

## Media Regulation, Self-regulation and Education

### *Debunking Some Myths and Retooling Some Working Paradigms\**

#### *Divina Frau-Meigs*

The tastes, preferences and references of young people in Europe are developing in a context of widely open mediascape, of massive imports from the United States and of recycling of cultural products on a variety of increasingly intrusive devices. A close look at the conditions of reception of young people in France reveals that they have acquired American “as seen on TV” tastes, without showing any particular leanings towards the United States (Frau-Meigs and Jehel 2003b). The values associated with such tastes reflect the narcissistic interests of adolescence rather than a belief in the American lifestyle of individualism and competition. Young people tend to look for media characters of their own age with whom they can identify and whose situations they recognize. Their taste for media violence, real as it maybe, is blurred by the fact that it comes packaged within a complex of human relations and of aesthetic and kinetic sensations. When considering how these tastes affect their references in their own culture, the national terrain seems to hold its ground, with a recognition of the role of the State and of education and an interpretation of violence as a social disease that can be prevented and cured. However, when issues of justice, police and the law are considered, French young people tend to subscribe to the procedures and behaviors of the United States, as seen on the screen.

These results show a partial erosion of emotional and cognitive references that can be associated with the socialization process due to media culture. They point to a situation of transition, with the co-presence of American cultural scraps and enduring blocks of national culture (Frau-Meigs 2001b). The most striking fact is the dissonance between the values and behaviors resulting from their visual experience (or modified by it) and their interpretation of the deep meaning of the institutions they live with. This cognitive dissonance seems characteristic of a situation of cultural scrambling produced by an ill-mastered acculturation process (Lonner and Berry 1987; Varan 1998). As a result of this current state of acculturation, young people seem to be in a general state of confusion about their

values and this leads them to a feeling of powerlessness and of inarticulate and somewhat constrained consent.

Acculturation is not a new phenomenon nor is it good or bad per se, but due to globalization and the increase in media trade, its conditions of penetration and its working mechanisms need to be reassessed, especially in the light of the European Union situation (Frau-Meigs 2003 ; Demorgon *et al* 2003). Given the conditions in reception, what are the answers provided by the State, the family, the educational system— all the caretakers that revolve around young people?

These answers are framed within the directive “Television without Frontiers”, with its broadcasting quotas and its financial support system for European production, buttressed by programs such as Eurimages (1988-) and MEDIA (1990-). They are also framed by the European Union Recommendation on the protection of minors (1998), calling for self-regulation of the media, and by the conclusions of the European Council (December. 17, 1999), asking for renewed efforts in media education (Frau-Meigs et Jehel 2003a 88-91).

These policies tend to reflect the vision of governance promoted within the European union, which leaves a wide range of initiative to the individual States in the application of guidelines and recommendations. France is one of the countries that apply the directive most severely, in open resistance to the quasi-monopoly of American fiction, in the name of pluralism and cultural diversity (Frau-Meigs 2002). Other countries, less keen on quotas, such as England, have moved toward implementing media education curricula in their schools. Assessing the French and European situation, a good ten years after the creation of these policies, allows for an evaluation of the impact of regulation, self-regulation and education, in a comparative perspective. However, the gaping discrepancies between the tastes of young people, the expectations of civil society, and the choices operated by decision-makers all seem to point to the need for developing a more coherent and efficient set of policies. This necessary retooling cannot be accomplished without a clear assessment of the received ideas on the family, the industry and the school system, not only around issues of violence but also around wider issues of socialization by the media.

## I. Some myths of self-regulation and regulation

A large and wide discrepancy appears in Western countries when the State is dealing with the complex phenomenon of the tastes of young people and of their acculturation to image-and-action-driven programs, mostly American origin. To justify the regulation of violence, the State refers to the youth welfare and protection rights often after public opinion has been stirred by triggering events, such as the case of little Silje in Norway, of Virginie Larivière in Canada or the Killing of Nanterre in France. However, this right runs counter the right to freedom of expression, which tends to overrule any other rights in democratic nations

and which is brought to call any time public opinion or decision-makers require more regulation of the audiovisual sector, branding any move of the kind as censorship. Hence the solutions generally adopted to deal with violence on television all tend to favor self-regulation, semi-controlled by the State, with the paradoxical situation that deregulation is fostered by the regulator, the State thus disengaging itself from its engagements.

France, as most European and North-American countries, has come up with a whole range of self-censorship solutions for media accountability: the family hour (prime time and its watershed), parental warnings (*signalétique* or parental advisories, with prior classification of programs), the ombudsmen (journalists acting as mediators between the network and public complaints) and technological filtering (scrambling, the V-chip) (Frau-Meigs 2004; Potter and Warren 1996). The underlying assumptions of these four types of solutions rest on a number of ideal claims that are being belied by the reality of reception patterns and the rapid evolution of society and technology.

### Outdated family patterns

The reception patterns that justify the family hour and the advisories posit that an ideal family is watching the screen. The expectations weighing on parents are then enormous: they are expected to take full responsibility for the television consumption of their children. The logic of self-regulation does not question the sources of production prior to programming; it thrusts the burden of choice a posteriori onto the unwitting watchers.

These solutions posit that parents are watching television with their kids. But research shows that children often are alone with that uncanny nanny, two thirds of them watching programs not intended for them, and more than 10 per cent of them staying after the watershed. The deregulation frenzy of the 1980s, together with the surge in cable consumption have played havoc with children's programming, which is in free fall on traditional networks (Frau-Meigs 2003b). These solutions also assume that parents are making educated choices with their children, using the specialized press and all possible parental guidance on a regular basis. Research shows that parents are less aware than their kids of the meaning of *signalétique's* warnings, especially in troubled families, and that some children will use it to select programs that are not intended for their eyes. Parents are also rarely aware that they can have access to mediators and complain to the network or to higher authorities for audiovisual matters, such as the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA). As for the scrambling devices, the assumption is that parents are apt programmers of complex machines and will adjust their selection criteria to suit the development of the child. Research shows that kids tend to be more proficient with this type of technology than adults and that when parents use filtering devices their purpose seems to be more the monitoring of time and phone and electricity bills than of content.

This ideal family does not stand in the face of reality. According to data from Union Nationale des Associations Familiales (UNAF), kids spend on average per year 154 hours of quality time with their parents, versus 1400 hours with their various screens and 850 hours with their teachers. Besides, approximately one family out of two is either divorced, extended or recomposed in our modern societies; those that stay together can be highly dysfunctional. So these solutions only serve those children who least need them, as their educated and watchful parents will always avoid the pitfalls of television over-consumption. The other family situations are not addressed by these solutions: parents are absent or gone, use television as a baby sitter and can not or do not want to antagonize their children.

### **An opaque audiovisual sector**

With respect to the conditions of production and broadcasting, these solutions posit that the commercial and private sector will respond to gentle pressure. Decision-makers believe that the industry will risk losing highly-profitable advertising slots in primetime scheduling, that it will invest in the production of costly non-violent and original programming (when it can access cheaper packages from the United States) and that it will proceed to classify its own programs in all due transparency.

Less naively, decision-makers hope that classifying violent (or pornographic) content will be effective less in terms of declared benefits for parents than in terms of its hidden impact on industry practices. They think that the industry will eventually modify their trade patterns (diversify their sources of supply, scrap their stock of programs, etc.). They expect the same impact on producers, hoping they will modify their editorial lines and their scenario choices in order to avoid classification, thus effectively affecting content at production level.

Research shows that most broadcasters have integrated parental warnings into their contracts with producers, with thresholds for classification clearly spelled out. However the cost, extent and weight of such a task have caused the networks to negotiate on their own terms, especially keeping a high hand on their criteria for classification. In the process they are both judge and party. As a result the committees they have set up, in France and elsewhere, lack transparency at all levels (choice of members, coding criteria). As for the role of mediators, within the public sector, in dealing with issues of violence and ethics in news and fiction, it remains to be given a real status, and a legitimacy all the harder to acquire as the journalists who volunteer as mediators are also both judge and party and are given little authority (Frau-Meigs et Jehel 2003a).

The most efficient solutions seem to be those emerging from the constraints of regulation. Framing regulatory policies and directives, such as production and broadcasting quotas, taxes or percentages of benefits channeled to audiovisual and cinema production funds, etc., are starting to bear fruit. They have succeeded

in modifying some consumption patterns among young people, who, when given the choice, tend to select the national products. Since 2000, French investments in the production process have started to bring profits, especially as far as cinema is concerned: more than 190 million entries (compared to 150 million in the 1990s), more than 50 per cent of French movies at the box office (compared to 30 to 40 % in previous years). Public sector funding for the European industry has increased by 13 per cent in 2000-2001 (compared to 10% in previous years), France alone contributing more than a third of the total funding (Observatoire européen de l'audiovisuel, 2003). The general trends confirm the national preference – production permitting: the privileged position of cinema in relation to television (which reflects choices of cultural exception), the drop in imports of American films, especially those aimed at prime time, a drop not compensated however by a wider circulation of European productions but by greater consumption of local productions (Frau-Meigs 2002).

#### A controversial definition of violence

In relation to content, the basic tenet posits that violence can be universally defined once and for all, a most thorny issue in the research world. Researchers, in their eagerness to provide data for decision-makers, have aligned themselves on quantitative procedures, like violent acts count, frequencies, etc. (e.g. Gerbner *et al* 1980). Their validity has been criticized, especially in France, where research traditions tend to privilege qualitative analysis. As for producers and broadcasters, they are alien to any notion of accounting, if not of accountability, though they have no problem with audience ratings. Since they classify their own programs (including films), in the long run, they determine what violence is for the general public, with the paradoxical result that they tend to be more censorial than the cinema classificatory commission! Besides, parental warnings, in France, seem to be relatively transparent, as all networks have adopted the same labeling icons (changed twice because of their lack of clarity) but in fact they are quite opaque because the criteria are not harmonized across networks, nor across media (cinema, video games, etc.), often unbeknownst to the public.

The recent evolution of news content blurs the issue additionally. News programs have been excluded from any classificatory effort, as they are constructed as part of the right to freedom of expression and the press. However these programs have been increasingly broadcasting images of graphic violence, which causes people to evaluate them in polls as even more violent than fiction (and children tend to find their proximity and relation to reality quite shocking). The self-regulatory solution adopted, the call for “mediators” in public service networks, is bolstered by media accountability systems set up in English-speaking countries. But these self-elected mediators are not real third parties, are not trained for mediation, and, being journalists, can be suspected of practicing self-censorship, dependent as they are on the profession that feeds them.

Public perception adds another perplexing twist to the issue: people tend to confuse criteria of violence with those of vulgarity and sensationalism, which is to say what “aggresses” their sensitivity. They perceive less violence per se than do researchers in their counts, they are not as wary as researchers of diluted and humorous violence, but they will denounce graphic news and info-trash as violent (Potter 2003). Their perceptions of the impact of violence also show a knowledge gap in relation to researchers: people in general emphasize imitative behavior, while researchers stress intimidation, fear factors and cognitive and emotional stress. This points to another difficulty in defining violence, due to its cultural variability within a country and across countries within a same regional area, as any quick comparison of film classification applied to a single movie across Northern America and Europe will show (Frau-Meigs 2004). The task of encoding tolerance threshold for violence, and consensus is difficult to achieve within the same country, let alone over the whole of Europe. The construction of the European union and the context of globalization both push the States toward the logical quest for a uniform classification, but this runs the risk of accepting as criteria the most common denominators, thus falling short of local cultural expectations and of adequate filtering of obnoxious programs.

Implementing self-regulation solutions is therefore characterized by some measure of inadequacy and inefficiency, all the more so as they may become obsolete with respect to the most recent technological changes, affecting portable and broadband media. Current media conditions are already pointing to some loopholes. They are characterized by transfrontier exchanges of cultural products, in a neo-liberal economy, the consequence being that violence-driven programs are allowed to circulate without much control. The lack of international standards becomes glaringly abusive and unfair as some countries are able to resist and others are not.

France and other States also ignore another media strategy, which is the tendency to create a coherent system of signs across media, establishing a sort of “media ring”, a consciously organized circularity among media, especially those aimed at young people. Current marketing techniques and the industrial logic of minimizing risk and incrementing stock value of successful (and less successful) products leads to the widespread recycling of violent programs onto other media, such as video game boxes, the Internet, portable phones, etc. Controlling television alone is no longer sufficient, as it is difficult for any child to be free from these violent contents. Very few countries classify the other media, and even fewer do so within a uniform set of criteria. Great-Britain and Canada do have parental warnings for video games; only the Netherlands has an established system of cross-media classification, via a program set up by a private-public Foundation, NICAM. The main drawback of that system seems to be its reliance on a technological solution (electronic questionnaires filled by producers), which may lead to total human withdrawal from the process.

Reception conditions within families reinforce the dependency toward the whole media ring: more and more children, regardless of class, find themselves

alone with violent programs. In some countries, like Great-Britain or the United States, one child out of two has his or her own TV set and other media appliances, in what Sonia Livingstone (2002) has called the “bedroom culture”. This culture places them beyond the pale of parental vigilance. It endangers the very idea of “watershed” and of the family hour, even if audience ratings point to a certain resilience of this ritual.

The new media are endangering it even more: they aim at creating a continuous flow around children, that can not be accounted for in hours spent facing the screen but being immersed in it. In this digital context, ads and publicity breaks are upsetting as they interrupt the one-to-one interaction between marketers and consumer kids; so they tend to be erased, the program itself being an incorporated brand-carrier (Montgomery 2001). In 2006, the revision of the directive “Television without Frontiers” allows such marketing on-line, as well as product-placement, thus acknowledging the procedures already established by the marketers.

However, despite these blatant disparities between sense and sensitivity in various Western nations, there seems to be a consensus on a few points: the need to protect children; the need to balance rights to expression with other rights such as those of children; the preference for self-regulation and the refusal of censorship; the acceptance of a posteriori monitoring kept to its basics; the relative efficiency of quotas, especially in terms of national public tastes and expectations, if not in terms of financial profits.

## II. Some myths in education

The school system too has its own set of received wisdoms in relation to its understanding of media education. It has fluctuated and, to some degree, continues to do so between three different pedagogical stances: the protectionist perspective (dominant in the 60s), the cultural perspective (dominant in the 80s) and the participatory perspective (promoted in the mid-90s). These perspectives tend to coexist, in a variety of combinations, in all Western countries. As a result great gaps exist between countries that fully include media education in their curricula, such as Austria and England, and those that resist such inclusion, such as France, Spain or Italy (Buckingham *et al*, 2002).

### Contradictory pedagogical stances

These perspectives carry with them a whole set of pedagogical aims and methods that are not always mutually compatible with each other. The protectionist perspective either focuses on the risks of manipulation (targeting advertising mostly) or uses audiovisual material as an illustration of the classical canons of

some other branch of learning (literature, history, the arts). The cultural perspective too can use media in a traditional and illustrative setting but it aims primarily at creating a critical citizenry and focuses on content analysis of audiovisual productions (Gonnet 1995). In France, it tends to privilege news, to the detriment of fiction, across media (written press primarily, and increasingly TV and the Internet). The participatory perspective prefers to facilitate access to the means of production, and to empower young people via mastery of the tool. Familiarity with the techniques of audiovisual creation and production is supposed to bring about a critical reading of the media.

These perspectives all run against the stumbling block of evaluation of procedures and assessment of knowledge acquisition; their efficiency still needs to be proved systematically, beyond the measurement of the students' enthusiasm. As a result they are often considered with suspicion by the teaching body and the school administration. Besides, their full integration into the school system entails disruptions in a number of areas: pedagogical (how to evaluate?), legal (how to deal with copyright issues?), technical (how to keep up with advances in equipment). As a result, the last two perspectives tend to be implemented outside the school system (e.g., by Centre de Liaison de l'Enseignement et des Moyens d'Information, CLEMI, and Centre d'Entraînement aux Méthodes Actives, CEMEA), with all sorts of local initiatives but no national focus.

These perspectives tend to deny or exclude the actual media environment of youngsters, considered as much too popular or as too far from the higher objectives of education. As a matter of fact, the pleasure of young people – and the attendant motivation – seems to be a sure criterion for the exclusion of media from the school environment. Such an exclusion entails a number of deficits: the lack of decoding of fiction genres, the absence of clarification of confusing issues such as acculturation or violence, the misperceptions related to (self)regulatory policies and economic production strategies, etc.

However, research shows how much enthusiasm media activities can create among young people: they can be reconciled with their everyday imagination and their cultural practices (Gonnet 2003 ; Jacquinot 2002). Censoring their media culture tends to make them feel guilty and uneasy: they cannot speak with adults of their basic preferences and references. This lack of communication, perversely, increases their dependency on media productions, whereas they could establish an aesthetic and critical distance if allowed to voice their tastes and their questions. Young people find themselves in a double bind of denial, which ties in knots their values and references while not allowing them to criticize those fostered by the school system. This double bind can account for the two most common reproaches the teachers currently and recurrently aim at them: their deplorable state of *ennui*, or their crass incivility (Frau-Meigs 2001b).

This double bind, unproductive as it is, fosters a rift of mistrust between the two parties concerned; it underlines the wider and wider discrepancy between the youngsters' life inside school and outside its protective precincts. The divergent missions of the media culture (entertainment) and the school culture (know-

ledge acquisition and social integration) are in no way clarified by these contradictory pedagogical stances. The media consumed by young people tend to foster values in direct opposition to those taught at school. Where education promotes discipline, work, long-term investment, critical distance, evaluation, media (television especially) promote effortless success, instant gratification, exposure of privacy, glamorized perverse or violent behavior. Besides, media tend to introduce foreign values (mostly of American origin) into French and European society, whereas school tends to promote national values and attitudes, parochial and limited as they sometimes may be.

### Ideal conditions of practice

In its relation to media and violence, the school system stands by its republican mission, that legitimizes its historical roles of transmission and integration; it dismisses the competitive encroachments of media upon its own turf. The school also considers itself as prime time harbor of peace against violence and it traditionally requires weapons to be left at the entrance. Media and their entertainment stance are no more welcome than real violence in that they are disruptive of the transmission of knowledge and of the integration of a whole population of youngsters. Transmitting knowledge works like a long-term self-regulating system, as it brings vigilance and critical distance; integrating young people diminishes the chances for aggression and racism. In the long run these strategies can deflect violence and the impact of media. Where the protection of children or child welfare is concerned, the school system acts as a buffer between the youngster and the outside world, especially the dysfunctional family; it can be very efficient in identifying abusive parents and ensuring psychological follow up. In Western countries especially, it creates a real break around junior high school (the crucial years around pre-adolescence), when it strongly isolates children from their caretakers and from the conditions of production. In doing so, school seeks to increase the autonomy of young people while preparing them for their future choices in life.

This republican mission rests on ideal conditions of practice that are being constantly thwarted by the incursions of reality in the protected space of the school. Violence has become the daily lot of school life, with around 80 000 officially reported aggressions in 2001-2002 (according to the French ministry database Signa), and it is less predictable than some years ago when it seemed to be confined to about a 100 high school in impoverished suburban zones. School violence added to media violence, though one should not draw direct relations of causality, all point to a similar mood: *ennui*, boredom packaged within a deep sense of loss of references, characteristic of anomia, of an acculturation process ill-mastered. This confirms the double bind of denial, the unbridgeable gap between the values taught by the audiovisual experience and the ones taught by the school experience, both vying for the child's attention on a daily basis. This

gap undermines deeply the child's understanding of the school system and its purposes: transmission of knowledge remains a vague notion, often modified by the media experience; social ideals and values are disconnected from working conditions and everyday behavior and procedures. This lack of connection is particularly damaging in the case of young people who have learning problems and dysfunctional families. It can increase in cases of media over-consumption, which tends to decrease investment in school work.

As for media literacy, research shows that, even though young people show a capacity to decode some media content, their spontaneous and familiar consumption does not necessarily lead to real knowledge, especially when they lack the intellectual and physical maturity to understand some content (violent or pornographic). They need the adults to help them make sense of what they see. Besides, being familiar with the media does not necessarily cause children to resist their manipulation: seeing isn't believing, but seeing isn't switching off the screen either. Being aware of manipulation does not bring about the desire to extract oneself from the fluid media ring, as exemplified by the phenomena of fan cultures around some cult series or of the reality programming frenzies in Europe and Northern America (Frau-Meigs 2003a). Collateral gains, in terms of identity-formation, group identification, and peer relations can be much stronger than all rational reasoning. And the school system is expected to mend the collateral damages...

It does so by adopting an entrenched, bunker-like position of refusal: the school system insulates children from the media and provides a derogatory clause to the otherwise pervasive market laws. This stance has the positive effect of providing respite and of delaying some of the impact of media on socialization. However, too much insulation can lead to a negative feeling of ossification that may warp the child-educator relation. When dealing with children references and preferences, teachers have to accept the fact that they are not abandoning their authority as teachers or their responsibility as adults. They should assume their role of value transmitters, in an explicit, overt context of constant elucidation and interpretation of the media phenomena, as they are induced by the global market of programs and products that target young people and create their world culture. No wonder some countries are considering the return to "civics" (*instruction civique*) in their curricula, though it displaces the problem without solving it. It might prove more fruitful to insert within media education curricula the basics of laws and regulations concerning the right to expression and information as well as of youth protection issues, such as the right to your own privacy, to the control of your own privacy, to the control of your own image, etc. (Frau-Meigs and Jehel 2003a).

Youth protection remains a valid mission of the school system but it has to shed its paternalistic slough. Teachers need to be sensitized to what is at stake in the socialization and identity-formation of children. They must protect the psychological balance of the child (in relation to violence and other traumatic or harmful content) and his or her sensitivity (essential to the development of tastes, access to individual references, openness to others and cultural identity). They

must also aim at accompanying the child in his or her own self-protection and empowerment.

Hence the crucial question remains one of the basic training of teachers, which is not always attuned to the child's development and to the new challenges set by media. Currently most media education curricula focus on secondary education. Necessary as it maybe, this training cannot do without reaching out also to teachers in lower grades, such as primary schools and even kindergarten. Research shows that the impact of media literacy training is most efficient on children aged 9 to 12, when they are more likely to trust adults and accept rational knowledge; older age groups tend to be more preoccupied with identity formation and construction of otherness. At younger ages, adults can still vie with peers for influence, a possibility that dwindles when full adolescence kicks in.

### **Inordinate expectations**

Laying the weight of the solution to all problems connected with the socialization of children by media on media education represents an expectation beyond the scope of the school, out of proportion with what it can do, that can only bring failure. School cannot be held responsible for all actions in this domain. The role of parents remains crucial, as does the part played by broadcasters, not to forget creators. All the actors present in the media world, close or distant from the child, need to be implicated.

Media literacy has to be placed on an educational continuum, within which parents, educators, broadcasters play an active role, which implies sensitizing them to issues of socialization, even training them. Media over-consumption is not the lot of children only: family environments of over-consumption may often lead them to it. Thus, educating children does not make sense if such steps are not framed within preventive family safety policies. In the context of dysfunctional families, however, the authority of the adult may not be necessarily the one of the parent(s) only. Other places than the family home and other adults than the parents may be found. The environment of children in our modern societies is relatively rich in possible adult mediators: social workers, media center workers, resource center librarians, school psychologists, child welfare personnel, tutors for children under police protection, etc. As for places, regions and local municipalities offer a variety of structures. They can play a key part in today's situation of governance, which fosters the autonomy of local players. They can provide special locations in school and off-school premises, they can give access to technological equipment (computers, DVDs, etc.). Some already help finance media programs, especially those related to e-learning. Some already support collective spaces (multimedia centers, libraries) that offer activities for young people and facilitate local school projects.

On the educational continuum, the media themselves can play an important role. Education is part of the obligations of public service of radio and television

and media education should naturally find its place within this mission. In France, most of the producing and programming with educational content is shown on France 5 (one of the three public service channels, targeting pre-adolescents mostly). The channel works with parents, researchers and teachers to produce programs such as *Cas d'école* or *Les maternelles*, which build on the relation between children and their mothers.

Partnerships also exist with France 3 (the regional public service channel), the channel Arte, local radio stations and the regional press. National, yearly events such as *semaine de la presse* (a week with the press), organized by CLEMI, provide an opportunity to bring them together in the public light. However media education on television should not be constrained only to public service. Teachers and students are sensitive to analytical programs such as *Culture Pub*, on M6 (the youth music channel) which reviews advertising throughout the world until 2005. The private sector has the means to produce entertaining programs that can also touch and educate a young public. This know-how ought to be tapped for the better decoding of some media productions, with the additional advantage that it would improve their somewhat damaged image (Frau-Meigs and Jehel 2003a). Innovative programs and initiatives should be encouraged on all networks, including cable networks targeting children, possibly with tax breaks and other incentives. The planned arrival of digital television and of the Internet should not create delusions about the so-called *new* economy: it is still television which will be used as a test of people's tastes and as a financial lifeline for other media ring productions, as the AOL-Time Warner venture in 2000 has recently proved – by becoming Time Warner again in 2006, having fully digested its online sector. The media industry is caught in a co-dependency relation similar to that binding *haute couture* to ready-to-wear in the clothing business.

To mitigate the risk of seeing the family hour disappear on the new digital mediascape, the public service philosophy needs to be extended to the Internet, especially by creating and developing a public domain for youngsters, free from advertising and of unnecessarily shocking or harmful content. This public service zone could thus both preserve the period of latency so important for childhood and serve the desire for participation of adolescence (Frau-Meigs 2003b; 2006). The public sector and government decision-makers can also develop media resource centers and visual databases on the Internet, and make these available to educators. Such is the case in France with websites like *eduscole* ([www.education.gouv/eduscole.fr](http://www.education.gouv/eduscole.fr)), or of UNESCO programs developed with the European Union, such as MENTOR (UNESCO 2003), which have led to the creation of a fully-integrated media education kit (UNESCO 2006). Among the options now available to a larger public of teachers there is the DVD collection, *Apprendre la television* (Learning About Television), the first volume of which is devoted to the news hour. Developed by INA (Institut national de l'audiovisuel) in partnership with CLEMI and tested by CEMEA, it offers navigational tools in a large database of audiovisual materials together with a series of exercises to be practiced in learning situations. It was first tested in real time with eight French

cities connected via broadband Internet technically facilitated by a partnership with France Telecom.

Finally, to accommodate the dual requirements of freedom of expression and of child welfare, the most elegant and least painful solution entails the participation of artists and creators themselves. Some writers and film-makers are willing to meet children in the schools and to develop materials with them, such as Quentin Blake or Lionel Delplanque. Partnerships of this kind and with other media professionals need to be given more opportunities to develop and to gain visibility, via youth film festivals for instance, such as the one held yearly in Barcelona by the Observatori Europeo de Televisio Infantil (OETI).

### **III. What are the recommendations? Reaching a balance between media environmental protection and sustainable development...**

This critical analysis does not radically call into question the solutions that democratic societies have come up with over the years. It tries to show their inconsistencies, their need to be updated and adapted to a changing environment; it also warns against the illusion of a single solve-it-all approach and points toward a variety of sustainable solutions over time. Self-regulation, regulation and education bodies seem to ignore each other; they all function on premises and solutions that ignore the recent developments in preferences, references and needs among young people and their various care-givers. The gaps and discrepancies in the missions and functions of these entities are not bad per se; they each fulfill a task in society and introduce some flexibility in the social fabric,—which justifies their very existence. However if the gaps turn into chiasms, and the discrepancies into disparities, they may well prove to be dysfunctional and destructive of the feeling of trust citizens place in their decision-makers and their institutions.

Hence no viable solution can come as a single panacea, only a composite patchwork can provide satisfaction to each and all, with their different life patterns, needs and expectations. This should come as a warning against the current temptation for the State to disengage itself from its duties, including its arbitration competence, and rely heavily and only on self-regulation. Implementing a balanced governance and moving toward a viable co-regulation system as promoted by the European Union, both imply the need to call on all major actors of the media environment (decision-makers, producers and broadcasters, educators and parents, not forgetting researchers)... and to hold them accountable. Hence changing paradigms from a protectionist view of the media environment to a more participatory sustainable development view requires some fine-tuning in all the sectors considered.

1. Self-regulation and mediation must be given real means. This can be achieved by giving more legitimacy to the status of mediators, with in-depth training and independence; creating and maintaining debate around guidelines and codes of ethics within the profession; including consumers and members of civil society in monitoring committees; homogenizing classificatory criteria within networks and across media, with more transparency.
2. Regulatory pressure must be kept on, especially by turning issues of violence (but also pornography and advertising) into public health matters. This implies that several entities must look after the media environment and promote its sustainable development, not just the ministry for communication and culture (when it exists) but also the ministries for health, family, education, youth, etc. Cross-sector bodies must be created to help these administrations work together and act as liaison agencies. Classificatory efforts must be supported as an aid to adult decision-making, not as censorship, and they need to be monitored from outside the industry as well as from within, not entrusted to a technological device. Members of associations representing civil society should be incorporated in regulatory bodies such as CSA, and these should increase their communication toward civil society, with an established bureau of complaints and the publication of annual reports.
3. Public service activities and public domain productions must be supported financially and legally to allow for advertising-free zones and pluralism of programs and content in the media fodder. The public service must slough off its protectionist paternalistic robes to endorse those of diversity and plurality and to address issues of socialization crucial to all, issues such as acculturation, equity, gender, etc. It should take the lead in offering programs that decode media productions, as in the case of *Arrêt sur Images* on France 5, in France. It should be given access to educational channels in the bouquets being prepared for digital television.
4. Media education is probably the best long-term filter. It must be promoted on a larger, coherent national scale. It can best accommodate the balance in paradigms, between an environmental perspective, that pushes for control and protection, and a sustainable development view that promotes empowerment and participation of all actors involved, especially young people. Media literacy should therefore address non-canonical issues that preoccupy public opinion and youngsters (violence, advertising, identity, etc.); it should emphasize selective patterns of media consumption together with media use for opinion-formation and citizenship. The objectives in the long run should be to make young people aware of their rights, their tastes, their national and European references, their capacity to express themselves through media and with media.

5. Research must be developed and extended, especially in terms of media acculturation and socialization of children, beyond controversies of effects and/or uses and gratifications. This research should be lead within a comparative framework, among the different countries of the European Union, and in collaboration with Northern America. It would provide regional and longitudinal databases for use by decision-makers and other interested parties. It seems urgent to bridge the knowledge gap between researchers and members of the public, especially in their respective perceptions of violence and of media impact, and a special effort should be made to disseminate results using understandable and yet not oversimplified language.
6. A European Foundation for Media and Youth should be established, to act as interface and to foster dialogue among the different entities, private and public, as well as the various actors (decision-makers, producers and broadcasters, educators and parents, researchers). It should endeavor to create synergy among already existing regional and national foundations and research centers. It should take the initiative to promote research in areas of public concern or interest (violence, pornography, health, memory, cognition, ...). It should monitor and evaluate independently media education, regulation and regulation, as well as produce international comparisons on all these issues and solutions.
7. As for violence in the media, campaigns to heighten or increase public awareness must be launched, directed towards all various actors, including decision-makers, producers and broadcasters who often consider themselves above the fray when in reality they are in the thick of it. These campaigns should aim at destroying a certain amount of perceived ideas, related to the critical analysis of the conditions of (self)regulation and education, such as:
  - violent content is not necessarily the most graphic : softened violence can harden people or loosen their inhibitions at all ages, though the youngest are most at risk. So, parental warnings are not enough, especially if not accompanied by programming constraints aiming at the maintenance of the family hour;
  - imitative behavior, harmful as it maybe and alarming to public opinion, is only the tip of the iceberg: other consequences (effects on cognition, emotion, tastes, references, lifelong political stances, etc.) are less visible and yet affect individuals in the long run. So, preventive policies and educational strategies are very important and they should be analyzed less in terms of effects or gratifications than in terms of risk management (Potter 2003);
  - the tastes of young people and their references do not alter drastically after adolescence: they affect their perception of the world (fear, inhibition, law and order leanings, etc.) throughout their adult life. So, focalizing on young people isn't enough;

- the tastes of young people do not necessarily lean towards violence and violent solutions: they are framed by international strategies of supply rather than demand. Demand tends to lean on issues such as family, friendship, identity (Frau-Meigs and Jehel 2003b). So, creators and producers all over Europe should be encouraged to meet that demand, for young people to find sources of identification and models of behavior related to the European values on which their future rests;
- the representation of violence is neither innocent nor neutral. This explains the various reasons for public opinion outbursts in France and in Europe: excessive representation in fiction, gratuitous graphics, recurrence of stereotyped formats, lack of context, survival of the strongest, etc. Thus, while recognizing that violence is a part of life and should not be excluded from all representation, its place should be relative, other formats and human relationships should also find their place, especially with respect to conflict resolution (such as humor, intelligence, mediation, law, respect for others, etc.);
- violence is not for free: it has a cost in production and in distribution, a cost partly supported by viewers, which entitles them to ask for accountability (Potter 2003). The commercial encouragement of consumption comes with an assorted bag of accessories, one of which is the right of the consumers to express their opinion. The argument of freedom of expression behind which producers and broadcasters shield themselves does not allow them to forsake all responsibility in its name. Thus, because freedom of expression may have secondary effects unrelated to it, in a situation of co-regulation, accountability should be shared by all parties, including producers and broadcasters.

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