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**Producing UK Children's Public Service
Broadcasting in the 21st Century:
A Case Study of BBC Scotland**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy



University of Glasgow

School of Culture and Creative Arts

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Abstract

This thesis examines the production of UK children's public service broadcasting in the 21st century through extended case study of one significant production facility: BBC Scotland Children's Department. Starting from the hypothesis that the Department offers a unique inflection of its public service remit through being an alternative producer to the main BBC Children's production facility in London, it argues that the various contexts and settings of the Department impact on its texts, practices and discourses to articulate a distinctive approach to children's public service broadcasting befitting the Department's status as a BBC 'centre of excellence'.

Based on production research at BBC Scotland from 2007 to 2011, the study explores a number of problematic concepts associated with contemporary UK public service broadcasting for children, including the perceived value of UK-originated content; the occupational values of producers as specialists; the construction and representation of the children's audience; and the specificity of television form in achieving public service for children. These issues are given additional scrutiny with respect to how BBC Scotland Children's Department negotiates the demands of producing content that is simultaneously national and network, and in light of the difficulties in UK children's broadcasting as a whole, suggested by the 2007 Ofcom Report on *The Future of Children's Television Programming*.

Occurring at a critical juncture in the history both of the BBC and of public service broadcasting more generally, the study reveals how the theorised gap between audience and producer, so critical in children's media, is managed by the Department, and how notions of 'public service' to children are articulated in institutional ethos and practice as well as in texts and artefacts. Through analysis of different aspects of the children's television production process at BBC Scotland, the thesis concludes that the Department embodies and manifests a strong ethos of public service in all its work.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to both my academic supervisors, Christine Geraghty and Karen Lury, for guiding me with such patient expertise through my PhD journey. I am enormously privileged to have had such talented, inspirational women as mentors and professional role models.

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The final thanks must go to my closest family for all their enduring love, support, encouragement and pride: Mum, Dad, Jacqui, Natalie, Annie and Ian, and above all my husband Fred and my beloved son, James.

Author's Declaration

This thesis represents the original work of Lynn Whitaker unless otherwise stated in the text. The research on which it was based was carried out at the University of Glasgow under the academic supervision of Professor Christine Geraghty and Professor Karen Lury, and in BBC Scotland Children's Department with the supervision of Simon Parsons, Head of Department, during the period October 2007 to May 2011.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Author’s Declaration.....	4
Table of Contents	5
Introduction	9
The hypothesis	9
The research questions	11
The children’s PSB industry context.....	13
The structure of this thesis	14
Conclusion.....	17
Chapter One: Literature Review	18
The study of cultural production in broadcasting.....	18
The study of PSB in the UK.....	25
The study of the construction of audiences.....	30
The study of children’s television	37
The construction and representation of childhood.....	43
Conclusion.....	51
Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Design.....	53
Project Background.....	54
Fieldwork Overview and Timeframe.....	56
Desk Research	56
Participant Observation.....	58
Interviews.....	62
Authenticity of fieldwork situations.....	64
Approaching interview participants	65
Ethics and confidentiality.....	66
Textual Analysis.....	69
Conclusion.....	71

Chapter Three: Relevant Contexts	73
Section 1: ‘Local’ contexts.....	74
BBC Children’s Platforms and Schedules	76
Location	79
Openness, transparency and trust.....	82
Key Personnel	86
Political Background.....	90
Section 2: Industry contexts	93
Rationale.....	93
Further implications for BBC Children’s.....	108
Conclusion.....	113
Chapter Four: Knowing and Constructing the Audience	117
Key concepts and questions.....	118
CBeebies.....	121
Children as the future	122
Best of audiences: enthusiastic participation.....	123
The Vulnerable Audience.....	125
Chasing the audience	130
Rights and Needs.....	133
CBBC.....	141
Audiences and diversity.....	142
The need for humour	144
Chasing the audience	147
UK-originated content.....	148
Conclusion.....	152
Chapter Five: Production as Public Service	156
Public Service Ethos.....	158
Development of programmes	160
Development as a means of serving the audience.....	161

Development case study: <i>Big City Park</i>	164
Positively representing Scotland.....	167
Creativity and commissioning.....	173
Barriers to creativity: location.....	177
Barriers to creativity: risk-aversion	178
Measuring success	185
Achieving ‘public service’	190
Connecting to the public	191
Conclusion.....	196
Chapter Six: Textual Analysis.....	200
Evaluating (children’s) PSB through textual analysis.....	200
CBeebies.....	203
<i>Same Smile</i>	203
Educational aspects	204
Media literacy: television form	207
Reinforcing public service ideology.....	211
BBC Scotland distinctiveness	215
<i>LazyTown Extra</i>	218
Representing UK cultural diversity	219
Resolving commercial tensions within a PSB co-production	221
<i>Big City Park</i>	223
Fitting the CBeebies brand	224
BBC Scotland distinctiveness	226
Conclusion: CBeebies.....	228
CBBC.....	229
<i>Ed and Oucho’s Excellent Inventions</i>	229
British eccentricity as distinctive	231
Representing child-adult relationships in and through text	232
Diversity and distinctiveness.....	234
<i>Copycats</i>	235

Conclusion: CBBC.....	242
Common themes: Chapter conclusion.....	243
Chapter Seven: Conclusion.....	245
Production studies and their methods.....	246
BBC Scotland Children’s Department.....	250
Children’s Television and PSB	254
The contribution of this research.....	257
Appendices	261
Appendix A: Interview Guide	261
Appendix B: Interview Consent Form.....	262
Appendix C: Research Participants.....	263
Appendix D: ‘LazyTown Stephanie’.....	264
References	265

Introduction

In all the research – and often furore – around the form, function and consumption of children’s broadcast television, little attention has been paid to the production of that television. Scant attention has been given to the UK context of production in particular, which continues to be heavily structured by public service broadcasting principles. Within the discourse and research that *is* dedicated to the production of UK children’s public service broadcasting, which necessarily focuses on the central role of the BBC, little has been made of the specific position of BBC Scotland as a significant producer of children’s public service content. This thesis is a production study of UK children’s public service broadcasting in the 21st century (with particular focus on the 2007 to 2010 period) using BBC Scotland as a specific case study.

The hypothesis

The hypothesis of this thesis argues that the Children’s Department at BBC Scotland represents a special case in the production of children’s public service broadcasting in the UK in the 21st century, through its unique situation as a producer of BBC children’s content *other or in addition to* the main BBC Children’s production centre (currently situated in London). This distinct position is manifest in the texts, production practices and discourse of BBC Scotland Children’s Department (‘the Department’). It is founded largely on concepts of diversity, plurality and representation that have long been enshrined in the BBC’s charter agreement but which, I propose, merit especial scrutiny in the genre of Children’s for two reasons: firstly, because producers of children’s media do not form part of its audience; and secondly, because children’s broadcast media provision is currently in a period of unprecedented change.

Together these factors act as a spur to the production staff of the Department, and their professional discourse centres on ideas of ‘knowing the audience’ in their attempt to bridge the gap between adult producer and child audience. Such discourse articulates the BBC core value that “audiences are at the heart of everything we do” (BBC 2007a) and demonstrates an on-going preoccupation with the authenticity and legitimacy of representing the audience,

thus rhetorically underpinning fundamental principles of public service broadcasting (PSB) for children. Nonetheless, however worthy and altruistic the motivations of producers, the production practice of ideas-consultation and programme-testing with children underlines that ‘knowing the audience’ has potential benefits as a market research tool through which a programme pitch or pilot can gain credibility for the commissioner and the consumer/citizen. Seen within the bigger picture that is BBC Scotland’s position as a provider of children’s broadcast content in a turbulent marketplace (internally and commercially), ‘knowing the audience’ may be the most effective means by which the Children’s Department at BBC Scotland can be both successful and accountable, and this thesis explores the conceptual relationship between producer and audience within that turbulent marketplace.

Working within the meritocracy of the commissioning system, but with certain guarantees under the nations and regions production quotas,¹ BBC Scotland Children’s Department has a complex role as a designated ‘centre of excellence’ in children’s programme-making that is complementary yet alternative to the metropolitan London department; this role of ‘significant other’ is expected to play a contributory role in achieving parity of access and representation for the child audience. In respect of representing the child audience (a key function of children’s PSB), I found that the production personnel of BBC Scotland Children’s Department have adopted a pragmatic approach of representing not only Scottish children’s audiences but all geographical sectors of the children’s audience. This is routinely achieved through the choice of participants and filming locations drawn from all over the UK. I would argue that there are double benefits to this strategy as BBC Scotland can choose to make content that is distinctly ‘Scottish’ or content that is not discernibly Scottish, as best fits the commissioner’s needs, thus fulfilling their

¹ Nations and regions production quotas ensure guaranteed minimum levels of network production will be allocated to the non-metropolitan national and regional production facilities. See the Statement of Operation (BBC 2007c).

representation remit while remaining competitive. Their interpretation of the remit of representation (to include the whole of the UK), is, I have found, a canny move that ensures BBC Scotland can compete for any work within the larger Children's broadcast media marketplace and cannot be regarded merely as a supplier of 'parochial' Scottish content.

The broadcast texts (predominantly television programmes) produced by BBC Scotland Children's Department also exhibit the themes and challenges of children's PSB in the 21st century, and, as end products of a series of structural mechanisms, act as examples of how greater policy issues are synthesised in cultural artefacts. Designed *by* adults *for* children, the texts reflect much about adult perceptions of child and childhood; but despite the myriad different expressions of the adult-child relationship, particular textual forms, genres and conventions within children's PSB exhibit common characteristics which point to a certain consensus as to what constitutes the 'proper' role of children within cultural norms. Thus children's programmes act as a site of aspiration and regulation of those norms. Analysis of the children's texts produced by BBC Scotland confirms greater societal anxieties around concepts of childhood and also sheds light on the dominant construction of children's PSB as a valuable cultural enterprise and artefact. I will demonstrate that, because of the Department's avowed commitment to authentic representation of the child audience, their texts make particularly apposite illustrations of how the purposes and characteristics of PSB are realised in practice.

The research questions

The main strands of my hypothesis were reached through a number of questions that underpinned my research activities and the subsequent writing of this thesis. Unlike most research projects, my research questions were not fully spontaneous or naturally occurring in that the project was set up under the collaborative doctoral awards scheme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and had pre-

approved research objectives under the heads “diversity, representation and interactivity”.² Given that the broad parameters of the study were fixed around collaboration between Glasgow University and BBC Scotland Children’s Department, I was particularly anxious that my research would reflect my unique access to the BBC and focus on the lived experiences of the production community working there during the period of my research. As such, issues of methodology and purpose became interlinked as I asked myself, “What is the best use of this access in order to make an original and significant contribution to knowledge in the field?”.

It should be noted that, in this particular instance, the existing knowledge in the field was based both in academia and in industry, and that the terms of the collaborative doctoral award are specifically structured to facilitate knowledge transfer between the academic and non-academic institution; it was important therefore that my specific research questions should offer interest and ‘value’ for both sides of the academic and BBC partnership without compromising the critical independence of my position. By focussing on the ‘now’ of production experience, rather than on putative developments, this research has a contemporary historical framework and I explore complex and often abstract issues within concrete practical examples, thus providing a robust evidence base from which to examine and draw conclusions of the following main research questions and their subsidiaries:

What is the role of BBC Scotland Children’s Department in the delivery of children’s PSB content?

- How does that delivery fit with the umbrella of BBC Children’s strategy?

² 2007 Advertised AHRC Project Brief: Glasgow University/BBC Scotland Collaborative Doctoral Award.

- In what ways do production practices and texts of BBC Scotland articulate the greater concerns of PSB for children?

In what ways do the constituent elements of producing children's PSB – e.g. regulatory framework, commissioning, scheduling, BBC strategies - uphold the probity of children's PSB as a valuable cultural and social enterprise?

- What is the role of locally-produced content?
- What are the demands and challenges of the dominant construction of children's PSB as a valuable cultural enterprise?
- In what ways does television form structure children's PSB and how does it construct the children's audience?

The children's PSB industry context

This research took place at a critical juncture in the history of UK children's PSB (and also in the history of PSB more generally), when the BBC became a virtual monopsony in commissioning, producing and broadcasting UK-originated children's content. The UK industry-wide acceptance that children's PSB would never again be delivered through the successful and longstanding BBC/ITV competitive duopoly (that had formed the current generation of producers' own memory and experience of children's television), confirmed by the findings of the 2007 Ofcom Research Report, *The Future of Children's Television Programming* (hereinafter 2007 Ofcom Report), has driven interested parties forward to seek not only new mechanisms for the delivery of children's PSB, but new validations for its *raison d'être* that might ensure its survival in future decades.

Children's PSB has traditionally drawn legitimacy in form and function from a broad conception that certain televisual textual forms and content are 'better for children' than others, and that the Reithian mission to 'educate, inform and entertain' has particular importance for the children's audience. Indeed the notion of a 'cosy duopoly' resonates strongly with children's PSB of the eighties and far beyond, with BBC and ITV the main providers of content right up until 2007; both

broadcasters positioned similar children's programmes at similar times in the schedule, thus making the competition 'fair' and reinforcing the value of the schedule as a means of delivering a variety of genres. Within this duopoly, it was relatively easy to amass audiences for *all* children's content, thus producers could include the less populist formats and genres (usually those considered most worthy or improving of all, such as news and factual) 'by stealth' in a mixed - and above all balanced - 'diet' of children's programming. Like the food counterpart of the allusion, much of the philosophy behind the mixed diet approach is predicated on the notion that, given choice, children will not naturally consume a healthy diet but will instead consume only 'rubbish' (be it cartoons or ice cream). Such constructions and assumptions will be discussed within the main body of my research.

Although gradually eroded in part by the provision of both the BBC digital children's channels (launched in 2002) and the digital ITV children's channel CITV (launched in 2006), and by the vast growth of the US-owned commercial children's channels available through cable or satellite from the early 1990s onwards, it was not until 2007 that the BBC/ITV children's PSB duopoly ended when ITV formally relinquished its public service commitments to children's television. This structural change was predicted by industry insiders prior to 2007, and sent the independent production sector into "free-fall" according to one senior industry figure (Simon Parsons, Glasgow University Media Week Presentation, Field journal, June 2007). Plurality of PSB provision was affected in two separate ways: firstly by the loss of ITV itself; and secondly, through the damage to the UK independent sector. Both factors may impact on the BBC's delivery of children's PSB. Far from revelling in a situation of no competition for UK-produced content, the BBC has stridently repeated that the situation is not ideal (as I discuss in Chapter Three). Several high-profile industry and public campaigns for protecting children's PSB content have not, as yet, achieved the political intervention that would be required in order to change the current position.

The structure of this thesis

Between introduction and conclusion, this thesis is structured in to two main parts; the first situates the context of my research (Chapters One, Two and Three) and the

second sets out my substantive findings and analysis (Chapters Four, Five and Six). This two-part structure was chosen as best suited to the kind of data generated by my research questions, since the significance and meaning of the fieldwork (the substantive research) could not be shown without prior explanation of the context or field. As I explain further in both my literature review and in my methodology chapter, the mapping of theory to practice would seem an aspiration of the field of production studies and therefore a division of this production study into two parts, dealing respectively with the 'context' and the 'content' of research, has helped me to marshal a volume of sometimes rather disparate research materials into an accessible and coherent framework.

Chapter One, the literature review, situates my interest in UK children's PSB and its production at the nexus of various research models and discourses and draws on several overlapping fields of research as relevant to this project. It examines models used for the study of cultural production, including those specific to PSB. It then goes on to examine the literature on PSB and on the BBC as a specific broadcasting institution. In consideration of 'children' as an audience, it looks at studies of the construction of the television audience and considers the explicit category that is 'children's television'. Finally it looks at the problematised study of the construction of childhood and the impact that 'childhood studies' might have in the study of children's PSB.

Chapter Two, the methodology chapter, carries on from the literature review in providing the justification and theoretical context of my methodological choices in conducting this research. It deals not only with a description and explanation of those choices but sets out the limits and constraints of the research design and locates my own subject position within the field of study. It outlines the nature of my fieldwork within BBC Scotland Children's Department.

Chapter Three locates the role and structure of BBC Scotland within both the BBC and the wider picture of UK children's broadcasting in the 21st century, discussing the 'situatedness' of BBC Scotland Children's production and how this works within the umbrella of BBC Children's. Primarily an overview of the contexts of Children's production at BBC Scotland, and of Children's as a discrete

department, the chapter presents discussion of the current changes and challenges faced by children's PSB and its specific implication for BBC Scotland as a producer, including analysis of the terms of 'crisis' that are often used in connection with the UK children's media production industry. Detailed consideration of the 2007 Ofcom Report informs this analysis.

Part Two (Chapters Four, Five and Six) presents the bulk of my substantive research findings as two fieldwork chapters and one textual analysis chapter. Chapter Four is drawn from my fieldwork and interview materials; it investigates the theme of the imagined child audience and the producers' relationship with it and examines the doctrine of 'knowing the audience' in various ways. In analysing what constitutes knowing the audience, I interrogate the value placed on the doctrine and the ways in which 'what is known' is concomitant with various models of audience and discourses of childhood.

Chapter Five is the second of my fieldwork chapters and is organised around analysis of the production processes of BBC Scotland Children's Department in terms of their ability to achieve public service purposes and characteristics. It considers the chronology of a commission from development to pitch to production and presents the broad characteristics of success from the perspective of members of the Department.

Chapter Six presents textual analysis of BBC Scotland texts within the broadcast context of the digital BBC children's channels, CBeebies and CBBC. It uses individual examples of a range of children's programmes recently produced by the Department to illustrate and explore the relationship between broadcast text and the purposes and characteristics of PSB, and to explore the distinctiveness (or not) of BBC Scotland as a producer of children's PSB as manifest therein. It considers also the representation and construction of childhood within the texts.

Chapter Seven provides a conclusion to this thesis, pulling together the main themes in response to the initial research questions and suggesting possible significances of the research model and the main findings. It takes stock of the specific case of BBC Scotland as a producer of children's PSB and speculates as to the

future of the Children's Department and as to how this research might be meaningfully expanded or utilised.

Conclusion

This introduction has given an overview of the context, hypothesis and structure of this thesis and highlighted the main research questions that drive it. To conclude this introduction I reiterate that this research is important because of the unique geographical and political position of BBC Scotland as the alternative producer to the main BBC Children's centre, and is timely in that UK children's PSB production is both under-researched and currently in a period of unprecedented change.

Children's television continues to be the subject of discourse and scrutiny related to notions of social benefit yet there is little close analysis of the production context or the specific textual content of children's PSB. Therefore this study hopes to intervene in a number of contemporary debates around the production of children's PSB, which include:

- the perceived value of UK-originated content for UK children;
- the occupational values of producers as 'specialists' and their responses to changes in broadcasting; and
- the question of how PSB is realised in discourse, production practice and programmes.

The next chapter will provide a review of the relevant literature that best illuminates these debates and which contextualises my research.

Chapter One: Literature Review

The work discussed in this chapter is drawn from a variety of fields within the wide literature of media, cultural and childhood studies, and so encompasses aspects of arts and humanities and sociological scholarship. As there is a paucity of literature specifically about the BBC and BBC Scotland as a producer of children's broadcast texts it has been necessary to select carefully those areas of established research that are most relevant to this study. Because of the range of this literature and its impact on methodologies, this chapter is broken down into five principal sections as follows: the study of cultural production; the study of PSB and the BBC; the study of constructions of audiences; the study of children's television; and the study of constructions and representations of childhood. Although there may be considerable overlap of the literature within these sections, the aim of this chapter is to provide a broad overview of the research context in which my own work is situated. Thus only work that is relevant to a number of chapters and overarching debates is evaluated here. Work that relates only to one specific concern of my research is discussed only in the chapter to which it is most relevant.

The study of cultural production in broadcasting

It is clear from the research questions set out in the introduction that this study examines the institutions, processes and texts of children's PSB and the ways in which the cultural production of PSB articulates greater societal attitudes and desires. The siting of a specific production ecology (in this case of BBC Scotland Children's Department) within its broader contexts of culture and society is posited by leading theorists as the highest ambition and most useful application of production studies; production studies are not an end in themselves but rather a means of engaging with greater debates and developments in the on-going field of cultural studies.

An influential model for such study can be derived from the 'circuit of culture' outlined by Du Gay et al. (1997: 3-4), wherein five distinct processes are identified – representation, identity, regulation, production and consumption - each of which overlap in the creation of culture, and each of which has to be considered in order to undertake meaningful cultural study. Although this study places greatest

focus on the production element, this is not considered in isolation or 'for its own sake'. Rather production is used here as a specific lens through which other elements can be examined; issues relating to the other elements are fully embedded within the objectives of this research. Peterson advocated just such an approach, arguing that production studies act as a crucible of the intellectual ambit of cultural studies, raising questions distilled from and resonant with the broader field of cultural studies (1994: 182).

Likewise, Frith, in 2000, foregrounded the importance of production studies, pointing to television production, in particular, as a relatively neglected area of academic enquiry compared to regulatory policy and reception studies. Nonetheless he warns of the over-privileging of production studies if they are divorced from their greater cultural context (2000: 38). This echoes the earlier concern of Golding and Murdock who promote two levels of relevance or concern necessary to maximising the specificities of production research: one at the level of the situational, i.e. consideration of the market in which production takes place; and the other at the level of the normative, i.e. the more general cultural framework of the research subject (1991: 35). It is hoped that my own research is illuminating at both these levels of concern and that my production study of BBC Scotland Children's Department is relevant both to the experiences of the children's television production community and the broader societal discussions of PSB and children's media culture.

The early theorists of production studies also pointed to possible multiple (interconnected) levels of analysis. For example, Elliot and Chaney (1969) differentiated between the micro (where the focus is on one specific individual or production team) and the macro (where the focus is on the greater institutional structures within which the individual/team operates). My own research integrates both the micro and the macro. Hesmondhalgh's limits of autonomy classification (2006) is also useful in relation to my own research, as the BBC Scotland Children's Department is specifically constituted as having paradoxical limits of agency and autonomy in its role of alternative voice to the main London production centre and each of its individual programmes sits within a set of 'Russian Doll' strictures,

policies and controls at both micro and macro levels. Although Hesmondhalgh (2006) looks to *producers'* own roles in challenging or conforming to such strictures, he also offers an account of appropriate research methods, which, in addition to the methods which give primacy to the producer's own interest (e.g. interview), optimises the relevance of the study within the greater field of cultural studies. More recently, Corner's 1999 work looks to genre outputs to help analyse a production entity, rather than the autonomy or scale of the producer/practitioner. A meaningful application of Corner's approach is to consider Children's as the genre category in which the Department operates. This model is particularly useful when seeking a holistic picture of the production of children's media or children's culture, as it allows for the genre category of 'Children's' to apply to production studies of e.g. children's literature, gaming, toys, marketing etc. (as in Máire Messenger Davies's 2010 monograph). Several of such broader genre studies have informed my research into children's PSB.

Corner's analysis (1999) can be most usefully applied to the practical, ethnographic style of production studies which spring from the desire to map theory and practice. In separating these production studies into those concerned with "public knowledge" and those concerned with "popular culture" (73) we begin to see the disparity in the field. Those studies relating to "public knowledge" are more prolific as the production of news, current affairs and documentary television forms attracted academic analysis from the earliest stages of television theory. The work of, for example, Philip Elliot (1972) and Philip Schlesinger (1978) has proven to be seminal, continuing to engender new production studies which consider aspects of bias, professionalism and self-reflexivity in the production of news/current affairs, such as those by Harrison (2000) and Matthews (2008). Matthews's study is especially interesting as it integrates the notion of the constructed child audience into discourses of producer professionalism. The impact of new technologies on television regional news structures and delivery looks likely to generate many more studies in this area and children's television news provision continues to be a research topic of international concern.

The aim of Elliot's extended case study of the making of a current affairs series is framed "to throw light on the relationship between culture and social structure as it is mediated through television" (1972: 6) and is a particularly interesting model for my own research because, in addition to looking at the professional contexts of the workplace, Elliot places emphasis on the notion of audience "as source", describing television as a "relay system through which the society as audience is presented with an image of itself, the society as source" (1972: 17). His research focuses on the role of the producer as the creator of the "intervening" image, and there is clear overlap with the concept of producers and programmes as creators of audiences, and as responsible for representing the audience unto itself. Both these ideas are large concerns of my own research and come under particular examination in Chapters Four and Six of this thesis where I consider the producers' relationship to the audience in discourse and text respectively. Although published late in my own research process, Jeanette Steemers's 2010 monograph, *Creating Preschool Television: A Story of Commerce, Creativity and Curriculum*, is a critical resource for the study of children's television production, and particularly relevant to my own research is Steemers's ambitious synthesis of textual analysis and policy and economic perspectives into production research.

Schlesinger's 1978 study of the production of BBC news presents double value to my research design as both a production study of a defined department or unit, and as a production study within the specific institution of the BBC. Schlesinger examines contrasts between producers' own discourse and the official institutional rhetoric, not as a method of 'exposing' individuals but rather as a means of showing the way in which certain policies and doctrines become incorporated into working practices and how day-to-day decisions articulate (or challenge) the broader institutional 'line'. Although Schlesinger's findings – that BBC news was a relatively hermeneutic environment – contrast greatly with my own analysis of the BBC Scotland Children's Department, the methodology suggested by Schlesinger was critical for my own fieldwork, as was that of Tom

Burns (1977) who also conducted a BBC-based production study (discussed in my next section and at greater length in Chapter Two).

Another useful account that sheds light both on production studies and the BBC as a specific producer, is Georgina Born's sprawling ethnographic study, *Uncertain Vision* (2004). Born's study blurs Corner's distinctions between production research of "public knowledge" and "popular culture" through her examination of an almost random or disparate assemblage of managerial strata, production departments and political culture. I find the instinctual and textured nature of her model - which gives free rein to her own creative responses and places dreams alongside historical quotations, policy statements, field journal excerpts and interviews - very intriguing, as her content effectively mirrors the cultural context, allowing the reader to make connections and draw inference. This methodology was especially enlightening in her chapter on BBC drama production where Born would seem to substantiate the notion that the prime purpose of the department - creativity - was seriously undermined in diffuse yet seemingly concerted ways by the economic, political and managerial climate operating in an institution which functions as more than simply a production facility. Born's model has a huge implication for my own research into a BBC department operating with a mainly creative remit in a period of charter renewal when "Creative Futures" (Thompson 2008) topped the institutional (and therefore - one might assume - the internal economic, political and managerial) agenda. Born's model is inspirational in its breadth, and a useful one for assimilating seemingly disparate concerns or artefacts into a production study.

As an aside to her argument for the continuing relevance of Tod Gitlin's production study, *Inside Prime Time* (Gitlin 1983), Amanda Lotz comments that the scale of Born's study was only possible due to the scale of the BBC as a *public service broadcasting* institution (Lotz 2009: 36), perhaps implying that the commercial sector necessitates a different model of production study. Although I do not agree entirely with the reasoning behind the statement, it is worth noting here because of the implication that cultural context and access dictate not just the aims of a study but the methodology too. Because the cultural context or "situatedness" (Tinic 2009:

168) of production is a key feature of production research, it is not always easy to assimilate models from other cultures and fields unless they can be meaningfully appropriated to the localised research context, even if they are of historical significance, and despite the now global reach of some media organisations and products and their structures of synergy and vertical integration (Long & Wall 2009). For this reason, I have been able to make only very generalised use of much of the early (even canonical) US-originated research into Hollywood film and television producers - such as the research of Newcomb and Alley (1983) into television as a “producers’ medium” – except where it is explicitly revisited with a view to broadening its application (as in Lotz’s appraisal of Gitlin). That said, one of the most influential production research models for this project has been derived from the work of John Thornton Caldwell on US film, television and new media production from the mid-1990s to the present day. Whether it is because of Caldwell’s dual status as academic and practitioner, or his on-going desire to try to move beyond temporal, geographic and disciplinary barriers created by the historical or culturally specific context of production studies, his work continues to broker new applications and collaborations.

What I find particularly apposite in Caldwell’s approaches, most notably in his 2008 study, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice*, is the focus on the ‘lived experiences’ of producers (wherein producers are taken as *all* members of a production team regardless of traditional hierarchical rank or status). Also influential is what might be termed his on-going *scepticism* of media producers’ self-representations in an industry in which the *off-screen* representation “is itself a cultural production, mythologized and branded much like the onscreen textual culture that media industries produce” (Mayer, Banks & Caldwell 2009: 2). That is not to say that Caldwell’s approach is in any way an ‘outing’ or ‘exposé’ of individual production personnel or practices that deviate from the desired institutional normative construction. Indeed, Caldwell repeatedly expresses his gratitude to the production community (and especially those who make up the bulk of the anonymous labour force) for allowing him to adopt a “theorizing from the ground up” approach “to find and articulate examples of

critical theory embedded within the everyday of workers experience – that is through the kind of indigenous cultural theory that operates outside of academia” (Caldwell 2008: 5). It was just such an indigenous cultural theory that I wished to access in fieldwork at BBC Scotland Children’s Department.

Implicit in Mayer, Banks and Caldwell’s exhortations to scepticism is the odd combination of self-aggrandisement (*my* opinion matters, *my* research counts, *my* viewpoint is unique) and humility (without access I have no research) inherent in the ethnographer’s burden of representation and no more so when, as in media industries research, the career and reputation stakes are very high for research participants, and they may stand to gain little in return. In this respect Cottle’s 1997 and 2004 work (on ethnic minority programming and natural history programming respectively) is also instructive as he posits that although academic interest does, virtually of itself, give greater authority to the voice of the producer (particularly in terms of creative authorship), sensitivity to the producer’s position only comes with full understanding of the interplay of professional, ideological, institutional and commercial pressures within which he/she operates. The researcher must therefore seek not only to *find* but to *understand* the producer’s ‘authentic reality’ in its fullest context. This was a key aspiration of my own research.

In Chapter Two, I will cover the specific methodology implications suggested by the literature on culture production in broadcasting, but for now I will conclude this section of the literature review by indicating that, from the literature in this field, I took forward the following key concepts in to my research design and ensuing thesis:

- production study is not as an end in itself but a means of interrogating broader cultural debates;
- questions around the agency, creativity and autonomy of the producer are central to production studies and can be meaningfully framed in relation to genre, institution and other contextual factors, especially through ethnographic research methods;
- textual analysis can be deployed successfully within production studies - particularly in consideration of how the audience is represented or

constructed by the producer – and a broad approach to what constitutes ‘text’ is helpful; and

- production studies are themselves a constructed representation or version of a reality in which both the producer and the researcher make self-representations.

I will continue now with the second area of my literature review which is the literature which considers the study of PSB in the UK.

The study of PSB in the UK

At the heart of this research are questions about how the specific production unit of BBC Scotland Children’s Department produces content that contributes to contemporary UK children’s PSB. It is helpful therefore to look at the general principles of PSB before considering the specificity of the BBC as an institution. Interestingly, despite its long history in the UK and its prevalence in academic writing, regulatory policy and public discourse, there is no standard definition of PSB; rather it is understood as a confluence of conventions and principles that “are always liable to be embellished, amended and inverted” (Burns 1977: 122) depending on who is referring to them and for what purpose. For example, the 2007 Ofcom Report used definitional criteria of “purposes and characteristics of PSB” for its main analysis but then translated these into “proxy statements” for its audience research analysis (Ofcom 2007a: 105-138). The malleable nature and ambiguous language of PSB must always be taken in to account when conducting research and be related to the increasingly consumerist construction of broadcasting and its audiences. The current debates around consumerist versus citizenship constructions of PSB are all the more interesting when applied to the children’s audience which, according to contemporary theories of childhood discussed in the final section of this review, lacks meaningful autonomy as either consumers or citizens (Kline 1993: 19).

Much of the current understanding and analysis of vulnerability and crisis in PSB, gaining momentum from the mid-eighties onwards (Scannel 1990; Blumler 1992a; Fairbairn 2004; and Collins 2006), is based on the historic specificity of broadcasting in the UK and the complex evolution of broadcasting infrastructures

and technologies - both public service and commercial - in the UK, rooted as they are in their socio-economic context. Asa Briggs's canonical history of the BBC (1985) provides a comprehensive overview, but it must be remembered that the BBC is not the only broadcaster with PSB commitments in the UK, even if this remains a public perception of children's PSB at least (Ofcom 2007a: 126). The staggered growth of four terrestrial analogue channels in addition to the original BBC single television channel (ITV in 1955; BBC 2 in 1964; Channel 4 in 1982; and Five in 1997) heralded continually changing relationships between the BBC, PSB and the commercial sector. For a fuller understanding of the 'pushmepullyou' relationship between the BBC and the commercial sector - sometimes characterised in terms of a popularising or 'dumbing down' of content (O'Malley & Treharne 1993) - Andrew Crisell's 2002 work is extremely useful. If we accept Branston's proposition (also Scannell 1990) that commercial broadcasting in the era of terrestrial analogue television was conceived as "an extension rather than an erosion of PSB" (Branston 1998: 58) or instead accept Anthony Smith's proposition that it was "an extension and duplication of monopoly, disguised as economic pluralism" (Smith 1986: 4), it is worthwhile noting the 21st century decline in commercial delivery of PSB in the age of largely unfettered "spectrum plenty" (Ellis 2000), as confirmed by Lord Carter's 2009 *Digital Britain Report* (DCMS & DBIS 2009). The example of Channel 4 as a public service publisher, which had seemed to offer new and exciting possibilities for the institutional structure of PSB and, by extension, PSB content (Harvey 2000; Lambert 1982; and Smith 1986: 15) is particularly salutary. There can be no doubt that, with the completion of digital switchover in 2012 and the BBC's charter renewal in 2016, the future of PSB in Britain has entered in to the period of greatest challenge in its august history (Attenborough 2008).

In relation to *children's* television, the current and future challenge of PSB is perhaps greater still and, writing at the threshold of the second decade of the 21st century, it is apparent that although, as a *unified* genre, it would be difficult to class children's programming as a market failure genre (there are currently over twenty dedicated children's digital channels), certain subgenres within children's

programming – notably those which are indigenously produced - are not provided other than under the aegis of PSB by the BBC. That they are provided at all would be considered satisfactory by some (Elstein 1986; Peacock 2004) - and there is perhaps a justified perception that campaigners for UK-originated content wish to 'have their cake and eat it' by controlling not only PSB but the greater market (as they once could in the 'golden days' of spectrum scarcity) - but for others, notably the lobby group Save Kids' TV (SKTV), the relegation of certain types of content to purely BBC provision risks the "ghettoisation" of children's PSB (SKTV 2008). For many academics and campaigners therefore (Messenger Davies & Thornham 2007; SKTV 2007, 2008, 2009a), questions around the funding and structure of children's PSB are inextricable from the notoriously intangible or 'soft' criteria of the cultural, informative or artistic merits of specific forms of content (Born & Prosser 2001). It is arguably impossible to legislate using these criteria anyway, but never more so than in an age when economic arguments shape broadcasting more than those of quality or value, as Pratten and Deakin argue:

There is a tendency for economists to espouse a form of meta-ethical scepticism, according to which all value judgements are merely expression of individual preferences. Those who argue that value judgements are purely subjective are effectively denying the existence of any objective basis for our values. Once this view is adopted it encourages a very particular and, we would argue, restricted framework for the assessment of alternative policy decisions. (2004: 92)

In respect of value judgement in children's broadcasting, Grant Noble's 1975 small production study of *Blue Peter* is useful, as is the work of Buckingham, Davies, Jones & Kelley (1999); Davies, Buckingham & Kelley (2000); and Messenger Davies (especially 1995, 2000 [with Andrewartha], 2001 and 2007 [with Thornham]). In respect of value judgment in children's news provision the on-going work of Cynthia Carter (e.g. 2007) is informative and has bearing on the construction of children as citizens. I am especially interested in the relationship between value judgement and audience construction, which is so frequently criticised as paternalism, moral and cultural imperialism and the infantilisation of

the audience: see, for example, Curran & Seaton (1991); Scannell & Cardiff (1991); and North's scathing attack on PSB (2007). Such arguments are all of added significance when considering children's broadcasting, and relevant to my discussion of the producer/audience relationship throughout Part Two of this thesis.

Defining current concepts of children's PSB and the BBC Scotland's role in the delivery of it is a fundamental task of this thesis, but as my research takes the form of a production study then one of the most important PSB discourses that my work draws on is research into the occupational values of PSB producers. In this respect the seminal model of Burns's 1977 study, *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World*, is enlightening and inspirational. Burns traced a shift in occupational values of BBC producers from those of public service to that of "professionalism". Burns explains (and condemns) this shift as predicated on a range of producer perceptions that remain relevant to this day: that the ethos of public service was seen as at odds with creativity and/or as arrogant and normative. Burns describes this as the "liberal dissolution" of the Reithian construction of PSB (149); and suggests that this professionalism demanded a degree of insularity or judgement autonomous from the audience and even the most senior management. Drawing on the work of fellow sociologist Everett Hughes, Burns posited that, while not unique to the BBC, the doctrine of "professionalism" in emergent labour markets and industries frequently implied

the invocation of some kind of moral order in which professional judgements, decisions and actions are grounded. The moral order endows them with a legitimacy and authority which are regarded as distinguishable from and at times superior to contractual obligations, loyalty to the organisation, or compliance with public or other 'outside' demands or claims. (126)

While such professionalism may be construed as a more pragmatic directive than the 'soft' criteria of public service values, and a more transferable index of competence and success for skilled workers, who, with the development of independent broadcasters and independent production companies, had new opportunities outwith those of PSB, it was clearly not seen as such by Burns. He describes the move towards "professionalism", as, "in brief, a shift from treating

broadcasting as a means to treating broadcasting as an end” (125). More recent researchers, such as Crisell, might add that the shift necessitated treating broadcasting not just as an “end” but as a commodity: “programme production is no longer a service or even a profession, but – in the sense that its creative aspects [are] becoming significantly constrained by the need to survive in the marketplace – a business” (Crisell 2006: 44). This perceived need to ‘survive in the marketplace’ was apparent in my own fieldwork and is discussed in Chapter Five.

Nonetheless, all three models - of public service, of professionalism and of commercial success - exist side by side in current children’s PSB, although whether that has *always* been the case in *children’s* television, wherein even non-PSB content is sold on notions of its ‘public service’ and ‘quality’ aspects (Steemers 2004: 172-173), is difficult to say without appropriate production histories. Schlesinger (2004), speaking of PSB in the 21st century, argues that PSB values *are* still present in the industry, but ascribes their dilution mostly to what Burns would recognise as a pluralistic rather than autocratic organisational culture, an argument which is also posited by Casey et al. (2002: 177). Schlesinger argues that the sort of producer sovereignty traditionally outlined by Newcomb and Alley (1983) is now greatly curtailed, and constrained by the ethos of the intended buyer of the output:

the extent to which PSB purposes can be and are mediated to employees through their production contexts and work practices will vary considerably, depending on the organisation for which they work and the markets to which the company’s output is orientated. (Schlesinger 2004: 11)

Certainly the work of Jeremy Tunstall in the 1990s suggests that television producers were caught in hierarchical structures that limited their autonomy, and that this was compounded by policy drives towards a more ‘level playing field’ for commercial and PSB commissioning. This is exemplified by BBC strategies such as “Producer Choice” and now the “Window of Competitive Creative Opportunity” (BBC 2007c). Tunstall (1993) believes the advance of new satellite and cable technologies resulted in an increased focus on the commercial and commodity aspects of broadcasting (including the commercialisation of the labour force) and the weakening of producers’ power (whether in the sense of creative autonomy or

job-security). But some critics – Schlesinger and Born included - would argue that the pendulum has begun to swing the other way and that now, in the first decade of the new millennium, BBC producers’ resistance to the commercialisation of broadcasting has led to what Born (2002) would term ‘reactivated Reithianism’. This may therefore account for the strong public service ethos that came across in my own research into producers’ attitudes.

In conclusion of this section of the literature review, I take forward into my thesis the following key aspects of the literature on UK PSB:

- PSB lacks a firm rubric or definition, relying instead on elastic ‘soft’ criteria by which to judge value or quality;
- the BBC has a complex and fluid relationship with commercial broadcasting and production – research into PSB must take account of the structural and economic mechanism of PSB delivery;
- economic arguments now dominate broadcasting discourse, impacting on how we characterise the BBC’s relationship with its audience; and
- producer autonomy and professional values reflect the changing construction of the BBC and of PSB and are taken as something of a barometer of PSB values.

I will now proceed to the third section of this literature review, which deals with the literature on the construction of audiences.

The study of the construction of audiences

Just as the pressure of commercial competition can be seen in broadcasting policy, infrastructure, producer attitude and content, so too do the conceptions and constructions of the audience (made by policy makers and producers) reflect changing ideas about the function or purpose of PSB. In this respect the work of Ien Ang (1991) is most valuable in thinking about the public service broadcaster’s fundamental problem in conceptualising its audience/s. The shift from thinking about a single unified audience to a less homogeneous *series* of audiences plural is itself an aspect of construction. Ang formalises these constructions into two major groupings: “audience-as-public” and “audience-as-market”, but, adopting Clifford’s “partial truths” model (Clifford 1986), warns that “no representation of the

'television audience', empirical or otherwise, gives us direct access to any audience. Instead it gives us 'fictive' pictures of 'audience', fictive not in the sense of false or untrue, but of fabricated, both made and made up" (Ang 1991: 34-35). It is this sense of the fictive and the constructed that is especially at stake when considering that producers of children's media do not form part of their audience, as Ang notes a general tendency for producers to treat 'knowing' the audience as investigating a small number of the audience as "exemplars of an alien species" (1991: 36).

When looking at the constructions of the audience made by a public service broadcaster then it may seem reasonable to assume that an audience-as-public model would dominate. Dayan notes that the concept of public is greater than that of mere viewers, connoting participation in debate, aspects of loyalty, and performance of the societal in its members (2001: 746). Content aimed at such an audience is figured around their *civic* and societal function and thus education and information is prioritised above entertainment in accord with the Reithian model of PSB (Alasuutari 1999; Blumler 1996). Interestingly though, many commentators note a curious absence of any truly reflexive construction of the audience by the BBC in its early years, with some arguing further that BBC producers tended to ignore their audience and audience research until they were obliged to do so through the market forces of the 1980s (Madge 1989: 34). Certainly despite the current invocation that "audiences are at the heart of everything we do" (BBC 2007a), the BBC's reflexive account of its relationship to the audience has not always given the audience such agency or power, as evidenced in the changing construction of that relationship. In tracking changing BBC metaphors of the audience, Julie Light's research into the construction of channel identities is instructive (Light 2004). The Reithian mission to 'educate, inform and entertain' remains part of the BBC's core values (BBC 2007a) but the construction of the 'who' that is being educated, informed and entertained – and the 'why' – continues to evolve.

As it was not until the advent of ITV that competition for audiences created more structured and formalised ways of thinking about those audiences, we must look to other means of reading how the BBC constructed its audiences in its early

days. Light points out that Reith, the first Director General, used several metaphors in which the BBC actively steers or acts as a gatekeeper of cultural enlightenment. Reith cast the BBC as a ship of which he was the captain, and again as a church of which he was figurehead, the producers its priesthood (Reith 1949). Light argues such metaphors suggest the audience's supervised journey towards betterment and redemption is to be brought about by the superior knowledge and taste of the BBC staff (Light 2004: 25). Certainly there was a gap between producer and the bulk of the audience, a gulf between notions of high and low culture and huge disparity of access to education and thus to elite institutions and professions. For some critics this audience construction was elitist and paternalistic and served only to widen the chasm between the institution and its (potential) public.

Kumar (1986) offers a damning account, suggesting a BBC that neither knew nor cared about the actuality of its audience, a BBC forced to confront its failure to speak for and to the public only when commercial competition (first in radio and then in television) threatened to do so more effectively by giving the public what they seemed to want rather than what an elite thought they needed (54). Kumar contends that the fragmentation of the audience resulting from increased channel choice (whether in radio or television) actually allowed greater numbers to participate in national culture, paradoxically leading to a true form of public address to a mass audience in contrast to Reith's vision of single-channel mixed-programming. Such arguments are particularly interesting when considering the relevance of the schedule and of channel/platform choice in children's PSB.

Kumar's ideas on fragmentation and Reith's conception of guiding and improving an audience's taste are all the more interesting when applied to the child audience conceptualised, amongst other things, as a *tabula rasa* receptive to and in need of instruction. David Oswell's painstaking history (2002), *The Making of the Child Television Audience in Britain*, documents not so much a changing BBC perception of the child audience but a changing perception of how it might be most effectively addressed, moving through similar notions of monolithic address and betterment to fragmentation and choice as in Kumar's account of the larger BBC address. Oswell is more inclined to defend the BBC's early strategies of leading

rather than following its audience, at least in relation to children's PSB, positing that the very act of addressing children as subjects within the home and family was a relatively novel idea, concordant with Reith's hopeful vision of a truly engaged and participative democracy. In this way, children could be seen to be offered a hitherto unknown opportunity to participate in civic life even though such participation was predicated on a prevailing notion of the child audience being 'led' to appreciate the BBC's prescription of 'better' taste:

A child who early learns the loveliness and purity of a Mozart minuet will not in later years be content with 'We have no bananas'. He has learnt the difference between gold and tarnished tinsel. He has won an abiding joy. His character is a-building. (Corbett Smith, 1924, quoted in Oswell 2002: 330)

Oswell's account of the radio roots of the BBC construction of the child audience offers much to think about in terms of the role that television form and mode of address plays in the construction of the audience, and in terms of a BBC notion that broadcast content is so beneficial that audience membership is a necessary aspect of citizenship. In the early days of children's broadcasting the prevailing discourse of 'proper listening' constructed the decision to switch on the radio and listen as, *of itself*, a participative and positive act (even if the conditions of proper listening could not be met), in a sense that does not seem to transfer to television, perhaps indicating a privileging of the merits of active listening over the 'inferior' and 'passive' act of watching TV. Construed as intrinsically good for the child audience (almost regardless of content), the benefits of active radio listening were limited only by obstacles of domestic circumstance: "I am thinking of the child who spends most of its time running errands, minding the baby or, most frequently, playing in the street" (McCulloch, 1942, quoted in Oswell 2002: 35).

This construction of the audience's limits of proper participation would seem to preclude active resistance on the part of the child; it was never assumed that 'one can lead a horse to water but cannot make it drink' but instead, that, given the proper opportunity, children would *wish* to listen. This is where Oswell's account is most at odds with the construction offered by Ang that "a history of European public service broadcasting could be written from this perspective: a narrative in

which the resistance of the audience against its objectification in the name of highminded, national cultural ideals drives the story forward” (Ang 1991: 101). As well as refuting Ang’s argument that non-participation signified resistance, Oswell challenges Ang’s presumption that the audience “pre-existed their formation” (and therefore had the agency to resist). In other words, he argues that an audience isn’t an audience *unless* it is objectified and targeted by a broadcaster; to be part of an audience signifies assent but the reverse does not signify resistance.

Although their rationales are polarised, Ang and Oswell both posit that the audience had agency – one to participate and the other to resist – but it is Oswell who is emphatic that without participation there is no audience, that the child audience was not a pre-existing phenomenon. More familiar for his research in children’s media, David Buckingham’s 1987 research into the creation of the *EastEnders* audience fits with Oswell’s notion of a constructed audience. Buckingham suggests several facets of the BBC’s practical and conceptual difficulties with its audience: insensitivity to actual audiences and to audience research; the gap between producer and audience; and the inherent tensions of content that is both public service and popular. There is much relevant to my own research in this atypical example of Buckingham’s research, although, like Oswell, Buckingham’s construction of audience is dependent on the notion that it is effectively a ‘new’ audience that is being constructed by ‘new’ television content. The argument of Oswell (and of Buckingham) is persuasive as regards the earliest days of broadcasting and, in a certain sense, the child audience is eternally new as children continue to be born and grow up; but this audience is no longer new to the broadcaster, or the market, or the medium, and I find it hard to accept that, in the current age of over 20 dedicated children’s channels, there is not a pre-existing and definable construct of the child audience for which channels and advertisers will compete in different platforms. The industry contributors to Bryant’s 2007 edited collection on the children’s television community would seem to confirm this, as indeed do Buckingham et al. in their chapter on how media producers define the child audience (1999: 147-174).

Despite acknowledging a special relationship between children and media, researchers of children's 'new' media rarely refer to 'audience' or even 'audiences'. Perhaps, as Sonia Livingstone suggests:

There is no convenient word to describe people's relation to media. Different media are associated with different activities – communicating, viewing, reading, listening, writing, playing. The term 'audience' does not capture all these. It is not only because of the diversification of media that the term 'audience' is becoming awkward. It is also that we no longer divide our time between media and other activities, but rather, for much of the time, we are both part of an audience and engaged with other activities. And it is children and young people who enjoy, and play with the possibilities of, such simultaneous participation in multiple activities. (2002: 8)

Livingstone, with certain provisos around the limits of the 'uses and gratifications' model, adopts the term 'user' in preference to 'audience' for non-broadcast media, and suggests that, despite the fact that much 'new' media is simply 'old wine in new bottles', it is the changing dynamic of the audience/user as constructed subject that warrants further investigation and which constructs the child audience in a 'new' way (2002: 9).

Henry Jenkins goes further still in his analysis of the children's audience, claiming "audiences are gaining greater power and autonomy as they enter into the new knowledge culture. The interactive audience is more than a marketing concept and less than 'semiotic democracy'" (2002: 280). Jenkins suggests that we should think less about how audiences are constructed by the media (be it by text, producer or institution) and more about how media is constructed by audiences, although other new media researchers, such as Sue Howard, guard against this very idea (Howard 1998: vii-viii). Jenkins's suggested model, with its notion of consumer sovereignty and power, accords with two related conceptions of audience, "audience as consumer" (Ang 1991) and "audience as commodity" (Webster and Phalen 1994), both of which are problematic when used in relation to the child audience in a PSB context. Had my fieldwork revealed web resources to be a significant output of the BBC Scotland Children's Department I would have

explored further the literature on audiences within new media, but, as I explain in Chapter Three, its output is almost exclusively television. For this reason, although it is necessary to have a general understanding of aspects of audience construction that would seem ‘new’ or exclusive to new media (and certainly the construction of the audience as a multi-platform one is used by producers), I have primarily focused on the literature relating to the children’s television audience.

In her comprehensive Foucauldian history of the [academic] discursive construction of the child television audience in America, Carmen Luke (perhaps surprisingly given the predominantly commercial structure of US television) posits that the child audience, unlike its adult counterpart of the same period, was constructed as “primarily learners and, only secondarily, future consumers and voters” (Luke 1990: 3). Luke’s minimisation of the audience as consumer and audience as commodity models has two significant limiting factors however: firstly, that her 1950-1980 research period excluded the well-documented rise of toy-based programming or the ‘programme length commercial’ in the 1980s (Kline 1995; Seiter 1995); and secondly, that her research parameters (solely *academic* discourse on the child audience), while comprehensively mapping that identified field, reproduce only the institutional point of view and so act as further entrenchment of the child audience as a closed taxonomic category or “ontologically stable fact” (Ang 1991: 36).

Research from the 1980s onwards makes use of both the audience as consumer model and the audience as commodity model. There is a subtle difference between the two but whereas the former depends on the size of the audience (and so is often allied to ratings-based research) the latter depends on the relative value (mainly in terms of spending power) of various segments within the mass audience and so lends itself to market-research and ‘narrowcasting’ objectives. Both models are of tremendous significance to the study of constructions of audience, including PSB constructions and the “audience as public” model, as they impact on the conception of a unitary public sphere which can be addressed/created by broadcasting. Rather than thinking of one model displacing another, there is a general shift towards accommodating both mass and individualised models of the

audience so that several models may co-exist at once. In this regard the more recent work of Scannell (2000) in aligning broadcast form and mode of address to audience construction via “for-anyone-as-someone” broadcast television structures is very useful especially when applied to a children’s audience now thought to be watching television as an increasingly solitary, private, individualised experience within the bedroom (Livingstone 2009): I will explore this further in my textual analysis chapter (Chapter Six) in consideration of the role that broadcast mode of address and perceived parental supervision plays in the construction of audience.

In summary of the literature relating to the construction of audiences I will take the following key points through to my thesis:

- there are two dominant constructions of PSB audiences – as citizens or as consumers - both constructions are problematic for the children’s audience;
- questions as to whether to lead or follow an audience are symbiotic with questions as to the form and function of children’s PSB and of children’s media generally; and
- the mode of address and of interaction in media forms plays a significant role in how the audience and its agency might be constructed.

I will now consider the literature devoted to the study of children’s television.

The study of children’s television

It may seem obvious that research such as my own should review a body of literature devoted to the study of children’s television (or even of children’s broadcasting or children’s media) but this category is perhaps the most nebulous in which to clearly situate my research. Indeed part of my purpose is to clarify those areas to which this study does *not* relate. This issue has been commented on by many researchers of children’s television (Brown 1976; Buckingham 1998; Lemish 2007; Löhr & Meyer 1999) and is indicative of the huge range of research aims and objectives offered by the study of children’s relationship to television. Writing over ten years ago, Buckingham estimated that there have been in excess of seven

thousand published research accounts relating to the category ‘children and television’, which, albeit a larger category than ‘children’s television’, suggests something of the massive interest in the subject and the myriad academic specialisms that claim to make use of it. Buckingham does not offer easy answers as to why the category should be one of such intense and widespread interest (and often contentious debate) but believes that it is more to do with moral and ideological assumptions about childhood (and conversely adulthood) than the identification of children as a ‘special audience’ (Buckingham 1998: 163). Add to this Cullingford’s assertion that television is the kind of topic in which “everyone thinks he is an expert” (1984: viii) and the lure of the research category is set.

Much of the earliest research into ‘children and television’ attempted to look at the effects of television viewing on children and youths, mainly from the angle of negative impact on psychological, social and educational development, but with a whole raft of studies devoted exclusively to television advertising. Such research has a long history in the disciplines of psychology and social science, and much of it was allied to the conception of television itself as an “unnatural” medium and a displacement of other (superior) activities and pastimes (Buckingham 1998: 165). Effects models which suggest direct causal relationships between, for example, violent content and aggressive behaviour in children, have been systematically pilloried within and outwith their originating disciplines for their methodological flaws and prior assumptions (Barker 1984; Cullingford 1984; Noble 1975; Tracey 1977). Nonetheless they have been modified into various ‘cultivation analysis’ models which, although robustly challenged (Durkin 1985; Gunter & McAleer 1997) appear to have a strong hold on the public consciousness and are bolstered with a ‘common sense’ argument that TV is ‘bad’ for children. We see these approaches reiterated and reinvigorated by additional concerns about children’s interaction and consumption of new media (especially gaming technologies and internet-based social networks) in Marie Winn’s *The Plug in Drug* (2002), Alan Prout’s *The Future of Childhood* (2005) and Sue Palmer’s *Toxic Childhood* (2006), although recent UK government reports and reviews such as *The Byron Review of Children and New Technology* (DCFS 2008) and the *Buckingham Report on The*

Impact of The Commercial World on Children's Wellbeing (DCFS & DCMS 2009)

offer generally more positive pictures of dedicated children's media. It is not the aim of this research to challenge or support such research as a primary source, as it falls outside the parameters of this project, but, as it permeates the broader context in which children's media producers work (and in which they try to claim 'legitimacy'), it informs the second part of this thesis. Many advocates and researchers of children's television will point to the damage that is done to the public perception of children's television by 'effects research' and so seek to locate issues relating to funding, content, scheduling, genre etc. in a broader cultural discourse around the value of UK-originated content. The Buckingham Report notes this in discussing "The Benefits of Children's Television":

there is relatively little definitive evidence of the benefits of public service television for children. While there has been some qualitative research in this area, much of it has focused on how children interpret and respond to the kinds of material on offer, rather than on questions about 'effects'. This evidence is suggestive of the cultural and educational value of children's television, but it is far from definitive. To put this another way, it is impossible to say what the impact on children would be if UK-produced children's television effectively disappeared, and if the only programmes available were animation series delivered by the US-owned cable/satellite companies. (DCFS & DCMS 2009: 17.22)

One of the difficulties of trying to extricate the study of children's television from the effects models pervasive within 'children and television' research is the perceived need to counter negative effects data with some robust evidence that children's television is beneficial, or at least to clearly position one's work in opposition to effects models. This point is raised by Karen Lury (2007) in her review of Dafna Lemish's 2007 global study. Lury advocates a more proactive stance to studying children's television, in which we should move away from trying to claim benefit or blame and accept that, either way, television is a reality in children's lives (an approach implicit in Hodge & Tripp's semiotic approach [1986]). Indeed Lury

frequently allies a snobbish distaste for children's television to a greater societal distaste for television and popular culture (e.g. Lury 2005b).

Nonetheless, two recent literature reviews of the field – Kondo and Steemers for SKTV (2007) and Messenger Davies & Thornham (2007) for Ofcom – were each given a clearly defined remit of researching aspects of 'benefit' within children's television, and both suggested that the lack of attainable or measurable proofs does not mean that children's television cannot be beneficial to children. Kondo and Steemers note that the 21st century is a very different media landscape to that of Messenger Davies's 1989 assertion that *Television is Good For Your Kids*, but that nonetheless a range of more recent studies, (predominantly educational in nature and including the literacy research of Marsh et al. 2005) clearly supported the discourse of pro-social benefits. Their 'soft' learning criteria (rather than the more formal pedagogic educational criteria frequently adopted in respect of US preschool programming) is indicative of the UK preschool programming tradition of 'learning through play' (the CBeebies tagline) and clearly allies with a PSB approach to content in which the benefits are both long-term and intangible as in Collins's theory of "merit goods" (2006: 20). Kondo and Steemers note however, referencing Close's 2004 literature review on television and language development in children, that

there is very little existing research concerning the potential beneficial impact of children's entertainment programming, and even less research that relates to British experiences and British programmes, where the categories of education and entertainment are often blurred. (Kondo & Steemers 2007: 2)

Likewise Messenger Davies & Thornham's 2007 review, which sought to establish the literature supporting the benefit of a range of genres and of locally-produced content in children's television, distinguished between the UK British and US American conceptions of benefit. Davies and Thornham catalogued a diverse range of research models which had the aim of finding benefit in indigenous programming, but found a relative paucity of research which explicitly advocated a range of genres in children's programming. Their literature review sets out the continuing importance of children's television as a leisure pursuit in a range of

global contexts despite the range of platforms and media entertainments available to children. It suggests that not only do children constitute a special audience, but that television is a special medium, a view typified by much research into children's television (Dorr 1986; Steemers 2010).

Those studies that deal specifically with children's television (and/or the audience for children's television) are of most relevance to my own research, and the US-based research in this area – for example the work of Kleeman (2007) on quality, Kunkel on genre diversity (1993), and of Montgomery on policy (2007) – is a useful comparison. The UK-based research on children's television remains the more useful however, dealing as it does with the specificities of the greater UK children's television culture as still heavily PSB driven. In this respect the extensive bodies of work of both Buckingham and Messenger Davies remain key, and are supported by a diverse range of academic work including Lury (2002) on children's channels and Oswell's detailed history of the construction of the children's television audience (2002). Steemers's 2010 research into the production of preschool television is particularly instructive, addressing both the specificity of the medium and the audience in its approach to preschool television production.

A further challenge for the researcher of children's television is the 'moral' dimension created by television's space within the concept of the family and the home. Oswell has written extensively on this from an historical post-war perspective (1995; 2002), as has Spigel (1992). We can add to this approach the ethnographic studies of Lindlof (1987); Livingstone (2002); Palmer (1986); and Richards (1993), who each seek to understand different facets of the role of television/media in children's lives and homes by observing children's media consumption within the home. Although my own project does not use primary audience research as a methodology, the current understanding of children's viewing practices offered by these research approaches informs the overall public perception of the benefits or ills of children's television and feeds into producers' own views of how best to address children through the medium of television. (E.g. are they active while viewing? Are they multi media-tasking? Are they choosing for themselves? Are they watching with a parent? Are they watching in the living room

or bedroom? Are they watching via video, time-shift technology or computer?) In particular the move towards a private mode of consumption (child's own choice of content, watching alone in bedroom etc.) poses practical issues for audience research, but, more importantly for this thesis, also poses conceptual issues for theorists interested in the structural aspects of children's broadcasting (e.g. Bachmair 1997; Livingstone 2002; Rockwell 2007; and Sefton-Green 2002).

In addition to these academic perspectives, the anecdotal accounts of various stakeholders from the fields of media production and media journalism provide useful material in relation to programme content, programme diversity, and the scheduling and production environment. Of these resources, Anna Home's illustrated history, *Into the Box of Delights* (1993), must be singled out for the richness of insight into the prevailing attitudes of the production community during the 'golden days' of the BBC/ITV duopoly, and both Richard Lewis's *Encyclopaedia of Cult Children's TV* (2002) and Ruth Inglis's *The Window in the Corner: A Half Century of Children's Television* (2003), while not restricted to UK-produced content, are written wholly from a UK viewing perspective and give an important overview of the vast diversity of programmes which have formed part of the UK schedules. Stuart Jeffries's *Mrs Slocombe's Pussy: Growing Up in Front of the Telly* (2000), is also helpful in giving an autobiographical perspective to programme meaning and resonance for a child and also implicitly points to the role of nostalgia and memory in the perception of the value of children's television (a notion also critically explored by Jenkins 1998; and Lury 2008). Although not necessarily critical in their perspectives, these books offer welcome insight and are a useful starting point into an aspect of children's television scholarship which is often neglected – the programmes themselves.

As already indicated, some children's media academics do make use of textual analysis in their research. This is most commonly done via ideologically framed content-analysis as in Jack Zipes's discussion of fairy tale films and programmes (1995), or related to distinctions between fact and fantasy and narrative recall in media literacy research such as Buckingham (1993); Clifford, Gunter and McAleer (1995); and Messenger Davies (1997). In the wider field of television

studies, as exemplified by the work of Butler (1994); Caldwell (1995); Caughie (1991); and Thompson (1996), the use of textual analysis for aesthetic considerations is allied with a critique of quality television, particularly drama. There is some replication of this in the field of children's television studies (e.g. Messenger Davies's 2002 account of costume drama and classic adaptations) but, following Lury's approach (2005a) and that of Jonathan Bignell (2005), I believe that textual analysis can be meaningfully used to examine other subgenres of children's television, including the 'everyday'. Indeed Steemers and Walters's use of textual analysis is specifically framed to thus 'elevate' preschool television as a subgenre which rewards detailed textual analysis (Steemers 2010: 191).

From this somewhat nebulous literature relating to children's television, covering concepts of medium, audience, ideology and function, I will be taking forward the following key aspects into my thesis proper:

- the research into children's television most relevant to my project acknowledges the specificity of both the audience and of the medium;
- like the soft criteria of PSB more generally, the 'benefits' of children's television are difficult to quantify but rely greatly on the cultural specificity of UK-produced content and the UK PSB tradition;
- the notion of benefit is itself culturally specific, with US content and UK content reflecting different broadcast ecologies and interests; these interests are increasingly convergent in the global marketplace for children's television; and
- textual analysis can and should play a meaningful role in the study of children's television but analysis tends to be restricted to prestige forms.

I will now consider the final area of relevant literature – that relating to the construction and representation of childhood.

The construction and representation of childhood

Where children are concerned, everyone (priests, politicians, journalists, parents, teachers, psychologists, sociologists) has something to say. The concept of childhood is understood as being a stage in the lifecourse characterised by dependency and immaturity – physical and mental. Children

are conceived of as being unable to make rational and informed social, sexual, political, economic and intellectual decisions and therefore depend on adults. Childhood is seen to be an important part of the socialisation process primarily associated with education and play wherein children are raised to be healthy functioning adults. (Casey et al. 2002: 21)

Implicit in much of the work catalogued in each of the four previous sections is a specific understanding of children and childhood as a distinct category, and most researchers of children's media begin their account by defining what is meant by the term 'children' (or 'child' or 'childhood'), thereby acknowledging the term itself as constructed or open to interpretation (see the introductory chapters of Bazalgette & Buckingham 1995; Jenkins 1998; Kinder 1999; Messenger Davies 2010; and Pilcher & Wagg 1996). Social theorists look to childhood as a constructed state and it can therefore be seen as an unstable, changing category dependent on societal norms; indeed the very notion of 'childhood studies', as a distinct field gaining ground within academia since the 1960s, implies a constructed category of research to which the study of children's television is an adjunct.

Philippe Aries has suggested that the way in which childhood is conceptualised varies both historically and culturally and impacts on the way in which children's lives are organised and understood within society. Indeed Aries famously posits that there was no such thing as 'childhood', as a separate state of existence, until the sixteenth century (1962). It is the construction of childhood that determines how we view children's behaviour and being, and much of the current construction would seem to reflect a notion that a child is "an inadequate or incomplete adult" (Bazalgette & Buckingham 1995: 1). The recognition of childhood as a time of transition, physically and socially, and as a journey towards the adult self, itself offers many constructions which continue to co-exist within current discourse. In Chapter Six, I suggest that diluted versions of these constructions or archetypes continue to resonate within children's television and, in Chapters Four and Five, I note the familiarity that producers have with theories of childhood and with recent research in the field such as Libby Brooks's *Story of Childhood: Growing Up in Modern Britain* (2006), and Layard and Dunn's 'landmark' report for

The Children's Society, *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* (2009), as well as the seminal works in the field such as Chris Jenks's *Childhood* (2005).

Jenks writes at length on the different constructions or archetypes of childhood, commencing with the 'evil child' that has its roots in the Christian doctrine of original sin in which every person is born stained with sin through Adam's actions. Born in sin therefore, the child has a natural predisposition towards evil and self-gratification which Jenks correlates to the notion of Dionysian pleasurable excess: "The child is Dionysian in as much as it loves pleasure, it celebrates self-gratification and it is wholly demanding in relation to any object, or indeed subject that prevents its satiation" (Jenks 2005: 63). This construction can still be seen in the assumption that, given choice, children will consume only 'junk' (be it food or television) as I discuss throughout Part Two of this thesis.

Alongside this notion of the evil child is its opposite, the 'innocent' or 'natural' child. Freed of the doctrine of original sin by the Enlightenment, the newborn child is now the purest form of creature possible; as Rousseau states: "God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil" (quoted in James, Jenks & Prout 1998: 13). In this model, children have a natural goodness which must be preserved and nurtured at all costs; it is adults who have fallen from this state of grace and so childhood represents a lost idyllic state to which we can never return. The pristine child is suited to similarly untainted environments of pastoral idyll, hence the adoption of the construct by the Romantic poets such as Blake and Wordsworth, or of Victorian writers and social-reformers like Dickens and Kingsley, who all railed against industry and human artifice. The image of the child freed from adult stricture remains a popular trope of children's media and serves both child and adult fantasy (Bettelheim 1999) but critics warn against its appropriation for adult use (Holland 1996). Certainly, for the poet, the artist and the writer, the child became a powerful image of the 'before' that preceded industrialised society's ills, as Coveney writes:

Through the child could be expressed the artist's awareness of human
Innocence against the cumulative pressures of social Experience. In childhood

lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation, fear and bewilderment, vulnerability and potential violation. (1957: xi)

The construct of the ‘innocent child’ is particularly important to my discussions of preschool production within the second part of this thesis as it remains a dominant mode of representing preschool children. The concept of childhood ‘innocence’ also provides the starting point for many of the critiques around notions of sexualisation and commercialisation of childhood which inform my Chapter Six analysis.

Several theorists (e.g. Jenks [2005] and Postman [1994]) argue that Rousseau’s vision of the innocent, natural child is the beginning of the idea of true subjectivity for the child as it constructs the child as capable of rational thought and gives importance to his or her emotional and intellectual life. Rousseau’s approach is frequently marked as the beginning of ‘child-centred thinking’ in which the needs of the child are served by adults rather than the desires of the adult served by the child. But Rousseau’s construction is an idealised one, and James, Jenks and Prout (1998) suggest another construction which depends less on the idyll and the ideal. They term this construction the ‘immanent child’ as proposed by John Locke in his late 17th century tracts, *An Essay on Humane Understanding* (1689) and *Some Thoughts on Education* (1692). Locke neither idealised nor demonised the child but instead looked to education and upbringing as the biggest influences on the child’s nature. He believed the child to be a *tabula rasa* or blank sheet on which could be inscribed positive or negative characteristics depending on example and lived experience. In this way all knowledge – and even the capacity to learn – is a product of experience, the child possessing no inherent disposition to good or evil. Locke offered a pragmatic model of education that could be considered the “earliest manifesto for ‘child-centred’ education through a delicate cocktail of idealist assumptions and empiricist stimuli” (Archard 1993: 1). It is perhaps this construction of childhood that remains one of the most enduring. It invests the child with the possibility of being moulded to adult aspiration – the only problem deciding what that aspiration should be and how most effectively achieved. In this sense, Locke’s construction accords with the public service model of broadcasting which sought to educate its audience through experience and the ‘cultural pyramid’

of taste. Paternalistic though that model might have been, it carried with it an implicit hope in the human capacity to learn by experience and example. In Chapter Six, I note the persistence of this model in the 'aspirational' behaviours and situations in preschool texts and in children's programming generally.

Although we live with the legacy of these preceding conceptions of childhood, there are other movements that have shaped our current thinking, such as the theories of Piaget towards a developmental model of psychological growth. Piaget's theories, based around empirically-evidenced age-related norms and achievements, continue to shape much educational policy and pedagogy despite the criticism that it sets a wholly iniquitous "gold standard of the normal child" (James, Jenks & Prout 1998: 19). Piaget's normative construction is frequently invoked to prescribe what children *should* like, want, or achieve, or be capable of, at various age-related stages and so is easily allied to the design process of children's media and other resources. Toys, clothes, programmes, text books and more are all produced with some notion of representing and of serving the needs and desires of what we think to be this 'normal' child within a Western, capitalist society.

As contentious critic James Kincaid writes: "What the child is matters less than what we think it is" (1992: 62). I have found Kincaid's work (especially 1998a), although frequently extreme in its expression and example, very important for thinking about how we as adults 'make use' of the image or meaning of the child in our representations. Other theorists in this field whom I have found particularly thought-provoking in my 'reading' of images and artefacts of childhood, and in consideration of the 'gap' between adult producer and child audience, are Anne Higonnet (1998); Patricia Holland (2006); and Valerie Walkerdine (1997). These writers, although not necessarily concerned with television studies, especially inform my textual analysis chapter (Chapter Six), and, along with Edelman (2004); Lury (2010); and Rose (1993), really excite my interest as to the 'performance' and cultural value of childhood, particularly where allied to questions of gender and to the commodification and sexualisation of childhood. Likewise the edited collection of Steinberg and Kincheloe, *Kinderculture; The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (1997), is useful.

The new sociology of childhood has a huge impact on how we theorise children's media culture, and, given the general acceptance that children lack the power to totally govern their own lives, the dominant question regarding their dedicated media is 'What form of guidance and intervention is most appropriate to serving them and society?'. Questions around the form and function of children's broadcasting must, therefore, take in to account issues around the construction of childhood. Marsha Kinder places particular emphasis on the distinction made between children as "Innocent Victims or Active Players" (1999: 1), with many theorists adopting polarised stances to defend what they think best for children. Stephen Kline, for example, denies children any role in the production of their own media culture, casting it as something that happens *to* them, and re-emphasising the gap between adult producer and child consumer:

What might be taken as children's culture has always been primarily a matter of culture produced for and urged upon children. Childhood is a condition defined by powerlessness and dependence upon the adult community's directive and guidance. Culture is, after all, as the repository of social learning and socialization, the means by which societies preserve and strengthen their position in the world. (1993: 44)

Because children are mute within this model they are vulnerable and in need of protection. For Kline, that protection cannot take the form of giving them 'a voice' within the medium because the 'innocent' child would be sullied by such contact with an already tainted 'adult' construct (similar to the Romantic construction). It should be noted that although Kline writes from a US commercial broadcasting perspective and (therefore) of a pervasive culture of marketing to children, these ideas do form a part of the discourse on UK children's PSB. In Part Two, I examine BBC producer's own stance on commercialism and exploitation of children and their attempts to minimise the perceived exploitative gaze of the camera.

Neil Postman (1994) is even more strident in his belief in the inherent evil of the mass media, arguing that, with its availability of information and power of reach, television has a constant hunger for the 'new' which trivialises and corrupts. Adopting Marshall McLuhan's aphorism that "the medium is the message" (1965),

Postman argues that television constitutes a “total disclosure medium” wherein all knowledge is within reach at all stages, blurring the proper boundaries between adult and child and between what might be considered as appropriate spheres of knowledge and shame. Postman goes still further in his suggestion that mass media – and television in particular - contributes to a loss of innocence on the part of the child, proclaiming it results in no less than “the disappearance of childhood” (1994). It is worth noting that both McLuhan and Postman were writing before the widespread use of the internet and one wonders what they might have made of that mass medium. Certainly Postman’s theories, although originally published in 1982, continue to excite critical comment within the field of children’s media and have been recently republished in anniversary editions as have other seminal texts such as Marie Winn’s *The Plug-in Drug* (2002) originally published in 1977, and David Elkind’s *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (2007) originally published in 1981.

Much of Postman’s fear (and that of Kline, and Elkind, and Winn) centres on the presumption of the parallel processes of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood. Both discourses are written about extensively by children’s media theorists, often with a view to renegotiating the child’s own voice within them through discussion of childhood identity and resistance. Valerie Walkerdine, for example, questions the construction of popular culture as “the intrusion of adult sexuality into the sanitized space of childhood” by contesting the construction of sexuality as a purely adult province (1998: 255). Rose similarly acknowledges child sexuality although she would argue that intervention into the discourse can only be made by adults because of the very exclusion of children from children’s media – what she describes as the “impossibility of children’s fiction” (1993). Allison James (1998) adopts a not dissimilar approach to the concept of commercialisation, locating in children’s choices of ‘trashy’ sweets an act of resistance and deliberate subversion of dominant culture. Likewise Ellen Seiter makes an extended case for children’s consumerism “as a desire for a shared culture with their schoolmates and friends” (1995: 9) so that, even though they have no role in the production of their

own culture, or might be ‘victims’ of marketing and manipulation, children’s very act of consumption reappropriates the item to their own culture.

One might ask of these approaches, ‘why champion acts of resistance rather than challenge the bulwark that is being resisted?’. If children’s mainstream culture is so bad or harmful that it should be recuperated via resistance or subversion then why do we perpetuate it? The conception of these childhood acts as resistant or empowering may only serve to further entrench the very constructions that they seek to resist, by pitting further ideological divide between children and adults (Kapur 1999: 134); or, as Libby Brooks argues, serve to co-opt discourses of childhood resistance to consumerist goals:

By subverting the notion of children as sophisticated and critical consumers, the idea of empowerment has been hijacked in order to sell more products. If children’s sense of mastery of consumer culture is being used to sell products back to them, then their power would appear to be voided. (2006: 153)

Henry Giroux (2000) writes at length about how an aesthetic of resistance is ironically a prime tactic of youth marketing, and Juliet Schor (2004) also warns of just such an approach, arguing that children’s consumer culture is loaded with messages of generational conflict. In supposedly empowering children via dedicated channels and products in which adults have no visibly valuable role, we are only further supporting the commercialisation of childhood:

Marketers defend themselves against charges of anti-adultism by arguing that they are promoting kid empowerment. It’s important to recognise the nature of the corporate message: kids and products are aligned together in a really great, fun place, while parents, teachers and other adults inhabit an oppressive, drab and joyless world. The lesson to kids is that it’s the product, not your parent, who’s really on your side. (Schor 2004: 55)

Some critics (Buckingham 2000; Holland 1996; and Messenger Davies 2010) do defend the UK broadcasting model, with its long public service tradition, as going some way to guard against the ‘them and us’ polarity that is so easily co-opted *against* children (while appearing otherwise) but there is no easy answer as to what constitutes our current construction of childhood and what therefore constitutes

the most appropriate form or function of children's media or its viability in the competitive marketplace that is dominated by commercial content. These are issues that I grapple with directly and indirectly throughout Part Two of this thesis and in particular in Chapter Four where I interrogate the construction of the child audience made by producers.

To conclude this final section of the literature review the key concepts that I will be taking forward into the thesis from the study of the construction of childhood are:

- childhood is widely accepted as a constructed state – this creates an especial issue for the validity of media representations which are of themselves constructions;
- various archetypes or constructions of the child continue to dominate and support various ideologies of childhood, impacting on our aspiration of what children's media is actually for or what it can achieve;
- commercial imperatives increasingly shape our construction and representation of childhood in respect of exploitation, gender and sexuality issues; and
- the conceptual 'gap' between producer and audience creates a particular challenge for producers' remit of representation – the validity and nature of that representation must be scrutinised.

Having thus outlined the five main bodies of literature that informed this thesis, I will now present a brief conclusion to this chapter before proceeding to Chapter Two.

Conclusion

Drawing together the five fields of study presented in this literature review: cultural production; PSB and the BBC; the construction of audiences; children's television; and the construction of childhood, it is hoped that the broad contextual situation of this research project is now apparent. It should be stressed that this choice of literature, and of interconnected fields, fairly represents the route by which I hoped to gain entry to my subject matter, but is certainly not the only choice I might have

made. Some 'omissions', such as a representative literature on the cultural production of small nations, will therefore require further explanation in the methodology chapter that follows. It should also be said that the breadth of literature selected accurately reflects the breadth rather than depth of focus I aimed to achieve in my study, as I hope the study will be, in time, a useful historical portrait of a particular BBC department at a particular time. The material required for us to continue to understand that portrait once the present context has moved on, necessitated, I believe, the kind of breadth of literature and fields that I cover here. However I also hope that the logical nature of these literature choices is apparent, given the overlap of questions and themes that interlink them here. By this I mean that, for example, the field of production studies and its concern with power relations has thematic synergy with the study of PSB. This, in turn, with its peculiar UK history and context but now located within an increasingly globalised media landscape, feeds into questions of the relationship between producer and audience, and questions around the specificity of television as a medium for representing and unifying audiences. The leap, then, to issues of how we construct and address audiences, and specifically the children's audience, through the medium of television, is logical. It leads us to constructions and representations of childhood which return us to the dynamic of power and agency in producer and audience. In short, these fields synthesise into a meaningful context for a specific production study of children's PSB production at BBC Scotland, as, despite the 'newness' of this specific area of study, they provide an established literature and research context in which to situate this thesis.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Research Design

The preceding chapter has situated my project within the literature of various fields of cultural study and their nexus with media research. This chapter now explains the methodological and practical research approaches that are implied by my engagement with those interconnected fields as well as those that are implied by the 'collaborative' nature of the study. In many ways this chapter describes the bridge between the theoretical and practical aspects of my research, justifying my research design within the theoretical fields in which it is situated and the practical application to which I put it. It continues therefore to explain why this specific production study has the form and content that it does. The chapters that follow will examine the Children's Department at BBC Scotland as a specific production institution; this chapter describes my methodological approach to this research, providing a reflexive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of my methodology and research design.

My overarching frame of reference for this thesis is that of television production studies. As such, the research has employed a combination of critical research methodologies within an extended case study of BBC Scotland Children's Department. Bearing in mind Mayer, Banks and Caldwell's exhortations to scepticism in production studies, in which they argue that the representations of both researcher and producer are "constructions" (Mayer, Banks & Caldwell 2009: 5), I should stress that this case study is not presented as an excavation or uncovering of knowledge or fact about the production of children's PSB at BBC Scotland. Rather, it is a constructivist account in which my own research agenda shaped each stage of the design, execution and writing up of the project and the 'knowledge' that it constitutes. Of itself this constructivist approach may be considered a methodological principle, as Schwandt argues that

constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models and schemes to make sense of experience, and further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. (Schwandt 1994: 118)

A further facet of the constructivist approach that Schwandt proposes, and which I think is important to stress as regards my own project, is that the constructivist research process is more circular than linear: the structured and rational account of my methodology choices and research design processes that I present here perhaps belies this sometimes frustrating and haphazard aspect of production study.

Before discussing the four main methodologies used in this research it is necessary to explain something of the origins of the project itself as this impacted on the overall research design. Following this I will then give a brief overview of the fieldwork. Just as I indicated in my thesis introduction that my research questions were not entirely my own but were governed by the parameters of the prescribed AHRC research objectives for the project, so too were certain observational fieldwork methodologies implicit in the way the approved collaborative project had been set up.

Project Background

Dr Karen Lury designed the original proposal for this PhD studentship in collaboration with Simon Parsons, Head of BBC Scotland Children's Department. The proposal was accepted for funding by the AHRC under their then relatively new 'collaborative doctoral award' programme, which, according to the literature of the time, is

intended to encourage and develop collaboration between Higher Education Institution (HEI) departments and non-academic bodies [and] encourage and establish links that can have benefits for both collaborating partners, providing access to resources and materials, knowledge and expertise that may not otherwise have been available. (AHRC 2007)

This iteration of the prime benefit of the collaboration being one of access to that which "may not otherwise" be available would suggest that exploitation of access to the non-academic institution is an *a priori* condition of the award, therefore

necessitating research methodologies that serve not only the demands of a PhD but which also make that ‘significant contribution’ contingent on data acquired through access to the collaborating institution. As my project was approved as an “inside-out production study” of the Children’s Department at BBC Scotland,³ it was clear to me that ethnographic practices must form a key part of that production study. In this sense, in taking up the award, I inherited a pre-approved ethnographic research design framework but within which I selected my own specific questions (outlined in the thesis introduction) and appropriate fieldwork methodologies.

I would say that the privileging of access to BBC Scotland explicit in the project brief impacted not only on my research execution (i.e. the data gathering envisioned by the AHRC to be the key aspect of the access) but also on my research *design*, in that my specific research questions and methodologies grew organically out of the access afforded to me by the collaborating institution. Access determined not only what data I gathered but what data I wanted or could gather, and to what end. I believe that this reactive approach, although daunting (one doesn’t know what one is going to find until one has found it), was key to creating my own specific research project from the original brief, and to making the best use of the access at design *and* execution stages. As Silverman observes, “most research is generated by a series of chance circumstances relating to the particular investigator and to the economic, social and political context in which (s)he works” (1985: 4). Silverman’s acknowledgement of “chance circumstances” would seem to validate this reactive style of research which continues to change and respond to the circumstances as they present themselves, in what Kemmis and McTaggart call “the enquiry cycle” (2003: 381) of planning, executing, reflecting and replanning in a continual and circular process which we can ally with a constructivist approach. In this way, both

³ 2007 Advertised AHRC Project Brief: Glasgow University/BBC Scotland Collaborative Doctoral Award.

ethnography and constructivism can be seen as foundational principles governing my research design and methodology choices.

I will now give a brief overview of my fieldwork structure and timescale before going on to discuss and evaluate my four main methodology choices of desk research; participant observation; interview; and textual analysis.

Fieldwork Overview and Timeframe

This project formally commenced in October 2007 and was funded until September 2010. During the first period of fieldwork (February to August 2008), I was present in the BBC Scotland Children's Department on average two days per week. During this first intensive research period I was mainly engaged in participant observation both within the physical department itself (at Pacific Quay) and in various field trips, location and production visits, including two visits to BBC Children's events in London and several industry conferences. This concentrated period was followed by a less structured period from September 2008 to January 2009 where I maintained mainly email contact with departmental staff and visited the Department approximately once a fortnight as a means of accessing specific resources, keeping abreast of the Department's production schedules, and of keeping my face familiar.

February 2009 to July 2009 constituted the second of my concentrated fieldwork periods, in which I attended the Department on average three days per week, and it was during this second period that I conducted the bulk of my in-depth research interviews with production personnel, as well as continuing participant observation. This was the final phase of my formal fieldwork, although sporadic contact with the Department was maintained from August 2009 to May 2011 in order to keep the collaborating partners abreast of the progress and completion of this thesis.

I will now discuss the main research methods used in this project.

Desk Research

The starting point for this research was a concentrated period of desk research in which I engaged with the literature in the field. It should be stressed however that desk research remained on-going throughout the entire process of the project, and that some of my BBC fieldwork can be characterised as desk research within the field

location. As indicated in my literature review, much of the literature of my desk research was based within academia, but also included various government policy documents such as the (massive) 2007 Ofcom Report. The public reception of this report, indicated in both the quality and tabloid press, generated an additional non-academic literature which is relevant to my enquiry of the term 'crisis' in children's PSB, as discussed in the next chapter.

Another aspect of my period of initial desk research prior to entering the BBC was familiarising myself with the ethical dimension of production studies and ethnographic approaches and planning my approach to the fieldwork at BBC Scotland Children's Department. This included setting up a protocol agreement that would govern the working model of the collaboration. While most of this preparation is subsumed by the eventual research design and methodologies utilised, and thus pointed to in the literature review under 'The Study of Cultural Production', it is worthwhile noting that one distinct tranche of my desk research is not immediately apparent from the literature review in Chapter One – that of the study of the media in Scotland and discourses of the national – although this literature is a relevant field for this study.

Much of my preliminary desk research was concentrated on discourses of the national in broadcasting and media in Scotland, and indeed I had anticipated that this would be a key field in which to locate my research, particularly given the currency and vigour of the field during my own central research period, which encompassed the research process and report of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission (August 2007 to October 2008); the publication of an important and ground-breaking anthology, *The Media in Scotland*, edited by Neil Blain and David Hutcheson (Spring 2008); and the relocation of BBC Scotland's administrative and production HQ from its Queen Margaret Drive site to an all new, purpose-built facility at Glasgow's Pacific Quay (Spring 2007). The doctoral research of two of my departmental contemporaries in the Centre for Cultural Policy Research also confirmed a particular 'buzz' in this research field at that time – Lynne Hibberd's examination of Scotland's creative industries policy post-devolution (Hibberd 2008), and Rebecca Robinson's examination of the newly created National Theatre for

Scotland (Robinson 2009). The somewhat hidden use of this research field in the eventual design and execution of my own project therefore merits some explanation. The simplest explanation would be to say that the Department's unusual position as a producer of solely UK network content meant that a more foregrounded (Scottish) 'national' focus to this study would have been a political contrivance that ignored the reality of the actual research context. However I obliquely explore this conceptual tension - between the national and the network - throughout this thesis. The effective 'downsizing' of the role that I thought this field would play in my research, reflects, therefore, the reactive stance I took to research design, especially in the early stages, as it was not until my fieldwork access commenced that I could see that a national frame of reference, although vital for one strand of enquiry, was too limiting a field in which to site the research as a whole.

Participant Observation

Having committed to an ethnographic approach to the project, I looked to key works in the field of television production studies which utilised ethnographic research models. As well as looking for guidance as to model and method, I was interested to see what sort of scope or volume of work might be reasonable for a three-year research project (three years being the standard AHRC doctoral research funding period). In consideration of ethnographic models, I compared the approaches contained in the following scholarly works:

- Philip Elliot, *The Making of A Television Series: A Case Study in the Sociology of Culture* (1972);
- Tom Burns, *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World* (1977);
- Philip Schlesinger, *Putting 'Reality' Together: BBC News* (1978);
- Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (2004);
- Julie Light, *Television Channel Identity: The Role of Channels in the Delivery of Public Service Broadcasting in Britain, 1996-2002* (2004);
- John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (2008);

- Caitriona Noonan, *The Production of Religious Broadcasting: The Case of the BBC* (2008); and
- Jeanette Steemers, *Creating Preschool Television: A Story of Commerce, Creativity and Curriculum* (2010).

(It should be noted that while this last work was published in the final year of this project and so instructive mainly during my analysis and ‘writing up’ stage, the previews of the research which Prof. Steemers presented at various academic and industry conferences in the 2007 to 2010 period also had a bearing on my research approaches at the design and execution stages.)

It is fair to say that my own research model draws on many aspects of the above scholarship but that no individual text suggested a ‘one size fits all’ model that I could replicate or map onto my own study in its entirety. Indeed each of these models of scholarship is significantly different from the other, depending on the focus and scope of the study and the level of access afforded to the researcher. Though perhaps risking something of a mish-mash of approaches, it would seem that flexibility is required to hone any model to the individual research context presented to the researcher.

Of these works, all but Light make some use of participant observation in their production study and thus participant observation became the first ethnographic practice that I considered adopting in my own research. Indeed Elliot (1972) makes participant observation his key methodology, and his Appendix B, which outlines his research method, provides a robust defence of participant observation as a prime rather than subsidiary methodology in his own particular research circumstance, though he suggests in his introduction that participant observation is “not so much a single method as a battery of methods” (7). I find Elliot’s work instructive, particularly in the way that he was unselective in what he recorded or treated as relevant throughout the initial observation period, and in his assertion of the suitability of this method for “enabling a wide range of research questions and interests to be handled continuously” (7). What particularly appealed to me about Elliot’s model of participant observation is that it would seem to lend

itself to open-ended research and to full exploitation of the specific research context in the initial stages of design. As Elliot argues:

A specific technique would have required an initial decision on the precise focus of the research. This is not to say that the research had no focus at start, but rather from the outset that there was a continual interaction between theoretical assumptions and interests, general and specific hypotheses and the data of the specific case. (7-8)

This reactive flexibility was adopted in my own fieldwork. Another aspect I found inspirational was Elliot's commitment to recording everything that he could in his research journal without imposing a critical agenda in the early stages – this approach was adopted throughout the journals of my first concentrated research period, where I sought to describe incidents and circumstances without a conscious filtering of what meaning, relevance or connection might later emerge in analysis.

Where I differ from Elliot is that my desired status as a participant observer was decidedly more participative than Elliot's status as a "passive observer" (172-173). I consciously chose to act, where I could, as an extra pair of hands within the Department so as not merely to observe but to experience the working practices of the Department, and so as not to 'scare off' members of the Department by my presence or motive. I had previously been advised that "wandering around with a clip board but not contributing might make folks wary that you are doing some sort of time and motion survey" (Simon Parsons, Field journal, July 2007). This approach had its drawback in that I ended up more interested and invested in those areas where I could naturally play a more participative role (such as in development, pitching, casting, scripting and research) and less involved in those areas where I did not have the necessary skills and knowledge to be more than a passive observer. This admission, which partly accounts for the skew of my research towards the development stages of programme production, also acknowledges a central concern of participant observation: how to become 'naturalised' within the research environment without losing critical objectivity, or, as Elliot suggests, how to reach "the stage, known in the literature as 'going native', in which [one begins] to

recognize beliefs and actions so clearly that it was hard to imagine how they could be different” (174).

On this topic, Born writes at length in her nearly decade-long ethnographic study of the BBC, *Uncertain Vision* (2004), and she would seem to propose no limits to the desired naturalization or immersion of the researcher at the fieldwork stage:

Whatever the setting, the aim of the anthropologist is to become immersed in the everyday culture, language and thought of the natives, so as to become sensitive to unspoken assumptions and implicit forms of knowledge and belief. (14)

The task of the anthropologist is to experience the culture from within. (16)

For Born then, as for Elliot, the greater the proximity to the research subject the better at the participant observation stage – such proximity is contingent on access as well as the researcher’s skill. It is at a later, reflective stage, that objective analysis and distance become important and description is replaced by analysis and critical connection. Schlesinger too advocates such a model of immersion followed by distance:

As a sociologist I was trying to grasp how the world looks from the point of view of those being studied. The amount of access permitted by the BBC afforded a genuine opportunity for immersion [. . .] to arrive at a sociological analysis, however, one must go beyond immersion. One must become disengaged and reconstruct the data gathered in terms of a number of themes. (1978: 11)

Building on these approaches therefore, I sought a particularly ‘participant’ model of observation in which I became immersed in the culture of the Department before retreating to a more isolated analysis mode: this is why my fieldwork was scheduled to fall within the first two years of this project with only very limited contact in the evaluative, analysis and writing up stages in which I then revisited my field journals. Distance too was built in between my two central fieldwork blocks of February to August 2008, and February to July 2009; this distance aided the more careful framing of my research questions and a narrower research focus during the second main

fieldwork period, in which I also conducted in-depth interviews. My participant observation comprised of attending meetings, departmental and BBC events and training as relevant to the Children's Department at BBC Scotland (including external representation of the Department), and most particularly the shadowing of Children's personnel in their daily production duties.

Where my research model clearly differs from that of Elliot is that I used participant observation in association with interview. This mixed methodology model is extremely useful in ethnographic research, and, of the studies outlined previously (at page 57-58), is the one adopted by all but Elliot (participant observation only) and Light (interview only) as regards their fieldwork. A mixed model seemed best suited to a doctoral research project with defined outcomes and fixed timescales as I wanted a source of robust and timely evidence in addition to that generated by participant observation. This is not to replicate what Elliot has criticized as "a [research method] hierarchy in which participant observation is relegated to preliminary status" (1972: 170), but rather a conscious acknowledgement that the doctoral research process has become increasingly structured and 'formatted' in recent years (Murray 2002), making the 'slow burn' of participant observation (which yields critical analysis only after a period of distance as illustrated above) a risky enterprise. I will proceed now, therefore, to discuss my use of interview as a research methodology.

Interviews

As indicated above, a 'mixed model' combining participant observation with interview is the dominant one in television production studies, and Burns (1977) can be considered seminal in this area. Burns's adoption of observational and interview methodologies "had a good deal of effect on the way in which the study developed in terms both of the kinds of information which interviews and observation yielded and of the formulation which eventually imposed itself on the information" (xiii). This illustrates not only the relationship of methodology to research design, but the complementary nature of interview and observation techniques whereby the two methods produce different insights. Certainly in my own adoption of this model the two methods provided sometimes markedly different insights into production

culture and into producers' occupational values than those revealed by a single method.

As indicated in Chapter Three, departmental staff effectively *are* 'the Department' (without them there is no geographical body or corporate site that could be referred to as BBC Scotland Children's Department), and so they were the most important source of data for this research both in terms of providing specific information about how children's PSB is produced at BBC Scotland and in terms of the attitudes and perceptions or ethos that informed this production process. These attitudes and perceptions were especially sought in the privacy and candour of interview rather than only in the corporate and mainly group setting of participant observation. Therefore, in addition to participant observation of departmental work processes, interviews of departmental members (or associated personnel) were used throughout both my main fieldwork blocks; informally in the February to August 2008 block (i.e. in private conversations with staff that occurred as a natural extension of the participant observation process) and formally in the February to July 2009 block when I conducted twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with personnel working in the Department and an additional two with figures who had a professional connection to the Department or its activities. These semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants (with the exception of one whereby consent was given only for written notes to be made), and lasted, on average, one hour but with four interviews (notably those from senior production ranks) lasting approximately two hours. Thus I have a total of 22 interviews totalling some 25 hours. (I will discuss issues of anonymity of research participants under the 'Ethics and confidentiality' section of this chapter.) The number of interview participants and duration is comparable with that of Julie Light's doctoral study (28 interviews lasting roughly one hour) and Caitriona Noonan's doctoral study (23 interviews lasting roughly one hour).

The in-depth and candid nature of these interviews would seem to support the view that a discursive, semi-structured interview format will "balance intimacy and distance, while opening understanding on how particular individuals arrive at the cognitions, emotions and values that emerge for the conversational journey"

(Crabtree & Miller 1999: 106). By being loosely structured on themes, issues and examples that emerged in participant observation, I was able to tailor interviews to the specific role of the individual but while using a semi-structured format that allowed me to make specific and comparative analysis of the materials. I aimed to fulfil the guiding principles of Strauss and Corbin to balance objectivity with sensitivity in interviews. These principles are based on the use of open questions; a focus on specific experiences and activities; and a reactive or flexible approach to the interview dynamic (1998: 42). (My interview guide is shown as Appendix A and the consent form as Appendix B.) Although in-depth interviews have been a backbone of production studies research (see e.g. Tunstall 1993; Caldwell 2008) they are frequently treated as secondary production evidence in lieu of access to primary production processes (Corner 1999: 70-79). However, following Steemers's recent model (2010), I have chosen to treat my interviews with staff as *primary* evidence of producers' perceptions and assumptions around their role as it is exactly that embodied or internalised discourse that I was investigating through interview. My interviews are not secondary evidence in lieu of access to production processes then but primary evidence of producers' articulated beliefs and discourse which complemented the primary evidence of production processes and corporate ethos gained in participant observation. There is no attempt made to evaluate the 'truth' of these representations but instead they are taken at face value as producer discourse.

Authenticity of fieldwork situations

This would seem an appropriate juncture to discuss what might be termed the authenticity or 'validity' of the situational basis of my fieldwork. Elliot notes that one drawback of ethnographic research models "is that the situation observed and the account recorded may have been arranged for the benefit of the researcher" (1972: 7). Certainly my access and dealings with the Children's Department at BBC Scotland seemed to take place in an atmosphere of goodwill and openness that is uncharacteristic of research at the BBC as an institution as conducted by Burns and Born respectively, although Born does specifically distinguish that "BBC Scotland, to name one location, made me completely welcome and gave me astonishingly open access" (2004: 17). The confidence with which Simon Parsons opened the door to an

outsider, may, to the cynical, suggest, to quote Eliot, something of a “put up job” (1972: 7), but the length of the study would mitigate against this, as would the observational methodologies employed in the light of the on-going demands of production:

Deliberate distortion is much less likely to occur if an observer is present over a period of time, than it is, for example, in responses to a questionnaire or interview. Moreover, other goals, such as getting the work done or the programmes produced, inevitably take precedence over any aim to mislead the researcher. (Elliot 1972: 7)

Again, while I am confident that no such “aim to mislead the researcher” was there in the fieldwork situation, it would not have mattered if it was, following Caldwell’s advice that the aim of production study is “less about finding an ‘authentic’ reality ‘behind the scenes’” than it is an aim “to look over the shoulder of television workers in terms of the ‘interpretative’ nature of their practices” (Caldwell 2008: 5).

Approaching interview participants

Recruitment of the BBC Scotland children’s personnel was achieved by various methods and the willing uptake of participants, coupled with the mood of excitement with which many staff seemed to treat and discuss the process, suggests that the interview was seen as a positive opportunity for individuals to talk. Born noted this willing uptake of interview participants in her research too: “I became a kind of psychoanalyst of the institution, in whom individuals entrusted private thoughts, theories and anxieties” (2004: 17). It is in accessing these “private thoughts, theories and anxieties” that I believed that interview and participant observation offered rather different insights, perhaps because while participation in interviews was voluntary, the terms of my AHRC project, set up by Simon Parsons, meant that staff were ‘obliged’ to accept me as a participant observer within the Department. That the interviews should be voluntary, rather than a scheduled departmental activity, was something I had discussed at length with Simon Parsons prior to moving to the interview stage of the second main fieldwork block, and this was carefully framed by Parsons in an email to the Department in March 2009 in which he stressed that participation was voluntary and entirely confidential (and indeed

Parsons did not know which members of staff volunteered for interview). This then resulted effectively in staff approaching me in person or through email to set aside an interview time within the working day. Two participants requested advance sight of the questions asked. Interviews with the three most senior members of the Department (Simon Parsons, Sara Harkins and Sue Morgan) were arranged via the departmental secretary. In this way respondents were gathered from all different ranks of the production hierarchy with a fairly even distribution of participants across researcher/runner, assistant producer/director, and producer and executive-producer roles. I do know that there were two specific members of staff that I would have liked to have interviewed but with whom I could not arrive at a mutually convenient date. As I will discuss in Chapter Three, there is no fixed number of staff constituting the Department at any one time, so that one of the drawbacks of an open invitation to interview is that it is difficult to gauge uptake as a proportion of available staff (though my general impression was that uptake was around 50% of those who were regularly based at Pacific Quay and not regularly away filming during the February to July 2009 period), or to gauge whether one's interview sample is in any way 'representative', but this is also a feature of the qualitative research process in which the data is treated as specific examples rather than an indicator of the general.

Ethics and confidentiality

Formal ethical procedures prescribed by Glasgow University help to establish clear boundaries for research as well as protecting the rights of those participating. These have "the dignity, rights and welfare of research participants"⁴ as their core criteria and acknowledge the power imbalances that are often implicit in research situations. In respect of my own project, a particular imbalance might exist through what participants could potentially lose through candour in contrast to what I might gain,

⁴ See University of Glasgow: *The Faculty of Arts Ethical Policy*
<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/Faculty/html/ethicspolicy.htm> [Accessed 01.12.08].

and I was aware that my research was conducted at a difficult time for the children's television production community, as well as for BBC production personnel, in which no job was considered secure. A key ethical consideration of my work therefore was that no participant should potentially be disadvantaged by their consenting participation in this study which led me to adopt the fairly standard ethnographic practice of anonymising contributions gathered through interview and participant observation.

I devoted much thought to the issue in both the interview preparation and in the writing up of this thesis as well as in the publication/dissemination of articles and research papers to date, and I have had to adopt something of a compromise solution which somewhat restricts the richness of meaning that can be gained by attributing contributions to specific individuals or roles in production. Although very few participants specifically requested anonymity,⁵ it became obvious to me that the frankness of interviews in particular frequently involved a fluid approach to anonymity in which, for instance, participants gave caveats that certain responses were 'off the record' or were made in a personal as opposed to an official BBC capacity. Furthermore, as *some* participants *had* requested anonymity, that could not be guaranteed without making all the participants anonymous, as, by a process of elimination it would be easy to identify the names that were missing. Light (2004) was faced with this problem in her doctoral research, further exacerbated by the fact that she too was a member of the BBC production community she was researching. However simply removing names is no guarantee of anonymity as frequently the identity of the interviewee was implicit in the nature of their contribution. Likewise, stating the sex, status or designation of the interviewee would have provided clues to identity given the relatively small scale of the Department, and I realised too that

⁵ Indeed, I noted that most participants were almost blasé about the issue of consent, treating the consent form as a mere formality. Only one participant really questioned where the data would be stored and who would have access to it.

even placing the specific date of the interview (as is commonplace in anonymous interview attributions in article publication) could compromise anonymity as the BBC use an open electronic diary system. This has forced me to attribute only the month of the interview to individual contributions and to call contributors the same term - 'producer' - regardless of their BBC designation: such a totalising procedure is adopted by Burns (1977) who weaves contributions into his narrative largely with no attribution at all, and by Caldwell (2008) who also foregrounds a political aim of valorising the collective as opposed to hierarchical process of cultural production. Additional efforts at anonymity beyond this default have been made where I believe the content to be particularly contentious; in such cases I have also altered specific narrative references (to programme titles or production meetings attended) to protect the identity of the contributor. From this default position I have occasionally noted the status/rank of the contributor where I have felt that such information was necessary to the meaningful construction of the material – particularly material that connects participant observation to interview - but did not present potential detriment to the participant, as is the procedure adopted by Born (2004), Schlesinger (1978) and Steemers (2010), amongst others. This distinction is used most commonly for those at executive level: Simon Parsons, Sara Harkins and Sue Morgan, and indeed not to attribute them on the occasions I have would be to undermine the importance of their leadership as shaping the Department. I have included at Appendix C the names and designations of the main contributors to this research.

Such caution on my part is not to suggest that my research aims were particularly contentious or my findings inflammatory, but rather acts as an acknowledgement of the 'small world' that is indigenous UK children's television production, and a protection of my investment in researching that world both within the period of this study, and hopefully beyond. Born (2004) negotiated this difficulty and exerted caution in another way: through reconciling the somewhat slower world of academia to the fast world of media production by agreeing "not to publish and to abstain from journalism for some years after the study" (17), an effective approach although one unsuited to doctoral scholarship funded by a research council under a

scheme specifically designed to promote knowledge transfer and fruitful collaboration between the two participating institutions. To conclude my explanation and evaluation of my fieldwork methodologies, I believe that the mixed model of participant observation and interview used in my fieldwork was a useful one for exploiting access to that which “may not otherwise have been available” (AHRC 2007) not only in the sense of gathering data from a ‘closed’ or ‘private’ department within an institution famously characterised as a “private world” (Burns 1977) but in the sense of gathering insight and data from a still more ‘private’ aspect of that department – the internalised, embodied practices and beliefs of production personnel.

Textual Analysis

While my chosen fieldwork methodologies are fairly typical of ethnographic research in television production, my overall design model is less traditional in its incorporation of textual analysis within a production study: of the studies listed at the start of this chapter (at page 57-58), only the final three (Caldwell 2008; Noonan 2008; and Steemers 2010) incorporate textual analysis, thereby suggesting that such incorporation of textual analysis is a relatively new development in television production studies, mirroring the still growing acceptance and use of textual analysis within television studies as whole and its applicability in integrated approaches to the critical study of television. In this respect John Caldwell (1995) was – and remains (2008) – a pioneer, and, indeed Jeremy Butler argues that Caldwell is unparalleled in critically blending “screen theory, industry discourse, and television aesthetics” in unorthodox ways (Butler 1997: 373-380) though that position has moved on considerably since 1997. (Lisa Williamson offers a comprehensive account of the development of textual analysis within television studies in her 2008 doctoral study, *Contentious Comedy: Negotiating Issues of Form, Content, and Representation in American Sitcoms of the Post-Network Era*.)

My incorporation of textual analysis within this particular study could be justified by the desire to valorize the use of textual analysis as a tool within television studies as advocated, for example, by Creeber (2006). For those cultural theorists who argue that children’s media has always been (wrongly) considered a ‘lesser’

media (e.g. Hunt 1994; Lurie 1990; and Zipes 2002) the opportunity to rescue both a method and a media from the charge of being ‘intellectually simplistic’ would justify the use of textual analysis in a production study of that media. Steemers’s inclusion of textual analysis, in the chapter lead-authored by James Walters, makes such aim of methodological valorization explicit (Steemers 2010: 191-211). But there are several other justifications as to why textual analysis is an important method for this study, arising in particular from my attempt to map both the ‘soft’ criteria of PSB, and the construction of the audience made by producers, on to the broadcast texts of BBC Scotland Children’s Department in pursuit of my main research questions.

Throughout my literature review a preoccupation with textual form emerged as an overlapping aspect of the various fields relevant to my study and therefore vindicates a blend in this project between what Corner has categorised as social-science-based ‘research’ and arts-based ‘criticism’, the latter of which he characterises as “an engagement with the signifiatory organization of television programmes themselves, with the use of images and language, generic conventions, narrative patterns, and modes of address, to be found there” (1999: 7). What I find applicable here is the way in which these formal features might be used to assess what is ‘public service’ about children’s public service television and what makes BBC Scotland content distinctive: to disregard textual analysis in this respect would surely be a serious omission.

Despite this logic I am aware that textual analysis as a methodology is not without problem and in Chapter Six – my textual analysis chapter – I discuss how practical problems and choices presented themselves. Here I wish to say something more about the philosophical use of textual analysis within the research design/conceptual model rather than just about its formal, practical and ‘outward’ expression in Chapter Six. Because just as desk research and literature review formed an on-going *mode* of research, so too did textual analysis of children’s television, which I watched – and continue to watch – on a daily basis as a fundamental mode of engaging with the field of children’s television study. That is not to say that every time an arts-based television scholar watches a text they engage in textual analysis (though I rather suspect they do at least to some extent) but that adult engagement

with children's texts predicated a particularly critical and 'made strange' viewing that is not based on any superior knowledge or critical faculty of the adult but on the intrinsically and always alien or 'other' nature of media designed for children which, by definition, is *not* addressed to adults.

Where the limits of textual analysis are felt in this study is that, although a useful investigation site for seeing how production processes, ideologies and policies manifest themselves in cultural artefacts of broadcasting, the broadcast text is always an artificial construct of the 'end' of the production process while a fuller examination of the production of broadcasting would move beyond the broadcast text to consider its reception by the audience. This would be the fullest expression of the production study as suggested by Corner thus:

What is also required is not only a broader understanding of producer cultures but more links, however tentative and partial, between production enquiry and analysis of the programmes themselves and the kinds of audience response they receive. (Corner 1999: 79)

Such reception study with the children's audience remains a future intention of expanding this research but lies beyond the scope of this thesis; access to BBC Scotland Children's Department was within the gift of the collaborative doctoral award but access to the children's audience was not.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the research design and methodologies utilized in this doctoral research project. It has explained the relationship between research design, research methodology and research execution and analysis in this project, arguing that a constructivist and ethnographic approach, taken as a prerequisite of fulfilling the terms of the AHRC collaborative doctoral award, was adopted by the researcher, thus allowing a fluid and reactive approach to the fieldwork and research design. To this end the original research brief was discussed before a précis of the fieldwork was given, followed by a more fleshed-out explanation of each of the four research methods used in the project. The benefits and limitations of each of these methods, their interaction with each other, and their contribution to the critical stance of the thesis was discussed, as was how the scope

of the project might be extended in the future by the inclusion of methodologies relevant to reception studies.

I will now proceed to Chapter Three in which I locate the role and structure of BBC Scotland within both the BBC and the wider industry picture of UK children's broadcasting in the 21st century (including the concept of industry 'crisis'), discussing the contexts of BBC Scotland Children's production and how they work within the umbrella of BBC Children's, thereby concluding Part One of this thesis: the research context.

Chapter Three: Relevant Contexts

In continuing to set out the context of my research, this chapter locates the role and structure of the Children's Department at BBC Scotland within the institutional framework of both BBC Scotland and its parent institution - the BBC - and also within the children's television production industry in the UK. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents a broad overview of the working environment, personnel and other key institutional factors that bear upon the production of children's PSB at BBC Scotland, mapping out the historical evolution of the Department as a specific BBC 'centre of excellence' and presenting a guide to the local contexts in which it is situated. The second section looks to the contemporary cultural setting of the Department, detailing the bigger industry picture in children's television production as a context for issues that emerge in relation to the notion of current 'crisis' in UK children's television production, which industry insiders claim is revealed in the 2007 Ofcom Report.

Although BBC Scotland made occasional children's programmes (often for Scottish broadcast only) throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a fully dedicated 'Children's Department' within BBC Scotland is a relatively recent development – since the late 1990s – and is perhaps indicative of a changing political will within the BBC, and of an increased focus on 'fairer' representation and distribution of assets throughout the institution. That within a decade the Department went on to become a strategic BBC 'centre of excellence' (in the 21st century) would also suggest the operation of a distinctive set of institutional factors in this period. The term 'centre of excellence' has no specific BBC definition but is frequently applied to non-metropolitan production centres that offer a particular specialism, such as the Natural History Unit at BBC Bristol; the Drama Unit at Cardiff (producing *Doctor Who* amongst other titles); and, since 2002, the Children's Department at BBC Scotland. The expectation of the centres of excellence is that they will outperform their otherwise ordinary regional/national production quotas, described by Schlesinger as the "life-blood of dispersed production capacity in the UK" (2008: 45), and so play a significant role in the BBC's aim to move 50% of network production outside of London by 2016 (BBC 2008). It should be noted that the planned transfer

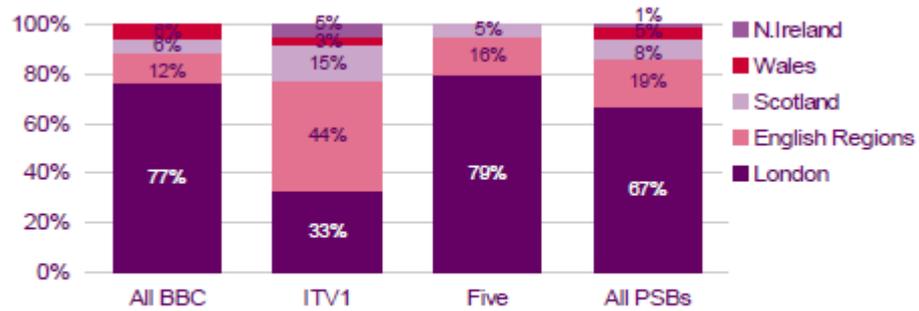
of key metropolitan departments (including Sports and Children's) to the Media City UK site at Salford Quays will greatly assist in this aspiration, though its envisioned synergy with the current 'centres of excellence' is unclear. There is keen speculation therefore as to the viability of BBC Scotland's continuing role in Children's once the main metropolitan department relocates to Salford.

Section 1: 'Local' contexts

In 2006, the capacity of the BBC Scotland Children's Department, taken from the BBC's own website, was advertised as "around 20% of all network BBC Children's output" (BBC 2006a). Although subsequently updated online (as of September 2009) – with no mention of a quantitative basis for the Department's significance – this statement provided a useful indication of the scale of the Department (and of the potential scale of this research). Arguably, the Department, in producing such a large proportion of network children's content, punches above its weight in comparison to other BBC Scotland departments.⁶ Scotland, after all, as a nation of around 5 million people, approximates only 8% of the overall UK population.⁷ This quoted '20% output' figure is aspirational however: it has never been achieved according to a senior executive (Field journal, February 2008). Furthermore it cannot be extrapolated from Ofcom's statistics for spend on non-London production which, although dealing with BBC Children's production as a whole (rather than solely in-house production), put BBC Children's spend in Scotland at approximately 6% (see Figure 1). Nonetheless, even if only aspirational, the figure of 20% greatly exceeds even the 2016 target for the overall proportion of BBC Scotland network production to be an equivalent proportion of Scotland's population to the UK population: i.e. 8-9% (BBC 2009).

⁶ In 2009, the Director General reported network production growth in Scotland from 3.3% in 2007 to 3.7% in 2008, and forecast a further rise to 5-6% by the end of 2009. The projected increase was stated to indicate that the BBC was on track to deliver, by 2016, network production equivalent to Scotland's proportion of the UK population (BBC 2009).

⁷ Statistics approximated from the Office of National Statistics population statistics report, Aug 2009 (National Statistics Online 2009).



Source: Ofcom/broadcasters. Note: Channel 4 did not commission any first-run original children's programmes in 2006. S4C figures not available.

Figure 1: PSB spend on original production outside London (Ofcom 2007a: 65)

Although aspirational, what is unclear about the “20% output” figure is how that was, is, or should be calculated. Does it relate to 20% of yearly production spend on children's content? Or 20% of in-house production? Does BBC Scotland produces 20% of broadcast content – and if so, does that equate to programming hours or titles, and is it determined by new or repeated content? A senior executive suggested to me that the figure probably relates to 20% of yearly in-house Children's production spend, and that while this figure had never been achieved the Department continues to build capacity (Field journal, February 2008).

The distinction that the Children's Department produces *network* content (i.e. content that is broadcast to the whole UK and not just Scotland) is extremely important. The Department produces *only* network content. No 'opt out' national children's programming is made or broadcast in Scotland, other than the Gaelic programming produced under the auspices of BBC Alba; there appears to be no overlap, other than informal consultation, between the Gaelic and Children's departments at BBC Scotland. The fact that the Children's Department at BBC Scotland produces only network content sets it apart from all other BBC Scotland departments, which produce either a mixture of national and network content or national content only. This makes the conditions for production – and especially commissioning – unique to the Children's Department, though producers have suggested that this is sometimes overlooked by other BBC Scotland staff (perhaps suggesting that the Children's Department is a fairly self-contained unit):

There's a lot of buzz whenever [other] departments win a network commission: they seem to forget that *everything* we do is network and all the

pressures that brings. We just get on with it. (Producer, Field journal, April 2009)

What is perhaps obfuscated by this attitude is that Children's enjoys a much more streamlined and direct process of network commissioning than other departments (which must go through multiple commissioners of genre and channel). Any children's content is commissioned by a single commissioner only. BBC Scotland Children's Department is thus insulated from some of the network commissioning uncertainty identified as attendant on the 'nations and regions' structure (Born 2004; Cook 2008); it is up to the Children's commissioners to handle quotas within a level playing field of competition as I will discuss further in Chapter Five. A consequence of network production is that potentially the Children's Department has greater access to network budgets; one freelance producer I interviewed said that his experience of working in Children's was that it was better funded than other BBC Scotland departments:

I like working in Children's because they seem to have budgets. We had a generator we towed all round Britain so our lights would work. I wouldn't normally have that luxury in other departments. I've always found that in Children's if you justify why you want something then people try to make it happen for you. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

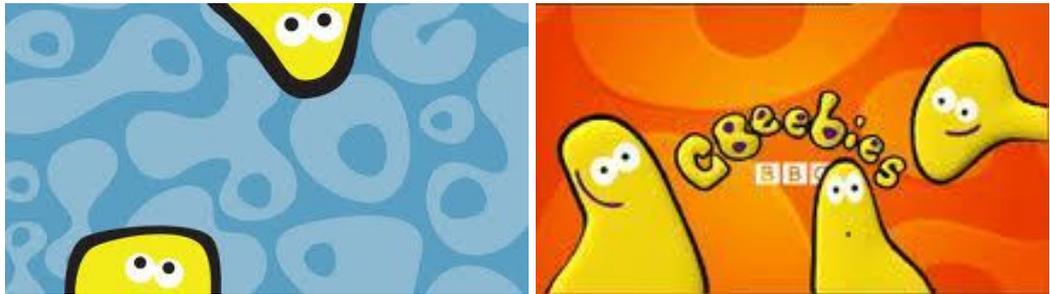
Perceptions of budgets within Children's production will be discussed later in this chapter in relation to the concept of 'crisis' in UK children's television production. The relationship between commissioner and Department is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

BBC Children's Platforms and Schedules

The BBC Scotland Children's Department produces a range of PSB content for the BBC Children's platforms (which include radio, television and the internet) but predominantly its output has been *television* content under the two BBC Children's 'brands' (BBC terminology): CBeebies (aimed for children up to six) and CBBC (aimed at children between six and twelve). As well as being broadcast on the eponymous digital channels (06.00 to 19.00, seven days a week), the brands are broadcast in scheduled blocks on the terrestrial channels BBC 1 (weekdays at 15.05

to 17.15) and BBC 2 (06.00 to 12.00, Monday to Saturday and 06.00 to 10.00 Sundays). My access to the 'now' of production in the Department means that this thesis mirrors the Department's focus on television production, although later in this chapter I will discuss the significance of other Children's platforms within the wider production industry context.

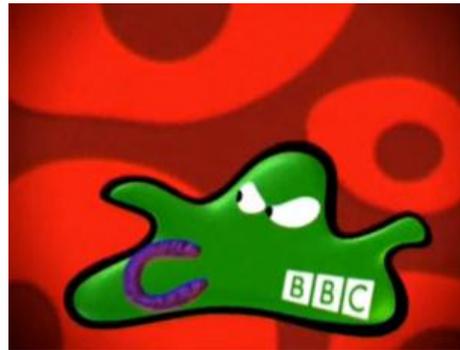
The two brands are very strictly delineated in visual terms, with distinctive logos and idents that allow the brand to be recognised whether on packaging for licensed products, for example, or within the BBC platforms. CBeebies has a distinctive yellow logo and its idents feature anthropomorphic blobs known as Beebies (see Figures 2, 3 and 4), while, as of 2008, CBBC has an angular green logo (see Figure 5) and has lost its former blobbiness (see Figures 6 and 7), presumably to further delineate it from the CBeebies brand.



Figures 2, 3 and 4: CBeebies logo and idents



Figure 5: New CBBC logo (as of 2008)



Figures 6 and 7: Old CBBC logo and ident

Such delineation is not perhaps so critical in the digital channels, which are two separate entities, but is important in the mixed scheduling of terrestrial channels.

The BBC has a long history of broadcasting children's content in mixed scheduling formats that have a linear progression from preschool content through to content for the next age group, with an additional structuring concept that content must be suitable for, though not necessarily appealing to, 'inherited audiences'. This notionally age-structured schedule continues in the Children's 'ring-fenced' blocks within the terrestrial channels of BBC 1 and BBC 2 and has a long, although not untroubled history, within BBC Children's scheduling. As Oswell notes of mixed scheduling in early BBC Children's radio:

Broadcasters were far from clear about the nature of the child audience.

Children's Hour aimed to address 'the widest range of children having regard to sex, age and social class'. It was equally evident 'to anyone who has had experience of children that there is a wide gulf between a boy or girl of eight and one of twelve and the adolescent of sixteen. (Oswell 2002: 24)

The implicit relationship between the schedule and the construction of the audience, in particular the issues relating to 'age appropriate' and 'age aspirational' content and

the competing demands of education and entertainment, is interrogated throughout Part Two of this thesis, but in this chapter it is my aim to set out the role of brands in the infrastructure of BBC Scotland Children's production.

The digital channels are clearly age-delineated and structured by brand so that while some content may be geared towards the upper or lower ages of the brand, *all* the content will be 'suitable' and 'appropriate'. Each brand has a single commissioner based in the main metropolitan department (currently London) who is answerable, along with a commissioner of acquisitions and animations, to the Children's Controller, also based in the main metropolitan department. The use of clear brand identities is an attempt to signpost content for its intended audience (and by audience I include a hypothetical parent or carer) across a variety of platforms, so that 'age appropriate' content can be easily identified and selected. It should be noted that, since 2007, the BBC no longer targets content at children over twelve as part of its Children's portfolio; 'BBC Switch' is the brand that caters for children aged twelve to sixteen, somewhat substituting for the ill-fated 'BBC Jam'. 'Children's' is therefore used by the BBC only to mean those up to twelve years, and follows the education system of the UK which divides between primary and secondary school at this age. I address aspects of 'age aspirational' content in my textual analysis chapter, thus highlighting some of the difficulties of producing age appropriate content for the CBBC audience.

Location

The Department is currently located on the fourth floor of the BBC Scotland headquarters at Pacific Quay, Glasgow, having moved there, from the former Queen Margaret Drive site in Glasgow's 'trendy' West End, in the summer of 2007. Several philosophical concepts are suggested by this specific site, so I will outline those that seem best to illustrate the ways in which location potentially inflects the working culture of the Department to contribute to a distinctive ethos. This kind of analysis of setting/s (and their relationship to production culture) was suggested to me by Chapter Three of Burns's seminal study of the BBC, in which he contrasts the "settings" of Broadcasting House with that of Television Centre to suggest that not only do these settings *reflect* "behaviour, and even purposes and feelings" but also

shape them; in other words he argues that producers' actions and attitudes are "in any case in some meaningful and designed relationship" to their settings (Burns 1977: 79). Burns makes much of the 'old' culture of radio broadcasting and the 'new' world of television as iterated in their institutional settings:

The contrast between the architectural manner of Broadcasting House and Television Centre, between the heavy fortress shape and 'Head Office' treatment of Broadcasting House, and the 'technological' design and exhibition styling of Television Centre is not confined to the difference in dates – the 'datedness' of sound broadcasting and the novelty of television. The sentiment that Reith lived on in Broadcasting House and not at Television Centre could be read, without being too fanciful, into the peculiarly appropriate siting of the two buildings. (Burns 1997: 79)

Such analysis is not merely of historical interest as, once again, the BBC is undergoing geographical, political, structural and technological change and this is evident in the new building programmes at Pacific Quay (Glasgow) and Salford Quays just outside Manchester. Indeed the prospect of the Salford Quays media city site, which will house the main metropolitan Children's department, was suggested by one commissioner, as being, for Children's production personnel, akin to what the Broadcasting House staff must have felt regarding the development of Television Centre (Field journal, April 2009).⁸ Given that this research was conducted wholly in the 'new' setting of Pacific Quay and commenced only two months after the Department's relocation there, it is neither 'fanciful' or irrelevant to apply a Burnsian analysis to the 'text' of Pacific Quay, and certainly staff made frequent reference to

⁸ It is ironic that the historic opportunity of Salford Quays should be cited as a determining factor in the decision of staff to continue in post and relocate to Salford from London. Both Children's commissioners waited until the last available day (30 April 2009) to announce their decision. Anne Gilchrist did not choose to continue in post and Michael Carrington did, though seven months later he announced he would be leaving the post to become Head of Children's at Turner Broadcasting, prior to such relocation. See coverage of the announcements by Holmwood (2009a; 2009b) and Sweney (2010).

their new environment in contrast to that at Queen Margaret Drive, or in contrast to that at Television Centre, or in putative contrast to that expected at Salford Quays.

'PQ', as it is known to BBC personnel, is, in essence, a glass box structure built in open-plan layers around a central, stepped atrium or 'street' that rises throughout the entire length of the building creating performance and meeting areas (see Figures 8 and 9). It encompasses a large high-definition (HD) television and radio production facility (studios, editing and dubbing suites etc.) as well as being the administrative centre of BBC Scotland.



Figures 8 and 9: The atrium at PQ, known as 'the street'

The building itself is designed so that there is no obvious hierarchy in the use of office space; senior executives and junior runner/researchers alike work from theoretically undesignated open plan 'hot desks'. There are frequent building services warnings and spot checks against customisation of these spaces although, in actuality, most folks do gravitate towards the same desk space each day and so do personalise them with the individuated paraphernalia of office existence. This desired homogeneity of the corporate workplace is in huge contrast to the creative, highly personalised 'dens' encouraged by commercial children's media companies such as Pixar. Indeed one producer I interviewed found the PQ building 'sterile' and lacking a true creative 'buzz': "I hear a lot in the BBC about creativity but I don't actually see a lot of it here – it is almost as if creativity is looked down on" (Producer, Interview, March 2009). On the whole, though, most staff seemed very pleased with their new work environment and Children's staff frequently said that it was a much

better workspace than Queen Margaret Drive, because it facilitated ‘cross-fertilization’ of ideas between teams and departments. One executive suggested that “There were things that were not working [at Queen Margaret Drive]. The old building was dark and there was no centre of energy for the development teams. No one talked to each other” (Producer, Interview, June 2009). Having visited both sites, I think it would have been hard for me to carry out this project at Queen Margaret Drive, as the warren-like layout of the building was not conducive to participant observation in the reactive style afforded by the airy, open-plan layout at PQ, where one can overhear on-going conversations at adjacent desks. Part of my practical methodology, suggested by an executive, was frequently to change desks and teams in order to ‘overhear’ as diverse a range of conversations as possible (Field journal, Preliminary visit, July 2007).

Openness, transparency and trust

As well as aiming to be anti-hierarchical, the building physically manifests the BBC’s institutional preoccupation with ‘openness’ and ‘transparency’ which was foregrounded in the 21st century and especially throughout my research period. It is difficult to trace the origins of this BBC discourse on trust, transparency and openness, but Onora O’Neill’s Reith Lectures of 2002 would seem to presage many of the issues around the perceived breaches of trust that were subsequently exposed in the critical 2007 to 2009 research period. Several of these breaches related to children’s content, including the naming of the *Blue Peter* cat ‘Socks’, when the audience had voted for ‘Cookie’, and the faking of a winner in a phone-in competition (for which the BBC was fined £50,000 by Ofcom). That such breaches of trust occurred in *children’s* PSB was framed in media reporting (including the BBC’s own coverage) as ‘the lowest of the low’ and a sure sign that a culture of deception was endemic in the BBC (see, for example, Revoir 2007). The mood within the BBC Scotland Children’s Department was that the *Blue Peter* producers had made very bad judgements for which they too, as Children’s producers, were being punished. There was also much disgruntlement that images of a key BBC Scotland Children’s presenter (James Mackenzie of *Raven*) were being used in media coverage relating to a faked winner in the Children’s segment of the BBC Scotland *Children In Need*

telethon, when he personally had nothing to do with this breach nor did any BBC Scotland Children's staff. There was also discussion of the fact that 'innocent' onscreen talent had to make apology to the Children's audience following breaches in which they, as individuals, played no part (Field journal, February 2008). In addition to the cringing apologies issued, institution-wide measures were put in place for editorial staff throughout the BBC, designed to address the issue of public trust. All production staff had to complete the 'Safeguarding Trust' workshop (February/March 2008) and the BBC declared a ban on competitions (September to December 2007), which was followed in January 2008 by strict editorial guidelines on competitions within BBC programming:

- Competitions and votes are conducted in a way that is honest, open, fair and legal.
- Winners of competitions and votes are genuine and never invented, pre-chosen or planted by the production team. Every entry should have a fair chance of winning.
- It will never ask anyone to pose as a competition contestant or winner.
- Prizes are described accurately. The BBC will not mislead entrants about the nature of a prize and prize winners will receive their prizes in reasonable time.
- There are clear rules for any competition or vote, which are readily available to the public. (BBC 2007b)

Children's Department staff at BBC Scotland treated these 'revised' guidelines as a public iteration of the 'common sense' production practices they were already adopting.

While the breaches of trust that necessitated the review of competition guidelines postdate the planning and building of the BBC Scotland HQ at Pacific Quay, the architecture and setting of PQ is suggestive of a BBC that wishes to project a public image of openness and transparency, with glass used as a building material throughout the open-plan structure. Furthermore its situation in a regenerated riverside landscape, encompassing the bizarre futuristic structures of the science centre and the 'Armadillo' alongside more traditional icons of Glasgow's industrial

heritage such as the River Clyde and the Finnieston Crane, suggests progressiveness and connectivity. In addition to the notion of transparency and openness, these features make up the desired ideal of the PQ ‘ethos’, articulating the current self-construction of the BBC as ‘*Your BBC*’: an accountable, trustworthy, responsive and dynamic 21st century broadcaster. Ken MacQuarrie, Controller of BBC Scotland, iterates this ethos in his comments to BBC News on completion of the construction stage:

Our vision for a world class headquarters *connecting* all of our BBC centres across Scotland and enhancing our *visibility to our audiences* is nearing reality. This magnificent building offers us a unique opportunity to create a working environment which will shape *the future of broadcasting*, inspire our staff and *welcome our audiences* to come in and see *their BBC*. (BBC 2006b) (My emphasis)



Figure 10: BBC Scotland HQ, Pacific Quay, Glasgow (showing the reflection of the Armadillo)

Despite the desired homogeneity and non-hierarchical openness of workspace, certain specific sites are prized above others at PQ, and executives placed great importance in securing the Department’s fourth floor corner site (facing the Science Centre), for two reasons, both of which reinforce the notion of audience connection (and its accordance with the “Your BBC” principle) at local level. Firstly, Department members and visitors can see out and observe the constant stream of children visiting the Science Centre (and, theoretically at least, those children can

see in). Secondly, visiting groups of children are able to spread out and ‘own’ the departmental ‘hangout’ space, which is furnished with giant beanbags, squashy sofas, and a huge plasma TV with various games consoles. The space is decorated with letters and drawings from children as well as childhood photographs of the staff. This corralling of groups of people was not possible in the initial second floor site (Aug 2007 to March 2008) which had a long thin ‘corridor’ layout and which was a through-route between other departments. The Department must sometimes work across two PQ sites during the busiest periods however, and this fact, along with the constant reshuffling of desks and sites suggests to me that it is predominantly *the staff* who constitute the sense of ‘Department’ rather than the specific locale within the PQ building.

An executive noted, nonetheless, that the claim on the corner site was particularly important for *Children’s* as they are the only content producers who are, de facto, NOT in the target audience for that content: all avenues of audience connection had therefore to be maximised, including the symbolic (Producer, Field journal, February 2008). The executive’s concern with the symbolic nature of the architecture of PQ, and of the Children’s Department specifically, remained a theme throughout my research as, once satisfied with the siting of the Department, the executive went on to suggest (to a small committee of people charged with improving the foyer) how the foyer area of PQ might also become more welcoming to children and might more obviously promote the content produced by the Department. This discussion threw up some interesting themes as to the umbrella nature of the BBC Children’s brands; it was considered to be acceptable and even necessary for the Children’s Department in London to foreground BBC Scotland Children’s ephemera (e.g. cardboard cut-outs of the Raven character and of Nina from *Nina and the Neurons*) but “disingenuous” and “misleading” for BBC Scotland to reciprocate by featuring, for example, a Doctor Who cut-out figure or a model of the TARDIS (Field journal, April 2008).

Interestingly, although the location of the Department does have a bearing on its ethos, there is also the sense that the Department, as a creative entity, does not have a necessarily ‘situated’ location: the Department effectively *is* its staff, rather

than its physical resources or specifics, and staff constantly adapt to shifting desks and sites.

Key Personnel

The Department is made up of a mixture of personnel, on staff (i.e. permanent BBC employee) or freelance contracts, but the rolling basis of programme production means that it is hard to give an accurate number of departmental members for any one continuous period. Throughout my research there appeared to be between 25 and 40 staff working in the departmental office space at any one time. Staff were aged anywhere between early twenties to (very) early-fifties, and while age did map roughly to seniority, the age or seniority of individuals could not easily be assumed at a glance. Indeed it was not until producer interviews that I realised the formal BBC rank/title/designation of all but the most senior personnel, although, as outlined in my methods chapter, I have chosen to refer to production staff at all ranks as 'producer' throughout this thesis, except where further detail is necessary to meaningful construction.

As noted, Simon Parsons is the Head of the Department, having taken up the post in 2005, replacing and expanding on the post of Claire Mundell. Simon's post is answerable to the BBC Children's Controller (Richard Deverell throughout the bulk of my research period) as regards production, and also to the Controller of BBC Scotland, Ken MacQuarrie, as regards management and administration. Simon would appear to be a rare creature of the media milieu for he is both respected professionally and liked personally by his colleagues and staff. Even under conditions of anonymity and candid interview, production personnel were never other than enthusiastically positive about Simon, and, on explaining my research at various industry conferences I was invariably asked, "Oh so you work with Simon Parsons? He's lovely!" (Field journal, July 2007). I appreciate that such gushing responses could be indicative of the power Simon wields, and will almost certainly reflect that he is boyishly attractive with a soulful gaze (see Figure 11); but it is my sincere belief that, having witnessed his dealings with staff (including during difficult occasions such as when redundancy decisions were revealed), Simon has earned the genuine esteem and affection of his colleagues.



Figure 11: Simon Parsons

Simon's 'likeability' must be considered of direct relevance to the production context that was my object of study. His upbeat, calm and caring mode of leadership, coupled with his straightforward, modest and engaging personality, set a particular expectation of friendly, honest professionalism within the Department. If we are to accept Caldwell's assertion that the personal stamp of leadership constitutes an (under-researched) industrial practice akin to auteurism (2008: 16), I would argue that Simon embodies a particular kind of professionalism or personality that is readily allied to *children's* media production – Simon's qualities of compassion, consideration and fair-mindedness are perhaps more prized in Children's than they might be in other genres or departments. It is also important to note that, although genuine, Simon's likeability is also a self-considered strategy that serves the needs of the Department's needs by fostering an attractive working environment. The notion that Children's, as a specific genre, attracts a 'different type' of staff was suggested in several contexts throughout my fieldwork (though staff do like to claim both generalist and specialist status with a weather eye to the job market). At BBC and industry-wide events (e.g. the BBC Children's Festival or the Showcomotion Children's Media Conference) Children's personnel will often distinguish themselves from other media producers in statements such as, "You'll find us a friendly, approachable bunch" (Field journal, Showcomotion, July 2007). Such distinction was cynically framed in direct comparison to other media production genres in this comment made to me at an industry wine reception: "You can tell this is a Children's event – the women aren't as glamorous and the men are all just en route to their real career" (Field journal, Showcomotion, July 2007).

Beneath Simon are two senior executives each responsible for one of the two BBC Children's brands: each has a slightly different job title and role, indicative of their different function. Both are relatively recent appointments, and both have had upgraded status – i.e. there were no equivalent posts at that level in Children's Scotland prior to August 2009 – from which it may be surmised that the present incumbents effectively raised their own profile and status.

Sara Harkins is the Executive Editor of CBeebies at BBC Scotland, having taken the post in February 2008 (initially as Executive Producer) as replacement for Lucille McLaughlin who retired due to ill health. Again, Sara has a down-to-earth likeability and attractiveness like Simon, and a quirky yet stylish appearance. She is soft-spoken yet very direct, and her sense of social conscience and public service duty is very apparent in her professional and personal activities (Sara serves on the Children's Panel system).⁹ Sara is a deep thinker who is constantly reflecting and evaluating. Sometimes she can be self-critical and self-effacing, yet she is also aware of her own strengths and breadth of experience and is a very good public speaker with a quiet charisma. This quiet charisma was particularly evident in the BBC's 'Interactivity Festival' held at PQ in August 2008, when Sara chaired the session with urbane international media producer Magnus Ragnarsson (LazyTown Entertainment). In interview, CBeebies staff universally credited Sara with the reinvigoration of the CBeebies part of the Department which would seem to have become something of a rudderless ship during Lucille McLaughlin's illness. Throughout the fieldwork periods, Sara adopted a particular responsibility for my role within the Department and I was able to witness many instances of the ways in which she nurtured the CBeebies staff and took a holistic or even motherly view of their personal and professional development. Beneath Sarah are four or five core staff

⁹ The Children's Panel is the division of Scotland's legal system which deals with child welfare and crime. It is a progressive system in which children are treated alike whether they are offenders or offended against.

members who regularly work in CBeebies, and that cohort is augmented with other departmental staff, including those on freelance contracts.

Sue Morgan is Creative Director of CBBC at BBC Scotland, having originally taken the post in 2006 as Executive Producer; she relocated from the London Children's Department to take the appointment. Sue is perhaps more obviously an urbane 'media type': she is well-groomed, confident, sharp-witted and somewhat inscrutable. There is no doubt that the CBBC staff are rather in awe of her. Several interview participants mentioned that they did not like to challenge Sue for she is considered very exacting and forthright in her choices. But that awe would also seem to be based on her impressive career record so that she is held in esteem as well; her professional expertise and commissioning success were cited frequently by staff. It was suggested to me that Simon strategically chose Sue to come from London and "kick ass" at BBC Scotland (Producer, Interview, May 2009). This may suggest that there is an element of 'good cop, bad cop' to their professional dynamic. Certainly Sue is forthright in her ambition for the Department's content and reputation and unsentimental in promoting the means by which success should be achieved. Sue has brought with her several other personnel from London and makes effective use of freelance and short term contracts to encourage 'visiting' expertise to the Department.

What is particularly striking of all three senior executives in BBC Scotland Children's Department – Simon, Sara and Sue – is their level of engagement with discourses and theories of childhood, and their desire always to question the representation and construction of the child audience. Indeed, I believe that Simon's role in setting up this doctoral study epitomises his profound curiosity about the role of children's PSB and that this curiosity is cascaded throughout the Department, for example in the way that the daily 'ten to ten' meeting is used to raise issues and act

as a discussion forum.¹⁰ There is nothing haphazard or taken for granted about the BBC Scotland's relationship to their audience as demonstrated by departmental personnel during my fieldwork, but I do not sense that this critical engagement is an expectation or norm for BBC Children's as a whole (judging from my interactions with other BBC Children's staff); I suggest that Simon's leadership has cultivated this approach. As is apparent in Chapters Four and Five, the frontline production personnel within the Department also consistently demonstrate a robust critical engagement with the child audience; this would seem to be a distinctive part of the Children's production culture at PQ.

Political Background

Working purely in network production and as a designated centre of excellence, the Children's Department at BBC Scotland has a different experience from others of the broader political agendas that impact on BBC Scotland and especially the tensions around network versus regional broadcast commissioning. A broad understanding of these issues is necessary nonetheless, in order to contextualise the production climate in which the Children's Department operates. Rather than attempt a comprehensive account of the political background, I have outlined only those aspects which would seem of immediate concern to the Children's Department and to this research project. It should be noted that broadcasting remains a non-devolved power under the Scotland Act of 1998: only full independence from Westminster or an amendment to the Act would afford the Scottish Government power over broadcasting in Scotland. In consideration of the disparate powers and agencies in Scotland, Schlesinger has identified the difficulties in creating a coherent "communications policy". He argues that

it is plain that Scotland's institutional frameworks for handling culture and for dealing with media and communications are asymmetrical and inconsistent.

¹⁰ The 'ten to ten' meeting lasts up to 45 minutes. It is a new departmental forum made possible by the architecture of the department at PQ.

That we cannot imagine a neatly bounded national space is one of the inherent complexities of the devolved Scottish condition. (Schlesinger 2008: 48)

Broadcasting in Scotland has long been a contested area for both BBC and independent broadcasters. Within the early days of BBC Scotland production there was dispute as to where the HQ should be sited; it was not really until the 1970s that Glasgow's greater capacity for colour production allowed the Queen Margaret Drive site to establish itself as the main nerve centre of BBC Scotland operations over the other television studio in Edinburgh. Nowadays a Glasgow HQ no longer seems to be contentious (Edinburgh retains only very small production capacity inclusive of its dedicated facility within the Scottish Parliament) and indeed Glasgow is accepted as "Scotland's media capital" (Schlesinger 2008: 35), but one wonders what the future might hold in a fully independent Scotland? Certainly a mood of uncertainty has characterised the BBC Scotland ethos outside and inside the Children's Department throughout the period of my research. Headline stories as to the state of television and television production in Scotland frequently featured in both the quality and tabloid Scottish press during the 2007 to 2011 period. *The Scotsman* caused a furore over its 'Myth of Made in Scotland' article of January 2008, in which the writer, Martyn McLaughlin, sought to expose a disingenuous practice of attributing programmes to BBC Scotland production quotas when there were sometimes only very "tenuous links" (McLaughlin 2008). This is despite strict BBC guidelines as to how programmes should be attributed (BBC 2007c). Two such programmes were *Raven*, *Secret Temple* and *Shoebox Zoo*, both landmark commissions for the BBC Scotland Children's Department in which staff were fully involved in the pitching, development and production processes, even though one was filmed in India as a spin off from the usual Scotland-set series, and the other was a co-production with Canadian broadcasters. The wrongful claim about these texts undermined the argument as a whole for the Children's staff who, rather than explore the validity of the other claims, felt that their creativity and their power to compete in a global market was being constrained by a geographical and parochial determinism of what is 'national' (Field journal, January 2008). This notion of 'national' constraint is

explored further in Part Two of this thesis and is a key issue of nationalist discourses around the probity of broadcasting and production in Scotland.

In September 2009, Scotland's culture minister, Mike Russell, presented a Scottish parliamentary paper outlining plans for a 'Scottish Broadcasting Corporation' (Scottish Government 2009b) which would effectively divorce BBC Scotland from its BBC infrastructure but retain Scottish BBC licence fee payments purely for use in Scotland. These plans arose in the wake of the cross-party Scottish Broadcasting Commission,¹¹ but are allied to Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) discourses which argue that Scotland does not get a fair dividend or distribution of 'its own' assets as typified by North Sea Oil.¹² The unfair division of assets is a discourse which runs throughout the history of the BBC and which we can easily link to the claims of cultural imperialism that have dogged the BBC since its formation (see Sweeney 2008). Aside from the economic implications of fair dividend, questions also arise as to fair representation and access in the content, production and scheduling aspects of broadcasting (Blain and Burnett 2008). It is possible that a separate SBC *may* benefit those BBC Scotland departments which produce mainly (or solely) regional content, but it would be rather difficult for the Children's Department to benefit, given that it has never been possible to justify a significant level of children's production on an 'opt-out' basis; and that the Department, in striving for 20% of all Children's in-house network production, is already in receipt of more than a 'fair' dividend. Questions as to the future of children's PSB provision in a fully independent Scotland must concentrate therefore on the issues of quality, quantity and diversity sustainable from a production base in a small nation, and Sweeney cautions that "currently it is debatable whether or not

¹¹ 2007-2008 Independent Research initiative set up by Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, to investigate and recommend on the contemporary state of television production in Scotland. The commission recommended a new public service Scottish broadcasting 'network' (SBC 2008) which has since been politically transfigured into an entirely separate public service broadcasting institution (Scottish Government 2009a, 2009b, 2010).

¹² See, for example, the section of the SNP's website entitled 'oil' (SNP 2011)

the Scottish economy could sustain what might be [an initial] short term surge in the sector's output on a long-term basis" (2008: 102).

Section 2: Industry contexts

Having thus outlined the range of local situational, geographical, structural and political settings that are relevant to the output and production context of BBC Scotland Children's Department, I now wish to examine the broader industry setting in which the Department operated during the research period. This broader setting is no less important to the overall context of production at BBC Scotland Children's Department, having an indirect impact on the nature of children's content currently made by the BBC. The distinction between local and industry contexts is, of course, somewhat artificial, as temporal, geographical, structural and political factors determine and overlap in both; nonetheless it is helpful when used in relation to a discourse of children's television that, while often differentiating between UK-originated and non-UK-originated content, rarely differentiates further. The aim of this section therefore is to locate and reflect on BBC Scotland Children's Department within the context of the on-going public and industry discourse of 'change' and 'crisis' in children's television. It will examine those elements of change which are most relevant to BBC Children's and identify areas where the BBC Scotland Department is distinct from BBC Children's and from the industry as a whole. In so doing it will reflect on whether the term 'crisis' can accurately be applied to the recent production climate of BBC Scotland Children's Department. Much of the evidence base of this section is derived from the Ofcom Report of 2007 which was a constant source of reference in industry discourse throughout the research period.

Rationale

The notion of crisis has, with little critical challenge, dominated discourses around UK children's television in recent years, and especially since the publication of the 2007 Ofcom Report. The report was generally interpreted by the media industry as confirming a crisis, as reflected in the agendas and conference themes of various relevant industry bodies and in the media analysis of the report. I wish to examine what exactly is meant by the term in relation to children's television and tease out the issues that are most at stake within that discourse. Having thus established the

terms of reference, with particular reference to current UK children's programming, I wish to ask what the implications of these terms are for BBC Children's as the main provider of children's PSB, and how these then impact on the BBC Scotland Children's Department.

The regulation of UK broadcasting is provided by the Office of Communications, officially known as Ofcom, under The Communications Act 2003; its specific remit as to children's programming is to ensure that PSB services, when taken together, deliver "a suitable quantity and range of high quality and original programmes for children and young people".¹³ The 2007 Ofcom Report, including its discussion paper and five research annexes, provides a rich seam of both quantitative and qualitative evidence of change in UK children's television in the period 1998 to 2007. This change is most frequently interpreted negatively and can be said to point to probable *future* decline of certain types of children's programming, notably those that deliver public service purposes and characteristics, as I will explore later. While the report, of itself, cannot act as a pragmatic intervention in that predicted decline, I would argue that, within it, Ofcom expresses some frustration at its 'toothless tiger' advisory role for 'Tier 3' PSB genres,¹⁴ in which its own "role in pursuing citizen as opposed to consumer interests" (Schlesinger 2008: 43) is anomalous given the 'consumer' based focus of its originating Act (Harvey 2006; Livingstone et al. 2007). Several critics will point to The Communications Act 2003 - wherein regulation of children's television became largely voluntary on the part of the broadcasters - as the beginning of the problems in the industry (see Smith 2006; Livingstone 2008).¹⁵ It is

¹³ The Communications Act 2003 (s264).

¹⁴ For example, "Ofcom's role is to offer guidance to broadcasters to which they must have regard when preparing their annual statements of policy. If they are proposing to make significant change to the overall character of their service they must consult Ofcom about the proposed change. *However it is ultimately for PSBs themselves to decide what to deliver*" (Ofcom 2007a: 12). (My emphasis)

¹⁵ See also the quality press, for example Bryan Appleyard's report for the *Sunday Times*: "the government, as if possessed of a sadistic desire to kick the industry when it was down, passed the 2003 Communications Act. This set up Ofcom to regulate the PSBs, but it also set

clear from the opening pages that Ofcom hoped that the report would serve as a sound platform on which to build informed argument:

Our aim has been to create a much firmer foundation for debate by establishing for the first time a comprehensive body of evidence about the current delivery and future prospects for public service television broadcasting for children in the UK, focusing on children under 16. (2007a: Foreword)

In this respect the report has been successful and well received, certainly by industry stakeholders and policy lobbyists who use it to support their arguments for government intervention into UK children's television production, though several key respondents, including the producers' union PACT and the consumer lobby group Voice of the Listener and Viewer (VLV), also suggest that the report was somewhat overdue in confirming their long-held cassandraic predictions of doom.¹⁶

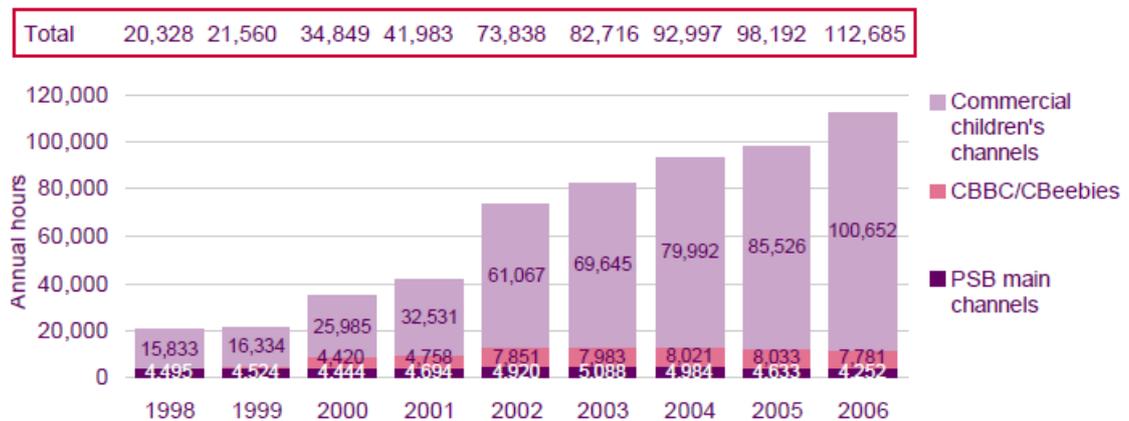
While full discussion of the report cannot be offered here, certain key statistics and analysis are necessary to illustrate how its core findings might impact specifically on the BBC as a producer and broadcaster of children's television in the 21st century. First, as illustrated in Figure 12 below, it should be noted that the available annual hours of children's programming have increased by over 500% in the 1998 to 2006 period (from 20,328 hours to 112,685 hours). Within this total the PSB hours remained fairly constant (at around 4500 hours) until the introduction of the BBC children's digital channels, which added some nearly 8000 hours. The bigger increase however, has been in commercial broadcasting, rising from 15,883

up three regulatory tiers. In a stroke of demonic genius, children's television was put in tier three. This meant largely voluntary regulation. The children's production industry was suddenly massively exposed" (Appleyard 2008).

¹⁶ See, for example, the Dec 2007 response of PACT: "PACT strongly welcomes Ofcom's report and its conclusions that the future provision of UK-originated children's content is at risk. PACT has consistently argued over the last two years that there has been a significant drop in investment in new UK children's programming" (PACT 2007: 2).

Or consider the Dec 2007 response of the VLV: "VLV welcomes the review indeed we had repeatedly urged Ofcom to undertake such a review and congratulates Ofcom on its quality and comprehensive approach. VLV has tracked the decline in the budgets for children's productions and in the diversity of programmes available, and continually drawn the attention of Government and others to the threats facing children's programmes" (VLV 2007).

hours in 1998 to 100,652 hours in 2006. Livingstone wryly notes that, “First, countering any notion of a crisis, one may read the situation as a good news story. Children’s television in the UK has seen an explosion from less than 1000 hours of output in the 1950s-60s to some 20,000 hours in 1998, recently rising sharply to over 110,000 hours in 2006” (Livingstone 2008: 2). Critics challenging the notion of crisis do invariably point to the huge volume of children’s content - available ‘24/7’, 365 days a year - as evidence that children have ‘never had it so good’. An apposite example of this is Stewart Purvis’s comment in *Television* magazine: “Compared with my own childhood viewing of a couple of hours of TV a day on a couple of channels it seems my two sons, aged eight and twelve, enjoy enormous choice on multi-channel television” (Purvis 2007). What seems to be at stake in the discourse then is not the volume of content available to children but the nature of that content.



Source: Ofcom/broadcasters for PSB and BARB for commercial children’s channels (includes +1 channels), all days, all time. Note: As the commercial children’s channels do not provide Ofcom with information on total output falling into the ‘children’s classification, BARB output data based on the children’s genre classification are used to estimate commercial children’s channel total children’s output.

Figure 12: Total annual hours of children’s programming (Ofcom 2007a: 25)

It is only when we examine the nature and substance of this growth in hours that other factors relating to choice and diversity become apparent. For example, although the number of Children’s hours available through public service broadcasting has remained fairly constant, when taken as a *proportion of total hours of children’s programming*, there is a dramatic shift: from 22% in 1998 to 4% in 2006. It is thus argued by critics that the substantive ‘character’ of UK children’s

television has shifted from that of public service provision (generally characterised as a beneficial societal force) to that of a consumer market product (generally characterised as vapid, commercial dross). This was certainly a theme found in my fieldwork at BBC Scotland Children's Department as we shall see in Part Two of this thesis. Veteran children's television presenter, producer and campaigner, Floella Benjamin OBE (who was venerated and lauded at each industry event I attended during the research period), exemplifies this stance in an article for *The Daily Mail*:

I know the extraordinary power that television has to open young minds to the possibilities of the world that surrounds them, which is why it is so important that children's programme making flourishes in Britain – and why it is so worrying that it isn't. British children's programming – drama, art or science – is spiralling into a potentially terminal decline, but it mustn't be allowed to. Good children's television shapes how children see themselves, and how they interpret the wider world. Bad children's television – shows that have been bought in from America because they are cheap – offer none of these benefits. Nor does presenting children with this new multiplicity of specialist channels help. (Benjamin 2007)

I reproduce so much of Benjamin's commentary because in it, I think, are clearly presented some of the main terms of reference that support the discourse of 'crisis' in UK children's television programming. I summarise these terms as follows:

- locally-produced (i.e. UK-produced) children's content is in decline with certain genres being at particular risk;
- American children's content now dominates;
- commercial children's provision now dominates over PSB provision; and
- intervention is required if we wish to change the current situation of children's television.

Furthermore, in Benjamin's article we can see the way in which these terms are promoted as quintessentially a loss *for children* and only consequently a loss for the UK children's media industry and production sector. The main responses of production stakeholders in this discourse (SKTV being a key example) tend to emphasise the societal, cultural and child welfare aspects of the 'crisis' in UK

children's programming far above those of production or industry concerns. It appears, therefore, that they are keen to distance themselves from the potential allegation that the campaign is one motivated purely by vested interest - a mere 'front' to preserve their own jobs. The campaign to 'save' children's television is instead presented as an objective goal for the greater good of society.¹⁷ Strikingly, however, the 'self-certified' status of children's programme-makers as 'passionate experts and specialists' is also foregrounded in this discourse; producers present not a wholly 'objective' stance (in the sense of being neutral) but rather an informed, *expert* stance.¹⁸ This discourse appears to me, an outsider, as a key feature of the way in which children's television producers define themselves and claim their legitimacy in serving the children's audience. Given that no political intervention into the UK children's production sector has occurred as of May 2011 (i.e. nearly four years since the 2007 Ofcom Report), perhaps a more transparent focus on the *economic* concerns of the production industry may constitute a more palatable and therefore more pragmatic approach in the campaign for government intervention. Put simply, it might be easier for campaigners to persuade a government to intervene on behalf of beleaguered creative industry workers rather than on behalf of the 'problematic' child audience. This was an approach hinted at by the little-reported House of Lords Communications Committee enquiry into 'UK-originated content on

¹⁷ See, for example, SKTV's response to Ofcom: "SKTV believe that good content for children is nothing less than a cultural entitlement that is part of the social fabric of British life. As children growing up in the UK, TV gave us shared reference points with kids from other backgrounds and contributed to our values and knowledge" (SKTV 2007: 1).

¹⁸ See, for example, PACT's response to the Ofcom Report: "The children's production sector includes some of the biggest businesses in the independent sector, but the vast majority are small specialist companies. A striking find of PACT's 2007 Independent Production Census was that more than 20% of all companies with turnovers of under £1m specialised in children's production activity. This may be due to the specialist nature of children's and animation production, which by definition entails making programmes for a particular audience" (PACT 2007: 9). Or, SKTV's response: "Save Kids TV is a coalition of parents, producers, artists, educators and others concerned about screen-based media for children in the UK. In formulating our response to Ofcom we have consulted widely with our membership and other key stakeholders to ensure we provide a balanced and pragmatic response to the significant problems that face the children's production industry" (SKTV 2007: 1).

film and television', launched February 2009 with the following stated research objective:

The inquiry will examine the contribution of the UK film and television industries to the British economy and how this might be increased. It will also examine the cultural contribution of the industry and how current arrangements support UK investment and jobs, the effectiveness of the tax credit system for the British film industry and how the regulatory system has impacted on UK content in television. (House of Lords 2009)

This enquiry, with its central concern of industry and economic benefits, may shift the focus of current campaign and debate around children's television to that of the economic benefits of a thriving creative industry sector, but the deepening of the global economic downturn even since 2009 has meant that no change in circumstances has been achieved by it.

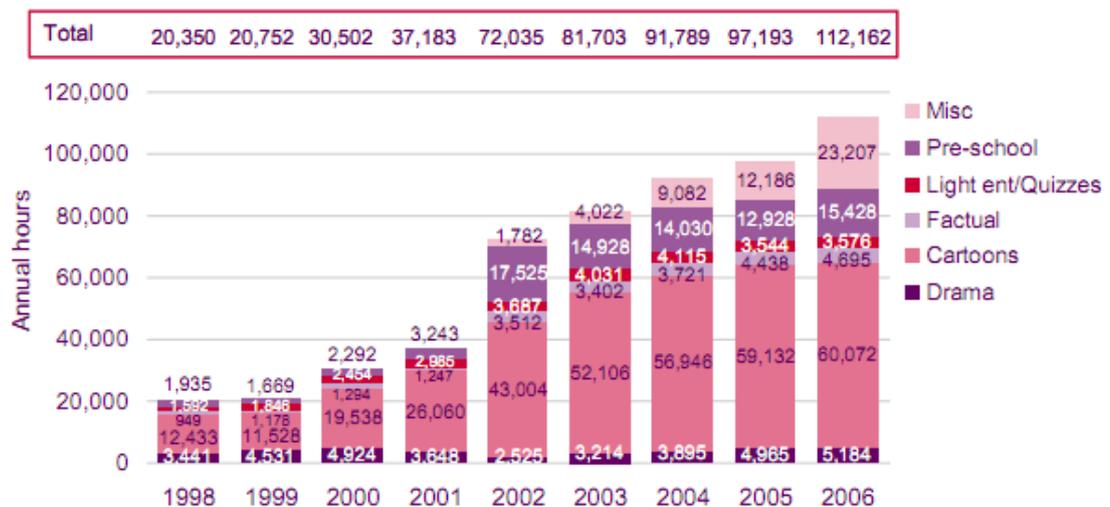
There is however one strand of discourse which contends that industry-pleasing government intervention could be easily and cheaply achieved in the form of tax breaks for UK children's production in the threatened PSB genres, similar to that employed in the UK film industry. This faction also suggests that 'political mileage' can be gained out of 'saving' children's television: but the fact that, now, several parliamentary debates later, and some 42 months on from the 2007 Ofcom Report this 'easy' solution has not transpired, could suggest that the reticence stems from political rather than economic directives, or a reluctance to accept that any crisis exists:

Politically, it would seem, the campaigners must win. Given that Mike Watt of PACT estimates its tax-breaks scheme would only cost the Treasury about £10m a year, it would seem saving our native industry would be cheap and politically virtuous. But the deep question, beyond the money and the politics, is not how it should be done but why. Is it so important we have home-grown children's TV? Is children's TV really a public good? (Appleyard 2008)

Implicit in the terms of crisis therefore is the cultural and social value placed on UK children's content as fulfilling public service purposes, and as being an important

cultural right. I think it is especially interesting that this implicit understanding of the function and value of UK children's PSB presents a blatant challenge to the popular *protectionist* discourses surrounding child welfare (wherein children's television is often implicitly determined as 'bad' for children) while paradoxically employing the same rhetoric: that we are damaging vulnerable and voiceless 'future citizens' and so adults must act, on their behalf, now. These aspects of the value and function of children's television will be assessed throughout Part Two of this thesis.

It is only in going beyond the *volume* of children's television to look at issues of *choice and diversity* that one may see the issues that give rise to the terms of crisis, and the 2007 Ofcom Report made this its main focus. It outlines in some detail the complex factors of *range and quality* in children's programming – determined partly by genre, origin, and proportion of 'first-run' programming as opposed to repeats – and in this respect the following three tables (Figures 13, 14 and 15), taken from the report, provide startling evidence.

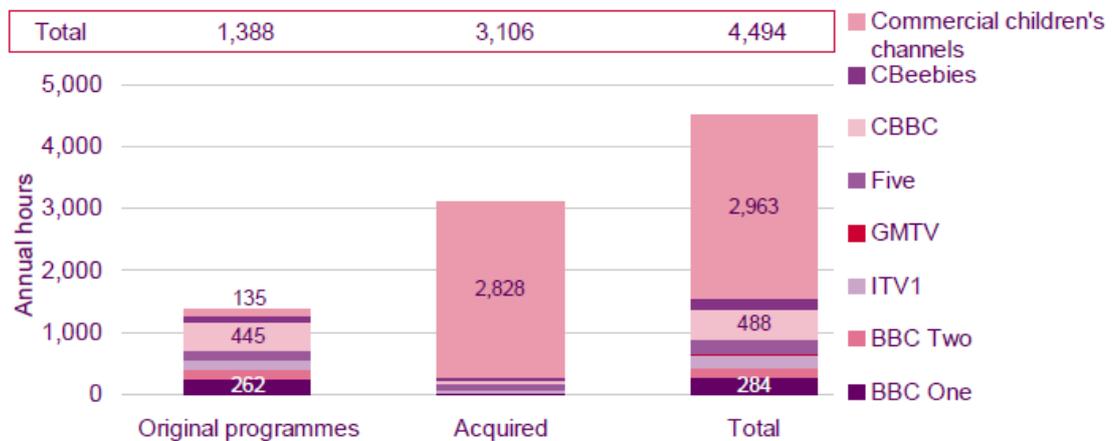


Source: BARB, all days, sum of children's output on PSB channels and commercial children's channels. Treat 2002 data with caution as BARB was in process of setting up the new panel.

Figure 13: Total hours devoted to children's programming 1998-2006 (by genre) (Ofcom 2007a: 35)

What Figure 13 reveals is that the huge growth in annual hours of children's provision is filled mainly by growth of the miscellaneous and cartoon genres. The growth in preschool provision is mainly attributable to the introduction of the digital CBeebies channel in 2002. Although there is some growth or relative stability in the other genres (with the exception of light entertainment which has decreased since its

2004 peak of 4,115 hours), when taken as *a proportion of available hours*, these slow growth genres (drama, factual and light entertainment/quizzes) now account for only a relatively small proportion of children’s programming (Ofcom 2007a: 34-35). It can be argued therefore that these genres are those of at least partial market-failure. BBC Scotland Children’s staff would seem to acknowledge the diminishing role that these genres have in the character of PSB content, partly in lament for what they believe is denied to them through the changing character of content (e.g. there has been no CBBC drama commission since *Shoebox Zoo* in 2003 and 2004), and partly in lament for the pressures exerted on budgets which create tough commissioning decisions. The changing character of PSB content can be fairly said to impact on what the Department can legitimately develop, pitch or produce. That said, a large proportion of the BBC Scotland CBBC output is in the light entertainment/quizzes vein – and often in high volume commissions – and so the Department does not seem to directly reflect this aspect of the terms of crisis.

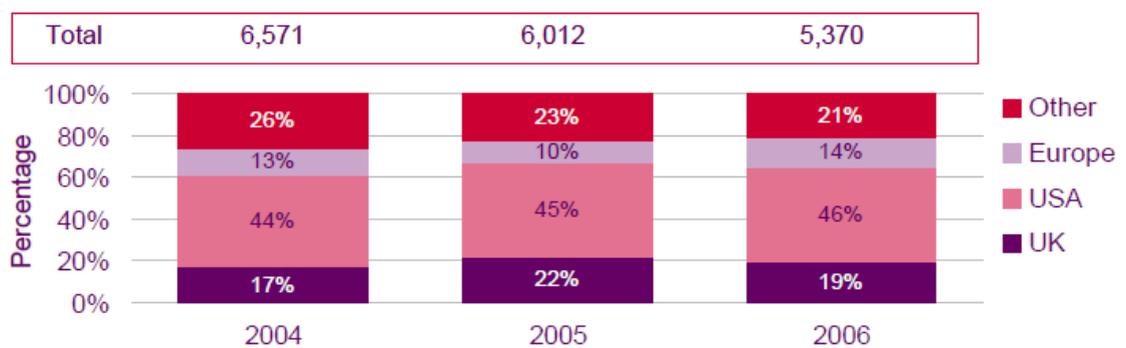


Source: Ofcom/broadcasters

Figure 14: First-run original and acquired hours transmitted in 2006 (Ofcom 2007a: 28)

Figure 14 reveals that, of the ‘first run’ programmes (programmes which are transmitted for the first time in the UK on that channel), only 31% are original programming – that is programming commissioned by that broadcaster. We can also see the centrality of BBC Children’s in commissioning original programmes (and the reliance of the commercial providers on acquisitions), which, at 3106 hours, makes up only a tiny proportion of the 112,162 available broadcast hours seen in Figure 13,

(Ofcom 2007a: 27-28). It is from this table that the much quoted statistic that “new UK-originated programmes make up only 1% of the children’s schedules” (Benjamin 2007), can be extrapolated. This statistic is not made explicit in the 2007 Ofcom Report or accompanying materials. Rather, it is arrived at by calculating the 1388 of first-run original hours (which are necessarily UK-originated but which will also include ‘first-run’ shows in time-shifted and associated or ‘sister-brand’ channels)¹⁹ as a rough proportion of the 112,162 total annual hours of children’s programming seen in Figure 13. As will be seen in Part Two of this thesis, the ‘threat’ and ‘lure’ of US-originated content was a recurring discourse in my fieldwork at BBC Scotland.



Source: Ofcom/broadcasters. Includes first-run and repeat acquired programming.

Figure 15: All broadcasters’ proportion of children’s acquired hours by country of origin (Ofcom 2007a: 28)

Figure 15 reveals that the origin of acquired programming – that is programming purchased in by a broadcaster rather than produced or commissioned for it – has remained fairly stable over the last few years, and that the biggest proportion of acquisitions is of USA origin (Ofcom 2007a: 28-29). The market therefore is now argued to be dominated by US-originated content.

In addition to statistical analyses produced by Ofcom, the report also provided deliberative and qualitative research into children’s television. Taking both

¹⁹ So that, for example, a CBBC programme airing first on BBC 1 and then on the CBBC digital channel will be counted as a ‘first run’ programme twice.

the quantitative and qualitative context of UK children's television programming as a whole, Ofcom raise five issues which I summarise below:

- First, although the majority of parents value children's PSB, some 50% are dissatisfied with PSB provision.
- Second, the economics of producing certain genres of content makes it unattractive for commercial broadcasters: the BBC is now the main commissioner and producer of UK-originated drama and factual content.
- Third, while BBC hours and spend on children's programming have increased this is not reflected in their service agreements and so are not protected.
- Fourth, parents appreciate BBC content but value a plurality of provision.
- Fifth, children's media consumption continues to change rapidly, with older children and especially young teenagers watching less television and using new technologies. (Ofcom 2007a: 1)

Each of these issues was discussed throughout the duration of my fieldwork, and may account for the real sense of engagement with concepts of the audience that I found so striking about departmental personnel.

These issues, taken together, *could* suggest an on-going decline in public service children's programming in the UK. Ofcom acknowledges that they are being interpreted as such, but Ofcom itself stops short of actually deploying the term 'crisis', using instead terms such as, 'decline', 'issues', 'questions' and 'distinct challenges' across the report, the discussion paper and the research annexes. Despite its statutory remit to advise on the provision of *PSB services*, Ofcom stresses, throughout the report, that these challenges are mainly a result of the overall broadcasting framework of the Children's sector. This holistic approach to the UK children's television industry (both production and broadcasting sides) was an attempt to ensure that decisions around children's PSB programming appear pragmatic, achievable and relevant, and furthermore it suggests a parallel drive of the PSB broadcasters and the regulator to ensure that PSB remain truly accountable to its 21st century audience. BBC Scotland is not singled out within the 2007 Ofcom Report, other than that it is "a strong in-house production centre" (Ofcom 2007a: 66) but staff claimed legitimacy for the Department on the grounds that it provided an

important and distinct contribution to UK-originated content as I illustrate in Chapter Four in particular.

It may have been expected that Ofcom would have adopted only a narrow PSB focus (rather than this holistic industry perspective) which could lead to the potential ‘ghettoisation’ of children’s PSB programming in both practical and discursive terms. SKTV warn of such a thing in their response to another government appointed research body, ‘The Buckingham Review’, (DCSF & DCMS 2009) on the impact of the commercial world on children:

The danger is that high quality children’s programmes may become ghettoised in a reduced, boringly worthy sector of publicly funded television, whereas the standards listed above [PSB characteristics] ought to be a powerful stimulus to the market as a whole, encouraging commercial companies to take risks. (SKTV 2009b: 4)

It should be noted, however, that SKTV prefaces this statement by contending that Ofcom lacks any real power to achieve change in PSB programming, let alone in the whole market: “we are concerned that Ofcom lacks the statutory powers to ensure that television production by all UK broadcasters meets these [PSB] standards” (SKTV 2009b: 4). This view is also present in the critical reception of Ofcom’s 2008 Review of Public Service Broadcasting, declared as “defeatist” by BBC Director General, Mark Thompson (quoted in Dowell 2008). Curiously, however, although children’s PSB is often depicted as at the vanguard of change in public service broadcasting more generally,²⁰ one cannot look to adult broadcasting as an accurate guide to the Children’s market. Indeed, Ofcom concludes that “children’s television can be seen as a relatively self-contained market with its own distinct economics and ecology” (Ofcom 2007a: 49), a view echoed by Steemers (2010) at least in as far as it

²⁰ PACT, for example, describes it as, “a canary in the tunnel”. (PACT 2007: 25) and Ofcom itself invited response to the Report on the basis that, “the debate reflects in miniature the issues facing PSB across all genres and responses will therefore be used to inform our thinking about PSB as a whole” (Ofcom 2007b: Section 10).

relates to preschool television. This distinction or separation from the main media production industries may be a factor in the 'specialist' or 'child-expert' stance noted of producers in the children's media industry.

Ofcom cite various issues as impacting on the UK children's television market (2007a: 48) however, as can be seen in Figure 13, these issues do not affect children's provision in a homogeneous manner, rather they affect *certain types* of content more than others, depending on various factors of both production and broadcasting that make up the 'opportunity-cost'. These types of content can be characterised as those which the market does not now 'naturally' provide to any significant degree: those genres which do not generate as much money as others through advertising, distribution and licensing opportunities, or for which high production costs limit the profit margins (though that is not to say that these genres do not make *any* money or cannot be cost-effective). This is not a simple equation however and numerous responses to Ofcom stress that it is wrong to assume that market-led content is automatically antithetical to public service content (and vice versa) and that it is wrong to consider children's content of US origin as 'the enemy' of UK-originated content.

However, the notion of 'genre' within Children's has no universal acceptance or application and it proved difficult for Ofcom to obtain this data from the commercial broadcasters. This means that in some parts of the report (notably the 'Broadcaster output' chapter) Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) genre classifications are used - drama, cartoons, factual, light entertainment/quizzes, preschool and miscellaneous - while in other parts (notably 'The business of children's programming') Ofcom's own broader classifications are used: drama, entertainment, factual, animation and preschool. It should be noted that, in both these genre taxonomy systems, 'preschool' content is not further classified and therefore decline in certain sub-genres *within* preschool programming (e.g. 'live-action' or 'factual', or 'drama') cannot be readily identified. Messenger Davies and Thornham note this in their literature review accompanying the report: "limitation of academic research to just one genre [preschool] inevitably limits discussion on the benefits of 'a range of genres'" (Messenger Davies and Thornham 2007: 1.1) Indeed,

limiting the analysis of ‘preschool’ content to mere volumetric measurements does obscure what is actually ‘going on’ in preschool programming (similar to the way in which a focus on the single volumetric sector of ‘Children’s’ hides the actual changes in balance of provision). Forced to treat preschool as a single homogeneous genre, however, Ofcom concludes that preschool is in many senses thriving within UK provision:

Preschool programming remains commercially attractive over a longer period: producers who are rights owners are able to secure an initial broadcast and funding up-front, which then supports secondary revenues, while broadcasters can sell advertising aimed at parents. (Ofcom 2007a: 46)

Steemers’s extensive research into preschool television production in the period immediately following the Ofcom Report (2007 to 2010) would also seem to suggest that preschool television is a thriving industry, with the BBC being courted as a co-producer by international companies as *a result* of changing global economics. (Steemers 2010: 45).

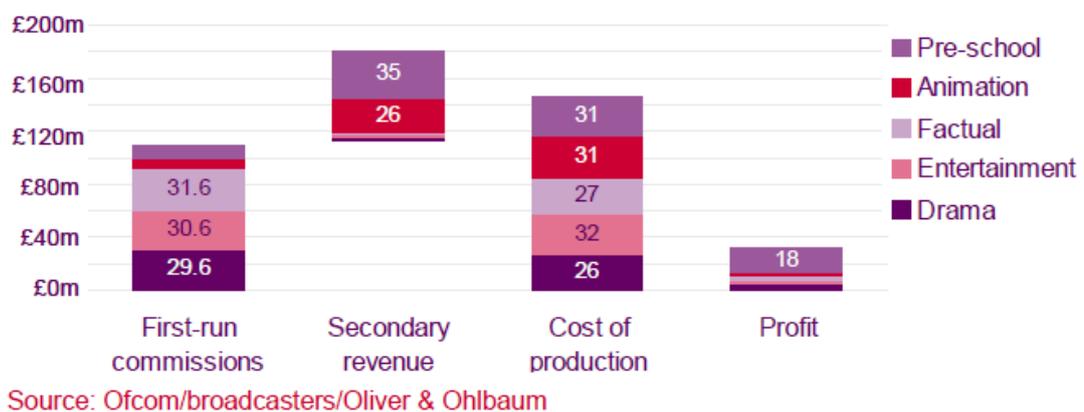


Figure 16: UK producer revenues/costs of original programme by genre, 2006 (£m) (Ofcom 2007a: 50)

Figure 16 above, drawn from the Ofcom research into the business structure of children’s programming (Ofcom 2007a: 50) provides the evidence of the apparently thriving nature of preschool production but obscures the more complex factors at work in preschool production funding, made explicit in their commentary:

Preschool programming makes a better commercial return (58%) for producers than any other genre, due to secondary revenues available. [. . .] However the

secondary revenue that makes animation and preschool programming viable is dependent on broadcasters' support, if not their investment. It is widely believed in the industry that commission funding and first-showing by a domestic free-to-air broadcaster remain crucial to precipitating secondary revenue. (Ofcom 2007a: 49-50)

The concerns over the advantage that may be taken of *certain types* of preschool content are then further highlighted in the accompanying discussion paper:

In the future, range within preschool programming [. . .] may become a concern if more funding is required from outside the broadcaster and may lead to reliance on sub-genres with greater potential for commercial exploitation or global sales such as animation. There may be less live-action, presenter-led programming commissioned as a result. (Ofcom 2007b: 45)

Interestingly, it is again possible to distinguish the BBC Scotland position from this industry generality as all of its preschool commissions have been “live-action” and “presenter-led”.

Accordingly, in both preschool and content for school-age children, the Ofcom statistics require careful consideration in order to extrapolate which genres are most directly affected by change. The typical funding models shown by Ofcom for drama and factual, for example, whereby the commission costs make up at least 85% of the budget and there is little to be made in international sales, might suggest that these genres will be hardest hit in the commercial schedules (thus supporting the notion of crisis in those genres at least). However other statistics (Ofcom 2007a: 62) shows an increased spend on factual programming. Whether as a consequence of the 2007 Ofcom Report or not, two of the main commercial children's channels (Nickelodeon and Playhouse Disney) did appear to me to have increased commissioning of UK-originated content in the 2007 to 2011 period, as suggested by Brown (2009) and based on my own viewing and on the academic consultation I provided for the UK relaunch of Playhouse Disney preschool channel in spring of 2011. Michael Carrington's 2010 move to Turner Broadcasting also carries with it the promise of increased UK-originated programming (Rushton 2010). Indeed, for the

commercial channels to commission more UK-originated content may be a better outcome for independent producers than that which might be achieved by increased BBC budgets or open commissioning. Crisis notwithstanding, there is also the argument that independent Children's producers, leaving their 'save kids' TV rhetoric aside, are simply not interested in those genres that do not generate returns over and above commissioning costs. It was suggested to me in interview that many of the current BBC commissioning briefs are too small in scope to attract independent producers because "that isn't going to provide them with a pension" (Producer, Interview, June 2009). Certainly the two massive, multipound-investment texts produced in the UK during my research period – *Waybuloo* and *In the Night Garden* - were both successful independent productions reliant on global sales and merchandising. A visit to the *Waybuloo* studios in May 2010 confirmed the scale and ambition of the project which the producer claimed presented opportunities usually found only on a film set and costing far more than ordinary television production accordingly. It would seem, therefore, that there is no single interpretation of the statistics that could fully support the notion of crisis in children's television programming as a whole. Rather, that the current decline in UK-originated content (excluding preschool) is the most proportionate use of the term.

Further implications for BBC Children's

Although the BBC is funded by the licence fee and is without any form of advertising on its channels and so is *directly* affected only by the first of the issues that Ofcom identify as constituting the financial roots of the current situation – the fragmentation of the audience across more channels and platforms (2007a: 48) - BBC Children's is in no way insulated from the market trends or concerns of the industry as a whole. It is affected by the market in many and complex ways. The pressure of fragmentation is twofold, with the BBC itself pursuing other platforms and modes of delivering content, as well as perceiving increased competition for 'eyeballs' from outside. It was suggested at more than one industry event though, that, although the industry had become "web-obsessed" for a while, the focus for the future was returning to television and there was a more relaxed view that "television is here to stay" (Field journal, Showcomotion, July 2008). This was iterated further at the

SKTV roundtable event I attended in March 2010, suggesting that the position of television is considered to be much more consolidated and still the sovereign leisure activity for children now and in the immediately foreseeable future.

Looking beyond other delivery platforms, therefore, to compare 'like with like', it would seem that the BBC is most scared of the developments in children's television broadcasting. Perhaps the factors most relevant from the Ofcom analysis are, that, in cable or satellite homes (which account for 65% of households with children) BBC Children's now compete for audience against over 20 dedicated children's commercial channels, only a tiny handful of which are UK-owned or based (the most significant being CITV). Eighteen of those channels are owned by three USA media organisations – Turner Broadcasting, Viacom and Disney Corporations – each of which has, respectively, substantial vertical integration of assets (Ofcom 2007a: 83). Another factor is that ITV, the BBC's longstanding historical competitor in children's programming, has withdrawn completely from commissioning new children's content (though it continues to broadcast existing UK content on its CITV digital children's channel) and therefore the UK has lost the main alternative commissioner and provider of children's new public service content outside of the BBC. This is particularly important given that, together, the PSB channels constitute the main commissioner of UK-originated content, as previously seen at Figure 14.

These market forces create a curious position for the BBC; on the one hand their content is under extreme competitive pressure for an audience and yet, on the other, they have no competitor in commissioning, producing or broadcasting *certain types* of content, especially that which is UK-originated. There are two main concerns arising from this position, the first relating to plurality of provision and the second relating to the level of satisfaction with the content which the BBC does provide. In respect of plurality, Ofcom did previously seem to suggest, albeit in relation to PSB broadcasting as a whole, that it could be possible for *one* PSB institution (i.e. the BBC) to provide the level of diversity required for satisfactory audience representation, *but that current BBC infrastructure and commissioning processes could not support this*.

The PSB Review (2004-5) postulated some potential advantages of the BBC becoming the only PSB provider of any real scale. These included eliminating unnecessary duplication in PSB programming, and maintaining competition for quality, with the BBC setting standards and conditioning audience expectations and thus forcing the rest of the industry to follow. The PSB Review (2004-5) suggested that plurality in production – through a diverse production sector – could be achieved even if the BBC was to become the sole PSB provider, although this would rely on the BBC having a transparently meritocratic commissioning system. (Ofcom 2007a: 16)

I would argue that, in relation to children's content, once freed from a terrestrial broadcasting advantage, it will be virtually impossible for the BBC to "force the rest of the industry to follow" in any matter relating to children's content and that it cannot be assumed that the BBC will continue to be a brand leader, especially given that some of its current success is as a virtually sole provider in the terrestrial sphere. But there would now seem to be a wholesale move away from the concept of the BBC as a sole PSB provider anyway, certainly as regards children's PSB provision, which, Ofcom argues, has significant distinguishing features from adult PSB provision. Industry discourse would now seem to favour a move instead to the concept of a children's 'public service publisher' (PSP) as well as the alternative provision of children's PSB on a new online repository or on demand service (see e.g. SKTV 2009a). Indeed, the BBC itself is vehement in its protestations against a PSB monopoly as seen in the comments of their high-profile personnel in a number of public and industry fora:

This isn't just about the BBC. It's about plurality of supply and plurality of commissioning. The BBC doesn't want to become anything like a monopoly. It is not good for us. Competition keeps us sharp. (Jana Bennet, Director of BBC Vision, Showcomotion, 2007) (Bennet 2007)

I'm terrified of a situation of no competition. ITV's cutbacks were inevitable in the on-demand world – it is the speed that has caught us all by surprise. I'm a reluctant advocate of a kids' PSP because, while the BBC needs competition,

I'm not sure legislation is the answer. Ideally our commercial friends should see the value in building audiences for the future. (Michael Carrington, CBeebies commissioner, quoted in Thomas 2007)

The BBC is already a monopoly supplier across news, drama and factual for children. [...] A monopoly is not where the BBC wants to be. We will suffer from the loss of competition. (Richard Deverell, BBC Children's Controller, quoted in Elliott 2007)

Despite such avowed endorsement of plurality in provision, the BBC Trust's review of children's services, published in February 2009, would seem to suggest that, if anything, BBC provision *strengthened* its position in the 2007 to 2009 period (i.e. when this lack of plurality was at its most noticeable), in terms of both audience figures and quality indicators. The potential crisis that monopoly of broadcasting and monopsony of commissioning would create in programme quality does not seem to have transpired for BBC Children's. There is however perhaps a question of how much faith can be put in the BBC Trust. One academic researcher points to the debacle over BBC Jam, the BBC online provision of educational resources for children aged twelve to sixteen, suspended in March 2007, as evidence that the BBC Trust fell at its 'first hurdle' and is merely a powerless 'sop' to the juggernaut of commercially led media change (Harvey 2009).

Although these concerns around plurality appear to be the more dominant in discourse, concerns as to BBC performance follow naturally on. Now that PSB for children aged six to twelve is provided almost exclusively by the CBBC brand, the BBC comes under greater scrutiny, and would seem to be falling short in certain key aspects of representation and diversity (according to research with parents of that audience):

There is a large gap between parents' perception of the level of importance of, and their satisfaction with delivery of children's programming that 'shows a range of cultures and opinions from around the UK'. 78% of parents gave this aspect a high importance rating, whilst only 43% were satisfied with delivery by the public service broadcasters taken as a whole. (Ofcom 2007a: 106)

The main evidence base for Ofcom's assessment of the BBC's children's provision is the views of children and parents. These views were gained using proxy measures of the PSB purposes and characteristics. It should be noted that neither 'quality' nor 'high quality' is anywhere defined in the Communications Act 2003 despite the fact that the statutory charge to Ofcom is to ensure "a suitable quantity and range of high quality and original programmes for children and young people".²¹

Despite the headlining of parental dissatisfaction with one specific aspect of the BBC's provision, and in consideration of the more recent findings of the BBC Trust service review (2009a), it is hard to say that the *general* terms of industry crisis fit the situation of BBC Children's. Instead those terms must be redrawn specific to the BBC if they are to then have any real relevance to individual production departments within the BBC Children's umbrella. Such redrawing of the terms might consider the following questions. Has BBC Children's budget been cut? Yes, arguably (see next page), but only in line with other BBC departments: Children's is not a special case. Has the BBC Children's balance of genres changed? Not really, though there are more repeats and fewer new titles given the budget cuts and the increased programming time available. Has BBC Children's reduced its UK-originated programming either in commissioning or broadcasting? Emphatically no for broadcasting: commissioning has reduced generally under the 'fewer, bigger, better' strategy but what is commissioned is still UK-made. It appears to me, therefore, that the BBC Children's position might be more or less the same even without the supposed crisis in children's television as a whole; that is, whereas the concept of crisis is specific to the Children's sector when considering the industry as a whole, it is not specific to BBC Children's when considering the BBC as a whole. In fact, it could be that BBC Children's, as a flagship genre within the BBC and as a powerful and highly visible expression of a caring civil society, is actually faring

²¹ The Communications Act 2003 (s264).

better than some other genres and departments within the BBC. It may also be that the discourses of plurality and diversity that emerge as concomitant with crisis afford BBC Scotland Children's Department greater legitimacy as a valuable alternative UK voice.

Richard Deverell, Controller of BBC Children's throughout the bulk of my research period, made the following statement suggesting that the BBC Children's situation is less of a 'crisis' and more of a natural change in broadcasting:

The BBC is not spending less. We're actually spending more this year than last. Hypothetically, if ITV were still spending and Ofcom had not banned the advertisement of junk food the sector would still be facing huge challenges. It's a revolutionary and challenging period. As a genre, Children's is in the vanguard of change because this is the Google generation. (Quoted in Elliott 2007)

I put this quote to an executive of BBC Scotland Children's Department and it was met with derision. It was suggested that Deverell "had to say that" but that in private he was extremely unhappy about budget cuts (Field journal, February 2008). It leaves a question mark over the issue of natural change. Of course those on the sharp end of that natural change – one of the unlucky culled in the reduced 'headcount' quoted in the BBC Trust service review (2009); London staff forced to move to Salford in order to keep their job; small Indie producers dependent on crumbs from the BBC's now parsimonious table – might not see it that way anyway.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn together various aspects of the context in which the BBC Scotland Children's Department operates. It is the last chapter of Part One of this thesis which maps the overall field of my research. The chapter was divided into two sections, dealing, respectively, with the local and industry contexts in which BBC Scotland Children's Department is situated. The first dealt with the immediate environment of BBC Scotland and the second with the UK children's television industry picture in the light of the 2007 Ofcom Report. It is acknowledged that while this division was helpful in marshalling the diverse range of factors that I believe constitute the most important 'settings' of the Department's production

context, it is a somewhat artificial one that perhaps disguises the threads that run across local and industry contexts and the due weight that should be given to individual factors.

In Section 1, the 'local' context, several factors were presented as being of most relevance to the context of production in the Department, which I shall now summarise. The first section outlined the following factors of being of key significance:

- BBC Scotland Children's Department produces only network content, setting it apart from all other BBC Scotland departments and creating particular issues for the commissioning and funding of content and the Department's relationship to the BBC Children's Department as a whole, whereby it acts as an alternative voice to the main metropolitan centre. Content is subsumed by the umbrella BBC Children's brands, CBeebies and CBBC, and is broadcast in both the terrestrial and digital platforms.
- The Department's location was considered to play a significant role in the general ethos and character of the Department and its daily working conditions, but furthermore it suggested something of the 'openness, transparency and trust' that the BBC is keen to claim as its own institutional identity and which has a particular resonance in *children's* media.
- The Department, as a 'centre of excellence', is somewhat insulated from some of the broader issues impacting on Scottish broadcasting but nonetheless is inflected with the mood of uncertainty attendant on the Scottish Government's Progress Report (2010) on the SBC, in which it is suggested that a fully independent Scotland would necessitate a restructuring of BBC assets. It is argued that such restructuring would be unlikely to benefit the Children's Department at BBC Scotland as a single department. Of more significance and immediacy in the local context is the unknown impact of the relocation of the main metropolitan Children's Department to Salford Quays in 2011.

Section 2 of this chapter, 'industry contexts', used the 2007 Ofcom Report as its main evidence base, picking up on the way that the report has been used, mainly

by industry stakeholders, to signal crisis in UK children's television production. This section interrogated the terms of this 'crisis' and mapped their significance (or not) for BBC children's television production and the BBC Scotland Children's Department. The following issues were highlighted in this section:

- The 2007 Ofcom Report has been interpreted as spelling out crisis in indigenous UK children's television production. Careful analysis must be given to the statistics as they do not necessarily suggest that there is a crisis in BBC Children's production, which remains committed to indigenous UK production, including co-production with UK independents. What *might* be read into the impact on BBC Children's is that BBC content is now less character-defining of UK children's television as a whole and that the BBC is not positioned to exert influence in the digital marketplace (despite leading the terrestrial sphere). Of the main economic issues suggested to be responsible for the current 'crisis', only the increased fragmentation of platforms is of *direct* impact on BBC Children's.
- Likewise BBC Scotland, under the umbrella of BBC Children's, remains, at this stage at least, relatively protected. Where the impact does fall however is in the general perception of the BBC's need to compete in an extremely crowded marketplace of children's digital channels: the impact of this is perhaps felt in the kinds of content and genres that are commissioned at BBC Scotland (and throughout BBC Children's as a whole). I would argue that the issue of plurality of production of PSB content actually strengthens the position of BBC Scotland Children's Department as they can offer or claim plurality of voice within BBC provision.

In conclusion therefore, the contexts bearing on the production of children's television at BBC Scotland's Children Department suggest that the temporal, geographical, political and social settings of the Department impact greatly on the ethos and output of the Department but in a way not restricted to direct causal links. It is the matrix and interplay of these contextual factors that makes the Department an important area of study in the 21st century, shedding light not only on the Department as a specific case study, but on the wider fields of PSB, the children's

television industry and the BBC as an institution. This first part of my thesis, therefore, has provided an introduction to my object of study, has mapped the relevant literature and outlined the relevant methodological and research approaches to that study, and contextualised the settings that bear upon BBC Scotland's production of children's PSB in the 21st century.

I shall now proceed to Part Two of this thesis which contains the substantive original research.

Chapter Four: Knowing and Constructing the Audience

Adults can be patronizing about children but children are totally clued up about what is going on in the world. But they are also children and they love to escape into a fantasy world. You can't have an adult telling kids what they want. Adults don't always know what is perceived by kids. Knowing the audience means getting out there and meeting the audience. It is important to do that to shape our programmes. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

This chapter, the first of two drawn from my fieldwork research, considers the construction of the imagined audience in the discourse and working practices of staff at BBC Scotland Children's Department. The rationale for this chapter is that the issue of 'knowing the audience' emerged as a key discourse of the Department, articulated not only in interview but in myriad working practices: questions of how to address, how to frame, how to serve, how to recruit and how to understand, engage and inspire the children's audience were raised and grappled with on an on-going daily basis at meetings and in decision-making. At its simplest, this issue of audience might be observed in a producer asking, "Will our audience like that?" when looking at a prototype design (Field journal, September 2009) but could also be discerned in the full range of working practices. For example, the use of a low camera-position, used for much preschool filming, when questioned, was justified as an attempt to replicate a toddler's visual perspective. "Why do you replicate a toddler's perspective?" I asked; "Because that's how our audience see their world" came the answer (CBeebies Producer, Field journal, May 2009). While such subjective, point-of-view (POV) replication may seem an obvious visual strategy, it is when looking at preschool content from another context or era that one realises that even obvious or seemingly common-sense strategies are convention only: this chapter unpicks some of the assumptions and conventions that underlie production practice to consider how the audience is constructed by producers.

So striking is the Department's focus on issues of audience that it could be treated as a stand-alone topic. However, in reviewing my fieldwork journals and my

interview materials, it became apparent to me that questions of audience were fully entwined with another key discourse of children's television: that of the importance of UK-originated content. So inextricable are the two discourses that one seems to predicate the other. This is surely because, in a BBC Children's production context, the imagined audience is simultaneously a UK and a public service audience. One does not, after all, find the same intrinsic value expected of locally-produced content in a US – and therefore predominantly commercial – context (as illustrated in Dale Kunkel's 1993 essay on 'Policy and the Future of [US] Children's Television'). That serving the UK audience is achieved best through UK-originated content would seem to be a taken-for-granted assumption of BBC Children's production staff, and this is also enshrined in the current regulation of UK PSB, as shown in Chapter Three. Great validity is therefore claimed by UK producers – especially PSB producers – in their ability to represent and serve the UK children's audience through UK content, as I discuss throughout this chapter. The focus on a UK audience made by BBC producers does not preclude the sale of BBC children's products to other territories however, nor prevent the co-production of content with other non-UK broadcasters. Indeed, although independent UK producers reliant on investment and sales from outside the UK market might question the extent to which content should reflect its UK-origins, there appears to be an industry-wide acceptance of the essential validity of UK-originated content as good for UK children, and widespread conflation of the terms 'PSB' and 'UK-originated' or 'UK-produced' content.

Key concepts and questions

The material analysed here is taken mostly from interview and participant observation of BBC Scotland Children's Department staff (in which I include those working on a freelance contractual basis), but it also includes material from independent producers based in Scotland who were producing content for the BBC, and from children's television production personnel based in other parts of the UK. My interviews are drawn from a diverse range of production roles – script-writer, researcher, runner, developer, director, editor, producer (at all designated BBC levels whether assistant-producer, producer, series producer or executive producer)

– but all are referred to throughout as producer, as explained in my methods chapter, with the exception of some executive roles wherein attribution is necessary for meaningful understanding of the material.

In relation to the construction of the audience, in interview I explored two key concepts that arose consistently in my participant observation, sometimes taking further ideas that had already been expressed by producers and sometimes interrogating aspects that had *not* previously been articulated aloud. The first of the concepts centred on the idea of “Who is your audience?” and the second on the idea of “What is your relationship to the audience?”. These concepts did not necessarily translate as bald, direct questions however and so were framed in various ways. So in saying, “Tell me about your audience”, or, “Who is this show aimed at?” or, “What do you think about your audience?” or, “Why might your audience like this?” interviewees were asked – by way of description and definition - about their understanding of the specificity of child audiences. The second concept – that of the producer’s relationship to that audience - could be framed around a specific text or production role (“How do you cast participants for *Raven*?”) but may also be framed as relevant to institution or brand (“What is distinctive about CBeebies content from an audience perspective?”).

Even when the question was more esoteric or conceptual in framing (“What is CBBC’s relationship to its audience?”), interviewees generally brought concrete examples to bear in their responses (i.e. examples drawn from their personal experience or role in production). The questions often became a useful way to explore how personal decision-making related to the concept of audience and of public service responsibility to that audience. In this respect, the general tenor of my interview responses is different to that of Buckingham et al. (1999), who found that respondents used the particularity of their individual experience to generalise outwards (147-148): my research respondents tended to use the general in order to reflect inwards. In asking these questions, and indeed in presenting and evaluating the responses in a qualitative sense, I have adopted an approach consistent with that of Born (2004) and Burns (1977) in that it is not my intention to ‘test’ the validity or accuracy of the producers’ beliefs but to treat them as valid expressions of

perception. What I intend to do is to identify the constructions made of the audience and their implications for the nature and form of PSB produced by the Department.

In setting the parameters of the aim and scope of both my fieldwork chapters, I have found useful the overview of production studies provided by John Corner in his *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (1999: 70-79). Corner notes the importance of the production phase thus: “It is a moment in a process but it is *the* moment of formation and this gives it a primacy” (70), and advocates a mixed methods approach to production research, similar to that adopted here. However, Corner considers participant observation as a means of gathering *primary* evidence, but interview as a means of gathering *secondary* evidence:

The extensive use of interviews to gain a level of secondary data and the methods of observational fieldwork (including where appropriate participant observation) to gain primary material are key procedures here, raising their own problems of implementation and of essential validity. (70)

I have covered the questions of implementation and validity in my methodology chapter (Chapter Two) but I wish to reiterate here, that, in this research, I am treating my interviews with production personnel as *primary* evidence of how producers think about their audience – in as much as verbal communications can ever be considered primary evidence of interior thought. This accords with my desire to explore the ideas producers had about the children’s audience, whether expressed in an individual or corporate sense.

Where most appropriate in Part Two of this thesis, I have divided my research findings according to the two BBC Children’s brands, CBeebies and CBBC. Producing for these brands is, by and large, clearly delineated in the BBC Scotland Children’s Department and so it makes sense for this chapter to present producers’ ideas about their audience and their relationship to that audience, relative to brand. The remainder of this chapter is divided in two roughly equal parts therefore between CBeebies and CBBC. At the end of the chapter I present a brief conclusion which draws together the themes that exist across both brands.

CBeebies

Cursory analysis of the CBeebies brand immediately suggests an overarching corporate construction of the audience. One only needs to hear the CBeebies marketing hook of “learning through play in a consistently safe environment” (BBC 2011) to understand that educational and entertainment aspects are key to the brand and that the audience is conceptualised as being one for whom these aspects are blurred. That the line between education and entertainment is so easily blurred may suggest a construction of the audience as naïve or impressionable and this supports a further element of the corporate construction – that this audience is vulnerable and must (therefore) be kept “safe”. Bearing in mind this corporate construction, I wish to examine its ineffable or hidden aspects as assumed by producers of CBeebies texts.

For most CBeebies production staff in the Department, the first response to my request to, “Tell me about the CBeebies audience”, was met with a construction very similar to that of the corporate brand:

LW: Tell me about the CBeebies audience...

P [Producer]: They are the future. They are enthusiastic. They want to watch and learn. They are longing for good quality content and revel in it. Older audiences are more cynical and think, ‘I can’t be bothered’ or, ‘I don’t want to watch that’. The CBeebies audience just lap it up and enjoy. That is a huge privilege because we have the best audience ever. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

What I find interesting here is that as well as the institutional construction of an audience learning through play (“They want to watch and learn/[they] revel in it/[they] lap it up and enjoy”) there is also the construction of the audience as “the future” and as not only different, but “the best” audiences for reasons of their enthusiasm and willing engagement. I wish to explore these two concepts further.

Children as the future

The construction of children as “the future” is a salient feature in many discourses of childhood, famously iterated in the trite lyrics of Whitney Houston’s 1985 anthem, ‘Greatest Love of All’.²² Here the construction is given a nuanced inflection as the producer suggests the preschool audience to be “the future” in two distinct senses: the future of society and also the future of the *television audience itself*.

The first sense – children as the future of society – fits well with the construction of audience as public or citizens because both constructions look to the child as both the inheritor and progenitor of a civilised society; it is the “child as citizen” construction that Buckingham et al. identified as a prevalent discourse (1999:149). Edelman (2004) argues that such construction is so deeply ingrained in the collective unconscious of society as to be effectively beyond challenge, yet he questions the political utilization of the child as “the emblem of futurity’s unquestioned value” (4) and “the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (3). Taken along with Lauren Berlant’s “theory of infantile citizenship” (1997), however, in which “the [infant] citizen form figures a space of possibility that transcends the fractures and hierarchies of national life” (27), the construction and inculcation of children as active citizens and a future public can be seen as the ultimate goal within the ideological ambit of a self-perpetuating society: it is a logical aspiration for children’s PSB and especially for a preschool brand that constructs its audience as impressionable.

²² I believe the children are our future
 Teach them well and let them lead the way
 Show them all the beauty they possess inside
 Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
 Let the children’s laughter remind us how we used to be
 Words and Music by Michael Masser and Linda Creed. Golden Torch Music Corp. (ASCAP)
 Gold Horizon Music Corp. (BMI 1985)

The second sense – that of children as the future of the television audience – combines both the audience as public model with the audience as consumer model, because it rests on ideas of brand loyalty and discerning consumer choice. In this way too, the sense of children as the future of the television audience squares the difficulty of constructing children as either consumers or public, by reinforcing PSB’s role in teaching children how to be discerning or how to appreciate quality programming. This was emphasised at a BBC in-house presentation whereby the Children’s Department outlined their work to the rest of the BBC Scotland staff at PQ. Simon Parsons’s opening statement, outlining the importance of children’s PSB, was that “We are guaranteeing audiences for the future”. This was then followed by a clear inference that the decline in what might be termed the ‘post-Children’s’ audience (and especially the 18 to 25 demographic sought after by BBC Three) was neither the fault nor problem of Children’s production: “And then we hand them over to you and it’s up to you to keep them and look after them” (Field journal, February 2009). I find the way that BBC brand loyalty was thus used to align different and perhaps antithetical constructions of the audience thought-provoking. Guaranteeing audiences (and ratings) for the future would give the BBC an edge over commercial competition – no other broadcaster offers content for all stages of the life course under a single corporate brand - but it is framed as a legitimate aspiration of the public service broadcaster because of the enduring understanding of PSB as beneficial in its educative function:

Teaching ‘how to listen’, ‘how to appreciate’, is of paramount importance. This, in fact is the keynote of [children’s PSB]. It is to send the children to read, listen or see for themselves and their ever-increasing pleasures and happiness. (Corbett Smith, 1924, quoted in Oswell 2002: 33)

In this way too, educational and entertainment imperatives can be aligned together because teaching children “how to appreciate” and how to be discerning in their entertainment consumption and choices is also a ‘public service’.

Best of audiences: enthusiastic participation

The notion of the CBeebies audience as not only better but “the best” of audiences is also interesting. In continuing to analyse producer interviews in the preschool

sector, one is able to pick out a thread of ideas as to why the CBeebies preschool audience may be perceived as “the best audience”:

The audience response is not just good but ‘WOW!’ off the scale. [They are] completely enraptured and they are doing the actions. They are taking everything in and seeing and believing. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

There is the inference that this audience has the ability to be fully immersed and engaged in the text and that their enthusiastic responses are without inhibition (“enraptured/doing the actions”). This perception of the audience as especially participative and enthusiastic would seem to be key in claiming the CBeebies audience as the best of audiences. The producer supported the statement by reference to parental experience of a child viewing *Waybuloo*, but was quick to back up such anecdotal evidence with observation of the preschool audience in another spectatorship context: preschool television-based theatre shows *Milkshake on Tour*, *CBeebies on Tour*, *LazyTown Live!*; and *Playhouse Disney: Live!*. The systematic attendance of these preschool theatre shows had previously been suggested to offer multiple benefits for CBeebies staff in that it offered the opportunity to “watch the audience” as well as to “see what the competition is doing” (CBeebies Producer, Field journal, June 2009). Staff who attended the shows would report back their experiences to colleagues. Discussion frequently centred on the level of participation or interactivity offered by the show and on the socio-economic class of the families observed to be attending.

The notion of participation or interactivity can be linked to the construction of the audience as an especially receptive one, able to be fully immersed within the text (Palmer 1986). This immersive and joyful quality, which I might associate with the Romantic construction of the ‘laughing child’, is believed to inhere in the preschool audience itself rather than in the medium or platform of delivery, and may therefore suggest a ‘timeless’ aspect of this particular construction of childhood:

LW: Has the preschool audience changed over the last 20 years?

P: I think kids are kids but they have so many more choices and the means of consumption has changed.

LW: Is TV a special medium?

P: I agree to a certain extent but it is my responsibility to get across other platforms [online gaming and interactive content had been discussed].

LW: But why *television* as public service then?

P: I think the BBC is so iconic in its association with PSB. The public know it is in ALL our values. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

This exchange speaks to both my questions of defining the audience and of the producer's relationship to the audience. Here there is the inference that members of the CBeebies audience do not themselves discriminate between platforms; to a joyful and curious audience all platforms are equally novel, and to an enthusiastic audience all platforms are captivating. But with that participation comes adult responsibility for facilitating such engagement in the face of commercial competition ("it is my responsibility to get across other platforms") but without exploiting the child's propensity for such immersion or engagement – i.e. we return back to the CBeebies brand identity that such engagement takes place in "a consistently safe environment" (BBC 2011).

The Vulnerable Audience

The construction of the audience as vulnerable or impressionable ("taking everything in and seeing and believing") is a traditional one in discourses around children's television, especially so in respect of the preschool audience who are deemed vulnerable with regard to commercial exploitation; potentially imitative behaviours; and, though a more nebulous category, various ideological or moral 'messages' (e.g. messages around race, gender, sex, faith or politics). Much of the US research into children's television is around content analyses of children's texts in appraisal of their ideological content (e.g. those stored at the Annenberg Public Policy Centre, University of Pennsylvania) but UK research has not favoured this approach, possibly revealing the element of trust that is present in children's public service programming in the UK. In view of this trust and of the perceived 'seeing is believing' quality of the CBeebies audience, several of my interviewees naturally led on to some of the practical demands of preschool programme-making when discussing their relationship to the audience; editorial staff, in particular, pointed out

the changes and modifications that had to be made to texts so as to fulfil the duty of care incumbent on producers to make sure that potentially negative imitative behaviours are avoided. This ‘duty of care’ is mandatory for children’s staff who must each attend a “Working with children” child protection course as part of their BBC contractual obligation. One producer offered me a litany of changes that had been made in order to protect the child audience. An interesting example was given of an episode of *Balamory* “pulled” because it had since espoused “dodgy” adult internet links (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009). The producer was horrified at the danger this presented to children “and not even a click away: they came straight up”, and would not accept the mitigation that the situation could not have been foreseen at the time of show’s original production. The producer felt that it was exactly *because* some things cannot be foreseen that a “huge part” of their particular role was checking and rechecking content. Even though this particular example was exceptional – and a “no brainer” that it should never be shown again according to the producer – the producer implied that *all* producers must always be aware of how paedophiles could manipulate content, particularly where TV promoted internet links (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009).

Following Buckingham et al. (1999), it might be suggested that the internet has again revived a protectionist discourse that has ebbed and flowed in children’s television production since the 1950s:

Infringements of regulated boundaries have increased in the 1990s; but they have not eliminated the vulnerable child from the everyday working imagination of producers [. . .] they are just as aware as their counterparts in the 1950s of the necessarily protectionist element in children’s television [. . .] Thus strong traces of earlier discourses remain. But in contemporary discourse they take on a new and more intense meaning. (Buckingham et al. 1999: 153)

The more “intense meaning” suggested by Buckingham et al. was provoked by the ‘threat’ of commercialism but I would argue that this is now further amplified by the ‘threat’ of the internet. Interesting, too, is that elements of protectionism are seen as ‘*obviously* necessary’ by producers then and now (“necessarily protectionist

elements”) – this can be seen as the ‘common sense’ or “no-brainer” approach iterated by the CBeebies producer.

Another example given by a CBeebies producer wherein the vulnerable preschool audience was protected, was in the re-edit of a sequence wherein children examined a train. There was no danger to the children involved (who were looking at the train wheels in the context of invention and steam power for an episode of *Nina and the Neurons*) but it was later realised that the scene gave the ‘wrong message’. What became evident through a range of such examples is that producers believe that the filmic context has to be very explicit in the final televised content – that either the naiveté of the audience or the nature of television form ‘changed the meaning’ of the sequence for the preschool viewer, as illustrated by another editing example:

In the dub I saw a sequence that wasn’t safe. We filmed in ‘Diggerland’ and we followed their protocol whereby children don’t wear safety helmets. But on tape it just looked like kids messing about on waste ground. So we had to recut with the ‘Diggerland’ guys visible in the sequence and do a special voiceover [to mask the joins and make it explicit that the children were in a controlled situation]. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

In this discourse, which constructs the preschool child audience as impressionable, there is often reference to the parent or adult carer who is also implicated in the construction. Like Winnicott’s famous remark that, “there’s no such thing as a baby [. . .] if you set out to describe a baby you are describing a baby and someone. A baby cannot exist alone but is essentially part of a relationship” (Winnicott, quoted in Holland 2006: 34), the concept of the preschool child presupposes a dependent relationship to an adult parent or carer. Paradoxically, this presupposition works to both locate and distance adult control over preschool television consumption in the discourse of preschool television producers. There was a notion that content must be ‘safe’ even without a parent there to further mediate, explain or contextualise, but it was only *because* the content was so ‘safe’ that parents were not required to mediate – they could leave their children watching without direct supervision. In this way the relationship between CBeebies and its

audience is very direct as it does not presuppose further adult intervention or mediation at the level of content. Producers were, however, very careful to frame this in the context of children of two and above in that programmes were always discussed as targeted at children between two and four or children between four and six. Although there is not a younger limit to the CBeebies age-guide, there is both an expectation and an anxiety that babies are watching. This is shown in the somewhat tongue-in-cheek exchange that occurred when a senior executive was talking about the producer relationship to the CBeebies audience:

LW: What are the challenges of producing content for your audience?

P: One is technological. Though there is still something in what I said earlier about content not dating for 2-year-olds.

LW: Even black and white content?

P: Well you'd need to do a study – there are theories about black and white being best for *very* young children.

LW But you don't make content for babies!

P: (*With ironic tone*) No, we don't and if people use it for that it is not our fault. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

It should be remembered that addressing children aged two as part of the preschool audience is still a relatively new phenomenon, heralded by *Teletubbies* in the late 1990s. *Teletubbies*, although now something of a 'national treasure' held up as exemplary preschool programme-making inside the children's television industry, was initially condemned by the popular press for addressing children aged two within the preschool audience. The BBC does not target content for children younger than two, but that is not to say that younger children are not watching, nor that this construction will remain unchanged. Indeed, in addition to this producer, who obviously had an awareness of baby products and of developmental theories, several other CBeebies producers talked of their professional curiosity around media for babies; the *Baby Einsteins* series of 'educational' videos and products was referenced several times during my research period and, in interview, one producer spoke of a theatre show she was going to see (in her professional context) that had

babies and children under two as its target audience (accompanied by parents) (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009).

The issues of 'safe' content also mesh with accepted ideas around child development models – what might be considered safe and appropriate for one age group may not be considered appropriate for another. There was a particular notion that even the content aimed at children between four and six must still be appropriate for younger children even though it was not specifically targeted at them, in recognition of the fact that parents may not be supervising closely and that children watch content with siblings. This requirement was frequently framed as essential to adult 'trust' in the CBeebies brand and in the BBC itself (which circulates back to notions of brand loyalty in audience). The question of audience trust was expressed in diffuse ways throughout my research, but in respect of the CBeebies audience was related to ensuring safety *whether the parent/carer was present or not*.

P: I genuinely think CBeebies is a fantastic brand because it marries high production values with great shows and learning in a fun way. The fact that there is no advertising and that we are so trustworthy that parents and carers can genuinely leave their kids . . .

LW: Are they watching with parents?

P: I think a lot of them aren't, though we see from the message boards that a lot of them are. *Nina* is back on and Dads choose to watch that with their children, but often it's a trusted babysitter.

LW: And what are the challenges of that?

P: We are trusted and reliable but there are lots of exciting, zippy choices out there and we need to make sure we remain fun. When children get to three and four and use the remote we have to try even harder not to lose them and I think we can feel a little bit old-fashioned, so we need, without scaring off the parents, to make programmes *for* preschool kids but programmes that the adults around them are happy with. And that's a balancing act. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

As well as illustrating the notion of the channel as a “trusted babysitter”, there are several issues of audience bound up in this exchange so I will take a little time to unpack some of them.

Chasing the audience

It is illuminating to reflect on this exchange because it reveals a particular discourse that might be termed ‘chasing the audience’ syndrome. This discourse was explicit in CBBC production, but I was not so acutely aware of it as considered relevant to CBeebies, or certainly not tied to children as young as three and four. The discourse *is* pertinent to the bridge between the two BBC children’s brands however, as it is frequently discussed in relation to the ‘drop off’ of boys at the upper ages of the preschool audience, who are often imagined to move on to the Jetix channel [now Disney XD] or Cartoon Network rather than CBBC, at the transition stage (Field journal, Showcomotion, July 2007). The idea is not usually discussed as applying to the younger portion of the preschool audience. Perhaps CBeebies’ position as UK brand-leader gives them a somewhat privileged position whereby they are not ‘chasing’ the audience so much as ‘leading’ them in true Reithian style (Brown 2009). The concept of ‘chasing the audience’ fits with a model of the audience as consumers which suggests preschool children have a degree of autonomy and control over their choices; this sits uneasily with the notion of their vulnerability and therefore exists as a tension in the discourse.

There is reiteration of the brand ethos of ‘learning through play’ in the exchange on page 129 (“marries great shows with learning in a fun way”). Nonetheless some tension is noted in this ethos – a “balancing act” of satisfying both child and adult desire, and an apprehension that CBeebies may seem boring in competition with other “exciting, zippy choices”. This was further elaborated later in the interview as, “I think many people see PSB as negative and fuddy duddy and boring” (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2011). Clearly there is a perception that once children physically control their own viewing (via the remote control) then their choice might not be CBeebies, even if CBeebies remains the parental preference. Again this articulates a tension between adult desire and child desire.

Steemers (2010), considers, at length, the tension between ‘education’ and ‘entertainment’ in preschool production; she posits that the UK preschool television market is especially distinct from the US market in regard to this tension and that, indeed, UK-produced content is often hard to sell in the current US market because it is perceived to lack educational value in a pedagogic, preschool curriculum sense. She does suggest, however, that UK content *is* now becoming more formally educational as a result not only of the US market imperatives, but as a result of a continuing need for UK producers of children’s content to protect programming while allaying societal fears that ‘TV is bad for kids’ (104-110). Steemers suggests that a formal educational dimension to content can be a very obvious marker of ‘value’ in the otherwise notoriously soft criteria of benefit in PSB:

A lot of what takes place in Britain is inspired by programme-makers’ practical consciousness and experience – it is often intuitive and infused with implicit public service priorities. [...] Where British productions usually differ is in the lack of any formative testing [...] a factor which potentially limits access to US markets unless British shows can be retro-fitted to meet US requirements. [...] In the words of one BBC producer, ‘you have to back up what you say with research from people who know enough to be able to say it.’ (Steemers 2010: 131-132)

Building a picture from the terms “retro-fitted” and “back up what you say”, there is a distinct inference that UK producers may well go down the route of curricular pedagogy but that it remains ‘lip-service’: an academic veneer over what is essentially the instinct and creativity of the producer. That is why it is ironic that my own CBeebies production interviewee should express anxiety over the competition as [more] “exciting and zippy” because it would appear that the content of other channels (all reliant on US programming) is actually *more* formally educational than the current CBeebies output. Ironically therefore, CBeebies, as the enduring UK brand leader (Calder 2011), is possibly more distinct in terms of preschool content because it is *less* formal in its learning objectives, rather than because it is more so.

These tensions between entertainment and education are underpinned by an understanding of the distinctiveness of UK-produced content and its intrinsic benefit to UK audiences. Sara Harkins alludes to this distinctiveness in response to the question, “What is distinctive about CBeebies channel from the competitors?”:

I think the quality of our audiences. They are a UK audience so we need to do more of that in our representations. These other channels are American and have cartoons and there’s no reflection of what it is to be a child growing up in the UK. I think the fact that we have live-action content is great. And no adverts is a bonus and the fact that it’s all learning through play. There is inherent learning behind all our stuff. (Sara Harkins, Interview, June 2009)

Again we see a ‘learning through play’ construction, the “quality” audience construction, and also the perceived benefits of no adverts (which I discuss next); but furthermore there is the emphasis on UK-produced content, especially *live-action* UK-produced content, as providing a beneficial reflection of the child’s own life. In all my discussions with UK-based producers of children’s content, interrogation of the concept of audience always provoked a response framed around the specificity of the UK audience and UK-produced content.

The value of UK-produced content is explicitly enshrined at policy level, under the purpose of “reflecting and strengthening UK cultural identity” (Ofcom 2007a: 14) and supports a logical conflation of PSB with UK-originated or UK-produced content. First defined in Ofcom’s review of PSB in 2004-05, these purposes and characteristics are not exclusive to *children’s* PSB but are stated to represent an “obvious synergy” with it (2007a: 14). If anything, it would seem that the claim of the *children’s* audience on high quality locally-produced content is construed as even greater than that of the general UK audience, through the traditional understanding that children’s lives are more narrowly circumscribed (in terms of geographical, financial and social mobility) and (therefore) more vulnerable to exploitation.

The construction of the audience as vulnerable confers additional value to the BBC’s non-commercial basis. Traditionally associated with public service because of the notion of impartiality, in BBC children’s brands the fact that there are

no adverts is discursively presented by producers as a means of protecting children from commercial exploitation. In the exchange quoted on page 129, the value of “no advertising” is constructed as intrinsic to the CBeebies ethos. Further, the value of no advertising was discursively constructed as the BBC having *no possible commercial motive in programming*. This was elaborated on at length in interview and was suggested to be a tremendous boon for the audience and the producer, offering great creative autonomy. The thinking appeared to be that those only those working from PSB imperatives can put the best interests of children first:

I don't know if I could work for Disney because it would be so limiting to always think about the merchandise and marketing. As long as I come up with ideas that are right for the audience then that is a tremendous freedom – it doesn't have to make money. *Big City Park* will not make money but it is really relevant and important for the audience. *Same Smile* could make money through the toy characters – but it wasn't designed to sell millions of pandas – it came about because we asked, ‘Is there a show which shows the lives of UK kids?’ and the answer was, ‘No.’ The fact that we can do live-action [is a tremendous benefit for the audience]: a lot of commercial companies don't want to do it. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

Rights and Needs

In discussing live-action UK-originated content, producers claim legitimacy for their representation of the UK children's audience and construe such content as addressing a particular need of the child and of the market. The authors of the 2007 Ofcom Report place further emphasis on the importance of UK-originated programming by allying it to the rights of the child:

The international policy debates about children's PSB focus strongly on the ‘rights’ of children (as in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) to have access to indigenous programmes which reflect their own cultures. This is also seen as beneficial to individual countries' economies in which a thriving and competitive market in children's original production is seen as necessary to produce high-quality PSB criteria in programming. (Ofcom 2007a: 16)

The promotion of locally-originated/produced children's PSB as a 'right of the child' was to be a recurring theme of my research, and would seem to follow logically on from what Buckingham et al. identify as a discourse relating to media "needs" of the child (1999: 163-165). Messenger Davies and Thornham (2007), authors of the academic literature review of the 2007 Ofcom Report, noted a similar discourse of right, or entitlement existing in many territories with developed broadcasting infrastructures. Interestingly, the adoption of a rights discourse, although frequently read as oppositional to a no longer politically fashionable protectionist discourse (see e.g. Karen Wells's 2008 discussion of "Child Saving or Child Rights"), does, in this instance, through its conflation of PSB with locally-produced content, obscure an agenda that is protectionist in two ways: firstly that locally-produced content is better for the UK's vulnerable children and secondly that locally-produced content is better for the UK's vulnerable industry. The second of these is often played down (perhaps so that the industry can resist claims of being self-serving) but the first is articulated strongly throughout the UK children's television production community, as exemplified here in personal interview with a senior spokesperson:

Children are a special group of citizens and their media needs special attention paid to it. And I do think it is their right to have it, they have the right to that care and attention in the same way that they have a right to have a social worker come and help them if they are being beaten by their parents. I know it is a dramatic way of putting it but it is part of the nation's duty of care towards its children. (Producer, Interview, April 2009)

Similarly, CBeebies producers endorsed PSB as a "right" of the [UK] child, as typified here:

LW: Is PSB a right of the CBeebies audience?

P: Yes, absolutely. Every child deserves to have good quality, entertaining and informative programming and I think it would be absolutely shocking if they didn't have it. Now whether it is CBeebies and the BBC who provide that is another issue – I'm not saying it should be us. But it would be awful if the only programmes they could get were dross and crap. It's a bit like saying, 'Do kids deserve fresh fruit and vegetables?' The choice needs to be there even if

they eat McDonalds a lot of the time. They need a more balanced diet so the choice needs to be there of better quality stuff and stuff that is ‘better for you’.
(CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

This exchange suggests slippage between a discourse of right and entitlement and that of consumer choice (“The choice needs to be there”) but the equation of quality television with healthy food (“It’s a bit like saying, ‘Do kids deserve fresh fruit and vegetables?’”) serves to elevate PSB to the status of a fundamental right of the child. The analogy of food consumption with media consumption is frequently found in discourse around children’s media, often with the implicit construction of US content as ‘junk’ and UK-produced content as “better for you” - so much ‘better for you’ that it becomes a right or necessity or constitutional element of UK childhood and children must have access to it.

The BBC Trust, in their review of children’s services, adopted just such a rights-based approach, and it was stated, in the accompanying News Release, that
The Trust believes that the BBC must remain a cornerstone of high-quality, UK-produced children’s content. This role is even more important given widespread concerns that other public service broadcasters are reducing their investment in children’s output. (BBC Trust 2009b)

In the adoption of a rights approach, both regulatory bodies – Ofcom and BBC Trust - acknowledge the importance of UK-originated content as a ‘market corrective’ force in the delivery of children’s public service content: effectively they suggest that UK content is something that children ‘must’ have, even if (or especially if) the market does not deliver it. However I would caution that although this conception of UK-originated content (as addressing market-failure) is both accurate and perhaps even inexorable in the multi-channel, multi-platform universe of current children’s media, the reasoning behind the importance of UK-originated content is not so clear and seems rather to circulate around a syllogistic, self-evident argument that ‘it just is’. The rationale is further complicated by this fact: the specific genres that traditional wisdom claims have little commercial export-potential (live-action; long-form drama; and news and factual) are the very genres that are also constructed as being especially ‘good’ for the audience. Interestingly, although the preschool

audience has enjoyed a long history of live-action PSB content (e.g. *Playschool* and *Playaway*) it has also always had a high proportion of puppeted and animated shows (e.g. *Bagpuss* and *The Woodentops*). Neither of these formats necessarily represented the preschool audience in the direct way that is claimed of live-action UK-originated content. It should also be noted that certain live-action formats that are now championed as the best of UK-produced preschool content – e.g. *Waybuloo*, *Balamory*, *Teletubbies* and *In the Night Garden* – not only sell well in the international market, but are essentially hybrid or new forms of the preschool genre born in the supposedly anti-live-action market of the last decade.

CBeebies producers spoke frankly about what they considered to be the representation mandate in respect of their relationship to the preschool audience. This perceived mandate has a big impact on casting and production processes in preschool programme-making. One of the ideas put forward was that of ‘celebrating’ the achievements of preschool children; this impacted not just on the casting of participants but also on the themes and topics considered to be most suitable for the preschool audience. The notion of ‘suitability’ of topic was one of relevance and access:

I wanted to choose subject matters and activities that kids could get access to and that no matter how small, no matter how skilled or physically able you were, you could actually have a go at it. I think it is important for us, as programme-makers, to focus on things children *can* do: all the amazing things. To be positive and remind them, “I can throw the ball” or “I can swim.” Now that might mean you’ve got armbands on, but you’re still swimming, you’re still in the swimming pool. If you’re not able-bodied - if you’re not doing the butterfly like Michael Phelps - it doesn’t matter. Let’s celebrate what kids can do. And that’s why I want a full spectrum of kids of different abilities that is reflective of society. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, April 2009)

This producer identified that although this approach would seem ‘obvious’ it is actually quite a novel way to think about representing the preschool audience, as not that many preschool texts actually feature preschool children (Brown 2009). The

producer made this leap by watching preschool texts from the imagined viewpoint of a child in order to imagine what preschool children think while watching. This technique of thinking about the text through the eyes of the audience was often referred to throughout my fieldwork.

Certainly many other preschool texts, if they feature children at all, feature child participants or performers that are slightly older than their preschool target audience. Various practical reasons are offered for this. It would seem accepted industry wisdom that children of six and seven are easier to work with, direct and recruit than those of four, as the primary school provides a useful institutional structure of socialisation. Often these practical considerations are bolstered or substantiated by the belief that the preschool audience ‘prefers [watching] older children’, and that, as suggested to me by an independent preschool producer: “little kids always love bigger kids” (Producer, Field journal, June 2010). The drive towards ‘age aspirational’ participants is endemic throughout the children’s television industry and has far-reaching consequences and implications, particularly where there is the sense of the older child ‘passing’ as a younger child, as I discuss in Chapter Six. The age-aspirational doctrine seems to me slightly disingenuous if the main value of live-action is construed as its relationship to the lived experiences of preschool children. And while older participants may be more practical for especially performative or rehearsed child participations (such as in drama production), it is unnecessary in other formats where the narrative is carried by adult performers or participants (as discussed in Chapter Six).

Coupled to age aspiration is a concern with gender roles and their part in addressing, representing and constructing the preschool audience. In the exchange quoted on page 129, there is an awareness of gender roles, with *Nina and the Neurons* (a preschool science and inventing show) singled out as offering a space for “Dads” to watch with children. Gender constructs were later discussed at length using *Nina* as a specific case study. The gender constructs were considered as relevant to both parent and child audience members and were textual as well as discursive:

Nina is a really important role model on several levels. The fact that she is a scientist is great and the fact that she is the shape she is and the kind of beauty she has. She is stunning but normal: so not the nonsense of stick-thin or voluptuous women or whatever. She is beautiful, funny, cheery, happy, approachable, upbeat – and doing science. I think her popularity is extraordinary with boys and girls and she crosses the gender divide and they respect her which is really important. When we took her to the science festival she was a hit with boys and girls. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

Research into gender was taken very seriously in CBeebies production. Sara Harkins had distributed an international research paper on gender representations in children's television throughout her team then brought some of the findings to bear on the designs of *Big City Park*. The preschool audience were often constructed as an important site wherein gender stereotypes could be challenged. I would argue that this challenge has both Utopian and anti-commercial functions in contrast to the heavily-gendered representations contained in commercial content, merchandise and marketing (see Griffiths 2002).

The question of 'diversity,' raised by the CBeebies producer in respect of representing disability (on page 136), was another aspect of representing the preschool audience that was frequently cited by preschool producers: indeed I would go as far as to say that every single producer interviewed in my research spoke about aspects of diversity when talking about the audience. Diversity was a term used to encompass a multitude of aspects of differentiation between children whether related to social class, ethnicity, race, faith, cultural background, disability, gender or nationality. Most often such differences were visible differences, thus the visual representation of diversity was considered of particular importance. Particular attention is paid to the onscreen ethnic mix. Schools and nurseries which offered a greater ethnic mix were privileged above those which didn't (e.g. in the invited studio audiences for *Nina and the Neurons*) even though such practice meant that urban schools were more represented than rural ones (surely another relevant form of cultural diversity?). Scottish schools do not, on the whole, offer the same ethnic

and racial diversity as those in London but there was an unspoken assumption that, as a network production, the greatest ethnic and racial mix should be sought. There seemed to be a Utopian normalising ideal or function to this practice which, again, corresponds to the notion of the preschool audience as both the future of society and as impressionable. On a field trip to an independent production studio that was producing for CBeebies, one of the visitors - a genteel retiree from Edinburgh - expressed surprise at the racial/ ethnic mix of child participants in the studio (two of the five child participants were non-white) and enquired whether this was standard throughout the series and what the rationale behind it was, given that persons of black and minority ethnicity make up what she (correctly) cited as “only around 2% of Scotland’s population” (Field journal, June 2010). She asked whether this was positive discrimination therefore and was told by one of the producers, “Well that’s what the BBC wants. Plus we are in a magical world so you don’t need to stick to reality – you can show a greater diversity” (Field journal, June 2010). The reasoning as to why the BBC might want “what the BBC wants” was not discussed.

The notion that visible diversity might be “what the BBC wants” struck a particular chord with me as I would very much agree that there is an unseen institutional pressure to deliver visible onscreen diversity (particularly in race, ethnicity and disability). Producers did not begrudge or question this pressure – at least at no point did I hear a question raised akin to that of the visitor on the field trip - but sometimes they were unsure as to how ‘difference’ should be framed in terms of its visibility. This was made obvious to me in discussion with a CBeebies producer who had worked with a child participant with a maimed hand. The producer pointed to the transformative properties of the screen and the camera gaze as inflecting the duty of care both to the individual child and to the audience:

You’re not trying to hide the disability, but nor are you trying to foreground it so as to attract a ghoulish fascination. You would never ask the child to cover it up, but you have to look carefully at the position in the shot and think about how the viewer sees it and avoid it being a ‘spectacle’ because that takes away from the actual onscreen action. (CBeebies Producer, Field journal, March 2008).

This same producer felt strongly that the drive towards representing diversity should not become simply a question of *visible* diversity in an onscreen sense as this could easily become a tokenistic practice and did not allow for aspects of diversity that were not visible onscreen. A very vivid example of this was shown to me in the field trip to an independent production studio as previously mentioned. The child participants were taken from local Scottish primary schools and the producers noted that it was not always easy casting a sufficient racial/ethnic mix: non-white children were therefore asked to film more episodes than their white counterparts. A *visible* onscreen ethnic diversity is achieved through this practice but the children are then redubbed with voices from other parts of the UK to achieve a (false) diversity of accents: it seemed to me that the *impression* of diversity was more valuable than actual diversity in this instance. The producers explained that the practice had come about as participants were not originally expected to speak (Field journal, June 2010).

BBC Scotland CBeebies producers did not ascribe to these practices, preferring instead to cast participants from around the UK in satisfaction of a diversity remit, but several staff raised the issue of cost-effectiveness of this in terms of the final product and its meaning for the preschool audience. Several other CBeebies producers also wondered if BBC Scotland was ‘trying too hard’ to make sure that their practices not only appeared inclusive but actually were inclusive, as we see in this selection of quotes:

Perhaps we shouldn't worry so much about going outside Scotland and we should be more confident. Others do it but I don't like when you source local kids and then redub them with other voices. But [on the other hand] maybe it is just us in Scotland who are trying to be more PC and inclusive and make it more complicated. Perhaps we should be like others and not fuss so much. (CBeebies Producer, Interview, June 2009)

You know the thing is, as a viewer, you don't care how it's produced – that's really got nothing to do with them. As a kid I just know I wanted to hear Scottish accents. If you really believe in BBC values – and I do – and you want

to reflect the full diversity then you've got to travel all over. (CBeebies producer, Interview, April 2009)

Endemol shot a children's series here with audiences drawn only from the local area, whereas we bus them in from all over. But from the viewer's perspective there is no difference to the quality of the final product in that respect so you have to question whether it is a good use of the licence fee. (Producer, Interview, June 2009).

Tensions exist within the discourse as to the meaning and value of this diversity for the audience. Consistent in these views is a construction of the preschool audience as impressionable to the representations; an audience for whom it is possible to suggest and even normalise a representation of a Utopian mixed and diverse society. Yet also present is the idea that the audience does not care about the production context, only the final onscreen product. While the audience is thus constructed as concerned primarily with the final onscreen product, the Department attempts to promote the concept of 'diversity' in more than just the onscreen sense through its inclusion of audiences and participants drawn from throughout the UK. I will continue to explore this theme in my textual analysis chapter, but for now I will move on to examine how producers of content for the CBBC audience construct their audience and their relationship to that audience.

CBBC

Tackling the same research brief in respect of the construction of the CBBC audience and CBBC producers' relationship to that audience, is undoubtedly more daunting than in CBeebies production. The construction of the CBBC audience would seem more problematised than that of CBeebies, not in respect of who they are or what CBBC producers would like them to be (UK children aged six to twelve), but in terms of what constitutes their appropriate representation or address. Questions of agency, gender and socialisation would seem more acute as the CBeebies 'child' grows into the CBBC 'schoolboy' or 'schoolgirl'. However, several of the elements discussed in relation to the CBeebies audience are also present in the

discursive construction of the CBBC audience. For example, the notions of children *deserving* PSB and of 'guaranteeing audiences for the future' were evident, as exemplified here:

I think they deserve PSB. I think they have the minds to enjoy it and not be cynical and in their world of opportunity they deserve great content. And ultimately if we deliver it now we are creating loyalty for the future. (CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009)

Also consistently present was the emphasis on UK content for UK kids and *every* interviewee, when asked what was distinctive about CBBC content, mentioned the fact that it was UK-originated and featured children and presenters from all over the UK. Interestingly, unlike CBeebies, no CBBC producer – not one – distinguished or differentiated or alluded to a specific need for representation of Scottish children, suggesting that casting child participants from across the UK is a fully embedded practice for all BBC Scotland-produced CBBC shows.

Because much of the ground covered by CBBC producers was so similar to that of their CBeebies counterparts, I have chosen here to focus primarily on the additional themes that emerged as especially pertinent or specific to the construction and representation of the CBBC audience.

Audiences and diversity

Part of the difficulty of constructing the CBBC audience is that it is seen more as a *series* of audiences than the largely undifferentiated mass that is more characteristic of CBeebies. By this I mean that CBeebies producers assume that the tastes and needs of a preschool child are reasonably generic and undifferentiated, less subject to the whims of taste or personal choice (though this is thought to increase with age). The CBBC audience, on the other hand, is thought of more as a differentiated audience of varying tastes and needs, all of which must be catered for by CBBC. This differentiation places a greater burden of diversity in representation for CBBC producers, following the rubric suggested by Buckingham et al.:

To speak of audience needs is to make a point about diversity: because audiences vary so widely in their tastes and situations, broadcasting cannot legitimately afford to respond only to the preferences of the majority. At

another level, the concept of needs appeals to values and to ideas of the personality that exist on a higher plane than mere gratification. In the Reithian framework, audiences have a need for knowledge, information and culturally broadening entertainment, whether they consciously recognise that need or not [. . .] children are seen, *par excellence*, as a social group which does not know its own needs, and thus requires protection from the consequences of its search for gratification. (Buckingham et al. 1999: 164)

Buckingham et al. make a clear distinction between the ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ of the child, arguing that PSB is concerned with addressing needs and resisting wants (in as much as wants are characterised as superficial gratifications) but I would argue that there is now a far greater slippage between the notions of needs and wants, with wants interpreted as a facet of the taste and choice and individuation within the diverse CBBC audience rather than in a pejorative sense of gratification. This slippage is of fundamental importance to the current construction of the audience. Sue Morgan, Creative Director of CBBC at BBC Scotland, stressed this idea of the different tastes and choices of the CBBC audience:

They are a mixed bunch. Their viewing habits are changing rapidly. They have so many choices and not just TV but other interactivity. They have so much more to entertain them. And not just electronics but traditional out and about things too, so the heyday of television’s huge Saturday morning audiences is shrinking. They can reach out and do more things. (Sue Morgan, Interview, June 2009)

Implicit here is the notion not only of a diverse audience of diverse tastes but of a now fragmented audience: one might say that PSB is now perceived to have less potential impact or importance in a child’s life – at least where that child has other choices. This is important in thinking about which children ‘children’s television’ is actually for or who stands to benefit most from its public service function.

Simon Parsons also concurred that the children’s audience was not a homogeneous mass, yet could still be brought together as an audience:

LW: Tell me about the audience

SP: Well that's the thing – it is many audiences but then again an audience is a group of people whose individual identities are subordinated in to the group. If you see a comic everyone laughs at the same time and sometimes at things you wouldn't [otherwise]. So they are an audience. (Simon Parsons, Interview, June 2009)

It is interesting that Simon Parsons should choose an example of humour to illustrate how disparate individuals can be united as an audience. I would argue that comedy and humour, far from being cast as a gratifying 'want' of the child, has been reframed in CBBC discourse as an important and natural 'need' of the child.

The need for humour

The framing of comedy entertainment as a 'need' of the CBBC audience was apparent throughout my interviews and fieldwork and is concomitant with the commissioning strategies of Anne Gilchrist, CBBC commissioner during my research period, as I discuss further in Chapter Five. There is a notion that comedy is a great leveller and can bring children together both within the filmic set up and in the audience. Comedy was not constructed therefore as 'the lowest common denominator' but was instead elevated to the 'one great uniting force' in discourse. In this way, many of the classic tensions between education and entertainment in PSB could be discursively managed by CBBC producers; laughter was framed as a need of the children's community as illustrated here:

Kids grow up incredibly quickly and the idea of comedy brings them down to being children. *Dick and Dom* got a lot of criticism but every team that came on - it didn't matter where they came from - they went away loving it. It wasn't about celebrities or clothes, or the music you're into, or your hair, because you all got covered in creamy muck-muck custard anyway. I'm a massive advocate of children having fun and not being forced to grow up quickly. I would rather that my nieces of six and eight sat down and watched *Dick and Dom* than *Hannah Montana* – wearing makeup at eight because of peer pressure. I'd rather they watched *Tracey Beaker* and were for the underdog. (CBBC Producer, Interview, May 2009)

In addition to the notion that comedy is a great leveller for children, there are also some really interesting ideas bound up in this defence of *Dick and Dom*. There is the almost Romantic ideal of the laughing child as the ‘true child’, uncorrupted by commerce or worldly concerns (“celebrities/ clothes/ music/ hair”); the same laughing child we recognise in the poetry of Blake or the pastoral idyll of Rousseau and in Whitney Houston’s anthemic plea to “let the children’s laughter remind us how we used to be” (Footnote 22 page 122). Laughter is held up almost as a defining marker of childhood and a positive indication that the child is not “being forced to grow up [too] quickly”: a construction of the child that David Elkind has famously theorised as *The Hurried Child* (2007). It should be noted that, during my research, one of the questions in a departmental quiz presented the statistic that “children laugh more than 300 times a day whereas adults laugh around 15 times a day” and that this statistic had really ignited discussion of what children ‘use’ laughter for (Field journal, February 2008). In offering a context for shared laughter, *for both participants and audience*, this producer posits that *Dick and Dom* helps preserve the innocence of childhood, in direct contrast to US content (*Hannah Montana*) which, one might construe, is seen as corrupting childhood. The corruption suggested of US content is both commercial and sexualised in nature (“wearing makeup because of peer pressure”) but also attitudinal in that it contrasted with a framing of UK content as ‘championing the underdog.’ In this way, live-action, UK-originated comedy content for children was constructed with almost a ‘triple dose’ of public service benefit – beneficial because it is UK-produced; beneficial because it is comedy; and beneficial because it is live-action. Through this discourse the genre of the game show, traditionally seen as a ‘less worthy’ television genre for adults and children alike (Holmes 2008), is given a particular probity as a beneficial PSB artefact.

Another CBBC producer also commented on a distinctive ‘British’ humour, though drawn in a less pejorative comparison with American content:

Comedy drama is costly. It is down to the writing as well as the production values. We may find *High School Musical* too schmaltzy but children don’t. But then they also like *The Chuckle Brothers* and you couldn’t get anything

more different. And that is British: the eccentricity, the wordplay and the visual humour. (CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009)

What can also be noted here is a separation of tastes – a view that children and adults did not necessarily share the same tastes. When the producer referred to “we” here, I understood the meaning to be ‘We as adults’ rather than ‘We as producers’ because CBBC producers’ tastes and children’s tastes were frequently aligned in the discourse around audience; albeit aligned *in recognition* of the assumed adult/child differentiation, as this producer illustrates:

LW: How do you like to see children represented onscreen and what turns you off?

P: Well it’s not what I like: we are not our audience. We need to be careful about how we portray children. What I think about children on TV is not what our audience think and what I find cute and endearing our audience might think, ‘So what?’ (CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009)

In other words, in recognising that adults do not (usually) share the same tastes as children, the producer must refrain from allowing their adult tastes to dictate content – the child’s tastes must be the first consideration. CBBC, therefore, no longer constructs the audience as what Buckingham et al. describe as “par excellence, as a social group which does not know its own needs, and thus requires protection from the consequences of its search for gratification” (1999: 164). Instead, a two-part process is at work which changes that construction: firstly, through the perception that children are articulate and expert in identifying their wants; and secondly, through the discursive transfiguration of those wants as needs of diversity. The focus, therefore, of CBBC PSB, could be said to be child-centred rather than adult-centred (confirming the suggestion by Buckingham et al. 1999).

There are huge implications for this shift in focus particularly where there is tension between the tastes of the adult and child. Indeed, some producers suggested that there is almost an inevitable clash between adult and child tastes, and that negotiating that tension is the challenge of children’s PSB:

As long as we are not doing something wrong or unhealthy then if we upset adults it’s not a big deal to us. And one of the dichotomies we have to deal

with is that kids like stuff more if they think their parents don't want them to see it; so if there is a trick we have to pull it's how to make content feel like the parents won't like it when actually parents are happy with it. That's the tightrope. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

Again we see here the alignment of the producer with the child, so that "if we upset adults it's not a big deal". The idea of children's content being not just unappealing but actively disliked or disapproved of by adults was something this interviewee spoke about at considerable length in discussion of the relationship between producer and audience. There was attention drawn to how far that idea might be taken under the aegis of 'public service' and an assertion that the limits for a public service broadcaster remained more stringent than for other broadcasters of children's content:

In some ways – superficially - we have moved more to what commercial television is like. We are much more concerned with trying to entertain them than we once were. But we [the BBC] are concerned with entertaining them in a way that feels completely authentic to kids. That is where we are different. We don't say, 'Is this going to upset adults?' and then if it is therefore we can't do it: we say, 'Is this right for the audience?' And if we can justify it we'll probably do it. But commercial telly just asks, 'Will this get bums on seats?' So there is that difference. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

This comment suggests that, while CBBC content may appear to be similar to commercial content ("In some ways- superficially – we have moved to what commercial television is like") in its drive towards entertainment, producers believe that there remains a deeper level of public service value inherent in that content.

Chasing the audience

Many producers talked about commercial competition and the direction in which it pulled the audience, clearly delineating what they saw as the limits of appropriate taste for the CBBC audience, as we see in this example:

There is the Nickelodeon mission statement thing of 'If kids ruled the world.' We are not about that. There is a difference between anti-adultism and the

ability to have some mischief at the expense of adults. If we were making something that was anti-adult then I would say we shouldn't do it. But that is different from saying that adults might not be comfortable with this. There is loads of stuff that is just for adults so we shouldn't have to worry if adults don't find our shows entertaining. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

There is a clear inference that the commercial providers were exploitative and that they dealt in shallow gratification of the child audience, while the BBC always kept the best interests of the child at the core of the content, even if that content was functionally similar. It was also suggested that one of the problems of retaining the audience in the face of this competition was that there was imagined to be little adult input or control within the child's viewing environment, allowing the commercial providers (and children) to 'do as they please.' This was seen to be forcing CBBC in to a difficult position in their relationship to their (desired) audience, forcing the BBC to 'chase' the audience rather than lead:

Quite often children are allowed to watch television on their own without adult supervision. And that is a problem because if you are in a competitive market – which we are – then children will just go to the bits they find most attractive. So without adult supervision how can we continue to make stuff that is useful for kids? It becomes very difficult. (CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009)

One of the ways of resolving this difficulty of how to attract the audience but remain true to BBC Mission statement that "Audiences are at the heart of everything we do" (BBC 2007a), was that the content remained distinct and "useful" because it was UK-originated and featured UK children. The fact of UK-origination alone seems to serve as a recuperation of contentious content and provides a useful discursive tool for producers through which to extol the virtues of content which, if originating from another source, may not be considered as 'public service.'

UK-originated content

As noted earlier, *Dick and Dom* was singled out as a programme that, although contentious, had a uniquely British appeal and flavour. Other producers also listed

Dick and Dom (which is not a BBC Scotland production) as a significant though atypical example of PSB, lauding it as peculiarly ‘British’ in its sensibility:

We are telling stories about Britain, made in Britain, for British children.

There are differences woven in to the fabric of the BBC that make a difference – the public service ethos is there in all that we do. Even in things where it is harder to see it without full analysis. Like the minor controversy over *Dick and Dom* where people asked, ‘What’s public service about that?’. Well, actually, it’s just about children given space to laugh without feeling guilty about having a laugh. And it’s done in a very British way: like pantomime. So there is learning stuff woven in there. (CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009)

I find the inference that children might otherwise “feel guilty” about laughing very intriguing as it implies that the adult sanction of certain types of humour is meaningful to the audience yet, conversely, also points to a concept of transgression or ‘rebellion’ within the audience (also noted in the exchange on page 147: “kids like stuff more if they think their parents don’t want them to see it”). A producer of *Dick and Dom* commented that, “working on Dick and Dom we got a lot of criticism. ‘Bogies’ for example [a segment of the show where the presenters shouted ‘Bogies’ with increasing volume in public spaces]: there was a complaint on *Points of View* and I’m proud of that!” (CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009). This supports a prevailing concept that adults dislike of content is a sure sign that children will like it and reinforces that the CBBC producer is aligned with the child audience rather than the adult critic. As well as aligning the adult producer with the child audience, the idea that adults will not like children’s content was also used to defer critical analysis of a different sort, as it was sometimes invoked to suggest that those outside the children’s audience or children’s production sector were not entitled to hold an opinion about the merits of children’s content.

The notion of children’s fun was a key element in how CBBC producers talked about their audience; making children laugh was prized and taken as a very concrete marker of success in PSB terms. It should be noted that all the CBBC commissions in recent years at BBC Scotland have a very strong entertainment element, and Sue Morgan perceives comedy to be a particular strength of the CBBC

team in the Department. Humour and comedy are therefore concepts very important to the construction of the child audience by CBBC producers. It seems laughter, as a tangible outward expression of an inner feeling, was almost looked on as a guarantee that producers were reaching out to children, and so pilot shows were tested with children to see if they laughed. Not all the Department's CBBC producers were comfortable with this testing. A comedy-writer suggested in interview that there were more ineffable aspects to children's humour than laughing as part of a shared audience, especially as TV form does not create the same 'responsive' audience as a live audience (CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009). However the procedure of testing and directly engaging with the audience was what Sue Morgan felt had helped to improve CBBC output from the Department: "the core values [of representing and engaging the audience] haven't changed but what we are better at is talking to the audience before we make content" (Sue Morgan, Interview, June 2009).

For Sue, much of the legitimacy of current CBBC representation came from direct discussion with members of the audience at all stages of production including the development, planning and pilot stages. She was also very emphatic about the responsibility owed to child participants to be represented in a sensitive way. She implied that simply increasing the number of child participants in children's television does not necessarily bridge the gap between producer and audience, and suggested that some onscreen roles are better done by adults:

When I came to Children's first there was an explosion of children's shows presented by children – but those kids on *Why Don't You* used to get hate mail! So it is an interesting question [how you represent children] and I think children's perspective of other children appearing or acting in programmes is changing – because we are getting better at it. You need a lot of caution. It is an easier show if it is adults. And Dick and Dom and Sam and Mark are aspirational – more so than two children. Sometimes we have twelve and thirteen-year-olds on *Raven* which is more aspirational than ten and eleven-year-olds. Older children appeal to the full range of our audience. (Sue Morgan, Interview, June 2009)

Morgan's advocacy of what might be termed proxy figures (presenters and older children) puts forward the idea of age aspiration that we have already seen in CBeebies discourse, but what is also suggested is a liberating function of the liminal, adult-presenter figure, which I discuss further in Chapter Six. As mentioned earlier, 'age aspiration' is a very common doctrine in children's television, for practical as well as ideological reasons. Within CBBC age aspiration has an additional dimension as the thirteen to sixteen age group are no longer part of the brand 'offer' made by CBBC. That older children do continue to feature in CBBC content is mainly under the rubric of age aspiration rather than as representation.

Other producers offered a different inflection of how CBBC should represent its audience, which, while not ruling out proxies as a model of identification, suggested the importance of authenticity of experience and of representations:

LW: What are the key things about representing your audience?

P: Well first of all they need to see themselves in a way they recognise and it's up to us to understand what that is and make sure it appears onscreen. So they need to be able to watch our content and say, 'That's me' or 'That's my friend.' But something that is real about being in the world at that age is *new* experience – so we need also to represent children that *aren't* like them.

(CBBC Producer, Interview, June 2009)

As hinted above, in constructing the CBBC audience, producers looked to represent its full diversity ("they need to see themselves in a way they recognise/ we need also to represent children that aren't like them"). As with CBeebies, departmental staff spoke of the practical difficulty in recruiting a diversity of participants and during my fieldwork there had been two occasions when a specific difficulty had been identified in recruiting Asian child participants. It had been suggested that the difficulty was not with the children themselves, who were keen to take part, but in getting parental permission, particularly if English was not the first language of the parents (Field journal, April 2008). Child licensing laws require specific written documentation that producers suspected could be daunting for some parents.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Ofcom identified that there was parental dissatisfaction in PSB representation of the full cultural diversity of the UK. The BBC Trust took very seriously the parental dissatisfaction expressed in the 2007 Ofcom Report, and as a discrete part of its review of children's services, instructed an independent research report, *Research amongst Children in Ethnic Minority Homes*, (BBC Trust 2008), with the aim of exploring how the BBC serves and delivers value to children from a "non-white" background (BBC Trust 2008: 4). The research focused on the views of children (rather than parents) in a range of ethnic minority homes and had some contradictory key conclusions, such as the author-narrated aspiration of improved representation of diversity: "Ideally, the BBC should aim to reflect this [dual cultural identity of ethnic minority children] by incorporating more multicultural elements into BBC Children's provision" (BBC Trust 2008: 42). This was in contrast to children's own stated satisfaction with delivery: "Diversity and representation were not top of mind for the children in the study and were not key factors in their decision-making about which channels or programmes to watch. However CBBC was felt to perform well in this area" (BBC Trust 2008: 42). Taken alongside the views of children expressed in the 2007 Ofcom Report, it could be argued that the expectation that UK-originated content forms an important role in representing UK cultural diversity is largely an adult and Utopian aspiration of children's PSB.

Conclusion

Of the overview provided by Corner of the "investigative agenda" (1999: 72) of production research, this chapter fits most closely with point 5, "In what ways do producers see their audiences, their expectations, and the responsibilities of media professionals towards them?" (72). Gaining insight into the way that producers construct their audiences is invaluable in charting the relationship between producer and audience that has long been problematic in PSB. Although each has an individual inflection, there are clearly shared themes that emerge in consideration of both CBeebies and CBBC production discourse. These themes relate to the construction of the audience as vulnerable but also as discerning consumers; the construction of childhood as an idealised state in which laughter plays a key role;

and a focus on the needs or rights of the child as extending to dedicated children's television content. Shared themes were also apparent in considering producers' relationship to their audience, and discourses centred on 'chasing' the audience; the importance of UK-originated content; the management of education and entertainment imperatives; and the difficulties of representation and diversity.

In treating the interview as primary evidence of interior mental processes I maintain the distinction between "production mentalities" and "production practices" that Corner argues is blurred in production studies, particularly where the researcher "uses one element as a route into others (for instance inferring mentalities from practices)" (1999: 71-72). In Chapter Five I will look discretely at production practices to see how the idea of commercial competition, articulated within this chapter as shaping 'production mentalities', is articulated in production practices. One of the things noted by producers about the CBeebies and the CBBC audience is that they enjoy both UK *and* US-produced content, and, in trying to evaluate this, producers will frequently refer to the 'escapism' offered by US content. In this way it furthers entrenches the idea of the UK content as 'real' or 'representative' but the US content as 'false' and 'beguiling'. Interestingly, despite the fact that the BBC channels and individual UK-produced programmes are often cited by children as their "favourite" (and attract high ratings across all platforms according to the BARB data referenced by Ofcom [2007a: 72-104]), the proxy statements relating to UK cultural identity were not considered as particularly important by children themselves (107). So despite producers' implicit assumption (also manifest both in the Ofcom purposes and characteristics and the corresponding proxy statements) that locally-produced content plays a key role in representing children to themselves, children do not necessarily expect this to be the case. This strikes me as the ultimate tension of the discourses of audience and of producers' relationship to that audience. For all producers' aspiration to serve and represent the audience in ways that promote a particular cultural diversity (and in ways in which the producer is aligned with the audience; and in ways in which children's 'right' to television is served), there remains a gap between adult expectation and child desire.

This gap returns us to a model in which children are constructed as “par excellence as a social group which does not know its own needs” (Buckingham et al. 1999: 164).

Turning then to how this material fits with the key ideas outlined in the literature, I think there are important conclusions to be drawn regarding the multiple models of audience evident in contemporary BBC fieldwork. I noted in the literature review that although the BBC is a public service broadcaster, with all its in-house production geared to public service in the first instance (whether or not in commercial co-production or later ‘sold’ in commercial terms by BBC Worldwide), the model of audience evident in PSB is not necessarily a pristine ‘audience as public’ model. Instead we can see that there are multiple audience models discernible in BBC parlance and in practice, including the ‘audience as public’ model and the seemingly antithetical ‘audience as consumer’ model. Although discursively reconciled with particular reference to humour and through a transmutation of wants as needs of the child, these models suggest differing constructions of children’s autonomy or even of childhood itself, and so return to the key questions of this research regarding how the children’s audience should be represented and constructed.

Buckingham et al. (1999) exhibit a similar research objective in Chapter 5, ‘Look Who’s Talking: How Media Producers Define the Child Audience’:

In this chapter we examine these conceptualisations [of the child audience] in more detail, by exploring the ways in which the child audience is discussed by those who work in children’s television. (147)

Through examination of the discourses of production professionals, Buckingham et al. argue that while a sense of prevalent discourse was “not to impute to our interviewees some entirely coherent paradigm” (148), the very notion of discourse suggests unifying or common assumptions: this commonality of assumptions is noted in my own research. As with my own research, Buckingham et al. suggest that in constructing the *child audience*, producers are also constructing *childhood*, and they categorise such constructions into four discrete discourses about childhood: “the vulnerable child”; “child-centredness”; “child as consumer”; and “child as citizen”(149). They argue that, while these discourses could be seen almost as a

linear, chronological progression, all co-existed simultaneously in the late-twentieth century: one discourse did not oust another and, indeed, one or more may provide the “sediment” for another (149). My own findings confirm this and in particular the last two discourses map readily to the ‘audience as consumer’ and ‘audience as public’ models respectively.

Bearing such constructions in mind I shall now proceed to Chapter Five in which I discuss how the purposes and characteristics of PSB are articulated through production processes at BBC Scotland Children’s Department.

Chapter Five: Production as Public Service

This chapter considers the ethos of production within BBC Scotland Children's Department in order to examine how PSB purposes and characteristics are embedded or articulated throughout that process. My rationale for this is the belief that PSB purposes and characteristics cannot 'appear' in a final text (or in the act of broadcasting that text) unless they are embedded or achieved in the production process itself. Following the approaches of Burns (1977) and Schlesinger (1978), I suggest that both the ethos and process of production within the BBC are an integral part of achieving PSB purposes and characteristics, and that what producers *think* they do, as well as what they *actually* do, to achieve those purposes and characteristics, is, of itself, an important factor in the success of production in PSB terms. That no regulatory body has attempted to define or prescribe the production of PSB, other than in terms of what the end product should achieve, would also suggest that the 'public service' element of PSB is fostered well before the 'broadcast' stage: PSB producers are effectively trusted to provide 'public service' content, with little change to the assertion of the Pilkington Committee of 1960 that "good broadcasting is a practice, not a prescription" (quoted in Burns 1977: 35).

The continuing controversy over the location, distribution and access to BBC production facilities and resources would also suggest that the public understanding of the legitimacy of PSB extends beyond the broadcast text to the conditions of production. To this end, this chapter draws on producers' self-representations (particularly those made in personal interview) along with my own participant observations of their production practices, in order to examine the ethos of production in the Children's Department at BBC Scotland. I think that there is value in looking at producers' own role in the creation of PSB and their understanding thereof, most especially because of the pressure created by the fact that producers of children's PSB do not form part of their target audience – ultimately producers must claim to speak to, for, and on behalf of the child audience. This is not to (over) privilege the producer viewpoint in the reading or valuation of a text (and in Chapter Six I present objective textual analysis) but instead to offer insight into the

production ethos that shapes the text and which constitutes an important, though largely opaque, aspect of the conditions of production.

The chapter is structured around three discernible aspects of production ethos which emerged, largely spontaneously, in both interview and observation with production personnel. In addition to issues relating to the representation of the audience and the importance of UK-originated content (covered in Chapter Four) these aspects can therefore perhaps be considered as those which producers themselves wanted to talk about or present, regarding how their working practice supports the notion of public service. These can be considered as the aspects of their practice which most obviously or directly evidence a public service ethos or institutional ‘mindset’ of public service (again, in addition to the aspects explored in Chapter Four). The three aspects covered are: development of programmes; creativity and commissioning; and measuring ‘success’.

What particularly struck me about the way these aspects emerged freely in interview and observation was the high degree of engagement and fluency with PSB purposes and characteristics that producers at every level consistently expressed: this is all the more interesting given that members of staff are not given training in these purposes and characteristics. All members of staff were very comfortable and enthusiastic in articulating their work practice in PSB terms, frequently at a deep analytical level. Although the aspects were ‘naturally occurring’, taken from loosely structured interview and observation, it is telling that their terms of reference very clearly map those of the “purposes and characteristics of PSB” outlined by the 2007 Ofcom Report:

Purposes and Characteristics of PSB

Purposes

- To inform ourselves and others and to increase our understanding of the world through news, information and analysis of current events and ideas.
- To stimulate our interest in and knowledge of arts, science, history and other topics through content that is accessible and can encourage formal learning.
- To reflect and strengthen our cultural identity through original programming at UK, national and regional level, on occasion bringing audiences together for shared experiences.

- To make us aware of different cultures and alternative viewpoints, through programmes that reflect the lives of other people and other communities, both within the UK and elsewhere.

Characteristics

- High quality – well-funded and well-produced.
- Original – new UK content, rather than repeats or acquisitions.
- Innovative – breaking new ideas or re-inventing exciting approaches, rather than copying old ones.
- Challenging – making viewers think.
- Engaging – remaining accessible and enjoyed by viewers.
- Widely available – if content is publicly funded, a large majority of citizens need to be given the chance to watch it. (Ofcom 2007a: 14)

In particular, producer-expressed aspects of creativity and the importance of UK content can be mapped directly to the Ofcom purposes and characteristics. The somewhat more linear processes of development, and of measuring success, can be seen, however, as vehicles or conduits of these purposes and characteristics (literally as well as discursively), rather than having public service value in themselves. It is acknowledged that my own presence in the Department, as a researcher specifically looking at aspects of the production of children's PSB, may well have influenced that the terms of reference were those of public service. However, I am satisfied that the range of situations and circumstances in which such terms emerged indicates their genuine embodiment within the institutional ethos of the Department.

Public Service Ethos

While a clear articulation of a public service ethos may seem a reasonable expectation of those engaged in PSB production, it is not necessarily a common occurrence. Certainly Schlesinger's work on a previous generation of BBC producers (albeit in a different department and in a different political climate) suggests an absence of public service terms of reference in the common discourse of BBC production staff. This is not to say that PSB *values* were absent as such; rather, that public service terms were not chosen by producers to frame their working practices. Moreover, Schlesinger found, in certain circumstances, that PSB values were *refuted* and even referred to as "the Bible of hypocrisy" (Schlesinger 1978: 107). This would seem to suggest a very different production culture and ethos to that found in my own research. In particular, Schlesinger's finding of a "missing link" (1978: 106-134) between producer

and audience (in both a discursive and mechanistic sense) was not replicated in my own findings. In fact, the discernible production ethos of the Children's Department at BBC Scotland was almost exactly the reverse of Schlesinger's assertion that

the 'problem' of the audience is not an urgent one for the communicator.

You do not find people [production personnel] wandering round in a state of existential angst wondering whether they are communicating or not.

(1978: 107)

As shown in Chapter Four, the "problem of the audience" *does* create tremendous "angst" for those engaged in producing children's PSB.

Schlesinger's findings bore out Burns's notion of a move "from public service to professionalism" in BBC production culture during the 1960s and 1970s (Burns 1977: 34-77). Burns too, noted of the period, "the surprising absence, in so exceptionally articulate a working community, of discussion about the social purpose or the social consequences of broadcasting" (132). Like Schlesinger, Burns was "inclined" to attribute this absence as springing from "a reluctance to disturb a complex set of assumptions about the relationship of the BBC to its functions and to the public" (132). It may well be that the inherent gap between producer and audience in children's PSB means that the relationship is always under question; or it may be that the prevailing view that the BBC is 'under attack' in the 21st century (see e.g. North 2007; Murdoch 2009) forces producers to rehearse their defence of the BBC and of PSB. Born has argued that it was not until the late 1990s and early 2000s that any reversion of the trend of professionalism as a mode of discourse could be discerned in BBC production culture, attributing what she terms 'reactivated Reithianism' (Born 2002) as a backlash against neo-liberalism.

Without appropriate evidence prior to that of my research period, it is difficult to say whether the current, very clear, public service ethos of the Children's Department at BBC Scotland has ever been more or less so. This is also difficult to judge because, historically, children's content is considered so apposite a 'public service' genre in which ideas of uplift, moral authority, minority audience and education dominate (Oswell 2002). Perhaps the BBC Scotland producers of children's content do not, therefore, exhibit a *reactivated* Reithianism, so much as a *continuation* of a Reithian discursive tradition of betterment or uplift, which logically

finds ultimate expression relative to the children's audience. This is supported by the notion of children's content being the 'last bastion' of PSB (SKTV 2009a; Hemley 2007) and also conversely by the fact that commercial children's content frequently has recognisably 'public service' values. In addition, the fact that dedicated children's content, *of any genre or provenance*, is considered public service if shown by commercial broadcasters in the terrestrial sphere, suggests that it is the definition of the children's audience as a minority audience that renders such children's content as 'public service'. It could be, therefore, that the ideological affinity of children's content with the concept of public service makes PSB purposes and characteristics the most logical terms of reference for producers of children's content to espouse. This is especially so when UK-produced children's content is discursively constructed as synonymous with PSB (as suggested in Chapter Four).

I will now consider, in turn, the three aspects of children's content production that emerged, in interview and observation, as evidence of a public service ethos.

Development of programmes

Programme development is an obvious starting place for examination of production processes; it is here that most programmes begin their life. Attitudes towards development, and the physical processes of developing programmes for successful commission, reveal much about the ethos of the Department. As noted in Chapter Three, a key feature of the Children's Department at BBC Scotland is that it is not merely a production facility (i.e. a producer of content devised outwith the Department), but that it is also responsible for the development and pitching of ideas for children's content - ideas which, if successfully commissioned, will then be produced by the Department. This role in original-programme development gives a prized autonomy to the Department, and would seem to be a large factor in the 'point' of having a production centre other to the main metropolitan one, as it should ensure that the programmes are truly reflective of the BBC Scotland production ethos (as discussed throughout this thesis). While there is a quota system by which BBC Scotland would be guaranteed certain levels of Children's in-house production (BBC 2007c), it is invisibly embedded within a 'level playing field' of open commissioning competition: commissions are awarded ostensibly on merit and then offset against quotas, rather than predetermined or simply 'allocated' to BBC Scotland. In this way

the Department has considerable agency in the development and creation of ideas but thrives only on the strength of the commissioning pitches of the rolling development teams.

Development as a means of serving the audience

Simon Parsons perceives a critical relationship between ideas development and commissioning success:

We live or die by our commissions and although there is an in-house guarantee, we wouldn't last long if we relied on it to get business. We have to compete on quality, pure and simple. It's our job to make the commissioners forget about quotas. If you start focusing on things like that you might as well run the planning department in a cardboard box factory. No. We stand or fall by our ideas and our ability to deliver.

(Parsons, quoted in Selig 2009)

Indeed, throughout the extended period of my research, Parsons consistently expounded the value of development *as a means of serving the audience and sustaining public service values*. His thinking can be summarised as follows: good development activities led to good programme ideas which led to good pitches which led to successful commissioning of good programmes which connected to the UK audience and harnessed creativity - key public service purposes and characteristics. Certainly the two senior executives (both appointed by Parsons) also stressed the importance of development, both pragmatically, as benefiting the Department, and ethically, as benefiting the audience:

Our biggest challenge is to continue our development drive because we are only as strong as our commissions. (Sue Morgan, Interview, June 2009)

As long as we can come up with development ideas that are right for the audience then that is a tremendous freedom. That's why I do lots of different things to connect to the audience and get ideas. If you are a public service broadcaster then you should be out and about with the audience and visible within that community. (Sara Harkins, Interview, June 2009)

As discussed previously, in Chapter Four, the concept of 'knowing the audience', here suggested to be synonymous with the creation and development of ideas, can, along with development, be seen as a defining element in the unique (and distinctly public service) character of the Department.

There are two separate development teams in the Department, one each for the CBeebies and CBBC brands, and each work to slightly different commissioning protocols for the relevant commissioner. Unlike other BBC genres or departments, BBC Children's has a self-contained commissioning structure in that it does not require both genre and channel commissioning: the power rests solely with the Children's commissioners. During my research period, CBeebies changed from a single, fixed commissioning round (March to August) to a rolling system of on-going commissioning in 2008, and CBBC maintained two fixed commissioning rounds per year as follows: Round 1 - March to August; and Round 2 – September to November. Both the rolling system and the fixed-round system mean that there is almost no let-up in the development activities of the Department, with some form of programme development activity taking place almost all year round, contemporaneous with the production activities of the Department. That there are always staff – including those at executive level - in dedicated development roles, even during the busiest production periods (i.e. when they might gainfully be employed in other duties), speaks volumes as to the perceived value of development. Development activities cost the Department money - in personnel and resources – but would seem to be considered a worthwhile and even necessary investment or speculation. Indeed, I heard Simon Parsons informally remark, of another genre/department which was disbanding their development team, that suspending development is “incredibly short sighted. Without a development team you have nothing, no chance of a commission. It's false economy” (Field journal, June 2008).

Likewise, the actual activities that constitute development demonstrate a 'long-term investment' approach, in that they rarely have a direct or linear relationship to the specific programme briefs from the commissioner's 'shopping list' (issued at the start of each round, or, in the case of CBeebies rolling commission, intermittently). It is worthwhile here to consider what these activities suggest of the relationship between development and 'knowing the audience'. This relationship

goes beyond the ambit of simple audience research. During my research period (much of which was spent in participant observation of the development teams) I encountered the following activities carried out under the aegis of ‘development’:

- Trips out/Away days (especially to children’s venues)²³ – Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery; the Burrell Collection, the Finnieston Crane; the necropolis; open-top bus tour of Glasgow; the cinema; the comedy festival; the science festival; a musical; children’s theatre shows. As well as the trip itself there is usually some sort of fun quiz or structuring ‘game’ to play at the venue. For example, during the necropolis trip, staff had to find individual graves by following a series of clues; and when visiting Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery, staff had to photograph objects that were of interest under various categories such as ‘death’; ‘nation’; and ‘religion’.
- Hands on technology and toy taster sessions - Nintendo Wii; Nintendo DS; Xbox 360; ‘Gogos crazybones’. Gameplay – Scattegories, Pictionary etc. These sessions were framed as a direct interaction with children’s own media culture.
- Competitions – create your playdoh monster; create your google-eyed object; create your photofit monster; make something with e.g. a paper clip; a piece of string and a cotton reel. Often there were spurious prizes for such competitions (such as a bag of sweets) and it is interesting that staff participation extended to administrative and other non-production staff.
- Viewing sessions – children’s programmes from the past, other countries, other Children’s Departments, other channels; adult programmes and formats that may translate well to Children’s; programmes about children (e.g.

²³ Although we were not asked to behave like children on these trips, there was a palpable excitement in the experience that manifested itself in childish (or child-like) behaviours. I was frequently reminded of Dennis Potter’s *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) in our ‘acting-out’ of the school trip: singing in the coach or car journey there, walking in a crocodile, pinching and poking each other, and frequent shouts of ‘Please sir, can I go to the toilet?’.

Channel 4's controversial *Girls and Boys Alone*); pilot episodes produced by the Department.

- Reading resources – new and classic children's picture books and children's literature (including non-fiction); educational resources and research about children.
- Brainstorms – one of the most prolific activities. Brainstorms may be around a specified idea (an item from the shopping list) or a more generic concept e.g. 'Our audience'; 'Tackling diversity head on'; 'Girls'.
- Meetings with 'experts' and specialists – nursery and primary education specialists; Glasgow School of Art Digital Designers, African storytellers, Children's yoga teacher, Children's comedians and clowns.
- Creativity forums – departmental emails with links to e.g. inspiring animations on YouTube; 'the wall of wonder' where staff place articles from newspapers or magazines or photos, postcards etc.
- Visits to schools and nurseries; visits by schools and nurseries. These may be structured around audience research (such as showing a taster tape or pilot episode) or be more informal or play-based.

While the hallmark of most of these activities is that they are of indirect (if any) benefit and that the writing-up of programme ideas and pitches happened outwith the activity sessions, it is instructive to map particular development activities to the successful pitch and commission of a BBC Scotland Children's production. I have chosen here to demonstrate the development activities and ethos leading to the successful commission of *Big City Park*. *Big City Park* is one of approximately a dozen titles that were developed and produced by the Children's Department at BBC Scotland during the period of my research, and is chosen because of the sheer diversity of development activities that shaped it.

Development case study: *Big City Park*

Big City Park is a BBC Scotland CBeebies show produced in association with Belfast-based independent production company Sixteen South, successfully commissioned in December 2009 after an 18 month gestation and development period which took place during my fieldwork and in which I was an especially active participant observer. Production commenced in April 2010. Although such a protracted

timescale (and longer) of development is not unheard of in independent Children's production (where millions of pounds are at stake in products such as Ragdoll's *In the Night Garden* or Kindle Entertainment's *Big and Small*), this development period can be considered long for BBC in-house production, which is structured around annual budgets and commissioning structures; most BBC Children's titles are *completed* (i.e. developed, pitched, commissioned, produced and broadcast) within a twelve-month period. The development processes of *Big City Park* constitute a good example of the non-linear, investigative, 'long term investment' approach to programme-development at BBC Scotland, and also of how development processes can, ideally, shape (rather than just respond to) commissioning needs.

The germ of the show can be traced back to Sara Harkins's engagement with a new direction in children's nursery education, spurred initially through a cluster of articles in the quality press from November 2007 onwards, regarding Scotland's innovation in outdoor nurseries. The articles suggested a zeitgeist in the notion of 'nurture through nature' in outdoor play, pointing to the emergence of several fully-outdoor childcare and nursery education facilities in Scotland. Sara distributed copies or links to these articles to the CBeebies development personnel, stating that there was something "really interesting and important – magical even" in the concept (Field journal, February 2008). Sara asked the team to look for further information, references or thematic links, which then led to her signing up for Children In Scotland's international conference on 'Nurture Through Nature' held at Crieff Hydro in June 2008.²⁴ In the event, Sara Harkins was unable to attend due to production commitments and asked if I would go in her stead. (This provided me with a very

²⁴ Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. "It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provision are of the best possible quality and able to meet the demands of a diverse society" www.childreninscotland.org.uk [Accessed 22.08.10].

valuable insight into how the BBC institution and the CBeebies brand were ‘read’ by other agencies, which I discuss under ‘measures of success’).

I had inferred that an additional value of the conference was the networking opportunities it presented and that a very positive outcome of my attendance would be an invitation for CBeebies staff to visit an outdoor nursery. I found these invitations easy to procure, with practitioners particularly pleased that our visit was for research rather than reportage purposes. Sara and I subsequently visited two such nurseries, one as an observational visit of a working day (i.e. with children), and the other as an adult workshop where adults experienced the outdoor nursery experience for themselves (i.e. effectively ‘as’ children). These visits proved to be very stimulating and even moving, revealing a very different approach to child-adult interactions than the traditional didactic ethos of much early-years education (by which CBeebies is heavily informed and structured). The approach is of utmost relevance when considering how PSB constructs its audience and when considering the means by which we educate children under the PSB requirement to ‘educate, inform and entertain’ in a medium antithetical to ‘outdoor education’.

I noticed how attuned Sara was to the approach, how intuitive her interactions with children and nature were in the quiet, reflective, reactive (as opposed to proactive), non-interventionist mode demanded of truly ‘child-centred’ (as opposed to adult-led) learning/play. An example of this was when, without invitation or initiation, a child asked Sara for help coming down from a tree. Even without Sara’s ‘natural affinity’ with the nurture through nature movement, however, I suspect that the fact that this new direction in early-years philosophy was emerging *in Scotland* meant that Sara would have been keen to explore the concept as part of her role as an early-years content producer living and working in Scotland. Sara, more so than the other executives, expressed a desire to promote Scotland through content. In interview, for example, Sara articulated her desire for a hit programme that was “inherently Scottish”:

I would love to do something that was inherently Scottish, but I don’t mean in a parochial way. I mean embracing the humour and the landscape of Scotland that would be seen worldwide. This is not about CBeebies, it is across the board – I think people have become frightened of having

Scottish content. So *Katie Morag*²⁵ would be great – a contemporary, feisty, fun, cosmopolitan *Katie Morag*. Like *Shallow Grave*²⁶ – it was Scottish but in no way haggis and heather. In the way that *Balamory* was a success. I don't want to do a new *Balamory* for the sake of it or because it was so popular within CBeebies, but because it was using the humour and the landscape.

While *Big City Park*, set in Belfast (as I discuss in Chapter Six), is not the vehicle of this aspiration, what is interesting here is Sara's explicit foregrounding of what she sees as two aspects of Scotland's distinct identity that resonate with audiences – humour and landscape.

Positively representing Scotland

Part of Sara Harkins's aspiration for PSB would seem to be the construction of a positive representation of Scotland that is attractive to viewers but which resists the much-critiqued parochial construction known as 'Kailyard' and the touristic construction known as 'Tartanry' (see e.g. Sweeney 2008). Sara's aspiration carries on a form of resistance to Kailyard and Tartanry that showcases Scotland's distinctiveness but does so in a "contemporary" way. It is, in itself, a familiar discourse of BBC Scotland:

To those who are not Scots it should be said that the Scotland we seek to project is not only the known land of romance and matchless scenic beauty but also the newer Scotland of off-shore oil, industrial growth, artistic renaissance and self-government – not parochial, but outward-looking and international in its approach. (Broadcasting Council for Scotland 1975, quoted in Sweeney 2008: 100)

This resistance, Maggie Sweeney argues (2008), is difficult to achieve within a small nation, and I find it interesting that Sara should cite *Balamory* as a text which

²⁵ *Katie Morag* is series of books by writer-illustrator, Mairi Hedderwick, set on the fictitious Scottish Island of Struay.

²⁶ *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1994) Black comedy set in Edinburgh. Sarah worked on this film.

offers such resistance, as my own critique would suggest otherwise. Balancing aspects of the positive and negative in representations of Scotland is a subject of much debate. A senior BBC Scotland executive had intimated to me that he perceived tensions between the BBC Scotland audience council and commissioning strategies. This executive cited *Balamory* as a text in which the competing demands coincided but also stated that frequently the audience council felt that texts “weren’t Scottish enough”.²⁷ It was further suggested that lack of national signifiers is a common complaint of audience councils in the nations, pointing to the alleged comments of the audience council for Wales that, likewise, *Dr Who* “wasn’t Welsh enough” (Field journal, March 2009).

The confluence of landscape, early-years practice and Scottish innovation offered in the ‘nurture through nature’ zeitgeist surely made the topic one of especial relevance to CBeebies Scotland. Sara was particularly interested in the mix of people attending the nurture through nature events (many had travelled from across the UK) especially in the mix of parents as well as educators and practitioners, stating that “it’s important that this is really something that comes from the grassroots and across different classes and backgrounds” (Field journal, June 2008). There are two elements to this statement: firstly, that Sara considered parental interest as key to the legitimacy of any development project (perhaps refuting Matt Briggs’s ideas of CBeebies as “ethicalization of existence” [2009a]); and secondly, that such parental interest had to have a constituency wider than that of middle-class aspiration. This was a recurring motif of Sara’s, a rule of thumb that the topic under investigation had to offer some appeal or benefit to parents and children across different social and economic circumstances. She had, for example, expressed reservations about how to suggest more than a middle-class constituency for various previous topics including yoga and vegetable gardening (Field journal, June 2008).

²⁷ When I put this charge to a member of the BBC Scotland Audience Council (a respected media academic) it was laughingly confirmed that much debate was always given to the ways in which the text represented Scotland (Field journal, June 2010).

Because both of the nature kindergartens visited were in scenic, rural forest settings (Secret Garden in Fife and Mindstretchers in Perth), Sara was anxious that she should also find some urban applications of ‘nurture through nature’. Although there was no specific programme idea at this stage, this was framed as pre-empting how the CBeebies commissioner might view the concept: “Michael [Carrington] is going to ask how it relates to urban kids, to kids who don’t have a gorgeous forest on their doorstep or are stuck ten floors up in a block of flats” (Field journal, July 2008). Sara and I also discussed with the nursery staff how the concept would translate to other non-forest locations – beaches, pasture land, fenland etc. Although framed, thus, around commissioner resistance, Sara’s concern points to the challenge of the nurture through nature movement which seeks to maximise the opportunity to engage with nature in every child’s environment. Sara’s concern also points clearly to the “problem” of audience even at the initial conceptual level of programme development, and also obliquely, perhaps, to an inherent tension of television as public service for children – how do we encourage healthy outdoor activity through an indoors, static medium? This last concern reveals the cumulative and overlapping processes of development as it was present in *LazyTown Extra* development and in the unsuccessful *Bendy Beebies* yoga project. Concern over parity of access and universality of application also fits a public service ethos.

Using contacts suggested by the forest nurseries, Sara tracked down two urban projects which she then visited: a Glasgow-based parents and toddlers group that met in parks and outdoor venues throughout the city, and an Aberdeen-based project which used ‘nurture through nature’ techniques with children on the care register or identified as ‘at risk’. Sara also bought various handbooks and educational resources which explored *The Potential of a Puddle* (Warden 2005) and showed how, even with very limited access to nature, natureplay could enhance a child’s life. A recurring theme of the educational research was that it was even more important for *urban* children and for deprived children to experience nature. This may correspond with a prevailing ideology that quality children’s media has a more important socialising function for some children than others (Hendershot 1999: 141-142; Messenger Davies 2010: 193).

Although there was no one single programme idea emerging from the research, Sara asked the team to start thinking about how the concept might translate onscreen. Programmes old and new were discussed and viewed in relation to how they promoted outdoor play (*Bill and Ben the Flowerpot Men*, *Come Outside*, *Dirt Girl World*, *In the Night Garden*, *LazyTown*, *Pogle's Wood*, *Rupert the Bear*, *Teletubbies* and *Waybuloo* among others). Certain principles emerged as central to Sara's vision of the concept – 'real' children, 'real' nature setting, 'real' weather and 'real' natureplay. Sara also stated that she didn't want to present the theme as a "half measure" and that it was important that she "got it right" (Field journal, August 2008). I interpreted this desire to 'get it right' as evidence of Sara's commitment to the audience and to the integrity of her belief in the value of 'nurture through nature'. In addition to children's television, Sara also looked at other representations of the child in a natural setting, including Enid Blyton's classic children's books *The Enchanted Wood* and *The Faraway Tree*, and the children's film adaptation of *Bridge to Terabithia* (Csupo 2007). Sara and I also discussed how adult texts which presented the child in nature – e.g. *Pan's Labyrinth* (del Toro 2006); *The Beguiled* (Siegel 1971); and *Les Innocents* (Téchiné 1987) – often explored the dark aspects of the child psyche. While I do not wish to exaggerate the importance of such discussions as a development activity (they are probably of little or no relevance) it does suggest the openness and the aspiration of the development approach.

At around this time, Michael Carrington passed on to Sara a pitch document for a show called *Big City Park*. Sara felt the proposal wasn't right (other than the title, the final commissioned show is now unrecognisable from the original pitch document) but thought that it was a promising vehicle vis-à-vis nurture through nature in two concomitant respects. Firstly, it was an urban setting of a natureplay concept (so it was perceived that some of the initial ground had been covered in introducing the philosophy to the commissioner); and secondly, that the commissioner was already interested in working with the company, who had produced *Sesame Tree*, BBC Northern Ireland's non-network version of *Sesame Street*. Taken together, I would argue that Sara recognised a viable commissioning opportunity in these aspects.

Sara began working directly with Sixteen South to redevelop the pitch to articulate more fully the themes emergent through the BBC Scotland development activities. She suggested that this was a balancing act between preserving something of the original premise of the show “otherwise there would be little point in working with Sixteen South” (Field journal, April 2009), but enabling the pitch to more fully express the nature through nurture concept of the BBC Scotland development activities. It is possible to map much of the “USP” [Unique Selling Point] quoted in the redeveloped pitch document (*italicised below*) onto specific aspects of the development research:

Big City Park is set outdoors and filmed completely outdoors – really outdoors: we film whatever the weather. A fundamental principle of the forest nurseries is that children are outside in all weather. This is replicated in the stated production practice of the show – a radical departure from studio-based filming or from the practice that outside location filming is dependent on good weather to enhance the attractiveness of the location and the aesthetics of the show.

The show emphasises and underlines that nature is accessible to all children. We emphasise that it is free and needs little preparation – we encourage the use of found and improvised items as play tools and treasures. The principle of making the most of what nature provides for free is a key point of natureplay. This was seen in the homemade shelters and toys that the children made for themselves in the forest nurseries. This idea allies naturally to Sara’s ideas about parity of access to children of all backgrounds and circumstances.

Big City Park uses a natural colour palette and natural textures to enhance the natural focus of the show. The nurture through nature practitioners made frequent use of Steiner techniques, which encourage the use of natural

materials and fibres. This dictates a significantly different colour palette to the ‘superbrights’ that dominate much preschool television and nursery education.²⁸ During development Sara and I amassed a collection of found objects as inspiration – pine cones, shells, interesting pebbles, nuts, textured twigs and leaves.

Dara uses May’s computer to research information – technology is shown as an enhancement (rather than a threat) to children’s appreciation of nature.

Sara was very interested in how the Mindstretchers outdoor nursery in Perth successfully met the government’s recommendations on use of technology and IT within the early-years curriculum. They did so by using internet resources in a research capacity (e.g. a child found an empty eggshell and looked online to find out what sort of bird it belonged to).

Nature provides us with natural stories full of changes, jeopardy and unpredictable endings to tell and retell. Advocates suggest natureplay is an antidote to ‘wrapping children in cotton wool’ in terms of physical and emotional development. Practitioners had stressed that the ‘stories’ as well as the ‘experience’ of nature were very important in developing a child’s understanding of their world: finding a dead animal; a den being blown away by a storm; a snowman melting, were all cited as opportunities for careful handling of such development. The role of jeopardy in preschool content had been discussed at various industry events in my research period and there was

²⁸ See, for example, Dutch preschool television executive, Van Kollenburg: “It’s important for young children to be stimulated by elemental colours. So as a result, for early learning programmes you should have these primary colours that are recognisable to young children” (quoted in Steemers 2010: 54).

a perception that risk and jeopardy were disappearing from preschool content.²⁹

The above retrospective fitting of development research to the final pitch would perhaps suggest that the development of *Big City Park* was a more linear process than actually occurred, and effaces some of the more ineffable aspects of the creative process. What I do find useful in this mapping, however, is that it exposes the level to which the ‘nurture through nature’ concept is embedded within the show’s format; it is not merely a veneer or fashionable gloss added to a generic preschool format but is instead the driving force of the show, with *Big City Park* a genuine outcome of original research and development. I offer textual analysis of the show in Chapter Six.

Creativity and commissioning

While *Big City Park* demonstrates a ‘concept led’ approach to creativity and development (shared by other BBC Scotland children’s titles including *Balamory*, *Roboidz* and *Raven*), wherein the idea for the show precedes a commissioning brief, most shows are developed in response to particular briefs (e.g. *Ooglies*, *Hedz*, *Nina and the Neurons*, *Wait For It*, *Ed and Oucho’s Excellent Inventions*, *Get 100*). A few titles are also developed by BBC Scotland working from a format or idea initially developed or initiated by a third party (e.g. *LazyTown Extra*, *Copycats*, *Carrie and David’s Popshop*): such projects will usually have their origin with an independent production company or co-producer. No matter where or when the genesis of the idea begins, its subsequent production as a BBC Scotland title requires a ‘green light’ from the appropriate commissioner. The relationship between any production department and the relevant commissioner is critical, and is a dominant influence on the production ethos and practices of a department.

²⁹ There was also a perception that the avoidance of risk or jeopardy was being driven by the demands of US commissioners – i.e. it was allied to a discourse around the value of UK-originated content. Steemers identified this, quoting one UK Producer, “I think one of the things that Americans tend to do now with preschool is they don’t want conflict. They seem scared of a putting a child in a situation that shows conflict. So they try and round up all the edges of any spiky story” (quoted in Steemers 2010: 53).

Both commissioners are based in the main children's department in London (and therefore will be relocating to Salford in 2011), placing BBC Scotland outside of their daily sphere of physical contact. The commissioners do visit, somewhat regally, perhaps once or twice a year, but BBC Scotland executives and senior production staff travel regularly (two or three times a month) to meet them. This separation may not necessarily be a bad thing as it supports the BBC Scotland mandate to be 'an alternative voice' and enables the team to 'surprise' the commissioner. Executives and producers alike allude to the (potential) bias/advantage frequently, and point to the way in which (as with *Big City Park*) the ideal situation is to *create* commissioner interest as early as possible:

Okay so we don't have the daily 'water cooler' advantage but we try to be having conversations with the commissioners *before* the shopping list. We want the heads up on what they are thinking and on how their brains work. If we can get ideas to them as early as possible then we'll know whether they're already in talks with someone else or even get them to create a slot on the list for our idea. (Producer, Field journal, November 2008)

I have issues with several aspects of the commissioning process and structure (especially the amount of power vested within one individual), of which the geographical base of the commissioner is part of the concern, although being in constant daily contact with the commissioner is not necessarily an advantage for a producer. Whether an advantage or disadvantage, nonetheless there is a situation of disparity between London and Glasgow producers and their access to the commissioner, although I would argue that this disparity contributes to a certain ethos of 'difference' and of 'autonomy' for the Department that supports its legitimacy in providing an alternative voice:

L: Have you bridged the gap between here and London?

P: I don't think it will ever be bridged. By simply not being in the same building as your commissioners or line-managers you are at a disadvantage. So our job is to shorten the miles in as many ways as possible.

L: How about if the commissioners stay in London after the Salford move to create a level playing field?

P: Well it would be fairer! But our advantage is that we are autonomous and so it makes little difference where the commissioners are based. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

As well as this perceived autonomy, here I wish to look at how commissioning structures impact on issues of creativity and other PSB purposes and characteristics expressed by departmental members.

Part of the BBC's stated survival strategy during the last few turbulent years has been a renewed institutional emphasis on concepts of creativity. Indeed Mark Thompson, Director General of the BBC since 2004, drove through the most recent charter renewal (in 2006), a critical process for the BBC and its impartial status and funding, on a manifesto of distinctiveness and quality in BBC content as predicated on creativity and innovation. The BBC sponsored nationwide debates and lectures on the theme of creativity thus: "Creativity is the point of the BBC. Our audiences expect it. Our services demand it. And, at our best, we live by it" (Thompson 2008). With such a clear message coming from the 'top' downwards, it would seem reasonable to expect that the encouragement of creativity and innovation would be the highest priority on the current BBC institutional agenda. The BBC's "vision" is, after all, "To be the most creative organisation in the world" (BBC 2007a), and one of its stated "values" is that, "Creativity is the lifeblood of our organisation" (BBC 2007a). Creativity is reinforced in one of the six public purposes set out for the BBC by Royal Charter, that of "Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence" (BBC 2007a). A more detailed explanation of this public purpose further enshrines the perceived nexus of quality/excellence and creativity/innovation as fulfilling a key cultural function in children's PSB: a definition set by the BBC Trust (the internal regulator of the BBC) is that, "You can expect the BBC to offer the best examples of creative work that engage and delight them and break new ground" (BBC Trust 2009a).

Implicit across this BBC rhetoric is the reflexive construction of PSB as a beneficial cultural artefact and societal right; this rhetoric, along with the fact that creativity is enshrined in the purposes and characteristics of PSB defined by the regulator, suggested to me that the issue of creativity would be an important professional discourse. It was, in its most commonly understood sense; but also in the pejorative sense of being a BBC buzzword associated with what one producer called

“creative bloody futures” (Producer, Interview, March 2009). Several producers both inside and outside the BBC suggested to me that the term ‘Creative Futures’ had become tainted by its association with job cuts under the BBC’s ‘rationalisation’ and budget cut processes during the same period. BBC Children’s, as a whole, incurred redundancies of almost a third of its staff in the 2007 to 2009 period, although the rolling nature of departmental staff meant that I was not fully conscious of such redundancies. One of my research participants articulated a gulf between the public message of creativity made by the BBC and the inner ‘madness’ of programme making:

I heard Mark Thompson loud and clear about quality and difference but, the only way I can rationalise it, is that that is the message for the public and on the inside it’s about targets and percentages and creative bloody futures. We have the external position and the internal reality and you can’t hold on to the anchor of what was said at the very top. It is a stupid analogy, but when Winston Churchill spoke everybody knew it was all about the one thing, so no one got lost in the madness of war. But here it feels like there are so many conveyor belts going in different directions. (CBBC Producer, Interview, March 2009)

This producer, along with several others, suggested that the biggest limitation of creativity was not time or money (lack of which does contribute to the stresses of production nonetheless), but the limited autonomy by which producers can implement their own decisions or ideas due to the various layers of management approval bearing on content. This was often seen as compounded by the fact that compartmentalised production-team structures, made up of rigidly designated roles, did not fully utilise the skills base of each individual team member. Real personal investment and satisfaction in the programme could be difficult to achieve therefore, even by the key decision-makers or creators of a text. This view was most recurrent in those who worked in what might be considered the more explicitly generative, artistic or creative processes of production (such as development, writing or artistic direction). Such producers were often frustrated that they could not have had a deeper involvement with other aspects of the project such as directing or editing. In

contrast, however, several research participants noted that Children's production was much better than other genres for facilitating multi-tasking – indeed the opportunity for multi-tasking across several creative roles was often cited as one of the main attractions of producing content for children. One writer/developer stated another contradictory view in that she had no interest in seeing a pilot project through from development to broadcast; she felt her expertise lay in the creative process only (Producer, Interview, March 2009).

Barriers to creativity: location

One institutional barrier to creativity that was suggested to me was the Pacific Quay corporate workspace. The theme emerged in interview but was also raised in the more public forum of the BBC Children's Festival. The Children's Festival is something of a misnomer as it is an event for producers of children's content, not an event for children. It occurs every two years and is a two-day programme of presentations relevant to various aspects of children's content. The theme in 2008 was that of 'Creativity' and, interestingly, all the presentations were made by those outside of the Children's Department and mostly by the independent production sector. During the presentation by a Pixar representative, in which their famous animation dens and creative workspaces were lauded (Pixar employees are encouraged to personalise their workspace to the extent of creating entire themed rooms), a producer from BBC Children's asked how that would work in a hot desk situation. The Pixar representative responded that it would not work, to the general hilarity of the assembled company. The producer who raised the issue with me in interview pointed to the fact that design work and construction no longer happened on the premises at PQ (a fact also lamented by design staff) and that this meant that the creative 'vibe' was missing in the building: "It's almost as if creativity is looked down on and you get pigeonholed. So I'm the guy who always does the visual type of shows" (Producer, Interview, March 2009).

Although I accept that this producer's talents might have been underutilised in the particular project discussed, I cannot agree that Pacific Quay lacks a creative 'buzz' or 'vibe' or that creativity is not visible beyond programme making; indeed this very producer was staging a photography exhibition in the second floor exhibition space. The changing exhibitions (of art in all media contributed by staff)

and the mixed programme of concerts, performers and speakers made Pacific Quay a very exciting place to work.³⁰ Creativity was encouraged in smaller ways too – producers were encouraged to make homemade props and costumes as part of development, home baking was much in evidence and much appreciated, and achievements out of the workplace (an entry in a photography competition, the performance of a first playscript, appearances in amateur dramatics etc.) were applauded at the departmental meeting.

Barriers to creativity: risk-aversion

A recurring theme in producer interviews was that the BBC, rather than using its distinctive PSB position as a means of *protecting* creativity (as promised by the ‘Creative Futures’ strategy), was actually highly risk-averse due to its perception of commercial pressures and competition. This pressure was believed to be responsible for creating ‘top heavy’ management procedures as articulated by another producer here:

Multi-channel pressure allows no weak start – you have to get it right first time. There are lots of people walking round poking their noses in to your product. It is not *me* saying ‘I like this, this and this’, it is an *exec* saying, ‘What are you doing?’ or ‘I don’t like that’. They crawl over everything and act as a safety net for what the commissioner will like or dislike. But the problem is that a lot of shows start to look the same because there is such a network of filters. My take, which is unique to me – because all producers are different – gets homogenised down in to what the execs think the commissioner thinks. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

This risk-aversion and homogeneity was also noted in the 2007 Ofcom Report:

Currently the BBC is focussing on ‘bigger, better, fewer’ commissions and favouring in-house production. As a result one stakeholder suggested that

³⁰ Some of the ‘acts’ which appeared in the PQ ‘street’ in Spring/Summer 2008 were; BBC symphony orchestra; Johnny Ball; and a hypnotist.

producers are pitching 'safe projects to type' in order to secure commissions. (Ofcom 2007a:143)

It should be noted that such criticism was not directed personally at the BBC Scotland executive team – indeed, a striking factor of my research was the high personal and professional regard in which the departmental senior executives were held by their staff – but rather a frustration at corporate procedures and structures.

Nonetheless, there are two important inferences to be made from this type of producer comment: firstly, that the commissioner's power and personal taste is absolute; and secondly, that much belief in commercial pressure is also linked to the notion that children, offered myriad media choice, have no reason to stay with content that does not offer instant gratification. As discussed throughout Part Two of this thesis, this second inference cuts to the very heart of children's PSB, because through it the child is constructed as attracted to only that which is entertaining or immediately pleasing, and the information and education elements of the BBC mission 'to inform, educate and entertain' can be achieved only 'by stealth'. This stealth is not possible if children do not choose to watch content within a mixed schedule format. These two inferences are not disparate. Rather, they act together to generate a frenetic and anxious creative climate in which everything must be newer, 'cooler', faster, 'edgier', and above all funnier to meet the demands of the commissioner trying to meet the perceived demands of a channel-hopping audience constructed as rapacious and fickle.

Certainly I would argue that Anne Gilchrist, the CBBC commissioner during my main participant observation period (replaced by Damian Kavanagh in September 2009), placed a huge emphasis on fun and humour within her commissioning briefs, with the terms "infectious humour" and "laugh out loud comedy" frequently forming desired requirements of content in the CBBC commissioning briefs during the 2007 to 2009 period. Although Anne Gilchrist did commission a broad range of content including, for example, award-winning factual content dealing with child poverty in Britain (*The Wrong Trainers*), her 'bread and butter' bulk commissions of comedy and game shows drove through a particular focus on humour and reality entertainment that dictated a particular way of developing ideas, as we can see from this range of producer comments:

It's the left-of-field, surprisingness, bonkersness of it that will make Anne sit up and notice. The whole way of developing your programme now is, 'What would Anne least expect?' or 'What does she expect but how can we deliver it so that it surprises her?'. You've got to give her what she expects because you can't give her what she doesn't want – but how can we give it to her in a way she won't expect to see? You've got a weird parallel thinking going on in your brain all the time. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

It is the way she [Anne Gilchrist] personally ticks – things have to work for her personally because who is there above her to say, 'You know what? I don't like that'. She's got to fulfil her remit and the buck stops with her. So it doesn't matter what I, or Sue [Morgan], or Simon [Parsons] think: it's trying to read what Anne thinks. She doesn't realise how often it comes up, 'Will Anne like this?', or 'Anne won't like this', or 'Anne will think this'. It is all the time. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

I was at a brainstorm for [a high concept game show] and I tried to emphasise the importance of keeping a 'watertight world' but one of the things people wanted was a funny [enemy] character. It was almost an emphasis on unnecessary humour to satisfy the Anne necessity for the channel to be fun. The current promo montage is all laughing and custard pies because all the current output is fun. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

I think the execs are a fantastic earpiece for the commissioner and that gets us stuff through that relationship, which is good. And obviously they want the Department to be successful, and if Anne likes it then we *are* successful and will be rewarded. But you have to play a careful game: you don't fight your corner or go with suggestions. You can't say, 'You are wrong'. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

What I believe is significant in these comments is not the criticism of the actual personal taste of the commissioner (who came from an entertainment background and had an exceptional track record of personal expertise in this area), but the criticism of the fact that such power is centralised in a single person to whom every creative decision then becomes accountable and prescriptive. Interestingly, Michael Carrington, the CBeebies commissioner during this period, came under no such criticism despite occupying a position of similar power. Whether this is because CBeebies content is less controversial in its fulfilment of PSB purposes, or because CBeebies producers don't express the same level of anxiety about 'chasing the audience', or because Carrington was simply more respected for his decisions and balance of genres, is difficult to ascertain. What *is* underlined by the disparity is how much personal taste and control is exercised by the commissioner without any apparent check as to the overall balance of commissioned content.

Such issues are not exclusive to Children's production however. Veteran screenwriter, Tony Garnett, launched a scathing attack on BBC Drama through the viral circulation of his article, *How to kill creativity while claiming to help it grow* (2009). The article, sparking huge controversy, and reproduced in the quality broadsheets and media trade press, presents a damning account of commissioning and top heavy executive processes limiting creative autonomy of ground-level programme-makers. Like some of my own research participants, Garnett argues:

Senior management still does not understand that detailed supervision by more and more layers, reporting to more and more senior executives, does not result in higher standards. The real motive must be neurotic control borne of fear. Let's make sure everything is safe with no embarrassing surprises. Better to squeeze the life out of it than run the slightest risk of getting in to trouble. (Garnett 2009)

This claim of risk aversion, in an institution that has moved from scandal to scandal in recent times (breaches of trust; 'Sachsgate'; furore over top salaries), is particularly important when thinking about creative freedoms and about what media content we deem appropriate, necessary or worthy of PSB. Both Garnett and some of my own participants suggest a homogeneity in broadcasting, indicative, at best, of the

'least objectionable programming' strategies of the US (commercial) networks, or, at worst, of a 'dumbed-down' mediocracy borne of content designed as the lowest common denominator. Mark Thompson may well champion BBC content as distinctive for its quality, but several of my research participants, while being proud of what they do within the restricted briefs and powers afforded them, expressed disappointment at the range and variety of programmes and sub-genres on offer to them as programme-makers - and therefore offered to the audience. Some of that disappointment might be expressed as mitigated by financial factors - for example "I know the commissioners don't have the money to make everything they want to" (Producer, Interview, March 2009) - but most often was seen as an institutional aversion to risk-taking, predicated on fear of commercial competition and driven by a commissioner's personal taste being allowed to skew the balance of content.

Although writing explicitly of adult drama, it is revealing that Garnett chooses to use parent-child relationships as a metaphor for various facets of broadcasting. Far from criticising the BBC as being paternalistic, he suggests that the diet of "junk" with which the BBC "feeds" its audience is, "perhaps its worst public service dereliction". He explicitly states the writer/producer to be child-like, deserving of positive 'parenting' from executives:

Good parents will erect boundaries, around personal safety for instance, but will leave room for the child's imagination to flourish. The children, with few material resources will invent elaborate worlds [. . .] This creative absorption needs room and time. The parents should not interfere. (Garnett 2009)

Garnett's evocation of the child as creative and the audience as child-like may be consistent with a paternalism that is very much out of fashion in the BBC and perhaps nowhere more so than in the Children's Department, where adult producers are wary of being seen as patronising to their child audience, as shown in Chapter Four. However, most of the CBBC producers at BBC Scotland cite this perceived challenge of captivating their audience as the most rewarding and exciting aspect of their job, frequently citing their own creativity and personality as 'child-like'.

Frustrations in creative processes and top-heavy management structures are thus frequently attributed as thwarting the producer's instinct for what children actually want, as seen in this selection of producer quotes:

I know what kids think. I've always had a pretty good idea of what children want. I'm a big kid myself and I know what excites children. I know what it feels like. I know what is in their heads – I'm pretty in touch with children and what they want, and yet the commissioner always seems to want it to be more complicated and more difficult to achieve. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

I put forward an idea about circuses and theme parks and the feedback was that kids today wouldn't understand it. I mean, come on, they're kids' lands – and they all play *Rollercoaster Tycoon* and *Wii Carnival* – so how they can say that? I don't know. It's bizarre. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

Sometimes you think, 'Kids will like that. They just will'. You just *know* that they will. There doesn't always have to be a big explanation for it. It is gut feeling. It is instinct. When children visit everyone asks them, 'Tell us why it is funny' and they say, 'Because it just is'. But when I say that no one listens! If producers think it is funny then it should be accepted as funny because [producers] are good at their job. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

Further creative frustrations can also be discerned with what are expressed as 'over-protective' content and compliance restrictions which were perceived as constantly changing. I must stress that this was not articulated as annoyance at the BBC's ultra-strict child-safety and risk-assessment procedures (everyone who works in Children's must complete the compulsory 'Working with Children' course which deals with child protection issues) or at the avoidance of potentially imitative behaviours as discussed in Chapter Four. Indeed producers frequently lauded the

BBC's desire to produce content that was 'safe' for children and 'trusted' by their parents. Rather, this was expressed as bewilderment at certain, seemingly random, decisions that changed the creative thrust of the content. An apposite example of this comes from the stop-motion animation sketch show *Ooglies*. The show was developed in-house at BBC Scotland in response to a commissioning brief of 'low budget comedy' (though the resulting pitch and commission was anything but low-budget, representing the biggest stop-motion animation project in the UK outside of Aardman animations). It features inanimate objects that have anthropomorphic 'googly' eyes attached. One character is a lonely Brussels sprout that nobody likes. The producers found themselves unable to show the sprout being picked up by the prongs of a fork onscreen because that constituted 'impaling'. One of the producers noted, (albeit with a degree of amusement):

We had to scoop it up instead. But children use forks every day! It is crazy and schizophrenic rules. So no toasted marshmallows or fruit kebabs either! And it blocks creativity because everything you do has to be rewritten so it gets to the stage where you just think, 'Tell me what to write and I will do it'. And it takes the fun out of it and you start to question your own judgement. And you don't even know who is responsible for the decisions half the time – all you know is that what you see onscreen isn't how you wrote it. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

Such anecdotes – and there were several others – do suggest a BBC that is risk-averse at an institutional level, including commissioning processes, but this same producer was at pains to point out that it was a 'stereotype' to suggest that the executives were not themselves creative and talented, noting that all the BBC Scotland executive team came from impressive backgrounds in practical programme making: the implication was that the problems lie further up the institutional structure but that executives had to attempt to second-guess what those further up might say.

The executives and production staff of BBC Scotland Children's Department are unanimous in the emphasis that they place on creativity as an intrinsic public service value. While that value is prized, the means by which it can best be achieved within the institutional BBC structure is open to question, with those at production

level often expressing limits to their creative autonomy particularly vis-à-vis commissioning. There is a clearly manifest desire and enthusiasm to serve the children's audience with quality television content that marks the best in creative competition. Frequently, however, a prevailing climate of risk-aversion is expressed as a barrier to the fullest use of the individual creative talents of producers. The commissioners' personal tastes and values may well serve to compound this.

Measuring success

In analysing the ethos of the Department, I found that my data offered recurring insight into another somewhat intangible aspect of production – the measure and expression of success or satisfaction that the Department valued, and which fed back into the ethos at individual and collective levels. Clearly, development and commissioning processes have a highly visible and concrete marker of success – i.e. getting a programme commissioned (and to the budget and specification as originally proposed or better)³¹ - that is central to the validity of the Department as an autonomous unit. Success or failure in these terms is very stark. Successful commissions are usually announced via departmental email from Simon, and again at the departmental 'ten to ten' morning meeting, and are always presented positively, with much whooping and cheering and thanks expressed to the development teams. This reception is the same whether there is only one commission or half a dozen, and whether there were only a couple of pitches made or lots – i.e. the percentage of success or the ratio of success to failure is not alluded to.

Accounting success purely in terms of commissions won, does not, however, allow for the subtleties of building reputation and trust which may be the more important outcome of any one pitch or development portfolio. Speaking of the initial reaction to the CBeebies commissioning round in 2008, one of the CBeebies development team had said to me that the team was "gutted" by the outcome (Field

³¹ *Nina and the Neurons*, for example, was put forward with a certain budget that was then increased by Michael Carrington. Budget guidelines and number of episodes are given in the Commissioner's brief that forms part of the shopping list, so to have this budget or programme specification increased at the commission stage is rare.

journal, August 2008), which was one returning strand (*Nina and the Neurons*) and one project with earmarked funds for further development (*Same Smile*). Several weeks on, however, and this outcome appeared to have been rationalised. CBeebies Scotland had, only a couple of months before the round, been given a very important commission of *LazyTown Extra* (which was perceived by many staff as contingent on Sara Harkins's appointment to the post), and they had also completed *Carrie and David's Popshop*. One returning strand and a further development project therefore was not too shabby an outcome after all, particularly since Sara was new to the post and to the CBeebies audience. The returning strand of *Nina and the Neurons* (as *Nina Goes Inventing*) was later spoken of as a particular coup, with several producers suggesting to me that, were it not for the innovation in the brand direction, *Nina* would probably have reached the end of its natural life, having run for almost five years. In this way, not just the commission proper, but the attendant circumstances, can be considered as a marker of success. Speaking a year later, Sara Harkins was aware of the relative success of the *Nina* recommission:

S: I'm tickled pink we got *Nina* recommissioned because I think internally and in London there was a feeling that it had come to the end of its life.

L: I wasn't aware of that. Is that to do with the natural life of a preschool show?

S: Well I don't think it was ever officially said, but 'Go Eco' might have been the last one. I think, without losing any of the inherent quality of the show, that I've really upped the brand and raised production values. (Interview, June 2009)

As well as rationalising the specific success of *Nina*, by 2009 Sara was discernibly more sanguine in her approach to commissioning outcomes in general, taking a more long-term and reputation-based stance to success:

I've bent over backwards to increase our relationship with London and I think that is reaping dividends. Staff are now more ambitious. Through development we have put forward a really interesting group of programmes and even if we don't get them commissioned I think Michael [Carrington] will trust us and that

has long term benefits. The biggest thrill is that I've learned so much about the audience. (Interview, June 2009)

Sara's identification of 'staff development', 'long term benefits' 'reaping dividends' and of 'knowing the audience', points to some of the other markers or measures of success that were considered important and necessary by production personnel, and which point to a 'bigger picture' of public service.

Although without commissions the Department has no chance to show its worth, commissions are only one part of how success might be quantified. Other measures or markers were also suggested by producers over the extended period of my research. I analyse these markers below. Cynically, these markers could be considered as somewhat consolatory measures of success (or mitigating measures of failure) and can loosely be attributed to either 'Creative difference' or to 'Practical consideration', or an overlap of both:

- Not every production is a commission originally developed in-house by BBC Scotland. *Copycats* was a bought-in Japanese format, *LazyTown Extra* was a 'spin-off' of an existing highly successful brand. Not all commissions are therefore 'won' in the usual sense. (Practical consideration)
- Only a small proportion of pitches submitted will be commissioned – there is not an expectation that every idea will be 'green lit' and so the system incurs much natural wastage. (Practical consideration/ Creative difference)
- Titles chosen for commission are not determined solely on quality or value: there may be a wonderful project that the commissioner simply doesn't have the money for, or it may not fit with the various political and quota constraints of the commissioner. (Practical consideration)
- Pitches that are successful are not necessarily the ones that the developer thought best or wanted most to have produced; as pointed at in the previous section, developers and commissioners do not always share similar tastes or values. (Creative difference)
- A successful commission is not necessarily a successful show. Delivery – on time and to budget - is just as important, although again being on time

and to budget is only one aspect of successful delivery. (Practical consideration)

Several of these consolatory measures of success also suggest something of the wasteful nature of the commissioning process. The Department expends many resources on developing pitches and ideas that will not be commissioned. Even though it may be consoling to imagine that it was ‘the wrong place and time’ for the idea, there is no opportunity to recycle the idea or to resubmit it in another round; pitches which did not get commissioned were binned in their entirety. One executive described unsuccessful pitches as “shop-soiled goods” (Field journal, August 2008).

In addition to these considerations, there was a construction of an alternative measure of success that links directly to both creative satisfaction and to a public service ethos. At its most extreme, this could be expressed as supreme value accorded to work that is public service in its most abstract or pure form, and as antithetical to any notion of consumer sovereignty in that it should not be indexed against any quantitative measure of audience reach or share. This did not mean that the programmes could not be popular, but that they had to be distinctive to the BBC in a way that audience statistics could not reveal. It was suggested to me that audience reach and share statistics (which are issued weekly to BBC Scotland by developers based in the main London department), were not only a poor measure of success but were effectively corrupting public service values. It was argued that it is becoming harder and harder to get programmes commissioned that have specialist or niche interests or which might not be expected to perform well in terms of reach or share (e.g. a show in a rural setting). As discussed in Chapter Four, this fits closely to a specific construction of the audience wherein there is a limited expectation of what children enjoy and find relevant or interesting. It is a construction wherein the broadcaster must constantly push boundaries in order to sustain attention – and ratings - in the face of *perceived* commercial competition. Such construction suggests an over- privileging of ideas about identification and relevance and monolithic assumptions about what gratification children want or get from media texts. Several established producers felt that the drive to compete with the perceived commercial competition was driving down standards:

There is no competition. Okay there's Disney, Nickelodeon and all. But not internally [in the UK]. There's no competition on ITV or the terrestrial channels so the whole ethos of competition is just ingrained, a hangover. Actually we need to step back and see where the channel is going because bigger, better, fewer just boils down to you've got to make it for less. But it is not about the money, it is the [content and aesthetics] that worry me. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

Children like to push boundaries to find out where they are. So if one channel feels like it pushes boundaries more than another then that is one element that makes it more attractive to the audience. And if adults are not supervising children then we end up with an impossible choice – we end up following channels where we don't want to go or we lose the audience. We shouldn't be making content we are not comfortable with but we still have to attract the audience who are attracted to this boundary pushing stuff.

(Producer, Interview, June 2009)

Conversely, commercial competition, with its vast global budgets, was seen as impacting on BBC programming in other ways, through exposing reduced domestic budgets:

In terms of quality, well, our costs are driven down year on year. That can make you creative, but there is a limit to that and I think we are approaching the limit. We are getting to the point where you compare one of CBBC's dramas to a Disney drama and it doesn't compare. We are at the point of suffering so we need to make choices. We are on the edge of that though not quite there yet. (Producer, Interview, June 2009)

The question of how to square less popular content with the Ofcom characteristic of being “engaging – remaining accessible and enjoyed by viewers” has long been a difficult one in PSB. The most popular of content might be decried as populist and as offering only a duplication of commercial content (and therefore failing to be “challenging” and “innovative”), while less-popular content can be seen as failing the PSB characteristics of being “engaging” (Ofcom 2007a: 14). Several studies have suggested that increased commercial competition, rather than increasing

plurality, merely limits the range of programmes offered in the market when taken as a whole (Blumler 1992b; Blumler and Biltereyst 1998; Messenger Davies and Corbett 1997). Certainly such scenarios are offered by Ofcom as the possible future outcome of market change (2007b). Some staff (as above) challenged the very notion of commercial competition and its supposed spur to creativity, very much in the manner of Lord Reith's apprehension that giving the audience 'what it wants' creates only self-sustaining mediocrity: "He who prides himself on giving what he thinks the public wants is often creating a fictitious demand for lower standards which he himself will then satisfy" (quoted in Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 7).

Achieving 'public service'

Whenever expressed, this 'abstract' measure of PSB success or satisfaction was often conceptualised in opposition to an unseen higher power or institutional structure, beyond even that of the commissioners and controller of BBC Children's. In it, emphasis is shifted from the commissioners' decisions to unseen figures such as 'those really in power', 'those really making the decisions', 'those really pulling the strings', who were envisaged to exist outside of BBC Children's (by which I include the entire BBC Children's structure of channels, scheduling, production etc., not just BBC Children's as a department):

The [CBBC] channel is driven hugely by the commissioner's taste – far more than ever before - because of the pressures they are under to deliver higher percentages of BBC viewers versus Nickelodeon or whatever. I don't know the pressures but they are probably massive, massive, massive. The commissioners have got to fulfil that remit. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

The tacit view here is that despite the commissioner's personal power and taste there is a higher authority dictating success and creating pressure purely in terms of ratings. It links to a recurring notion, hinted at by senior figures in the children's television industry (both inside and outside the BBC), that the BBC, for all the rhetoric, "doesn't really 'like' Children's" – that it is merely there on sufferance, and "they" would "get rid of us if they could" (BBC Children's Executive, Field journal, June 2008). This 'conspiracy' theory was then ideologically linked to the notion that, as a society 'we don't like children'. As extreme as this belief sounds, it is

a prevalent one in childhood studies and a view put forward by many high-profile advocates of children's rights including Sir Al Aynsley-Green, England's first Commissioner for Children, and Tam Baillie, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People.³² Within children's media circles these various ideas constitute a matrix of belief wherein only those who are specialists in Children's really know and understand children and 'are on their side'.

Connecting to the public

Under this rubric therefore, measures of success could be found wherever a truly public service ethos was engaged; these measures might even be considered those of resistance or subaltern politics. I saw various measures of success and satisfaction which might be termed as this. In CBeebies, for example, much time is spent reading and providing feedback on programme ideas submitted by the general public (the Children's section of the BBC commissioning website would seem to invite such approaches to be made direct to Simon Parsons). Although it was not initially put to me that these approaches were anything other than valid, I would imagine that it must be very difficult for a non-television specialist to frame an idea to the standard required. I asked Sara Harkins why, therefore, she and the development team should spend time on these submissions. Her response was characteristically ethical and public service in its rationale:

Because the BBC is a public service broadcaster and for me that means we are obliged to serve the public and give them access - and not just in the sense of the end product or to the building. Someone who has taken the trouble to write in to us *deserves* feedback. And it fosters creativity: one chap wrote to us with an idea and we suggested that he should try to get it published as a children's book first. And he succeeded. The idea still

³² Evidenced in keynote speeches given at an Equality and Human Rights Commission/ Centre for Rural Childhood event to raise awareness of Article 12, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Edinburgh City Chambers, Wednesday 23rd March 2011.

wasn't right for television, not for us at least, but I see that as a very worthwhile outcome. (Field journal, March 08)

When, later in interview, I asked Sara about this, she candidly reiterated this response:

If you are a public service broadcaster then you should be out and about with the audience and visible within that community. You should be reading every submission and responding personally. I was reading one on the train and it was shocking but it is important to do it. (Sara Harkins, Interview, June 2009)

I gained the opportunity to speak to a member of the public about a submission she had made to CBeebies Scotland. The submission was a drama idea and the woman submitting had no previous experience of writing for television or indeed of any form of creative writing. I asked the woman why she had made the submission. Her main motivation was that, as a parent, this was the sort of story that she felt would work (the idea promoted healthy eating for toddlers). The woman was delighted with the response from BBC Scotland because although it was a clear 'No', it acknowledged value in the submission, and thanked her for her input and interest as a parent; it also suggested how she might take such ideas further (Field journal, August 2008). Using Sara Harkins's rationale, this act could be considered a very positive measure of public service.

The example above suggests that one of the measures of success valued by the Department is their accessibility and visibility to the public. The importance of visibility surfaced in many interviews with producers who believed that it was important that the BBC was involved with certain things both in the sense of being involved and in the sense of 'being seen' to be involved. During fieldwork, several staff lamented the loss of the old Children's 'roadshows', whereby a Saturday morning programme was broadcast as a live stage-show event, usually open air in a city centre. Quite apart from the direct interaction with the audience, what was quantified as a success was the creation of an event that raised the profile of children's television as a beneficial cultural artefact:

It was just incredible because it would gather thousands of kids in the one place and you really felt you were giving them something that only the

BBC could. It really made me feel proud and that you were really ‘giving’ something. (Producer, Field Journal, March 2009)

I’d love the BBC to do roadshows again or other event-based stuff for children. It’s so direct and where you really get a sense that children just want to get involved and see the BBC as ‘theirs’. People need to see that live. (Producer, Field Journal, April 2009)

There was another element to visibility that can be framed as public service, which is that the presence or interest of BBC Children’s Department would appear to be seen by third parties as something of a validation and endorsement of their activities or initiatives. A good example of this was when Sara Harkins visited the Aberdeen-based nurture through nature project. As part of her continuing interest in the project, Sara had subsequently been sent a copy of a presentation made by the project staff to their funding body. In the presentation, Sara’s visit had been listed as an external indicator of the project’s value – the interest of the BBC was constructed as ratification of the impact of the project. This was also made clear to me when I attended the Nurture through Nature event at Crieff Hydro as a CBeebies representative. There was tremendous goodwill and excitement towards CBeebies attendance expressed by the organisers and the participants of the event. Several people expressed pleasure that the BBC was ‘taking an interest’ in the natureplay initiative.

What seems important in this goodwill is that third parties believe that the BBC is ‘giving’ rather than just ‘taking’ something (hence the nurseries’ delight that CBeebies did not want to film children but to explore the topic), and that the third parties are not being ‘used’ but have equal power in their relationship with ‘their BBC’. Producers frequently articulated this idea of the BBC ‘giving’ something as a personal value or work practice, and this was considered a particularly important marker of success when dealing with the children’s audience. Several producers spoke to me about the importance of ‘giving something back’ in the casting process for child participants and about the casting process being an important tool for promoting parity of access. Casting for CBBC reality formats and game shows frequently takes the form of a schools-based drama workshop in which children are invited to

participate (with parental consent). The tacit understanding seemed to be that the workshops must be fun and be a worthwhile or enriching activity in themselves, regardless of the potential benefit to the BBC as a preliminary audition process:

You are representing CBBC. It's a fine-tuned hour long workshop and they have a great time so if you don't find kids (to be invited for further audition) then everyone still goes away happy. That is the most important thing. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

The responsibility felt towards children in all aspects of the BBC process – be they audience, auditionees, visitors or participants – was evident always in production practices and processes. I was struck by the warmth, kindness, patience and respect with which children were always treated by all staff members. This culture of respect was promoted and prized by Simon Parsons. When informally discussing staff recruitment with me, Simon underlined a fundamental principle that, “You've got to *like* children to work here” (Field journal, March 2008). Simon had faith in his own instinct for sensing whether a person had that quality or not. It is challenging to document how this quality manifested itself in the staff ethos but two specific examples spring to mind, one mundane and the other exceptional. One is that when a child visits the Department, especial effort is made to find some treats or goodies for him or her, and members of staff will stop what they are doing to talk to the child, finding out a little about the child as an individual. The other relates to a child participant in *Raven*, who, months after filming, was diagnosed with leukaemia while on holiday in Florida. The parents let the *Raven* team know and they quickly organised for *Raven* star, James Mackenzie, to send a special video message to the child in hospital, to be played before he went in for treatment. Staff were profoundly moved by the child's experience. In interview, this child's story was used to illustrate the depth of connection that the production experience can have for children and also the privilege that staff felt in being involved in Children's production:

I can honestly say that *Raven* was the most rewarding experience. And I know it might be a cliché but it is life-changing for the children. The programme has a profound effect on those who take part. I can't say how much *Raven* made me see what an effect it has. (Producer, Interview, March 2009)

Raven has a particularly rigorous casting process for its child participants due to the tough physical demands of the show and to the sheer volume of applicants. The brand has long been self-sustaining in its ability to generate applicants (children writing in or emailing the show). Each child who meets the age criteria is offered an audition workshop at one of several city venues of their choice (Birmingham, Glasgow, Inverness, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Southampton). This access entails weeks of workshops to process over one thousand auditionees, even though CBBC is looking only for a handful of participants, and even though this process does not form part of the onscreen action (as it might in a television talent show for example). After the workshop rounds, some fifty children are selected to go on an adventure weekend in Aviemore; this weekend trip is critical to the choice of final participants as it replicates many of the physical and emotional challenges of the show. *Raven* production staff both past and present spoke about the workshops, and especially the weekend, as offering something 'concrete' to children – a memory or experience that was positive in its own right, even though the majority of children would not be selected. Having listened to the discussion in the casting sessions and departmental meetings it seemed that the adventure weekend was seen as a highly positive experience for the participants, acting as something of a 'consolation prize' for those who were not picked. Two particular participants (from two different seasons) were discussed in this respect – one a child with Down's syndrome and the other a child with Asperger's syndrome. Although neither of these children was picked for the final show, both had enjoyed their adventure weekend. Also, both sets of parents were delighted that their child had been able to take part in the process (Field journal, October 2008). This was a facet of PSB that cannot be seen onscreen or in analysis of the end product only, but nonetheless constitutes an important part of the measures of satisfaction that staff used to reference their working practice as 'public service'.

Simon Parsons cautioned that such measures must not remain abstract altruism however but must feed back in to the public service roles of production staff. This became apparent when discussing the foyer area of Pacific Quay, an area that Simon believes to be underused as a literal and figurative device of public access for children. I accompanied Simon to an informal meeting on how the space could be

made more inviting. Simon was keen that, in particular, children were made to feel welcome and that there was something for them in the foyer, pointing to the science centre opposite as a missed opportunity: “There is a stream of kids there every day on school trips and family outings – we should be able to capitalise on that, to have an audience lab where kids can try new things or where we can get their feedback and reactions” (Field journal, August 2009). When I asked if this was purely as a means of ‘opening up’ the BBC to children, Simon was more pragmatic, “No it can’t just be for altruistic purposes. It must support the work of the Department. Ultimately the production teams have a job to do – it must enhance that. But it can do both” (Field journal, August 2009). Sara Harkins, too, acknowledged that a balance must be struck between altruistic activities (Sara is a supporter of several child-welfare organisations) and ‘doing the job’. Sara expressed this as concern for the emotional and physical impact on the individual in finding that balance:

I am aware that I mustn’t go too far down that road [of altruistic activities] and that ultimately my job is Editor of CBeebies. But I’m aware that my social conscience may override – it doesn’t stop me doing the job I have to do but it does add extra layers that impact not so much on my job but me and my time. But I do think there is a responsibility for me to connect with members of the audience that CBeebies isn’t so good at connecting to – the 2CDEs. (Interview, June 2009)

What I find striking in each of these examples of how producers expressed satisfaction in their work practice, is the suggestion that final texts provide evidence of the visible elements of public service but cannot capture the depth of the commitment that is only manifest off-screen and which forms an embodied practice of public service. This, taken along with the Department’s perceived relationship to the UK audience discussed in Chapter Four, I found immensely gratifying in a media climate where PSB purposes and characteristics can be considered under threat from commercial pressures (Murdoch 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ethos of the production culture at BBC Scotland Children’s Department. This ethos is manifest in production practices and in the mindset of members of the Department in both a corporate and individual sense. The

affinity with the purposes and characteristics of PSB demonstrated in the Department across a range of processes – in particular those relating to programme development, creativity and measuring success - allows me to conclude that this ethos is overwhelmingly one of public service. Furthermore, it is a version of public service that is allied to a child-centred practice in which children are valued and respected, and thus staff can be considered ‘specialists’ in the production of children’s PSB by dint of their commitment to serving the children’s audience. The greatest spur to public service in the Department would seem to come from this desire to serve and value children, thus extending the concept of ‘knowing the audience’ into a pragmatic approach to programme-making. While knowing and serving the audience would follow from the BBC’s core mission that “audiences are at the heart of everything we do” (BBC 2007a), it has especial significance in relation to children’s PSB in which the adult producer can never be part of the audience whom they attempt to know and serve.

What is clear also is that such ethos transcends the final broadcast text and therefore vindicates production studies as a powerful means of evaluating PSB. Broadcasting means more than just ‘broadcast programmes’ and connotes the process of production and institutional cultures and structures that facilitate those programmes. There is potential tension noted between the Department’s ethos and the ethos of the greater institutional or parental structures in which the Department operates, particularly relating to commissioning. Various issues follow from the structure of commissioning and the relationship this has with the Department’s practice and output. The first relates to autonomy of the Department as a creative facility and the way in which it values this distinctiveness while negotiating a level playing field of commissioning in which decisions are made by powerful individuals who remains apart from BBC Scotland but are embedded in the main metropolitan department. The power and taste of the commissioner together inform the programme-making process and dictate the opportunities afforded to the Department; some producers feel that this power serves to skew the creative process however so that true creative autonomy is lost despite the BBC’s current rhetoric. This loss of agency is tempered by the Department’s autonomy as an alternative voice however.

Another tension flowing from the structure of commissioning within a nations and regions framework relates to how Scotland should be represented in the 21st century, and it is interesting to reflect on who is responsible for driving that representation, with competing voices suggested from the commissioner, the audience council and the development teams at BBC Scotland. Despite these competing voices it appears that the remit of alternative representation afforded to the Department means that individual producers can still push forward certain agendas, topics or representations that are distinct to their origination in Scotland.

Possibly the greatest tension within commissioning relates to how its structures articulate the perception of commercial competition and the corresponding impact on the types of content that are commissioned. It is perhaps here that members of the staff of BBC Scotland Children's Department were most concerned as to how their autonomy and creativity can continue to uphold public service values in the face of these perceptions and constraints. I would argue that the production practices adopted by the Department strive to iterate an ethos of public service over and beyond that which is visible in commissioned content. This remains in keeping with the concept of 'knowing the audience' in that many of these practices are to do with the visibility and accessibility of the BBC for the audience and within the community it serves. Again, while this might be a reasonable aspiration of 'public service' in its broadest sense, it has a particular resonance in *children's* PSB because of the 'gap' between producer and audience, and because of the marginalised status of children within society. It is this marginalised status of children that staff members allude to through the notion that society does not like children. The concept translates also to the unseen shadowy figures within the BBC who like neither children nor Children's and who put pressure on the Children's controller and the commissioners to behave in certain ways.

In the light of these tensions, the Department, led by Simon Parsons and the two brand executives, exhibits enormous integrity in its achievement of PSB characteristics and purposes and in its embodiment of a child-centred ethos. I suggest that, whatever constraints further up the hierarchy, this integrity comes from Simon downwards. Sue Morgan concurs:

As an executive you are across many projects, but at a lesser level of involvement. But it is your vision that is passed on to those producers. You feed them from the Head of the Department downwards. (Interview, June 2009).

Chapter Six: Textual Analysis

This chapter presents the final element of my research into children's television production at BBC Scotland, in the form of textual analysis of five recent programmes produced by the Department. My motivation in providing textual analysis is to connect programme texts (and elements of their broadcast context) to their production ecology and to analyse them in light of the thematic issues presented in my research. It is my aim to appraise the text objectively in light of these themes or concerns by treating the text as the *primary* source of information. In other words I rely on my own reading as to what the text contains or presents, which may be in contrast to what the producer believes it contains or presents. Neither do I look at how the audience interprets the text, though this may be an interesting avenue for further research, completing what John Corner holds as a necessary (and under-researched) matrix of production studies, textual analysis and reception studies (1999: 79).

Evaluating (children's) PSB through textual analysis

It is necessary to preface this chapter with an explanation of the role of textual analysis within the study of PSB, children's television and the greater field of television studies. It remains the case that questions of aesthetics and style remain relatively neglected within television studies, and that although 'prestige' modes of television (such as big budget television drama) may be subject to such enquiry, 'everyday' television is not usually considered in this way (Lury 2005a; Briggs 2009b). The same is true of children's television and perhaps more so, even though the budgets and audio-visual technologies involved in some contemporary children's programmes – such as *Waybuloo*, *In the Night Garden* or *LazyTown* – are comparable with prestige productions. Children's television has received little artistic criticism, certainly in its everyday forms, and even children's television drama suffers, according to Messenger Davies, from a "lack of recognition" that it forms part of "the great TV drama tradition" (Messenger Davies 2001: 57). Messenger Davies points partly to the generic problems of television studies in explanation of this fact (e.g. that many broadcast texts are no longer available to view) but more so to the cultural status of children's media forms generally, using

Peter Hunt's study of children's literature as illustration that a text "becomes something other once it is labelled 'for children', and it becomes invisible for critical attention" (Messenger Davies 2001: 57). Contemporaneous with my own research, Steemers suggests, for *preschool* television at least, that, "unlike drama, a category which has perhaps received the greatest critical attention in recent accounts of television, preschool television does not engage the adult viewer in an aesthetic debate over its construction as a means of understanding artistic ambitions" (Steemers 2010: 195). Rather than attributing this neglect as one relating to the cultural status of preschool television (what Messenger Davies describes as its 'invisibility'), Steemers points to the implicit tension between form and function in children's television, "the implication seems to be that programmes such as *Teletubbies* perform their function almost too well to attract critics to retrospectively debate their quality and value [in an aesthetic sense]" (Steemers 2010: 197). This picks up on Steemers's earlier point on the misalignment between the very nature of textual analysis and of preschool children's television:

Acknowledging programmes as texts implicitly involves an appreciation of their *texture*: the extent to which they are composed of different aesthetic layers requiring time and consideration to appreciate how they are made meaningful *in combination* with each other. [. . .] Examples of preschool children's television, however, do not match these criteria precisely because they are required to communicate their salient points directly and straightforwardly. (Steemers 2010: 194)

What Steemers (and Messenger Davies) suggests is that aesthetic strategies are considered subservient to the narrative of children's television texts and so traditionally become judged *only* in the sense of what they contribute to narrative clarity.

Although such research acknowledges a continuing neglect of aesthetic enquiry into children's television, I do not wish to make too big a claim for inclusion of textual analysis as a methodology in this production study. The simple truth is that, coming from an arts-based approach to the greater field of screen studies, it did not occur to me that textual analysis should *not* be used, or that such

an approach might be considered problematic. Indeed, although I was keen to make best use of the access I was given to the Children's Department at BBC Scotland, an equally viable approach may have been to make my research even more text-centred in looking at the representation and construction of children and childhood. In so doing I could have chosen to work 'backwards' from the text to interrogate certain decisions or practices rather than 'forwards' from the production decisions or practices to the final artefact that is the text (and its broadcast context). As it is, by working forwards through development, commissioning and production processes to the final broadcast text, the text is treated as the final – and crucial – output of that production process: an output which then has a meaning and significance of its own, independent of the producers' intention.

Justification can be claimed for using textual analysis as a methodology as it is unclear what other technique could be used to consider what *textual* elements contribute towards a sense of public service to children or that satisfy purposes and characteristics such as being "original", "innovative", "engaging", "well-produced" or "challenging" (Ofcom 2007a: 14). It seems that genre considerations alone determine what constitutes "a suitable range of programmes" for the regulator (Ofcom 2007a: 14), as content of individual programmes, series or titles was not considered within the report or its annexes. This seems strange to me – if one doesn't actually look at text then how does one assess public service programming? How can "a suitable range" be determined? If analysis is made on genre only, then who decides to which genre a programme belongs, particularly given the development and evolution of hybrid genres (e.g. factual/entertainment; game show/drama)? This is a particularly moot point in children's programming that has only very broad genre distinctions (and indeed preschool content has no genre distinctions at all in current Ofcom protocols).

The selection of texts for my analysis was mostly naturally occurring and sampled by convenience (i.e. they were BBC Scotland texts broadcast during the final stages of my research in summer and autumn 2010). But this convenience sample, in the main, also represents the most up-to-date output of the Department during the research period and is comprised of texts in which I had observed, first

hand, the production processes of their creation: this is why the textual analysis chapter is necessarily the *last* part of my linear production research process.

In conducting textual analysis I have explored various overlapping themes that emerged in my fieldwork and which are derived from my original research questions.

- How do BBC Scotland texts sit within the umbrella of BBC Children's brands (e.g. through distinctive markers and brand norms)?
- In what ways do the texts of BBC Scotland articulate the greater concerns of PSB for children (e.g. through education/entertainment imperatives or in avoidance of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood)?
- What is the role of locally-produced content (in terms of national characteristics; representing and constructing the children's audience; and the significance of 'market failure' genres)?

As with Chapter Four, this chapter is divided according to whether the content is made for and broadcast under the CBeebies or CBBC brand. For CBeebies I have selected three main texts as case studies followed by a brief conclusion and for CBBC I have selected two case studies followed by a brief conclusion. At the end of the chapter there is a further conclusion that draws together the themes of my analysis relating to *both* brands.

CBeebies

Same Smile

This programme (14 x 20 minute episodes) excites my interest in three particular ways: firstly, it was designed to fill a perceived 'gap' in representing the 'ordinary' lives of preschool children. Secondly, it was the first preschool show that was fully developed and produced under Sara Harkin's leadership of CBeebies Scotland: *Nina and the Neurons* was a continuing strand, *Carrie and David's Popshop* was already in development when Sara came in to post and *LazyTown Extra* was a spin-off from a well-established independent brand. Finally, it is aimed at the lower ages of the CBeebies audience (children between two and four). Together these reasons would

suggest that *Same Smile* is an apposite example of the Department's current inflection of PSB for the youngest of their audiences.

Educational aspects

The show is broadcast on the CBeebies digital channel as part of the 'Discover and Do' programming strand/zone which occupies a large part of the daily digital schedule and runs from 09.00 to 15.30 on weekdays. Typically the programmes within this strand are designed to be lively and stimulating; they intend to encourage creativity, exploration and experimentation, often through depiction of such. The song which introduces/frames the strand urges the audience to "Try something new with Discover and Do" and the notion of new experiences is presented as both a vicarious and an actual pleasure for the preschool audience – just by watching 'Discover and Do' children are 'discovering and doing'. By this I mean that watching other people (especially other children) having fun while learning something new or while engaging in an unfamiliar activity is constructed, of itself, as a new and valuable experience for a preschool child. By being situated in the 'Discover and Do' strand, *Same Smile* is already framed as a text of discovery and activity and both of these concepts are important to the construction of the preschool audience (particular the lower ages of the envisaged audience) as 'learners' and 'sponges'. This construction creates a legitimacy – or need - for the soft educational benefits of PSB.

The opening title sequence of *Same Smile* continues to offer visual and aural clues as to what the programme content is about and reinforces notions of discovery and action, particularly through the medium of play. An adult female voice sings to a simple musical arrangement:

Smile . . . **HEY** . . . Here today

Smiling every single way

Travelling Pandas . . . **ONE, TWO, THREE**

Here to learn from you and me

Let's play, sing, have some fun

Smiling faces . . . **EVERYONE**

Same Smile every day
 Come on sunshine play with us -
 Play with us today.

The emphasis here on play, as itself the ‘business’ of childhood and a pleasurable learning experience, is central to the CBeebies ambit of ‘learning through play’ and fits the dominant construction of childhood emerging in the late 20th century as summarised by Stephen Kline thus:

Play was accepted and valued as an excellent instrument of social learning by teachers and psychologists mainly because of a child’s apparent intensity, autonomy and involvement in it. This aspect of volunteerism and self-production seems to imply a depth of experience and creativity that distinguished play. (1993: 153)

The exhortations to play and participate, apparent in the words of the song, are reinforced by various textual elements. Children’s voices are heard joining in with the words in bold and the lyrics “play, sing, have some fun” are accompanied by a visual of children singing and playing instruments. As the theme song plays, there is an edited sequence seamlessly tracking from left to right depicting many scenes of children playing against a partly CGI and partly studio backdrop. Tracking from left to right mimics the action of the eye in reading and can therefore be interpreted as a formal device of ‘reading readiness’ whereby a reading/viewing strategy is being inculcated, assumed or fostered by the text.³³

The onscreen children – as singles, pairs or disconnected groups - are the main focus in the title sequence, but the presenter (Nisha Anil) and the three toy panda bears are also depicted, and, at the lyrics “travelling pandas one two three”, Nisha is shown in her tricycle with the three pandas seated behind, looking at a

³³ Tracking from left to right is also frequently used in scrolling video games because it mimics the action of the eye in reading, though it should be noted that not all reading systems move from left to right and that therefore this is a conditioned response rather than a universal one.

simplified map of the UK and Ireland as if drawn by a child of perhaps seven or eight (see Figure 17).



Figure 17: Nisha shows the pandas the map

As no further narrative framing is offered for the show's content (i.e. at no time is it explained or justified in a plot exactly why or how Nisha is tricycling around the UK with three toy pandas) this brief visual and aural clue provides an important overarching narrative context for the show's premise, with each episode featuring Nisha and the pandas in a different part of the UK. In this way too it could be said that television form shapes the narrative – each episode is self-contained and does not require a memory or understanding of the series as a whole. A memory or understanding of the series structure gained by repeat viewing may, however, further enhance the sense of UK diversity that the show specifically promotes, and offers the audience pleasure in guessing certain narrative elements (such as guessing which part of the UK Nisha will visit, what kind of home the featured children will live in, and which panda will stay and which ones will go). Such interplay between single and repeat viewing, and in particular its affiliation with narrative guessing, could be said to be a formal feature of many preschool texts, whether it is guessing which window will be looked through in the iconic *Playschool*, or which disguise Robbie will wear in *LazyTown*. In *Same Smile*, there is pleasure offered to the single viewing and single guess; but there is additional pleasure offered to the repeat viewer. In this way the title sequence of many preschool shows is particularly important in establishing any overarching narrative structures in lieu of repeat viewing; an apposite example of this is *LazyTown*, in which the entire expositional first episode is recapped in the theme song and the visuals of the title sequence, thereby allowing 'access' to the show for viewers of single, non-sequential episodes. In this way the 'soft' educational benefits of *Same Smile* – as both a PSB

characteristic and a BBC strategy for the CBeebies brand – are offered in the unit of a single episode.

Media literacy: television form

The mise-en-scène in the *Same Smile* title sequence is doubly interesting as it is completely different from that of the show proper (which is live-action, location filming) and the blend of CGI and studio background suggests permeability between real and make believe. The visuals of the opening sequence roll seamlessly from one studio scene to another augmented with superimposed ‘real’ landscape features; however the ‘pretend’ nature of the environment is emphasised by the strange studio set that is composed of white, cardboard, origami-style models of houses, trees and landscape features of town and country in various scales. The colourful clothes of the children are in stark relief to this, drawing the focus to them (see Figure 18).



Figure 18: Same Smile title sequence draws to a close

Nisha is the only adult seen and the children range in appearance from babies of around twelve months to children of around six and are taken from a diverse ethnic mix: this age range, which exceeds the target audience, fits the show’s content as the nursery children who are the focus of each episode are frequently shown along with older and younger siblings. The ethnic mix is likewise reinforced in both the nursery footage and the featured children in the body of the show, although the episodes in rural Wales and rural Northern Ireland (NI) have (naturally occurring) all-white nursery groups. The final image (see Figure 18) is more colour dense as it is of a large group of children playing with coloured balloons which is then

superimposed with the *Same Smile* title-card logo that, like many other preschool programmes (including those made by BBC Scotland), features ‘blobby’ letters in different colours (see Figure 19).



Figure 19: Same Smile title card

Such logos would seem a convention of preschool programming, although their relationship to, for example, pedagogic reading strategies or other formal curriculum goals is unclear: there would appear to be no functional reason for the similarity of the logos other than convention. The scrolling forward motion of the title sequence and the steady build-up of the volume of children and the density of colour, all help to suggest that although the depicted visuals are unconnected, the title sequence is a linear structure with a progressive ‘narrative’ of its own that the title card brings a distinct closure to: a ‘pause’ before the commencement of the programme proper.

These elements, so distinctive of television form, are indicative of the complexity of televisual convention which is assumed to already be accessible or understandable to the preschool audience; see, for example, Williams’s classic analysis of television form as flow - a series of mini closures that paradoxically invite and enable viewers to ‘stay tuned’. Such closures and interruptions operate at the “close range” level of individual text segments and at the structuring level of the schedule (Williams 1974: 86-120). In some ways the assumption of this familiarity could be taken as an endorsement of Postman’s theories around the inherent accessibility of television form: “We require no analogue to the McGuffey reader, no preparation, no prerequisite training [...] Which is why, in truth, there is no such thing on TV as children’s programming. Everything is for everybody” (Postman 1994: 78). Unlike Postman, who famously argues that such accessibility contributes to the “disappearance of childhood”, media literacy advocates would

point to the acquisition of such televisual literacy as a *necessary* skill in contemporary society: children must *learn* this skill (see the work of Marsh et al. 2005). This concept of media literacy fits with a public service agenda.

While the title sequence of *Same Smile* is perhaps not as multi-textured as that of *In the Night Garden* and *Charlie and Lola*, the range of features – especially the blend of realist and non-realist modes – is in keeping with the findings of the Steemers and Walters analysis of non-realist complexity in preschool title sequences (Steemers 2010: 202-210). Steemers and Walters make the point that such complexity is evidence of “high production values” (a PSB characteristic) and representative of “the potential depth, range and inventive drive inherent in the range of preschool television, observable even within its most direct and apparently straightforward elements” (Steemers 2010: 208). I would argue that the complexity of the *Same Smile* title sequence, and of the aesthetic components of the rest of the show, suggests something further about preschool television – that the audience is assumed to have familiarity with, or an acceptance/understanding of, a complex televisual vocabulary that goes far beyond simple direct representation of the ‘real’. As well as in the opening sequence, this complexity is particularly obvious in the use of visual effects and unusual editing features which ‘augment’ the otherwise straightforward, documentary-style footage. These effects can be seen to be part of a current convention of preschool television and, in the BBC Scotland catalogue, can first be seen in *Balamory* and then in all subsequent shows so as to now be an almost ubiquitous formal feature of BBC Scotland-produced CBeebies programming. An example of this would be the ‘rainbow bubbles/balloons’ of *Same Smile* which function in the same way as the ‘sparkling twinkles’ of *Balamory*. Indeed, in an early development note for *Same Smile*, the developer had suggested points at which there would be “lots of sparkles and twinkles” (Field Journal, August 2008).

In *Balamory*, the effect was one of sparkles and twinkles which framed Miss Hooley’s recap of the story of the episode. The visual effect was accompanied by high-pitched celeste glissandos, suggestive of ‘magic’ (as per *Harry Potter* or *Indiana Jones*). In *Same Smile*, the ‘magic’ effect is one of multi-coloured bubbles/balloons and blobs accompanied by a faint popping sound mixed with glissandos. Again this effect is used at the recap sequence of the story – near the end of the programme –

but it is also used at the start of the show to suggest a 'magic' about Nisha's suitcase which she carries to each nursery. The suitcase carries an item which suggests the theme for each day (e.g. a hairbrush in the episode that looks at hair; a pair of shoes in the episode that looks at different footwear for different activities) and the children within the diegesis are asked to guess what might be in the suitcase. The audience at home is given a more heightened sense of 'reveal' than the children in the diegesis, as the interior of the suitcase, when opened, is framed surrounded by the multi-coloured balloon effect and the magical sound effect. As the objects are always mundane items there is a sense that the 'ordinary' is special and exciting, and this is consistently reinforced in the narrative of the show which tracks three different stories in each episode: that of two individual children who take a panda each to their respective homes, and that of Nisha with the children and the panda left in the nursery. The celebration of the ordinary would seem to support a particular inflection of PSB in which 'real lives' are represented and a certain validation of the 'ordinary' is achieved and objectively discernible within the text.

The non-linear structure – which jumps from story to story and therefore location to location – suggests a parity of participation: i.e. that the featured individual children are not having a superior experience to those in the nursery and that the child at home can have a similar experience. The different stories are also aesthetically segmented by a visual effect of stylised paw prints in the same colour as the panda featured in the segment and punctuated by a sound effect. The use of segmented, multiple narratives helps reinforces a notion of simultaneous and contemporaneous experience that is suggested as characteristic of television form (Ellis 1992). This contemporaneous experience is a fiction that fits the show's message that 'we are all the same but different' as no individual experience is privileged above others. Thus the aesthetics and formal features of *Same Smile* support the ideological *function* of the text and have value beyond the demands of narrative, in contrast to the traditional assumptions (as discussed by Steemers 2010; Messenger Davies 2001) that aesthetic and formal features will be subservient to narrative.

The fact of the matter is that the storylines *are* filmed separately and non-consequentially in the three different locations, but are then edited so as to appear

as if all three storylines are happening simultaneously. Using the nursery-based panda as a device, Nisha can say, for example, “Moosh wants to know what Mish/Mogo [the panda at home with the child] is up to”, before the scene changes to the featured child’s home. It is a simple device for making the three disparate narratives coherent, and demands of the child audience an understanding of a non-linear narrative structure particular to television form, because the sequential, cause and effect, linear chain of events is broken. In some episodes the structure is undermined however because it is obvious that the nursery children are asked to pretend that the two selected children have been away for the day when they have not yet left (as the nursery scenes will all be filmed together at the nursery location). This is particularly nonsensical in an episode where a featured child has a haircut as part of their individual storyline which they clearly don’t have on their televised ‘return’ to nursery. One can only suppose therefore that the structural elements of form and linkage are as important as the narrative element in the totality of the product’s “stickiness”,³⁴ though Messenger Davies warns of the dangers of overly interrupted or simultaneous narratives:

If the sequence of events is interrupted, young children may have difficulty in maintaining earlier events in memory, in order to understand later ones.

Thus they may be completely baffled by what is going on in later parts of the story. (Messenger Davies 1989: 22-23)

Reinforcing public service ideology

One of the distinctive features of the show is the way in which the pandas function not only to link the narratives but to reinforce the ideology of *Same Smile*. The pandas – Mish, Moosh and Mogo – are, as items, also ‘same but different’: each is a different colour (purple, orange and green) and each is made from a different fabric but to the same naive design. They look inexpertly homemade of scrap material

³⁴ The term “stickiness” is accepted throughout the children’s television production community as meaning the cohesiveness of text and the synergy of narrative and aesthetic elements. See for example Steemers’s discussion with the producers of *Blues Clues* (2010: 121).

perhaps to suggest that Nisha herself has made them and therefore that anyone can 'have a go' or that toys do not need to cost a lot of money (see Figure 20).



Figure 20: Nisha and her 'homemade' pandas

Either way, the homespun look may also perhaps symbolise an anti-commercial stance, as the pandas are a world apart from the glossy 'toyetic'³⁵ characters from *In the Night Garden* or *Waybuloo* or indeed most other preschool texts.³⁶ Another factor which seems deliberately 'anti-toyetic' (and so would support the anti-commercial ethos considered in Chapter Five as evidence of Reithianism) is that the bears are clearly shown to be *only* toys with no individual personality or attribute beyond that of the inanimate cuddly toy. There are lots of shots of children hugging and squeezing the bears tight to reinforce their function *as* cuddly toys however (see Figure 21).

³⁵ Steemers (2010) has coined the term 'toyetic' to describe the propensity a character or property has to be turned into (successful) toy merchandising. Live-action is notoriously difficult to make toyetic but *Same Smile* seems to *deliberately* avoid being toyetic as the aesthetic of the obvious candidates – the pandas – is too homespun to be replicated by mass manufacture.

³⁶ Ironically the independent adult/parent fan site set up for *Same Smile* consists almost exclusively of questions as to where one can buy or commission the panda bears as toys for children. <http://www.samesmile.com/> - however knitted and home sewn versions can be seen by searching for 'Same Smile Pandas'.



Figure 21: Cuddling the cuddly toy

Not since *Playschool*, can I point to another preschool text that has presented toys purely *as toys* in this way rather than as distinct characters or puppets. In *Same Smile*, the bears are only given voice, personality or animus by the obvious intervention/pretext of Nisha, other adults or the children. For example, there is clear exposure of the fact that the pandas are not animate through the framing of Nisha's hand bobbing the bear's head up and down, or by exposure of the material physicality of getting the bears dressed or situated in certain poses. This is seen in an episode when the bear 'goes for a ride' on a toy train and the child and his granddad struggle to squish the soft toy into the carriage; the strangely undignified manipulation emphasises that the panda is obviously inanimate and non-sentient.

The clear framing of the pandas as inanimate toys has interesting implications for the way in which adult-child behaviours and interactions are constructed in and through the text, with the adults depicted as colluding with (but not duping) the play of children. I would argue that the text and the adults within it are endorsing or demonstrating a particular way of playing with soft toys 'appropriately' – one cuddles them and talks to them 'as if they are real' but one 'knows' that they are not 'real'. Certainly the show does not depict some of what Higonnet has described as the "brutal, carnal, tragic or strange" elements of children's play (1998: 217), nor are the toys ever made to look disrespected or abused in the kinds of everyday ways that researchers with children regularly document as forming part of children's ordinary play – such as pulling the limbs off dolls (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002: 96-97). So all the adults depicted in *Same Smile* imply by speech or action that the panda is sentient and/or to be treated by the child as such, e.g. by asking the child, "Do you want to show Mish your room?",

but at the same time the text makes it clear that they are *only* toys. A lot of the featured action is simply children talking to the pandas while ‘showing’ them things, and this, like the role of Ziggy the puppet in *LazyTown Extra*, allows the child to be cast in the role of expert or mentor because they have knowledge and authority over what the bear is learning and are seen as specialists in their own environment or activity. It is an ‘empowering’ role and an artful way to present the young preschool child as having mastery and authority. It is a method used by ethnographers of children’s culture to access that culture, and in this the toy bear acts as a facilitator of multiple gazes – of the child within and outside the text, of the production crew and of the parental adult audience too. In this *Same Smile* would seem to capture and represent something of the real lives and experiences of children in keeping with PSB purposes and characteristics.

Nisha’s role is particularly interesting here, because although in some ways she is presented as ‘adult’ (she *is* an adult), her level of investment in the pandas would seem to be more akin to a child e.g. she chats to them and she carefully dresses them in their cycle helmets for each journey. When shown in the nursery, Nisha plays with the children on the level of another child rather than as an adult (colouring and painting with them; in the den with them rather than just supervising or instructing; referring constantly to “We all like” when talking about children’s tastes).³⁷ This child-like behaviour is a feature of research with children termed ‘least-adult status’: stopping short of ‘passing’ as a child, least-adult status is where the adult assumes the behaviour, language and postures of childhood (Mandell 1988). Even Nisha’s mode of transport – a tricycle – and her brightly coloured clothes would seem to support this liminal, ‘least-adult’ status and perhaps the inference of the crude map in the opening sequence is that Nisha herself has drawn it, further aligning her with a child-like identity. The mimicking of child’s

³⁷ Indeed Nisha is barely distinguishable from the group of children in Figure 18 on page 207.

play by adults is a therapeutic technique in child psychology, often used as an encouragement to communication:

Imitating the child's use of toys may increase eye contact, touching, vocalizations . . . prompting the child to play with a preferred toy may decrease social avoidance . . . other ways to enhance social interaction include social toy play [and] pretend social play. (Mash & Wolfe 2008: 322-323)

Interestingly the use of toys in therapeutic psychology settings is a technique that resonates strongly with artists who use childhood as their subject,³⁸ and both the artistic and psychological benefits of such use would seem to feature in *Same Smile* in the attempt to bridge the gap between adult producer and child audience.

BBC Scotland distinctiveness

What is difficult to quantify is how much the liminal status of Nisha is somehow inherent in the preschool presenter role, and how much is a default attitude enforced by the narrative: i.e. if you are going to have an adult apparently tricycling around the UK with three toy pandas in cycle helmets as your basic premise then is that adult *forced* to adopt least-adult status? The reason I might wish to gauge this is that while the least-adult behaviour and mode of address has been a feature of CBeebies presentation from the very inception of the channel, it is not necessarily typical of *BBC Scotland* preschool texts or presentation styles. BBC Scotland preschool texts usually have a more clearly defined 'adult' status of their central adult characters while the London-based CBeebies presentation team is more likely to have the exaggerated, often 'hyper' or performative persona that would seem associated with least-adult status. For example, Nina (of *Nina and the Neurons*) is a scientist, Miss Hooley (*Balamory*) is a nursery teacher, May (*Big City Park*) is a park-keeper and Carrie and David (of *Carrie and David's Popshop*) are established 'adult' television personalities. While there is a certain shift in tone to create an

³⁸ See for example David Hopkins's catalogue notes for his curated exhibition, *Childish Things*, Edinburgh Fruitmarket Gallery, November 2010 to January 2011. (Hopkins 2010)

appropriate form of child address through adult performances, the presentation mode in BBC Scotland texts is not as extreme as the now fully 'least-adult' status of the CBeebies presentation team who have no such adult function in the diegesis other than that of presenter.

From its beginnings with Pui Fan Lee, Sue Monroe and Chris Jarvis, the CBeebies presenters have always exhibited some elements of least-adult status but this has now been consolidated by gradual changes in mise-en-scène and the actual premise of presentation. All the fictions of CBeebies presentation currently support least-adult status and the central presentation squad of Cerrie, Andy, Sid and Alex are shown to 'play at house' in the brightly coloured CBeebies 'house'; to enjoy dressing up, finger painting and collecting nature items for their oversized scrapbooks; to jump and roll on the floor and get excited about CBeebies programmes and characters (see Figures 22 and 23).



Figure 22: Presenters playing in the CBeebies 'house'



Figure 23: Presenters dancing in the CBeebies 'house'

In short, the presenters are not shown as adult carers, mentors or guides but as quasi-children 'home alone'. This least-adult status is now such a ubiquitous convention that it is frequently parodied in other media contexts and it is only when faced with footage of an older style of presentation (as Messenger Davies presented at the 'Making Television for Young Children' Conference at University of Westminster, September 2008) that one realises just how fully entrenched the convention is as an accepted mode of behaviour for presenters, though again there is no functional reason why this should be so – it is a matter of taste and style linked to the construction of the audience.

Nisha Anil fits clearly into the current CBeebies presenter convention and it was known at BBC Scotland that her choice as presenter of *Same Smile* would be supported by the commissioner Michael Carrington as she had fared well at a previous CBeebies presenter audition (where she was the 'runner up' to Carrie Burnell's contentious appointment).³⁹ Nonetheless I would suggest that there are clear moments of direction in the *Same Smile* text which suggests that the main CBeebies presentation mode has been 'toned down' to fit the less exaggerated and more naturalistic or conversational mode of address that is normally favoured in

³⁹ Carrie Burnell (see Figure 22) is a presenter who was at the centre of an online and tabloid furore over claims that she scared children because she has a missing lower arm. See e.g. Thomas 2009.

BBC Scotland preschool texts (as exemplified by Nina, Miss Hooley, and – albeit poorly – by the ‘flat’ performance of Mairi Clair McManus in *Zingalong*). Looking across the full spectrum of CBeebies texts over the last nine years – and contextualising BBC Scotland’s output amongst it – there would seem to be a subtle difference in presentation modes between the performative, London studio-based squad and the more muted performances of presenters in BBC Scotland CBeebies productions.

LazyTown Extra

As discussed in Chapter Five, *LazyTown Extra* is a BBC Scotland co-production with the established global brand LazyTown Entertainment which originates in Iceland. Produced and first broadcast in 2008, the show’s repeat transmission (26 x 14 minute episodes) in summer 2010 was as part of the CBeebies summer holiday schedule, which, in 2010, had a particular focus on outdoor activity and exercise. The *LazyTown* brand has a dedicated emphasis on healthy choices in diet and exercise for preschool children and part of its global success is that this explicit ideological message is timeous with the current anxiety around child obesity in the developed world. Unlike the original show’s drama format, *LazyTown Extra* has a non-fiction magazine format and features *real* children. The original show was aimed at the upper end of the CBeebies audience (and was one of the first of the ‘ageing-up’ texts of the CBeebies brand) and relied on a rich narrative and aesthetic synergy to promote its health message while the spin-off, though clearly exploiting an existing awareness of the brand identity in its audience, is pitched younger and uses straightforward depictions of children engaging in healthy activities and sports to convey its ideological message. The magazine format of the spin-off, which is constructed around individual themes of health, wellbeing, hygiene, diet and exercise, stitches together existing and new *LazyTown* footage with live-action sequences of children in the UK, and uses a (very) loose framing device of being a news show presented by existing *LazyTown* characters, with Ziggy (a puppet character) as a roving reporter in the UK. The format of the show could clearly be adapted for other territories as the live-action inserts of Ziggy and local children remain only loosely sutured in to the text and could easily be replaced with custom footage of local children of any territory (a similar format to *Teletubbies*). What

particularly interests me in analysis of *LazyTown Extra* therefore, is the representation of real UK children therein and the ‘fit’ with the existing *LazyTown* brand ideology which, as a commercial brand (albeit with a clear ‘public service’ mission) presents some challenges and tensions.

Representing UK cultural diversity

One of the strategies by which a sense of the local is emphasised in *LazyTown Extra* is in the use of UK accents. Analysis of all 26 episodes of *LazyTown Extra* reveals an incredible diversity of voices and accents, perhaps reflective of its strange global, Icelandic, Scottish hybridity and the driving commitment of the programme-makers to show UK cultural diversity. The Iceland-produced elements feature mainly American accents (provided by American, British and Icelandic voice artists), with adults voicing both adult and child puppet characters. Notable exceptions to this are the superhero ‘Sportacus’ played by *LazyTown* creator Magnus Scheving using his own Icelandic accent, and the baddie, ‘Robbie Rotten’, played by Icelandic actor Stefan Karl using an Anglicised pantomime villain voice that evokes an archetypal Manichaeian duality fitting of his status of arch-nemesis; this Manichaeian duality is explained (and explainable) only in the original text and is assumed knowledge in the spin-off as no further context for the characters or their bizarre behaviours is offered. Although the original *LazyTown* was specifically dubbed for UK broadcast because CBeebies commissioner Michael Carrington insisted that the American accents be replaced by British ones - except the natural American voice of Stephanie (Julianna Rose Mauriello), - this redubbing is not consistent in the spin-off. This leads to some disjunction between the original and the spin-off whereby some character voices, e.g. Stingy, are not the same as the known and successful original UK version of the urtext.

Certainly the segments of *LazyTown Extra* which are produced by BBC Scotland and filmed on location throughout the UK reveal the producers’ emphasis on representing UK cultural diversity in terms of region, race, ethnicity, disability and class and this is therefore reflected in the huge variety of accents and voices of the child participants. Although this seems an obvious point, it must be remembered that regional accents are still not the norm of the BBC and Mark Thompson continues to call for increased regional representation through diversity

of accents (quoted in Martin 2008). In addition to the ideological reasons for this change, the practical benefits of hearing a variety of accents plays an important role in physically attuning the ear to that diversity, though it seems perennially moot that Glaswegian accents should need subtitling (Mowatt 2008). The benefits for the preschool audience in hearing a diversity of UK accents may even stretch to formal language acquisition and so be pedagogic. CBeebies programming, as a whole, now features many different regional accents of adults and children. It is also notable that these are the authentic synchronous voices of real children, which again may seem an obvious statement, but children's voices are frequently redubbed in preschool television either by older children or by adult female voice artists. Lury has noted the novelty of 'real children's voices' in her detailed textual analysis of the soundscape of Teletubbies:

The children's voices are clearly coached and carefully edited, but they are recognizably *real* children's voices in terms of their pitch, dynamics and sometimes fragmented pace. The voices are not performed and therefore feel and sound much less artificial than other children's voices on television, such as the children who sing and talk in a programme such as *Barney*. It is also significant that the children's voices are not impersonated by anyone, as they are, for example, by adult actors in the majority of children's animation.

(Lury 2005a: 90-91)

In addition to regional diversity in accents, the show presents a wide diversity of age and ability in its child participants suggesting the ideological message of 'healthy choices for all'. As such, I was interested to see, how, in particular, the show might present disability or poor ability of its real life child participants in a show which hopes to be aspirational. This was carefully handled through a range of textual features. One strategy, like the pandas in *Same Smile*, is that the puppet character Ziggy fulfils the function of the learner to the child's expertise, regardless of the child's ability: the action sequences are also carefully edited to ensure that no child is made to look foolish or inept. By Ziggy taking the role of hopeless but enthusiastic beginner even the least skilled child participant is afforded an air of mastery, and this reinforces the notion that 'having a go' or taking

part, itself perhaps a particularly British construction of sportsmanship, is key to fun and health benefits. The action sequences – of various sports activities – are extremely fast paced (effectively a montage of shots each of which lasts less than two seconds) and are accompanied by the distinctive *LazyTown* techno/Europop/high energy soundtrack. Some incredible gymnastic feats are featured in some shows – including a child of around eight demonstrating Sportacus’s signature aerial split – but even the more mundane activities and participants are given a glossy televisual appeal by the pace, energy and style of editing which makes the children and the activity look attractive and appealing onscreen. The show appears therefore to ‘celebrate’ the achievements of children of various ages and abilities, not just the obviously talented or aspirational participants.

Resolving commercial tensions within a PSB co-production

The fast pace of editing in these sequences fulfils another function in that it avoids the lingering gaze that might be deemed inappropriate to the presentation of children’s physicality: the ‘attraction’ presented is the movement, energy and vitality of the activity and the sequence rather than the body or aesthetics of the child. I believe this is doubly important because the original brand struggles to mitigate an exploitative gaze on the character of Stephanie, and on the Stephanie-Sportacus child-adult dynamic. The problem of this exploitative gaze is evidenced by the (faked) inappropriate images or sexualised references to this character that are only a ‘click’ away in any search for ‘LazyTown Stephanie’ (see Appendix D).

Ultimately the casting of a teenage pubescent girl (Julianna Rose Mauriello) to play a child of eight has created this problem for the *LazyTown* brand, injecting, as it does, an unavoidable precocity of performance that both Walkerdine (1998) and Kincaid (1998a) respectively treat as one means of eroticizing or fetishizing ‘innocence’ within mainstream popular culture. The character of Stephanie as presented in the original series is an apposite illustration of what Kincaid has described as “the adorable child” of a “long line of culturally mandated [child] cuties” (1998b: 245) Although she is played by a real child – albeit an older child – the text works to undermine the reality of Stephanie by assimilating her into the puppet fantasy world of *LazyTown* itself. Stephanie, with her short pink dress,

bobbed pink hair and flat, shining features, is a representation of a female child akin to the way in which a mannequin or doll is (see Figures 24, 25 and 26).



Figures 24, 25 and 26: Stephanie of *LazyTown*

Scheving originally described her as such: “She is half human, half puppet — or rather half make-believe. She sits in the gap between Barbie and Britney, and I believe parents do want their daughters to make a transition between the two” (Scheving, quoted in Phillips 2004). Scheving’s unproblematised identification of a ‘desired’ transition between “Barbie and Britney” would seem to support Walkerdine’s contention of “the ubiquitous eroticization of little girls in popular media and the just as ubiquitous ignorance and denial of this phenomenon” (1998: 254). Stephanie/Mauriello’s centrality to the success of the *LazyTown* brand cannot be ignored however, and so must be managed within the spin-off series even though it is doubtful that the casting or the character design would have emerged through ordinary CBeebies development processes.

Indeed, *LazyTown Extra* provides some redress to the ‘problem’ of the Stephanie character through a range of strategies. One is that the new footage of Stephanie presents her as older, and in the company of other ‘real girls’ who look the same age (young teenagers): she performs a didactic instructional function as dance teacher and is dressed in sporty ‘street dance’ type clothes (see Figures 27 and 28).



Figures 27 and 28: An older Stephanie with girlfriends

But there are indirect ways in which the ‘problem’ of Stephanie is also mitigated in *LazyTown Extra* in that adult-child relationships are shown in a much more authentic way than is possible in the fantasy world of *LazyTown* where there are no parents or parental strictures and all the adult figures present facets of the child psyche. Primacy may be given to the real child’s voice and experience within *LazyTown Extra*, but parents, carers, educators and other adult roles are present onscreen too and are clearly shown as helping the child and facilitating the healthy activity. For these reasons *LazyTown Extra* works as a useful companion piece to both the text and the ideology of the original *LazyTown* brand although its magazine format and only very loose thematic packaging of the disparate elements would perhaps limit its success as a stand-alone text. Also interesting is that, despite the inclusion of Scottish participants and the origination of the UK-produced segments at BBC Scotland, the resulting show does not manifest markers of Scottish origination within the text itself, rather that origination is effaced within the broader markers of *UK* origination.

Big City Park

This all new show (26 x 14 min episodes), produced by BBC Scotland in collaboration with independent NI production company Sixteen South, was first broadcast in the summer of 2010. The production set up was interesting because, unlike co-production with the established brand *LazyTown*, BBC Scotland had much more input and control over the co-production partners and so over the finality of the text. This is indicative not only of the different power relationships of

the respective co-producers but of the demands of an established as versus a new brand.

Fitting the CBeebies brand

In some ways *Big City Park* is a very traditional CBeebies text, a blend of puppets and live-action incorporated into a formatted structure that allows a focus on the activities of real children within a loose drama narrative enacted by the puppets and the ‘real’ adult character of May (see Figure 29).



Figure 29: May and the Big City Park gang

Similar preschool formats can be seen in much of BBC in-house production and co-production of the last decade including *Nina and the Neurons*, *Balamory*, *Carrie and David's Popshop*, *Zingalong*, *Same Smile*, *Green Balloon Club*, *I Can Cook*, *The Story Makers*, *Me Too*, *The Shiny Show*, and *Waybuloo*, amongst many others. It is a useful format for getting children visible onscreen but with the interest and narrative carried by adult performers (including puppeteers or CGI characters) and by the formatted structure. Such formatted structures are also easy to shoot, edit and produce because the format points are replicated across the entire series and can be carefully planned and scheduled. *Big City Park* differs from other formats in being shot entirely outdoors, thus responding to unpredictable weather. There also appears to be an element of unpredictability as to what the children will bring or add to the child-focussed segments, i.e. it *appears* to be more reactive than proactive as to how children should play or present themselves since they are allowed space to respond naturally to the questions or situations with which they are presented. Despite this cultivation of spontaneity some inset segments still carry markers of coached or overly rehearsed responses, typically where children shout in unison or

speak in a stilted, robotic manner. This is fairly endemic in children's programming and even a high-end production like *Waybuloo* seems to make little attempt to capture the spontaneity and wonder of the children it physically places in the magic land of Nara.⁴⁰ There is also an inherent difficulty in working with puppet or CGI characters in that the 'magic' of the experience may be spoiled for the participating children for the sake of the viewer experience. I would argue that any opportunity to retain that textual integrity – particularly for children who are already familiar with the brand as viewers – should be maximised, which is difficult to achieve within overly rehearsed or formatted set-ups. Interestingly, my experience of the puppeteers of both *Big City Park* and *LazyTown Extra* is that even though children can see the 'gubbings' of puppetry and the television trickery that is not part of the viewing experience, they still engage very much with the puppet directly. This means that the puppet/child interactions in both these shows have the ability to sound natural and authentic *when not over-rehearsed*.

Much is made of the landscape and natural features of the environment of the park and this is clearly seen to change with the seasons (suggesting a rather different filming schedule than is usually expected of a television series) and lends a unique colour palette and lighting aesthetic to the show. This important and distinctive 'unique selling point' aside, *Big City Park* clearly fits with many of the generic conventions of BBC Scotland produced/co-produced CBeebies programming, including the diversity of featured participants and various structural and aesthetic elements. Although there is no visual equivalent to 'sparkles and twinkles' in the show - which retains a very natural visual aesthetic of colours and textures - the ubiquitous magical glissandos are present when Ruari opens his treasure chest. Again, the theme song of *Big City Park* is sung by an adult woman but with children shouting out the refrain in bold:

⁴⁰ Nara is a real and permanent construction in the huge *Waybuloo* studio film set. Given that the vast set is as appears onscreen but that the CGI characters are not there, the set provides the most tangible reality of the premise of the show for the child participants.

Where do you wanna go today?

BIG CITY PARK!

We wanna play, we wanna have some fun.

Let's go on a treasure hunt!

A very special day in the big, big city park.

BIG CITY PARK!

So come on let's have a great time today in the big, big city park!

BIG CITY PARK!

Likewise although the structure of the show follows a linear narrative (unlike *Same Smile*) there is a recap moment at the end which takes the form of a short poem as part of the 'story circle'. Thus the traditional 'recap' sequence is given a new Celtic storytelling twist by the puppet character Ruari, a sort of muppet-style, hairy human figure. One of the sequences I particularly like in the series – which was not present in the pilot – is where the huge hairy feet of Ruari are shown climbing his treehouse steps: the sequence breaks with the otherwise necessarily restricted linear movements of a puppet or skin character, and the twisting camera angle, tracking the feet upwards, emphasises the novelty of the televisual image. In this way, *Big City Park* both upholds but plays with the conventions of the live-action/puppet format and is innovative and therefore fulfils characteristics of PSB.

BBC Scotland distinctiveness

A further example of convention, but perhaps distinctive of BBC Scotland-produced CBeebies content, is the character of 'May' the park keeper, who is very similar in function, appeal and performance style as Miss Hooley of *Balamory* (both actresses are Glaswegian, pretty, and have a natural onscreen warmth); indeed the opening sequences of both programmes depict these central characters going to their place of work and encountering children along the way. Like Miss Hooley, May addresses the viewer at home directly, straight to camera, at the start of each episode: "Oh hello there! I'm May". This cements the fiction that the onscreen character can see and directly interact with the child at home. There are pauses built in where a child might be expected to fill in the answer to a question, such as Miss Hooley saying

“And what’s your name?”. Such pauses are commonly used in preschool television to suggest a (non-existent) interactivity of the medium and are often coupled with a predictive element that is assumed to foster mastery; e.g. in both *Dora the Explorer* and *Blues Clues*, the protagonist will ask a question or guessing game of the audience, leave a pause in which the child is presumed to answer correctly, and then say “That’s right!” or “Good Job!”. These techniques have been criticised by UK producers as patronising or empty according to Steemers’s research (2010: 131) and even though they are used sparingly in BBC Scotland preschool productions I think that they remain ‘clunky’, forced and formulaic (particularly so in *Carrie and David’s Popshop* where objects are ‘passed’ to the viewer through the screen).

A further generic similarity with other BBC Scotland preschool texts is the inclusion of a CGI sequence that morphs from a representational map to a real shot of the location – such a geographical locator is used in both *Balamory* and *Me Too* (an independent production with an appointed BBC Scotland executive) - and in *Big City Park* it is used to locate the park in the bigger context of a thriving cityport. I am not familiar with Belfast (where the show is filmed according to the endcard) so cannot readily tell whether the location and the map are accurate or ‘pretend’; it could be that, as with *Balamory* and even more so with *Me Too*, the map presents an impressionistic version of a particular place (‘Balamory’ is a CGI composite of Tobermory in Mull, and *Me Too* has London landscape features such as the Gherkin and the London Eye inserted into an otherwise recognisably Glaswegian riverfront). Because of the Utopian aspirations of representation within preschool programming (discussed in Chapter Four), I am not sure how to read the geographical uncertainty or slippage suggested by these map sequences, particularly where other textual markers either support or contradict a specific location. In *Big City Park*, this slippage or uncertainty is also created by the predominant mix of Northern Irish and Scottish accents used in the show: the main adult character, May, is Scottish, Billy the Badger (puppet character) is English (though was Scottish in the pilot), while the other two puppet characters - Dara the fox and Ruari the muppet - have ostensibly Northern Irish accents but with some lapses and wanderings, suggesting these are not native NI voices. The children who feature in the inserts (which are not filmed onsite) are mostly from either Scotland or Northern Ireland. While

sometimes it may be obvious which is which (for example in one episode the insert is filmed at Edinburgh Castle and there are clear Scottish landmarks and markers including a kilted piper), the format and the performances suggests a conflation of, or slippage between, Northern Irish and Scottish discrete national identities. This accurately reflects the production background of the show, but may be confusing for its audience. This slippage could also support the show's theme of outdoor play as a universal concept or right of the child as no specific equipment or location is required in order to participate and enjoy outdoor play.

Conclusion: CBeebies

In analysis of the above BBC Scotland-produced CBeebies texts the following points may be concluded in relation to the research questions and themes.

- In relation to how the texts sit within the umbrella of CBeebies it can be seen that there is a coherent strategy of 'learning through play' promoted in the texts but that there are also subtle distinctions or markers of BBC Scotland origin. These include a more restrained style of presentation and use of particular editing features and conventions.
- Multiple concerns of PSB are articulated in the texts including one of diversity in representing the ordinary lives and experiences of UK children. An anti-commercial stance is noted and most strongly realised in fully in-house production, but there are tensions around the sexualisation of childhood in the specific example of *LazyTown Extra*, a co-production.
- As regards the role of locally-produced content, there is a consistent foregrounding of the experience of UK children in the texts, although in the three examples chosen there is no apparent national focus or dynamic as is the case in *Balamory*. Interestingly, all three texts belong to the live-action genre that is considered to be one of market failure for the global preschool market according to Ofcom (2007a) but which is a mainstay of BBC Scotland CBeebies production.

I will now consider two texts produced by the Department for the CBBC brand aimed at children aged six to twelve.

CBBC

I found selecting the BBC Scotland-produced CBBC programmes for textual analysis was difficult through either convenience or purposive sampling because the range of genres and styles of programming available meant that any selection could not be taken as representative of the breadth of work the Department produces for CBBC. In the end I chose two programmes that were markedly different from each other and which revealed to me a fresh nuance of my themes and questions and which unsettled some of the ideas formed during the production phase of my research.

Ed and Oucho's Excellent Inventions

Produced and first broadcast in 2008 (Series 1) and 2009 (Series 2), *Ed and Oucho's Excellent Inventions* (2 series of 13 x 28 minute episodes) was developed in-house by BBC Scotland, but around the talent and persona of the established CBBC presentation double act of Ed Petrie and 'Oucho' the cactus puppet (performed by Warrick Brownlow-Pike). The show is something of a one-man sketch show (Oucho's contribution notwithstanding) shaped around the premise that in each episode Ed is building a fantasy invention from an idea sent in by a child viewer who also features on the show. The inventions are real submissions, as are the child participants, and the format is small-part educational (science and invention facts and histories) and large-part entertainment. It is a very funny show indeed, largely due to the sketch format which allows the insertion of entirely random and incongruent elements into a potentially didactic format, creating a strong tone of unpredictability and eccentricity. The humour is well written and executed, and the show benefits from repeat viewing such is the density or levels of humour – so while a viewer may simply get the spoken punch line or gag first time round, further viewing reveals all sorts of additional elements of humour such as visual gags in the dense mise-en-scène or subtle expressions or behaviours of Oucho.

I suspect that one of the reasons why *Ed and Oucho's Excellent Inventions* did not initially attract my interest as a title is because I thought it was a generic 'wacky science show' of 'crazy experiments' which seem to proliferate not only in children's television but also in mainstream entertainment. An apposite example of this is *Richard Hammond's Blast Lab*, a CBBC commission contemporaneous with

Ed and Oucho's Excellent Inventions, which is essentially exactly the same in tone and style as adult show *Brainiacs: Science Abuse*, also starring Richard Hammond. Such shows are zany in tone and frenzied in pitch, and usually involve blowing something up and making a mess: they suggest anarchic mayhem and misrule and so ally to a particular construction of untamed or uncivilised childhood appetites. The currency of such shows across both children's and adult genres would seem to give credence to the concept of the 'kidult' expounded by Kincaid and Postman, illustrated by adult shows like *Mythbusters* featuring activities such as 'polishing a turd' and 'exploding toilets'. *Ed and Oucho's Excellent Inventions* does bear some functional similarity to such shows in that the invention under construction is essentially useless or ludicrous (such as a jacket that lights up in the dark, sprays water at enemies and has a built in MP3 player and mobile phone; or a floating pizza delivery mechanism), and there are the ubiquitous moments of 'gunge', but the overall tone and pace is gentle, polite and eccentric and the humour silly rather than zany.

The opening title sequence is a fast-moving animated sequence of hand-drawn images of Ed and Oucho in a surreal 'mash-up' environment. Because the title sequence frequently bleeds in from a mash-up animated CBBC ident (submitted by a child through the online My CBBC Mash-up facility) in the broadcast schedule, it is tricky to spot where the title sequence proper starts. Although this slippage creates a distinct and coherent visual identity for the CBBC brand, there is the danger that this strategy creates a 'sameness' or blandness to the overall identity, despite the striking nature of individual components. There is also the danger that if a child does not like the visual style they can be disenfranchised from the channel. As there is slippage between the child-produced idents and the title sequence, there is the impression that the title sequence too is produced by a child (perhaps underlining the adult producer's proximity to the child-producer and the child audience), also suggested by the fact that the drawings are done with felt-tip pen. Over the sequence a man (presumably Ed) is heard to sing in a cockney accent:

We got a television show of our own

Making stuff that's been designed by you lot at home

Building your inventions the best that we can

Mostly out of rubbish from the back of our van

We've even got a title to grab your attention –

All together now –

Ed and Oucho's Excellent Inventions

The idea of building something from “rubbish from the back of our van” is central to the entire premise of making daft inventions out of leftover junk and fits well with the mash-up and Pythonesque aesthetic established in the title sequence and then sustained throughout the show. It also makes sense for a relatively low budget production to celebrate rather than disguise such an aesthetic. The title card also continues the aesthetic of recycled junk (Figure 30) through its hand-drawn interpolation of disparate elements.



Figure 30: Title card

British eccentricity as distinctive

The mise-en-scène reflect a British eccentricity as Ed tours around country roads – frequently stopping for tea and cake - in a Volkswagen camper van full of the sort of junk one might find in an attic or garage: floral thermos flasks, artificial flowers, old telephones, soda siphons, space hoppers and prams. Much of this stuff is of another ‘retro’ era, which, combined with the olive green camper van and the default countryside setting, evokes something of a British camping holiday in the 1970s: an allusion which of course predates the audience by over twenty years and which may suggest that there is an inherent humour in ‘the past’ for the audience (especially a recent generational or parental past), particularly its technologies and gadgetry. Indeed humour is consistently made of redundant or arcane technologies e.g. Ed attaches a record player to the prototype jacket, rather than the MP3 player

requested by the child or they watch ‘rubbish’ television on an old wooden-cased portable TV with a spiky aerial. Certainly historical figures and events form a large basis of the comedy sketches and parodies in the manner of hit CBBC show *Horrible Histories*, and can cover any period prior to the 21st century: the insertion of Ed into these roles allies Ed with an ‘uncool’ and funny past rather than the ‘cool’ present (and implied future) of the child inventor. This is frequently made explicit in the narrative, for example by a child participant telling Ed “I don’t want to grow up like you – I don’t want to drive a rubbish van.” Because of this, there is separation between the adult and child roles within the text but the invention project gives a united purpose, and Ed can function as the self-deprecating butt of jokes through geekiness, ineptitude or general uncoolness, without assuming least-adult status (though this in itself is a double irony as Ed is an extremely attractive, popular and ‘cool’ presenter with numerous independent fan sites).

Representing child-adult relationships in and through text

There is a relaxed dynamic between Ed and the child inventor which also distinguishes *Ed and Ouch’s Excellent Inventions* from the often inadvertently patronising ‘get down with the kids’ tone of other wacky science shows, and which seems to rely in part on the sort of laid-back, non-performative child chosen for the programme, as well as on the effortless, uncontrived persona that Ed conveys. The depicted interactions between Ed and the featured child are very low-key and uninhibited, and in all but a few instances there is no sign of the children being either rehearsed or nervous. The scenes with Ed and the child often seem to start ‘in the middle’ of an activity, even if that activity is sitting around doing nothing (see Figures 31 and 32). This also helps create the relaxed rhythm of the show which is pleurably juxtaposed against Ed’s race against time to build the invention usually to a silly deadline built into the narrative. I suggest that this contrast between the narrative ‘rush’ and the somewhat slow rhythm of formal elements – movements within scenes and editing between shots and scenes – helps to further direct the humour to the presenter and the situation.



Figures 31 and 32: The relaxed dynamic of Ed and the participants

Joining the narrative midstream gives a sense that the events were filmed over an extended period of time with lots of other incidents happening off camera. This sense of continuing action does not ‘exclude’ the viewer, however, but lends another layer of humour to the essentially ridiculous plot because it implies that Ed retains his ‘inventing’ persona at all times and that the onscreen Ed is therefore the ‘real’ Ed. This then acts as a sort of shared joke with the viewer because of course they know that Ed is *not* an inventor but a presenter, albeit that he assumes an inventor role in some of his presentation slots as part of CBBC continuity.⁴¹ The

⁴¹ This also fits with the ‘fewer bigger better’ approach to presentation. The presentation squad is now streamlined so that presenters appear in many shows thus contributing to a consolidated CBBC brand identity.

lyrics of the theme song at the beginning of the show have iterated Ed and Oucho's 'promotion' from mere continuity presenters to having "a show of our own". The suggested premise that the show is 'real' is then consolidated by the aesthetic that quite a lot of what is filmed is spontaneous and apparently captured on film by a transparent process. This is in contrast with the highly performative and 'over-the-top' sketch inserts (with elaborate costumes, props, song and dance routines) featuring Ed's vast catalogue of ridiculous characters (see Figure 33 for an example).



Figure 33: OTT aesthetics in the sketches

Diversity and distinctiveness

As well as the featured child whose invention the plot is built around, other children's drawings of inventions are featured and these children are mentioned by name, thus involving and inviting further audience participation. As with the CBeebies examples, participants are drawn from all over the UK (including London) and would seem to represent a diverse ethnic, racial and class mix as well as a gender balance. There is no obvious 'Scottish' identity to the programme though some episodes do feature Scottish children from both urban and rural settings. I noted that the episodes that had weaker performances from the featured child (i.e. obviously rehearsed or scripted) tended to be those with female participants and I would speculate that, unlike most CBBC shows, the casting of the featured girls was harder than the casting of boys. It may be that it is harder for girls to sidestep the attractiveness of Ed to embrace the fiction of his geeky inventor persona. I would argue that although Ed is an appealing presenter to both boys and girls in the audience (evidenced by his fan mail and fan sites), within the diegesis itself the low-key dynamic fostered between Ed and the child participants seems to work better

with boys and that the ‘wacky science’ thrust of the show has a particular function to attract male viewers.

All in all, I found *Ed and Oucho’s Excellent Inventions* to be a show with high production values. It is innovative and original in the often formulaic genre of factual entertainment and presents a naturalistic representation of the participating children (and therefore, one might argue, of the audience) that sits well with PSB values and with BBC strategy for CBBC, albeit without showing any particular BBC Scotland distinctiveness. By making Ed the butt of jokes in narrative and textual elements and by having the sidekick Oucho as further deflection or distraction, the text creates a non-judgemental and relaxed site in which the child participants have space or licence to be creative, innovative and funny without fear of ridicule.

Copycats

The first season of this show was produced and broadcast in 2009 and the second was produced in summer 2010 and broadcast in autumn/winter 2010 and spring 2011. *Copycats* merits analysis for several reasons. Firstly, it is an entirely ‘everyday’ or mundane text, a low budget/high volume commission (2 seasons of 52 x 28 minute episodes) of a game show format. Secondly, the format originated in Japan as an adult format and was bought in by CBBC commissioner, Anne Gilchrist; it is not therefore a fully indigenous product although it was very much repurposed for the CBBC audience. Thirdly, BBC Scotland Children’s Department is considered to have especial expertise in game show production; *Prank Patrol*, *Wait For It* and *Get 100*, as well as high-concept game shows *Raven* and *Roboitz*, were all in production during my research period and account for a large amount of the whole Department’s budget and work time. Finally, *Copycats* is skewed towards a *family* audience rather than a *children’s* audience which is extremely unusual in BBC Children’s production and Season 2 in particular aims for a big-budget ‘Saturday night entertainment’ feel. All of these aspects, taken together, make *Copycats* an interesting and unusual text for analysis and the show can be considered atypical in its volume (most commissions are 13 or 26 episodes), target audience (families) and provenance (a bought-in global format) but typical in its genre and in its studio setting.

The show's basic format is that two families compete against each other in a series of 'Chinese whispers' style copying games. The copying games are interspersed with activity challenges of the *It's a Knockout* variety in Season 1 (such as running down a travelator wearing flippers) and with slightly more cerebral versions in Season 2 (such as manipulating a ball in a large-scale maze table). Each show in Season 1 culminates in representatives of both families taking part in a giant obstacle course in a 'hamster ball' or 'orb' race – a huge plastic sphere in which the contestant must run and navigate the course. The games and copying activities are rotated across various episodes but the hamster ball finale is a constant of each episode in Season 1 and the highlight of the show for both participants and viewers alike. In Season 2, however, the hamster ball finale occurs only at the end of each series and features the winning families from individual episodes. Instead, the Season 2 families compete for a trophy at the end of each episode.

Child participation and empowerment

As noted above, it is families who participate in the show, but this concept is treated very loosely indeed, to encompass the child's friends, extended family, and family friends. The show is neither humiliating or exploitative in tone, but, like *The Generation Game* (1971-2002) or *Family Fortunes* (1980-), some of the humour comes from the different personalities in the family dynamic and it is clear in some episodes that some adult participants don't necessarily want to be on TV but are there 'for the sake of the kids'. An interesting device is that one child is the nominated head of the family and must make any decisions as to whether to pass or play challenges, and whom to nominate to play. While ostensibly empowering, this makes for an interesting representation of the child as key-decision-maker. Those children who are nominated as family heads clearly enjoy taking part but some of the somewhat arbitrary scoring structures and decisions⁴² seem to create a competitive pressure that is paradoxically exploited within the tense narrative

⁴² In as much as the games are silly and nonsensical and so a clear factual basis for a decision is not always possible.

jeopardy demanded of the game show yet minimised within the editing, perhaps indicating a cultural unease around what is considered to be an appropriate competitive pressure for child participants.⁴³ This paradox is shown by the dramatic pauses and music accompanying decisions and final outcomes, in contrast with the quick turnaround between games so as not to dwell on poor results or ‘sore losers’. The emphasis, therefore, like in *LazyTown Extra*, would seem to be in taking part and having fun. The hamster ball finale of Season 1 is also helpful here because, win or lose, the family has a very exciting and unusual activity in which to participate. In Season 1 the winning family may win tickets to a theme park, for example, or a ride on a hot air balloon, but both families have been part of the ‘family day out’ that is the *Copycats* production experience. In Season 2, there are no such prizes or individual show finales but instead the whole show itself is constructed as a participative fun experience and a trophy is awarded to the winning team. The nominal value of this trophy (like the *Blankety Blank* cheque book and pen) underlines a public service ethos and stresses that participation is more important than winning. The notion that participation is of itself a fun experience also extends to the studio audience, smiling shots of whom intersperse the action of the games. This helps to further reinforce the ways in which a studio game show can serve a public service agenda by allowing access to production.

The show clearly has its source in mainstream (i.e. not children’s) entertainment/reality/game show formats and the substantial revamp of the show between Seasons 1 and 2 explicitly foregrounds this. The BBC blurb states:

Sam Nixon and Mark Rhodes bring a little bit of Saturday night sparkle to weekday afternoons as CBBC's hit game show *Copycats* returns. In a shiny new version of the already popular format, the show continues to feature children's favourite pass-it-on games . . . making the new series unmissable

⁴³ There is both general and industry-wide concern over the role of children in reality or competitive programme formats especially those related to talent or skill. The case of the child finalist, Hollie Steel, who broke down on the final of *Britain’s Got Talent* was the subject of a session at Showcomotion 2009. See, for example, Revoir (2009) or Singh (2009).

family viewing. Bigger, bolder and brighter than ever, the new series promises to deliver an entertainment show that will have the whole family laughing out loud. (BBC 2010)

Three key interconnected themes emerge from this: a big-budget entertainment aesthetic; a family focus; and an emphasis on the entertainment value of the text. Such themes fit well with the research questions around BBC strategy for CBeebies content. These themes are played out within and across the series but are particularly evident when contrasting Seasons 1 and 2.

While Season 1 followed the mash-up aesthetic dominant throughout the CBBC brand, Season 2 of *Copycats* strives towards a slicker, glossier, more obviously ‘adult’ aesthetic. This is obvious when comparing the title cards from each season (See Figures 34 and 35). The original season 1 title card/logo features a greyish grainy abstract background and, although colour is used to separate the letters (like the coloured doors that separate contestants in the studio set), the overall effect is quite edgy and restrained. The “shinier” Season 2 title card is, in contrast much more ‘showbiz’ in its appeal and hints at the centrality of presenter identity within the *Copycats* brand.



Figures 34 and 35: Title cards (Season 1 and 2 respectively)

Further evidence of the move towards a more adult entertainment aesthetic is the loss of the animated inserts between games and challenges. These inserts, used in Season 1, continue in the vein of what I consider to be the distinctive and rather ugly CBBC aesthetic (see Figure 36) and were replaced with a suave voice-over announcement in the mode of the *National Lottery* or *Blind Date* in Season 2. The cartoon, 2D aesthetic of the animated sections was light-hearted and ironic, drawing

on the family audience's familiarity with the animation styles of, for example, *South Park*, in which the (seemingly poor) quality of the animation is part of the ironic or 'edgy' humour.

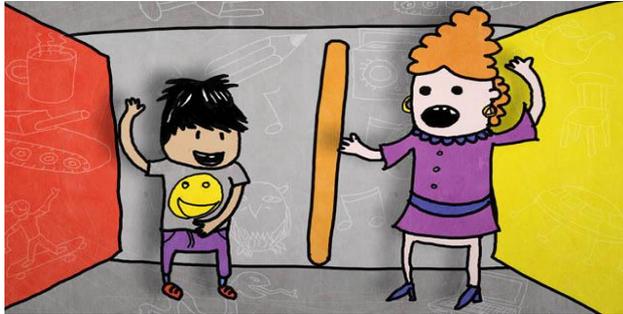


Figure 36: Animated insert example, Season 1

Above all, it is the transformation of presenters Sam and Mark that completes the 'Saturday night' entertainment aesthetic and which is constructed to appeal to a family audience. In Season 1, Sam and Mark were dressed in jeans and t-shirts but in Season 2 they are in tailored suits (See Figures 37 and 38) and, though their natural onscreen warmth and banter remains the same, the more formal structure and format of Season 2 means that they appear much more polished and rehearsed in their delivery compared with the seemingly haphazard gaffes and spontaneity of Season 1 (though it should be stressed that I believe both styles to be cultivated constructions). The studio set reflects the change in formality too, with the families now seated at desk-like tables between games as opposed to the big surreal couches of Season 1 (one of these couches can be seen in Figure 37).





Figure 37 and 38: Sam and Mark in Seasons 1 and 2 respectively

Entertainment as offering public service value

Su Holmes's work on the quiz show suggests that it has traditionally been considered difficult for either academics or producers to evaluate the merits of a game show of this nature, a programme that is designed to be a 'schedule filler' but which also aspires to attract large audiences through a defined genre. She notes this particularly in relation to aesthetic merits:

But if industry professionals seem reluctant to engage with questions of creativity, judgement or value where quiz show aesthetics are concerned, Hills (2005) has complained that academic criticism has similarly avoided these issues . . . when debates about 'quality' in television studies have been entertained, the quiz show has been positioned as beyond the pale. (Holmes 2008: 73-74)

Combining Holmes's assertions with the respective ideas of Messenger Davies (2001) and Steemers (2010) on the traditional criticism of children's media makes *Copycats* an interesting text for assessing quality within PSB programmes and I wonder therefore if the revamp between Seasons 1 and 2 is as much about underlining 'quality' aspects of the show as appealing to a family audience. *Copycats* Season 2 seems to have the higher production values than Season 1 (in respect of its props and sets and lighting) which a family audience might be deemed to expect; yet the show's ethos of participative fun seems more muted in Season 2 which, for me, makes it a poorer product. Interestingly the show does not claim any educational value at all in respect of PSB purposes and characteristics, although its

dynamic of family entertainment and participation could be framed as a benefit in that it encourages intergenerational interactivity for participants and audience alike. I would argue that the ethos of participation and the volume of diverse participants (including large studio audiences) that the show presents would seem to fit well with the aims of public service by giving many children (and their families) direct access and experience of the BBC. This access is also important in turning a generic format into a show that is UK-specific.

This participatory pleasure translates well onscreen and the show has a positive energy since the short format – 28 minutes – means that the pace is very hectic and fast moving. This is supported by the large number of people present onscreen throughout – the show ‘bustles’ in every sense – but the pitch also has moments of calm and silence, particularly at decision points between games, allowing a better flow of the text than just continuing from start to finish at one hectic, frenzied level. The inserts between games suggest an individuality for each challenge which invites the repeat viewer to recognise what comes up next, (‘Oh – flipper flapper – I like this challenge’). This recognition is not available to the participants (at least not in the first season) and creates a certain smug anticipation in the viewer who ‘knows’ what is in store for the participants. The silly challenge titles, themed games and inserts help, therefore, to make the series elements cohesive: no single episode has the full range of games and challenges, and the challenges are generated in such a way that no two episodes will have exactly the same selection of elements.

I was especially interested to see the performance of established CBBC presenters, Sam Nixon and Mark Rhodes, as I have traced their career development as children’s television presenters throughout my research. Sam and Mark were (individual) runners up on Pop Idol in 2004, and were almost instantly seized upon and moulded by CBBC as a children’s presentation duo along the lines of ‘Ant and Dec’ or ‘Dick and Dom’. They have ten CBBC titles to their credit – most of a reality/game style format – and have won various awards for presentation. *Copycats* was their first production with BBC Scotland. Sam and Mark fit a particular TV ‘cheeky chappy’ Northern duo mould as typified by Ant and Dec (to whom they are frequently compared); this is particularly so with Season 2 in which Sam and Mark

assume a more adult presentation style and *Copycats* would seem to form part of a BBC strategy that will see Sam and Mark make the transition to adult presentation (as with Ant and Dec) and the duo feature on the annual Children in Need telethon. As with Ant and Dec, part of dynamic of their duo is that they appear to be best friends both on and off stage so that their stage personae appear to be an authentic extension of their 'real' lives. The dynamic was fully exploited in the CBBC show *Best of Friends* in which, in addition to the 'off-screen friendship' being emphasised by in-jokes and references to what they were up to the weekend before, the presenters assumed a 'least-adult' status in keeping with the show's premise of testing the friendship of a group of friends. Sam and Mark literally become part of the group of children: eating mouth-staining gobstoppers to determine the nature of the tasks and playing with the children as one of them, in various activities in theme parks and play areas. The show's premise of testing friendship is supported by the notion that Sam and Mark's 'best mate' relationship is also under test as they 'hang out with the kids', making them not so much adult mentors, as liminal quasi-child figures, even though Sam is 23 and Mark is 28. I was interested to see how such a dynamic would fit with the family participation ethos of *Copycats* and noted that, while Sam and Mark were clearly at ease and have a good rapport with the child participants (and audience), they were equally at ease with the adult participants in the family groups. There was no further alignment with least-adult status so as to humiliate or alienate the adults and, in fact, the adults were often praised for their efforts by Sam and Mark who would remark "You made a better job of that than I could" in acknowledgement that they too were adults who sometimes have to overcome inhibitions in order to perform 'childish' things.

Conclusion: CBBC

In analysis of both the above BBC Scotland CBBC texts the following points can be concluded in relation to the research questions and themes.

- Within the umbrella of CBBC, the programmes uphold the brand values in content and especially so in their aesthetic strategy. Unless there is a particular aspiration to step outside the CBBC norms (as with Season 2 of *Copycats* which aspires to a family audience), BBC Scotland production is not delineated in any way from the parent brand.

- Multiple concerns of PSB are articulated in the programmes but interestingly the educational imperative is downplayed in favour of an entertainment imperative. As discussed in Chapter Four, the child's desire for entertainment is reconfigured as a need or a right of relaxation, and in *Copycats* in particular this is configured as a soft PSB benefit of a shared family experience.
- As regards the role of locally-produced content, there is a consistent foregrounding of the authentic experience of UK children and this extends to the studio audience. Within CBBC texts there is little, if any, emphasis on an individuated 'Scottish' experience and in some ways the focus shifts to the role of the presenter to facilitate an authentic representation of the participating children. The loose interpretation of family within *Copycats* supports a diversity principle.

Common themes: Chapter conclusion

Common themes emerge when considering the analysis of CBeebies and CBBC texts together. I think it is fair to say that while CBeebies programmes retain some markers of BBC Scotland origin (particular in choice and style of presenters), this dynamic is more or less effaced within CBBC texts to present a more homogeneous or united picture of UK childhood within the CBBC brand.⁴⁴ Both brands articulated concerns of PSB for children, particularly relating to adult-child relationships, both inside (i.e. represented in the diegesis), outside (i.e. within the audience) and *through* the text (i.e. in the adult producer/child audience dynamic) that fit with concerns of the new sociology of childhood more generally. In all the texts considered here, the role of the presenter was a key figure in articulating that relationship and so performed a key aspect of textual mediation. In representing the experience of a range of real children throughout the UK, both brands made a clear

⁴⁴ Exception can be made, perhaps, for the long-running show *Raven*, which draws on a particular representation of Scotland's landscape as akin to Tolkien's Middle-earth, in as much as it draws on elements of Celtic mythology.

attempt to satisfy a diversity principle but where CBeebies did so by making children's experience the central focus of the situation and narrative, CBBC texts allowed this to happen almost by shifting focus to the presenter or the situation. It was clear, in the fact that all five texts looked outside Scotland for participants or settings, that BBC Scotland does not interpret its remit to represent that which is 'other' as restricted to a role of Scottish representation. A recurring theme was the degree of naturalism achieved in these representations and how that related not just to the conditions of production outlined in Chapters Four and Five but also to the premise, narrative and structure of the show as a television programme. All the shows considered here (including the often problematised game show format) could be considered to have high production values and to embrace and deliver multiple aspects of public service, and in this sense programmes made by BBC Scotland Children's Department offer a rich site for textual analysis.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The aim of this research has been to examine the production of UK children's public service broadcasting in the 21st century using the BBC Scotland Children's Department as an extended case study. This thesis has outlined the role of BBC Scotland in the delivery of children's PSB and considered how that delivery fits with the umbrella of BBC children's strategy as articulated through the CBeebies and CBBC brands. In so doing it has considered the ways in which the production practices, discourses and programme texts of the Department articulate the greater concerns of PSB for children. These practices, discourses and texts simultaneously uphold the probity of children's PSB as a valuable cultural and social enterprise that provides a 'public service' of representing and addressing the children's audience in a way that the market currently cannot. The thesis has highlighted how the children's audience is constructed in and through these processes and texts of PSB and the ways in which television form interacts with or facilitates that construction.

In summary, the main findings of this research are as follows:

BBC Scotland Children's Department would appear to enact its 'significant other' role mainly as that of an *additional* (rather than fully alternative) supplier by focussing on network contributions which are not intrinsically Scottish in terms of content or locus of production. This strategy supports the representation of UK diversity, in keeping with BBC strategy and with PSB policy, but raises questions as to the legitimacy of the Department as a strategic Nations/Regions producer when BBC Children's relocates to Salford. Production methodologies afford unique insights into how the BBC Scotland Children's Department functions as an alternative or additional producer, perhaps especially so given the lack of visibility that the Department, as a national producer, would seem to have within texts and within wider PSB policy discourse (unlike BBC Scotland as a whole). It is only through production access that the extent and nature of Children's production at BBC Scotland can be explored and therefore this study reveals new material for the study of UK children's PSB. Nonetheless, within this production study, textual analysis plays an important role in providing up to date evidence, via the CBeebies

and CBBC brands, of the actual interpretation of current BBC strategies for children's PSB and the ideology thereof and any particular inflection that BBC Scotland has of these approaches. It is noted in particular that, in response to perceived commercial pressures, entertainment imperatives now dominate PSB texts and that this is allied to producers' own fears regarding continuing to connect to an audience constructed as self-gratifying and largely in control of their own viewing choices. The management of the perceived gap between producer and audience remains a driving force of children's PSB with strategies to close that gap evident throughout the texts, discourses and production practices of BBC Scotland Children's Department. It can be said that the Department is profoundly 'public service' in its ethos and commitment to serving its audience.

To conclude this study therefore, this chapter is structured around three specific areas of reflection. The first area relates to the nature of production studies and their role and methodology in evaluating PSB and its production. The second area relates to the specificity of the Children's Department at BBC Scotland and its relationship to the BBC as a whole, particularly in light of the Department's function in providing plurality and diversity. The final area relates to what is revealed about contemporary children's television and its relationship to PSB; here speculation is on the continuing role of the BBC as a provider of specific platforms and genres of content in a fast-evolving broadcasting landscape. The chapter then concludes by outlining the contribution of this thesis to the knowledge of the production of UK children's PSB in the 21st century and the future directions that this research might take.

Production studies and their methods

Having reached the end of this research process it is worthwhile to reflect on the project as a contribution to the field of production studies and on my use of the research methodologies associated with production studies. Here the importance of access cannot be stressed enough as without access to the production environment the project would have been restricted in scope to a reconstructive process facilitated by external sources such as the programme texts, web resources and broadcast schedules. While this approach can work well in an archival or historical framework (such as adopted by Oswell 2002) it is less appropriate to discovering

the 'now' of a production culture, which was my aim. It is in gaining sustained access to a range of production processes that this research distinguishes itself as a production study. This study carries on the production studies work of Burns in the 1970s in researching the particular 'ethos' or internal culture of a BBC production environment. Although Burns's research was predominantly concerned with the ethos and culture discernable in a particular strata of the BBC workforce – management level - his findings on the relatively organic (and thereby hidden) means by which discourses are maintained and circulated are borne out in my own research which enquires across the strata or employment hierarchies of one designated and relatively specialised genre. Similarly while it is argued that Burns's study "enables us to look behind the generalisations about accountability and the standard of service in the Annan Report to see the way the corporation runs" (Burns 1977: cover jacket), it is hoped that my own study enables us to 'look behind' some of the general findings of the 2007 Ofcom Report, particularly in respect of the role and function of locally-produced content in children's PSB and the validation of PSB purposes and characteristics.

Like Burns, my main methodologies have been participant observation and interview within the production environment. This mixed methodology has been a mainstay of production studies and combines ethnographic and sociological modes of research; as such it is particularly suited to my research, which functions as both investigation and description (in providing an historical account) and critique (in evaluating or scrutinising the processes, discourses and texts of the culture). Philip Schlesinger adopts such an approach in his classic production study of BBC News, *Putting Reality Together* (1978), demonstrating its suitability for an explicitly politicised sociological research aim in questioning the impartiality of BBC news production. While this research project has no such overtly politicised aim or conclusion, where I feel it builds on Schlesinger's model is in charting the relationship between producer and constructed audience as a particular 'gap' or issue, albeit that Schlesinger presents this gap as self-imposed or constructed on the part of the BBC producers and I would characterise this gap as both genuine and an inherent difficulty or 'impossibility' (to extend the analogy of Rose 1993) of children's media and especially children's *television*. In this respect this production

study also sits clearly with the approaches of Bryant (2007) and Steemers (2010) in treating those who work within children's television production as a distinct "community" or specialised professional group with its own discernable culture and discourse that merits investigation. This study is as much a study of *producers* as it is of production per se, as is also the case with the work of Burns (1977), Elliott (1972), Noonan (2008) and Schlesinger (1978). As such this study recognises that, despite the segregation of individual craft processes, making television remains a human and creative process and that production is merely 'what producers do'. This recognition also accords with Caldwell's aim in democratising the creative authorship of screen texts through examination of the less visible personnel and processes of production (2008).

Chapter One of this thesis (the literature review) and Chapter Two (the methodology chapter) made clear the breadth of approaches that informed this production study but paradoxically identified the paucity of specific production study research into the UK children's television industry; as such I believe this study to be a significant contribution to the study of children's television as a specific production genre, as well as to the study of a specific BBC production department and to the study of the BBC as an organisation and institutional culture, in the manner of Born (2004), Burns (1977) and Schlesinger (1978). Both the fieldwork chapters of this study (Chapters Four and Five) examine the Department from the twin angles of genre production (children's television) and BBC institutional culture. Where my research develops the methodologies of production studies is in its use of detailed textual analysis however. Unlike Noonan (2008), who weaves textual analysis throughout her study of the production of religious broadcasting, I chose to present textual analysis as a discrete methodological approach in Chapter Six, treating programme texts and elements of their broadcast context as the final artefact or output of a linear production process. Although Chapter Six can effectively 'stand alone' in its discussion of programmes produced by the BBC Scotland Children's Department, it follows from Chapters Four and Five and therefore completes Part Two of this thesis in its appraisal of contemporary PSB production for children in the UK. It does so because throughout Part Two of this thesis I argue that public service purposes and

characteristics do not necessarily manifest themselves in programmes merely by dint of the fact that they are produced by the BBC, as one of the main aims of this thesis has been to interrogate *how* 'public service' for children is achieved through production processes and then subsequently manifested in broadcasting.

This, I would argue, is a key purpose of production studies within PSB institutions and becomes all the more urgent when PSB content is perceived as functionally similar to commercial content – the added value of PSB must be sought in text *and* in production processes. What was revealed to me throughout my research was the depth of what might be termed a PSB sensibility among BBC Scotland Children's producers – a depth that can only be revealed by examining producer attitudes and observing practical processes of development, casting, filming and editing through production study. The fact that, for example, children's groups are bussed in from all over Scotland to be part of the studio audience is not apparent in the final onscreen text but suggests an inclusivity and desire to make the BBC accessible. Again the incorporation of textual analysis into production studies seems to me a vital aspect of this process of evaluating public service purposes and characteristics but for the reverse reason: because conditions of production *do not* necessarily manifest themselves within a text, the text must also be examined. This approach therefore fleshes out and builds on the broad genre findings of the 2007 Ofcom Report. It is the combination therefore of traditional production studies methodologies along with textual analysis that is particularly effective to the study of PSB in this research, and extends Steemers's (2010) inclusion of textual analysis within production studies as a means of validating quality and creativity aspects of children's television. A further suggestion can be made regarding the effectiveness of textual analysis in production studies in that I believe it helps the specific contextual findings of a production study to be broadened out to more general claim and applicability. By this I mean that while it may be possible to limit the qualitative conclusions of a production study purely to the specific environment and context of study, the mass-medium of broadcast television means that analysis of broadcast texts has more generalised applicability, the individualised 'reading' of the researcher notwithstanding.

Where I feel textual analysis has also been useful throughout this research is in gaining an impression of children's television that children's television producers simply do not have time to gain while doing their job at the same time. As well as the alienation inherent in the 'gap' between adult producer and child audience, there is also the simple fact that most producers do not have the opportunity to watch children's television in any sustained manner, critical or otherwise. Simon Parsons lamented this fact often, stating that "I do not get to see nearly as much children's television as I would wish" (Field journal, March 2008). Producers may bandy about the names of channels they see as competitors (Nickelodeon and Disney being most often cited) but there was little evidence that producers actually watched the competitor's channel or, indeed, their own BBC channels; so descriptions of the competition as 'edgy' or 'boundary-pushing' did not have a basis in fact so much as a basis in fear and supposition. This lack of overview of the actuality of children's television extends from the micro to the macro level of BBC Children's production as there was no sense that the Controller or Commissioners are really watching either. Without anyone really watching and evaluating BBC content for children we are faced with a situation where overarching themes are overlooked. I identified for example, that there is a huge gender discrepancy in CBBC presentation, with the male comedy duo being the dominant presentation style. Such inherent sexism should not be tolerated within Children's PSB but had simply gone unnoticed because there is no one really watching in a holistic sense.

BBC Scotland Children's Department

Although not a comparative study, this research frames BBC Scotland Children's Department as an in-house production department which is the designated alternative producer to the main Children's department currently situated in London. It is this alternative or *other* status that, I argue, gives the BBC Scotland Department its particular legitimacy as a PSB producer under a remit of plurality and diversity and which provides a particular inflection of how the children's audience is represented in and through the discourses, production practices and programme texts of the Department. This remit is all the more legitimate in the contemporary context of lack of plurality in children's PSB provision as outlined by the 2007 Ofcom Report. Although a study of a single department therefore, this

research necessarily touches on the relationship of the BBC Scotland Children's Department to the main BBC Children's department; to the BBC children's brands; to the rest of BBC Scotland; to the BBC; and to the UK children's television market as a whole. It takes the view that, as with other material facts of production context, these interlinked relationships may not necessarily be visible or discernable within the programme text but are no less important in their impact on 'public service' and so are of particular interest to production research within a PSB facility. It is anticipated that this study strengthens rather than diminishes the claim of BBC Scotland Children's Department to legitimacy and value as a producer of PSB content.

One of the striking findings of this research relates to the geographical interpretation of the Department's remit of representation. While the Department is based at Pacific Quay, Glasgow, location filming is not restricted to Scotland and featured programme-participants for both studio and location-based programmes are recruited, most often by inclusive casting processes, from all over the UK. It is tempting to say that while the role of alternative producer is an important one in BBC policy, particularly in an era of little other PSB provision (as outlined in Chapter Three), it is not necessarily important that this alternative facility is based in *Scotland*, although for operational and political reasons it does make sense that BBC Scotland, as the biggest of the nations in the 'nations and regions' structure and with greatest technical capacity in its new purpose-built headquarters, should fill this role. It could be argued that, for example, BBC Wales might make an apposite alternative provider, particularly given the concentration of independent children's media companies in Wales producing for S4C. It would seem therefore that plurality, production quotas and fair distribution of assets are distinct if overlapping concepts in BBC strategy and that, as BBC Wales is already responsible for a key tranche of BBC drama production, locating the alternative Children's Department role within BBC Scotland fits with a broader strategic plan of decentralising metropolitan production in a politically fair and transparent (yet also economically viable) manner while also increasing BBC Scotland network production quotas. That the role of alternative Children's producer *does* lie in Scotland makes the Department a particularly important one for BBC Scotland as a

whole, as the Children's Department plays a strategic role in sustaining BBC Scotland's network production quotas, which are set to further increase in coming years, as outlined in Chapter Three.

This leads us to question what is distinctive then about BBC Scotland Children's production if, in satisfaction of plurality and fairness objectives, it is not reliant on a purely Scottish national remit of representation but produces content with no discernable difference from the parent BBC brands? What is it that makes any one text, brand or property be rightly attributed as a BBC Scotland production when that text might be filmed outside of Scotland and with participants who live outside of Scotland? The origin and attribution of texts is a particularly moot point for a BBC Scotland anxious to increase its network production in *actuality* rather than just in attribution, and I have deliberately avoided reductionist or essentialist Scottish nationalist discourses in this attribution, such as a systematic identification of production personnel as Scottish or otherwise might constitute. I do not believe that television production lends itself to scrutiny of individual components of authorship in pursuit of the national (where does one look – to the writers, developers, commissioners, directors, producers, editors - for such national authorship?) and I offer instead a model that relies on the origin of a text within BBC Scotland development processes as a key marker of 'BBC Scotland' origin. This applies not only to those texts which spring from original in-house development ideas but also to those texts which arise from existing formats or co-productions which are then subsequently developed further by BBC Scotland staff. It is this sense of 'ownership and origination' of the text which is the clearest marker of BBC Scotland identity and of the autonomy of the Department. Such ownership and autonomy is clearly illustrated in Part Two of this thesis. This model is particular to the specific context of Children's production at BBC Scotland however, and could not be applied to the new generation of network programmes that are produced from different centres on a rotational basis but whereby the aim is not plurality of voice but fair distribution of assets, satisfaction of production quotas and effective use of HD studio capacities (an apposite illustration of this is *The Weakest Link* which is transferring half of its production time to BBC Scotland).

The autonomy of the Department as developers and producers of content is, I believe, a critical means by which the Department justifies its remit of plurality and diversity and maintains effective relationships with the wider contextual and institutional players as outlined above. It is clear that the current development-strong operational model is only one model of providing plurality while satisfying various production quotas however and so the Department will always be at risk of its remit being reinterpreted as a production facility only. This risk will surely increase when non-metropolitan production quotas are satisfied by the main Children's department being situated in Salford. However the main legitimacy for the role of BBC Scotland Children's Department will always inhere in the notion of plurality and alternative voice that any single Children's department cannot provide. As illustrated above with *The Weakest Link*, satisfaction of production quotas does not necessitate development capacity or autonomy of the production facility, however the notion of plurality does. As Simon Parsons states, "There will always be the need for an alternative voice to the main department, wherever that might be situated" (Field journal, September 2008). Maintenance of a critical mass of personnel in a specialised genre such as Children's would also seem to be an important part of a remit of plurality and diversity, and development is an important means by which staff are offered the creative autonomy and progressive career paths necessary to sustaining that critical mass.

Where I may foresee danger to the sustainability of the Department is in the double-edged sword that is specialism, be it in one brand or in one specific genre such as the game show. While such specialism may be commissioner-enforced rather than Department-led, too narrow a production specialism within what is already a specialist area (Children's production) with a comparatively small BBC Scotland staff-base, would leave the Department vulnerable to pigeon-holing and would restrict staff opportunities to broaden their skills and experience base in-house at BBC Scotland. A striking example of how the future of the Department is perceived was shown in a 2010 public presentation on current BBC Children's production, made by Joe Godwin, the new Controller of BBC Children's. During Godwin's hour-long presentation, including a lecture and showreel, no BBC Scotland Children's productions were featured or mentioned, nor was BBC

Scotland referred to until Godwin was directly questioned as to its role (by me). Godwin assured the assembled company however that BBC Scotland would continue to be a “key supplier of game shows” (Field journal, VLV's 16th Annual Children's Seminar, 'Children at the Heart of the BBC's Mission', London, 1 November 2010). This would suggest the very real danger of the Department becoming pigeon-holed. This would seem a longer-term issue however and in the coming period of transition the inevitable teething troubles of Salford are likely to benefit the BBC Scotland Department at least in the short-term, where it will be the ‘still point of the turning world’ offering stability and continuity while the main Children’s department is in upheaval. This transition will perhaps offer new opportunities to staff in terms of the range of genres and programmes commissioned at BBC Scotland Children’s Department and this would fit with the aspiration of the Department executives not only to consolidate but to enlarge the role and importance of the BBC Scotland Children’s Department’s role in producing UK children’s PSB in the 21st century.

Children’s Television and PSB

As demonstrated in Chapters Five and Six especially, I believe that this research has presented a convincing account of the embodiment of public service values within the Department, manifest in a range of production practices and in the general ‘ethos’ of the Department, as well as in its discourse and texts. While this manifestation extends beyond text therefore, and across platforms, brands and genres, I believe that much of the understanding of public service value (in the broadest sense) remains rooted in the specificity of television as a broadcast medium or platform with a power to unite its audiences. Broadcasting’s unifying power, Oswell has argued, is a particularly striking concept in respect of the children’s audience, for which no such ‘public’ mode of unifying address was otherwise possible (2002). Messenger Davies has long-argued of the democratic power of children’s television to appeal to and connect children of diverse backgrounds and circumstances, and campaigners for locally-produced content advocate the power of children’s television to create a shared sense of experience or of UK childhood, particularly through representation of the same. This is not to say that this sense of public service value cannot be extended to web resources or

on-demand texts (wherein the conventions of television form are still present), but that the ‘public’ that is constructed through the BBC’s aspiration to ‘educate inform and entertain’ is still very much a public constructed by broadcasting’s ‘public’ yet also domestic mode of address and its traditional delivery mechanism of an accepted schedule of regulated choice and synchronous shared viewing experience.

The shift towards digital viewing platforms with time-shift technologies and on-demand content necessarily impacts on television’s power of unifying address, and this shift, along with the massive availability of commercial content on over twenty dedicated children’s digital channels, changes the nature of children’s PSB content and impacts on the construction of its audience. This impact can already be seen in BBC Scotland-produced children’s content, particularly that made under the CBBC brand, wherein the appeal of humour and entertainment values is maximised for an audience constructed as requiring instant and constant gratification in the face of multiple platforms and commercial alternatives. This emphasis is commissioner and controller-enacted, but is driven by the greater industry-wide (and therefore commercial) imperative of competing for audiences. Ironically the perceived threat of competition increases the formal education aspects of preschool texts but increases the entertainment aspects of CBBC texts. Yes, PSB must compete for audiences in order to satisfy the characteristic that it is “engaging – remaining accessible and enjoyed by viewers” but this must be balanced against other characteristics such as those of being “challenging – making viewers think” and of being “innovative – breaking new ideas or re-inventing exciting approaches, rather than copying old ones” (Ofcom 2007a: 14). There is further tension in that the desire to maintain a large audience share in a competitive market can mean that creativity and experimentation is seen as risky compared to ‘surefire’ formats and tried and tested formulas.

While the Ofcom remit is to ensure that PSB purposes and characteristics are exhibited across “a suitable quantity and range of high-quality and original programmes for children and young people” (Ofcom 2007a: 14), the concept that the viewer may not necessarily, as an individual, consume a range or scheduled block but instead zap from channel to channel selecting only favourite programmes or elements, changes how we must evaluate the ability of individual texts to

uphold PSB purposes and characteristics. I believe that there is now an emphasis on *individual* texts playing out a range of purposes and characteristics rather than across a scheduled block, and that this both accounts and legitimises the inclusion of humour across a range of formats and the development of hybrid entertainment genres. However this humour requires skilful handling as it runs the risk of constructing its audience as shallow, laughing goons without the capacity or attention-span demanded of more serious content. BBC Scotland Children's Department does handle this humour with skill, as demonstrated in Chapter Six, and in both CBeebies and CBBC texts the producers exploit the particularity of television form in order to serve public service objectives.

Ofcom acknowledges that, in children's programming, "different sub-genres might be more likely to reflect some purposes than others" and uses the examples that "children's entertainment and children's drama might be more likely to 'reflect and strengthen UK cultural identity' while children's factual programmes might focus on the purposes of 'informing ourselves' and stimulating knowledge" (Ofcom 2007a: 14). I would suggest however that the perceived value of locally-produced content has become the 'trump card' for all genres to claim intrinsic public service value and that the BBC should concentrate its resources on those genres of locally-produced content that are not provided by the market, and no longer buy acquisitions that the market does provide in abundance. This is not because I wish the ghettoisation of BBC Children's content into an overly 'worthy' site of PSB but because I believe that well-funded locally-produced content is the most distinctively 'public service' contribution that the BBC makes to children's television: consolidation in this area will strengthen the distinctive appeal of BBC brands while meeting the purposes and characteristics demanded of PSB.

I believe that BBC Scotland's particular context as a producer of PSB providing an alternative voice to the main Children's department effects a particular nuance to their relationship to the UK-wide network audience or public (remembering that this is a *children's* public which is not without conceptual difficulty), but that nonetheless there is difficulty in bridging the gap between adult producer and child audience, particularly where that gap is all the more fraught due to perceived commercial pressures. Some of the industry techniques

aimed at bridging this gap – the adoption of least-adult status, ‘empty’ interactivity or empowerment strategies, ‘edgy’ aesthetics – while motivated always by a genuine desire to connect and serve the audience, illustrate the current problem of how to address and represent children that is perhaps symptomatic of a societal unease over childhood and adult-child relationships. However where the BBC Scotland Department did impress was in the ability of producers to get natural performances from child participants and in the quality of the adult-child interactions depicted. The quality and authenticity of such representations is vital to the probity of UK PSB as a valuable cultural artefact that represents the audience to self and to others and necessitates a cultural diversity in participation and representation which in return can only be achieved by the BBC remaining accessible – in every sense - and accountable to its audience.

This representational dimension of PSB raises a very interesting question as to what the future of children’s content should be on the main BBC channels (BBC 1 and BBC 2) once digital switchover is completed in 2012. Given that at that point children’s content will be accessible to all via the digital CBeebies and CBBC channels, one wonders whether scheduled children’s blocks will continue in the main ‘adult’ channels. Extending the concept of PSB’s function in representing audiences to self and to others I believe that the BBC should continue to include children’s content in its main channels as these channels represent the face of the nation of which children are a part of. To exclude children’s content would be to further marginalise children from society, decreasing their voice and their visibility in the medium that is most uniquely suited to addressing and uniting an audience as a society and a public.

The contribution of this research

As outlined in the introduction to this study, this research has explored a number of issues relevant to the production of UK children’s PSB in the 21st century. In so doing it has offered the following contribution to knowledge in the fields of production studies, children’s television and BBC institutional culture, in answering the original research questions:

What is the role of BBC Scotland Children's Department in the delivery of children's PSB content?

BBC Scotland's role cannot be defined as a distinctively national one but is one defined by the concept of plurality of provision within in-house BBC production. The role is a significant one, providing a good number of high quality children's texts through open commissioning competition, although greatly short of the 20% suggested in departmental literature. Not all the output of the Department is 'landmark', as the bulk of output is in 'everyday' texts and commissions, but there are several stand-out texts that have been both developed and produced within the Department which increase the profile of the Department both in-house, with independents and with international producers.

The delivery of PSB by BBC Scotland Children's Department fits with the umbrella of BBC Children's strategy through this plurality of provision and especially through the synergy offered with the BBC children's brands CBeebies and CBBC. While some content – more notably that produced for CBeebies – does have a distinct BBC Scotland hallmark, most content seamlessly fits the brands in such a way that BBC Scotland origination is effaced in the text itself and only attributable by the 'BBC Scotland' endcard or discernable via production research.

The production practices and texts of BBC Scotland articulate the greater concerns of public service broadcasting for children in complex and nuanced ways particularly in their embedded public service purposes and characteristics, and in their representation and construction of the audience. These concerns extend to the problem of how to represent contemporary childhood and exhibit some of the tensions in the construction of childhood. What may have been originally construed as 'wants' of children – entertainment programmes – have a new validity as satisfying the needs of children in the contemporary discursive construction of childhood.

In what ways do the constituent elements of producing children's PSB – e.g. regulatory framework, commissioning, scheduling, BBC strategies - uphold the probity of children's public service broadcasting as a valuable cultural and social enterprise?

Legitimacy or probity of PSB is currently bound with the concept of television as a unique platform with a specific form of address and traditional delivery mechanism of the schedule through which it is possible to 'inform, educate and entertain'. This specificity is the means by which a balanced and therefore 'healthy' diet of programming is constructed and carries with it a particular construction of the audience as benefitting from particular genres or types of content more so than others.

The role of locally-produced content is one of representing the UK audience to itself and to others and as such it is intrinsically constituted as the public service vehicle par excellence, particularly in an era when the market does not provide locally-produced content in any quantity.

The demands and challenges of the dominant construction of children's PSB as a valuable cultural enterprise are such that the soft benefits of PSB content are now apparent at the level of individual text. In CBeebies this is manifest through a 'learning through play' emphasis throughout the brand and in CBBC this is manifest as a shared experience of UK childhood, whether achieved through emphasis on humour, authentic representation or a family focus. For the staff in the BBC Scotland Children's Department public service values would seem to be embedded across the full range of production practices, discourses and texts in subtle ways.

In what ways does television form structure children's public service broadcasting and how does it construct the children's audience?

Television form and address remains the structuring mode of PSB, with the very notion of public, when applied to the children's audience, interdependent with television's unique form as a public yet domestic medium with a corresponding form of public yet private and domestic address. The language and form of television is effectively utilised in public service content to attract and sustain the audience, making public service purposes and characteristics discernible in more than just narrative strategies. The current construction achieved through this form is not without difficulty however as it can suggest an audience with a short attention-span motivated only by instant and constant gratification.

In thinking about how these findings might be expanded or further developed I envisage that this research offers two specific avenues for future development. The first of these is a comparative strategy – taking the findings relative to BBC Scotland Children’s Department and contrasting them with findings of another children’s television production research context be it of another small nation or of the main BBC children’s department. The latter of these suggestions will be particularly interesting in the initial period of the main department’s relocation to Salford. Of course the comparison may also be framed in relation to another time-period, by revisiting the BBC Scotland Children’s Department and conducting similar research at a future date.

The second strategy for development would be in completing John Corner’s call for production research that completes the production ‘cycle’ by incorporating audience research as well as textual analysis into its methodologies (1999). I think it would be of great value to use reception studies to shed further light on issues such as national characteristics and determinations, public service purposes and characteristics and on the positioning of audience in text and in production practices and discourse. I hope that I shall be able to continue such research in my future academic career.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

- General introduction to the research with reference to aims, dissemination, anonymity and candour.

Background questions

- Interviewee's background/career in Children's
- Description of their role

Specific brand or production

- Current project or role
- Audience for the project (leading to discussion of whether the audience has changed)
- History of the project – any specific issues or observations
- Commissioning and development process
- Brand identities and directions

BBC Scotland Children's Department

- Strengths and weaknesses
- Relationships with others (BBC Scotland, main London department, Indies)
- Move from QMD to PQ
- Staff

The future

- Career progression
- Challenges facing PSB
- Personal pet project or dream

Winding up

- Thanks
- Concluding observations or questions from interviewee including how they found the interview process.

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to contribute to this research on BBC Scotland's delivery of children's public service broadcasting. Over the course of the interviews I will be asking questions related to both the *conceptual* and *practical* aspects of making television (and associated media) for the child audience. The interview will be structured as a conversation around some specific questions with time allowed for discussion of any particular themes or issues which may emerge. The interview will be recorded and electronically stored in secure files: portions of it may be transcribed at a later date. Information obtained in this interview will then be used in my doctoral research and may be used in further research which may be published. You have the right to amend or withdraw your contribution before the completion of the thesis.

Data Protection Statement

This data is being collected as part of a research project concerned with BBC Scotland's delivery of children's public service broadcasting for a PhD thesis in the department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at the University of Glasgow. The information that you supply and that may be collected as part of this research project will be entered into a filing system and will only be accessed by authorised persons of the University of Glasgow. This information will be retained by the University and will only be used for the purpose of (a) research, and (b) for statistical and audit purposes. By supplying such information you consent to the University storing the information for the stated purposes. The information is processed by the University in accordance with the Provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Consent to being interviewed

Name _____

Designation _____

I hereby give consent to any information discussed in this interview being used in Lynn Whitaker's research.

Signature _____ Date _____

I hereby give consent for my name to be cited in Lynn Whitaker's research.

Signature _____ Date _____

If at any time you have any questions or concerns regarding these processes or this form you may contact me or my supervisor:

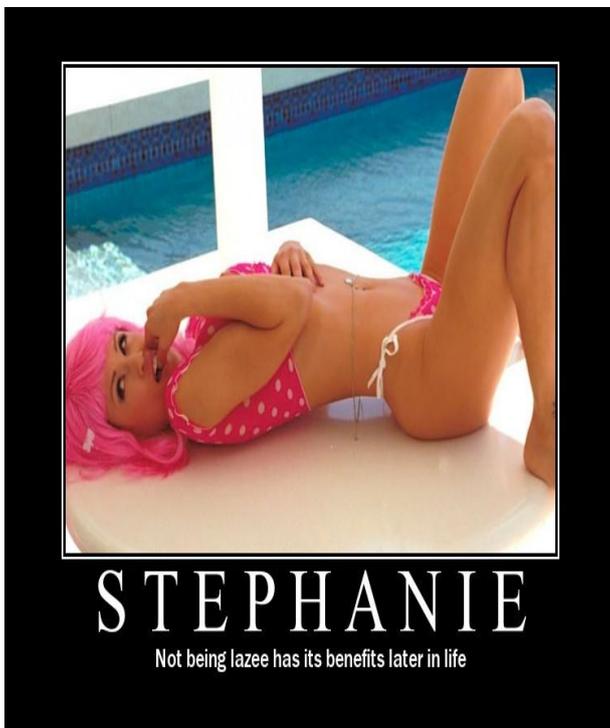
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Appendix C: Research Participants

Angela Galvin	Producer
Austin Low	Researcher/ Writer
Claire Gillies	Assistant Producer
Dan Sweeting	Assistant Producer
Dave Coulson	Researcher
Donna Damassa	Researcher
Dougie Napier	Producer
Gillian Irvine	Production Manager
Greg Childs	Executive, SKTV
Jane Baxter	Producer
Louise Corbett	Producer
Louise Wilson	Producer
Matthew Lee	Finance Executive
Matthew Napier	Producer
Michael Prince	Producer/Director
Natalie Moss	Assistant Producer/Director
Nick Hopkins	Producer
Rachel Bazely	Assistant Producer/Director
Sara Harkins	CBeebies Executive
Simon Parsons	Head of BBC Scotland Children's Department
Sue Morgan	CBBC Executive
Yvonne Jennings	Producer

Appendix D: 'LazyTown Stephanie'



STEPHANIE

Not being lazee has its benefits later in life

Figures 39 and 40: Google search results for 'LazyTown Stephanie'

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