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A Case of Asynchronous Media Change in the 1950s: How US-American TV Series Came to Early West German Television

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Abstract: The influence of radio and cinema on the first television program designs in West Germany, and other nations, can be explained by a theory which has recently been put forward by communication scholar Gabriele Balbi. According to Balbi, in a first step new media imitate old media in manifold ways before they develop characteristics of their own and become a truly new medium. However, the 'producers' of early West German national television were not only looking to radio or cinema for clues on how to design the program of Deutsches Fernsehen (DFS), West Germany's first and only national television channel from 1954 to 1961/63. DFS' executives and executive employees were also looking to other nations, particularly to those – like the United States – that were years ahead in television's evolution. Especially the implementation of the entertainment series in West German television is strongly rooted in visits to the United States and newly gathered information and impressions. To exemplify this argument, I delve into examples which demonstrate that West German television executives and executive employees were either creating television series on the basis of US-American television series or were broadcasting the latter after synchronization. In this context, major findings of diffusion research constitute a useful addition to current theories on media change.

Keywords: media change, television history, TV series, USA, West Germany, diffusion theory

Introduction

“You can only approach television,
if you understand its people, the inhabitants of the U.S.A.”
(Haensel, 1952, p. 8, own translation).

Previous research has pointed out that, in terms of technology, institutional patterns and television aesthetics, the introduction of television in 1950s Postwar-Europe can be described as a rather “conservative media revolution” (Fickers,

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2012b). Regarding the latter, Andreas Fickers has stated that not only in France but also in many other European nations a “‘televisualisation’ of original radio programmes and [...] ‘cinematisation’ of television” (2012b, p. 59) took place. Indeed, Knut Hickethier has pointed out for West Germany that the first television program conceptions were heavily indebted to cinema and radio traditions. West German television executives believed that the television program of each day should only last two to three hours and was to be composed around a center – just the same way cinema programs were organized (Hickethier, 1984, p. 445). But, since the mid-1950s, they began to reconsider their strong belief in this kind of program composition – the call for an adaption of radio's regularly returning structures emerged (Hickethier, 1984, p. 452).

However, the 'producers' of early West German national television – even those who were former radio people – were not only looking to radio or cinema for clues on how to design the program of Deutsches Fernsehen (DFS), West Germany's first and only national program channel from 1954 to 1961/63, which was produced by an association of regional public service broadcasters, the so-called Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Rundfunkanstalten (ARD).² DFS' executives and executive employees were also looking to other nations, particularly to those – like the United States – that were years ahead in television's evolution. Especially the implementation of the fictional entertainment series in West German television is, as I will point out in this article, strongly rooted in visits to the United States and newly gathered information and impressions. In the United States, this format had already been established as an important part of television program in the early 1950s. Some years later, West German television executives and executive employees began either creating television series on the basis of US-American television series or broadcasting a synchronized version of the latter.³ Previous research has either highlighted the thesis that TV series from the U.S. were only purchased rather coincidentally until the 1960s (Schneider, 1992, p. 113) or that US-American TV series' implementation in West German TV was a reaction to the audiences' wish for entertainment (Schildt, 1993, p. 487). Indeed, even though the audiences' entertainment focus needs to be considered a major factor for the continuation of broadcasting US-American TV series, initial motives for the implementation of US-American TV series in the DFS' program were – at least among some – quite different as this article will set forth.

On a theoretical level, this article seeks to productively combine a theory of media change with diffusion research's notion of the so-called “champion” who spurs on innovations within organizations. In an innovative article Gabriele Balbi recently pointed out that new media first imitate old media before they develop characteris-

² In 1961, the ARD started a shortlived second channel. Already in the same year, it was decided that this channel was to be replaced by the so-called Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) which eventually started broadcasting in 1963 (Hickethier, 1998, pp. 114-119, 138-141).

³ Of course, West German television executives also paid special attention to British TV (Hickethier, 1980, p. 242). However, British television series were not broadcast on DFS until the early 1960s (Schneider, Thomsen, & Nowak, 1991, pp. 33-37).

tics of their own (2015, p. 232-239). Regarding media's content he stated: "the fact that new media copy the content of old media is one of the key features of the society of mass communication" (Balbi, 2015, p. 235).⁴ Diffusion research's notion of champions allows, as I will point out in this article, considering the new medium (as already established in certain places) as a potential driving force for the new medium developing major characteristics of its own in a transnational context. Thus, cases of a highly asynchronous, i.e. spatiotemporally diverse diffusion of new media and / or its content – like the one sketched above – can be described within the frame of Balbi's theory.

After first presenting diffusion theory's notion of champions as a productive complement to Balbi's theory on media change in some more detail, I turn to the aforementioned case study of West German television and US-American TV series to exemplify this approach. In this context, the article heavily draws upon archival research. An assessment of the DFS broadcasting logs (BR, Historisches Archiv, PER.BR.68) showed that among the different West German public service broadcasters the Norddeutsche Rundfunk (NDR) and the Bayerische Rundfunk (BR) were especially engaged in broadcasting US-American TV series on West Germany's only TV channel in the 1950s.⁵ Thus, the NDR's and BR's historical collections on the 1950s and early 1960s were sighted for any content possibly related to US-American TV and television series, each research being complemented with a search for travel reports of the respective television executives and executive employees in West German television industry magazines (*Fernsehen: Gestalten Senden Schauen*; *Fernseh-Informationen*; *FUNK-Korrespondenz*; *Kirche und Fernsehen: Ein Informationsdienst*). Additionally, the files of the so-called Ständige Programmkonferenz (DRAF A44/1-10)), a board put together by the several public service broadcasters that coordinated and decided on the DFS' program (Bleicher, 1993, pp. 88-94), were searched for discussions of US-American TV series in the 1950s and early 1960s. The results of this research are presented in this article and complemented with previous research on West German television and television series.

Needless to say, there are many more ways to study media change than focusing on a medium's content or program, each approach possibly relying on a variety of different theories as Jürgen Wilke has recently summarized (2015, pp. 29–30). Yet, among these different approaches like focusing on media systems, media receptions or media technologies, the significance of analyzing a medium's content

⁴ In total, Balbi's model encompasses two further steps of media evolution. In a third step, old media try to cope with the establishment of the new medium before in a fourth step old and new media finally coexist, having found their respective places in the media ensemble (Balbi, 2015, pp. 239–244).

⁵ According to these logs four US-American series (*Fury*, *Union Pacific*, *Private Secretary*, *Lassie*) were broadcast by the BR, two (*Circus Boy*, *Tombstone Territory*) by the NDR. One series was each broadcast by Sender Freies Berlin (*The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*), Süddeutscher Rundfunk (*The Lone Ranger*) and Westdeutscher Rundfunk (*Captain David Grief*). These series were identified as those US-American TV series being broadcast on DFS in the 1950s by means of Schneider et al., 1991.

cannot and must not be underestimated. It has already been pointed out that a medium is as much defined by its content as it is by its technology (e.g., Peiser, 2008). Of course, there are also other examples for an influence of US-American television on the content of its West German counterpart. For example, Hallenberger (1992) has dealt with quiz shows and found out that 'only' general concepts were imported. However, the television series are of special importance: the genre is generally considered a defining characteristic of the medium (Giesenfeld & Prugger, 1994, p. 349).

Media Change and the Diffusion of Innovations

Diffusion research is characterized by the axiom to differentiate between social systems with the latter constituting “a boundary within which an innovation diffuses” (Rogers, 2003, p. 24).⁶ It thus points to the fact that research on media change has to carefully consider its point of view since media change cannot and must not be regarded as a necessarily simultaneous process among several social systems.⁷ Media change within a specific social system might substantially differ from media change within another: A new medium may already have established itself as a mass medium in a particular social system – yet, in another social system it might still be or have been in its infancy. Still, there might be connections, probably created by influential individuals, between different social systems with different media ensembles / states of media evolution. This notion especially holds true for historical processes of media change – media processes in an often less globalized but still interconnected world.

Diffusion research has shown that so-called “champions” are a variable of pivotal importance for innovation processes in organizations, even though the latter are highly structured (Rogers, 2003, p. 404). The process of initiating and implementing innovations in an organization highly depends on individuals as Rogers describes: “a champion is a charismatic individual who throws his or her weight behind an innovation, thus overcoming indifference or resistance that the new idea may provoke in an organization. [...] Of course, anti-innovation champions (that is, opponents) can prevent a new technology from reaching the routinization stage of the innovation process. [...] Champions in an organization play a role something like that of an opinion leader in a community” (Rogers, 2003, p. 414-415). Thus, when trying to grasp innovation processes in organizations like West German public service broadcasters, major aspects of individual innovation-decision processes can help increase our understanding of the former.

⁶ Since an innovation is defined rather broadly in diffusion research as „an idea, practice, or object that is perceived new by an individual or other unit of adoption“ (Rogers, 2003, p. 12), the term thus encompasses new media in general as well as US-American TV series in 1950s West Germany in particular.

⁷ Kinnebrock, Schwarzenegger and Birkner also highlighted that media change has to be defined as “a multitude of singular phenomena”, each situated in its own specific context of space and time (2015, p. 13, own translation).

According to Rogers (2003, pp. 170–180, 229–240, 420–430), the first four stages of the individual's innovation-decision process can be summarized the following way. First, an individual – who might finally turn into a champion – identifies a problem and the need for innovation. Second, the individual forms an opinion on the innovation by considering aspects such as its advantages and disadvantages and its compatibility with “sociocultural values and beliefs, [...] previously introduced ideas, and/or [...] client needs for the innovation” (Rogers, 2003, p. 240). In a third stage of the process, the individual probably tests the innovation “on a probationary basis to determine its usefulness” (Rogers, 2003, p. 177). Finally, in a fourth stage, the innovation is proposed within an organization with the latter deciding on its implementation, possibly modifying the innovation to suit the organization's needs before finally using it routinely.

Against this background, this article will proceed in three steps when dealing with US-American television series in West German TV of the 1950s. First, attitudes of major West German television executives towards US-American TV will be pointed out to illustrate the institutional background within which champions began advocating the broadcast of US-American television series. In a second step this background will be expanded by pointing out some television series of the Nordwestdeutsche Rundfunk (NWDR) / NDR⁸ that were inspired by US-American ones and shortly describing the first two attempts of establishing US-American TV series on West German TV. Third, and finally, the article turns to the public service broadcaster BR and the champion who significantly pushed US-American TV series becoming a major part of DFS and thus West German TV. In this context, both actions and motives of the champion will be discussed. Thus, it will be pointed out that early West German TV was not only influenced by the old media radio and cinema. On the level of content, it was also impacted by US-American TV.

West German TV Executives and Their Limited Interest in US-American TV

In the early days of West German television, a time when both the West German government and the larger part of its population supported the decision to become part of the Western bloc in the Cold War, thus arguably leading to long-term processes that have been described by historians as Americanization and Westernization (e.g., Doering-Manteuffel, 1999; Gassert, 1999; Herbert, 2003), television executives and executive employees were looking for information on television when trying to establish the new medium in West Germany.⁹ They not only visited

⁸ The NWDR – which consisted of a Hamburg and a Cologne branch – was split into two public service broadcasters, the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) and the Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR). In 1956, the NWDR was officially superseded by the NDR (Hamburg) and the WDR (Cologne) (Hickethier, 1998, p. 94).

⁹ Hickethier has already suggested that the drive to gather impressions of television in other nations was rooted in the wish to offer a programming that was different from the one in Nazi Germany (2007, pp. 115–118). However, this explanation is only one among others as will be

other West European nations (Diller, 2002, p. 147; on European program exchange Fickers, 2012a). Travel reports that were either written for internal use or published in television industry magazines confirm that they also went to the United States, a nation where television had already been established as a mass medium.¹⁰ Yet, the interest of West German television executives and executive employees in US-American television still had its limits. At least at first, it mainly concentrated on the technological aspects of the new medium (Wagner, 2009), thus implicitly echoing a specific kind of anti-Americanism defined by a self-perception of cultural superiority (on the latter Gassert, 1999; Schwaabe, 2003; on US-American television see also Müller, 2010, pp. 137–147).

Whereas Carl Haensel, the permanent legal adviser of the public service broadcaster Südwestfunk (SWF), omitted a (detailed) description of US-American television programs in his official account of a fact-finding tour and simply referred to a forthcoming book of his (report reprinted in Diller, 2002, here p. 156), thus revealing the limited interest of many executives and personnel, others put it bluntly. For example, BR's then-television commissioner Dr. Clemens Münster stated in a 1953 article of *Fernsehen* that in most respects US-American television should not be considered a role model since it was – contrary to West German television – characterized by commercial interests. Thus, he believed that only in the field of technology much could be learned from US-American television (Münster, 1953, p. 86). One year later he maintained in *Fernsehen* that there were only a few good television programs in the United States (Münster, 1954, p. 203).

Yet, even though Münster and others (e.g. Lange, 1956; Langhoff, 1956) ushered harsh verdicts on US-American television programs, the latter soon began to influence its West German counterpart. Some television executives that went to the United States returned with new ideas and impressions. In the case of the NWDR / NDR these newly gathered impressions lead to an adaption of basic concepts of US-American television series and the broadcast of an US-American television series for children.

The NWDR / NDR and US-American TV Series

Two months before West Germany's first and then only national program channel officially started, a family series premiered that proved popular with the DFS' audience in its early years as surveys imply (Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 621-1/144 NDR 3991). That series, *Unsere Nachbarn heute abend: Familie Schölermann* (Our Neighbors Tonight: The Schölermann Family), was produced by the NWDR

indicated by this article.

¹⁰ In this context, West Germans could possibly resort to cultural exchange programs (Latzin, 2005, p. 11-21). Yet, at least in the case of the cultural exchange program of the USA, television people did not constitute a primary target group (Latzin, 2005, p. 205). If the television executives and executive employees that are discussed in this article did actually participate in such a program is unknown to this article's author.

(Hamburg) / NDR. In total, 111 different episodes were broadcast on a regular basis between 1954 and 1960 (Beile, 1994, pp. 362–364).

Based on an article that was published in a 1954 issue of *Fernsehen* (Urban, p. 653–656) it has been argued that this series was an example of television people consciously continuing radio traditions (so did Bleicher, 1992, pp. 26–27). In fact, it was quite common in the United States to adapt radio series to television (e.g., Santo, 2015, pp. 316–317). Yet, in this specific West German case Bleicher's argumentation has to be put into question. Charles Brauer, an actor who portrayed one of the Schölermann children, recalled in an interview that the series was broadly based on the US-American family sitcom *I Love Lucy*. According to this interview, Brauer was informed that *I Love Lucy*, which was originally shown in the United States by Columbia Broadcast System between 1951 and 1957, was one of Werner Pleister's, the NDR's chairman, favorites. Thus, Brauer was told, the NWDR was planning to do something similar (Strothmann, 1998, p. 120).¹¹

That fact that Pleister and others of NWDR / NDR were looking to the United States for inspiration on what to broadcast on West German television can also be confirmed by the case of another NDR production: the highly popular crime anthology series *Stahlnetz* (1958–1968). As Nora Hilgert already summarized (2013, pp. 81–84), this show was heavily based on the US-American television series *Dragnet* which was broadcast in the United States from 1951 to 1959 by the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). In 1956, NDR's Jürgen Roland went on a study trip to the United States as the NDR wanted him to become acquainted with US-American television detective stories. Roland was impressed and fascinated with *Dragnet* as he recalled years later (Vorländer, 1992, p. 136). In fact, he took over several elements from this series which featured the fictional adventures of LAPD's detective Sergeant Joe Friday. Not only is the word "Stahlnetz" a German translation of the word "dragnet", Roland also adopted the signature tune of the US-American series (Hilgert, 2013, p. 84). Yet, some major characteristics of the US-American original were changed. Contrary to *Dragnet*, *Stahlnetz* did not feature a protagonist in a fixed setting since Roland believed there was no city in West Germany with an adequate amount of crimes (Hißnauer, 2014, p. 160, footnote 39). Thus, in ten years, only 22 *Stahlnetz* 'episodes' (from 40 to 109 minutes) were produced and broadcast in varying time slots (Brück, 2003, p. 113).

Besides producing television series that were more or less loosely based on US-American ones, the NDR did also purchase the rights of a children's television series from the United States. This series, *Circus Boy*, which was originally broadcast in the United States by NBC and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) from 1956 to 1958, premiered on DFS in 1957. *Circus Boy* was the second US-American

¹¹ I have to especially thank Dr. Hans-Ulrich Wagner and Alina Tiews from the Research Centre for the History of Broadcasting in Northern Germany at the Hans-Bredow-Institut, Hamburg, for granting me access to their research files on *The Schölermann Family*, making me thus aware of this interview.

television series on West German TV. In 1956, already five episodes of *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* (ABC, 1954-59) had been broadcast on DFS (Schneider et al., 1991, p. 33). The responsible public service broadcaster, the Sender Freies Berlin (SFB), initially had high hopes in this series as a telegram to NDR's Werner Pleister, dated September 13, 1955 implies (Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 261-1/144 NDR 163). Yet, *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* soon vanished from West German television screens until 1961 (Schneider et al., 1991, pp. 33–36).

Regarding *Circus Boy*, there is evidence that the series was met with skepticism by those who decided on the DFS' program, the Ständige Programmkonferenz (SPK). The minutes of the SPK meeting in October 1957 state that there were doubts on the series' first episode, it was decided to pre-screen further episodes in one of the SPK's next meeting (DRAF A44/6). However, the minutes of the SPK's following meetings do not contain any detailed information on related discussions (DRAF A44/2-7). The series is only mentioned in the minutes of the April 1958 meeting when the SPK approved the NDR's plan to broadcast the series on Sundays at 2:30 pm every other week (DRAF A44/2). After two episodes had been broadcast on DFS in 1957, *Circus Boy* continued its run with more episodes following the next two years – ten in 1958, 23 in 1959 (Schneider et al., 1991, pp. 33–34).

Although the NDR was one of the first public service broadcasters to air a US-American television series on DFS, the importance of another public service broadcaster employee, BR's Gertrud Simmerding, for establishing US-American TV series on West German TV must not be underestimated. Simmerding deliberately championed US-American TV series since she considered these series a valuable addition to the DFS' afternoon programming. As previous research has already highlighted on a quantitative level, the DFS' afternoon programming is particularly important for the establishment of US-American TV series in West German television. In this part of the DFS' program, US-American TV series significantly proliferated first (Krewani, 1992).

Gertrud Simmerding, the BR and US-American TV Series

In the early days of DFS, afternoon broadcasting slots were rather neglected in program designs. According to the television treaty of the ARD, the regional public service broadcasters were only obliged to contribute to the evening slots (Schmidbauer, 1987, p. 12). Yet, already in September 1955 the chairmen of the broadcasters stressed the importance of afternoon programming and urged their subordinates to pay more attention to it. This was not only due to the fact that television sets were (mainly) sold in the afternoon and sellers were keen to present marketable devices. The chairmen also believed that the afternoon slots, which mainly targeted children, young people and women, were a field for experimentation in which new shows and formats could be tested (Schmidbauer, 1987, p.

12,14).¹²

In the wake of this new attention especially children's programming was controversially discussed. First, much of the discussion centered on how television might affect children. Yet, in early 1958, a new criticism was brought forward by Gertrud Simmerding (Schmidbauer, 1987, p. 20) – a graduate in psychology who had worked in the BR's women's radio division and became head of the BR's television programming for children and young people in 1954 (Simmerding, 1991, p. 207). On orders of Dr. Clemens Münster, who had been named head of BR's television programming in 1954 and who was part of the SPK, she had assessed DFS' programming for children. The results of this assessment were not only distributed internally by Münster, Simmerding also published the results of her evaluation in a 1958 issue of *Jugend Film Fernsehen* (Schmidbauer, 1987, p. 20). In her article she stated that West German television was characterized by a strive “to educate, teach and influence” (Simmerding, 1958, p. 5, own translation) children. As she argued, this strive resulted in a lack of entertaining programmes that children could enjoy in the afternoon. However, she believed that it was important to provide the latter kind of programs to children. In her opinion, children were already taken up by school and other aspects of daily lives (Simmerding, 1958, p. 7).

Having (most probably) been on a fact-finding mission to the United States,¹³ Simmerding was familiar with US-American TV and conceived it to be the solution to the problem of offering a suitable programming for children. This was not only due to the fact that the DFS' budget for the afternoon programming was small and purchasing US-American TV series was rather cost-saving compared to producing one's own (Simmerding, 1991, p. 207). Simmerding argued that US-American TV's commercial orientation was no reason to look down on it. In fact, she believed that the US-American strive to create the largest possible audience resulted in “qualitative clous and psychological finesses” (Simmerding, 1958, p. 2, own translation). In the eyes of Simmerding, one of the clous and finesses of US-American TV was the concept of the fictional entertainment series. She believed that it was important for children to meet their heroes and favorites regularly as they both wanted and needed role models – a need that could be satisfied by entertaining TV series (Simmerding, 1958, p. 4).

Simmerding's assessment was neither discussed in the SPK nor by the other executive employees of the public service broadcasters that were responsible for the DFS' afternoon programming (Schmidbauer, 1987, p. 21). Still, her convictions changed the DFS' children's programming. Even though she recognized that airtime was limited to a few hours a day and that this rather eliminated the possibility to broadcast episodes of a series in short intervals (Simmerding, 1958, p. 3),

¹² In 1960, the chairmen of the several public service broadcasters decided that Monday evening broadcasting slots were to become a testing field for foreign programs (Hickethier, 1984, p. 456).

¹³ This is implied by the newspaper clipping „Kinder vor dem Fernseh-Schirm“ which is included in folder 28 of the following collection: BR, Historisches Archiv, NL/29.

Simmerding had already secured the rights of some episodes of two US-American television series in 1956: six episodes of *Fury* and six episodes of *Lassie* (Simmerding, 1991, p. 207; BR, Historisches Archiv, FS/6634; BR, Historisches Archiv, FS/6635.1).¹⁴ An explanation for her selection of *Fury* and *Lassie* is offered in her *Jugend Film Fernsehen* article from 1958. In this article she stated that western, adventure and detective stories were probably most successful with children as they offered them “suspense, uncertainty, anxiety and curiosity” (Simmerding, 1958, p. 5, own translation).

As Simmerding had assumed, *Fury*, which premiered one year ahead of *Lassie*, proved immediately popular with children. After all of the BR’s first six episodes of *Fury* had been broadcast on DFS each Sunday at 2:30 pm between October 5 and November 9, 1958 (Schneider et al., 1991, p. 33), the series was canceled for the time being, leaving many viewers wanting more. This is at least indicated by a press clipping (without any hint on the author or the publication itself) that was collected by Simmerding and integrated in one of her personal “diaries” (No. 3) in which she collected air dates and other material on programs that she had been responsible for. According to this press clipping, which was titled “Wir wollen alle Fury und Joe wiedersehen” (We all want to see Fury and Joe again), the BR had been flooded with “thousands of letters and postcards” (BR, Historisches Archiv, NL/29, own translation) of kids and adults alike, all protesting the preliminary end of the series on West German television.¹⁵ The article's author stated that Simmerding was willing to fulfill the viewers' wish: it was announced that 13 further adventures of Fury and Joe would be broadcast on DFS in 1959 (BR, Historisches Archiv, NL/29). As promised, *Fury* returned on DFS in 1959, 13 episodes premiered until early 1960 while Simmerding secured the rights to further episodes of the successful series (BR, Historisches Archiv, FS/6634).¹⁶

Even as Simmerding 'championed' US-American TV-series, her 'support' had its limits. In fact, Simmerding screened the episodes of the series as dozens of normed evaluation sheets confirm (BR, Historisches Archiv, FS/6634). Only after watching the episodes of the series' she decided which episodes were to be purchased and broadcast. While some episodes were readily accepted by Simmerding, in other cases she believed that changes were necessary. This is implied by evaluation sheets like the one for the episode “Timber” from December 4, 1958. It contains the following comment circled with red ink: “good with cuts due to the barney” (BR, Historisches Archiv BR, FS/6634, own translation). Letters from the early

¹⁴ *Fury* was originally broadcast on NBC (1955-1960), *Lassie* was originally broadcast on CBS (1954-1971).

¹⁵ Unfortunately, these letters are no part of the collections that are preserved in the BR’s historical archive.

¹⁶ When Simmerding decided to continue broadcasting she was not only backed up by aforementioned viewer letters. In fact, from 1959 on, several studies stated that *Fury* was especially popular among children (Schmidbauer, 1987, pp. 29-32-61) and experts like Horst Wetterling, Professor of Pedagogy at the PH Osnabrück, praised the series for possibly strengthening children’s “motoric systems” as well as their “bodily power and briskness” (quoted after Schmidbauer, 1987, p. 29, own translation).

1960s (written by BR's Elisabeth Laussen) confirm that at least in some instances the dubbing company was asked to shorten or even omit a scene that was considered unsuitable for children (Historisches Archiv BR, FS/5524-FS/5525). Other times, the judgement was clearer: The episode "Pete's Folly" was screened two times, first on December 4, 1958 and second, on September, 29, 1960 – both times being judged unfit (BR, Historisches Archiv, FS/6634). This was probably due to a certain fight scene that was mentioned in both evaluations. As on most evaluation sheets, no clear explanation was given. However, even though Simmerding was highly selective in her choice of episodes, the fact remains that she was actively championing US-American TV series in West Germany – both by publicly discussing them and by securing the rights in some of these series like *Fury*.

Conclusion

This article has taken up the assumption that media change has to be conceptualized as "a multitude of singular phenomena" (Kinnebrock, Schwarzenegger & Birkner, 2015, p. 13, own translation) that take place at different places in different times. I have argued that a new medium is possibly not only influenced by older media, but also by the new medium itself if media change is considered a temporally and spatially diverse phenomenon. In this context, a perspective that is informed by diffusion research's notion of champions is a valuable addition to a perspective on media change that highlights the impact of old on new media. Thus, in processes of asynchronous media change, the new medium (as established in a given place) can be considered a driving force for the new medium developing transnationally shared characteristics (like a specific content).

This argument was exemplified by the case of West German television and US-American TV series in the 1950s. Whereas TV series had already been established as an important part of television in the U.S., West German television did not officially start broadcasting until 1954. Indeed, at the beginning West German television executives and executive employees were looking to radio and cinema for clues on how to design TV's program – but they also looked to the United States and were, at least in some instances, eager to gather new information and impressions. Subsequently, television series were created on the basis of US-American ones or the rights of US-American TV series were secured for broadcasting at least some of their episodes in West Germany after dubbing. Contrary to previous research, this article has also shown that the proliferation of US-American TV series did not happen rather coincidentally in its beginnings – it was a deliberate move by some people who believed in these series as good programming and thus championed them. Against this background further research will need to ask about networks of entanglement between different social systems when studying the diffusion of new media and the mutual impact of old and new media on each other in other national contexts. This specific case study indicates that these entanglements between different social systems are probably established by individuals. In this

context, further research not only needs to ask about those individuals that turn into champions of a new medium and / or its content. It also needs to ask about the motivations of those organizations and individuals that distribute media content to other nations.

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