

Broadcasting Health and Disease: Bodies, Markets and Television, 1950s-1980s

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Bericht von: Stefan Offermann, Vergleichende Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte des modernen Europa, Institut für Kulturwissenschaften, Universität Leipzig

Studying the history of healthy bodies in the second half of the twentieth century, television is of crucial importance. From the beginning, the new mass medium was interested in health-related matters and sought to popularize knowledge about bodies and health to an unprecedented extent. Throughout its history television developed a multitude of different formats dealing with this subject, ranging from health advice programs to medical documentaries, from health education films and fictional series to commercials for healthy food or antiseptics. This conference invited scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds working at the intersection of media and health history. Focusing on Great Britain, France, and East and West Germany, the papers dealt with very different topics such as sexuality, sunbeds, nutrition, exercise, breast cancer, disability, or disinfection.

In his introduction CHRISTIAN BONAHE (Strasbourg) formulated a key methodological principle for visual history that also applies to television history: Scholars should not consider television programs merely as means to illustrate what historians already know from other, mostly textual sources. Instead it is more fruitful to write a history of bodies and health *through* the audiovisuals. Therefore, scholars ought to acknowledge the materiality and agency of television. The papers approached this challenge quite differently. They illustrated that tracing an intrinsic logic of the medium can mean different things depending on the historical context and the research question.

Each conference day opened with a keynote speech to introduce the three – or rather four –

national television cultures. Yet, each of them had a different focus. ISABELLE VEYRAT-MASSON (Paris) offered an overview of French television since the 1950s, focusing on organizational and program history. Similar to Great Britain and both German states the triad of education, information, and entertainment was very important for television producers and officials in shaping the directions and the forms the new medium should adopt. Presenting numerous clips from different formats (unfortunately most of them without English subtitles) Veyrat-Masson demonstrated how these three guiding principles shaped the formal differentiation of TV broadcast. Furthermore, she showed that health education was only one aspect of a broader educational project that also included literature or history. Television producers were convinced that the medium was capable of creating a strong impact on the audience. This belief was an indispensable precondition for this educational project. Moreover, the French government referred to the political power of the medium in order to legitimate claims to control production and distribution.

Focusing on the aspect of televisual health education, SUSANNE VOLLBERG (Halle-Wittenberg) provided an overview about health magazines in East and West German TV. With the establishment of the Second German Television (ZDF) and several regional programs in the 1960s, the television landscape in West Germany witnessed a massive extension of such formats. In 1964 the ZDF started broadcasting its long-living format *Gesundheitsmagazin Praxis* (Practice Health Magazine) whose leading position was questioned by *ARD Ratgeber: Gesundheit* (ARD Health Advisor) that started airing in 1971. In the same year, East German television started its most important health magazine *Visite* (Doctor's Round). Furthermore, Vollberg analyzed different techniques the magazines used in order to involve the audience, such as encouraging spectators to write letters or inviting them to the show. In both TV cultures the activation of the spectator gained importance in the 1970s resulting in a shift of power between patients and medical experts.

The third keynote held by TIM BOON and JEAN-BAPTISTE GOUYON (both Lon-

don) picked up the topic of power relations in the field of medicine and television. In a first step, they regarded *On Call to a Nation* (GB 1958), a medical documentary that dealt with the early years of the British National Health Service (NHS). Applying film-theoretical approaches of cinematic addressing and interpellation they argued the film sought to turn the viewer into a docile patient. Drawing from Erving Goffman's insights about social roles Boon and Gouyon showed that the subject of the spectator 'inscribed' into the film's mise-en-scène corresponded with a specific social role. Accepting that role meant to meet the expectations of the NHS system. At the same time, scientific progress including the growing importance of medical technologies such as computer-based imaging techniques affected the televisual representation of medicine that calls for an expansion of the theoretical framework to analyze power relations. An 'actor network of modern medicine' emerged consisting of medical technology and human cells, patients and physicians, and television programs.

The first two papers also dealt with the British context. FABIOLA CREED (Warwick) explored the visual culture of sunbed use in the 1980s, drawing on various (audio)visual sources including television programs, feature films, and adverts in magazines or newspapers. In the early 1980s sunbeds were mostly used in private homes, but this practice moved increasingly to public tanning parlors throughout the decade. This trend noticed an increase of men using sunbeds, whereas the depiction of sunbeds was still focusing on women, thereby making the sunbed consumption of men invisible. Creed discussed the question if this might point to a feminization and devaluation of sunbed use.

WILLIAM FOWLER (London) chose a long-lived TV series as his object of inquiry: *Doctor Who*. Fowler showed to what extent the rapidly growing importance of fitness in the 1980s resonated in the portrayal of Dr. Who.

Taking the news coverage on the Paris attacks in 2015 as a starting point, PASCALE MANSIER (Paris) looked at the portrayal of victims in French television health magazines from the 1950s to 1980s that dealt mostly with

impacts of physical violence and medical malpractice.

ROBERT STOCK's (Konstanz) paper on visual constructions of disabled bodies that had been affected by thalidomide also focused on questions of individual agency. On the basis of a broad range of source material ranging from television productions to documentary films from the 1960s to 2000s he underlined the importance of prosthesis as a means to normalize the 'thalidomide body'. Using the example of *One of Them Is Brett* (GB 1965), Stock accentuated the protagonist's agency and stubbornness: The four-year-old boy displays strong reluctance towards the usage of a prosthetic arm and is much happier using his feet instead.

JESSICA BORGE (London) chose another approach to television history. Instead of focusing on representation in television programs she examined legal regulations regarding the display of contraceptives in British TV advertising. Tracing the complex 'genealogy' of these regulations, Borge was able to shed new light on the history of the condom and oral contraceptives. According to her analysis, the understanding of these contraceptives was considerably influenced by the emergence of commercial television in 1955 and Independent Television's (ITV) commercial exploitation of contraceptives as advertising products.

Just like William Fowler, HANNAH ELISABETH KERSHAW (London) drew on a long-running television series as her main source material: the BBC children's drama series *Grange Hill*. In 1995, the series not only dealt with sex education at schools but also presented a female protagonist facing the decision whether to take an HIV test or not. Situating these issues in the broader context of the history of HIV since the 1980s, Kershaw argued that the portrayal of the girl as a 'knowing actor' capable of making informed choices referred to the (gendered) idea of individual responsibility that had been highlighted in health education on HIV.

Addressing the history of breast cancer, ELISABETH TOON's (Manchester) paper also dealt with agency as the ability to make informed decisions regarding one's own health and body. Enabling women to

rebalance asymmetric power relations within the health care system has been a key aim of the women's health movement. Against this background, Toon stressed the importance of the BBC television play *Through the Night* (GB 1977) that contributed to turning the problem of breast cancer into a significant field for negotiating these power relations.

Taking the media coverage on the first human-to-human heart transplant performed by South African surgeon Christiaan Barnard in 1967 as a starting point, ANNE MASSERAN and PHILIPPE CHAVOT (both Strasbourg) looked at the 'evolution' of televisual portrayals of organ donation and transplantation. They argued that these scenarios had increasingly been standardized contributing to raising awareness of this issue.

STEFAN OFFERMANN (Leipzig) examined health education on heart diseases in the German Democratic Republic in the 1960s to 1970s. Very similar to the West German context, health educators considered television not only an effective means to address the population. They also worried about excessive television consumption because they believed it was posing a risk to cardiovascular health. Therefore, health education films shown on television adopted techniques that prompted viewers to assume responsibility and learn to regulate their TV consumption rationally.

Analysing the history of physical relaxation in Britain, AYESHA NATHOO (Exeter) looked into technologies of the self as a means to prevent stress and heart diseases as well. Edmund Jacobson's concept of progressive muscle relaxation firstly published in 1934 was the key reference for relaxation techniques popularized in the 1960s to 1980s through different media including guidebooks, audio cassettes, and television. Using the example of *Tomorrow's World* a long-running BBC series on science and technology, Nathoo illustrated that television was more effective in portraying the emergence of stress and tension than its reduction through physical relaxation.

SHERYL HAMILTON's (Ottawa) paper was stimulating for writing a history of the body through audio-visual sources that goes

beyond approaches of discursive construction and takes into account the materiality of the body. Analyzing commercials for antiseptics from the perspective of sensory history, she illustrated that they were making the new and invisible problem – germs – visible and perceivable for human senses. A specific facial expression, for example, indicated smell, and smell pointed to germs. In contrast to printed media, Hamilton stated, television offered a new sensory experience, a synesthetic experience. Therefore, television can be understood as 'a sensory enhancement technology'. In the 1960s learning to detect and eliminate germs developed into a new ability of female housework and housecleaning. Her analysis demonstrated that sensory history can add a new dimension to gender history of maternal and feminine caring.

ANGELA SEWARD (London) dealt with the University of London Audio-Visual Centre established in 1968. This institution produced a vast amount of medical and health films that, among other things, had been used for academic teaching. Seward focused on the question discussed from the 1960s onwards what the medium of television was, could or should be and how it was to be used in the institutional setting of postgraduate medical education.

CAMILLE BOUBAL (Paris) analyzed current campaigns for healthy eating in France. Based on her research on the National Institute for Prevention and Health Education (IN-PES), Boubal argued that the campaigns were implicitly guided by the idea of a 'French exceptionalism' praising French cuisine as particularly pleasurable and healthier than, for example, the British food culture.

I would like to highlight a screening of television programs followed by a discussion as a particularly fruitful component of the conference. The organizers chose British, French and West German television programs that problematized in one way or another the heterosexual marriage. A British program illustrated the increased popularity of couple therapies on and off television in the 1960s. A West German report about Beate Uhse's efforts to stimulate the sexuality of a married couple demonstrated the growing importance of the sex industry. Together these programs

opened up a transnational perspective on the era of the so-called sexual revolution. Focusing on a certain historical problem based on programs from each national context allowed for a vivid and fruitful discussion.

In conclusion, I would like to touch upon two aspects that were mentioned by conference participants and that might be considered more systematically in future research. Several conference papers have demonstrated the importance of television in shaping national health cultures in the second half of the twentieth century. On the other hand, as ANJA LAUKÖTTER (Berlin) pointed out, television always transcended national boundaries regarding production, distribution, and reception. Therefore, attempting to follow these televisual traces more methodically promises new insights into the transnational dimension of health history. Furthermore, in order to exploit the value of television as a source for historical research it is important to approach the characteristics of this medium more accurately. LUTZ SAUERTEIG (Newcastle), for example, pointed to the importance of sound in audio-visual sources: the sound of the aerosol when the housewife uses it to disinfect her home or the sound of the heart beat slowing down during relaxation. Taking into account these sensory and affective aspects of television can shed new light on the history of the body and the healthy self.

Conference Overview:

Angela Saward (Wellcome Collection) / Christian Bonah (Université de Strasbourg) / Anja Laukötter (MPIHD-Berlin): Welcome and Introduction

Keynote lecture

Isabelle Veyrat-Masson (Laboratoire Communication et Politique-IRISSO UMR7170, Paris): French Television: Between Attracting Audiences and Meeting Public Service Needs

Panel 1: Television Portrayals: What Subjects Are Shown (Or Not Shown)

Joël Danet (Université de Strasbourg): Chair and Commentator

Fabiola Creed (University of Warwick): 'A visual feast [of] muscle builders': Men, Sunbeds and Television in Thatcher's England

William Fowler (BFI National Archive, London): Doctor Who, The Trial of a Time Lord: An Exercise in Corporeal Identity and Keep-fit

Pascale Mansier (Laboratoire Communication et Politique-IRISSO UMR7170, Paris): Portraying Victims in French Television Health Magazines: A Survey from the Fifties to the Eighties

Joël Danet (Université de Strasbourg) / Tricia Close-Koenig (Université de Strasbourg): Film Projection: Intimacy on TV – Kitchen Sink Dramas, 1960s

Keynote lecture

Susanne Vollberg (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg): Health Magazines in FRG and GDR Television, 1960s to 1980s

Panel 2: Television Portrayals: How Subjects Are Shown (Or Not Shown)

Alex Mold (LSHTM, London): Chair and Commentator

Robert Stock (Universität Konstanz): (Dis-)Abling Images of Public Health. Broadcasting the Thalidomide Body – Challenges and Transformations Since the 1960s in Germany and the UK

Jessica Borge (University of London): Clarifying the Code: Mid Twentieth-Century British Commercial Television Regulation as a Gateway for Understanding Contraceptive Products and Practices in Mass Media

Hannah Elisabeth Kershaw (LSHTM, London): 'Private things affect other people': Depictions of HIV, Antibody Testing and Sex Education in Grange Hill

Panel 3: Television Discourses: Messages (Transmitted)

Sandra Schnädelbach (MPIHD-Berlin): Chair and Commentator

Elisabeth Toon (University of Manchester): Visualising Bodily Agency: Women and Breast Cancer Treatment on British Television in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s

Anne Masseran / Philippe Chavot (Université de Strasbourg): Graft on the Screen, 1950s to 1990s. Televisual, Social and Technomedical Contexts

Stefan Offermann (Universität Leipzig): Responsibility for One's Own Heart. Health Education Films on Cardiovascular Diseases in the German Democratic Republic, 1960s to 1980s

Ayesha Nathoo (University of Exeter): Broadcasting Therapeutic Relaxation in Britain, 1960s-1980s

Keynote lecture

Tim Boon (Science Museum, London) / Jean-Baptiste Gouyon (UCL): Doing the Work of Medicine? TV and Museum Display Across the Era of Social Revolution

Panel 4: Social Forms and Functions of Television

Lutz Sauerteig (University of Newcastle): Chair and Commentator

Sheryl Hamilton (Carlton University, Ottawa): Screening Hygiene / Spraying Health: Disinfectant Commercials and the Governance of Contagion

Angela Saward (Wellcome Collection): Television Discourses: A Critique of the University of London Audio-Visual Centre's Educational Video Programme

Camille Boubal (CSO-Sciences Po, Paris): Building Health Campaigns in Nutrition: Limited Rationality and Communication Constraints

Round Table Discussion

Virginia Berridge (LSHTM) / Christian Bonah (Université de Strasbourg) / Anja Laukötter (MPIHD-Berlin)

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