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Publishing without Editors or Authors?

Competing Logics, Circulation, and Cultural Creation in a Publishing Firm

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Abstract

Two contradictory logics have historically been present in the publishing field (Thornton, 2002): editorial logic and market logic. Based on a qualitative case study within the French publishing sector, our study demonstrates accounting's colonization of the editorial process. Specifically, we explore the effects of the income statement on shaping the publication of a collection of children's books. Our study shows that previous traditional editorial logic is marginalized and that the controller has become the key actor in taking stock of the creative process. Moreover, we also note the performative effects of the income statement on actors and their understanding of the creative process. Our case study explains how the widespread use of accounting technologies in this context is sustained by a market logic that it in turn sustains and strengthens.

Keywords: publishing, management control, conflicting logics, qualitative case study, performativity, accounting technologies

1. Introduction

During the 1970's, French publishers decided to divide among them the philosophers-authors, whose initial sales generated close to zero. Thus, Foucault was published by Gallimard, Derrida by Minuit,

and Althusser by Maspero. André Schiffrin provided translation and publication services in the United States. These publishers defined themselves as “geographers of thought”, whose job it was to produce an “intellectual cartography” (Giribone & Vigne, 2000, p. 181). Consequently, the editors' mission was to discover talent, and their success was measured in terms of the emergence of new authors rather than financial gain. The mission of publishers like Lindon (Editions de Minuit), Gallimard, Maspero (Discovery), and Bourgois was to create a backlist, as Diderot defined it in 1763 (Diderot, 1984). This inventory was created under financial pressure and with financial prudence, but not as an end in itself. Thus, a successful publishing enterprise had to reconcile short-term demands (profitability, cash generation) with building a project and inventory over the long term. In the field of publishing, two logics peacefully coexisted (Giribone & Vigne, 2000), with one supporting the other: editorial logic was concerned with discovering and supporting authors, while market logic was concerned with ensuring a profitable business.

In recent decades, large mergers and acquisitions in the publishing industry have occurred worldwide—in the USA and the UK since the 1960's (Feather, 1993; Rudman, 1990; Schiffrin, 2000; Thornton, 1990) and in France since the 1980's (Schiffrin, 2010). The acquiring groups, which are often conglomerates with very diverse activities, tend to impose on the publishing companies managerial standards that they have tested in other sectors. Managerial and budgetary controls have thus been imposed on publishers by their new owners, who are seeking to maximize the return on their investment (Greco, Milliot, & Wharton, 2014; Schiffrin, 2000). This trend has resulted in the homogenization of production methods. More specifically, the perception of creation and culture in terms of generating an immediate return on investment, which the media has helped promote, disrupts the traditional view of the slow, sustained constitution of a backlist (Bouvaist, 1993, p. 92). These changes have led to what is generally considered a crisis in the publishing sector as “channels of intellectual thought are controlled by fewer and fewer publishers” (Rudman, 1990, p. 20). Moreover, pressure is being applied to produce fewer books and concentrate on those with the highest sales potential. Consequently, fewer and fewer new authors are able to find a publisher, and most of those who do can barely make a living from their published writing (Schiffrin, 2010).

This new management style runs counter to that of traditional publishing, which was instilled by major publishers who knew little about the management style of these large conglomerates (Davies & Balkwill, 2011; Schiffrin, 2000; Thornton, Jones, & Kury, 2005). Trust therefore was not being

placed in external tools but in the editor's flair and judgment in discovering and promoting new authors (Giribone & Vigne, 2000; Hazan, 2003). These trends are uncertain however and deserve to be investigated because "publishing can never quite be just another trade... books are different because they are a cultural product" (Feather, 1993, p. 180).

Hatier Jeunesse, the subject of our case study, has belonged to Lagardère, a financial holding group, since 2002. The Group has imposed a widespread use of the income statement (for each book and in aggregated form) in order to determine whether a minimal profit margin has been attained for each new book. To ensure that its accounts meet the Group's expectations, Hatier Jeunesse, as the publisher, has had to increase the likelihood of an author being successful, thus limiting any risk of failure. In the negotiations that take place regarding the publication of a new book, the income statement plays a significant part in selecting or rejecting manuscripts. Although as a management tool, the income statement may seem perfectly understandable to the controller and managers, authors and editors require a learning process to adapt to its use. At first glance, use of the income statement seems to result in greater rationality. With seemingly "neutral" and "objective" accounts, it constructs the performance measurement process in stark contrast to "subjective" forms of appraisal, such as an editor's sensibility, inherent qualities and life experience.

By relying on prior works that have highlighted the performative role of accounting and figures (Ahrens & Chapman, 2007; Ezzamel, Robson, & Stapleton, 2012; Fauré & Rouleau, 2011), we explore herein the revised accounting system's specific approach to book publishing, namely a publishing without editors (Schiffrin, 2000) and the empowerment of controllers in the decisions made to launch a new book.

These issues are worth investigating because they have the capacity to greatly inform us about the functioning of "accountingization" (Kurunmaki, Lapsley, & Melia, 2003) or "financialization" (Carter and Mueller, 2006; Froud, Johal, & Papazien, 2004) in organizations, as well as the effects on actors and the representation of creative processes.

Based on a qualitative case study spanning 10 years within the setting of a French publishing firm, Hatier Jeunesse, we explore how the coexistence of two contradictory logics, market logic and editorial logic, has shaped the publication of a collection of children's books. Analyzing accounting

within a creative, cultural organization enables us to illuminate the use of accounting tools and their effects on the creative process. Our aim is to contribute to an understanding of the role of accounting in everyday life (Hopwood, 1994; Jeacle, 2009), especially the inter-linkages between accounting and popular culture (Jeacle, 2012).

A book is a collective good and a product characterized by non-competition because although the act of reading takes place individually, it fosters sharing and enriches society (Samuelson, 1954). The non-competitive nature of the book led to the introduction of intellectual property rights, which were jointly held by the author and publisher regarding the use of their work¹. In France, royalties relate to the ex-post remuneration generated by a work and fluctuate according to the volume of sales. This remuneration often represents the authors' sole source of income. The fact that the book is a collective good and a cultural product legitimizes the intervention by the French State in the form of: a special VAT rate², a preset sales price for a given book³, subsidies, and the circulation of books through public libraries. The Lang Law stipulates that publishers set the price customers pay at the bookstore, and booksellers are not allowed to sell a book at a discount of more than 5% below the publisher's price, which is considered a mark of France's "cultural exception". This law signifies that the French State wishes to protect French culture and language by protecting small publishers and booksellers in order to encourage literary diversity. This imposition matches the widespread view held in France that books are cultural goods and constitute "tomorrow's literary heritage"; as such, they must not be sold in supermarkets at discounted prices (Benhamou, 2003, p. 109).

Our case study is symptomatic of the crisis currently faced by the publishing sector in France. We chose the setting of a publisher of children's literature because the financial and educational stakes in this field are high. Since 1970, children's publishing has continually grown to a point of constituting 14% of publishing sector revenues (SNE, 2005), which has attracted publishers of all sizes (Parinet, 2004). Moreover, the content of a children's book is important by its intention to educate future generations. Children identify with heroes, sharing their emotions: joy, sadness, laughter, and the excitement of discovery. The hero becomes the friend and companion of children as well as their role model. A diversification strategy is associated with the hero of a collection of

¹ In France, the Law of March 11, 1957 (amended in 1985).

² VAT on books is 5.5% in France (whereas the normal VAT rate is 19.8%).

³ The Lang Law of August 10, 1981.

children's books, through the marketing of toys, games, and figurines. These gadgets generate high margins for bookstores and are sold in superstores, such as FNAC, Virgin, Toys R Us and Apache.

This article shows how the decision to publish a new book is addressed and translated into a financial calculation through use of the income statement and moreover explores the performative effects of this accounting tool. We also offer insights into the nature of the negotiations through which a new book project comes to fruition. In contrast with previous research ([Thornton, 2002](#); [Thornton et al., 2005](#)), we do not observe one logic displacing another logic, but instead contradictory logics coexist. Our paper therefore responds to the demands for further empirical research on how organizations and actors react to multiple, often contradictory, logics ([Ezzamel et al., 2012](#); [Kodeih & Greenwood, 2013](#); [Reay & Hinings, 2009](#)). Our focus is on exploring the tensions and their consequences, as caused by the effects of contradictory logic on the creative process.

Our study is aimed at answering the two following research questions: 1) how do accounting technologies (specifically, the income statement) shape cultural events (namely the publication of a collection of children's books); and 2) how do they influence actors' behavior?

The paper is structured as follows. In order to establish the context for the discussion section (Section 7), the next section provides an overview of the publishing field, presents the major changes that have recently reshaped the world of publishing, and identifies the dominant logics. Section 3 discusses the performative effects of accounting numbers and the resulting tensions between creation and control. Section 4 presents our research methods and the case study of the Balthazar collection at Hatier Jeunesse. We then relate our findings in Sections 5 and 6, followed by a discussion of them in Section 7. Section 8 concludes our study.

2. Contradictory logics in the publishing field

In a study on publishing in higher education ([Thornton, 1990](#); [Thornton et al., 2005](#)), the authors identified two ideal types of logic: an editorial logic and a market logic. Logic has been defined as “identities and valuation orders that structure the decision making and the practices of the players in a product market” ([Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 805](#)). Furthermore, “the concept of institutional

logics is a way of understanding how actors' selections are conditioned by specific frames of reference that inform the sensemaking, the vocabulary of motivation and the identities that actors bring to situations" (Ezzamel et al., 2012, p. 283–284).

During the period when editorial logic was dominant, editors played a key role, and those with the best reputations were selected to develop new titles and build relationships with authors. Editorial logic emphasizes the professional autonomy of editors and their freedom from the influences of management and hierarchy (Powell, 1990). However, the last few decades have marked a shift from the prevailing editorial logic towards a market logic that emphasizes the need to build the competitive position of the firm and increase its profit margins. The advent of this new logic has been accompanied by the introduction of new technologies and practices, which have caused actors and organizations in the field to alter their practices (Reay & Hinings, 2005; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). These two logics were also apparent in the field of editing in France during the period of our case study, i.e. the end of the 1990's to the beginning of the 2000's.

As the renowned editor André Schiffrin (2010) noted, until quite recently, publishing was viewed as a profession and not merely a business. People who were interested in making money did not choose publishing as a career. According to Schiffrin (2000), traditional publishers of quality material had managed well with an annual profit margin in the range of 3–4%. However, the new conglomerate owners were seeking profits much closer to those from their other media holdings. The result was the introduction of managerial and budgetary tools (Feather, 1993; Greco et al., 2014) emphasizing cost accounting, cost-benefit calculations, and editors' "performance". The pursuit of higher profits to meet shareholders' expectations (especially institutional shareholders) has led to changes in publishing policy and practices (Feather, 1993). Some of the most notable changes have been the gradual abandonment of traditional backlist publishing and the conspicuous advent of "short-termism" in planning the life cycles of new books.

A marketing logic in publishing, like in other cultural industries, favors entertainment and "pre-accepted" content, easy to access and assumed to attract the greatest number of readers (Bouvaist, 1993, p. 92).

From an organizational point of view, the various publishing departments became integrated with the corporation's general policy of profitability (Rønning & Slaatta, 2011). In terms of output, many

publishing houses started producing fewer books, focusing on those with the highest sales potential, in an attempt to increase the bottom line and minimize risks.

The following table summarizes the main characteristics of the ideal type of logic at play in the publishing field ([Table 1](#)). It demonstrates the major differences between these two logics. We are not claiming herein that these two logics are the only ones practiced in the publishing field. They were however the two most salient logics informing the debates and practices as regards the new role of the income statement in publishing a collection of books during our study period.

Table 1. Ideal Types of Institutional Logics in Publishing (adapted from Thornton and Ocasio, 1999)

Characteristic	Editorial Logic	Market Logic
Main actor in decision-making	editor	management controller
Main tool for decision-making	editor's inherent qualities (flair, experience)	calculative practices (income statement)
Time horizon	long-term	short-term
Mission	build prestige	increase profits
Identity	publishing as vocation	publishing as a business

The previous literature provides evidence of tensions existing in both the cultural and artistic fields between creativity and control ([Armstrong & Tomes, 1996](#); [Chiapello, 1998](#); [Jeacle & Carter, 2012](#); [Le Theule, 2010](#); [Zan, Blackstock, Cerutti, & Mayer, 2000](#)). [Chiapello \(1998, 2000\)](#) highlighted the paradox between control and creativity that exists in artistic fields. By defining control as influential in generating order and routine, she argued that creativity is difficult to measure in terms of results and behavior. In fact, creation is based on two essential conditions: the intrinsic motivation of the creator, and the emotional aspect of the relationship between the artist and his or her work environment (e.g. support, understanding, respect, etc.). On the contrary, in traditional management, formal routines are designed as a series of instruments of “ordering” and play a central role in the organization.

The question of whether the accountant helps or hinders the artistic process ([Le Theule, 2010](#); [Zan et al., 2000](#)) has drawn some attention. Responses to this question have been divided. Some have highlighted the positive influence that accounting exerts on creativity. For instance, [Ditillo \(2004\)](#),

in a study of how knowledge-intensive firms deal with uncertainty, showed that management control systems could play both a coordinating and knowledge-integrating role. In a study on the fashion industry, [Jeacle and Carter \(2012\)](#) demonstrated that accounting acts as a mediating instrument regarding the tensions between creativity and control in high street fashion. Similarly, [Adler and Chen \(2011\)](#), in their study on large-scale collaborative creativity, indicated that management control systems could improve performance in contexts characterized by high levels of task uncertainty.

Other studies have been more critical of the effects of accounting on creation. [Armstrong and Tomes \(1996\)](#) found that the attempt to plan and control for the creative aspect of the design process could become self-defeating, ultimately displacing the trust of the designer by market research indices of “design effectiveness”. Accounting/audit measures might thus infiltrate and redefine the meaning of creative, non-calculative activities. Another study revealed how the introduction of budgetary controls at the Royal Danish Theatre posed a threat to the artists’ zone of liberty ([Christiansen & Skærbæk, 1997](#)).

3. The performative quality of accounting numbers

Previous research has convincingly shown that accounting is not a neutral or objective practice ([Hopwood, 1994](#); [Miller, 2001](#); [Power & Laughlin, 1992](#); [Robson, 1992](#)) but rather a powerful device implicated “in shaping contemporary life through its ability to act on individuals and intervene in their lives” ([Jeacle, 2012, 587](#)). In our European societies, “calculative practices” ([Kalthoff, 2005](#); [Miller, 2001](#); [Vollmer, 2003](#)) have come to occupy a central role in legitimizing and objectifying human activities. Everything is subjected to verification ([Pentland, 2000](#)), and since figures have become so important we speak of “governance by numbers” ([Desrosières, 2008](#); [Miller, 2001](#)). Objectivity, as defined numerically, has come to replace objectivity as determined by a person's inherent qualities ([Porter, 1994](#)).

In an accounting context, the quantification process is an appealing translation of qualities into quantities ([Miller, 1994](#)) and one that appears to reduce ambiguity ([Robson, 1992](#)); thus, it contributes to an apparent mastery of risk and uncertainty. The need to control is increased in creative contexts, which are characterized by high risk and uncertainty. However, this reduction of

ambiguity seems to be problematic because quantification (specifically profit contribution measures) implies the suppression of qualitative differences (Robson, 1992). Moreover, accounting tools are performative because measurement intervenes in the social world being depicted (Ahrens & Chapman, 2007; Espeland & Stevens, 2009; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Ezzamel et al., 2012). According to Espeland and Stevens (2009, p. 412): “Measures are reactive; they cause people to think and act differently.” In a study on the introduction of budgeting practices in the education field in the UK, the authors concluded that “budgeting was not a neutral technology of representation within the field: budgeting both represents and intervenes” (Ezzamel et al., 2012, p. 19). As this research shows, budgeting practices have had performative effects on cognition in the studied organizations.

The calculative practices of accounting are understood as “technologies of government” (Miller, 2001) facilitating “action at a distance” (Latour, 1987) through the production of inscriptions that enable distant “centers of calculation” (Latour, 1987) to act upon individuals and organizations (Robson, 1992; Rose & Miller, 1992). The income statement can thus be interpreted as an inscription (Latour, 1987), i.e. a material translation of a setting to be acted upon. Hence, it is mobile, in continuously moving between the context of the action and the remote actors in the network (Latour, 1993). The circulating nature of management tools, which are likely to become the norm applicable to a range of actors, also constantly serves to refer constantly local accounts to global phenomena (Chiapello & Gilbert, 2013, pp. 255–256). Accounting numbers may circulate in complex action networks that span large expanses of space and time (Boedker & Chua, 2013). Actors define “themselves in interactions with one another and with the intermediaries that they themselves put into circulation” (Callon, 1991, pp. 132–133). These intermediaries may be human or non-human. In our case study, the income statement circulates between the local actors, such as the controller and editors, and distant actors, including senior management.

Our study seeks to explore how calculative practices shape cultural events and influence actors’ behavior. In short, our study pertains to the relationship among three interacting concepts that are central to the understanding of our case study, namely: the contradictory logics at play within an organizational setting; calculative technologies and practices (i.e. the income statement in a publishing firm) inherent in the field; and the performative effects of accounting technologies on people and cultural objects (i.e. a collection of children’s books). The following sections will

introduce our case study organization and investigate how the project to publish a new book is negotiated between key actors and how it is addressed and translated into a financial calculation.

4. Research context and method

4.1 Balthazar, a collection of children's books

In 2002, an important event took place in the French publishing industry, namely the acquisition by Lagardère of the publishing branch of the Vivendi Group (VUP). Consequently, Lagardère secured a quasi-monopolistic position in this industry. The French government had supported Lagardère's various acquisitions in the sector in order to help French publishing face global competition (e.g. Pearson). This move was part of the government's strategy to prop up France's publishers. Thus, in 2006, two publishing groups (Lagardère and Wendel Investissement) dominated the French market. Hatier Jeunesse (the focus of our case study) is part of the Lagardère holding Hachette Livre. Both groups have highly diversified business holdings. Lagardère operates in the sectors of advertising, civil and military aviation, aerospace, sports, and defense contracting. Wendel Investissement, an investment firm with no stock exchange listing, operates in industry, notably petroleum, and in the security and service sectors. These changes marked an important step in the financialization of the French publishing industry, whose ramifications can be detected in our case study.

In France, the number of children's publications has consistently expanded since the early 1970's, reaching 14% of total publishing sector revenue.⁴ Children's books are works published for readers ranging in age from two or three to the teen years. Production is dynamic, and in 2005, it grew at a pace of 15.6% in value terms and 6.9% in volume (Syndicat National de l'Édition [SNE]). The development of municipal and school libraries spurred an increase in the production of children's literature, attracting both large and small publishers as well as new entrants. As [Parinet \(2004\)](#) noted, in an uncertain economic climate, the healthy growth of children's literature attracts all publishers. This growth rate has led to enhanced creativity and originality with respect to both texts and illustrations. It should be noted that children's literature involves considerable work on the text, images, and related objects, e.g. pens or toys. A fun experience and the educationally innovative and sensorial features of the book are highly coveted in enabling children to develop a taste for reading, learning and knowledge. Authors develop pedagogical thinking to create the text and

⁴ Data provided by the *Syndicat National de l'Édition* (SNE), a French industry federation (2005).

pictures from their own experiences and experiments, and they seek to evoke a child's pleasure in exploring and constructing meaning. On the supply side, the range of competing titles is quite wide, and survival can be very difficult. According to SNE, average sales figures for most children's books are roughly 3000–5000 copies with profit margins of about 5%.⁵

Our case study, the Balthazar collection, comprises books for young children (three years old). The collection was first created in 1997 by an author and an illustrator. Hatier Jeunesse has since published more than 30 books in this collection (see [Fig. 1](#) in [Appendix A](#)). By 2005, it boasted around 50 titles, including Balthazar activity books, albums and albums with Balthazar's companion, Pépin (see [Fig. 2](#) in [Appendix A](#)).

In our case study, Balthazar is the hero in the collection *Aide-Moi à Faire Seul* (“Help me do it on my own”). Hence, he receives large volumes of letters from young readers who identify with him and share his emotions of joy, sadness, laughter and discovery. He becomes the child's friend and accompanies his or her discovery of the world. The authors have put tremendous thought into carefully depicting what the hero conveys at both emotional and educational levels. Marie-Hélène, the author, studied the Montessori method⁶ of learning and sought to transmit it through her books, which therefore have been designed to teach the child how to count and read by using the body's memory—for instance, children can touch the soft or rough letters with their fingertips. They also enable children to discover their five senses. For example, they smell a real sprig of lavender or listen to the sound in a shell, and so on. The authors have a legally binding contract for each title in the collection. They earn royalties based on a percentage (6%) of sales and are granted an advance payment of €2000, with the deduction of this advance paid from initial sales. Because the Balthazar books are handcrafted, they are expensive, compared with other books for young children, ranging from €11 to €23.

Marie-Hélène, a 40-year-old mother, whose children encountered learning difficulties, became fascinated by the question: “How can a child be taught in a fun way, using his or her five senses?”

⁵ According to the criteria set by IPSOS, a French survey institute, a bestseller is a publication that sells more than 25,000 copies. However, there are longstanding bestsellers that sell a little more than 10,000 copies in the course of ten years.

⁶ Montessori education is an educational approach developed by Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori based on her experience with “special needs” children and characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child's natural psychological, physical, and social development.

The project took on such importance for her that she left her job as a stylist at Cacharel to write and travel to India for several months with her family to find inspiration for creating an original character for her stories. Upon her return, she submitted a proposal for a collection of children's books featuring the stories of Balthazar. Her project resonated with the editor, who was experiencing similar difficulties with her own children. The editor decided to give the project a try.

At the outset, Marie-Hélène met a long-suffering mother working at Hatier [the editor] who was looking for something new for Hatier. Our editor believed in us... No doubt this was because of the warm welcome we received and the positive relationships we established with this publishing firm. In fact, the frequency and regularity of our meetings were to our complete satisfaction. We are talking here about a genuine collaboration between authors and editors. Furthermore, it seemed to us that the Hatier brand name as a publisher of children's and extracurricular books perfectly matched the spirit of the collection (Caroline, Illustrator).

Balthazar was the first Montessori-based collection published in France. As an original work, it represented a major risk for the publishing firm.

4.2 The Hatier Jeunesse team

The Hatier Jeunesse team is a streamlined unit comprising just six staff members: two editors, a management controller, two sales representatives, and a head management controller. They know each other well and meet on a daily basis. The authors are in regular contact with Carole,⁷ one of the editors. Everyone on the team has a passion for books. The backgrounds of the two editors, Beryl and Carole, are different. Carole has a Master's degree in philosophy and turned to publishing after completing her studies. Recruited five years later, Beryl had previously worked in marketing and then in the financial markets before being retrained at ESCP, a business school, to specialize in publishing. Reine, the management controller, also has a business degree.

The team found the Balthazar collection to be original by virtue of being the first Montessori-based collection published in France. It won over the editors and controllers alike. Some titles in the collection sell better than others, and the author and illustrator have regular meetings with Carole.

⁷ The quotes included in the present paper were translated into English by the authors.

The sales representatives distribute the books to bookstores. Their work consists of proposing titles, making them known to booksellers, and eliciting their interest by focusing on the rates of return from sales. Representatives are remunerated based on a fixed salary plus commission that varies according to sales volumes. Depending on the representatives' convictions, books are typically sold in one of two ways: either from their boxes at the bookstore, or from the bookseller's display table of favorite titles. A book that makes it to the display table has a far greater chance of being sold than those kept in closed boxes (Benhamou, 2003). At Hatier, the management controller and sales representatives work closely, but neither the editors nor the authors normally have any contact with the sales team. In short, for the Balthazar collection to exist, an author and both human and technical resources are required (Becker, 2002, p. 127–129). In our case, the human resources are the editors, the management controllers, and the sales representatives. The technical resources include the quality of printing, bookbinding, and so on. Moreover, this project must be viable, meaning profitable, for the publishing firm. Profitability is measured by the income statement, which has become a tool for supporting or disrupting creativity.

The income statement is used to monitor the sales of each book and compare sales across the full range of the firm's products. Individual income statements for each book are then aggregated to generate the consolidated income statement. It is worth noting that all interviewees mentioned the need to measure profitability through use of the income statement. As the primary tool for implementing the market logic, the income statement was naturally adopted as the focus of our study.

4.3 Research method

The purpose of this paper is to explore how financialization colonizes the editorial function and seeks to shape the creative objects in conformance with its logic.

The field work was carried out by the first author, who maintained contact with both the author and illustrator of the Balthazar collection from its creation in 1997 until 2007. The two editors, the author, the illustrator and the management controller of the Balthazar collection at Hatier Jeunesse were interviewed in 2003. All interviewees were questioned on their background, role and

responsibilities in the publication of the collection as well as on their interactions with the other actors involved. The interviewees were also asked about the role of the income statement in the selection and publication of book projects. The interviews were conducted in French, transcribed and then analyzed.⁸

To better understand the publishing context and its dominant logics, editors and controllers working for other publishers were also interviewed between 2003 and 2006. Due to space limitations however, we could not include these other editors in the present paper. In addition to these interviews and in order to grasp the context of the publishing industry as well as the French specificity, this study has drawn on a rich collection of books and articles written by famous editors (e.g. Bourgois, Minuit, Hazan and Schiffrin) and academics. We also consulted a number of accounting documents, legal contracts and sales figures provided by the Balthazar book authors (see [Table 2 in Appendix A](#)). The interviews were analyzed to identify the main themes involved in the negotiation of the Balthazar collection publication, as well as the role of the income statement.

Because of author reticence, the meetings with the authors, with the exception of one interview held with the illustrator, were not recorded. In writing up our findings, we also relied on the extensive field notes taken immediately after the meetings with the actors, including notes on our impressions of the meeting and the character of the interviewees.

This paper has taken a long time to come to fruition largely because of the need to build relationships with the key actors through trust built over several years. It should be noted that all interviewees took a great risk by talking to us. As noted by [Greco et al. \(2014\)](#), most book companies guard their income statements (as well as their standard operating costs and overheads) “as if they were the secret formula of Coca-Cola” (p. 211). Access to field data was difficult, as was the writing of our findings because we tried to account for all the voices involved.

The interest in studying accounting tools within the publishing industry was piqued by three main events. First was our awareness of the responsibility we have as lecturers in the field of accounting/management control to how these disciplines are taught to future business managers. We may often give the impression that accounting tools are neutral and objective, and

⁸ All names have been changed to protect the interviewees' identities.

that by silencing other ways to “measure” and “count” we are actually contributing to the current hegemony of numbers in financialization or the verification of everything (Pentland, 2000). The following paragraph is an excerpt from the first author's research journal:

I have arrived at a phase in my teaching that intrigues me, questions me. Are we going to teach our students solely about financial profitability, or are we going to teach them about other forms of profitability (non-financial)? (Author Research Journal, 2001, ESCP-EAP).

In December 2002, the second event was the sale of VUP (pending approval by the European Commission) to the Lagardère Group, which could have given the latter a virtual monopoly in the French publishing industry. The third event was the special June 2003 issue of the French magazine "Esprit" on the state of French publishing, which stated: "... Because of the uncertainties of impending decisions, publishers with whom we had conducted interviews wished not to have them published." (Esprit, 2003, p. 45). This was a period of uncertainty, which culminated at the beginning of 2004 when the European Commission authorized Lagardère's retention of 40% of VUP, in requesting that the remaining 60% be returned to the market. Because we encountered high levels of uncertainty both in the field and in reporting our findings, we decided to channel this experience by asking the question: "How is it that... ?" (Becker, 1988, p. 46). In doing so, we adopted the methodological approach suggested by Foucault (1969), in including the questions he proposed for analyzing any model. Who built this tool (in this case, an accounting tool)? What is this tool's purpose? Who uses it? Whom does it serve? Whom does it not serve? What does it bring to light? What does it not bring to light? To address these questions, we examined both the architecture and content of the income statement. We then explored how the numbers generated in the income statement were the result of purely technical processes and how they translated organizational and political choices. Our analysis focused on the important roles played by management controllers and sales representatives, and the impact of the "bookseller's display table" on the success of a book. We also inquired about the decision-makers and the distribution of risks among diverse stakeholders in the publication of the Balthazar collection—authors, editors, sales representatives, management controllers, and the publishing firm itself.

Table 2. Data sources⁹

Publishers	Data	Period of data collection	Interviewees	Number of interviews
Hatier Jeunesse	Interviews	Sept. 2003 - Sept. 2004	Editors (Carole & Beryl), Management Controller (Reine)	3
		1998-2005	Marie-Hélène* (author) & Caroline (illustrator)	10
	Documents consulted	2001-2004	Budgeted income statement (confidential) 2003	
			Income statement (confidential) 2003	
			Contracts - 2001 (2 contracts)	
			Intellectual property rights: 2001 (16 books); 2002 (28 books)	
	Meetings (not recorded)	1998-2004	10 children and 4 parents	
Lagardère	Corporate Annual Reports	2001-2006	Management Controller (Blandine)	1
Hazan	Interview with editor*	2003-2004		1
Le Seuil	Interview with editor*	2003-2004		3
Maspero	Interview with editor*	2003-2004		1
Total interviews				19

It is worth noting that the editors and controllers interviewed during our study spoke of the need for profitability as measured by means of the income statement. The next section will examine questions regarding who actually constructs the income statement, given its status as the central tool, and how it is constructed, who uses it and with what purpose, as well as its impact on the publication of a new book.

5. The income statement and its impact on new book projects

5.1 Negotiating the numbers contained in the income statement

An author sends a draft of his/her work to the editors, who if interested in the work will contact the author. The editor and management controller then jointly study the project. Before the book can be launched at Hatier Jeunesse, it must be forecast to generate a profit margin of at least 5% from a print run of 3,000 copies. Such a determination requires calculating the book's production costs, its sales price and the sales figures; in other words, a provisional income statement needs to be

⁹ The interviews marked with an * were not recorded because we had not received permission from the interviewees. We relied on notes taken during the interviews to understand the context and the logics at play in the publishing field.

drawn up.¹⁰ In this section, we present a simplified income statement (see [Table 3](#)) to highlight three main items: the cost of creating the work; the cost of producing the work; and the royalties generated by the work. Creation costs include illustrations, photos, printing (photoengraving), along with industrial costs (layout). Production costs include packaging, components, quality control and transportation. Part of the creative process is subcontracted to a South Korean firm. Authors' royalties only appear in the operating margin; they are not included in the creation costs because they are categorized as variable costs. As will be shown below, this practice seems to be symptomatic of the authors' perceived position. Royalties are not taken into account when calculating creation and production costs, yet they do bear a portion of the risk since they are considered variable costs, and in the case of zero sales, authors receive no remuneration.

In the following paragraphs, we will briefly explain how the various items of the income statement are calculated. The sales price can be set by the sales representatives, who provide the market trends, or else by the editor, who stipulates the book's quality (e.g. top-of-the-range or mid-range book). In all cases, if there is an obvious market price (set for similar books sold by competitors), then this price would be chosen. It is therefore obvious how the market view takes over other possible views regarding book price, including that of the editor. With regard to the number of products sold, the editor submits a proposal to the sales representative for review, but it is the management controller who makes the final decision:

On the whole, the editor proposes the figure first... based on his/her own knowledge and vision of the product. This sales estimate will then be reviewed by the sales rep using the items submitted by the editor and then by myself, again according to what the sales rep tells me and whether or it will be necessary to carry out a promotion to boost sales. So, in the end, I'm the one who makes the decision as to how many copies to print. (Reine, management controller)

Once a price is selected, the management controller adjusts the other variables, notably production costs and royalties, accordingly.

The editors basically tell me: "Here's a project. It's a series of four works. It will be presented in a 32-page format. It will be printed in four colors, bound or whatever..." So they give me a

¹⁰ Excluded from this income statement are costs tied to the organization (e.g. expenses incurred by editors, sales representatives).

price for that, including the type of paper, with details of the costs for creation, fixed production and variable production. The production department actually does that. And then they tell me: “For this collection, we’re going to pay the authors four percent of the sales revenue and we’re going to give them an advance of €2000.” And so, I input all that data. Then I compare the output with sales. Everything hinges on that. (Reine, management controller)

The editors are often “supportive” of the authors, requesting on their behalf advances on royalties for up to five years, a duration that the controller often seeks to shorten. Negotiations generally deal with costs (creation, production, royalties) in the aim of trying to lower them in order to increase the profit margin.

This strategy means, for example, that if, off the top of my head, the advance covers, say, five years’ of sales, from a purely financial point of view, I won’t generally agree to it because that would tie up significant capital. So, *we’ll then discuss based on this income statement to find out how we can make improvements.* (Reine, management controller)

Table 3. Simplified Representation of the Income Statement for a Book

Sales	Costs
	<i>Creation costs:</i> fixed over 3 years (illustrations, photos, printing - photoengraving, industrial costs, layout)
	<i>Production costs</i> (packaging, components, quality control, transportation)
	<i>Royalties:</i> % of turnover
	Margin

The calculation of a book’s costs is relatively standardized yet remains complex. Before approving the publication of a book, the controllers calculate its cost with help from the editors and seek potential profit margins of 5% based on estimates and information provided by the editors.

They [the editors] basically outline the book’s features. They will draw up a unitary production cost. But the overall production costs, which include all costs incurred, are

calculated by me. That means combining the costs of creation, printing and plating. For me, included in the creation costs are the costs of layout, the cover and any illustrations. And then there's the engraving. (Reine, management controller)

The editors solicit information from the graphic artists and illustrators in order to calculate the cost of the book. A project will be accepted, or not, based on the income statement produced by the controller and approved, or not, by senior management:

Things proceed in stages, which means that when we launch a project, she [the controller] must draw up an income statement in order for the project to be green-lighted. We also have to draw up a budget, which is done with the layout artist. We then reach an agreement on the budget and assign the work to the layout artist, the illustrator, the translator, etc. The controller then integrates all this into the income statement over three years, including an advertising budget, a production budget, etc. She is responsible for establishing an income statement. And, in the end, *we get a green light, or not, for the project based on the results presented in this income statement. If the margins are too low, the project will be abandoned; we won't get the green light from senior management...* So, yes, she is crucial insofar as she is the one... (Carole, editor)

The controller acts as a gatekeeper because she can stop certain projects even before they have begun, based simply on the income statement she has drawn up. She thus has complete control over production of the accounting posting that will subsequently get circulated within the network.

If profit margins are insufficient, the editors will negotiate with the production staff in order to decrease costs. I'm in charge of that. Let's say that it's my task. But I do actually draw up the income statement jointly with the management controller. I'm in charge of seeing with the production staff about obtaining the lowest costs possible. I inquire with the head of the production studio about the best prices we can get in terms of layout, illustrations, etc. And then I'll go and see the management controller. Together, we'll draft the income statement and verify whether it works or not, the areas where we can save, etc. But it's a very delicate task. (Carole, editor)

If profit margins remain too low, the editors can renegotiate with the authors and restrain them if necessary. And we often have to step back somewhat in terms of product quality, form, number of illustrations, and things like that. We even at times have to restrain the authors. (Carole, editor)

The editors negotiate costs on both the creation and production sides, with the goal of achieving a profit target of 5% to ensure the project's approval. If the editors do not meet this target, they renegotiate with the authors and might also interfere in the creative process. The controller supervises the entire process and sets the final costs. For both the editors and the controller, the main goal is to receive approval from senior management for the project submittal. Thus, they attempt to reduce costs based on their understanding of the project.

To summarize, let's observe that the items composing the profit margins are negotiated among the editors, controllers and sales representatives, each of whom has his/her own priorities and all of whom are seeking to bring the project to a successful conclusion. These negotiations take place within the confines of Hatier Jeunesse, and senior management plays no direct part in them.

5.2 The representation of key actors in the income statement

As noted previously, the author in our case study stayed in India for six months with her family to find inspiration for her character, Balthazar. She then visited Morocco for two months to find Balthazar's friend, Pépin. She needed this change of scenery to create original characters. However, the expenses incurred during the creative process were hers to bear alone. Though these costs are necessary for creation, we argue, in the same way that traveling is necessary for perfume creators, these are not assumed by the publishing house, unlike the perfumery. Thus, the entire creative process is not taken into account in the income statement. When studying the income statement, the creative process seems marginal since it is the focus of just three of 39 lines: royalties, amounting in 2003 to 0.53% of sales (see [Table 4](#)); provision for royalties; and advance payment on royalties.

Table 4. Excerpt from the income statement showing the distribution of fixed and variable costs

Payroll	Real 2002	Real 2003	Nature of Costs	Actors
	% Net Sales	% Net Sales		
Personnel costs – organization, chief editors, director and purchasing department	13.19 -	5.36 -	Fixed	Publisher
Personnel costs – creators, editors, editorial department	6.78 -	5.47 -	Fixed	Internal Creators
Royalties, excluding concessions	0.80 -	0.53 -	Variable	External Creators
Personnel costs	23.42 -	17.46 -	Fixed and Variable	Sales Representatives
Marketing salaries	10.92 -	6.80 -	Fixed	Marketers
Total payroll	52	33		

The representation of the various actors in the income statement is worthy of attention. [Table 4](#) shows how the actors, such as editors, controllers and sales representatives, who play a key role in the book publication process, appear under the fixed costs. They are employed by the firm and earn a salary, which is a fixed cost. The cost of editors represents 10% of sales, whereas the cost of sales representatives accounts for 20%. [Table 4](#) also shows that the cost of the commercial function is much higher than that of the editorial function (internal creators), providing therefore the first indication of the importance ascribed to each function at Hatier. The income statement not only highlights the importance of the commercial function but also sheds light on the authors' vulnerability. Since the royalties that remunerate them are variable costs, in the case of zero sales authors receive no remuneration, meaning that they assume themselves a large part of the risk involved in publishing a book.

By exposing the importance of certain actors, the income statement strengthens their position within the firm, thereby endowing them with even greater importance. Conversely, those in a financially precarious position have even less influence, and their vulnerability is accentuated.

To summarize, the income statement analysis reveals the importance of some actors (sales representatives) and how this importance translates into both influence and salary. It also indicates the vulnerability of other actors (authors), which translates into low remuneration, the absence of legal protection and the research that must be carried out at their own expense. The income statement both displays and validates the way in which the organization functions, i.e. through a numbers-based model.

6. The book as a consequence of negotiation among actors

This section will examine how the publication of the Balthazar collection is negotiated among key actors and the consequences for the book itself.

6.1 *The authors and the creative process*

Carole, an editor at Hatier Jeunesse, chose the authors and launched the Balthazar collection in 1997. They worked with her on the pedagogical research. However, due to pressures from senior management, two or three years into the project, market logic became predominant, with an emphasis on short-term sales; pedagogical research and innovation had become secondary. This short-term management perspective undoubtedly affected creation, which is explained in the following paragraphs.

Following a discussion with her editor, Caroline, the illustrator, described her reaction to the dominance of market logic and its promotion of "short-termism" in publishing:

I suddenly find, today, that the creation cycles in publishing are extremely short. *I previously believed in the publishing myth—publishing relates to culture, and culture is always long-term—but I was wrong.* Publishing has a cycle that is as short as, if not shorter than, the cycle in fashion, but it's a cycle with so many challenges... Collections are very important. You bring out a book and it takes off. Afterwards, you see that you need to write more books, *but those of us who work for the long-term feel that things can be very fragile. We have to renew the product.* (Caroline, illustrator)

Caroline and Marie-Hélène are working on developing creative pedagogical tools, yet the team at Hatier Jeunesse takes a short-term view because it is more interested in the commercial aspects. This is symptomatic of how the lack of time and the pressure to hurry, which are spurred by the desire for efficiency and characteristic of market logic, are in opposition to the desire of the authors to innovate and construct a sustainable pedagogical tool.

But with short-term thinking, they don't have the time, *they think in terms of product and numbers.* (Caroline, illustrator)

Market demand emerges in discussions between the authors and the management controller, who asks the illustrator to consult books at the bookstore to find out what is currently being published:

“You have to do that. Caroline, go and see at the bookstore. That’ll give you an idea of what is out there.” (Caroline, illustrator)

The illustrator does not agree with this demand because her objective is not to create books that are similar to those already on the market, but to be original:

That’s not my job. *My goal is not to do things that are already on the market. I offer something different*; there is something different. (Caroline, illustrator)

This quote shows that the authors and the management controller have different views of the creative process. The authors are stepping into a risky field by producing an original work. The controller wants to minimize the risks and uncertainty over not selling the book and thus would like to have a book similar to products already on the market. Moreover, this excerpt shows that the controller, emboldened by her power to decide, steps outside her role and offers advice to the authors regarding the creative process. For example, Caroline commented that the controller had told her to use green rather than blue.

“Blue doesn’t work; you have to use green”—well, that depends. Why? Why all of a sudden is green better? (Caroline, illustrator)

Buoyed by the income statement, the controller seeks to assert her power in order to control the object of creation. Thus, we can perceive an expansion of the accounting field into the creative sphere. The decisions made according to this approach appear to be arbitrary because they are only supported by abstract numbers and not by any real artistic competence. Converting the income statement into the main control tool also has consequences for creation in terms of diversifying and developing the collection. First, *in terms of collection diversification*, there is a need to expand the collection with activity books, albums, new characters and early learning materials (for two- and three-year-olds). Here, two approaches collide as the management controller requests development of erasers and pencils, similar to “Barbie gadgets”; whereas the authors request development of objects more in line with the Montessori method.

So, if we were to make small erasers, why not? Child-friendly objects, okay; good pencils and nice paper to give to children. (Caroline, illustrator)

For the author, producing “Barbie pencils” does not serve to develop the collection; instead, it does the collection a disservice.

You see, all of this feeds into this universe and consolidates it. Thankfully, neither Marie-Hélène [the author] nor I write books just to fill up book shelves or to add to the world of publishing. She does it because she has things to say. She says them through her text, and I say them through my drawings. (Caroline, illustrator)

Second, *in terms of collection development*, the controller suggests adding titles to them or withdrawing them from the collection. Those titles that do not work well—that is, those that generate very few sales—are withdrawn from production. As noted previously, the income statement is analyzed product-by-product and not as a whole. Consequently, if the management controller says that a particular book has generated too few sales, it has to be withdrawn from production. However, a collection of books has its own logic, and withdrawing a single book may also affect the sales of the other books in the collection.

For example, I suggested that we bring out new books this year, but I was told “no”. Although last year, we released new books that performed well—very well in fact—even when compared to other print runs and children's series. They were very successful. But since some books launched five years ago have had really poor profit margins, they put all the numbers together to produce an average profit margin and... So, there are no new books for this year. (Carole, editor)

This excerpt indicates that the editor would like to develop the Balthazar collection by releasing new titles. However, Hatier’s editorial policy, which aggregates profit margins to produce a single number (i.e. average profit margin), prevents her from doing so.

At times, it seems as though the editors and controllers are not speaking the same language. For instance, in the eyes of editors or management controllers, the risk assumed by the author is minimal.

I want to carry on working, and I need to bring in money to do so. When people tell me that I'm lucky to be working, I feel like saying, "You're the one being rude, the one being inappropriate. You earn a salary; it arrives every month, and you don't have to worry. I have to buy my own pencils, my brushes; how do I live?" It's insulting to say that creating means being full of yourself. It's so French to say that we shouldn't talk about money. (Caroline, illustrator)

The risks that the author faces include not being produced or distributed and having to cope with a financially precarious position. Moreover, beyond possible financial hardship, the risk is also incurred at a very personal level:

They put money on the table while we're putting our lives on the line. We all have a stake in the project working out. (Caroline, illustrator)

The above excerpts show that the interests of the authors and controllers are based on different logics. While the authors take a long-term view, the approach preferred by the controller is short-term. These excerpts also reveal how authors resist the market logic taking control of their project.

There are two categories of authors: integrated and mavericks ([Becker, 1982](#)). The Montessori collection authors are highly innovative and the first in France to use the Montessori method, so they belong to the second category. However, it often takes time for maverick authors to become established since they are not directly meeting a market demand and must therefore create a new space in the market. A short-term approach using quantitative measurement tools would most likely thwart the authors' ability to find an audience.

6.2 Market logic influences editors' behavior

Although both editors had a passion for books, their discourses differed, notably when talking about authors and how they supervise them.

In Carole's view, the editor is the one who helps authors express their thoughts to the best of their ability; the editor accompanies the author on a journey and, at the same time, may defend the author's project to senior management, as the following excerpt illustrates with regard to the authors of Balthazar:

I defend them at Hatier. I've defended them. I continue to defend them... And it's true that we bump into... This is the real topic... We bump into the controllers who say that it doesn't work and that, on some books... Indeed, there is stuff in the books, so they can be very expensive to make, so it's very hard to monetize them, etc. (Carole, editor)

Carole's definition of her role as an editor is to help the authors in their creative endeavors. She is a staunch supporter and believer in the originality of the Balthazar collection:

I think Balthazar has real utility and should continue to exist. And it's true that there are subjects that they [the authors] have not yet treated; they would love to do it and I think they could in a very original way, like it has never been done before (Carole, editor).

The editor believes that authors should be given time to develop their ideas, so she takes a longer-term stance when defending the existence of the Balthazar collection. She also acknowledges that working on the Balthazar collection has changed her personally as well as her way of working on other children's books. Carole thus seems to follow an editorial logic.

Beryl, the second editor, has a somewhat different view. In her opinion, the editor is the one who “manages” the author in terms of time, coordinates the draft submission, and facilitates the workflow between the layout artist and the production team.

I was working with another illustrator last winter, and he sent me his illustrations one month late. Fortunately for me, I was three months ahead of my schedule. Otherwise, that would have meant going to print late, and show that I was handing things in late. In fact, he kept me

waiting for a month. For one month, I phoned him every day or every other day, and he would say, “Yes, I’ll send it across tomorrow.” But for a month, he sent me nothing. So there came a time when I told him, “Listen, if I don’t get it tomorrow, I’m cancelling the order and I’ll turn to someone else.” And in fact, there was quite a substantial amount of money involved, so that made him jump to attention. I was starting to get worried about falling behind schedule.

(Beryl, editor)

The above excerpt shows that the editor pushes artists to meet tight deadlines and does not hesitate to harass or micromanage them in order to respect these deadlines. The editor’s task, as perceived by Beryl, is to coordinate several parties: authors, illustrators, and translators.

I’m in the middle. For instance, I’ll receive the manuscript from the authors that I forward to the layout artist, who then sends back a first draft, which I send on to the illustrators and authors. I’ll then get back the corrections from the authors and the drawings from the illustrators to exchange with the authors, who subsequently send me their corrections that I have to send out again... It’s an endless game between everyone and we’re at the center...

(Beryl, editor)

In Beryl’s opinion, the editor lies at the center of a network, from where she coordinates the various competencies of the actors in order to achieve the final product. She seems to imply that her role is vital. Moreover, in her view, authors are often people with big egos and tend to hinder the publishing process.

It’s not always easy, because these are people who are proud to be authors, so very proud to have their name on a book. So, these are people who don’t always like to take criticism, or [don’t like it] when we ask them to change something. So you have to justify, you have to insist, you have to... Because an author is someone who puts his name on a book, he immediately becomes very proud of himself. Proud, as in he gets a big head. Yes, I think so... It means they become very confident, very self-assured; they’re sure what they’re doing is very beautiful and will not bear any alteration [...] That’s not easy to manage. (Beryl, editor)

In her perception of the author as a proud individual, Beryl also reveals her impression that she is perceived as a “secretary”. She seems to experience difficulties in working with the artists because she's bothered by their easygoing nature and their incapacity to hand things in on time:

Authors are not easy to get along with. Just like illustrators. It's easy to approach them, but illustrators are far less concerned about schedules. Their notion of time, for example, is totally... It's very rare for illustrators to hand things in on schedule. Because these are people who live... It's their artistic side, I suppose. They live life as it comes. (Beryl, editor)

The two logics (editorial and market) are apparent in the analysis of how the two editors, Carole and Beryl, perceive their roles and relationship with authors. Carole manages based on her editorial sensibility, while Beryl seems more interested in outcomes. The former relates to content and to the issue over whether the project makes sense, whereas the latter relates to form, material results, and to whether the project will be completed on time. The fact that Beryl had worked in financial markets and completed a training course at ESCP, focusing on managerial aspects, probably led her to assign greater importance to managerial and control tools rather than to her editorial flair. Moreover, because market logic had assumed a central position in the organization, due to pressures from within the Group, it undoubtedly encouraged the recruitment of editors with a background in management.

6.3 The controller's central position

Reine, the management controller, spoke of her work and relationships with her colleagues and with senior management as follows:

I'm in contact with everyone. [...] I work a lot with the editors, a lot with the sales reps, a little less with marketing people, what we call the Communication Department in our firm, with those who carry out all the operations, and with the production team. I work a little less with the last three, but still... And also quite a bit with senior management. This is the real benefit. I get a good overview of the firm's business activities, of how the firm operates effectively. (Reine, management controller)

The controller seems to occupy a key position in the organization. Her central position in the network of actors appears to be based on her numerical literacy, which allows her to liaise with the other actors involved in publishing the book.

Our analysis has exposed a change in the recruitment policy of editors as well as a change in the performance evaluation system, showing that financial performance was being emphasized over innovation. Moreover, regarding the same evolution in the underlying logics, a new controller with no previous knowledge of the youth publishing sector was brought in from Hachette.

It's a beautiful little piece of parachuting-in from Hachette. She has never worked in youth publishing. At first, I was thinking she knows nothing but will learn (when I arrived here, I knew nothing but I learned). It's very important to be able to manage a team, but since she arrived relationships between people have deteriorated (Carole, editor).

This interference by the Hachette Group in the Hatier Jeunesse team composition had a negative effect on relationships between team members. The editor points to differences in the approach to book publishing between the previous controller and the new one:

Previously, we had another controller who was really great, who taught me a lot and with whom I've learned a lot, and everything went fine. Every time she got involved in a project resulted in improvements. We didn't always agree, but we talked, we managed to communicate, she never decided arbitrarily, but now it's different with her [the new controller]. (Carole, editor)

A meeting between the editor and controller to decide the fate of a book is handled expediently. Through this "exercise", the controller asserts her superiority. Because their interests do not overlap, it is difficult for the editor to communicate with the controller.

When I go to see the [new] controller, I have thirty seconds or a minute to present my case. Maybe five minutes, but what I mean is she's not really interested in the content of the book. Which is really a shame. (Carole, editor)

Because her decisions do not take into account the book contents, they seem arbitrary and discussions between the editor and controller resemble a power game.

She decides arbitrarily in order to mark her hierarchical superiority and assert her power over us because she is incompetent for the job: she doesn't know much about it [and] has no desire to learn. (Carole, editor)

Getting a book published and keeping it on the market is always about juggling the two logics. Some books are released with very low profit margins. Here, editorial logic is at work. The editor uses her flair in choosing the project, and the controller has to accept that the decision is no longer hers.

But yes, we have been known to launch products that result in very, very low profit margins. Two, maybe three percent over three years. That's hardly anything. But we still sell them because it's good for our image because we think we have been overly cautious with sales and that there is room to... well, for this or that reason. And I consider it my role to say, "profit margins are very low". It's not up to me to veto the project. Because it's the goal of any publishing firm to make slightly different products and to test new things. Not to hold products back. (Reine, management controller)

This excerpt reveals that the controller, even temporarily, adopts a discourse that would better fit with editorial logic. However, if a financial loss is incurred, then the management controller must sound the alarm; based on the numbers, a decision will be made jointly by the controller, the editor and the sales representatives to halt a book's production:

In most cases, I'm the one who sounds the alarm. Because I'm the one who has her nose buried in the numbers and profit margins. Generally, I send out a warning when a collection has been racking up losses over one or two years... I may be the one who sounds the alarm, but everyone else has to agree. That means when the sales rep cannot see any way forward. It also means when the editors can't see any way forward. So, obviously, in these cases, we have to pull the plug. (Reine, management controller)

The controller's short-term approach is clear in the following excerpt:

Every morning I print out the sales report. [...] Because based on this report, I can sound the alarm quickly if there's a problem. (Reine, management controller)

The analysis of this case study demonstrates the confrontation between editorial logic and market logic within the Hatier Jeunesse team. The management controller vacillates between the two logics. She lies at the center of a network of people who cooperate in the creative process, and she's the one responsible for providing an account to senior management. The authors also encounter difficulty in communicating with the controller because such communication only seems possible if they speak and act according to market logic:

There's a dialogue only if we generate sales; no sales, no dialogue... We're not autistic, but there needs to be some openness. It's not actually worth asking the controller to understand the creator because she's got her accounts... she has her place—she puts people in place to make the puzzle work. (Caroline, illustrator).

The creators try to make sense of how the widespread use of the income statement affects the creative process. It does not exert a direct constraint but instead is quite subtle:

The income statement does not prevent us from creating what we create, that is to say [if] we have things to say, we say them; it's very pragmatic, but we are continually referred to it [the income statement]. I'm not sure... It is also a distinct language, you must understand what the other one is telling you." (Caroline, illustrator)

Those who master the language of accounting manage to secure better positions in for-profit organizations, which are primarily managed by means of accounting numbers. Those who do not master this language, such as editors and authors, find themselves marginalized through the imposition of a power relationship constructed by language (Fairclough, 1989). Gradually, over time, the management controllers find themselves at the heart of decision-making processes. Increasingly, it is they, not the editors, who are giving the accounts to senior management. By taking

the place traditionally occupied by editors, the management controllers are implicitly becoming "creation enablers".

6.4 The controllers' accountability

Based on the income statement for each book, the management controller draws up a general income statement. This aggregated statement is then submitted to the Financial Department, and the controller reports to senior management:

Interfacing with senior management means that I regularly report on sales, profitability rates for the collections, and whether operations are running smoothly. [...] So, I have tasks imposed from above that I must perform regularly. With monthly reporting, budgeting, account closures, forecasting and revised forecasting, etc., these are the kinds of things that set the pace of my work year-round... (Reine, management controller)

In describing her accountability to senior management, the controller explained the process as follows:

Senior management doesn't really draw a line to follow, or rather... A line to obey... Not really, no. So, as long as we don't do things that appear completely crazy to them, they give us quite a lot of freedom to carry out whatever editorial line we wish, so that's quite good. This freedom does require a lot of trust. But there is this trust, I think, precisely because all levels of risk have been assessed and we know more or less where we're heading. For example, they'll request to see all the income statements for all new products we're releasing. They do monitor that very closely. (Reine, management controller)

Senior management supervises based on income statements, as part of a process that follows market logic. This supervision shows greater trust being placed in the objectivity of numbers, instead of the competency of the editor (Porter, 1994). As Reine, the management controller, clearly stated, senior management exercises no control over editorial content or editorial policy. However, things are not clear-cut because calculative tools (budgets as well as the income statement) enable long-distance control by remote managers "through the provision and maintenance of networks for the gathering,

transmission and assimilation of inscriptions” (Robson, 1992, p. 691). This power to act remotely allows for accounting tools (e.g. the income statement) to migrate from the periphery of the network to its center. Basing the success of a book on an income statement places economic constraints at the heart of decisions made regarding which books do or do not deserve to be published. However, editorial logic is not completely absent from this negotiation:

They give us *carte blanche*. If we manage to argue that such a product is necessary even if we aren’t making any profit on it, if the risk isn’t too great, they’ll say: “Let’s do it.” (Reine, management controller)

At the Lagardère Group level, the management controller becomes the guarantor of financial soundness. As Reine commented, the controller’s job involves “walking a tightrope” between risk-taking and ensuring the firm’s long-term financial prospects. To manage risk, senior management requires the controller to conduct risk assessments.

For each new publication released, I assess the level of risk, yes. This is indispensable and precisely because we often don’t have any indicators that allow us to guarantee 100% that the product will be successful and hit our stated sales targets, especially for children’s products, we’re kind of forced to do so... Well, anyway, I’m forced to tell senior management: “We’re going to launch x number of products and the overall risk is x amount.” (Reine, management controller)

The controller drafts the income statement, but it is also presented to the editors and senior management. Senior management determines whether the project is feasible or not, after which the income statement of each book is consolidated into a group statement. During this process, only quantifiable information is consolidated. It is not the books’ content but the editorial line that is being consolidated and then communicated to senior management. The communication does not focus on Balthazar as a children’s hero or on Marie-Hélène’s struggle to create an original character; the income statement is senior management’s only predominant concern.

6.5 The sales representatives’ role in the success of a book

To achieve strong sales, a book first needs to be distributed. The position that the book occupies on the display shelf in bookstores determines sales, profits and the share of the publishing market (Benhamou, 2003).

As noted above, the Balthazar collection is unique. Based on the Montessori learning method, it represents an innovation for Hatier. Because they are unfamiliar with the Montessori method, sales representatives do not pay any special attention to the collection. The authors and editors have no contact with the sales reps, so who's explaining the method to them? Caroline, the illustrator, understands however the importance of meeting the sales reps:

It's up to us [the authors] to meet with the sales reps, because their job is to meet the booksellers. [...] It's our job to meet the sales team if they don't understand what they're told. *We're the ones who must explain the collection*, how it works, why we're publishing it, its purpose, even when they do make an emotional connection with it. Once there's an emotional link, the sales rep must like the collection in order to sell it. He/She has to understand it intimately.

From the author's initial draft to the bookseller's display table, many actors participate in the project, which lends the entire process a high degree of uncertainty.

In fact, *everyone interacts during the process*. It's quite impressive. Because *there are quite a few intermediaries before the book reaches the end user*, so... many things can happen. [...]

From the standpoint of commercialization, from the standpoint of distribution, things that we have absolutely no control over. (Reine, management controller)

The author and controller recognize the importance of the sales team in the book's success. When a book or collection is perceived as lacking personality, the sales reps will not be motivated to present it because it has little chance of success and thus the commissions on its sales will be small.

For the sales reps, *this can be a disincentive* [...] because let's not forget that the sales reps are the ones who will sell the books, that these reps are paid a commission based on what they sell, and that if they see the umpteenth new publication arrive they'll obviously know they're only going to sell so many, so they are not extremely motivated. Instead, they'll try to

sell a new book that will generate more money. Hence, the interest [lies] in developing things on the side a little and to always bring new life into the collection. (Reine, management controller)

The sales representatives' understanding of the product and financial parameters is not the sole factor. The management controller also pointed to the importance of human parameters and making an emotional connection.

We really feel it when the sales team has an emotional response. You can see it in the sales figures. It's impressive. You can see it instantly. It's hard to say then, for each rep, how things are going, because I don't have that data, but... you can see it. You can really see it. We can even notice when one bookstore chain falls for a product or not. It's funny. If we get an order from Fnac Junior [chain of bookstores] on an end-of-year product, then that's 3,000 more copies straight off the bat. So, obviously, that's a bit of a game-changer.

The controller recognizes the impossibility of analyzing (because it cannot be quantified) the contribution of affective factors towards the commercial success of a book:

There are many *human factors* involved that remain totally human, that totally work on an emotional level and that we simply cannot analyze. Well, that's what thrills me. It's a special moment. So we work on producing these emotional responses. On our own emotions. (Reine, management controller)

Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. A book's worth cannot be tied to its intrinsic value alone; it is also tied to production and distribution, and we observed first-hand the important role played by the sales reps in ensuring that a book finds its readership. It can be said that the "book carries the hallmark of the weight that ensures this distribution, and therefore some works are condemned from the moment they come into existence" (Becker, 1988, p. 116). A book's trajectory also depends on the support staff, which exerts a strong influence on the production and distribution of a piece of work.

7. Discussion

The French publishing sector has had more than its share of great editors, whose ability to select authors is well renowned. These editors represent a traditional publishing model, in which trust is placed in the editor's inherent qualities. Editorial logic has always coexisted with market logic in the publishing field (Giribone & Vigne, 2000), with one logic supporting the other. In this field, the two competing logics (Thornton, 2002; Thornton *et al.*, 2005) are sustained by the practices of actors guided by different kinds of other logics. Market logic in the organization is strengthened by the policies and managerial standards imposed by the Group (Schiffrin, 2000), which utilizes the income statement as the main decision-making tool in the publication of a book. The traditional editorial logic has not been rejected. Thus, in the case study, the controller vacillated between an editorial approach and a market approach. Because the editors, in accordance with their training and mindset, did not have the same approach, they also alternated between the two logics. The authors refused to adhere to the market logic; they needed their writing to make sense. The sales representatives tended to adopt a market logic. In some cases however, if they did not like a book, they did not present it, so emotions were also involved in their decision-making. This case study has thus shown that through their different practices, the actors sustained the coexistence of these two logics (Reay & Hinings, 2009).

The income statement is an inscription that circulates between local settings (the publishing firm) and distant settings (Group management). As it travels, each statement is aggregated and becomes increasingly disconnected from the reality it claims to represent. Moreover, the quantification required in the income statement implies a suppression of qualitative differences (Robson, 1992), rendering illegible the diversity of human contributions to the book in its presentation to readers. This case study also shows however that the income statement reflects only a partial view of the entire reality. It did not indicate the editor's emotional response to the Balthazar character or the author's political commitment and her trip in search of inspiration for the creation of a new character. Nor does it indicate the sales representatives' preferences and the impact that this favoritism has on the inclusion of a book on a bookstore's display table. In short, it does not take into account the fact that the book, in the form presented to readers, is the outcome of the cooperation of a network of actors emotionally involved in its publication.

All creative work requires organization, and therefore management, in order to come to fruition. However, the same tools used to sustain creation can become self-defeating ([Armstrong & Tones, 1996](#)) in shifting trust away from the editor towards the income statement and ultimately the market, hence limiting the freedom of the creators ([Christiansen & Skærbæk, 1997](#)).

Implementing tools and adopting standards are intended to limit the uncertainties and risks tied to creative activity. In addition to limiting risk, accounting tools have performative effects ([Boedker & Chua, 2013](#); [Espeland & Stevens, 2009](#); [Ezzamel et al., 2012](#)). First of all, the use of accounting technologies causes individuals to act differently ([Espeland & Stevens, 2009](#)), and authors and editors will then also begin to talk numbers. Moreover, as the income statement becomes the main tool used to evaluate the creative endeavor, some actors, like the controller, will be promoted while others, like editors or authors, will become marginalized. Through the use of calculative practices that create “trust in numbers” ([Porter, 1996](#)), the editor’s skill in selecting valuable authors is marginalized. Many competencies are no longer needed and can be allowed to atrophy. In exchange, editors are required to develop new skills related to numerical literacy. Since the 1990's, a shift has taken place in France with respect to the desired backgrounds of editors ([Le Theule, 2010](#)). New editors are increasingly being trained in business schools. While graduates from literary programs had previously been recruited for the position of editor, business schools, such as Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris (ESCP)¹¹, have begun to offer Master’s degrees in publishing. For instance, editors (i.e. Beryl in our case) with a business training are therefore familiar with the use of management tools, notably accounting and management control tools. Organizational actors possess variable levels of financial literacy ([Carter & Mueller, 2006](#)). Those who master this language, such as management controllers, are in a favorable position. We have observed that authors, by learning to read an income statement, are also compelled to learn the language of accounting. However, even though everyone might learn this language, not everyone has equal mastery of it. Those without mastery may find themselves marginalized. The language of accounting is a “dominant language” ([Bourdieu, 1984](#)) and thus tacitly acknowledged as legitimate. According to [Bourdieu \(1984, p. 110\)](#): “It is a language that produces most of its effects by seeming not to be what it is.”

¹¹ ESCP's Master’s program in publishing was founded in 1990.

In this case study, our findings demonstrate that accounting has sought to shape a collection of children's books according to a market logic. The advent of the income statement has had consequences for creation in terms of diversification, development and content of the Balthazar book collection. It built new competencies for the management controller, reduced some autonomy of the creators, and devalued some of the editors' competencies. As Miller (1992) pointed out, calculative expertise replaced professional authority. The cultural and creative enterprise of the Balthazar collection became factual and calculable. The income statement drawn up by the controllers to measure sales and profit had become an element (Latour, 1987) that enabled action to be taken remotely (Robson, 1992). As a powerful technology, accounting is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately upon others; instead, it acts upon the actions of others (Miller, 2001). Thus, the holding group's management influenced the actors' behavior without their awareness. In fact, as the interviews revealed, these actors tended to present themselves as autonomous. However, resistance was expressed when the editors and authors were stripped of their competencies by introduction of the income statement. The authors resisted product diversification and refused to see what was currently being published in bookstores because they wanted to remain true to their original project and maintain their originality. Through this resistance, it was possible to thwart the attempts of accounting to colonize the creative endeavor and thus maintain a balance, however fragile, between the two dominant logics.

At the time of our study, the income statement was the main tool used to assess projects and make decisions about the publication or rejection of a book. Actors, such as the controller and senior managers, viewed this management tool as rational, transparent and fair. However, when depicting reality, this tool engineered a modification (Ezzamel et al., 2012) by constructing a new correspondence (which did not previously exist) that equates a good book with substantial sales figures and an attractive profit margin.

We argue herein the existence of a strong correlation between the income statement format, which ascribes a secondary role to creators and marginalizes them during negotiations in which controllers occupy a central position. Our findings have shown that the authors' position was made vulnerable by its representation in the income statement as a variable cost, meaning that in the case of zero sales, they would receive no remuneration despite having assumed a large share of the risks in publishing the Balthazar series.

The profit target set by the publisher serves as a standard against which individual conduct can be constantly monitored and evaluated quantitatively as a deviation from standard figures, with rewards or punishments to be allocated accordingly (Miller & O’Leary, 1994). Moreover, the income statement had the capacity to act at a distance (Latour, 1987) in the creative process by selecting products able to meet the set targets while rejecting others. By reducing the book’s production costs and requiring products similar to those already on the market in order to minimize commercial risks, the income statement definitely altered the creative act.

Our case study has also shown that accounting technologies, such as the income statement, are “affective vehicles” (Boedker & Chua, 2013, p. 247). A book's low profit margin, from the point of view of the publishing firm, may mean the suspension of a creative, cultural project and thus provoke a range of emotions: anger, frustration, and powerlessness on the part of authors; disappointment on the part of the editor maintaining the project; and disappointment on the part of children worshipping their hero Balthazar and awaiting his new adventures.

8. Conclusion

This paper has explored the colonization of the editorial process by accounting practices. As opposed to studies showing the positive effects of accounting and control systems on creative enterprises (Adler & Chen, 2011; Ditillo, 2004; Jeacle & Carter, 2012), our study has taken a critical stance by examining the performative effects of accounting tools in a context characterized by the coexistence of two contradictory logics: editorial logic and market logic.

For decades, editorial logic has enjoyed prominence over market logic in French publishing, although to a certain extent it always needed the latter (Giribone & Vigne, 2000). In the case study presented herein, we showed that as accounting tools have usurped the editorial decision-making process, market logic became reinforced and legitimized, which in turn marginalized both editors and the creative process. The findings of our study demonstrated that market logic had negative effects on the creative process by emphasizing short-term thinking to the detriment of longer-term objectives. Moreover, we revealed in the case of the Balthazar collection that efforts to shape the book according to market logic were legitimized through the income statement and especially given the need to reach the profit target. When market logic predominates, the income statement is

produced for a single book, and not for the entire collection or an editorial line, meaning that books with limited sales at the beginning cannot be subsidized by books with higher sales. This view is short-term and may prove to be problematic for the publication of innovative, *avant garde* books with initial sales near zero.

The French government backed Lagardère, a large diversified group, in its acquisition of companies within the publishing industry in order to cope with global competition. However, when groups acquire companies in the cultural field, such as publishers, they tend to apply calculative practices and managerial requirements that were developed in other fields and remain independent of the field in which they are being applied (Schiffrin, 2000; Miller, 1992). A short-term view is often enforced, thus requiring the production of books that can be consumed immediately, such as bestsellers. Yet establishing new authors can be a lengthy process. Over the short term, sales may be quite low. It is then legitimate to ask, “Would Lagardère publish Foucault?” The presence of the State therefore remains important to supporting a creative enterprise that is not immediately financially successful. However, the French State is also caught between the two logics: a desire to support diversity on the one hand, and financial logic on the other, whereby a group like Lagardère is allowed to obtain a quasi-monopoly position in French publishing.

Critical researchers have long questioned the objective depiction of accounting data. We wish to add to this body of research by pointing out that accounting is powerful because it is sustained by a market logic that has been strengthened by the financialization of the publishing field over the last several decades.

These issues raise the question of cultural transmission: books are cultural goods and part of tomorrow's heritage (Benhamou, 2003). To produce books, financial and human resources are mobilized and cooperation between them is facilitated (Becker, 2002). Behind Foucault was an editor who managed the publication process not only according to managerial objectives and control tools but also by using editorial flair and sensibility. We conclude this case study by asking the following question: Would Foucault, Bourdieu and others be part of the world's heritage today if their editors had managed the publication process in a market logic mindset?

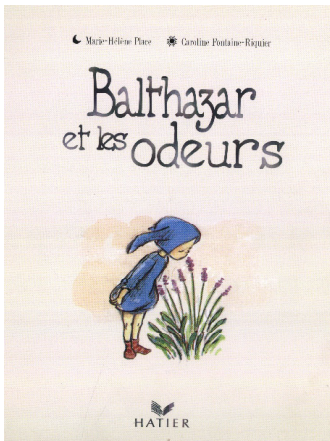


Figure 1: Balthazar



Figure 2. Pépin

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Appendix A.

See Figs. 1 and 2 Table 2.

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