took part in the task in the morning and did not seem very at ease and they shied away from commenting on the episodes. They were quite uncomfortable sitting on the beds, the only available seats, which proved to be distracting, as they needed to keep adjusting their positions. There was a division between the boys and the girls, both in the way they chose to sit and how they viewed and reacted to the clips; the girls, for instance, would whisper in each others' ears from time to time. Furthermore, some of them had already seen the films. I had left the tape with the first grade teacher who had helped me with tasks one and two. The idea was for her to show the films to her class and hand-out some questionnaires at the end for the children to complete. As it happened, on the last day of school things were quite hectic and she had to use a television that was in the third grade students' classroom and they also watched it.

The group dynamics were overall better in same sex groups. Even in Group A, where there seemed to be a good relationship between the girls and the only boy it was clear

from the boy's body language that he would sometimes look to the girls smiling and asking for some reassurance that he did not get.

7.4.2) Appreciation of characters and narrative

7.4.2.1) *The Tale of the Three Sisters who fell into the Mountain*

Gender identity was noticeable in the way children commented on the film. The girls liked Mai, while the boys preferred the Troll and the hen. Also, the cartoon initially frightened girls. This was clear from their body language when the film started – some got close to each other and held hands - and from the comments they made afterwards. The boys, on the other hand, did not seem to be frightened, and at times laughed.

The girls from Group A said they were a bit frightened in the beginning, not so much by the narrative, but by the visual and sound effects:

> G3: I liked it, very nice, but I was a bit scared.
> G2: Me too.
> G3: But then it had a happy ending.
> G1: I thought the movie was nice. In the beginning I was a bit scared, I thought the music was a bit creepy (...).
> Int: Did the cartoon amuse you, scared, or bored you?
> G3: Scared.
> G2: Scared.
> G3: The sounds of the trees and starting to see the monster on the path, and then starting to walk ... And they would fall and the monster transformed them into stone...

The boy, contrary to the girls, said the Troll did not frighten him, and he was sure the other boys would feel the same. However, he was the first to say that the cartoon was most appropriate for older children, "up to the 4th grade", suggesting that he might have not felt comfortable to admit in front of the girls and the researcher that he did find it slightly scary. He also agreed with the girls when they asked for a better ending for the Troll:

> B: I liked the most...that part...the monster.
> Int: You liked the monster? Did you think he was nice?
> B: I did.
> Int: What about you?
> G3: I was a bit frightened.
> G2: But when I saw he was turned into stone I felt sorry for him, poor thing.
> Int: You felt sorry? Why?

G3: Because he was bad to the girls, turning them into stone, but then they were saved and he needn't turn into stone. He could help them and as they didn't have one he would be the father.
G1: Or, then he could be the boyfriend of the girl who wanted to...
Int: You wanted them to be sweethearts?
G1: Right, because he asked her to and...
G2: And he could take care of the mother and her chicken, until the mother is well.
B: And she would also stay...
G3: And as he wanted to ask and he was all happy for her, wanting to be his sweetheart... I thought it was like that.

The producers' attempt to appeal to both boys and girls by making the male character not completely dislikeable, resulted in a certain disappointment for the older children who realised the psychological complexity of the Troll. They would have liked him to have a happier ending, and did not quite understand why he had to be turned into stone if he was actually good to Mai.

The children in the second year groups were not sympathetic towards the Troll, and they were happy with the story's ending. They were more anxious throughout the film as they did not predict the story's end and worried that Mai would not escape the Troll.

G3: Only when the monster appeared and wanted to take her.
Int: You were a bit frightened by the monster?
G2: I was crying. (she was not)
Int: Why?
G3: Because I felt sorry for the girls.
G4: Because the monster, when he threw a stone, it was then I was frightened because I thought the chicken and the girl would die.

The girls in Group A found it normal that a little girl should be a Troll's sweetheart. They did not refer to the Troll's physical appearance, distinct from the girl's, or to a possible age difference, as he was much bigger than her. His kindness towards Mai, his childish behaviour, and the fact that the girl deceived him, made him vulnerable, not a strong, confident, adult like character. Also, the cartoon's weak modality might have influenced the children's perception of what could or could not happen. Still, they seemed to have understood the story as something that could have happened in reality, and not so much as fantasy.

> Int: Do you think this story could happen in real life?
> B: Erm…
> G2: Yes.
> G3: Instead of having a monster I think it could have happen, like, with a boy. He wouldn't transform them into stone; he would do them something else.
> G2: Right.
> G1: Not to me. It could be like this, as it is, but only I wanted him to come out well.

Trolls are not mythical creatures in Portuguese culture, and the fact that they chose to call him 'monster' reveals their unfamiliarity with such imaginary characters. They did not perceive it as inherently bad, as Norwegian children familiar with Trolls' stories might have, thus their confusion as to the character's destiny in the cartoon.

Group C measured the cartoon's modality in different ways:

> B3: On the one hand I think not, there are no monsters, but when the girls turned into stone they survived so it could be a real story.
> Int: What about you?
> B1: I don't think so. I mean, it could, but these stories are from the old days, from many years ago, from the time when there were monsters.
> G: It's a story with imagination! I don't think it could happen.
> B2: That's what I think.

Reality was measured through the story's outcome. B3 was aware that monsters do not exist but he assessed the story's credibility by comparison with other narratives where happy endings are the rule. Like the groups in Task II who placed fantasy in the distant 'country side', Boy 1 suggested that fantastic things did happened in the 'old times'.

Distance in time was also mentioned by Group E second-graders when I asked them if they knew how the cartoon had been made:

> G3: Erm…They appear on television… But I don't know how they appear on television.
> Int: Does anybody know? Does anybody have any idea of how they are made?
> G5: It seems that it was a long time ago! I think it was in the old days…That they made them.

Groups B and C established a comparison to *Little Red Riding Hood.* One of the girls in Group B, showed her understanding of the Troll's function as the cartoon's villain, and Mai's role as the heroine who has to save family members, by comparing the two stories:

> G1: We know... We know *Little Red Ridding Hood*, but it doesn't have two sisters, only a girl.
> Int: And you think the story is similar.
> G1: I think so, instead of a monster it's a wolf.

Group B assessed the characters according to their influence on the narrative. The boys liked the Troll because 'He transformed into stone, and when he asked the girl if she wanted to be his sweetheart...' - something B2 had laughed at; and the hen 'Because she helped with the rope' (B1). Similarly, G2 liked Mai due to her active role, 'Because she managed to escape, she was very smart, and she managed to escape'.

They were not so sympathetic with the Troll as Group A, and they surely did not feel much sympathy for the sick mother. They talked about her almost as if they did not understand she was the girls' mother (Group A did not even mention her). Considering the results from the previous task and children's stories about parentless children, this does seem to confirm that parents are expendable in children's fantasies.

> Int: And which character did you like the least?
> B2: To me it was the one who stayed at home, who was sick.
> Int: The mother?
> G2: Right, the mother. She did almost nothing.

The children from Group A compared the characters to those in *Chicken Run* (clay animation) displaying a certain awareness of animation techniques. Except for G1 who looked a bit puzzled at the suggestion that the characters in the tale were puppets.

> G3: It looks like that one...
> G2: *Chicken Run*! It's the same thing, isn't it?
> Int: *Chicken Run* it's clay animation; in this one I believe they're puppets.
> G1: Then... I thought that was really reality because they started walking and they never stopped...

Overall, and despite the small age difference between the children in year two and year three, the younger children did struggle a bit more to understand the story. Though they

understood that the Troll was endangering the girls' and hen's lives it was not so clear how and why he turned them into stone and how he became a mountain at the end. This does not mean they are less sophisticated viewers, but that they had their own theories about the narrative and wanted to make sure they had fully understood it. Such a finding stresses the importance of adults watching TV with children. Just after the film finished Group B asked me some questions:

> G2: I wanted to make a question. What about when it became night again?
> Int: Him? He was forever turned into stone.
> G2: Now he was the one turned into stone.
> Int: Right. Maybe you didn't hear him, but he said that he couldn't go out during the day because the sunlight would turn him into stone.
> G4: Forever, right?
> G2: Then, when the sun was coming he went home!

Later the group's boy also placed a question regarding the story's events:

> B: I would like to ask something. Then, how did he turn them into stone?
> Int: Because the Troll had magic powers, he had that / G3: That powder! / The magic powder that transformed them.

From this question emerged an interesting comment about the modality of the cartoon that was not mentioned in any of the other groups,

> G3: Then he broke the chicken's neck and put some magic powder.
> Int: Right, then it came back to life.
> G1: But chickens can't fly! (in the end the chicken has to fly to help Mai to escape)
> Int: No, they don't. Why do you think this one did?
> G1: Because it's cartoons.

7.4.2.2) *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands*

Group A rated the first cartoon with four stars, in comparison to the five given to the previous film.

> G3: I would give it 4 because it was very small.
> B: Not me, I give 5, 5.
> G2: Me too (four) because I don't understand it very well.
> B: Because it's nice. Just because it's small it has nothing to do with it. What matters is that it's nice and well done.
> G2: I also gave 5 to the other because it was bigger and it seemed more interesting in my opinion.
> G1: I give 4 to this one, it's also very well done.
> Int: And did you like the dummies?
> Several: We did.
> G3: But I think that these they don't do a lot of movements, they are, like, a bit stuck.
> Int: Their movements?
> B: Yes, but...
> G2: They're very still.
> G1: I thought it was... With the sharks around them, I thought they would come with those sticks and hit them in the head.

Regarding this rating exercise. Firstly, it shows that children are not uncritical viewers. They were making an obvious effort to show their critical skills by using terms like 'well done'[89] - adults when referring to films technically good and credible commonly use this expression; and through their efforts to assess the quality of the animation by the rhythm and characters' movement. It shows as well that they were assessing the second cartoon with reference to other existing ones. They expect elements like a faster pace, or aggressive slapstick comedy as G3 suggested. The children in the Group B had similar views:

> G1: (...) I found this story a bit too small.
> (...)
> B2: Because...This one was, like, a little poor...Stuck on the boat...

There was an effort from the boy in Group A to stress the second cartoon's quality. However, being the only male in the group he struggled a bit to explain his ideas. His preference might have been related to the fact that, in this cartoon, the majority of the characters were male making it easier for him to identify with the cartoon.

Only the girls in Group E preferred this cartoon,

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[89] In Portuguese 'bem feito'

G5: This one was prettier than the other.
Int: You preferred this one?
G5: Yes, this was more original.
G4: The other was very...Like...
G5: It was very...
G4: Looked very dark, the environment

Criticisms about the audiovisual aspects of the cartoon were also used by the children in Group A in relation to the Portuguese cartoon:

Int: So, you didn't understand this cartoon very well the first time?
G1: No.
G3: No.
G2: Quite badly.
Int: Why?
G3: You could listen to the sound of the sea, and than you confused it with the characters.
G2: With the talking.
(...)
G3: I preferred the other.
G1: Me too.
B: It was bigger.
G2: Me, perhaps, because of the images, made of clay. I preferred those, they are neater.
G3: To me it was because it was bigger and it had more emotion and...
(...)
G2: Because of the noise of the / G3: The sea, the river...
G2: And then you confused it with people.
G3: It didn't let the story shine.

As to character appeal, the animals and the anthropomorphic characters caught children's attention, even if some only made a very short appearance like the jumping kangaroos; the flying pink dragon; or a mermaid in the opening credits.

G1: I liked the little mice better.
Int: The little mice? Why?
G2: Because I think they made me laugh.
B2: I liked it when the mouse fainted...
Int: You liked it when it fainted?
B1: I also liked the sharks.
Int: You liked the sharks.
B2: I thought the man running with the kangaroos was funny...

Comedy value was replaced by 'scare potential' when it came to disliking characters, as the 'all girls' group from year two commented:

G1: For me it was that shark.
Int: The shark.
G1: They were in danger and then he was frightened/ G3: I didn't like that one...who was saying those strange words.
G2: That black one.
Int: You didn't like him? Why?
G3: Erm...
G2: Because... I was scared.

When asked if the cartoon was more suitable for boys or girls, the children did see the characters' gender as an influential aspect. Group A suggested:

G1: I think both.
B: All.
G3: Maybe more boys than girls.
Int: Why?
G3: Because for girls would have had more dolls.
G: More girls.
G3: But I think it's also for girls. I liked it.
G2: Me too.
G1: Me too.

7.4.3) Signifiers of Cultural Specificity

G4:Yes, in England it could happen...
G1: Because there are pirates.
G2: There are pirates as well.
G4: Are there pirates in England? Erm... In Australia, are there pirates?
Int: What about the first one?
Some: Yes.
G3: When it happens home; it happens the same on television, some times...
G1: It's a dream.
G5: There were dinosaurs so there could also have been monsters!

This was the reaction from the second group from year two to the question of whether the story in the cartoons could have happened in reality. Yet again it shows how fantasy's plausibility is placed in a distant time and place by the children. In this instance the discussion is also revealing of the mismatch between the cartoon producers' constructions of children's understandings, and what the children read.

The section devoted to 'Appreciation of character and narrative' points out that the children did not seem to be familiar with the physical characteristics of Norwegian mythical Trolls and the role typically ascribed to them. The children in this study were

likely to understand the Troll differently from Norwegian children who are familiar with folktales about these creatures. This is an example of how different frameworks of knowledge may affect the communication process, leading to gaps between the preferred readings given by the text's producers and the meanings that Portuguese children, in a particular cultural context, derived from them.

Both the *Animated Tales* and the *Quest for the Enchanted Islands* were flagged as being culturally specific by their producers; something that, in their opinion, children need in order to preserve their sense of cultural identity, as well as to understand other cultures. The problem is that cultural specificity is not on the front line of children's interests when enjoying an animated story. I would argue that children need stories to have a certain level of familiarity allowing them to empathise with the characters. But they do not necessarily need them to be close to home. This research shows how fantasy is equated with unthreatening distance.

Considering their unease when asked to elaborate on the country where the stories took place, and where the cartoon had been produced, children are not usually aware of 'location' in cartoons. This does not mean that they do not have their own theories of location and production, or that they do not look for specificity.

> Int: In Which country do you think the story takes place?
> G3: I heard in Norway.
> Int: In Norway, right. And where do you think the cartoon was made?
> G2: In Norway.
> G3: Erm... In Norway.
> Int: Norway, do you think so?
> G3: I don't know.
> G2: Me neither.
> B: Or then in Portugal.
> G1: In Portugal. Why?
> B: Because they speak Portuguese.
> G3: Or it could be in any other country and then they could put the language.

This extract from Group A shows children's understanding of the global character of cartoons, and how they can easily be adapted to different countries. Other groups, however, read the fact that the cartoon's language was Portuguese as a signifier of local

production. Group D went a bit further, developing a theory about the centrality of Portugal's capital city:

> G2: I think it was Lisbon...
> Int: Why?
> G1: Lisbon is the capital of Portugal!
> G4: Uhm-uhm...
> G2: (...) Because there, in Lisbon, there are also cartoons and fun things.
> G4: It is there that television appears.

The girls were not concerned with the cultural specificity of *The Tale of the Three Sisters*; they did not pay attention to where it took place, and they were quite dismissive and avoided elaborating on this. But they revealed an awareness of cultural specificity in relation to their own country, where the capital is where all the major events, 'all the fun', happens.

This was also the only group with a student from an ethnic minority, and this raised further issues regarding cultural identity. From the interviews with the animation professionals, it was clear that they interpreted cultural identity as common cultural heritage and history within specific geographic boarders; they did not refer to the diversity within. G2 was born in Angola, one of the PALOP[90]; her parents immigrated to Portugal when she was a baby. More than once she was keen to talk about her favourite character on television, Manuela, an Angolan woman; and when asked to say what her favourite character was in the Portuguese cartoon she pointed out the aborigine:

> G2: I liked the black guy, with the 'uha-uhm' thing.
> Int: What was he doing?
> G2: He was doing magic for that thing to appear. Look! The part I liked the most, he did the 'uha-uhm' and scared me.

Most children did not read the signifiers of Portuguese culture present in *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands*. The children were not at all sure of the country of origin or the place where the story was located. Some groups referred to the Kangaroos as signifiers of place, but one of the groups was not even sure in which country they existed. The

[90] African countries with official Portuguese language

messages read from this cartoon were mixed; one of the girls in year three' Group B noticed a flag on the boat that she thought was the Chinese flag,

> G2: I saw a flag there; it looked like China's...
> Int: So you think it's Chinese because of the flag?
> G2: It seemed so, and on the boat there was a flag that looked like China's.

In Group C there were several different suggestions until they agreed on the Portuguese islands:

> B1: In the islands.
> G: In Portugal.
> B2: On a boat.
> B3: On a boat in the Ocean.
> B1: Norway.
> B2: In some island.
> G: Then, Madeira.
> B2: Madeira! Madeira or Azores!
> B3: Azores ... (...) I think it's Azores that has more islands than Madeira.
> B3: At which land do you think they arrived?
> G: To an island.
> B3: To an enchanted island.
> B1: I know... What's the name of that land that has the...
> B3: What?
> B1: Indians, a land of Indians (...) They were there in the islands, they were undressed, not dressed.
> B3: Ah! Right, in Madeira. In Madeira is also quite hot.

Only G1 in Group A mentioned the Portuguese discoveries, the main focus of the series. She also considered that the cartoon could have been produced in Lisbon because she heard one of the characters mention Lisbon. The other girls in the group disagreed and said the cartoon was foreigner, though they could not quite explain: 'Because...I don't know... Because of the colours...' (G2, Group A).

The children had never heard of the programme unlike the Portuguese journalist cited in an earlier section, who followed it from the beginning, and remembers the series having had a lot of publicity because it was Portuguese, but he was also a twelve-year old adolescent. G1 summoned up what the main obstacle to the children's understanding of the series was when commenting on the age group targeted by the cartoon:

> G1: Right, because the discoveries...we learned a bit with Carmo[91], but we haven't learned everything. I think older, who are on the 10th grade, like (...) Some people like to hear about the discoveries.

Conclusion

In the first chapter I referred to the concept of 'child agency' and how the way in which it is conceptualised conditions how childhood, and children's action, is theoretically and methodologically approached. I have positioned my approach across the different lines of thought of what James et al (op. cit) have called the 'new paradigm' of childhood. I was concerned with how children's agency could be equated in a localised setting while considering the extent to which this may be determined by the social structure. The nature of this project asked for a multidirectional analysis looking at the communication process both as a structured practice and a product of local interactions.

The 'new paradigm' sees children as social actors whose actions are interwoven with the social circumstances, 'shaping and shaped' by the contexts. Such concept of 'child agency' can be used to strengthen the relevancy of Hall's model of mass communication as an analytical tool to study children as television audiences. This model equates the role that different communication agents play in the construction of meaning.

The narrative and semiotic analysis of a sample of animated programmes presented in the previous chapter helped in understanding television broadcasting and production practices which, as Hall suggested, are embedded with 'knowledge-in-use' among other things about what audiences need and like. The data from the interviews with creatives points-out some of these assumptions, like the idea that boys will not empathise with female heroes; that child audiences are homogeneous in tastes which somehow overlooks the need to provide them with well-planned and balance schedules catering for both genders and smaller age sections; that children need and will appreciate cultural specificity regardless of cultural context; and that global television is inherently poor in

[91] Their educator at the day care centre

content and style. Such idealisation of child audiences can, as my audience reception data indicates, result in communication gaps.

The children in this study displayed, for instances, an ability to transform global products through the use of local references to their social and cultural contexts particularly in relation to Disney products, which showed that some criticism to the brand's imperialism should be better considered by taking into account not just the analysis of its texts but also what children make of them. Furthermore, the children's readings of cultural specificity did not necessarily conform to what the creatives, and myself as a researcher, had predicted. Narrative and semiotic analysis helped in assessing how cultural specificity can be conveyed through animation but the social and, as Chapter II suggests, psychological distance between adult creatives and researchers, and the children is better overcome by looking into the reception findings.

In relation to television, children's agency is conditioned by institutional structures like the broadcasting and production companies' that determine what is to be offered to the young audiences. Nonetheless, the audience research data indicate that children can engage creatively with television contents, which are transformed and re-invented in different spheres of action becoming a part of children's cultural worlds.

The work with Portuguese children reinforced findings from other research, presented in previous chapters, which stressed the idea that child audiences are heterogeneous. Failing to address diversity may result in communication gaps, misconception about the audience, and the reproduction of stereotyped social representations. The children in this study were critical and creative viewers, but they did not read the texts' signifiers of cultural specificity in the ways adults' would have expected. Their frames of reference are different from those of animation creatives.

The last chapter of this thesis presents the study's main conclusions and elaborates on some strategies that might help in improving the quality of children's television, and bringing creatives and audiences closer together.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how childhood is constructed through animated programmes for child audiences produced for the medium of television. It provides a triangular analysis that considers three agents of the communication process: the creatives; the animation text; and the audiences. Starting from the broad concept of 'cultural specificity' loosely used by animation professionals when justifying the need for home-produced programmes, the research aimed to reveal how they conveyed it through cartoons. As well as looking to the ways in which children's identities were constructed by products from different countries and distinct market-orientation. Also, I wanted to see how the Portuguese children who took part in the case study, and who have a very limited access to animation produced in their own country, constructed their social self when talking about animation. Finally, I wanted to compare the emergent versions of 'cultural specificity' and the extent to which they could be said to coincide or, indeed, differ.

The lack of a previously used model of analysis that embraced all the angles of analysis I wanted to approach led me to look into a variety of theoretical approaches. I have research approaches within developmental psychology; the sociology of childhood and the competence paradigm; media studies and discourse-oriented research, particularly semiotics; and animation studies. Admittedly, such plurality of contributions did not always facilitate the production of a linear analysis. This is one of the perils of research, particularly when one tries to follow a path that has not yet been fully explored.

This approach proved, for instances, to be useful in defining an original thematic category in which the children in this study were particularly interested – the Child's Quest. This task was facilitated by the effort to look at the texts as well as to children's views on animation; by combining the narrative and semiotic analysis with the data collected through the audience research techniques. Also, such research strategy allowed me to demonstrate how deterministic views on the effects of global television (as the numerous textual accounts on Disney's imperialism) may not always be appropriate, since the groups of children who took part in this study engaged actively

with television contents and appeared to be deriving meaning by reference to their daily lives.

I felt this was a process that needed to be documented in full, instead of just setting aside some parts that might not fit so smoothly into the whole equation. The information in Chapter II, for instance, may at first appear expendable, as this study does not further investigate the psychological processes of the construction of meaning. For me, however, it is an important part of this thesis as it emphasises the complexity of the study. It aids in understanding how children construct meanings; reinforcing the idea that there is no such thing as the 'child audience', but different child audiences, whose social and psychological background will influence how they read and what they take from television. The study of children's discourse helps to explain audience differences and similarities in terms of television tastes and story interpretation.

Approaching television from yet another angle, Chapter IV, examines the commercialisation and globalisation of children's animation. It is important because it shows how cartoons can be seen as an art form especially if one considers the particularities of their contents in relation to the audience. The chapter also raises important questions about how, despite market pressures, animation can be meaningful in different ways.

I chose to articulate the study of children's experiences and social identities with the notions of childhood by animation creatives - through speech and text production. Thus, my research question incorporated sub-questions referring to both dimensions. In relation to the ways in which 'artists' construct local audiences, and how they perceive and convey 'cultural specificity' through their animation, my research hypothesis were not entirely confirmed.

In different contexts, constructions of childhood are often similar. The content of programmes is determined not by an informed understanding of the audiences but by artistic and technical knowledge, and the need to survive in the global market. Transnational television is a product of market domination by big media conglomerates, which offer comparatively cheaper products, leading to a decrease in the investment in national production. In turn, this impacts on local audiences' media preferences due to

their unfamiliarity with local products and forces smaller companies to look for international co-productions for funding and market appeal. Still, even if global television is often equated with cultural imperialism it can be a vehicle to circulate multi-cultural discourses.

The narrative analysis of the cartoons revealed similarities in their basic moral message. They all emphasised the need to believe and pursue dreams no matter what the obstacles faced. Friendship and companionship were central in this quest. The help and presence of family members, particularly adults, was secondary; though respect and admiration for the elders was implicit.

The interviews with animation professionals revealed a general belief that children will respond to universal narrative elements – 'basic human truths and emotions' (Aidan Hickey, 2004). Another, the tendency to broaden the ranges of ages targeted and to claim the interest of both genders, reinforces such findings. This was the case even with *The Animated Tales* a series that prides itself on not being 'market-oriented'. Such choices are problematic. There are developmental and cognitive differences between children, at times observable even within a short range like five to six, or six to seven-years old. Also, it leads to an imbalance in gender representations, a lack of strong leading females that results from the tendency to use primarly male characters for the main roles.

In *SailorMoon*, the majority of characters are female, but their strength is affected by ridiculing femininity; and, in the episode analysed, by the central role a male plays in helping Bunny to escape the 'devil'. In *The Tale of Three Sisters*, the Troll's personality is ambiguous in order to retain some element of interest for boys. Younger children who tend to interpret things in a bipolar way may not hesitate in identifying him as 'bad'; older children, as I had the chance to observe, were confused as to why he had to have such a fate, and felt he should have been rewarded for helping Mai. In a way, the little girl is not an inherently 'good' character because she deceived a lonely and pitiful Troll. In *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands*, femininity is presented as domesticity; the only girl in the series is a wife about to become a mother.

Cultural specificity was found in all the programmes both thematically and stylistically. A contradiction emerged in that, though cartoons for local markets reflect a greater concern with diversity and cultural relevance, the need to come up with products that have appeal to the international market creates self-imposed limits on the creative process.

The so-called market-oriented cartoons, on the other hand, offer possibilities of 'glocalisation' through language. Still, visual signifiers of specificity such as ethnic diversity are lacking and cannot be adapted. Also, the specificity of *Anime* series is trivialised by the over-exploitation of successful formulas, thus diminishing the quality of the products and contributing to the homogenisation of children's television slots. Japanese animation is undoubtedly popular among the child audiences. Nonetheless, children will benefit from novelty instead of repetition.

The Portuguese cartoon explores a different mode of storytelling for children. The driving force of the story comes from the adults in charge of the expedition. There is a younger member in the crew but his actions, in the episodes sampled, are not singled out. Research (e.g. Pinto, 2000) has shown that children do appreciate family-oriented programmes where adults' dramas are central to the action. Animation, due to its low modality, might not be the most appropriate genre to talk to children about the adults' world. The children in the study preferred secondary characters to the adults featuring in the episode; and in their own stories they banished adult protagonists. From the results obtained, it was certainly the case that children preferred stories about other children's quests, which coincides with Bettelheim's perspective on the uses of fairytales and their influence in strengthening and building a child's personality.

Another characteristic of *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands* is the richness of signifiers of Portuguese culture, from period props (such as the garments); to the identifiable regional accents; and the programme's credits. The fact that the Portuguese children in this case study did not clearly identify the series as a national product reveals how background knowledge, and unfamiliarity with a certain style of storytelling, can influence the ways in which meaning is created.

Not having received any extra information about the origin of the episode prior to its viewing is their first handicap. When it was broadcast by RTP it would have had a fair amount of advertising prior to broadcast, stressing that this was a special, 'homemade' cartoon about the discoveries period. Another problem is their relative unfamiliarity with the historical era where the story is set. From the cartoon's props I could easily deduce its context, but this was not the case with children. It seemed that this was a subject that they had not often come across. Finally, some children were critical of the style of animation, of audio-visual features like the film's slow pace and the background sound effects. In Chapter II I alluded to the fact that different life experiences have implications on how children process information, such as misunderstanding the contents of a programme, or accept it as accurate information; and evaluate it without considering the means and motives for its production and broadcast.

Animation's cultural specificity is limited by a need to fit in the global market, but also by television and animation professionals' assumptions about what the children's readings will be. A programme's specificity need not be restricted to traditional fairytales; it can go beyond it and incorporate elements relevant to children's socio-cultural contexts (from racism, to issues of gender equality, peer pressure, or friendships). For that, however, there must be a concerted effort to learn about the issues from children themselves.

My first hypothesis relating to children's readings of animation assumed that these would differ from adults' as their codes of reference vary. Children did not interpret the signifiers of cultural specificity as the 'artists' intended or, indeed, as I had predicted. In general they did not seem concerned with the country of origin of the series; neither were they particularly excited when a child suggested that the cartoon could have been produced in Portugal. This does not mean that children do not appreciate local production. On the contrary, their favourite programmes on national television were Portuguese live action serials. The failure to recognise the Portuguese cartoon as such appeared to be on the one hand, a consequence of animation's low modality and the fact that cartoons happen in the distant plane of fantasy; on the other, it is an outcome of the lack of national productions and a disbelief that these fantastic things could have been made in Portugal.

It is possible that the little concern from broadcasters in showing positive representations of 'Portugueseness' in ways significant to the child audiences may be having an impact on the children's cultural self-esteem. One little girl pointed out that if the film were produced anywhere in Portugal it had to be in Lisbon because that is where all the nice things happened. This is something worth exploring in future research, the extent to which positive representations of Portuguese culture on television may contribute to children's pride in their own country, and on their belief in what they can achieve as its citizens.

The stories that children created indicate that they do look for positive representations of childhood through television characters in the same age-range as themselves, as well as similar ethnic background. The only Luso-African to take part in the study pointed out the aborigine in *The Quest for the Enchanted Islands* as her favourite character, and she was very keen to talk bout an Angolan female character featuring in her favourite soap-opera.

The story line most appreciated from a variety of cartoons available on television was what I have called the 'child's quest'. It was possible to determine a tendency regarding some ingredients in the success of such story line. Children tend to like cartoons with a restricted number of easily identifiable lead characters. Preferably, the narratives should be centred on child characters to whom autonomy and responsibility is attributed. Plots should be simple, with a well-determined beginning and, more importantly, a clear end.

The type of narrative structure preferred reinforces the latter point. Older children were able to present more complex and structured narratives, while younger children's stories tended to have paratactic structures. Still, in general children preferred television programmes with hypotactic narratives.

Besides story line, other elements emerged as important to assess quality. The children's gender, apart from humour (gags and trickiness), and animation technique, influenced this assessment. The characters' gender was crucial to the boys' and girls' social identification. Boys appreciated fights (a type of action that does not involve deadly combats and bloody scenes, and where technology and special powers are used); and valued merchandising that allows transporting the cartoon to the playground. Girls

mentioned romance, fantasy (equated with fairy-tale stories), domesticity, and paid more attention to the characters' looks. Tastes were also gendered in relation to general television tastes. While girls were the big fans of 'telenovelas', the boys preferred live action serials and cartoons.

Younger children were more enthusiastic to talk about cartoons. Still, their favourite programmes were family-oriented live action Portuguese productions (such as *A minha família é uma animação*, *Ana e os Sete*, and the youth series *Uma Aventura*) indicating that they value the quality of narratives. Older children tried to distance themselves from cartoon viewing but they were knowledgeable of the different series on television, showing that they were consumers of animation.

When creating their own narratives, children's awareness of social-self was reflected in their discourse. Most often they constructed their identity by opposing their tastes to that of the opposite sex, using stereotypical representations. Less frequently, as in the case of the group who adapted the youth series *Uma Aventura*, they levelled their tastes with those of teenagers. Girls were more versatile, in that they were not reluctant to show their knowledge and appreciation for areas typically of male domain, like football; and even created stories about male characters. This can be a cause for concern as it reinforces the idea that there is a shortage of female role models on Portuguese television leading little girls to choose to identify with male characters; and with a sport that has a high symbolic value in Portugal but is overtly a masculine sphere of action (female football championships are seldom shown on television; and the players, the board directors, and team managers who get media coverage are males).

The stories the children created were rich in cross-cultural references and intertextuality. Overall children's imaginary worlds did not seem to be constrained by existing animation. In most cases they appropriated and reinvented global texts, placing them within different contexts. Their imaginary scenarios were often sited in distant, but familiar settings. In some cases they departed from existing Disney characters, and from cartoon formulae like *Anime*'s. But their stories evoked the distant countryside, its desertification and underdevelopment in relation to the coastal areas; the Portuguese Diaspora; and themes close to home like the sea.

Another way in which cultural specificity was noticed was through children's choice of music for their cartoons. Interestingly, despite the abundance of foreign products available, the music references were markedly Portuguese (a word of caution is needed in relation to the quality of music offered by the national marked, particularly to some forms of the so-called 'música Pimba', described in Chapter VII, and its availability to children).

Some children showed an extraordinary awareness of cinematic conventions, which held strong resemblances with those used in Japanese animation. This indicates children's tastes but also that children learn and develop mental schemas when watching television. While this *per se* is a good thing, it does alert to the need to provide a diversity of equally appealing animation, exploring different themes and styles, as it will enhance children's media literacy.

As Davies (1986, p.114) suggested, and this research reinforces, children have determined ideas about gender roles, about boys and girls behaviour and tastes. Still, there is space for television to promote diversity and avoid stereotypical representations.

Considering the results from this research, I suggest that future actions (whether academic research or broadcasting decisions) must continue to acknowledge the child's perspective. A number of points deserve further consideration, in particular in the Portuguese context:

- Criticism of animation series can only be informed when efforts are made to understand what uses children make of them and what meanings they derived from them.

- It is important that parents and educators understand Televiewing as a moment of interaction with the children. They should be encouraged to share the experience with children. Only through this can they appreciate how children use the media, while being able to discuss with them and understand its contents.

- This includes a consideration of the programmes' influence on peer interaction, and how children re-invent cartoons through discourse and play.

- The child audience is not homogeneous. Age, gender, and ethnic background are important variables that influence tastes. Quality media must cater for these different sections, and special attention must be given to representations of ethnic minorities, and female role models.

- Similarly, future research needs to consider the influence of social background and geographic location on children's tastes and discourses.

- Cultural specificity can be encouraged not only through folktales and historical references, but also through references to the daily lives of Portuguese children.

- Children are critical viewers. Strategies to maximize profit such as the constant repetition of series are not desirable.

- Portuguese production of animation should be encouraged, as it was clear that when national products are available children do prefer them. For the same reason extra care should be taken to provide quality products. Local production is valuable in that it offers possibilities to explore different styles, and narratives relevant to the audience (*The Animated Tales of the World*, for example, offer a plurality of ethnicities, something uncommon in children's animation).

- Attending to the Principle of Cooperation[92], broadcasters' openness to debate, and to share information regarding schedules and other choices made, can help improving the quality of the media. As this is not always the case, there might be a need to reinforce existing legislation through, for example, the creation of an

[92] Television Act: Law no. 32/2003, of 22 of August, Article 7
Principle of Cooperation: The State, public service concession holders and other television operators shall collaborate in the pursuit of values of human dignity, the rule of law, democratic society and national cohesion, and in the promotion of the Portuguese language and culture, taking into consideration the special needs of specific groups of viewers.

independent committee within ANACOM[93] to define and control the quality of children's programming.

- Broadcasters and professionals who are involved with the production of children's programmes need to have an informed understanding of the audience. Specific training on childhood studies could be provided, and efforts could be done to establish contacts with academics.

- Finally, children's television should be open to active participation by children. Media education should be an integral part of educational curricula at all levels. Broadcasters and media producers could work with schools to provide the children with opportunities to learn about media and express their views on content targeting young audiences. The project 'Juro que vi' from MultiRio Brazil (mentioned in Chapter VI) could be used as a model.

Though some emphasis has been put in the Portuguese context, the issues tackled have a wider interest and are raising concerns and leading to specific intervention all over the world. The following extract from the *Adolescents' Declaration* presented in the 'Rio Charters'[94] (April 2004) illustrates the ongoing global debate about the importance of using media to empower audiences around the world:

> In order to discuss the democratization of production and use of the media, we must alert governments that globalization of access to information is a necessary first step. If we are to unite forces with peoples around the world in this effort, instead of changing the media, we should use it to eradicate violence, poverty and to facilitate access to education. Joining forces means uniting with the media thereby bringing quality culture, entertainment, and education to the entire population.

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[93] ANACOM is the regulator, supervisor and representative of the communications sector in Portugal. http://www.icp.pt/index.jsp?categoryId=2958

[94] See Appendix 15

In terms of future research, I would certainly like to see this study replicated to a national scale as it would bring an important contribution to the understanding of Portuguese child audiences, and help to improve the quality of media offered. Another path I would like to further investigate has to do with a definition of 'Portuguese cultural identity' and to explore the ways in which it can be enhanced through media. Without defending nationalism, I do consider that it is important to understand the changes that are taking place in the country (such as the recent wave of immigration from the Eastern European countries), and how the concept is evolving. The media can play an important role in the construction of a Portugal in which people can be proud and believe in. Thus the need for research concerned with the ways in which media products that appeal to child audiences, like animation, can contribute to their empowerment, providing role-models, and building-up their self-esteem.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 - Hodge & Tripp's Principles to guide a semiotically informed research strategy into children's television

Hodge & Tripp's Principles to guide a semiotically informed research strategy into children's television (1996, p.50)

1) Decoding children's responses to television requires a prior and powerful theory of how television has 'content'

2) The theory must take account of different levels of message, and different codes and media

3) The theory must also project abstract grammars of the languages of the media in such a way that differences between different codes, or between different kinds of viewer and sender, can be explored and tested.

4) Hypothesis must be empirically checked by reference to children's responses at different levels and in a range of codes and media

5) The social dimension of children's responses must be taken into account, so that its effects on the language can be allowed for.

6) Responses should include, where possible, responses in another code or medium: verbal responses should be recorded to include non-verbal cues, and similarly non-verbal responses should be supplemented by verbal commentaries

Appendix 2 – Propp's Narrative Functions

Function			Description
	α	Initial situation	Members of family introduced, hero introduced
1.	β	Absentation	Member of family absents himself/herself
2.	γ	Interdiction	Interdiction addressed to hero (can be reversed)
3.	δ	Violation	Interdiction is violated
4.	ε	Reconnaissance	Villain gets attempt to get information
5.	ξ	Delivery	Villain information about victim
6.	η	Trickery	Villain tries to deceive victim
7.	θ	Complicity	Victim is deceived
8.	A	Villany	Villain causes harm to a member of the family; or
	a	Lack	Member of family lacks something. Desires something
9.	B	Mediation	Misfortune made known; hero is dispatched
10.	C	Counteraction	Hero (seeker) agrees to counteraction
11.	↑	Departure	Hero leaves home
12.	D	1st donor function	Hero tested, receives magical agent or helper
13.	E	Hero's reaction	Hero reacts to agent or donor
14.	F	Receipt of agent	Hero acquires use of magical agent
15.	G	Spatial change	Hero led to object of search
16.	H	Struggle	Hero and villain join in direct combat
17.	J	Branding	Hero is branded
18.	I	Victory	Villain is defeated
19.	K	Liquidation	Initial misfortune or lack is liquidated
20.	↓	Return	Hero returns
21.	Pr	Pursuit, chase	Hero is pursued
22.	Rs	Rescue	Hero is rescued from pursuit
23.	O	Unrecognised arrival	Hero, unrecognised, arrives home or elsewhere
24.	L	Unfounded claims	False hero presents unfounded claims
25.	M	Difficult task	Difficult task is proposed to hero
26.	N	Solution	Task is resolved
27.	R	Recognition	Hero is recognised
28.	Ex	Exposure	False hero or villain exposed
29.	T	Transfiguration	Hero is given a new appearance
30.	U	Punishment	Villain is punished
31.	W	Wedding	Hero is married, ascends the throne

Appendix 3 – Berger's proposal of Actions, Goals, and Primary Characters

Berger's Basic Actions of Characters in Fairy Tales

Basic actions of characters			
Cooperate	Compete	Search for	Evade
Help	Hinder	Tell Truth	Lie
Escape	Imprison	Allow	Prohibit
Defend	Attack	Question	Answer
Initiate	Respond	Rescue	Endanger
Disguise	Uncover	Protect	Threaten
Pretend	Reveal	Suffer	Punish
Love	Hate	Dispatch	Summon
Unravel	Mystify	Allow	Interdict
Pursue	Evade	Retain	Lose

Berger's Goals of Heroes and Villains in Fairy Tales

Goals of Heroes	Goals of Villains
Overcome a villain	Overcome a hero
Rescue a victim	Kidnap a victim
Succeed in a quest or task	Prevent hero from quest or task
Make up for a lack	Create a lack
Freedom	Enslavement

Primary characters	
Heroes	Villains
Aides	Henchmen
Princesses	Sirens
Magicians	Sorcerers
Donors	Preventers
Dispatches	Retrievers
Seekers	Avoiders
Seeming villains	False Heroes/ Heroines
Rulers	Commoners

Berger's Opposing Types Among Primary Characters Found in Fairy Tales

Appendix 4 – Constructions of Childhood Citizenship

Constructions of Childhood Citizenship

A Cross-cultural Semiotic Analysis of TV News Bulletins for Children

by

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News bulletins as Mythical Narratives

1.[myths] are the product of society as a ruminator, masticating the essential categories and contradictions in its way of life through a system of stories that preserve and legitimate its identity (Silverstone, 1988,p.29)

2. [myth of marginality] understanding of minorities as marginal, less significant, and less valued members of society (Campbell, 1995,p.37)

YOUNG CITIZENS

1. The quality of the decisions we make within a democracy depends upon the quality of the information we receive (Lewis, 1991, p.123)

2. [Y]oung people's alienation from the domain of politics should not be interpreted merely as a form of apathy or ignorance. On the contrary I would see it a result of their positive exclusion from that domain (...). (Buckingham, 2000, p. 219)

Focus of Analysis

1. The selection and definition of the bulletins' contents;

2. The verbal and visual language used to address the viewers;

3. The allocation of agency and 'voice'

The Bulletins

Newsround

- Started in 1972 on BBC1
- In the 80s starts its daily week-days shows
- Often came within the Top Ten Children's programmes according to the rating charts from *Broadcast*

Caderno Diário

- Started in 1990 on RTP1
- Eventually moved to RTP2
- In 1999 returned to RTP1 at 19.00h
- Changes in afternoon block resulted in decrease of audiences, moved back to RTP2
- Cancelled in October 2002

1 - Scheduling and Context

Caderno Diário

- Aired from 19.50 to 20.00 on RTP2
- RTP2 children's slot was the latest on air
- RTP2 was a non-commercial channel aiming at providing a space and voice to a diversity of social groups
- On the other channels: RTP1 Regional News; SIC Brazilian 'telenovela'; TVI News Bulletin
- 20.00 main news start on RTP1

Newsround

- Aired from 17.00 to 17.10h on BBC1
- Part of the CBBC slot (15.25-17.35h)
- Coincides with a similar slot from ITV
- On Fridays gives place to *Newsround Extra*, a mini-documentary

2- Approaching the News

Caderno Diário

- Events are dissociated from the date they occur
- Hybrid between a news and magazine show
- Protectionism
- Predominance of thematic frames
- Opening news usually devoted to political issues, mostly national
- Closing stories in the broad category 'children's issues'
- Authority allocated to adults
- Several information gaps

Newsround

- Sense of Immediacy
- Strong resemblance with main news formal features
- Both thematic and episodic frames
- Less protectionism
- Opening story of international or national relevance
- Closing stories in the broad category of 'children's issues'

3 - Talking to the Viewers

Caderno Diário

- Two young adults presenting
- Attempt to differentiate styles
- Logic of dynamics
- Posture on studio similar to main news
- Informal dress code
- Viewers addressed directly
- Children have limited agency
- Adults' in a power position

Newsround

- Three young adults presenting
- Attempt to differentiate styles
- Logic of dynamics
- Informal dress code
- Different posture on studio from main news
- Children encouraged to participate
- Adults in a power position

In Conclusion

- Both bulletins have inherited the ideological and mythological character of mainstream news
- Clear intention of educating and informing the viewer
- Distinct perceptions of childhood:

  CD doesn't construct children as active and capable members of society

  NR incites the viewers to active participation

Appendix 5 - Technical Elements of Moving Images

Technical Elements of Moving Images

Camera Shots	**Close-up:** shot of a part of a person or object; used to heighten the dramatic sense, or to direct the audience attention, identification or empathy with a character.
	Extreme close-up: presents more clinical details and it gives a greater emphasis to drama and tension
	Medium shot: typical in studio TV; usually emphasising a detail on a person from the waist up. The person or object are still isolated from the surrounding environment
	Long-shot: Used to relate a person to the surroundings, either other characters (the cover shot), or place (the establishing shot)
	Point-of-view shot (POV): the viewer sees the world through a character's eyes
Camera Angle	**Straight on position:** gives the viewer a direct view of the subject on screen
	Low-angle: camera is placed below eye-level often ascribing power and stature to the subject
	High-angle: the camera looks down on the subject making it look small, insignificant, vulnerable
	Oblique angle and Dutch angle: camera tilts, the first to the left or right, the second, horizontally and vertically
Lenses	**Wide-angle lenses:** commonly used on the long-shot; when used in close-ups creates a sense of distortion
	Fish-eye lenses: creates an even greater sense of distortion; heightening tension and drama, indicating perhaps a disturbed or disrupted world
	Telephoto lenses: favoured by documentalists, it records subjects from a distance without disturbing the environment
	Zoom lenses: standard in TV, allows the camera-person to change the range of shot without moving the camera. A possible use is to direct the audience's attention to different subjects within a shot
Camera movement	**Panning:** camera movement on the horizontal plane, allowing the character's actions to be followed, or the scanning of a place in an establishing shot
	Tilt shot: camera movement on the vertical plane, it can have the same function as panning.
	Panning/Tilt with POV: subjective use of the movements as the viewer sees the world through the character's point of view
	Tracking or **Dolly:** the action is followed on a dolly pushed on tracks or a moving vehicle, allowing for fast-moving action. It may be used to intensify or distance the emotions of a character by moving closer through a close-up, or moving away to a long-shot showing the character in isolation.
Editing	**Fade-out:** Gradually darken the end of a shot to black
	Fade-in: Lightening a shot from black
	Dissolve: Brief superimpositions of the end of one shot and the beginning of another
	Wipe: A boundary line moves across the screen to replace one shot for another
	Cut: Cutting and splicing two shots
	Straight-up: Where one shot is immediately replaced by another
	Crosscut: Cut to another line of the developing story

Lighting	**High-key:** equal amount of lighting across a scene
	Low-key: less light on the entire scene creating contrast and areas of light and shade (usually used in high-intensity scenes or genres such as thrillers)

Appendix 6 - Symbolic Elements of Moving Images

Symbolic Elements of Moving Images

Choice of colours	The choice of colour or black and white film can convey both realistic and expressive messages. They can give a sense of time (sepia usually represents past events). Colour contrast, such as bright colours set against a dark background, draw attention; when lightness values are equal, 'warm' colours in the red-orange-yellow range tend to attract more attention, unlike 'cool' colours such as purple and green; 'limited palette' when directors use a few non-contrasting colours allows the viewer to make finer distinctions of intensity or saturation in the composition
Costume and objects	**Costume and make-up:** used to connote time and space, as well as to provide spectacle to products
	Objects: hold connotative and mythic value
Stars and Performances	**Stars:** particular icons carry symbolic power and are identified with particular genres and personality traits
	Performance: subtle emotional and character shadings reveal the quality of performance and acting verisimilitude
Sound	**Diegetic:** comes from the scene eg.:(dialogue, sound effects
	Non-diegetic: does not emanate from the scene (eg.: music, voice over)
Setting and Location	**Setting or/and Location Work:** establish time and space; certain genres are intimately linked with particular settings; shooting on location is preferable when there is a strong need of authenticity

Appendix 7 - Children's certificates of participation

Certificado de participação no projecto:

'Imaginando a Infância - Um estudo sobre programas de animação para públicos infantis'

Certifica-se que _____

aluna do 1º ano do Ensino Básico, do Agrupamento de Escolas de Esgueira,



colaborou neste projecto de investigação desenvolvido na Universidade de Cardiff, Reino Unido, com o apoio da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia. Obrigada, és perita em animação!

A investigadora,

_____

Certificado de participação no projecto:

'Imaginando a Infância - Um estudo sobre programas de animação para públicos infantis'



Certifica-se que _____

aluno do 1º ano do Ensino Básico, do Agrupamento de Escolas de Esgueira, colaborou neste projecto de investigação desenvolvido na Universidade de Cardiff, Reino Unido, com o apoio da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia. Obrigada, és perito em animação!

A investigadora,

_____

Certificado de participação no projecto:

'Imaginando a Infância - Um estudo sobre programas de animação para públicos infantis'

Certifica-se que _____

aluna do 4º ano do Ensino Básico, do Agrupamento de Escolas de Esgueira,

colaborou neste projecto de investigação desenvolvido na Universidade de

Cardiff, Reino Unido, com o apoio da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

Obrigada, és perita em animação!

A investigadora,

_____





Certificado de participação no projecto:

'Imaginando a Infância – Um estudo sobre programas de animação para públicos infantis'

Certifica-se que _____ _____

aluno do 4º ano do Ensino Básico, do Agrupamento de Escolas de Esgueira, colaborou neste projecto de investigação desenvolvido na Universidade de Cardiff, Reino Unido, com o apoio da Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

Obrigada, és perito em animação!

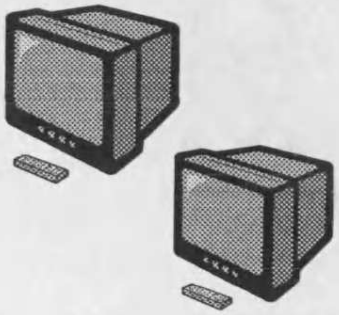
A investigadora,

_____

Appendix 8 - Questionnaire Year 1

Quantas televisões tens em casa?





Nenhuma. Uma. Mais do que uma.

Vês desenhos animados na televisão?











Nunca **Pouco** **Algumas** vezes **Muitas** vezes **Sempre que posso**

Gostas de televisão?



Não gosto



Gosto pouco



Mais ou menos



Gosto



Gosto muito



A programação da RTP para crianças é:



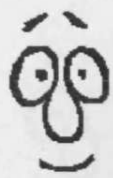
Muito má



Má



Mais ou menos



Boa



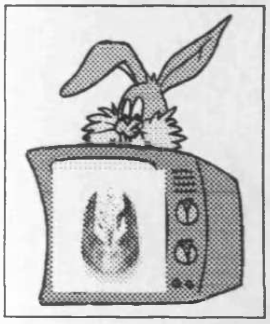
Muito boa



A programação da TVI para crianças é:



Muito má **Má** Mais ou menos Boa **Muito boa**



A programação da SIC para crianças é:



Muito má **Má** Mais ou menos Boa **Muito boa**

Conheces algum desenho animado feito em Portugal?



Não



Sim

Se respondeste sim, diz qual:_____

Conheces algum desenho animado feito no estrangeiro?

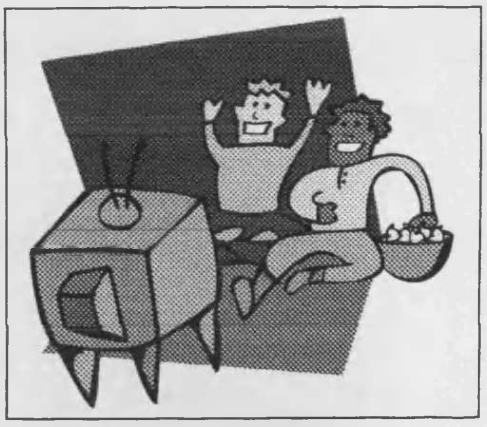


Não



Sim

Se respondeste sim, diz qual:_____



Qual é o teu programa de televisão preferido?

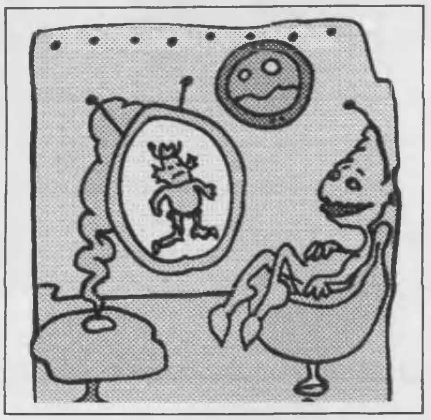
_____



Qual é o teu desenho animado preferido?

_____

Qual é o canal de televisão que mais vês?_____





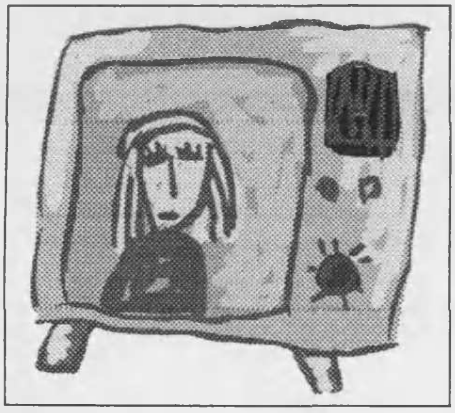
Dá um exemplo de um desenho animado que conheças para meninas:

_____



Dá um exemplo de um desenho animado que conheças para meninos:

_____



Diz o nome do desenho animado de que menos gostas:

_____

Chegaste ao fim do questionário.

Obrigada pela tua participação!



Questionário sobre animação infantil

Como te chamas?_____

Quantos anos tens?_____

Onde nasceste?_____

Appendix 9 - Questionnaire Year 4

Questionário sobre Animação Infantil

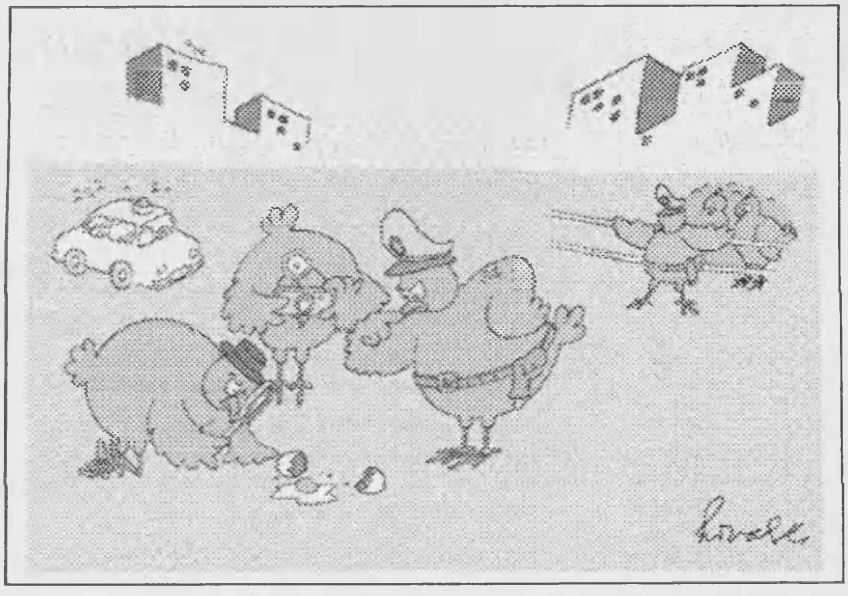
Universidade de Cardiff

Obrigada por colaborares neste estudo que tem como objectivo saber qual a tua opinião sobre programas de animação infantil (desenhos animados).

Neste questionário vais encontrar vários tipos de perguntas que pedem formas diferentes de resposta:

a) **Para responder a algumas perguntas tens que escrever a resposta.**
b) **Para outras, tens que desenhar um círculo à volta da resposta que consideras correcta.**

Se não perceberes a pergunta pede ajuda à tua professora e não a um colega. É a TUA opinião que interessa! Podes responder à vontade, o teu nome não será usado.



Questionário

1. Nome:_____

2. Idade:_____ **3.** Data de Nascimento:_____

4. País onde nasceste:_____

(Por favor desenha um círculo à volta da resposta verdadeira)

5. Quantas televisões tens em tua casa?

a) Nenhuma b) 1 c) Mais do que uma

6. Se tens televisão em que sítio da casa é que está?

a) Na sala b) Na cozinha c) No teu quarto

7. Com que frequência vês desenhos animados na televisão?

a) Nunca
b) Poucas vezes
c) Algumas vezes
d) Muitas vezes
e) Sempre que posso

8. Gostas de televisão?

a) Gosto muito
b) Gosto
c) Mais ou menos
d) Gosto pouco
e) Não gosto

9. A programação televisiva da RTP para crianças é:

a) Muito boa
b) Boa
c) Razoável
d) Má
e) Muito má

10. A programação televisiva da SIC para crianças é:

a) Muito boa
b) Boa
c) Razoável
d) Má
e) Muito má

11. A programação televisiva da TVI para crianças é:
a) Muito boa
b) Boa
c) Razoável
d) Má
e) Muito má

12. Conheces algum desenho animado feito em Portugal? SIM NÃO

13. Se respondeste sim à última pergunta, diz qual:_____

14. Conheces algum desenho animado estrangeiro? SIM NÃO

15. Se respondeste sim à última pergunta, diz qual:_____

16. Qual é o teu programa de televisão preferido?

_____

16.1 Porquê?_____

_____

17. Qual é o teu desenho animado preferido?_____

17.1 Porquê?_____

_____

18. Qual é o canal de televisão que mais vês?_____

19. Dá um exemplo de um desenho animado para meninas:

_____

19.1. Porque razão achas que é adequado para meninas?

_____

_____

20. Dá um exemplo de um desenho animado para meninos:

_____

20.1. Porque razão achas que é adequado para meninos?

_____

21. Diz o nome do desenho animado de que menos gostas e porquê?

_____

22. Que tipo de animação gostarias de ver com maior frequência na televisão portuguesa?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Chegaste ao fim do questionário. Mais uma vez, obrigada!



Appendix 10 - Questionnaire to the parents

Inquérito

1. Relação de parentesco com o aluno ou aluna:
a) Mãe ☐ b) Pai ☐ c) Outra ☐ Qual? _____

2. Idade: ☐☐

3. Estado civil:
a) Solteiro(a) ☐
b) Casado(a)/ União de facto ☐
c) Divorciado(a)/ Separado(a) ☐
d) Viúvo(a) ☐

4. Nacionalidade:_____

5. Nível de escolaridade:
Próprio: _____ Cônjuge: _____

6. Número de elementos do agregado familiar: ☐☐

7. Descrição do agregado familiar (ex.: mãe, pai, 2 filhas, avó): _____
_____

8. Condição perante o trabalho:

	Própria	Cônjuge
a) Activo(a)	☐	☐
b) Desempregado(a)	☐	☐
c) Doméstico(a)	☐	☐
d) Reformado(a)/Pensionista	☐	☐
e) Outra	☐	☐
	Qual?_____	Qual?_____

9. Profissão (que exerce ou a última que exerceu caso não esteja activo):
a) Própria:_____
b) Cônjuge: _____

10. Situação na profissão (que exerce ou última que exerceu caso não esteja activo):

	Própria	Cônjuge
a) Patrão	☐	☐
b) Isolado/Trabalhador por conta própria	☐	☐
c) Trabalhador em pequena empresa familiar	☐	☐
d) Trabalhador por conta de outrém/Assalariado	☐	☐
e) Outra?	☐	☐
	Qual?_____	Qual?_____

11. Qual a sua opinião sobre a programação infantil da televisão pública?

_____

_____

Appendix 11 - Task III interview guidelines

Cria um desenho animado[1]

Imagina que trabalhas para um canal televisivo e te pedem para, com a tua equipa[2], criar um programa de animação para crianças. O director do canal quer[3]:

a) Um desenho animado para meninas portuguesas da tua idade.[4]
b) Um desenho animado para meninos portugueses da tua idade[5].
c) Um desenho animado português para meninos e meninas estrangeiros.
d) Um desenho animado com uma história passada em Portugal.
e) Um desenho animado para meninos e meninas de 6 anos/ da tua idade.

Tens que decidir:

1) Sobre o tipo de história (escreve um pequeno sumário)?

2) Quem é a personagem principal (ou as personagens principais)? Como se chama? Que idade tem? Onde vive? Com quem vive?

3) O que faz a personagem principal? Porquê?

4) Quem são as personagens secundárias? (amigos; inimigos; etc.)

5) Onde se passa a história?

6) Que língua falam as personagens?

7) Como acaba a história?

---

[1] No dia anterior pedir à professora que, antes do intervalo, lhes entregue os questionários e, depois, os divida os grupos e lhes transmita alguma informação sobre a tarefa do dia seguinte. A informação deve ser limitada: Têm que criar um desenho animado; têm que eleger um chefe de equipa.

[2] Pedir para elegerem um chefe de equipa que tem que saber ouvir e respeitar todas as opiniões e ser capaz de tomar as decisões finais.

[3] São turmas de 25 a serem divididas em 5 grupos de 5 que terão características diferentes e tarefas diferentes: 1 grupo só de meninas; 1 grupo só de meninos e 3 grupos mistos.

[4] Tarefa a ser realizada pelo grupo de meninos.

[5] Tarefa a ser realizada pelo grupo de meninas.

Appendix 12 – Producers' interview guidelines (ATW) and production house

a) How would you describe the panorama of production and broadcasting of animation for child audiences in your country?

b) What are the origins of your country's animated tale and how faithful do you consider it to be to its roots?

c) What age group is the tale targeting? Why and how?

d) In what ways do you do you think the tale appeals to its targeted audience(s)?

e) How do you think children in your country and abroad benefit from a production like the Animated Tales of the World?

f) How does the production of animation for children in your own country benefit from this international co-production?

g) Do you believe that children from different countries will react distinctively to your tale? Why?

h) What concessions, if any, did you have to make to your original tale in order to make it appealing to such a diverse audience?

i) How important do you think cultural specificity is to children's animation? Why?

j) How would you define 'cultural specificity'? And in what ways can it be present on children's animation (what elements are signifiers of cultural specificity?)?

Name	**Production house**
Humberto Santana, Portugal	*Animanostra*, screenwriter for 'The quest for the Enchanted Islands'
Virginia Witts, Namibia	*NBC*, Executive Producer, Animated Tales of the World
Thomas Shneider-Trump, Germany	Clay Art / Scopas Medien AG, Director, Animated Tales of the World
Laura Tey, Spain	*Tomasvistas*, Producer/writer, Animated Tales of the World
Aidan Hickey, Republic of Ireland	*Brown Bag productions*, Animated Tales of the World
Chris Grace, Wales	*S4C*, Producer, Animated Tales of the World
Penelope Middelboe & Martin lamb	*Right Angle*, Producers, Animated Tales of the World

Appendix 13 – Preference tables (pilot study)

PREFERENCES REGARDING CARTOONS – 1st Grade children (6/7 years-old)

	Clips' likes	Clips' dislikes	Favourite	Adequate for same age	Adequate for older	Adequate for younger	Adequate for boys	Adequate for girls
Boys	Rotten Ralph Navegantes da Lua Pink Panther Bob Morane Little Mermaid		Dragon Ball Pokemon Digimon				Pokemon Digimon	'those with women' Navegantes da Lua
Girls		Digimon Navegantes da Lua	Cinderella Navegantes da Lua Nobita					

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Girls	<u>Girls</u> **Qt.A:** I:You like Cinderella, how is it? G1: Ehm… I: It's a girl… G1: It's a girl that, that… Her stepmother makes her clean the house, wash clothes… (background noise) I: Do you prefer cartoons with girls? G1: Yes. I like Cinderella and also Navegantes da Lua.	<u>Fights</u> & <u>Animal inspired characters</u> **Qt.A:** G1: Boys prefer those with fights. G2: Fights and animals. I don't.

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Boys	<u>Characters' trickiness</u> **Qt. A:** I: Divertiram-se com ele (Rotten Ralph)? Porque? Porque e que gostam dele? B: Por causa das partidas todas! <u>Diversity</u> **Qt. B:** I: But the 'Little Mermaid' is about a girl and still you like it? B1: I do? B2: Me too. B3: It's funny. I: The characters are neat? B1: There are different ones. <u>Good story</u> **Qt. C:** I: And why do you prefer these (Pokemon)? B1: Because they are neater (mais giros). I: They are neater? And what do you like, the characters, the story? B2: The story. I: And why? B2: Because it has the Pokemon. <u>Action figures</u> **Qt.D:** B1: And there's the toys, I have... I: Digimon and Pokemon have them, they have toys to play with, isn't it? B1: Yes. I: So, you prefer those cartoons that have toys to play with, right? All: Right.	<u>Girl or women characters *</u> **Qt.A:** I: Do you think some cartoons are more suitable for boys and others for girls? B1: The boys, for example, Pokemon, Digimon (...) The girls they like those... Those with women. * Refering to human like characters, and may not be the case regarding other female characters

PREFERENCES REGARDING CARTOONS – 2nd[t] Grade children (7/8 years-old)

	Clips' likes	Clips' dislikes	Favourite	Adequate for same age	Adequate for older	Adequate for younger	Adequate for boys	Adequate for girls
Boys	*Rotten Ralph* *Digimon* *Dexter's Lab* *Pink Panther*	*Rotten Ralph* *SailorMoon* *The Adventures of Santa Claus*	*Pokemon* *Digimon*			*Rotten Ralph* (5 years-old)		
Girls	*Digimon* *Pink Panther* *SailorMoon* *Dexter's Lab*	*SailorMoon*	*Pink Panther* *Tom & Jerry* *Pokemon* *Doraemon*					

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Girls	<u>Gags</u> **Qt.A:** I: Your favourite cartoon? G1: Pink Panther! I have a videotape with Pink Panther's activities. I: Why Pink Panther? Because of all the silly things she does? G1 & G2: Yes! G2: You haven't shown Tom & Jerry. I: Do you also like T&J? It is similar isn't it? They are always chasing each other. G2: Why haven't you shown it? (....)	<u>Fights</u> **Qt.A:** I: Next we saw 'SailorMoon' do you usually see it? G1: Yes, we see (laughs). G2: I don't like it. G3: I like it. I: Why? G2: Because I don't like thins with fights. I: You don't like fights? But you were telling me that you liked Digimon. G2: But... G3: Because it's fun. I: What do 'SailorMoon' do? G3: Fight. G2: Fight.

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Boys	Fights: I: Why is Pokemon good? B1: Oh! Because they fight! Duration of episode/series: B2: It lasts longer (Pokemon compared with Rotten Ralph). Diversity B3: It has more cartoons (Pokemon compared with RR) Cell animation: B1: This one wasn't an animated cartoon (RR). I: It was a puppet animation not animated drawings. Do you know any other, which is like that? (....) I: And do you prefer puppet or draw animation? B1: Animated drawings.	Girl or women characters * **Qt.A:** I: Which ones did you dislike: . . . B1: I didn't like the one with the girls. I: SailorMoon? Why? B1: It's boring. I: Boring? B1: It's for girls. I like those with fights. . . . . I:But don't they fight as well? B1: The way they fight they would be all dead! To fight like that... I'd touch them with my fingers and they would be on the floor! I: So you prefer boys? B1: Yes miss.

PREFERENCES REGARDING CARTOONS – 3rd Grade children (8/9 years-old)

	Clips' likes	Clips' dislikes	Favourite	Adequate for same age	Adequate for older	Adequate for younger	Adequate for boys	Adequate for girls
Boys	*Digimon* *Rotten Ralph* *SailorMoon* *Dexter's Lab* *Pink Panther* *Santa Claus* *Kangoo*	*Bob Morane* *Santa Claus* *SailorMoon* *Little Mermaid*	*Pokemon* *Action Man*	*Pink Panther* *SailorMoon* *Digimon* *Pokemon*		*Rotten Ralph* (2, 5 years-old)	*Pokemon* *Digimon* *Dragon Ball* *Dexter's Lab* *SailorMoon*	*'Barbies'* *Pink Panther* *SailorMoon* *Pokemon* *Little Mermaid*
Girls	*Rotten Ralph* *Pokemon* *SailorMoon* *Kangoo*	*SailorMoon*	*Atari* *Pokemon*	*Rotten Ralph* *Digimon*	*Rotten Ralph*	*Pink Panther* *Rita Catita* *Batatoon*	*Digimon*	*SailorMoon*

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Girls		Fights **Qt.A:** G1: Atari it's a Ninja with special powers, he can transform into things, and there's also a smaller Ninja, there's a dog, and then / they// I: Do they fight like Pokemon? G1: No. I: Do you like cartoons with fights? G1&G2: No. I: Do you like SailorMoon? G2: Yes. I: They fight. G1: I don't like it. I: Why? (....) 'Childish' behaviour: **Qt.B:** I: A cartoon for the younger? G1: *Rita Catita.* I: Do you like *Rita Catita*? G1: I don't like it. G2: Me neither. I: Why? G1: It's a childish girl, with a huge head and a tiny body. [laughter] I: It's not funny? G2: No. G1: She is always talking and talking. She tells the others to shut and she keeps talking.

Boys	Diversity **Qt.A:** I: Do you prefer Pokemon or Digimon? B1: I prefer Pokemon. I: Why? B1:Because of the new Pokemon. I: Because new Pokemon keep appearing? B1: Yes. Merchandising: B1: [shows Pokemon cards] I: Do you like cartoons that have toys to play with? B1: Yes! [explains how the card game is played] Characters' trickiness I: Did you like the cartoon with the cat? B1: Yes (....) because he kept playing tricks. I: And you like that? B1: Yes.	Romance: **Qt.A:** I: What cartoon did you prefer? B1 & B2: Digimon! I: And the one you least liked? B1: That one with the 'Sleeping Beauty'. B2: It's too romantic. I: And you don't like romance? B1 & B2: No. Girls: **Qt.A:** I: What about SailorMoon? B1: They are... B2: That one... B1: I don't like because its just girls and they do lots of attacks and stuff. I: So, you don't like it? What about you? B2: I don't like it either. I: But they fight, as do Digimon and Pokemon. B2: It's different; it's girls' fights. I: How is that? B2: They fight against women. B1: And than they say: 'Oh, SailorMoon and the Power!'. It's really boring, it takes them a year to do that.

PREFERENCES REGARDING CARTOONS – 4th Grade children (9/10 years-old)

	Clips' likes	Clips' dislikes	Favourite	Adequate for same age	Adequate for older	Adequate for younger	Adequate for boys	Adequate for girls
Boys	Rotten Ralph	Digimon Santa Claus	Doraemon Alvin Digimon			Rotten Ralph Ti-No-Ni Teletubbies		
Girls			SailoMoon Doraemon Cinderella					

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Girls	Girls Magic Family life Romance Knights' fights Fairies **Qt.A:** I: What story and characters would you create for a cartoon? G1: Some gilrs/ Princesses G2: And magic. G3: And a family. G4: It would be a romance. First they would break up, but then they would start again. G2: There would be fairies, good and bad, and some fights, but not like the boys like, with some swords and so.	

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Boys	Boys Animals Fights Technology **Qt. A:** I: If you could create your own cartoon how would you do it? What kind of story and characters? // I: What would you choose, monsters, boys, girls? B1: Boys / and some girls. B2: There would be animals and boys. (....) I: And what would they do? Fight? B2: No... B1: They would fight. Fight with shotguns, special effects. B2: With technologies. I: What kind of technologies? Laser? B2: No / Like jumping in the air and so.	

PREFERENCES REGARDING CARTOONS – 4th Grade children b (9/10 years-old)

	Clips' likes	Clips' dislikes	Favourite	Adequate for same age	Adequate for older	Adequate for younger	Adequate for boys	Adequate for girls
Boys	Rotten Ralph	SailorMoon	Digimon Pokemon II			Rotten Ralph SailorMoon	Digimon	SailorMoon
Girls*								

	Wanted Elements	Unwanted Elements
Boys	Characters' trickiness **Qt. A:** I: What did you like? B1: I liked the cat. B2: Because it's funny. I: Playing jokes? B2: Tricky. B1: The cat's like me!	Girls: **Qt.A:** (SailorMoon) B1: It's for girls. I: Is it only for girls? B2: It's more for girls. I: Why? Because the characters are girls? All: No! B3: The one with the cat also had girls and it was fun. I: Why don't you like it? B4: I don't like it. B1: It only has girls. Romance: **Qt.B:** I: What did you think about the ending of the episode (SailorMoon)? B1: I didn't like it. I: Do you like cartoons about dating and things like that? B1& B2: No, it's for girls [laughter].

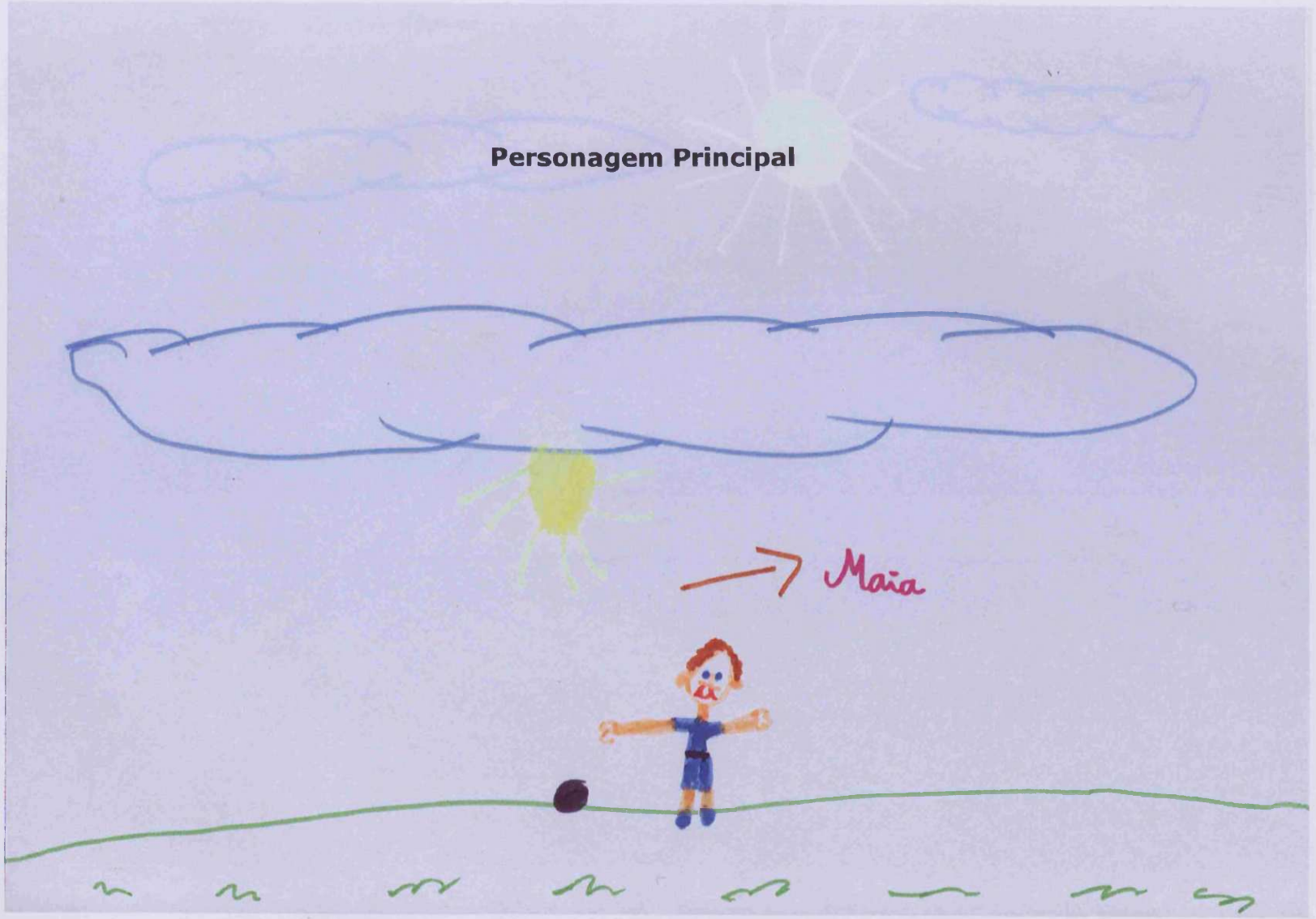
* The bad recording quality prevented the collection of data from the girl's group. Still, they weren't very talkative and did not express enthusiasm towards cartoons. They said they preferred soap operas.

Appendix 14 - Children's illustrations

Personagem Principal

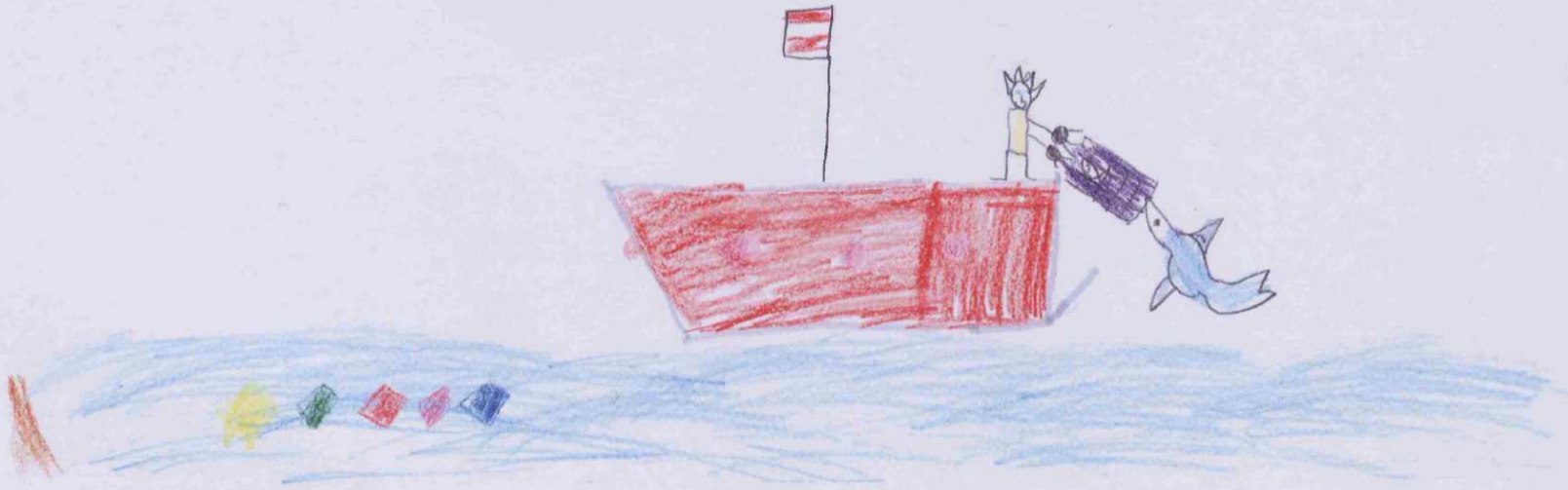


Personagem Principal



Personagem Principal

Golfinho Dourada

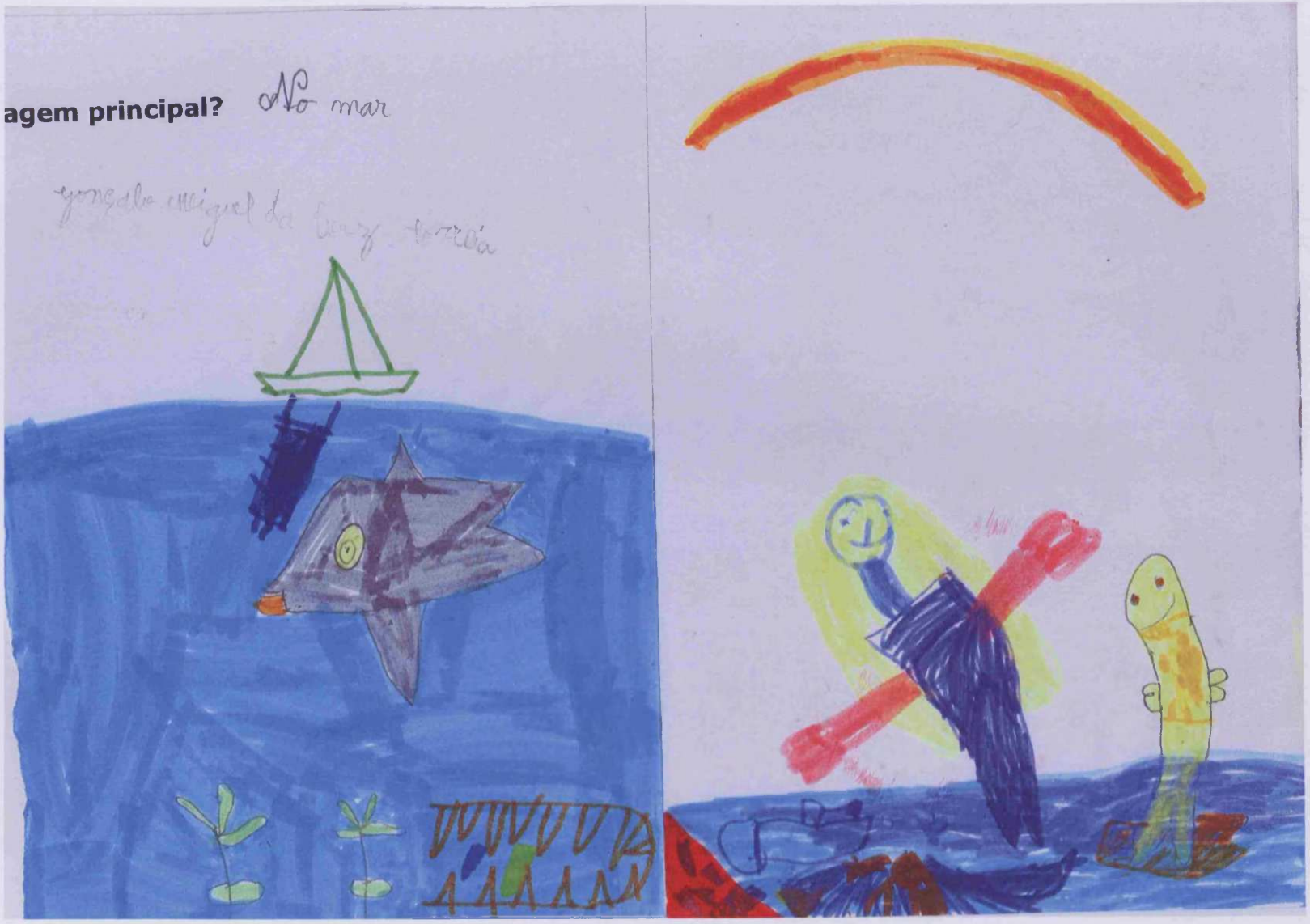


Outras Personagens

Coelho

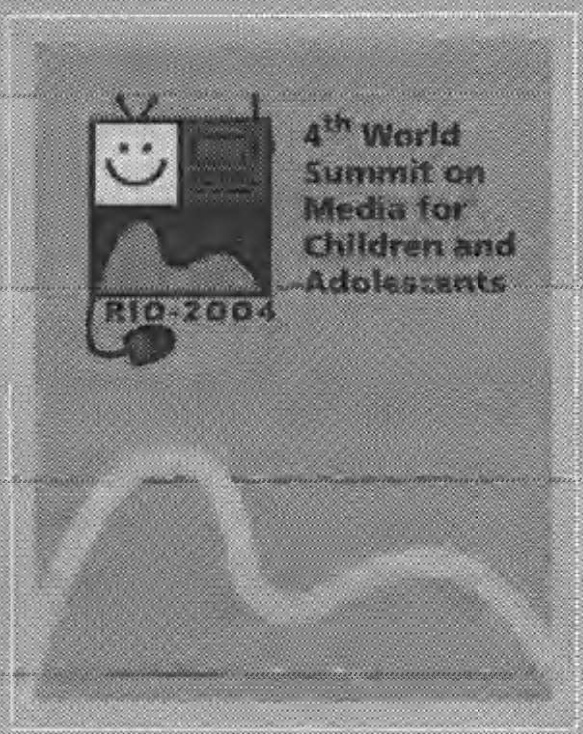


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Appendix 15 – Rio Charters

PREFEITURA DO RIO



Rio de Janeiro Charters

RIO
PREFEITURA
EDUCAÇÃO MULTIRIO

RIO 2007
Panamerican Games
An accomplishment of the CITY OF RIO.
A victory for its PEOPLE.

MIDIATIVA

Declaration of the Professionals

The world – and the mass media that reflect and shape it – is at a cross-road. Wars and hatred, poverty and inequality, cast a shadow over our collective future. We ask ourselves if the media are part of the problem or part of the solution. Our answer is that they are both.

Media globalization is a reality, for better or worse. Media driven by profit alone and concentration of media ownership in fewer and fewer hands illustrate the dark side of globalization. Lack of quality and cultural diversity are the outcome.

The media can either help to perpetuate this situation, or become an instrument to transform it. We can resign ourselves to their dividing and polarizing us, or take action to ensure that they fulfill their great promise and bring us together as a human community.

The vast potential of the Information and Communication Revolution to promote diversity and social justice will only be realized through the active participation of all sectors of society. The airwaves and cyberspace do not belong to the broadcasters or to the advertisers – they belong, by law, to the people. Media companies are issued licenses with the condition that they serve the public interest.

Because the media are central to children's and adolescents' development and education – influencing not only attitudes but also behaviours and identities – we are deeply concerned about the negative values and lifestyles promoted by so much of the media today.

The media are taking on roles once played by parents and teachers, frequently without being prepared to face this awesome challenge. Children and adolescents are entitled to something better than what they are getting from the media.

The greatest investment we can make in the future is in our children and adolescents. This implies greater responsability from both media and society, and actions that can no longer be postponed.

Adolescents' Declaration

We, the participants of the Adolescents Forum at the 4th World Summit on Media for Children and Adolescents, given our concern about the current media crisis for children and adolescents, recognize the need to discuss and re-examine the democratization of information in today's society and in mass media.

In order to discuss the democratization of production and use of the media, we must alert governments that globalization of access to information is a necessary first step. If we are to unite forces with peoples around the world in this effort, instead of changing the media, we should use it to eradicate violence, poverty and to facilitate access to education. Joining forces means uniting with the media thereby bringing quality culture, entertainment, and education to the entire population.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."



Proposals

Professionals	Adolescents
To meet the goals listed above, we agree to the necessity of involving and engaging governments, broadcast companies, advertisers, advertising professionals, schools, universities, educators and researchers, civil society, media consumers, families, and others, to guarantee the following:	In light of the ideas expressed above, we, the Adolescents Forum, hereby propose:
Establishment of broader alliances between these key players.	Communication among children, teenagers and adults about quality media.
Incorporation and dissemination of the resolutions stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.	
Regulation of mass media.	Guarantee of quality control in media starting with the creative process and including society, councils on ethics and grievance boards in all countries: 1 - Setting of times for, or prohibition of content that is violent, erotic, or encourages drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes or using illegal drugs; 2 - Establishment of councils to receive audience suggestions and complaints about media abuses, making this information available to the general public; 3 - Put pressure on advertisers to refrain from sponsoring low quality programs based on audience complaints; 4 - Set up a media commission encompassing of children and adolescents. Emergency establishment of ways to block pornographic content on the internet from children and adolescents.
In servince training of communications professionals by institutions of higher learning and by businesses.	Raise the sensitivity of producers of news and information for children and adolescents in order to: 1 - Avoid portraying stereotypes that associate children and teens with products outside their reach; or which associate them with crime and violence; 2 - Refrain from using embarrassing discriminatory images of children and adolescents.
Training to develop critical sensibilities in children and adolescents, as technical media production skills.	Create spaces in schools to teach children and adolescents (especially those with physical or mental disabilities) how to receive, search for, and utilize information in a critical and productive fashion.

Proposals

Professionals	Adolescents
Authentic representations of children and teenagers in the media, considering cultural, social, ethnic, religious diversity, gender, et al. with special consideration to people with disabilities.	
Increasing quality, quantity and diversity of media for children and adolescents at various stages of their development.	Creation of mass communication media specifically for children and adolescents with space for local programming produced by themselves.
Promotion of media production with the participation children and adolescents.	Guaranteed space for children and adolescents in the production and transmission of media products.
Public and private financing of media for children and adolescents.	Government and private financing policies to induce in media production investment by children and adolescents.
Democratization of the means of access to technology and information Maintenance and strengthening of the public systems of communication.	Legally mandated free airtime TV and radio set aside for schools and organizations that promote the production of educational media for children and adolescents.

Conclusions of the Professionals

In Rio we looked at the media and the world from different perspectives. A wide range of successful experiences from all countries proves that there are viable, creative alternatives to mainstream homogeneity. This summit has renewed our commitment to build solidarity and human values through the media.

Conclusions of the Adolescents

We adolescents commit ourselves to the implementation of these proposals with the same level of passion today as when we are adults.
When adults recognize our work, prioritize quality media that is produced with the participation of children and teenagers, come to understand that we are not an expense but an investment, that we are the present building the future, then we will have won the battle we are fighting today.

Rio de Janeiro,Brazil
23 April 2004

