

# Pills, magic bullets, scandals. A social and cultural history of medical drug use in Germany and France 1950-1990

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During the last 60 years, pharmaceutical industries in western countries have undergone an enormous expansion. Mass production and health insurance have made drugs easily available, a large range of indications and changing medical practices have made it possible to treat a lot of diseases with pharmaceuticals. Thus, they have become important objects of our daily life as to their consumption, prescription, publicity and discussions about costs and patent rights.

Recent studies in drug history – inspired by science studies approaches – mainly focus on the actors' relationship in the processes preceding the market introduction of a new drug. They integrate successfully the most diverse aspects of drug development, its regulation and to a lesser degree their commercialisation. However, all these studies start from an experts' perspective, thus differentiating from a specialists point of view the drug's active agents, their clinical trials and their marketing techniques.<sup>1</sup> Based on this prior research, the present proposal wants to take a complementary perspective, the consumer's one. This change of perspective allows to focus on discourses and practices in drug use. It replaces a differentiated expert's view by a more or less uninformed layman's one, who, by this means, regains autonomy as an important actor in drug history. Patient's ways of behaviour of getting or preventing a prescription, their use of drugs and finally their consumer's decision on OTC drugs are decisive for a deeper understanding both of the industry's motivation to develop and produce, for regulator's efforts to control and for doctors trials to assess and distribute drugs.<sup>2</sup>

Amidst the great number of more recent publications, two works have been particularly inspiring for the present approach. First American historian of medicine Susan Speaker's article on the cultural history of minor tranquilizers and secondly Robert Bud's concept of popular drugs or drug groups, such as penicillin, as "brands".<sup>3</sup> While the former convincingly shows the relation-

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<sup>1</sup>The latter will be done by a new project on drug marketing by Volker Hess, Jean-Paul Gaudillire and Christian Bonah.

<sup>2</sup>This is an important aspect in the publications of Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra; Van Heteren, Godelieve; Tansey, Tilli (Ed.): *Biographies of remedies. Drugs, medicines and contraceptives in Dutch and Anglo-American healing cultures*, Amsterdam/New York 2002.

<sup>3</sup>Speaker, Susan L.: From "Happiness Pills" to "National Nightmare". Changing cultural Assessment of Minor Tranquilizers in America 1955-1980, in: *Journal of the History of*

ship between consumption habits, image and political assessment of widely used tranquilizers, the latter provides us with a methodological instrument to approach the different consumers view on such specialised therapeutic "products" which he can't assess other than by trust, experience and experts council.

The present Ph.D.-proposal explores the discursive and practical use of drugs as part of modern 20<sup>th</sup> century western society's development, using France and West Germany from 1950-1990 as example. A comparative perspective has been chosen to highlight transnational and national developments in an era which is characterised by a growing importance of supranational institutions (EEC, EU) and globalisation processes. By looking beyond national borders, I hope to get significant information about the impact of national traditions concerning consumption practices, medical traditions, doctor-patient-relationship and state intervention. Both France and Germany have strong pharmaceutical industries while showing significant differences in their regulation politics during the 1950s and '60s. Although, for example, French consumers do use alternative medicine's preparations, they seem to consume them to a much smaller extent than their German counterparts do.

Based on well-known, widely used drugs such as Aspirine, the "Pill", appetite suppressants, Penicillin and a homoeopathic drug (such as an antitussive), this projects poses the question in which manners people use drugs, where they are likely to follow their doctor's advice and where they choose an alternative behaviour. The comparative study will consists of three parts: In a first step, cultural norms which influence and regulate drug use are identified and analysed. Secondly, norm infractions such as heavy side effects and their scandalisation as a failure of drug security are taken as a methodological tool to delimit cultural framing of drug use. In both the first and second part, the "handling" of drugs is in the centre of the analysis to allow statements on the expected relationship between drug and drug user. A third focus shall be on the iconography of drugs. By integrating ways of visual dramatization/production/presentation, common images of modern drugs can be shown in their function as symbols and "lieux de mémoire".

The study relies on a large range of sources. Four groups of documents – consumers' statements, Pharmaceutical industry's documents, media resources and consumption statistics – can be distinguished. Sources on patients behaviour such as letters to editors and opinion polls will be used together with patient information leaflets and documents on drug use which can be found in scientific publications (WHO, statistics of state agencies, physicians comments on drug use). Pharmaceutical Industry Archives (Bayer AG, Rhône-Poulenc S.A. (today Sanofi-Aventis)) can provide necessary sources for the iconography of drugs, such as packages and bills (posters). Based on the assumption that the media participate in the construction of a society's cultural norms, two important periodicals for each country such as *Der Spiegel*, *Stern*, *Bunte*, *Le Nouvel Observateur* und *Paris Match* as well as one "women's magazine" (*Brigitte*, *Elle*) are used. Additionally, articles in nation-wide newspapers *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Bild-Zeitung*, *Die Zeit*, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* und *Libération* shall be integrated.

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*Medicine and Allied Sciences* 52 (1997), p. 338-376; Bud, Robert, Antibiotics. From Germophobia to the Carefree Life and Back again: The Lifecycle of the Antibiotic Brand, in: Tone, Andrea; Watkins, Elizabeth Siegel (Ed.): *Medicating modern America. Prescription drugs in history*, New York et al. 2007.