

Tracking the Global in the Local: On Children's Culture in a Small National Media Market

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Researchers in many countries have begun to productively map how children of all ages use media, music and associated merchandise in their everyday lives. Ethnographic audience studies of children's media culture have flourished since the 1980s when easy access to video recording enabled scholars to probe audience responses to texts (television programmes, films, etc.) and to closely observe children's peer group play. There is now rich evidence that demonstrates the idiosyncratic and creative ways that children, like youth, use popular culture in their 'work' of identity formation as well as a source for 'scripts' used in peer group play (Hengst, 1997; Lemish et al., 1998; Kelley et al., 1999; Buckingham, 2000; Davies et al. 2000).

By contrast, ethnographic work on how producers and marketers shape the local cultural resources available for children for their playful (but serious) work of identity formation has been neglected. Understandably, it has been more difficult to gain similar access to the often 'commercially sensitive' decision-making of commissioners, producers and marketers in order to conduct ethnographic work on their decision processes. But this work is important if we are to understand the *institutional* power to shape available imaginative horizons for children. Born, who has conducted recent ethnographic work within the BBC, argues even more forcefully that ethnographic studies of a range of production decision-making moments are critical because they provide evidence of how production always pre-empts consumption, shaping television texts and the ways they set up limits to and condition consumption (Born, 2000: 416).

This article describes how children's culture in a small media market with limited public funding, like New Zealand, is shaped by the media outputs of affluent nations, and suggests in turn, how these global audio-visual flows have implications for the viability of local production and consequently for the range and variety of local cultural resources for children.¹ The article argues that the study of production moments within children's television in a range of countries would enable one to investigate the differentials of power between stakeholders

involved in producing children's popular culture. McChesney (1999) characterizes the current media landscape as being dominated by a handful of transnational media companies, where even second-tier of first world media corporations are driven by a 'mantra' of expand or die. These changes make it as important to undertake production research in a range of locations, as it is to undertake audience research, if one is to grapple with paradoxical global and local tugs within children's cultures.

Certainly New Zealand's physical distance from 'centres' of global corporate power is of no significance in the eyes of New Zealand's children who, as elsewhere (Blumler et al., 1997; Goonasekera et al., 2000) embrace the latest hit programmes. Media time and space have collapsed for children in New Zealand, just as it has for children in India and Spain, who all share enthusiasm for commodified popular culture. Being at the capillary end of arterial capital flows in a far-flung country like New Zealand is something now shared by children in all capitalist cultural environments simply because marketing instrumentality can only *ever* manifest itself in the particularity of *local* children's media environments. *Each* child, whether viewing television in Ireland, San José, Vietnam or Fiji, is now best conceptualized as being 'at the end' of hybrid cultural flows.

Who gets to make television, how and where, have long been the central concerns for democratic conceptions of the media. This is reflected in many national media policy concerns to provide appropriate cultural range, diversity and quality of media provision for local children. However, it is the diverse group of stakeholders in production – programme commissioners, producers, purchasers of children's entertainment products, marketers, line managers and programmers – that continue to shape daily provision for children in broadcasting because it is the result of their combined professional judgements that decides what is available on free-to-air television. This article uses a series of 'production moments' observed during one season of a New Zealand children's weekday magazine programme in order to tease out how negotiations between adult stakeholders in local children's television shaped a 'local' magazine programme. These micro production case studies enable one to observe the implications of recent global shifts in audio-visual trade for 588,000 children in a deregulated national television environment.

Television in New Zealand and the children's programme What Now?

New Zealand, in common with other small or less affluent nations, has never had a commercial-free public service television service. The cost of delivering television to a sparse population spread across a mountainous island nation has seen public money augmented by advertising dollars since first transmissions began in 1961. By the late 1990s, the state broadcaster, Television New Zealand, comprised two channels: TV1, a prestige news and information channel targeting adult upper demographics, and TV2, an entertainment channel targeting house-hold shoppers, young adults and children. This latter popular channel

showed a mix of imported and local programmes for children after school and on weekend mornings, of which only early childhood programming zones and Sunday morning broadcasts were advertising free. During the 1990s, competition for audience share intensified with the entrance of free-to-air TV3² and Sky, a pay service offering Nickelodeon and the Cartoon Network. During the same decade, successive governments required high dividends from its state broadcaster Television New Zealand (TVNZ), thus emphasizing its commercial bottom line rather than public service objectives.

The funding for public service local production objectives during the 1990s was derived from a licence fee of NZ\$110³ charged on television sets, and this fee had remained static during a decade of rising production costs. Over 8 million dollars out of the 45 million dollars of the licence fee⁴ spent on television was dedicated to children's and youth productions by a statutory funding body called New Zealand On Air. Both state-owned TV2 *and* overseas-owned TV3 could seek public funding for children's programme ideas from New Zealand On Air and the funds were allocated on a competitive basis. Local producers were required to pitch ideas to either state-owned TV2 or overseas-owned TV3, thus ensuring that broadcasters controlled what was pitched for commissioning and where it was scheduled. Local producers found themselves negotiating between the requirements of commercial broadcasters to deliver ratings, and the cultural requirements for New Zealand On Air public funding.

The majority of *children's* production funding was spent on two strands: a daily, repeated, early childhood programme on TV3 and *What Now?*, a magazine strand targeting children between six and 12 years on TV2. In the years of data collection (1998/1999), this magazine strand comprised 40 non-commercial Sunday morning two-hour shows, and 195 half-hour commercial weekday programmes costing approximately 4 million New Zealand dollars. During the research period, the *What Now?* weekday strand was typical of many lower cost magazine programmes targeting six to twelve year olds in Europe, America and Asia. It used youthful presenters in studio links to glue together a mixed menu of entertainment, media gossip, field reporting, skits, drama and informational content, thus delivering elements of public service content within a popular format. During the last years of the 1990s, it was commissioned by TV2, as mentioned a commercially driven broadcasting channel owned by the government but required to make profits. The overwhelming proportion of its production budget came from New Zealand On Air and was required to fulfil local cultural public service objectives. The remainder of the budget was contributed by TV2, partly through a 'licence fee' assessed on the programme's value to the broadcaster in terms of advertising revenue (this was paid partly through the use of in-house facilities) and partly from carefully selected sponsorship deals.⁵

In the following section, this article analyses how global hits challenged the viability of the weekday afternoon strand of *What Now?* during the late 1990s. The challenges to local production presented by global hits (animation in particular) is a theme in recent debates over children's provision in affluent (Blumler et al., 1997) and poor countries alike, but it reaches critical dimensions in na-

tions that cannot afford dedicated public service television channels on which to show a mixed menu of local age specific children's television production (see Goonasekera et al., 2000, for the devastating evidence from Asian nations).

In the section after that, the article tracks how state owned TV2 in New Zealand became just one of many marketing tools used by local and global corporates wishing to brand generic and entertainment products to local children. In this section 'children's television' appears to disappear as a clear object of research, to be replaced by case studies of local and global marketing campaigns involving rights windows, public relations, marketing, and promotional events all of which were designed to shape children's consumer expectations of local children's media culture.

New Zealand (paradoxically the world's first welfare state) dismantled both trade and audio-visual barriers in the mid 1980s when the government of the day embraced neo-liberal economic reforms. This saw the New Zealand local producers increasingly exposed to global audio-visual flows in the absence of the protective local content quotas, licensing or export initiatives used in other countries to nurtured local production industries. Media commentators remain divided about the benefits that this exposure to economic and cultural global flows has brought its citizens over the last decade. At one extreme it is believed that New Zealand has become a

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

On the other hand there is the view that New Zealand politicians have had the vision to accept the benefits of globalization:

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

Global shifts in audio-visual production and trade

Political economists argue that we are currently experiencing a stage of 'disorganized capitalism' whereby multiple imagined worlds are shaped by complex flows of capital, labour, commodities, information and images. Appadurai, for example, suggests that the nation state is being by-passed by five new dimensions of belonging: ethnoscaples, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes and that these global 'flows' overlap highly diverse ways in different places (Appadurai, 1990: 296). Empirical evidence certainly suggests that during the late 1990s there were several critical shifts in the economic drivers within global media industries and that these have profound implications for children's mediascapes everywhere.

From the mid-nineties onwards, a chaotic process of rapid vertical and horizontal integration of trans-national media companies saw the largest players consolidating, thus increasing their share of global audio-visual markets, and second level media players (including some public service broadcasters like the British BBC and Australian ABC) grappling to expand into specialized global media niches in order to survive (McChesney, 1999). The trans-national power of the top tier entertainment corporations has been further consolidated by widespread national media deregulation, the collapse of regional and global trade barriers, and recent concerted international efforts to defend free commercial speech based on American constitutional interpretations (see, e.g., Wiggs, 1999).

This has provided business synergies between rights windows⁶ related to production, distribution and media platforms and business opportunities related to character licensing and merchandising. Any one global entertainment 'property' is now designed to earn the maximum income from each rights window in a carefully calculated sequence over different releases.

This may see media rights for film, television, video, and multi-media managed over time, in association with merchandising and licensing rights. The increasing use of deficit funding by dominant players in the U.S., based on expected returns from such 'windowing' opportunities, has squeezed the funding resources for smaller children's media producers, at the same time cutting them out from major markets in the U.S. This has also seen smaller companies aligning themselves with major corporate players through output deals, co-production and other ventures. The tipping of production outputs from free-to-air to pay companies was demonstrated in 1998 when the Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon's programming expenditures outstripped that of the combined BBC and ITV children's budgets. Expenditure on original programmes by children-only pay channels has boomed, while the audience share of free-to-air channels, even in larger countries, decreases as global pay options grow (Fry, 1998). In 1998, Nickelodeon earned \$773 million in net U.S. revenue (Flint, 1998).

Figure 1 presents the largest U.S. based media companies delivering material to children during the late 1990s. (Products in italics are among those discussed in the article.)

By the late 1990s, children's productions that became global hits with children were no longer necessarily American. As one leading Canadian producer puts it:

The US has become more of an ancillary market; open to acquisition of internationally-produced product (Kettler, 1998: 14).

In 1997/98, production flows swung in radical new directions when Ragdoll's *The Teletubbies*, originally commissioned by the BBC, became a huge early childhood U.S. hit for PBS (Britt, 1998), followed by the Japanese Nintendo video-game spin off animation *Pokémon* for Warner Bros 'Kids'.

Figure 1. The largest U.S. based media companies delivering material to children during the late 1990s

Company	Disney	Time Warner	News Corp	Viacom
Hollywood distributor	Disney	Warner Bros	20 th Century Fox	Paramount
US networks	ABC (1995) Disney radio	Warner Bros television network	Fox Network Fox Kids radio	United Paramount Network (50%) (1999 CBS)
US cable and international pay markets	Disney Channel Toon Disney	The Cartoon Network Warner Bros Kids	Fox Family Channel Boyz and Grlz channels planned	Nickelodeon
Production of programme content	Disney	Warner Bros	Saban Entertainment	Viacom
Co-ventures	BBC co-production soap: 'Microsoap'	Nintendo's <i>Pokémon</i> pushes up ratings on WB Kids		Pay channel 'Noggin' in partnership with CTV Workshop
Production/licensing/merchandising opportunities	10 year global licensing deal for Disney film merchandise in world-wide (18,000+) outlets of McDonald's	<i>Loony Tunes: A pantheon of favourite characters from old cartoon series by Warner Brothers</i>	<i>The Simpsons: A mainstream animation about a nuclear suburban family in the American Midwest that became a top rating programme for children</i>	<i>Rugrats: An animation on family life made from the play-level perspective of American children. A global hit.</i>

The problem of global hits

Rugrats

The success of Nickelodeon is a good illustration of the economic and cultural flexibility of the animation market. The company has positioned itself in the eyes of children through cutting edge animation (for example, *Doug*, *Rugrats*, *Cat Dog*, *Rocko's Modern Life*, *The Angry Beavers*, *KaBlam!*, *Hey Arnold* and *The Ren and Stimpy Show*). In 1998, Nickelodeon's *Rugrats* became the most watched children's animated show in the U.S.A. – with a cumulative 5.3 rating and 2.2 million viewers, based on total U.S. households (Flint, 1998). This enviable audience appeal of *Rugrats* has, in turn, seen it vied for at audio-visual markets by free-to-air national broadcasters in Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand to provide the 'appointment viewing' draw card for their mixed local and imported children's viewing zones.

Full service broadcasters had long used the mixed programming strategy of hammocking riskier programmes (as local programmes tended to be) between heavily promoted popular overseas hits. This had worked to the advantage of local children's producers in many countries during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in 1997 *Rugrats* in New Zealand was scheduled at 3.30 p.m. on TV2, thus providing a promotional opportunity for the local flagship programme *What Now?* which was scheduled directly afterwards at 4.00 p.m. However, this strategy changed in 1998 when the TV2 programmer shifted *Rugrats* from 3.30 p.m.

(school finishes usually at 3.00 p.m.) to a more desirable position *after What Now?* in order to help audience flow into prime-time. As a consequence the local programme was relegated into the hinterland of off-peak viewing at 3.30 p.m., where its lead-in was an infomercial programme for adult abdominal exercise machines. In 1998, *Rugrats* became the highest non-primetime show for 5-14 year olds in New Zealand, whilst *What Now?* languished with low ratings figures.

At this point it is important to note that programming strategies were based on evidence from electronic 'people meter' ratings, which in New Zealand were drawing on the viewing choices of often less than 200 households – those with children watching after school – out of 450 available people metered homes. Ratings were clearly a statistically untrustworthy measure on which to base the success or otherwise of off-peak local children's programming. The fickleness of ratings figures for off-time child audiences was, embarrassingly, illustrated by events in the middle of 1998 when ratings suggested that children 5-9 years of age were viewing youth programmes, infomercials and late night shows in large numbers. This anomaly was tracked to one Northland metered home where a home-handyman had tinkered with an antenna, thus assigning channels incorrectly. The press reported the audience research company noting that this household was unusual in as much as it contained *four* children aged from five to nine years, thus skewing the *national* ratings (Lewis, 1998). But despite academic criticism, ratings remain the currency for off-peak viewing of children in New Zealand, as elsewhere.

The Teletubbies

In 1997, TV3 bought rights to 260 half-hour programmes of *The Teletubbies*, commissioned by the BBC in Britain from the Ragdoll production house for 2-4 year olds. New Zealand was the second market after South Africa to purchase the programme, from BBC enterprises that owned rights to all territories barring North America, held by the production company Ragdoll. In New Zealand the fad for the programme appeared to engulf the attention of all ages with astonishing speed after it went to air in mid-March 1998, in competition with TV2's *What Now?* (Noone, 1998: 16). It is worthwhile investigating this short, parochial, but startling episode in the cultural history of television, because it offers an excellent illustration of how even the most idiosyncratic programming decision – in this case to schedule an early childhood programme targeting 2-4 year olds after school in competition with a local programme targeting 6-12 year olds – can have unfortunate long term consequences for local production options.

In mid-March 1998, the producer of *What Now?* commented in a matter of fact way in an e-mail to the production team that TV3

...has put *Teletubbies* against us... – the hottest pre-school show in history – but good for us in the long run because it is being watched in equal numbers by the under fours and drug crazed twenties. As expected, it out rated us on day one, but by mid week we overtook it (Palmer, 25/3/98).

It was certainly an unusual decision for TV3 to schedule the early childhood programme in the commercial after-school broadcasting zone because it required that they drop advertisements within the programme in order to comply with non-commercial zoning for early childhood viewing. This saw TV3 in the extraordinary position of giving away advertising inventory in preference for a ratings win, which, according to ratings, was lost back to TV2's later scheduling of *Rugrats*, once *The Teletubbies* had finished! In the event *The Teletubbies* did not fade as a 'fad' as Palmer had predicted. Indeed April focus groups for *What Now?* heard eleven-year-old males skiting about their ability to talk 'Teletubbese' as it exploded into a school-yard cult. *The Teletubbies* continued to win ratings against *What Now?* from its introduction in March until audience researchers stopped tracking ratings in May, thus signalling the decision of TVNZ programmers to 'pull the plug' on *What Now?*, declaring it a terminal ratings disaster. In June, midway through the production year, TVNZ managers pushed for a radical re-versioning of the local magazine programme as a series of interstitials around imported hit cartoons.

What Now? – a programme targeting audiences of 6-12 year olds after school – was destroyed by failing to rate against an imported programme for 2-4 year olds as it exploded into a brief school-yard fad. This story surely demonstrates the vulnerability of all local programmes to ratings judgements, as producers are increasingly chastised for not rating against high budget, heavily promoted overseas hits. Local children's production in New Zealand has become increasingly fraught as commercial programming strategies prevail over earlier British-style 'full-service' programming for children. Meanwhile programmers argue that ratings evidence proves that children prefer overseas hits to 'home-grown over-worthy political correctness' (a manager's comment) and that the only format that works for local children is judicious use of short interstitials around sure-rating imported animation.

But why was *The Teletubbies* such a huge New Zealand fad? Clues come from Paul Greaney, managing director of Hasbro New Zealand at the time, a distributor for *The Teletubbies* merchandise. He comments that 'we knew about the success of *The Teletubbies* in the U.K.' as *The Teletubbies* was launched on after-school television in March with no merchandising available for release. This created a huge pent-up desire for merchandise, which in the end did not arrive in New Zealand until August. But in the intervening months there had been a steady stream of sensational 'news' stories from the United Kingdom picked up from satellite feeds by both TV3 and TVNZ's own news service, about the consumer frenzy for merchandise in Britain. Greaney states that the use of public relations was highly successful in generating a range of news stories in Britain about *The Teletubbies*. In his words 'public relations' in various forms was 'becoming a preferred form of marketing' and 'public relations' kit and video material had been demonstrated to be more cost-effective than advertising (Greaney, 14/2/99). In New Zealand no advertising was required to promote the arrival of *The Teletubbies* merchandise and the programmer of TV3 notes that at no time did BBC Enterprises suggest holding off screenings until merchandise

arrived. It might be concluded that astute public relations had been used to generate buying frenzy. As one TVNZ manager noted, 'there was hysteria out in the shopping malls with mums throttling each other to try and buy the dolls' as the voracious parental desire for toys provided a vindication of the marketing strategy of 'pester power'. This New Zealand frenzy over acquiring dolls, in turn, became a news story in its own right as local media filmed guards on the doors of retail outlets, and then filmed the parents as they stampeded to reach stands merchandise. A case could be made that the craze for *The Teletubbies* constituted a form of media panic orchestrated by public relations and news stories, with the end effect of driving parents to buy.

The following year saw *Pokémon* take such multi-level public relations marketing to new levels: 'Powered by juvenile affluence and the latest multimedia marketing techniques... It has put deep into the shade anything that has come before it, from conkers to yo-yos to Cabbage Patch Kids' (Laurence, 1999: 21). In 1999, *Pokémon* represented the most developed multi-media super-system so far, in a long line of children's media and merchandising collectables. TV2, who had the rights to show it in 1999, claimed huge ratings and clear evidence of fandom as hundreds of letters arrived at the *What Now?* club and were used to line the passages to the studios. These letters described school-yard passions for collecting figurines and cards, as well as memorising names and characteristics of over 100 *Pokémon* characters. The following year, TV2 lost *Pokémon* to TV3 and it is said that TV3's children's advertising income increased by one quarter (Jeremy Scott, 18/9/00).

By the late 1990s, TVNZ faced a series of challenges. Firstly overseas-owned CanWest TV3 had greater buying clout at trade fairs by dint of its size, given networks in Canada, Australia and Ireland. TVNZ, once the local media giant, now lacked clout at global audio-visual fairs. Secondly, by 1999 Nickelodeon became available on pay television in New Zealand. This signalled the beginning of the end of access to hits from Nickelodeon like *Rugrats*. The TVNZ programme buyer might challenge pay television provider Sky over the local first run rights still owned by TVNZ, but it could not ensure first run rights in the future. Local free-to-air broadcasters' access to children's hits was disappearing with the expansion of the reach of global pay access, at the same time that it was becoming economically unviable to commission local programmes.

Integrating global/local media flows

Rights and licensing deals have ripple effects at many other levels of local children's culture, as shall be seen in the following case studies.

Tazos

This is an example of how it is not only new media properties like *Rugrats* and *The Teletubbies* that are carefully groomed as licensed properties. During the late 1990s, Tazo trading cards were a very successful collectable for children in

association with licensed characters from a range of entertainment super-systems. They were first designed for the American food company Fritolay (PepsiCo owned, like Pizza Hut) in the U.S.A. in 1993, but by 1998 Tazo trading cards had become an international marketing hit appealing to children in 28 countries. In the late 1990s, the 30-year-old property *Loony Tunes* was given a global face-lift as a brand extension for the long-shelf life Warner Brothers cartoons, and in 1996 Tazos were launched in Australia for Eta chips in a campaign that licensed *Loony Tunes* characters. On one side of each trading card was a picture of a Warner Brothers cartoon character and on the other side a Tazo logo.

Australian marketers claimed that the craze for Tazo collectables had seen chip sales grow, and by the end of 1997 they claimed that they had grown sales by 41 per cent (Eta/Tazo Proposal to *What Now?*, January 1998). Their research indicated that 86 per cent of kids in Australia thought 'Tazo's' [sic] were very 'cool' and would play and collect more Tazos. Cards could claim several levels of appeal (some targeting parents), the primary one being that they colonized the natural stage of 6-12 year olds' peer group collecting. In phrases from the proposal presented to *What Now?* the campaign ensured that: 'Kids play with each other to win Tazos from their friends' (thus signifying pleasurable, competitive activity); 'Tazos can also be joined together to build and create things' (thus signifying creative activity); 'Where ever kids imaginations take them' (thus signifying productive activity); 'Tazos are found in Eta potato chip bags, similar in concept to how marbles were collected years ago' (thus signifying a continuity with childhood traditions). (Phrases taken from the Eta/Tazo Proposal to *What Now?*, January 1998).

This enthusiasm for collecting Tazos flowed into New Zealand school playgrounds during 1997 and early 1998 in the Australian advertising campaign using *Loony Tunes* characters. Associated public relations included a Tazo 'headquarters', a Fan club (with newsletter), a Web site, Tournaments, and Swap meets. Advertisements appeared during *What Now?* and other children's programme advertising breaks. In January, Eta approached *What Now?* with an opportunity to associate this 'leading edge popularity with the *What Now?* brand'. They asked for a regular segment in *What Now?* called 'The ETA *Loony Tunes* TAZO Zone' for six weeks beginning in early March. They requested clear definition within the programme, billboards opening and closing items, and Eta product available on the set. In return, free Tazos would be made available for a club mail-out and a joint fifteen-second promotion produced, which would screen, preferably, on Sunday morning. This promotion would give *What Now?*

...the opportunity to be associated with a leading edge new kids collection game. TAZO's are interactive, and will become the craze for New Zealand kids to collect! Once the *Looney Tunes* theme is over, ETA will be producing more TAZO's with other characters. If this promotion is a success, *What Now?* and ETA could continue with this association... The TAZO promotion could also be cross promoted on both the ETA and *What Now?* web sites (Eta/Tazo Proposal to *What Now?*, January 1998).

In return for running a phone line competition with the audience about the collectable cards (which involved free product), Eta would offer a prize of a trip to Movie World in Sydney for contestants. *What Now?* could further benefit through the promotion being screened three times on TV2 Saturday morning, between 7.30 and 10.00 a.m. The value of this was calculated in the contract proposal to be 9,504 NZ dollars, of which TVNZ and Eta would split the cost.

But there were problems. The producer of *What Now?* noted that his programme received nothing out of this, and, for their pains, would end up with the commercial clutter of pack shots of chips on the screen which would not help create a critical commercial-free image of *What Now?* for the public-service funder who made the largest budget contribution to the show. Neither would it help the reputation of the programme with health campaigners arguing that there was an association between television advertising, high fat foods, and childhood obesity in New Zealand. Even without these critical image problems, the deal brought no financial gain. No money was offered by Eta for services rendered. Indeed, any production cost was to come out of the TVNZ Sales and Marketing earnings. The proposal notes that 'ETA have currently placed \$95,000 worth of advertising airtime with TVNZ [...] We understand there may be a production fee involved with this concept, so this cost would come out of their existing airtime' (Eta/Tazo Proposal to *What Now?*, January 1998). Costs to *What Now?* would include, at the most conservative count, time spent by the already stretched graphic artist on logos and pack shots, and presenter time used to take live calls for the competition. In the programme producers' view, television exposure on children's television was scant and worth a lot more. They turned it down.

However, that is not the end of the story. Not only did a sister local children's programme funded by the broadcasting fee (shown on Saturday mornings on TV2) agree to an Eta/Tazo deal, but TVNZ's own subsidiary company, TVNZ Enterprises, managed the rights for the new property chosen for a new 'all New Zealand' campaign – *The Simpsons*.

Deal-making: TVNZ Enterprises

Central to understanding wider marketing dimensions is TVNZ Enterprises, an independent corporate profit centre and entrepreneurial unit within TVNZ Sales and Marketing which brokered marketing opportunities in New Zealand for a range of entertainment, food and electronics companies targeting adults and children. In 1998, the TVNZ Enterprises campaign successfully positioned Eta chips as number one chip in schoolyards using Tazos in association with *The Simpsons*. This vindicated their hunch, shared with market researchers in Britain, that Bart's 'eat my shorts!' attitude was 'a powerful global cultural marker for 6-12 year old 'tween' peer culture'.⁷ Every aspect of the creative package was planned. The 'look' was created from a mix of original and stylebook features to tie the colours and imagery used in the local campaign into the wider international signifiers for Tazos and *The Simpsons*:

Each element of the promotion will be of similar 'look' and feature Bart Simpson as the key focus. Art is taken from the styleguide – the 'bursting Bart' logo is the feature of the Eta/Tazo logo and is representative of the image they would like to portray. The purple background is taken from the Tazo material used in other territories. The pink clouds are creative and are inspired from the TV series (TVNZ Enterprises Eta/Tazos Marketing Plan).

The Simpsons promotion included a collectors album to hold a full set of Tazos, on-pack advertising in various forms, point of sale advertising for supermarkets (from A2 posters to Pavement signs and 4 tier display bins), public relations, including giveaway stickers, bus advertising, trade vehicles, samples and copy for press releases. Events included field product give aways. One special event was an 'ETA Tazos All-Stars' sponsored basketball team created to perform alongside 'costume character Bart Simpsons' at the October Auckland marketing expo, Planet 2, organized by TVNZ Enterprises. This complex promotional plan was supported with print advertising to the trade, advertisements and sample give-aways for kids' magazines, like *Disney Adventures* and *Simpsons Comics*. Also commissioned were one thirty second and one fifteen second television advertisements. The association of *The Simpsons* with Eta during 1998 was not only a great success, according to both TVNZ Enterprises and the chip company, it was also high profile – in one promotion the entire side of a metropolitan bus was illustrated with the Simpson's family on their couch, with pack shots of chips and the Tazo logo. Meanwhile, the widely appealing cartoon of *The Simpsons* continued to be a favourite programme for tweens in New Zealand. It was scheduled in primetime on TV2 and out rated any local show targeting children.

It is worth pursuing the Eta/Tazo/*The Simpsons* campaign one stage further because it demonstrates marketing strategies used by a range of corporations targeting children in New Zealand in three useful ways. It illustrates how local New Zealand children's television fits into the marketing strategy of one chip brand in New Zealand. It illustrates how global entertainment brands are licensed within *locally* designed marketing campaigns in order to become part of the cycle of local schoolyard fads, and thus acquire cultural capital with children. Finally it illustrates how the presenters of a local magazine show, embedded in a free-to-air commercial schedule, are inevitably implicated in marketing brands to children.

Licensing and merchandising

As has been mentioned, rights contracts function across a complex range of windows, including time, number of plays, geographic regions, and media. These rights, in turn, are tied to licensing and merchandising opportunities. It was the task of TVNZ Enterprises, as agents for entertainment properties, to negotiate and manage regional licensing and merchandising contracts. During the late 1990s, TVNZ Enterprises was a small and relatively untested team, compared with the large entrepreneurial units attached to other national broadcasters like the ABC and BBC, but it had already demonstrated considerable creative flair in

the way it managed licensing and merchandising rights for a range of imported third-party properties. In 1998, its 'bread and butter' work was for a range of lucrative children's entertainment properties. These included *Rugrats*, *The Simpsons*, *Bananas in Pyjamas* (and, later in 1998, the entire ABC video catalogue), as well as *Thomas the Tank Engine*, *Ren and Stimpy Show*, *Goosebumps* and *Humphrey B Bear*. It also managed retail opportunities for merchandise of global brands because it required cultural sensitivity in a small market to avoid rapid saturation. It was as important to choose the appropriate retail outlet, as it was to decide how much product to release (and when) for long haul 'classics' like *Rugrats* and *The Simpsons*. TVNZ Enterprises, for example, negotiated an exclusive point of sale deal with a department store positioned with families, for *The Simpsons* merchandise.

TVNZ Enterprises, which already managed *Rugrats* merchandise, in October 1998 organized the release of the new *Rugrats* movie, and associated new licensing rights. To launch this event TVNZ Enterprises hosted a morning event for 'Licensees, Retailers and Promotional partners'. 'Fiona Anderson, a much loved ex-presenter from *What Now?* (who still made guest appearances in the *What Now?* comedy soap, *Serial Stuff*) hosted the event as the audience was 'shown how to think like a kid' and 'to maximize involvement in an award winning #1 kids show... *Rugrats*' (*Licencing Now*, November/December 1998). The same *Licencing Now* foreshadowed a pending Krispa chips promotion designed to battle out school-yard chip supremacy at the beginning of the 1999 school year which used *Rugrats* for 'Attention grabbing packaging... In store displays... Cross promotions with other licensed product... Giveaways in pack'.

Planet 2

What Now?'s final unsolicited encounter with the Tazo/Eta campaign occurred in October, 1998, at an event called Planet 2. This was a marketing expo initiated by TVNZ Enterprises, and designed to showcase advertising and marketing clients of TV2 by creating 'the World of Interactive Entertainment' in an events centre in the capital, Auckland. This event used *What Now?* presenters, along with stars from other local children's and youth programmes in roles of 'celebrity MC's for non-stop entertainment'. The stars of *What Now?* used the occasion for a Sunday live link from the event on October 25th, during which they toured the displays, ostensibly to provide *What Now?* viewers with a preview of exciting new products. *What Now?* presenters in their 'celebrity' role at Planet 2 were useful to TVNZ for several reasons. At the level of corporate to corporate communications they helped to market the TV2 brand as an advertising destination for companies wishing to market to children. At the audience level the Brand Manager of TV2 hoped that the effect of *What Now?* doing a live link would be 'one way we can take TV2 into the streets. The kids will go absolutely bananas because Jason, Anths, Shauv [popular presenters] are absolutely fantastic' (Brewster, 9/9/98). At the promotional level their tour of toy displays provided free pre-Christmas public relations exposure for local and global brands with stands at the expo.

Planet 2 is an important site in which to track how the hosts of children's television (as local cultural intermediaries) are used to promote global brands, and how those global brands in turn are used to refine the image of a local show as being in touch with popular culture. Before the event, a press release was sent to prospective corporate clients who might be expected to book space for product promotion. Part of it read:

Planet 2 will be an annual event targeting the youth [sic] market 5-18 years. A large promotion campaign will ensure the 25,000+ anticipated visitors attend the show. The show will spread over four pavilions allowing easy flow through the exhibition and entertainment areas.

The Expo-Centre was physically split, with the 5-12 year olds' section 'focusing on family fun... and a toy land giving gift ideas for Christmas'. The 12-18 year olds were served by an 'Extreme Hall', the name of which signified the shift in address to 'attitude' and the risk-taking play of 'youth' culture. The retail hall was stocked with 'hot' pre-Christmas specials, thus 'capturing all visitors as they move between halls'. Planet 2 was described as ideal for 'new product launches, sampling opportunities or interactively exposing your products'. The physical layout thereby ensured the perceived desirability of an 'easy flow' between the security of family patrolled 'childhood' signifiers and those designed to appeal to youth interest in the subversive cultural pleasures of video games and new technology.

The poster designed to market Planet 2 combines appeals to children and their parents, whilst being careful not to repulse the key early adopters within the 'youth' market. It illustrates the perceived synergy and power of intertextual associations between global brands and local icons from television and, as such, is worth describing in some detail. The background is a star-studded night sky, on which photographs of TV2 stars are 'unfolding' into a circle formation around the Planet 2 logo. At 12.00 o'clock is a young female star of *Mai Time*,⁸ at one o'clock is a photo of the *What Now?* team, followed by other pictures of other TV2 youth presenters, at 3.00 p.m. there is an image of *Bananas in Pyjamas*™, followed by more youth presenters and stars from the local primetime soap of *Shortland Street*, a full suited photo of 'Mr Peanut' with smiling children (representing Eta), and at 11.00 o'clock Bart Simpson bursting out of an animated bubble™. The sponsors logos run along the bottom of the poster and include: TV2 (come and see the TV2 stars live), Phillips Bomb Bass: Have you got the loudest car? Prove it! (car stereos), *Girlfriend* 'Girl Power': Girls only, Give aways, make overs, retail specials, and judge the Hunk! (a style magazine), *Mai Time* Kapa Haka (Maori cultural performance from schools of children ages 10-12 years), Pepsi, Nintendo, Griffins (snacks), Eta (chips), Barbie, Cadbury, Tommy Hilfiger (clothes), Time out leisure centres (computer games), NZ Post (post office), Crayola (drawing equipment) and many more. 'All brought to you by... A smart service event in conjunction with TVNZ Enterprises.' In small figures in the right hand corner of the poster there is a note saying that 'The image of Bart is trademarked, 1998, Twentieth Century Fox Corporation, all rights preserved'.

The poster illustrates the complexity of arrangements between local and global economic, cultural and symbolic capital, as participants fight for promotional space, and synergies derived from association and cross-promotion with other brands. TVNZ Enterprises' *Licensing Now* newsletter featured Planet 2 in its final newsletter for the year. In it a snap of 'Bart Simpson joining in with the Eta Tazos Basketball Team' nudges another one tagged 'Live action in production – *What Now?* crew in action'. It was as important for the presenters of *What Now?* to be associated with the 'breaking news' of 'hot brands' with emerging peer group cultural capital for children, as it was for those brands to be associated with *What Now?* celebrities.

Conclusion

During the late 1990s, free-to-air channels in New Zealand increasingly preferred to programme imported hits over local programmes on the grounds that they rated better with children. This had particular implications for creative and formatting choices of local producers who relied on commissions from commercial programmers in order to access public service funding. But managers of commercial channels were also aware that broadcasting channels were no longer necessarily the first stop advertising shop for children's marketers, as the value of television advertising was weighed up against other branding options. Marketing strategies moved increasingly from bulk television advertising buys made by measures of cost effectiveness per thousand ratings, to strategic branding using a range of communication tactics: public relations, media events, promotions, web sites, direct mail from shops and distributors, as well as contra and sponsorship deals. Thus it can be said that commercial free-to-air local television continues to provide a premium window for marketers to local audiences of children, but this occurs increasingly through programming content contra licensing and sponsorship deals rather than through spot-advertising packages. The work of TVNZ Enterprises illustrates how global entertainment brands are used locally in complex cross-media, cross-promotional campaigns for snack foods and other products. The Planet 2 expo illustrates how local broadcasting brands itself to children's marketers and how a local magazine show, *What Now?*, was positioned within global signifiers as 'cool' for local children. In such a way the state-owned commercial channel TVNZ and its subsidiary TVNZ Enterprises can be seen to function as 'go-betweens' for global and local marketing campaigns, and thus play the roles of powerful cultural intermediaries within the tastes and desires of New Zealand children.

Notes

1. This article draws on data gathered during the course of a larger ethnographic study, conducted by the author, of the production of children's television in New Zealand.
2. A TV3 consortium was granted a broadcast licence in 1987 and was later bought out by the Canadian consortium CanWest.
3. The NZ dollar hovered just below 50 cents US at the time of the study.
4. The licence fee was dropped in 1999 – a political sweetener to voters during pre-election months.
5. There was heated debate over what was appropriate sponsorship for a publicly funded programme during the late 1990s as production costs rose. New Zealand On Air was driven to 'approving' appropriate sponsors (a breakfast cereal company, for example) as part of the programme budget.
6. 'Window' is used to describe the many different opportunities to earn money from selling rights to an entertainment property: for example, a television programme can be sold to different regions, for a certain number of replays, over a certain period of time. Windows can be traded at the production funding stage, or later sold as together or sequentially for different media versions (video, music, books, CD-ROMs, etc.).
7. BBC World documentary *Getting Older Younger* accessed on Prime television NZ on 23/9/00.
8. *Mai Time* is a New Zealand On Air funded programme shown off-peak and targeting Maori and Pacific Island youth with a mixture of imported black and local music clips. It makes a virtue of hybridity and street label savvy.

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- Jeremy Scott: Agent for Nintendo merchandise, interviewed 19/9/00

