

ERC BodyCapital & Wellcome Collection International Conference

## Broadcasting health and disease. Bodies, markets and television, 1950s-1980s

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Wellcome Trust, 215 Euston Road, London, UK

Throughout the age of television health and body-related subjects have been presented and diffused into the public sphere via a multitude of forms, ranging from short films in health education programmes to school television, from professional training to TV ads, from documentary and reality TV shows to TV news, but also as complementary VHS and similar video formats circulating in private and public spheres. From live transmission of daunting surgical operations or accounts of medication scandals in the 1950s and 1960s to participatory aerobic workouts or militant AIDS documentaries, bodies and health on television and more genuinely the interrelationship of the history of health and bodies and the history of the various TV formats has not been extensively researched. Our assumption is that such audio-visuals are not conceived merely as a mirror or expression of what is observed, but that visuals should be regarded as a distinct, interactive performative power of mass media societies.

The three-day conference aims to investigate how television programmes in their multiplicity approached issues like medical progress and its limits, healthy behaviour or new forms of exercise by adapting them to TV formats and programming. A telling example of this is the US born aerobics movement as it was brought to TV in Europe, in shows such as *Gym Tonic* (from 1982) in France, *Enorm in Form* (from 1983) in Germany or the *Green Goddess* on BBC Breakfast Time (from 1983) in Great Britain. Contemporary, similar and yet differing in national broadcast contexts, the conference seeks to analyse how television and its evolving formats expressed and staged bodies, health and in the above example fitness from local, regional, national and international perspectives. How spectators were invited not only to be TV consuming audiences, but how shows and TV set-ups integrated and sometimes pretended to transform the viewer into a participant of the show. TV programmes spread the conviction that subjects had the ability to shape their own body.

Further, we take into account the long-term evolution of televisual editorialization and staging, notably as it focused on the intimate and adapted to consumer/market logic. We ask what effects these had on the preventive information and the messages related to current health and medical techniques that were diffused.

The conference seeks to better understand the role that TV, as a modern visual mass media, has played in what may be cast as the transition from a national bio-political public health paradigm at the beginning of the twentieth century to societal forms of the late twentieth century when better and healthier lives were increasingly shaped by market forces.

For further information or to register, [tkoenig@unistra.fr](mailto:tkoenig@unistra.fr)

The conference is organized by the ERC funded research group BodyCapital, and hosted by Wellcome Collection.

*The healthy self as body capital: individuals, market-based societies and body politics in visual twentieth century Europe* (BodyCapital) project is directed by Christian Bonah at the Université de Strasbourg in collaboration with Anja Laukötter at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin. The project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Advanced Grant agreement No 694817).

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