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Achieving a global reach on children’s cultural markets: managing the stakes of inter-textuality in digital cultures

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The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the formation of children’s cultures in a digital global marketplace by developing the idea that, in such a context, inter-textuality consists of a complex intertwining of cultural references partially shaped by commercial strategies. The chapter draws on recent and successful experiences by French animation producers on global cultural markets. Indeed, in order to achieve a global reach on children’s cultural markets, the managerial stakes that producers have to face include making decisions that take into account the competitive positioning of their clients (TV channels or cable broadcasters, internet service providers or web portals), and their programming choices. Moreover, content producers have to deal with inter-textual subtleties also when they design spin-offs policies and consider their potential spread, as well as when they engage their properties in bounded promotional campaigns...

Part 1 – The global reach of recent French animation productions

1.1 – Some evidence¹

Today, the French animation industry is ranked third in the world and first in Europe, producing each year around 300 new hours of animation. French producers benefit from efficient governmental subsidies designed to support creativity in this industry. Partly due to this unique and enviable system, French productions globally gather more than 50% of their budget on the national territory since 2000. As a consequence, in 2005, on an average, 17% of the budget were coming from the French producers, 26% from the French TV channel which

¹ Most of the information in this section is coming from SPFA (*Syndicat des Producteurs de Films d’Animation*, i.e. Union of Animation Movies Producers), and especially June 2006 edition of SPFA’s publication *Le marché de l’animation* (i.e. “the animation market”), a report published every year.

bought the series, 16% from governmental subsidies, 5% from “pre-selling” to other French TV channels², for a total of 64% of the budget.

But since 2000, this production financial scheme has deeply changed. At the end of the 1990’s, the French animation production was at 30%-40% of “foreign initiative”, whereas in 2004 it was only 5%, and 13% in 2005³. In 2000, co-productions with foreign countries represented 35% of the average budget, and pre-sells to foreign countries 9%; in 2005, foreign co-productions were only worth 19%, whereas foreign pre-sells were worth 14%, increasing the part of French ownership over the animation programs. And between those two periods, a crisis happened that might have changed the deal.

From 2001 to 2004, the animation industry was undergoing a deep crisis, while the audiovisual distribution market became glutted, partly due to a more generalized economic crisis as well as to an excessive number of products on offer, leading to a situation of price reductions and aggressive competition between producers on international markets. In that context and more than ever, the USA market was considered as a kind of “Eldorado”: the third in size, after China and India, but with a more similar culture and closer business uses. This situation entailed two major consequences for French producers: concentration of companies and internationalization of their market.

From 2000 to 2005, a hundred societies are considered as producing animation in France. Nevertheless, only 4 of them have produced at least one program each year, and the 15 biggest of them have made 69% of the animation hours produced by the profession. Meanwhile, Media Participations has bought Storimages, Ellipsanime and Dupuis Audiovisuel, creating a group that has produced 16% of French animation production from 2000 to 2005. Antefilms has bought France Animation to form Moonscoop SAS (8% of French animation production from 2000 to 2005). And the new group Finhera has been created, gathering Marathon Medias and Tele Images Kids, for a total of 10% of French animation production from 2000 to 2005. Thus, in only five years, three groups have emerged and produced a third of French animation, leading to a concentration situation never known before.

In the meanwhile, owing to the success of some series like “Totally Spies” or “Funky Cops”, sold in more than 100 countries, French producers have proved their capacity to attack the global market. Although representing only 10% of audiovisual French production in 2004, the animation genre was worth 55% of pre-sells and 37% of sells of audiovisual French production to foreign countries, and 50% of co-productions.

In 2004, over the 22.8 Million € pre-sales to foreign countries, 1 Million € included pre-sales to the United-States. And over 39.5 Million € sales in 2004, 3.4 Million € were sales to the US although it was only 2.2 Million € one year before.

Considering the whole North America, animation is worth 65% of French audiovisual exports there: the American Eldorado doesn’t appear anymore as unreachable.... How can French

² Usually, an animation series is sold to a channel that invests a lot, but asks for exclusive first diffusion ; once the series has been totally aired for the first time, other channels, more often cable or satellite ones, will be allowed to buy it and air it; to secure that diffusion, some of them “pre-buy” the programs at a very early stage.

³ A production is considered “of French initiative” if the French producer has the artistic control of the program (creating it or buying the rights linked to it) and is in charge of budget and fund raising.

productions seduce an American audience? Part of the answer can paradoxically lay in the French process of fund raising.

1.2 – Fund raising : a dual construction

As we have previously seen, the French TV channel that buy the first exclusive broadcasting right (“main broadcaster” in the following sections) is an important actor of the animated series fund raising process, bringing an average of 26% of the budget, i.e. more than the producer itself. Considering that specific situation, an animated series has virtually no existence until the main broadcaster is found, a position that gives them a great power on the cultural content itself. Very often, main broadcasters ask for important changes in the series before signing. But even more often, the series are designed for a specific channel, and try to gather every element that could seduce that channel and reinforce its competitive positioning and its identity within the saturated media marketplace. In France, only “air channels” can pretend to be main broadcasters for an animated series, except in rare cases concerning very small series.

But to achieve commercial success in the United States, the producer should also take into consideration what the requests of American broadcasters. For example, when Tele Images Kids wanted to sell a TV series to Cartoon Networks, it created “Atomic Betty” with a graphic bible very close to Cartoon Networks’ one. So, for the audience, it resulted virtually impossible to differentiate the French series from the other series of the channel. So how is it possible to seduce two broadcasters airing in two different cultural contexts? In fact, it might be way easier than it seems...

Channels know perfectly their own audience: they know its gender, its age, the programs it prefers, and so on. To please it, channels tend to offer it series that match its “revealed tastes”, meaning series that gather elements already used in previously successful series. By doing so, channels take fewer risks, but even if they lower innovation, they are sure to respond to present children’s culture. And if we take a look at broadcast animation on French air channels in 2005, we see that only 38% of it is French. As a consequence, smaller but nevertheless important parts of TV series aired in France are American or Japanese.

As far as American channels were concerned, 1998 was an important year leading to major changes: in 1998, Pokémon appeared in a favorable context, and became one of the most successful series in American animation history. Thus, quickly after, Japanese animation represented about 33% of the animation being broadcast on Cartoon Network. Drawing on the success of Pokémon, “Japanim” became a standard fully recognized by audiences on the USA animation market. As a consequence, meeting Japanimation standards can be considered as an additional competitive advantage to reach American audiences.

Considering those observations, we can say that American and French children share a huge common cultural ground based on Japanese cartoons (referred as “mangas” or more properly “Japanimation”) and American ones. Children audiences have “revealed” some common tastes, and it is then possible to build a budget with a French main broadcaster, while including also American co-producers or pre-buyers. And once the series is under production, the American partner acts as a gatekeeper, opening commercial contacts to sell the series in the United States.

To understand the nature of this emerging realm covering a global children audience’s common animation culture, as well as to explore the stakes of its exploitation by French

producers in their efforts to reach the international global marketplace, we develop our analysis through the concept of “inter-textuality”.

1.3 – “Inter-textuality” : playing with pre-existing standards

This section will consist of a brief reminder of the main definition given to “inter-textuality” in literary analysis. Dealing with this notion leads to understand writing as a permanently creative flux that integrates previous standards and conventions in order to produce texts likely to be readable, understandable and recognizable by an audience...

1.3.1 – “Inter-textuality” at the heart of literary practice

In a nutshell, this notion has been introduced by Julia Kristeva (1980:69) as a reaction to the tendency to analyze texts as discrete and close units whose meaningfulness laid in their internal structure. Drawing on the dialogical perspective introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) in literary theory, she contends that texts become meaningful if considered as a fragment in connection to former texts. Shared codes allow both the writer and the reader to recognize, situate and appreciate the text in the continuum of literary production.

It is worth noting that this post-structuralist perspective considers that every text is under the dominance of previous texts that impose a universe of codes in relation to which it will be read and understood by several audiences. This entails a drastic shift in the way of analyzing writing and reading by focusing the effort on studying the process of structuration through which the text came into being. By questioning the romantic roots that lead to the invention of the notion of “authorship”, this perspective lays special emphasis on the fact that, to communicate with an audience, writers are compelled to use pre-existing concepts and conventions. When speaking they are at least partially spoken... and their individual creative skills are socially founded in shared language and scriptural conventions. That’s why Roland Barthes defines the text as a tissue of quotations, a creative art consisting in weaving former codes, references and genres (Barthes 1974).

Texts draw upon a large range of codes and social norms that allow them to be assigned to a particular genre. Genres are situated and evolving conventions that make possible to classify texts and frame their relation to each other. Literary theorists have brilliantly demonstrated that the definition of genres is quite fluid and submitted to ongoing changes and social renegotiations, leading to a permanent blurring of borders and a constant mitigation of their distinctive characteristics. Thus, categorizations are always precarious and need to be constantly revised to stick to literary creative evolutions: new genres such as advertorials, advergaming, infomercials, edutainment, docudrama, etc. are always emerging in the global digital cultural landscape...

However, the notion of inter-textuality has already been largely criticized as it seems too encompassing. It is worth being understood as a principle that needs to be adapted to different situations. Thus, Gerard Genette (1992) suggests to distinguishing between five kinds of ‘textuality’:

- *inter-textuality*: operates within a text through quotations, plagiarism, allusions...

- *para-textuality*: includes all the peripheral elements that closely surround the text and help situating it such as titles, headings, dedications, footnotes, prefaces, illustrations, etc.
- *archi-textuality*: is the twofold process – activated by the author and the readers - by which a text is designated to form part of a literary genre.
- *meta-textuality*: implicit or explicit criticism of former texts included in the text itself.
- *hyper-textuality*: the transformations of former codes or genres to which it relates that the text carries out.

Moreover, in the context of digital cultures, some authors (Chandler 1995) have emphasized the profound disruptions in texts' conventional linearity that hypermedia navigation allows. Some exploratory displacements appear then possible through simultaneity, argumentative shortcuts, coexistence of textual fixity and visual mobility or vice versa, etc., leading to convey meaning in very unusual forms and to enhance truly innovative reading processes.

We are fully aware that such a brief presentation of the complexities linked to the notion of “inter-textuality” and its use in cultural studies and literary analysis, is a risky undertaking. Nevertheless, in the context of this chapter, we aim at transposing this notion in a managerial perspective, as we contend that it could help producers to better assess the stakes they have to face when expanding the reach of their productions on a media saturated global marketplace. Thus, from a managerial standpoint, the purpose of this chapter is to elaborate the first elements of a guideline intended to support production managers' efforts to master the complex stakes of “inter-textuality” needed to exploit the long term potential of a property

Part 2 – Differentiating layers of “inter-textuality” in successful French animation series

Our attempt to transpose the notion of “inter-textuality” to animated TV series production draws on the analysis of two French TV series that have both achieved a global success in children's cultural market: “Code Lyoko” and “Totally Spies”. When contrasting these two French series, another interesting dimension appears: the fact that they privilege two contrasting cultural contexts, a Japanese one for “Code Lyoko”, and an American one for “Totally Spies”.

2.1 – Methodology

The methodology we used to explore the various dimensions of ‘inter-textuality’ that could be traced within these two French series, gathered different techniques of direct and indirect analysis.

Firstly, by viewing several episodes of the series unfolding over different seasons, we undertook a two dimensional direct analysis which covered:

- *A narrative analysis of plot construction:*

This included an analysis of the storyline, the way the main characters of the series behave, the quest they collectively follow, and the topics of interest they deal with, the cultural elements they refer to in their talks and the decisions they make. Plot construction refers to previous genres and stories known by the audience and it easily reveals evidence of “inter-textual” references the audience is supposed to master.

- *An assessment of graphic and artistic choices:*

This included a close examination of the evolution of the characters themselves – their progressive ageing, the way they are dressed, the accessories they use, the digital devices and items they use... It also includes the different settings and the rendering techniques privileged according to the realistic or fantastic nature of the scenery.

Secondly, an analysis of marketing and managerial statements made by the companies through their official declarations within professional circles (press, magazines, websites, commercial documentation, etc.), and direct interviews with the authors and producers of the series.

Thirdly, we made a “loose survey” of the reactions of the audience by obtaining from marketing managers a selection of the most significant direct contacts they had by mail and by exploring through several wordings related to “inter-textuality” the discussions going on among fans within the official forums of the series. The official websites are massively invested by active fans and they unfold over the different seasons covered by the series, allowing researchers achieve a deep understanding of the evolution of the topics of interest for the community of fans.

2.2 – Totally Spies

“Totally Spies”, a series produced by Marathon, Fox and ABC, have been designed to reach in priority an American audience as a co-production with Fox and ABC Family (Disney group) associated with Cartoon Network (Warner Bros). Although created by French authors, this series has a totally American background (an American Campus in Beverley Hills; and its scripts have been designed in accordance with American taste and references in order to convince the audience that it was an American production). It seems to us that a wide part of the originality of the humour of the series is based on a displacement: a stereotypical European vision of American references. By this mean, the series achieves a paradoxical positioning: fully reaching the American standards when sold in the rest of the world, whereas appearing as original and innovative to the American audience. “*We produce French series disguised in American ones*” comments Vincent Chalvon-Demersay, co-creator of “Totally Spies” and Genral Manager of Marathon Animation⁴.

“Totally Spies” plays on both American and Japanese references. The most evident references on which “Totally Spies” plays are for instance:

- Charlie’s Angels
- Beverley Hill
- The avengers
- James Bond for the gadgets,
- Japanimation in graphical attitudes (exaggeration of the expressions, smiles)
- Close to the body clothes including high-heel shoes
- Trio of women with a secret life

Some details are quite similar to “Cat’s Eyes” (3 girls who search for their father painter) that was a huge Japanimation success in France in the 80’s targeting girls from 8 to 12 years old. Stéphane Berry, co-creator of the series and Artistic Director of Marathon Animation says: “*The style of « Totally Spies » is a melting between the American style, which associates action and comedy, and Japanese design for the aesthetic environment and the emotions expressed through the large eyes of the characters. It is an entertainment product that didn’t*

⁴ Marathon’s Press Release 2007

exist before in the French audiovisual landscape and that defines a new genre of animation whose uniqueness and originality is appreciated by the audience.”⁵

Episodes from the series have been met with great enthusiasm in 130 or so countries, in the 6 to 11 year-old bracket. The double betting made through this series was:

- targeting girls with a genre - adventure and comedy - generally aimed at boys.
- using animation whereas girls of this age usually have already shifted to live shows.

The result is obvious: girls were seduced but boys also appreciated the series. On a smaller scale, “Totally Spies” did what Pokémon had done years before: reaching a wide audience considering age ranges and genders. After more than 130 episodes aired, the fifth season is under production, and enacts the three heroines of Totally Spies, who are getting older and are now fully developed - in a new scenery : at the university.

“Totally Spies” is also graphically conceived as a brand that can be used on nearly everything: the objects used in the series have their own design bible (colors, use of the “Totally Spies” flower, 3D texture of gadgets, and every gadgets looks like an everyday life object – powder, hair dryer, lipstick, backpack, etc.)

2.3 – Code Lyoko

More recently, another French series, Code Lyoko has also been broadcasted on Cartoon Network in the States where, in the space of a year the MIGUZI block⁶ in total scored excellent audience ratings. Our planet earth and the parallel universe called Lyoko face the threat of annihilation. A super virus has infected the central processing units in X.A.N.A. And only four kids can foil the mad computer’s evil designs... Yumi, Ulrich, Odd and Jeremy lead double lives: ordinary students in their early teens by day, action heroes in the virtual digital world. Intended for 6 to 14 years olds, the series has proved most popular among 8 to 10 years old on Cartoon Network.

The main characteristics of this series, considering our concerns about inter-textuality, are the following:

The narrative itself combines two plots corresponding to the two designs: a classical school show, based on seduction, groups of friends, love rivalry, pupils’ everyday life similar to the audience’s; and an action adventure intrigue in a virtual world where magical objects make everything possible. “Science-fiction blends with sitcom in a cross-genre” show ⁷. The efficiency of this narrative construction has already been proved in the case of “Power Rangers” whose more than 20 years longevity is a quite exceptional phenomenon.

Another characteristic of the plot construction is that it has been designed to reach two targets: an action / adventure genre that targets mainly boys melted with a sitcom genre dealing with love relationships, friendship, rivalry, and exploring a wide range of feelings among teenagers, which overtly targets girls. Even though usually girls watch action series aimed at boys, the betting in this case consisted of leading boys to find some interest in the sitcom part of the series.

⁵ Idem

⁶ The MIGUZI block was a famous TV block on Cartoon Network devoted to Japanimation

⁷ Source : commercial leaflet by Moonscoop

In the real world, everything is quite mundane: Jeremy's exceptional skills in programming are yet totally rational; the background is a typical French junior high school... The sitcom part of each episode uses 2D animation techniques that constitute a traditional standard in animation aimed at kids. But, High technical quality animation with 3D renderings are used for half of the episodes (corresponding to the virtual world); full 3D is sometimes avoided because of its unreal texture, but here, the script being strongly linked to video games, this choice becomes totally significant and consistent.

As far as graphic design is concerned in the virtual world Lyoko, we can notice the prevalence of Japanese references in the drawings style, as well as in the objects and the costumes used by the heroes who then transform into warriors. Yumi for instance wears a kind of short kimono and uses a fan, a traditional weapon of samurais. Other weapons like katanas or magical techniques like duplication are archetypal of Ninja fighting arts. Lyoko is also a straight reference to "Digimon" and "Matrix" worlds, creating a new layer of inter-textuality that moves closer to the dominant plot – a secret and risky quest – and graphics used in video games.

Moreover, fashion has been carefully taken into account as it constitutes a main concern for tweens and adolescents. The heroes are very well dressed and use a lot of up to date accessories (latest generation of mobile phones, design handbags, earrings, belts, piercings, etc. This focus on fashion also opens avenues to launch spin-offs in that area.

When developing animated TV series aimed at children from 6 to 12 year old, production managers implement a dynamics of "inter-textuality" that allows an integration of the TV series into the global digital cultures children appreciate, recognize and master. Children's cultural background is partly shaped by the media saturated global marketplace and includes TV animated series, as well as video games and Websites... Thus the stakes of "inter-textuality" spread far beyond a specific media to offer an encompassing perspective of all the media that the child learns to use in the course of his (her) development. If television stands out as the preferred media of young kids, the latter learn very rapidly to use computers, to read magazines, to listen to the radio, to record music, to send e-mails, to send SMS on mobiles, to surf on Internet... (Kline et al. 2003; La Ville 2005)

Part 3 – Mastering the stakes of inter-textuality to improve property management

The notion of "inter-textuality" allowed us to better understand the strategies consciously or unconsciously set up to bring "Totally Spies", "Code Lyoko" and other French animated series to an international audience. We will now see that although the five kinds of "textuality" can apply to those strategies, some of them are far less relevant from a managerial perspective.

3.1 – Privileging kinds of "textuality" according to design objectives

Firstly, "inter-textuality" gathers various kinds of references, from the most unconscious, not even seen by the creator, to the most conscious, designed to be not only seen but purposely identified as a reference by the audience. Hereafter, we explore at least three levels of "inter-textuality".

As we said, allusions to Cat's Eyes may be identified in "Totally Spies", but can't be considered as a key reference for the audience, due to the fact that Cat's Eyes was broadcast in the 80's and is no longer known, even only its name, by today's kids and teens. This reference is not anymore relevant, and we may even wonder if it was wanted by the authors of "Totally Spies", who are also influenced by their own child culture. It is likely that this reference is aimed at parents themselves rather than children.

If those years the Ninja theme was very popular among children, it is almost surely because of the "Naruto" phenomenon; and thinking that "Naruto" has no relations with the creative choices that ended with the creation of "Shuriken School" is making a big mistake. Nevertheless, the audience probably considers "Shuriken School" as simply another Ninja series and not as a direct reference to "Naruto". Nevertheless, there is much to bet that the strategy set by the producer is not perceived as such by most of the audience.

"Fan-service" is an expression coming from Japanim fans and corresponding to situations in which the series intentionally adds elements that are not necessary for plot construction, but which main purpose is to please the fans. Such elements are mainly divided in two categories: showing the female heroes in underwear and, what is more interesting for this section, making direct allusions to other TV series, allusions purposely designed to be seen by a part of the audience in order to value its sub-culture and to give that part of the audience an opportunity to impress the other part of the audience. This tradition of "fan-service" was usually aimed at teens and adults, but is step-by-step reaching a younger audience. "Shrek I" and "Shrek II" are feature films filled with "fan-service" references, as for example in "Shrek I" the upside down kiss scene, reference to "Spiderman", or in "Shrek II", the axe in front of the moon, making it a "Batman" sign. But, be careful, as the global parodic scenario of "Shrek" doesn't lay in this category, it appears mainly as a "meta-textual" reference. Secondly, "para-textuality" is not irrelevant, but is a marginal tool, as the peripheral elements are far less numerous for animation than for written texts. We could attempt to summarize by saying that an animated series must have a title in relation with its content, what seems quite obvious. Still, we shall consider an example in which titles have had an important influence, considering their relation with the "text" of the series. This example is "Code Lyoko". When the pilot episode was presented to potential partners, the series' name was not "Code Lyoko" but "Garage Kids". Both names are direct references to the content of the series, but one refers to "the code to save the real world in a videogame-like universe" and the other to "the everyday life not exciting building where part of the adventure takes place". And actually "Code Lyoko" was more seducing for a global audience than "Garage Kids".

Thirdly, "archi-textuality" is very important for the audience. "Archi-textuality" opens a set of possibilities in order to blur genres and references, thus creating some ambiguity actually felt by a part of the audience. For instance, a young boy from the Code Lyoko community sent the following email: "*There is this forum on the site, and people are arguing if Code Lyoko is an anime or not. Anime is Japanese cartoons, but some people think that Code Lyoko is a French anime. What is it? An anime or not?*"⁸. If the existence of a French anime is impossible for this young kid, The debate to know whether or not Totally Spies and other French productions could be considered as "anime" is a sign that animation genres are strong concepts for those children audiences, strong enough to categorize even the "aliens", as "Totally Spies" might be considered, but also strong enough to lead some children to fight to preserve their purity. But

⁸ Source : mail received on March 19th, 2005 at 22:36.

“archi-textuality” is not only the result of the “readers” action, and there’s still room for the authors or producers to make this classification step-by-step evolve, in order to smoothly alter its categories or create new ones more efficient to ease the integration of French productions in the international children’s common animation culture, and therefore on the digital global marketplace.

Fourthly, “meta-textuality” holds an ambiguous position, whether we consider the “content”, i.e. the animation “text”, in a strict way (story, plot construction, characters, and so on) or not. In the first case, it seems to be a weaker tool for the producer. Indeed, criticism in animation is most of the time done through parody (a positive or negative point of view) or “fan service” (usually a positive point of view), what is an important restriction of genres. Moreover, if reaching the global market implies the necessity to focus on “revealed common tastes”, it could be quite dangerous to negatively criticize the audiences’ common tastes... Therefore, the only criticism left is a positive one, probably less efficient than the basic “inter-textual” reference (provided by the “fan service”) in pleasing the audience. Nevertheless, taking a wider definition of “content” changes the analytical perspective. Indeed, technique is a strong “meta-textual” characteristic as an animated series is also deeply defined by its graphical prowess. Thus, the obsolescence of some techniques intrinsically brings implicit critics of the series by newer ones, using more up-to-date graphical techniques. This is especially true for 3D animation, a graphical style which is highly dependent on computer know-how. For instance, viewing a 3D soccer match in “Galactik Football” definitely burries “Captain Tsubasa”⁹ in the obscurity of nostalgia.

Fifthly, “hyper-textuality” is probably one of the most powerful tools available for producers, as it allows the use of highest level of references, if we put apart sequels and plagiarism. A fan of “Code Lyoko” expresses quite well the transformation of former codes or genres he identifies as achieved by the series: “*Code Lyoko is the greatest show I have ever seen from France. It is neither an anime nor a cartoon, yet I love it all the same. I am 17 and from the USA. The characters are unique and special with each displaying a new angle in personality. Even the minor characters in the show (sissy, Jim, etc.) add to the total genius buffet within the show. I have, in my spare time, written an episode idea for Code Lyoko and will be e-mailing it to production director Joanna Ruer. Please tell me what you think of it. Thank you for the hard work and the hard work of all the people to make this show.*”¹⁰ Moreover, “hyper-textuality” allows targeting of a wider audience, as most of the examples using this technique were not based on other series, but more fundamentally on a global common cultural background. For example “Ulysses 31”, a series adapting the Odysseus to a futuristic world, in which Ulysses is not any more searching a way back to Ithaca, but a way back to earth, after killing the Cyclops on their own planet and angering the Gods. We can also notice that “hyper-textuality” avoids being in the shadow of another series in which inter-textual, archi-textual and meta-textual references find their origin. Indeed, for a producer and a series, quoting implicitly or explicitly another program is a way of reinforcing the notoriety of its own competitors... The proximity between “Pokémon” and “Digimon” is surely what made “Digimon” so strong from the very beginning, but also so short-lasting.

⁹ *Captain Tsubasa* is a very popular anime of the 80’s based on the ascension of a young Japanese soccer player. The series is famous for its never-ending jumps and its soccer fields that seemed a couple kilometers long. The exaggeration of jumps and prowess is also a central element of *Galactik Football*, except that it has an explanation : in the future, some alien soccer players will develop a kind of magic power called The Flux that gives them extra-human physical abilities.

¹⁰ Source : a 17 year old boy from the Code Lyoko Community – mail received on April 29th, 2005 at 16 :53.

Even though they help clarify specific stakes producers have to face in order to reach a global audience, these different kinds of “textuality” don’t bring a perspective to handle one of the crucial elements for production managers: trans-media references. From a managerial standpoint, we will attempt in the following section to build more adapted tools to guide production managers in their efforts to explore the specific opportunities of animation “inter-textual” strategies.

3.2 – Towards an integrated inter-textual strategy to achieve a global reach in children’s global cultural markets

In the recent years, the leading French animation production companies have improved their management in three directions:

Firstly, they have tried to reach a critical mass in production due to constantly improving technologies, particularly in motion capture. Technology is very important as it has allowed French producers to develop the kind of quality requested for the international market, while at the same time, improving their capacity to master and significantly reduce production costs.

Secondly, another aim of the concentration movement that has recently taken place within the French animation industry is also to better master the distribution stage. In distribution, size is what actually counts: you need to constitute a significant catalogue to absorb the costs of attending foreign markets, of waiting longer the final decision of powerful buyers, and of achieving more complex negotiations that include the exploitation of spin-off rights. Recently, several mergers and acquisitions took place to constitute wide back catalogues. After a series of acquisitions since 2004, Moonscoop is an integrated global group with offices in Paris, Los Angeles, London and Wales, the company has fully-integrated production, distribution and licensing facilities, as well as a library that includes over 3,000 half hours of animation, encompassing some of the leading worldwide brands and best-loved animated creations in the global television market. Its commercial subsidiary, Taffy Entertainment¹¹ is a worldwide distribution company to leading broadcasters in 160 countries around the world that represents brands from global animation producers, including Mike Young Productions and its French parent company, Moonscoop, as well as select properties from third parties. This sharpening up on its marketing and distribution capacities results in an increased credibility when negotiating with foreign channels, and particularly USA broadcasters.

Thirdly, this concentration also operates inside the companies that now focus on the development of a few successful series only, in order to create more episodes to fit in the requirements of international broadcasters. The new French shows recently launched on the international market offer at least four or five seasons, a criterion that appears as a powerful lever to sell in the global cultural market. Within Marathon, “Totally Spies” offer 130 episodes and the fifth season is presently under preparation. For Taffy Entertainment, “Code Lyoko” represents 97 episodes and the fourth season is currently under production...

Finally, production teams integrate marketing and merchandising concerns very early in the process: for example, by designing a graphic bible that accurately defines the constraints linked to merchandising. Spin-off rights for the series have been the subject of a high-profile development strategy, with perfect target customer familiarity and marketing back-up progressively introduced into each territory in line with local specificities – all with a view to

¹¹ www.taffyentertainment.com

long-term development. “*We want to create brands and my strategy is to develop a few series but with a lot of episodes. To create an event, the programme must be sold worldwide and with best possible exposition.*” stated Vincent Chalvon-Demersay, General Manager of Marathon Medias¹².

The launch of new cultural products worldwide increasingly requires French producers to cast a wide promotional net over a mass audience and to consolidate brand identity through multiple licensing agreements. This is a new challenge as, in such a context, French productions need to gain symbolic capital on a fierce competitive environment. In such a context, management is a matter of cleverly balancing a global exposition of the TV series on the most relevant channels with the necessity to stick to local culturally embedded modes of behaviours and relationships in order to develop brand significance.

Indeed, gaining visibility on the global cultural industries means having the capacity of reaching a global audience through successful TV series also implies fostering the expansion of sales of spin-off products on an international basis. Indeed, planning to generate spin-off revenues is a means to increase the profitability of a series. Being able to fully exploit the rights associated to its own properties will strengthen the independence of French producers in the long run: they can develop their properties as brands and design a consistent merchandising policy. Toys, video games, animated TV series or feature films are strongly linked as they contribute to create meaningful cultural worlds for children.

As far as series’ revenues are concerned, the Consumer Products Department plays an increasing role in designing long term policies to promote the most successful series as brands. For Instance, “Code Lyoko” in the States is in the process of turning into a cult phenomenon – its dedicated website receives over 5,000 mails daily featuring children’s drawings or suggestions for storyboards. “*There is no doubt that spin-off sales are going to rocket as soon as the products are available*”, says Axel Dauchez, General Manager of Moonscoop¹³. This grants larger revenues streams for French producers able to reach successfully American or global Networks.

Notwithstanding, after four or five seasons, there is an actual risk of getting the audience bored if some additional events are not successfully planned... Thus, French producers have now to meet new challenges:

- organize the progressive escalation in symbolic added value every time a spin-off is negotiated and launched;
- increase entertainment added value each time a connected cultural activity is offered;
- structure their marketing department to meet the requirements of powerful retail partners;
- conceive of complex promotional events involving a large number of partners and licensees;
- mastering planning and deadlines in the scheduling of different promotional events.

This managerial reflection on inter-textuality affords a new perspective as it allows us to differentiate it from the localization process. In managerial terms, localization consists of a downstream process whose objective is mainly to adapt promotional techniques to diverse consumption habits in several countries. Inter-textuality sheds light on the formation of children’s cultures in a global marketplace as a complex intertwining of cultural references

¹² Declaration by Vincent Chalvon-Demersay CEO Marathon, in *Ecran Total*, June 2004.

¹³ Declaration by Axel Dauchez, General Manager of Moonscoop, in *Ecran Total*, May 2005

partially shaped by commercial strategies (competitive positioning of channels' identity, programming choices, spread of spin-offs policies, bounded promotional campaigns, etc.)

Drawing on the work by Gerard Genette (1997), who has proposed trans-textuality as a more generic term than inter-textuality, it could be interesting from a managerial standpoint, to define with more accuracy the different forms of inter-textuality and their associated advantages and risks. We can suggest a very tentative classification of different stakes linked with inter-textuality in children's global cultural industries:

- Media inter-textuality: refers to the allusions to former genres and codes included in the product itself to help positioning it in a given medium context (TV series, video game, feature film, publishing, etc.) while making its singularity also perceptible. It includes the dominant genres and codes that are used to situate a cultural production within one specific medium. The audience will appreciate a TV show for instance by directly comparing it to previous successful TV series that shaped criteria or codes concerning what is a "good" or "enjoyable" show in a specific cultural context. This "media inter-textuality" makes it possible to appraise the competitive landscape in which a new property will develop itself and to better argue the originality of its positioning with the aim of bringing innovative products to targeted broadcasters. The risks associated with this kind of "inter-textuality" lay mainly in the efforts carried out to build awareness in children's topical cultural references.
- Trans-media inter-textuality: covers the "translations" to be mastered when a cultural world - aimed at a primary target on one medium - expands through different media which have their own media inter-textual dynamics. Taking into account that media convergence represents a reconfiguration of media power and a reshaping of media aesthetics and economics (Jenkins, 2004: 34), trans-media inter-textuality becomes highly complex when it is developed across a large range of media, running from wireless-connected mobile game devices, home consoles, TV series, Internet websites, collectible cards, books, comics, toys and even fashion accessories or fabric collection. The difficulty here is to situate the inter-textual dynamics of a media in relation to those driving creativity in other media. Each industry has its own history and customers or audiences have developed their own references and codes... that need to be cautiously weaved one to each other in order to establish the grounds for a consistent exploitation of the property. Kline and al. note that "*in the oligopolistic market of the third millennium, branding plateforms and establishing synergistic connections with other branches of youth culture becomes essential for cultivating, consolidating and expanding a loyal user base.*" (Kline et al. 2003: 220). In that perspective, the risk lays in the ability to transpose a property from a medium into another, a complex process which sometimes leads to a global re-conception of the main characteristics of the heroes or the plot construction to better fit the tastes and comparative elements mastered by the newly targeted audiences.
- Branding inter-textuality: expands the symbolic reach of a property used as a brand by developing bounded spin-offs through different media. The managerial stake here consists of building the symbolic synergies necessary to strengthen the appeal of the branding strategy linked to a property. Companies attempt to capitalize on the recognition and symbolic value of their characters by "repurposing" them into licensed products, which opens new revenue streams. Such "*brand extensions are no longer adjuncts to the core product or main attraction; rather, these extensions form*

the foundation upon which entire corporate structures are being built” (Klein, 2000: 148). Nevertheless, driving this semiotic escalation is a risky task as it increases the saturation of youth cultures with branded properties. The complex interplay of codes through time may end in incoherencies, ambiguities, contradictions or omissions... Indeed, pushing too far bounded promotional policies to impose a property in several entertainment activities or media environments can be counter-productive, leading sometimes to foster indifference and even resistance from the consumers... and the targeted audiences. “The management of demand for symbolic goods in the post modern market place has been far from flawless, consistent, or uniformly effective, especially as media channels have expanded and cultural markets have become saturated with commercial signs. In some ways, the marketers’ efforts increase the very uncertainty they seek to control by creating ever more sophisticated and jaded young consumers. Fads pass, styles change, values realign, markets mature, and boredom and overload increase with saturation and repetition, making management of symbolic value a risky adventure” (Kline and al. 2003:).

Inter-textuality expresses itself in multiple forms and degrees of combining different references and codes children master. Even though it blurs boundaries among animation genres and melts cultural references, this art of hybridization (Consalvo 2006: 120) is what enables producers reaching a global child audience. Exploring in detail how this hybridization is practised by French, Japanese or American producers might reveal subtle differences in the creative and managerial competencies that are mobilized to reach a global audience... These synergistic connections we have describe, that are based on intertextual movements, are becoming vital for success or even survival in the animation global market, in the game market and even in the toy market, as well as in the internet services market.

Nevertheless, according to Joseph Tobin, the global success of Pokémon “*came at a price: Pokémon’s producers decided that if Pokémon were to make it globally, it would have to reduce what Koichi Iwabuchi calls its “cultural odor”*” (Tobin 2004: 261). Inter-textuality can also be used as a means to blur idiosyncratic references and to refer to “deodorized genres” (science fiction for instance) in order to ease the exportability of the production. But in the case of “Code Lyoko”, the episodes have not been adapted for an American audience and the choice of maintaining a highly situated context – old Renault factory in Paris – high school in Sceaux, a suburb of Paris... - can be surprising as it would have seemed preferable to refer to a plainer environment to reach foreign audiences. Nevertheless, it works as American fans of “Code Lyoko” have investigated about the French schooling system and they share this information to go deeper in the understanding of what is at stake in the series¹⁴. Voluntarily or not, this process might in the long run add French references to international standards, opening up then the global market to productions clearly identified as French...

Conclusion: In partially managed digital cultures, how can we understand children’s play and creativity?

As proven by literary analysis theory, textual representations are never innocent and they are very closely connected to systems of power in society. The progressive emergence of a "global children's culture industry" in which French animation producers play presently an

¹⁴ <http://groups.msn.com/CodeLyokoFanGroup/frenchschools.msnw>

important role leads cannot escape the moral and political debates inherent to a conjunction of the terms "globalization" and "childhood" (Langer 2004).

The widening role of marketing techniques and creative advertising management has made the animation industry a model of synergistic marketing in the wired mediascape. This industry provides a perfect case study of what Andrew Wernick (Wernick 1991) terms the “*promotional vortex*” that interconnects in a multiplicity of ways the various “spheres” of children’s cultural practice to managerial and commercial interests.

The commodification of culture leads to the production and marketing of experiences.”*Play is what people do when they create culture*” and “*the commodification of cultural experience is above all else, an effort to colonize play in all of its various dimensions and transform it into a purely saleable form.*” (Rifkin 2000: 260) Young consumers become active participants in shaping the creation, circulation and interpretation of media content. Thus, , the techniques of experiential marketing pervade brand extension and marketing communication, which are managed through an encompassing trans-media policy in order to deeply bond the consumer to the cultural property under promotion and to the variety of its spin-off products. Such experiences with the branded property deepen young consumers' emotional bonding to the property, and partially shape their own identities (see Chapter by Willett.)

Even though Michel de Certeau has taught us that consumers are never passive, nor docile, children's play is partially shaped by commercial strategies as well as the definition of myths about childhood in contemporary society : “*Global circulation of the belief that 'real' childhood is organized by a combination of toys, fun, games, fantasy and controlled adventure, appropriately packaged for 'age' and 'stage', is essential to market expansion not in the sense that cultural construction precedes the market, but in the sense that this version of childhood is constituted through the market. The two are inseparable.*” (Langer 2004:256).

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