

OPERATIE NL FIT: Constituting and reinforcing self-government

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Abstract: Commercial reality TV has often been analysed as a technology of governing and as providing technologies of the self. This article explores this relationship further by doing a critical discourse analysis on a particular media text, OPERATIE NL FIT. This Dutch public service programme's self proclaimed goal is to stimulate the Dutch citizens to be healthier and fitter. The goal of this article is to show how this programme constitutes and reinforces a specific notion of the self. This particular case will also shed more light on the Dutch context and the role of public service TV as a technology of governing. I will especially look at the transformation of the participants, the role of the experts and the multi-platform approach of the show.

Keywords: governmentality, reality TV, neo-liberalism, public service

1. Introduction

In October, 2011, the Danish government introduced a fat tax on products like butter and milk to reduce the growing rate of obese citizens.¹ The Dutch Board of National Healthcare proposed to do the same for the Netherlands, but this did not get enough support from the House of Representatives.² Discussion arose again in a broadcast interview in 2013 with the current Minister of Health, Edith Schippers: the question was if the government should interfere in such a controlled way or if they should only play a supporting role in this issue.³ The Ministry of Health decided to work together with local governments and private organizations to stimulate people to work out and eat healthier. Together they set up a covenant, 'Covenant Gezond Gewicht'.⁴ This covenant was also a sponsor in creating a new reality show on public television, OPERATIE NL FIT.⁵ Dutch commercial reality TV has already dedicated several programmes specifically to the obesity problem in Holland, but until now this was not yet the case on Dutch public service TV.⁶ OPERATIE NL FIT aired primetime starting 5th of September, 2013 for ten weeks on the public network (AVRO). In this programme five 'captains', different in gender, age and social backgrounds, were chosen to follow a ten week programme to lose weight. Viewers were specifically invited to identify with one of them and view them as a kind of 'coach' in their own weight loss process. So apart from offering entertainment, this programme also addressed viewers to be active and change their own lifestyles. This programme shows reality television trying to help and stimulate contestants and

¹ Thomas van der Kolk, "Opnieuw wordt een vettaks bepleit. Maar werkt zo iets echt?," *Volkscrant*, December 13, 2011.

² "Procedure vergadering," *Tweede Kamer*, accessed February 8, 2014, <http://www.tweedekamer.nl/vergaderingen/commissievergaderingen/details/index.jsp?id=2011A02836>.

³ Edith Schippers, interview by Jeroen Pauw and Paul Witteman, *Pauw&Witteman*, VARA, February 1, 2012, http://pauwenwitteman.vara.nl/Artikel.4215.0.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=25174&cHash=3a1cd98da0f7c3822eafe20032379949/.

⁴ "Covenant Gezond Gewicht," *Convenant Gezond Gewicht*, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.convenantgezondgewicht.nl/home>.

⁵ OPERATIE NL FIT, AVRO, September 5, 2013 – November 8, 2013, produced by Blazhoffskey.

⁶ Examples of Dutch programmes on obesity broadcast on commercial tv: OBESE, HELP! MIJN KIND IS TE DIK, THE BIGGEST LOSER



viewers to take care of themselves by giving them rules to live by. Uncovering the strategies and elements which are used in the process and analysing these as constituting a specific form of self-reliant subjectivity is the aim of my research. My main focus will be on the broadcast television text, but an additional part will look at the programme's multi-platform approach, which includes extensions to a website and several social media platforms.⁷

In the theoretical framework I connect the relationship of reality TV and a presumed 'obesity problem' to what Ouellette and Hay understand as the neo-liberalisation of government and its move to self-government.⁸ According to them the usually private domains of the everyday life of ordinary people are now being examined in reality TV to provide us with guidelines to live by and transform ourselves: This can be understood as the neo-liberalisation of social work through reality TV.⁹ My starting point, concurring with that of Ouellette and Hay, are the theories and concepts of Michel Foucault concerning 'governmentality' and 'technologies of the self'. I will use these Foucauldian concepts of self-regulating subjects and ideas on governmentality and power relations to examine the relationship between reality TV and the neo-liberal ideas of 'governing at a distance'.¹⁰ Most research on neo-liberal self-government and reality TV concerning obesity has been done on American and British commercial TV.¹¹ However, this research will not only show how self-government works specifically in the Dutch context, but also broaden the research on neo-liberalism and reality TV to public service (reality) TV.¹²

My main question is: "How is OPERATIE NL FIT part of reinforcing and constituting specific notions of the self?" I will look at how certain elements of the programme reinforce and constitute a specific type of subjectivity. To answer this question my first subchapter will focus on how the participants are constituted as 'problematic' individuals at the beginning and as 'improved' or even 'ideal' ones at the end. The transformation of the participants in the show is an important aspect for my analysis, because it highlights how a linguistic and visual 'before and after' effect in television can reinforce and constitute a specific subject. In the second chapter I focus on the role of the programme's 'experts'. I examine how the experts

⁷ "Operatie NL Fit," *Operatie NL Fit*, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/>.

⁸ Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

⁹ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2-6.

¹¹ A few works on reality television and self-governmentality: Jack Z. Bratich, "Nothing Is Left Alone for Too Long': Reality Programming and Control Society Subjects," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 30, no. 65 (2006): 65-83.; Bree Hadley, "Self-Making as Public Spectacle: Bodies, Bodily Training and Reality TV," *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and Television Studies* 24 (2012): 1-14.; Emma Rich, "I See Her Being Obesed!': Public Pedagogy, Reality Media and the Obesity Crisis," *Health* 15, no. 3 (2011):3-21.

¹² I will further elaborate on this in the theoretical framework and methodological chapter.



are part of this technology of governing in several ways. What strategies are used to legitimate their expertise? And how do they act as agents of surveillance? These first two subchapters focus on the television text, but as mentioned before it is important to address the context of public service broadcasting (PSB). Therefore, in my third chapter I analyse the programme's participative multi-platform approach, a strategy which has been discussed in the context of PSB as cultivating the relationship between public broadcasters and their audiences.¹³ The multi-platform approach is an important part of OPERATIE NL FIT, because it is a more direct platform to address and activate the viewer. How does the programme's multi-platform approach contribute to constituting a specific subjectivity for the viewer? By analysing the programme's relationship with the viewer I can analyse how the mode of address contributes to constituting a specific notion of the self.

To answer these questions I will use a critical discourse analysis (CDA) as formulated by Norman Fairclough.¹⁴ It is critical in the sense that it draws connections between the use of language and power relations in society. This kind of CDA has to be concerned with textual analysis, discourse practice and sociocultural practice.¹⁵ My thesis will start with the sociocultural practice, which entails a wider view of society and culture, by focusing on the (Dutch) political context of the show.¹⁶ I limit this context to the interview with the Minister of Health I have mentioned before. The first two chapters will be mainly analysed through a detailed textual analysis. For this textual analysis I will use four out of the ten episodes: the first, fifth, sixth and last one.¹⁷ My findings will be presented in the form of excerpts from the episodes. Important for my analysis is a concern with discourse practice, which is the way in which texts are produced and consumed. This will be covered in the third chapter on the multi-platform approach and the context of PSB.¹⁸ I will reflect further on how this will be analysed and the choice of material in my methodological chapter. Ultimately this thesis will attempt to connect the media text, OPERATIE NL FIT, the processes of production and consumption (discourse practice) and the political practice to analyse the strategies and elements of the programme which reinforce and constitute a specific notion of the self.¹⁹

¹³ Gunn Sara Enli, "Redefining Public Service Broadcasting, Multi-Platform Participation," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (2008):105-120.

¹⁴ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

¹⁵ Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 18.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁷ I will elaborate on the choice of material in my methodological chapter.

The episodes have been viewed from the website: "Operatie NL Fit," *Operatie NL Fit*, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/>.

¹⁸ Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 202.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 204-205.



2. Theoretical Framework

The focus of this thesis is on the role of media texts in processes of constituting and reinforcing specific forms of subjectivity. To analyse this I focus on one specific media text, the television show *OPERATIE NL FIT*. I approach this particular media text as what Michel Foucault would term a 'technology of governing'.²⁰ I follow a central perspective in the theoretical debate on reality television as a technology of governing as offered by the research of Ouellette and Hay.²¹ Foucauldian concepts like 'governmentality' and 'technologies of the self' will therefore play an important role in my own research on the processes of subjectivity in a reality TV show.²² In this outline of my theoretical framework I start by elaborating more on the specific theories and concepts surrounding governmentality as articulated by Foucault and then move on to a more detailed understanding of these concepts in regards to media and specifically reality television.

2.1 Michel Foucault and governmentality

In examining relations of power throughout history, Michel Foucault developed the term 'governmentality'.²³ According to Foucault, governmentality encompasses a change in attitude towards governing, which developed in Europe in the eighteenth century, calling upon the citizens to take care of themselves. It is very different from earlier models of sovereignty, and is characterized by a more liberal attitude. One example of this attitude can be found in the privatization of responsibilities for the well-being of the population.²⁴ This kind of power is thus concerned with what Rose and Miller termed "governing from a distance".²⁵ For Foucault government is "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself."²⁶ In explaining Foucault's theories, Danaher et al. claim that governmentality is characterised not just by conventional politics (the state), but

²⁰ "Technologies, for Foucault, refers to two main functions or mechanisms: first, the ways in which societies pacify, dominate and regulate subjects; and second, 'technologies of the self', which allow individuals to shape their own bodies and thoughts." Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, *Understanding Foucault* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 2000), XV.

²¹ Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, *Better Living Through Reality TV* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

²² Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 4.

²³ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

²⁴ Danaher, Schirato and Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, 91-94.

²⁵ Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller, "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government," *British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (1992): 173.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. 1)* (New York: New Press, 1997), 81.



also by what Foucault terms 'body politics': the way we conduct ourselves and the relationships we have with our own bodies and other bodies in society.²⁷ The state became concerned with the human body, because it was seen as a resource which had to be productive to ensure "(...) the development and viability of the state."²⁸ Foucault uses the notion of 'biopower' to explain the technologies that were developed during the eighteenth century out of the new developed human sciences and were used for analysing, controlling, regulating and defining the human body and its behaviour.²⁹

Several theorists have criticized Foucault's theories and suggest that his analysis of government neglects the agency and resistance of subjects.³⁰ However I argue that Foucault's historical analysis shows that being formed by power relations (biopower) does not mean citizens are helpless objects. His concept of technologies of the self implies a certain 'freedom' of these subjects. Technologies of the self refer to the ways that individuals work on themselves by regulating their own bodies, thoughts and conduct to transform themselves.³¹ I follow Rose, who rejects the idea of freedom being opposed to government. He argues that freedom of subjects only exists as a strategy for technologies of the self.³²

When it comes to governing human beings, to govern is to presuppose the freedom of the governed. To govern humans is not to crush their capacity to act, but to acknowledge it and to utilize it for one's own objectives.³³

For Rose the subjects have 'freedom' to govern themselves rather than being merely obedient, but are compelled to be free in specific governed ways.³⁴ Following Rose, and Ouellette and Hay in the context of analysing reality TV, I will examine how OPERATIE NL FIT calls upon these technologies of the self to create a more self-empowered subject.³⁵

²⁷ Danaher, Schirato and Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, 83.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

³⁰ Pat O'Malley, Lorna Weir and Clifford Shearing, "Governmentality, Criticism, Politics," *Economy and Society* 26, no. 4 (1997):501-517.; Boris Frankel, "Confronting Neoliberal Regimes: The Post-Marxist Embrace of Populism and Realpolitik," *New Left Review* 1, No. 226 (1997):57-59.

³¹ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luter H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

³² Rose, O'Malley and Valverde, "Governmentality," 11-12.

³³ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom, Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 3.



2.2 Neo-liberalism and reality television

Foucault connects his theories on governmentality and self-government to new forms of liberalism, neo-liberalism, which rely on more privatization of welfare.³⁶ Ouellette and Hay explain that a neo-liberalist state governs at a distance and stimulates citizens to be active, entrepreneurial and responsible for their own choices.³⁷ Lemke discusses the concept of governmentality to analyse and criticize these neo-liberal practices and argues that neo-liberalism does not diminish the power of the state, but is a transformation from formal to informal techniques of government.³⁸ The Foucauldian approach acknowledges that there is a wide variety of institutions, disciplines and discourses besides the state which govern citizens in different ways and with different objectives.³⁹ In discussing the political relevance of media, Markus Stauff proposes to understand media as one of these institutions and therefore as a technology of government. Stauff argues that media can contribute to the shaping and structuring of social relationships and modes of conduct.⁴⁰ Following Stauff, I approach television specifically as one of those institutions which informally constitutes and reinforces specific forms of subjectivity. Stauff notes that the notion of governmentality in media studies has often been used for the analysis of new formats whose common goals consists not in representing reality but in modifying it.⁴¹ The research of Ouellette and Hay is an example of these kinds of analysis.⁴² However, Stauff proposes to look at the broader picture and look at media “as a whole”.⁴³ Stauff explains how media as technology of governing in a Foucauldian sense is constantly shaping and shaped by culture and society.⁴⁴ My approach will be more focused on the analysis of a format, like Ouellette and Hay, instead of media (or television) as a whole. However, it is important to add Stauff’s arguments to this approach and analyse this format as simultaneously shaping and shaped by culture and society.

Most of the new formats that media studies analyse in relation to the concept of governmentality belong to reality television, like OPERATIE NL FIT. Following Ouellette and Hay’s approach, reality television, and specifically what they call “intervention TV”, is trying to show

³⁶ Thomas Lemke, “‘The birth of biopolitics’: Michel Foucault’s lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal Governmentality,” *Economy and Society* 30, no.2 (2010): 191.

³⁷ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 12-13.

³⁸ Thomas Lemke, “Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique,” *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, 14 no. 3 (2002): 59.

³⁹ Rose, O’Malley and Valverde, “Governmentality,” 3.

⁴⁰ Markus Stauff, “The Governmentality of Media: Television as ‘Problem’ and ‘Instrument’,” in *Media, Culture, and Mediality: New Insights Into the Current State of Research*, ed. Ludwig Jäger, Erika Linz and Irmela Schneider (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 263.

⁴¹ Stauff, “The Governmentality of Media,” 263.

⁴² Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 1-5.

⁴³ Stauff, “The Governmentality of Media,” 264.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 270-273.



citizens how to conduct and 'empower' themselves.⁴⁵ "TV assists by acting as a visible component of a dispersed network of supporting technologies geared to self-help and self-actualization."⁴⁶ However, a connection between reality television and neo-liberalism can only exist if we can claim a certain cultural power of television. Ouellette and Hay approach television as cultural technology; as an object with certain policies and regulations which can help educate, improve and shape citizens, into a civil society.⁴⁷ Reality TV is seen as one of the industries in which citizens get handed practical guidelines to govern themselves in their everyday lives; its programmes therefore work as technologies of governance.⁴⁸ Bratich notes that reality television initially was often thought of as a purely representing reality, but he proposes to analyse reality TV as intervening in reality.⁴⁹ I propose to analyse television, and more specifically reality TV, as intervening and representing reality simultaneously. Following Stauff, (reality) television is not only shaping society, but also shaped by it. Therefore I argue that representing reality in reality TV can also reinforce existing notions of the self.

A connection between neo-liberalism, self-government, and reality TV shows surrounding obesity is readymade as mentioned in my introduction. Many reality TV programmes now focus on the training and transformation of human bodies. Health promotion on television tries to stimulate regular people to take better care of themselves and take responsibility for their own care. This resonates with the privatization of responsibilities of welfare in a neo-liberalist state I mentioned earlier. An analysis of OPERATIE NL FIT breaks new ground by examining how self-government works specifically in the Dutch context and also broaden the research concerning neo-liberalism and reality television to public service (reality) TV. Ouellette and Hay have focused their research on television in the private sector, commercial broadcasting. They understand the privatization of television as a technique of governing.⁵⁰ Hence, it is important to discuss the consequences for my approach of television as a technology of governing, because I analyse a reality TV programme broadcast on public service TV. OPERATIE NL FIT is overtly sponsored by the "Convenant Gezond Gewicht", which was set up by the Ministry of Health, and is broadcast on state funded public service TV. This raises questions surrounding the concept of 'governing at a distance', because it has direct connections to the state. Hence, it is important to include this context of institution and production in my analysis, specifically the methodological approach.

⁴⁵ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 63-98.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁴⁹ Jack Z. Bratich, "'Nothing Is Left Alone for Too Long': Reality Programming and Control Society Subjects," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 30, no. 65 (2006): 65-66.

⁵⁰ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 86.



3. Method

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

To answer the main questions of this thesis I will use a critical discourse analysis (CDA) as formulated by Norman Fairclough.⁵¹ This analysis partly stems from Foucault's concept of discourse and is thus directly linked to my theoretical approach. For Foucault, discourse is an individual act of language in action "they are the windows, if you like, which allow us to make sense of, and 'see' things."⁵² These discourses shape, influence, regulate and can control the way we give meaning to ourselves and our actions.⁵³ Media are not only powerful in constructing and reinforcing discourses, but are in itself a field of discourse. Thus, in order to analyse media discourse it is important to analyse media texts.⁵⁴ Bell and Garrett see CDA as the standard framework for analysing media texts within European linguistics and discourse studies.⁵⁵ Fairclough's approach in his book *Media Discourse* combines Foucault's idea of discourse as a social construction of reality with a more linguistic approach which focuses on social action and interaction through language. It is critical in the sense that, as mentioned before, it draws connections between the use of language and power relations in society.⁵⁶ Fairclough has developed a research programme concerning what is known as "Language in the New Capitalism". In this programme he seeks to examine how the contemporary transformations of capitalism, including neo-liberalism, are closely linked to contemporary changes at the level of language and discourse.⁵⁷ Governmentality theorists like Rose have also acknowledged this connection between language and government: "Language is not secondary to government; it is constitutive of it. Language not only makes acts of government describable; it also makes them possible."⁵⁸ Hence, I have chosen Fairclough's CDA to examine the ways in which specific uses of language and discourse contribute to constituting and reinforcing specific forms of subjectivity in a neo-liberal way of governing.

According to Fairclough, media are seen as important public spaces and media discourse is studied as a site of power and social struggle. Critical discourse analysts need to approach language as a form of social practice and attempt to uncover the ways it figures in

⁵¹ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

⁵² Danaher, Schirato and Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, 31.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 1-3.

⁵⁵ Allan Bell and Peter Garrett, "Media and Discourse: A Critical Overview," in *Approaches to Media Discourse*, ed. Allan Bell and Peter Garrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 6.

⁵⁶ Ruth Wodak and Brigitta Busch, "Approached to Media Texts," in *The Sage Handbook of Media Studies*, ed. John H. Downing (Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage, 2004), 109-111.

⁵⁷ Norman Fairclough, "Language in New Capitalism," *Discourse and Society* 13, no.2 (2002): 161-300.

⁵⁸ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 28.



social processes. This kind of CDA needs to not only be concerned with the text, but also connections between specific discourses (discourse practice) and a wider sociocultural context.⁵⁹

It is not so much a question of what a word or text 'means' (...) but of analyzing the way a word or a book functions in connection with other things, what it makes possible, the surfaces, networks and circuits around which it flows, the affects and passions that it mobilizes and through which it mobilizes (...).⁶⁰

Discourse practice and sociocultural context should always be simultaneously involved with a linguistic analysis. Further, according to Van Dijk, critical discourse analysts need to see this relation between language and social practice as a dialectical one. The media discourse expressed in language is both constitutive of and constituted by those social practices.⁶¹ This is also in line with my theoretical approach of reality TV I have explained before. My analysis will therefore not only include how this TV programme constitutes discourses on self-governing subjects, but also acknowledge that it reinforces existing discourse present in social practice.

3.2 Choice of material

Foucault points out that when we deal with a textual analysis of a television text it is important to also include the visual aspects of communication.⁶² However, critically we can see that in his further case analysis he neglects to include these aspects himself.⁶³ For my own analysis I will take these visual aspects of communication far more into consideration than Fairclough has shown to do. These visual aspects are important as they can emphasize, initiate or even criticize points made about the text in language. Hence my textual analysis will not only entail written and spoken language, but also stylistic and formal aspects on a visual level. On a linguistic level I will mainly focus on the generic structure of the text, grammar, vocabulary, sentence types (mood and modality), interactional control features and how various voices are ordered in relation to each other. Because we are dealing with spoken language I will also be able to include pitch range, intonation and expressiveness. On a more stylistic and formal level I will include body language, music, mise-en-scène (setting, staging and lighting) and

⁵⁹ Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 18.

⁶⁰ Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 29.

⁶¹ Teun van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen and H. Hamilton (Oxford:Blackwell, 2001), 352-353.

⁶² Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 150-175.



cinematography (framing and camera movement). I will make use of shot frames to illustrate my arguments about visual aspects. Fairclough notes that analysts need a multifunctional view of texts. It needs to be oriented towards representation and the constitution of relations and identities as simultaneous processes in texts, and the important relationships between them. Every function has its own systems of choices. Representations are found more in the structure of sentences, while identities and relations are formed in modality and interactional control features. With this textual analysis I will examine how specific subjectivity is constituted and reinforced through language and image.⁶⁴

According to Fairclough, media texts constitute of a set of options from a lexical and grammatical point of view, but also in genre and discourse. Except for what is present in the text it is also important to note what is absent.⁶⁵ In the excerpts I have chosen I will examine these selections to reveal more about the media order of discourse. For my textual analysis I will use four out of the ten episodes: the first, fifth, sixth and last one. The first and last episode (as originally broadcasted) are important for the 'before and after' effect I examine. Additionally the first episode holds introductions to the identities of and relations between all the participants, experts and the presenter. The fifth and sixth episode add a depth to the analysis, because they can show the processes of subjectivity in action. My findings will be presented in the form of excerpts from the episodes. After establishing subquestions for my thesis, I have chosen exemplary scenes. These scenes are never isolated events. A principal feature of this particular reality TV show and reality TV in general is its repetition of storylines, of settings and of behaviours. Therefore I will be able to use short scenes to analyse the overall workings of this show.

My first two subchapters on the transformation of participants and the role of the experts correspond to my method of this textual, stylistic and formal analysis. However, CDA is also concerned with discourse practices (production and consumption) and sociocultural practices.⁶⁶ Hence it is important to examine the public service aspect (production) and the way audiences are addressed (consumption). As mentioned before I will address both in my final chapter on the multi-platform approach of the programme. For this chapter I will expand my analysis to the online activities of the programme and perform a textual, stylistic and formal analysis on the lay-out of the website, the video's posted on it and the messages found on several social media channels the programme utilizes. I will address how this approach is part of a particular strategy of public service broadcasting and how it can address viewers to

⁶⁴ Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 202.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

steer them in a desired direction. However, it is important to note that the consumption context only entails the strategies of addressing the audiences, because I have not included audience research.

Eliminating certain elements, like the audience research, can limit how valuable the outcome of my research will be. However, Fairclough himself acknowledges that there need to be made certain choices in material beforehand to keep an analysis workable. He proposes to focus on specific elements in discourse practice and do a selective sociocultural analysis.⁶⁷ Fairclough differentiates three domains in sociocultural practice: economics, political and cultural and stresses that an analysis should be limited to a specific area and topic to keep it manageable.⁶⁸ Therefore I will only include the political context of the covenant set up by the Dutch government and specifically the interview with the Minister of Health I discussed earlier.⁶⁹ The Minister has been asked to react on recent discussion concerning the obesity problem. By approaching the Minister in this interview as a spokesperson for the Dutch state I can say more about the political context this programme is working in. I will start by elaborating on the political practice before going on to my subquestions, because this will frame the entire show and chosen excerpts in a wider sociocultural context.

4. Political Context

To do a critical discourse analysis it is important to look at the wider sociocultural practices this text is a part of to take into account what effects these practices might have on the text.⁷⁰ The interview I have discussed immediately puts the entire programme in its Dutch political context as it directly addresses the issues of 'governing at a distance'. The interview was held in the context of the daily talk show *PAUW EN WITTEMAN* and was broadcast on Dutch public service TV on the 1st of February, 2012.⁷¹ The Minister was invited to discuss the role of the Dutch state in reducing the increasing number of obese citizens, specifically children. As mentioned before the Dutch Board of National Healthcare proposed to introduce a fat tax in 2011, but this idea was ultimately dismissed.⁷² In this interview the Minister operates as a spokesperson for the Dutch state and states that citizens should take responsibility for

⁶⁷ Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 62.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 204-205.

⁶⁹ Schippers, interview by *Pauw&Witteman*, February 1, 2012.

⁷⁰ Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 205.

⁷¹ Schippers, interview by *Pauw&Witteman*, February 1, 2012.

⁷² Thomas van der Kolk, "Opnieuw wordt een vettaks bepleit. Maar werkt zoiets echt?," *Volkskrant*, December 13, 2011.



themselves (“Mensen moeten het in eerste instantie zelf doen”). However, she argues that the Dutch state has to make certain choices more attractive than others to steer the population in the right direction. The Minister explains how a distanced approach by the Dutch state will have greater effects than a disciplinary approach. Even though the state has the power to control and discipline citizens with laws and official regulations, the Minister explains how “freedom” of choice has shown to be a better strategy. Additionally she wants to bring ‘exercise’ closer to the realm of ordinary people and their private life, so the choice to get fitter is easier and more accessible.⁷³

The covenant that was set up by the Ministry of Health is obviously one of these strategies of the Dutch state to govern at a distance in a neo-liberal sense. The covenant not only consists out of state organisations, but also private companies and social workers which have no connection to the state.⁷⁴ As OPERATIE NL FIT is directly part of the governing strategies of the Dutch state I believe this can have an effect on the workings and strategies of the programme itself. The political context that this interview implies is limited, but it can still offer a specific viewpoint of the Dutch state on their role in reducing the ‘obesity problem’ in the Netherlands. Therefore, I will examine if the ideology of the Dutch state I have sketched above is in some way reinforced in the language and images of this show.

5. The transformation

The format of the show differs slightly throughout the episodes, but we can discover a repeating storyline in each of them. The contestants consist out of a stay at home mom (Gwenda), an old veteran (Leo), a hard working dad (Rob), a student (Maja) and a hard working city woman (Linda). Every episode starts with images summarizing the content of the episode while the presenter addresses the viewer through a voice-over. Following this, the episode is normally divided up into five different segments. Each segment is concerned with one specific contestant. These segments show what challenges the contestant had to face during the week and how he/she dealt with these. The segment always ends with a weekly in-studio weighing ceremony. The show has a repetitive structure and walks through a same kind of transition with every contestant. Because of this repetitive structure it is easier to follow a

⁷³ Schippers, interview by *Pauw&Witteman*, February 1, 2012.

⁷⁴ “Convenant Gezond Gewicht,” *Convenant Gezond Gewicht*, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.convenantgezondgewicht.nl/home>.

transformation in the contestants' behaviour and detect a 'before and after' effect through comparing scenes. Therefore this chapter will be divided into two segments: the 'before' and the 'after'.

In the before segment I want to establish how the individuals are initially addressed and address themselves as 'problematic'. The scenes I have chosen are all part of the first episode. They are part of the 'before', because they focus on the current state of the contestants and establish their starting point (mentally and physically). Further I will focus on the relationship between participant and expert, because this can shed light on the level of autonomy the participants are granted in their 'problematic' state. The second part will focus on how an 'after' effect is created in the last episode. I focus on the after effects created in the final episode through certain visual aspects. Further, I look at the developing relationship between participant and expert through a comparison with the scenes of the first episode on aspects of autonomy and self-accountability.

5.1 The 'before'

Intervention TV shows, as Ouellette and Hay term it, often utilize a kind of 'before and after'-effect. By emphasizing the faults of the contestants at the start of the show, a contrast can be created with the end result. They have to be constituted as 'problematic' individuals: individuals that *need* intervening.⁷⁵ I start by examining how the obese participants are constituted as 'problematic' individuals in the beginning of the show. In the first episode the viewer gets to know the participants and their background stories. The first excerpt I have chosen takes place at the beginning of the first episode and is the first in-depth introduction the viewer gets of the participants. In this first episode, a group of around twenty obese people, who volunteered for this programme, are evaluated by three professionals on a physical, nutritional and psychological level. During their psychological evaluation they stand in a circle, while the psychologist in the middle asks every individual why they think they are obese. The excerpt entails an introduction by the psychologist and a conversation between the psychologist and two possible contestants, Maja and Ed.

⁷⁵ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 66-67.

EXCERPT 1⁷⁶

1. PSYCH: Dit is het moment van de waarheid.
2. Dit is het moment in je leven waarin je leven een andere afslag zou kunnen nemen.
3. Je hebt zelf gezegd:
4. het punt waarop ik mij nú bevind, daar ben ik niet tevreden over.
5. Er moet iets veranderen.
6. En daarvoor heb ik één ingrediënt van jullie nodig
7. En dat is de waarheid.
8. De waarheid om te vertellen wat je denkt
9. De waarheid om te vertellen wat je voelt
10. En de waarheid om te vertellen wat je doet.
11. Ieder van jullie heeft al eens een dieet gevolgd.
12. Het enige dieet dat werkt is het dieet dat je een leven lang vol kunt houden.
13. En je kunt dingen alleen een levenlang volhouden
14. als ze niet over eten gaan, maar als ze over jou gaan.
15. Bij mij kom je dus ook niet om te vragen wát je eet
16. Bij mij kom je met de vraag: waarom je eet.
17. Oke?
18. Maja mag ik met jou beginnen?
19. MAJA: Bij mij is het eigenlijk begonnen toen ik elf was.
20. Vanaf dat moment was het belangrijkste voor mijn vader
21. dun zijn en een goede opleiding hebben.
22. En dat was allebei wat ik niet had.
23. En ik had twee zussen tegenover me staan die nu nog steeds
24. zo dun zijn en afgestudeerd zijn aan de universiteit.
25. Nou ik kom van het MBO af en ik ben al mijn hele leven dik.
26. Ik werd gedwongen om te wegen, om te sporten (*sad music insert*)
27. En dat was het enige wat belangrijk was voor hem.
28. En ik ben eigenlijk om mijn verdriet kwijt te raken, ben ik stiekem gaan eten
29. PSYCH: En waarom zou dit programma jou helpen?
30. ED: Dat ik me wel bewust ga worden sowieso van de fouten
31. Die ik eigenlijk onbewust maak.
32. PSYCH: Maar is dat zo onbewust?
33. ED: Ja het is onbewust.

In the introductory speech of the psychologist (line 1 to 17) the individuals are told to self-disclose and speak the truth as a requirement to receive help. The psychologist claims that by disclosing their ‘bad’ self he will be able to help them and intervene in their private lives. According to Barresi and Nunn in these kinds of lifestyle programmes a very important moment is when the subjects are made to admit to their bad behaviour. In such moments of self-disclosure, they find that: “the overall message is that the surrender of this private space of the self to the scrutiny of the expert, the programme and to viewers will be worthwhile in the longer term.”⁷⁷ Looking closer at the text, the importance of the truth is stressed in this scene by foregrounding this word in the first sentence (“waarheid”). It is also emphasized by repeating this word four times in subsequent sentences (line 7 to 10) and foregrounded even more by its position within these sentences. The psychologist in this scene asks for a confession about the individuals’ current ‘problematic’ situation, because he believes this will

⁷⁶ “Aflevering 1 - Operatie NL Fit,” *Operatie NL Fit*, 05”24 - 07”32, September 7, 2013, accessed March 24, http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991.

⁷⁷ Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, “Bad Citizens: The Class Politics of Lifestyle Television,” in *Exposing Lifestyle Television, The Big Reveal* ed. Gareth Palmer, 15-24 (Hampshire: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2008), 23.



lead to a transformation of their self (line 5 to 7). He focuses on three different areas: what they *think* (“denkt”), what they *feel* (“voelt”) and what they *do* (“doet”). According to the psychologist the individuals in this scene should be able to turn themselves into better subjects through speaking the truth about these three areas. For Foucault there is a close connection between processes of subjectivity and what he calls ‘games of truth’.⁷⁸ In earlier works he thought of this relationship in terms of forced situations like prison, but in later works he sees these ‘games of truth’ more as a technology of the self.⁷⁹ “Because language has a performative function, speaking the truth about oneself also makes, constitutes or constructs forms of one’s self.”⁸⁰ Besley notes that a confession will acknowledge “a crime, fault or weakness”, but will ultimately be able to constitute a new notion of the self.⁸¹ The participants in this scene have confessed to their weaknesses and disclosed their ‘true’ self, but following Besley they will now be able to transform themselves.

The psychologist moves on from this speech aimed at the group to a more individual approach. In line 18 and 29 he points directly to two individuals to tell their personal story. This combination between a totalizing and an individual approach is also reflected in the cinematography. We see the camera change during this scene from group shots (Fig. 1) to individual close-ups of the participants (Fig. 2). If other individuals are visible within the close-up they get blurred. Thus, the camera does not just address the participants as a collective, but also gives notion to their individuality. This resonates with one of Foucault’s essential ideas on governmentality. He argues that the state has often been explained as a form of power that only looks at the population, a totality. However, in his article “The Subject and Power” Foucault argues that the state is both individualizing and totalizing. He says the modern state does not ignore individuals, but actually integrates these individuals in the concept of the state.⁸² The goal of this programme is to get the Dutch population as a whole healthier. The emphasis on the individual in this scene might be seen as an effort to also stress the importance of an individual approach.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern For Self as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 1*, ed. P. Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley, 281-301 (London: Penguin Press, 1997).

⁷⁹ Tina Besley, “Truth Telling and Technologies of the Self in Schools,” *Journal of Educational Enquiry* 6, no. 1 (2005), 79.

⁸⁰ Besley, “Truth Telling,” 85.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 782.





Fig. 1 Operatie NL Fit: psych evaluation. Episode 1, 05:42min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991>).



Fig. 2 Operatie NL Fit: psych evaluation. Episode 1, 06:22min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991>).

But what exactly is ‘problematic’ about these individuals? Analysing the first excerpt I see the individuals confessing to their true self, but not accounting their individual selves to be responsible for their current situation. Maja talks about how *it started* (“het is begonnen”) when she was eleven (line 19). By using the third person pronoun *it* (“het”) instead of *I*, she is not a causal actor in the sentence. She does not account herself as being a causal actor in the situation. Even more strongly she talks about *being forced* (“werd gedwongen”) to go work out (line 26). She backgrounds her own responsibility by talking about a certain state she is in and portrays herself as a passive object by denying herself the position as causal actor. In line 30 one participant says he wants *to become conscious* of the faults he *unconsciously makes* (“Dat ik me wel bewust ga worden sowieso van de fouten, die ik eigenlijk onbewust maak”). So when he speaks of himself as a causal actor in this sentence, he emphasizes in words how he cannot be taken responsible for his actions, as he makes them *unconsciously* (“onbewust”). The individuals are addressing themselves as non responsible objects. The acceptance of personal responsibility for actions and consequences is emphasized by Ouellette and Hay as an important skill for ‘ideal’ self-governing neo-liberal subjects.⁸³ Therefore in a neo-liberal sense they are problematic individuals. The ‘ideal’ neo-liberal citizen has to master certain techniques of the self including calculated decision-making, personal accountability and self-esteem.⁸⁴ This first in-depth introduction of the participants shows individuals who are not self-reliant (yet) and portray themselves as passive which problematizes their past actions and behaviours: in a Foucauldian reading they are lacking technologies of the self.

Additionally I want to address the role of the participants in the relationship between the experts and participants as constituted in the first episode. It is important to look at this relationship, because the level of disciplinary power of the expert can say something about the

⁸³ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 68-69.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

level of autonomy of the participants. To analyse this I have chosen to examine the most confrontational moment of the show for the participant, the weigh-in ceremony. This scene offers a direct confrontation not only with themselves, but also with the experts. The participants need to stand on a scale, half undressed, in front of the three experts (and all the viewers at home). In the scene I have chosen Rob steps on the scale for the first time and gets his first personalized advice from the experts on how to conduct himself.

EXCERPT 2⁸⁵

In studio

1. PRESENTER: Het moment van wegen is voor Rob het moment
2. dat hij aan zijn kinderen wil laten zien dat hij wil veranderen.
3. DIETICIAN: Rob we gaan afscheid nemen van het verleden
4. en we gaan kijken naar de toekomst.
5. Laten we kijken wat jouw startgewicht is voor Operatie NL Fit
6. Oké?
7. ROB: Is goed
8. DIETICIAN: Stap er maar op
9. Jouw gewicht is 99,6
10. We gaan kiezen voor vitale voeding
11. en fatale voeding is met hoge uitzondering maar deze week eigenlijk verboden
12. Je weet eigenlijk wel wat vitale voeding is: groente, fruit, brood, vlees, vis.
13. Fatale voeding?
14. Koek, snoep, chips, alles uit het frietvet.
15. Dat doen we niet meer.
16. Daar nemen we afscheid van.
17. Ja?
18. ROB: Oké.

It immediately stands out how little speaking time the participant is offered in this conversation. He makes a passive impression as he only talks or takes action when the expert explicitly asks him to (“Oké?”, “Stap er maar op” and “Ja?”). When the dietician says they *are going to choose* (“gaan kiezen”) for specific kinds of food, possible agency is offered to the participant. It is represented as a conscious self-made *choice* by Rob. However, by using the future tense *are going to* (line 3, 4, 10, 15 and 16) it seems that these choices have actually already been made for him by the expert. However, the experts uses declarative sentences instead of imperative ones. This may be used to give a false sense of agency and responsibility to the individual. The expert constantly uses the pronoun *we* (“we”) when instructing the participant about the future guidelines: *we are going to say goodbye to the past* (“we gaan afscheid nemen”) and *we are not going to do that anymore* (“dat doen we niet meer”). By using the inclusive pronoun *we* the expert emphasizes a collective responsibility for the health of the captain. Additionally, her calm and soft voice together with the heavy stress on words at

⁸⁵ “Aflevering 1 – Operatie NL Fit,” *Operatie NL Fit*, 25”16 – 26”15, September 7, 2013, accessed March 24, http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991.



the end of sentences makes her message easier to remember and establishes a kind of pedagogical relationship, like a teacher and a student. She combines professional authoritative vocabulary, like *vital and fatal foods* (“vitale en fatale voeding”) with a slow and measured delivery to make sure everything is understandable. The questions the expert asks Rob (line 6 and 17) are not intended to seek agreement from him, but to ensure he has listened and understood what she said. The relation between the expert and the participant in this first episode is far from equal. This inequality is enhanced by the fact that the participant undergoes this entire conversation half naked. The experts sit behind their desks and subject his naked ‘true’ self to their authoritative gaze (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Operatie NL Fit: weigh-in. Episode 1, 15:22min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991>).

In discussing television discourse on obesity and health Inthorn and Boyce state: “It is the expert who guides participants through their transformation, helping them to make the ‘right’ choices.”⁸⁶ The experts can only help by offering a number of choices if the goal is to create self-governing subjects, as Foucault’s technologies of the self entail a certain ‘freedom’ of the subject.⁸⁷ . In a neo-liberal way of governing these ‘problematic’ individuals will not be granted much autonomy as their current status indicates their poor choices in the past.⁸⁸ However, the absence of imperative sentences in this particular scene may seem to give a sense of ‘freedom’ to the participant. They are not being dictated what to do, but *choosing* (“kiezen”) to follow the expert’s guidelines. The use of imperative sentences would have denied them from a sense of responsibility, but the lack of speaking time and the use of the future tense (*are going to*) still leaves no room for agency. Cumulatively in the first episode the obese participants are portrayed as ‘problematic’ individuals through a confession of their true ‘bad’ self, a lack of control over their decision-making and the pedagogic relationship established between expert and participant.

⁸⁶ Sanna Inthorn and Tammy Boyce, “‘It’s disgusting how much salt you eat!’: Television discourses of obesity, health and morality,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 92.

⁸⁷ Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 18.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

5.2 The 'after'

In the course of the show these 'problematic selves' get handed tools and guidelines to become more 'ideal' subjects. How are they established as these 'new' subjects in the last episode? To compare the 'before and after' I have chosen a weigh-in scene from the last episode. I have examined the confrontational setting from the first episode, in language as well in image. In this last episode the weigh-in ceremony is completely different. Firstly, there is a difference in terms of mise-en-scène. The participants have to walk up and down a catwalk as if they are giving away a modelling show. They are celebrating their new bodies and their new 'selves'. In contrast to earlier weigh-in ceremonies they are now fully dressed and made up. Additionally, they no longer have to stand on the scale, as this has been done behind the scenes. They no longer have to be put in this confrontational setting. Following Besley, these subjects don't have to be confronted with their 'true' self anymore, as they have become 'good' subjects.⁸⁹ It seems as if they are presented as a finished product, as ideal subjects.



Fig. 4 Operatie NL Fit: weigh-in. Episode 10, 06:13min.
(Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014.
<http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1641009>).



Fig. 5 Operatie NL Fit: weigh-in. Episode 10, 12:10min.
(Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014.
<http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1641009>).

The final episode of Operatie NL Fit is entirely dedicated to celebrating the 'new' and 'improved' subjects they have become, especially by celebrating their new bodies. For Foucault the population was understood most importantly as a resource for the state. Regulating the human body was the way to ensure a productive state. In a Foucauldian sense the participants are now valuable, because their bodies are made productive.⁹⁰ To enhance a 'before and after' effect they show a lot of the 'before' bodies in this last episode to offer a direct comparison with the 'after' bodies. Foremost they make use of 'before and after' photographs (Fig. 5). By putting these photographs directly next to each other the transformation of these subjects is made more visible. It is notable however, that they have improved the lighting on the 'after' photographs to enhance the contrast even more. Besides

⁸⁹ Besley, "Truth Telling," 85.

⁹⁰ Danaher, Schirato and Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, 83.

these photographs, they also integrate videos to make a visual comparison. This segment starts with a 'before' video of the first time they failed to run even a mile, which is supported by slow and sad music and has a dark colour filter. The 'after' video is contrastively accompanied by epic music and slow motion images as they cross the finish, which might associate the participants with heroes or champions.

As a result of this transformation the relationship between expert and participant also changes during the course of the show. The authoritative gaze of the experts on the 'bad' self of the participant I discussed before has now changed into a physically standing up and applauding the participants' new self. Comparing figure 3 and 6 also shows a contrast in the distance between the experts and participant and consequently the direction of their gaze. In the last episode there is less distance created between them. It also means that the angle of their gaze has changed. The expert in figure 6 therefore even seems to look up to the participant. I have added figure 7 to illustrate the difference with the first episode. These changes might signal that the relation has become more equal.



Fig. 6 Operatie NL Fit: weigh-in. Episode 10, 21:18min.
(Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014.
<http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1641009>).



Fig. 7 Operatie NL Fit: weigh-in. Episode 1, 39:35min.
(Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014.
<http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991>).

The excerpt I analyse next captures the new relationship established between participant and expert on a linguistic level. During the weigh-in ceremonies in the last episode, the experts congratulate every contestant and give them further advice if needed. In this excerpt the dietician personally congratulates Gwenda.

EXCERPT 3⁹¹

1. DIETICIAN: Ja fantastisch
2. Ik heb heel veel respect
3. en ik vind het ontzettend goed dat je het zo knap hebt gedaan.
4. en dat je hebt doorgezet.
5. Want het is niet altijd even makkelijk voor je geweest.
6. Je was sommige momenten onzeker en had niet alle zelfvertrouwen
7. En als ik nu naar jou kijk
8. zie ik een fantastisch mooie vrouw staan
9. een hele leuke moeder, en een ontzettend fijne vrouw voor Willem.
10. Ik wens je ontzettend veel succes verder.
11. GWENDA: Dankjewel Anja.

Firstly, in the first episode the dietician created a sort of collective responsibility for her and the participants by constantly using *we*. Now she fully accounts responsibility to Gwenda by using the pronoun *you* (“jij”). She accounts all of Gwenda’s achievements to be her own and not of the dietician. The responsibility for her health is shifting from the professional expert towards herself. However, earlier scenes actually show how Gwenda only *pulled through* (“doorgezet”) because of support by the experts, but this is excluded from her achievements in this scene. If the dietician would have included this in her speech she would have devalued the transformation. Secondly, the relationship has changed into a more informal and equal one. The intonation of the expert is much lighter and her pace of talk is much faster than before. In every weigh-in ceremony of the last episode they are granted *respect* from the experts (line 2). They are no longer addressed as irresponsible problematic subjects, who supposedly did not earn respect. The pedagogical relationship has lessened, as the distance between them is visually and linguistically lessening.

The way the participants are now addressed by the experts establishes them as self-governing subjects who are now knowledgeable enough to conduct themselves. They are no longer associated with self-destructiveness and passiveness, in language and in image. With Stauff, we can read this television show functioning as a technology of governance and teaching the participants technologies of the self.⁹² The role that the Dutch state has envisaged for itself, in which citizens are more dependent on themselves than the state, is being reinforced and constituted through this show. The show is therefore acting as an “(...) instructional device that encourages self-responsibility, self-entrepreneurialism, and self-improvement as a neo-liberal form of governance” through constituting passive subjects as ‘problematic’, promoting active and entrepreneurial ways of behaving and living and celebrating the ideal subject through a ‘before and after’ effect.⁹³

⁹¹ “Operatie NL Fit”, *Operatie NL Fit*, 07”51 – 08”17, November 8, 2013, accessed March 24, http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1641009/.

⁹² Stauff, “Governmentality of Media,” 263.

⁹³ Bratich, *Reality Programming and Control Societies*, 67.



6. The expert

The 'expert' is a common part of a lot of reality television shows, and according Ouellette and Hay a crucial part of 'intervention TV':

"Life intervention" is the term we use to describe these programmes, which mobilize professional motivators and lifestyle experts, from financial advisors to life coaches, to help people to overcome hurdles in their personal, professional, and domestic lives.⁹⁴

According to Powel and Prasad, these experts not only stimulate the transformation of the subjects, but also offer specific choices during this process, which enhances the chances of a successful transformation.⁹⁵ Ouellette and Hay understand this implementation of professional experts as an aspect of the neo-liberalisation of social work through reality TV. They see them as an integral part of governing through 'freedom'.⁹⁶ However, the function of the experts points to a certain paradox within these programmes, because they hold an authoritative role while simultaneously contributing to the production of 'free' self-reliant subjects.⁹⁷ As discussed, Foucault explains how the development of the human sciences has enhanced expert knowledge on how to analyse and regulate the human subject, how to 'control at a distance'.⁹⁸ As Barker points out in his reading of Foucault, individual subjects are not left to themselves to learn how to take care of themselves. Their consciousness needs to be raised by the involvement of expertise.⁹⁹ Therefore I understand the experts in reality intervention TV to be a crucial aspect of television's ability to 'control at a distance'. I will start by analysing how the professionals in OPERATIE NL FIT are actually discursively constructed as 'experts' and what strategies are used to constitute their field of expertise. The scenes have been selected from the first episode, because this is the first 'official' introduction to the experts. In addition to that I will analyse how this expertise is constituted as important for the success of the transformation process.

⁹⁴ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 63.

⁹⁵ Helen Powell and Sylvie Prasad, "Life Swap: Celebrity Expert as Lifestyle Adviser," in *Makeover Television, Realities Remodelled*, ed. Dana Heller, 56-66 (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2007), 60.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹⁸ John Coveney, "The Government and Ethics of Health Promotion: The Importance of Michel Foucault," *Health Education Research* 13, no. 3 (1998):461.

⁹⁹ Philip Barker, *Michel Foucault: Subversions of the Subject* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994), 196.



6.1 Experts and expertise

In OPERATIE NL FIT there are three different professionals with three different expertises presented to the participants and to the public. In the next excerpt taken from the first episode they get ‘officially’ introduced to the viewer for the first time by the presenter in a voice-over.

EXCERPT 4¹⁰⁰

1. PRESENTER: De kandidaten worden begeleid door drie coaches.
2. Oswin Beingsick,
3. boegbeeld van de nieuwe generatie personal trainers in Nederland.
4. TRAINER: Train het, want je lichaam is je eigen trofee.
5. PRESENTER: De ervaren voedingscoach Anja Bastings,
6. gespecialiseerd in voeding en gewicht.
7. DIETICIAN: Kijk niet naar wat je niet mag, maar kijk naar wat je wel mag.
8. PRESENTER: En, Steven Pont,
9. succesvol ontwikkelingspsycholoog, mediator en relatie- en gezinstherapeut.
10. PSYCH: Maak je niet alleen druk om wát je eet, maar uiteindelijk ook wáárom je eet.

This first introduction to the experts immediately constitutes the different areas of expertise that will be called upon to transform the individuals. The personal trainer will obviously focus on fitness and the nutrition coach will concentrate on eating habits. Additionally, this programme puts emphasis on a transformation of the mind of the subject on a mental level by including a psychologist. The three different areas are repeatedly emphasized in every episode during the weigh-in ceremony. The experts sit behind their desk and evaluate the progress of the candidate in their area of expertise. The differentiation between these areas is even emphasized in the often repeated slogan of the show: “Train mee, Eet mee, Leef mee” (Take part in training, in eating and in living). These three areas of expertise resonate with Foucault’s idea of body politics.¹⁰¹ Foucault explains how the state thought of its citizens “not as ends in themselves (with rights and duties), but as resources which had to be used and taken care of in their everyday activities.”¹⁰² Their bodies and behaviour needed to be ideal to be productive for the state and therefore need to be analysed and regulated to create productive subjects.¹⁰³

In this short excerpt their expertise is legitimized linguistically and visually.

Linguistically we can note that the presenter puts a lot of emphasis on the experience of the professionals. The personal trainer is *figurehead* (“boegbeeld”) in his line of field, the dietician is *experienced* (“ervaren”) and *specialized* (“gespecialiseerd”) in specific areas of expertise and the psychologist is *successful* (“succesvol”). The emphasis on these positive and powerful traits

¹⁰⁰ “Aflevering 1 – Operatie NL Fit,” *Operatie NL Fit*, 04” 47- 05” 16, September 7, 2013, accessed March 21, http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991.

¹⁰¹ Danaher, Schirato and Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, 83.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 83.



gives more power to the authority of these professionals. Emphasis is also put on their official titles, as they would be used in their professional careers in the real world: *personal trainer*, *nutrition coach* (“voedingscoach”) and *development psychologist, mediator and relation and family therapist* (“ontwikkelingspsycholoog, mediator en relatie- en gezinstherapeut”). By giving notion to their status outside of the realm of the show they seem to gain even more authority. These official titles are also simultaneously visually emphasized at the bottom of the screen during their introduction (Fig. 8). Additionally they are staged on a red carpet and framed in the center of the screen. In this case the lights on either side of the personal trainer literally put him in the spotlight as an important powerful figure of the show. Authority also speaks from their gestures and body language. The personal trainer’s body posture seems steady and strong, which reinforces his authority and knowledge of the body. In addition to that, when the nutrition coach points her finger at the viewer she seems to take the role of a teacher (Fig. 9). This reinforces her possession of knowledge, as a teacher is inherently associated with knowledge and authority.



Fig. 8 Operatie NL Fit: Intro expert. Episode 1, 04:50min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991>).



Fig. 9 Operatie NL Fit: Intro expert. Episode 1, 05:04min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640991>).

Additionally, the three reactions of the professionals are all aimed at the viewer as they are talking directly into the camera (line 4, 7 and 10; Fig. 9). Their reactions consist of general guidelines which everyone should live by. These are not so much suggestions, but orders, because they are presented in imperative sentences (“Train het,” “Kijk niet” and “Maak je”). Their expertise which was already established by the presenter (and discussed above) is directly made apparent by sharing some of their expert knowledge with the public. They directly address the audience to follow their rules. However, earlier I mentioned how the experts try to keep their distance and not dictate. This is still the case as I see the presenter foregrounding their role as *coaches* who will *guide* (“begeleid”) the candidates, by leading with this statement in the introduction. In relation to the other sentences, this sentence is foregrounded and therefore might seem to capture their overall role. The use of vocabulary in



this sentence represents the experts more as motivators which contrasts with the authoritative and more disciplinary role they seem to represent in the rest of the media text. In this sentence they are presented as guiders instead of teachers, even though in the rest of the text they are simultaneously presented as having the professional expertise and authority to order the candidates how to behave. By foregrounding the role of coach in this first sentence the show seems to emphasize the expert's role of coach. A coach has less disciplinary power than a teacher and only offers specific choices to steer the subjects in the right direction. I pointed before to the paradox the role of the experts that Ouellette and Hay note within these intervention programmes. On the one hand they represent an authority, but in an ideal neo-liberal way of governing they can only contribute by offering guidance and install a sense of self-accountability.¹⁰⁴ I see this paradox at work in this programme as authority is being established, while simultaneously being backgrounded to stimulate self-governing subjects.

6.2 Surveillance

This paradox brings up the question that I addressed earlier on the notion of 'freedom' within these governing techniques. The subjects in this case have volunteered to transform themselves and become self-governing subjects, but to do this they are put under 24/7 surveillance by the show, the experts and their own environment. Every choice, every success, but also every misbehaviour can be recorded by the show or spotted by people in their environment. According to Foucault surveillance techniques have become an important part of life in the modern state.¹⁰⁵ He refers to Bentham's model of the Panopticon, a prison with a tower in the middle from which guards were able to observe every prisoner without being seen by the prisoners. Prisoners were never able to know when they were being observed and thus adjusted their behaviour at all times.¹⁰⁶ This model of the Panopticon with its surveillance techniques seems paradoxical in a connection to Foucault's concept of governmentality. How can the 'freedom' that is desired in liberalism be bound up with a disciplinary measure like surveillance? For Foucault this kind of gaze is not just confined to prisons or specific institutions, but is even "the very formula of liberal government."¹⁰⁷ He understands surveillance as a regulation that actually creates 'freedom'.¹⁰⁸ According to Nicholas Gane many theorists have not made this connection yet, but he understands Foucault's lectures on

¹⁰⁴ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 65.

¹⁰⁵ Danaher, Schirato and Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, 54.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 67.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*



biopolitics to explain that: “Neoliberalism is not simply about deregulation, privatization or governing through freedom, but also about intervention and regulation.”¹⁰⁹ Foucault argues that the State in the case of economic or politics may intervene to guarantee and protect the ‘freedom’ of the market.¹¹⁰ Surveillance is a specific form of discipline as part of governmental strategies.¹¹¹ I argue that these surveillance techniques are at work in OPERATIE NL FIT through the presence of the experts. They can intervene and regulate the choices made by the participants whenever they seem to get off the desired track. Ouellette and Hay note that: “Through television the self becomes something that can be studied, reflected upon, surveilled and therefore recalibrated.”¹¹² The experts in OPERATIE NL FIT are an important part of these surveillance techniques.

I will examine in what ways the expert functions as an agent of surveillance in OPERATIE NL FIT and what kind of subject the show is attempting to produce through this technique. Every week, the experts evaluate the recorded images of the participants, but also do several home visits or webcam sessions to offer more guidance where needed. These aspects of surveillance are most overt in the relationship between Rob and the dietician throughout the entire show. He has trouble following his nutrition plan and seems to get more home visits, personal e-mails and phone calls from the experts than the other four participants. The next excerpt is taken from the fifth episode and is part of the individual segment of Rob’s week. In the fourth episode he was judged by the dietician, because he rewarded his children with (fatty) food. In the following excerpt Rob has a discussion with his wife, Kitty, about how to reward their children.¹¹³ The private affair of raising of their children has become an element which the experts try to surveil and transform. Bratich notes how in reality TV the private sphere finds itself as a target of surveillance; reality TV intervenes in the private lives of subjects.¹¹⁴ During the discussion I notice an important change of shots. At the start of the discussion the camera shoots from outside of the house looking through the window. The shots then change to inside shots. This cinematographic choice can imply how the show, and the viewer, is moving in and intervening in the private life of Rob (Fig. 10 and 11). They are literally under surveillance by the camera in this scene. With the following excerpt I will analyse how their discussion in this scene is part of the surveillance ‘apparatus’.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Nicholas Gane, “The Governmentalities of Neoliberalism: Panopticism, Post-Panopticism and Beyond,” *The Sociological Review* 60 (2012): 629.

¹¹⁰ Gane, “Panopticism,” 630.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 629.

¹¹² Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 97.

¹¹³ This starts at line 6, because line 1 to 5 are a summary of the events of last week.

¹¹⁴ Bratich, *Reality Programming and Control Societies*, 66.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*





Fig. 10 Operatie NL Fit: discussion. Episode 5, 14:16min.
(Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014.
< http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640999>).



Fig. 11 Operatie NL Fit: discussion. Episode 5, 14:20min.
(Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014.
< http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640999>).

EXCERPT 5¹¹⁶

1. PRESENTER: Vorige week beloonde Rob zijn zoontje Robin met een frietje
2. en werd daarvoor op zijn vingers getikt door voedingsdeskundige Anja. (*voice over*)
3. DIETICIAN: Maar waarom beloon je hem met frietjes?
4. Je zou ook iets anders kunnen verzinnen.
5. ROB: Nou dat was toen ook nog een beetje eigen belang.
6. PRESENTER: 's Avonds krijgen Rob en Kitty een bericht van Anja,
7. waarin ze hun opnieuw stimuleert hun kinderen op een andere manier
8. dan met friet te belonen. (*voice over*)
9. ROB: Ze hebben misschien wel een punt
10. en ik vind ook dat je het niet altijd moet belonen met eten.
11. En dat doen wij ook absoluut niet.
12. We gaan echt niet altijd belonen met eten,
13. maar laten we even naar de realiteit gaan van de wereld.
14. Roken is ook niet goed.
15. En zo heb je zo heel veel dingen die niet goed zijn.
16. KITTY: Nou er zijn ook wel andere manieren om te belonen.
17. Ja dat is wel.
18. Bij jou is het wel altijd meteen: eten.
19. ROB: Wás altijd met eten
20. Nu beloon ik mezelf met een wortel.
21. KITTY: Ja dat doe je zelf, maar ik heb het nu over de kinderen.
22. Je kan ook zeggen: "nou hey heel goed,
23. weet je wat, gaan we straks op het veld voetballen."
24. ROB: Even heel reëel he.
25. Hoe vaak eten wij slecht?
26. KITTY: Nu sowieso niet.
27. ROB: Nee maar dat gaan we ook niet meer doen
28. Wij gaan terug naar de basis van 1 keer snacken in de week.
29. En ik weet, dat zullen ze wel niet meer mee eens zijn.
30. Want die zeggen: "nee dat moet je 1 keer in de maand doen."

This scene exemplifies how the expert is present as an agent of surveillance in language and image even though she is not present on camera. Rob and Kitty have a discussion in the privacy of their own home, but Rob does account for the experts as present surveilling agents in his language and body. He anticipates the guidelines he would get when he gives a direct quote of their anticipated reaction: *no, you have to do that once a month* ("nee dat moet je 1 keer in de maand doen"). At the same time he lifts up his hands, which is a sign of surrender

¹¹⁶ "Afllevering 5 – Operatie NL Fit," *Operatie NL Fit*, 13'36 – 14'52, October 3, 2013, accessed March 23, http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640999/.

(Fig. 12). He anticipates the experts to give him orders on how to behave and physically surrenders to them without them even being present.



Fig. 12 Operatie NL Fit: discussion. Episode 5, 14:47min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. < http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1640999>).

However what is even more notable is that this gesture is in this case physically directed at his wife. This actually corresponds with my next point. I argue that Kitty takes up the language of the dietician and represents the expert's role as agent of surveillance in this discussion. Rose claims:

Discourses on health promotion—like those on other aspects of human improvement—govern at a distance by ensuring that subjects are bound into the language of expertise at the very moment they are assured of their freedom and autonomy.¹¹⁷

Rose thus argues that subjects can have 'freedom' of choice when they embed the language of expertise into their own lives. Rob and Kitty can have this discussion because they see themselves as free and autonomous to discuss their own decisions which relate to their private sphere. However, their choices are influenced and governed from a distance by the expert knowledge as Kitty has integrated the expert's language into her own. In the episode prior to this one the dietician literally advised: *You could also come up with something else* ("je kunt ook iets anders verzinnen"). This translates to line 16 where Kitty says: *There are also other options* ("Er zijn ook andere manieren"). In line 17 she says: *Yeah that is right* ("Ja dat is wel") as to agree with her own statement. However, this statement of the dietician has been integrated into her language, which she has now made her own. She is governing herself and surveilling Rob within the discourse of health that the expert provided. Rob and Kitty test their decisions, their conduct, to the guidelines set out by the expertise of the experts. Their feeling of a certain presence of the expert during their discussion guides their behaviour in the right direction (the Panopticon).

¹¹⁷ Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990), 203.

Rob is not making the ‘right’ choices and following the guidelines of the experts, as is shown in the fifth episode. As a result, surveillance is heightened through personal e-mails and home visits by the experts. The e-mails and home visits are part of the surveilling role of the dietician to encourage Rob even more to pursue to take care of himself: stimulate technologies of the self. The expert reduces the distance at which she is governing, because Rob needs more guidance. Here it becomes clear that a subject is only ‘free’ when his decisions fit in with the desired ones of the show (or the state). Even though the experts govern Rob from less distance through heightened surveillance, they still aim for his self-accountability. The next excerpt is from episode six during Rob’s weigh-in ceremonies. He is actually the first captain who has already reached the initial goal, set by the experts, of a 10 percent weight loss. However, the dietician apparently does not feel that Rob’s physical transformation exemplifies a full transformation into a self-governing subject and puts his self-accountability to the test. The authority of the experts is once again visible, because a successful transformation exclusively depends on their final assessments (of all three fields).

EXCERPT 6¹¹⁸

1. DIETICIAN: Wat zou je dit weekend het liefst willen eten Rob?
2. PRESENTER: Nou ik denk dat ik het wel weet.
3. ROB: Hahaha ja, wil jij het zeggen?
4. PRESENTER: Een frietje
5. ROB: Een supertje.
6. PRESENTER: Jij pakt wel meteen alles erbij, ik dacht gewoon 1 frietje.
7. ROB: Nee dan gaan we meteen..hey hallo, natuurlijk.
8. DIETICIAN: Zou je dat willen Rob?
9. ROB: Een supertje? Ja graag, als dat mag.
10. DIETICIAN: Ja van mij mag alles, dat is jouw verantwoordelijkheid, niet de mijne.
11. Nogmaals, als jij daarvoor kiest mag je dat best doen.
12. ROB: Ha gaaf, Anja dankjewel.
13. DIETICIAN: Nee, nogmaals. Niet ik neem die verantwoordelijkheid,
14. Jij neemt hem zelf.
15. Als jij denkt dat dat in jouw eetpatroon nu een keer moet kunnen
16. moet je dat doen.
17. Het is jouw keus, niet de mijne.
18. PRESENTER: Oeh, het voelt nu wel weer zoals mijn moeder zo iets zei.
19. ROB: Ja zo iets van: en da volgende week zullen wij wel zien, ha-ha.
20. PRESENTER: Je moet het zelf weten.
21. DIETICIAN: Inderdaad Art, je moet het zelf weten.
22. En dan ben ik niet jouw moeder.
23. PRESENTER: Denk er maar over na Rob.

After establishing his physical success the dietician asks Rob what he *wants to* (“wil”) eat this weekend. When he answers that he would like a big bag of fries (line 5) she asks again: *Would you want that?* (“Zou je dat willen?”). By asking him what he *wants* she is testing if he has

¹¹⁸ “Aflevering 6 – Operatie NL Fit,” *Operatie NL Fit*, 23”28 – 24”24, October 11, 2013, accessed March 23, http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/AVRO_1641001/.



integrated her guidelines and expertise in his own life. If what he *wants* is now equal to what she has advised the expert can leave him to be more ‘free’ in his choices. Rob seems to not yet feel free and autonomous as he immediately asks for her permission (line 9). She responds by telling him that he can do whatever he chooses, because it is his responsibility. As the dietician governs at a distance she does not tell him exactly what to do even though he is asking for her expert opinion. Instead she tries to stimulate his self-accountability, which is overt in the constant use of *you* (“jij”) and *your* (“jouw”). She repeats several times how she is not taking responsibility (“Niet ik neem die verantwoordelijkheid”) to stimulate him to be proactive and ‘free’ in his decision. As discussed earlier, for Rose, ‘freedom’ of subjects exists as a strategy for technologies of the self.¹¹⁹ By testing the subject’s own choices the expert can assess how much ‘freedom’ he can be granted as he needs to be free in specific governed ways.¹²⁰ The paradox between surveillance and ‘freedom’ comes into play here. Rob is asked to make a decision himself, while being aware of the fact that this decision will be under surveillance by the cameras. In the model of the Panopticon this should stimulate the participant to make the right decision without direct interference by an authority, like the experts. Rob’s ‘freedom’ of choice is being utilized for a neo-liberal objective of the constitution of a responsible citizen: “In one’s ability to practice freedom well and responsibly and in one’s reliance upon the technologies of the self one becomes a good conductor of power.”¹²¹ Taking this into account the participant will only be able to empower himself if he makes the desired decisions, following the expert’s guidelines.

7. The multi-platform approach

OPERATIE NL FIT’s self-proclaimed ultimate goal is to activate the Dutch population to get healthier and fitter.¹²² The viewer is often addressed directly through the TV show (not only by the experts, but also by the captains). However, Ouellette and Hay state that even though reality television is made integral to the project of transforming citizens, it is only one part of several cultural technologies that are made available. The TV programme is often expanded to websites, tie-in merchandise, DVD’s etcetera.¹²³ OPERATIE NL FIT has expanded on several levels,

¹¹⁹ Rose, O’Malley and Valverde, “Governmentality,” 11-12.

¹²⁰ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 12.

¹²¹ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 15.

¹²² “Operatie NL Fit,” *Operatie NL Fit*, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/>.

¹²³ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 84.



including an interactive website, an exercise workbook, podcasts and tie-in merchandise.¹²⁴ This multi-platform approach is a very important strategy for OPERATIE NL FIT to reach its self-proclaimed goal of a big and active audience. During the show the viewer is invited to actively participate and be part of a self-empowering transformation. The multi-platform approach that OPERATIE NL FIT has implemented can create a multilayered viewing experience according to Ouellette and Hay. “It enables the TV viewer to engage more directly with the techniques of the self that are demonstrated on camera.”¹²⁵ The multi-platform approach is used to mobilize the viewer to work on themselves and be steered in the ‘right’ direction. To Ouellette and Hay an interactive website with recipes, dieting plans, exercise videos, blogs and video diaries extends the suggestion for techniques of the self and stimulates the personal responsibility of viewers.¹²⁶ I will start this chapter by examining the role the production context plays in this show, but more specifically in its multi-platform approach. This is important as many earlier research has been focused on reality TV on commercial channels and not yet public service channels. I will address how the multi-platform approach is part of a particular strategy of public service broadcasting and how it can address viewers to steer them in a desired direction. Then I will do a textual, stylistic and formal analysis on the lay-out of the website, the video’s posted on it and the messages found on several social media channels the programme utilizes. This will answer my question of how the programme’s multi-platform approach contributes to constituting a specific subjectivity for the viewer.

7.1 Public service broadcasting

It is important to discuss the production context of this show concerning its public service aspect, as many research on reality TV and governmentality has been concerned with commercial broadcasting. The public service aspect can have several implications for the claims that have been made about television as a technology of governing. It is important to examine in what kind of market logic these life interventions are realized. Ouellette and Hay put a lot of emphasis on the lack of a direct connection between television and the official government. They argue that commercial TV can therefore take up a persuasive role, because their authority is not sanctioned by the state, but by a free market which relies on “supply and demand”.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ “Operatie NL Fit,” *Operatie NL Fit*, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/>.

¹²⁵ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 85.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.



Ouellette and Hay, by referring to Rose, claim:

Cultural technologies are integral to modern approaches to governing precisely because they can translate the particular goals of ruler and authorities into diffuse guidelines for living with no obvious connection to official government, formal laws or regulatory procedures.¹²⁸

Television is part of what Rose here calls cultural technologies. But Ouellette and Hay frame this argument in the context of privatization and are therefore referring purely to commercial television as an informal way of governing.¹²⁹ Moreover, their direct approach of Intervention TV states: “Life interventions operate within the cultural economy of commercial television.”¹³⁰ However, OPERATIE NL FIT is shown on Dutch public service broadcasting (from now on PSB) and has more direct connections to the official government. Dutch PSB is financed by the state and OPERATIE NL FIT itself is sponsored by the Covenant Gezond Gewicht, which was also set up by the state. Following Ouellette and Hay, this show may seem less governing at a distance in a neo-liberal sense as it is directly stimulated by the official government. However, in the television show itself and on the multiple platforms there are no obvious connections made with the state. I approach this show and its public service context as the cultural technologies Rose discusses. The show takes distance from the official government and does not refer to any official regulations. At the same time this public service context might even offer more opportunities for a neo-liberalist ideal of a self-governing population. According to Syvertsen the main characteristic of PSB in the digital age is its capacity to address an entire country instead of more targeted broadcasting in commercial broadcasting.¹³¹ Additionally, Enli argues that PSB addresses the viewer more as citizens than consumers and enables the viewers to partake in society. A neo-liberal ideal of active entrepreneurial subjects in society might therefore be easier constituted and reinforced through PSB. I will not be able to consider the ways in which actual people incorporate the techniques into their own lives, because this does not fit within the limits of this thesis. Hence, my question will be limited to an intended viewer, by examining how the viewer is addressed via the multiple platforms. I will examine how the participative multi-platform approach of OPERATIE NL FIT reflects how PSB addresses its viewer and how it creates a specific notion of the self.

¹²⁸ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 67

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹³¹ Trine Syvertsen, “The Many Uses of the Public Service Concept”, *Nordicom Review* 20, no.1 (1999): 10.



A multi-platform approach has been discussed in the context of public service broadcasting (PSB) by Enli as cultivating the relationship between public broadcasters and their audiences.¹³² Enli argues that this strategy reflects that public service broadcasters seek to have a big audience, but also be an alternative to commercial broadcasting in its content.¹³³ Traditionally they want to address the public as citizens not as consumers, like commercial channels, and add an educational or ethical value to their programmes. Syvertsen claims that in earlier forms, PSB had been against audience participation because they found this too commercial and populist.¹³⁴ However, Enli examines how participation has become an important new venture in PSB to keep up with commercial channels in market shares.¹³⁵ OPERATIE NL FIT was broadcast on public service TV and its multi-platform participatory approach can be seen as a strategy of Dutch PSB to boost market shares. In the 2012 year rapport of the AVRO they state several successes they have made with the implementation of a multi-platform approach of several programmes and stress the importance of this approach for the TV viewer: “We show how we go further than radio and television. That we challenge people to participate themselves and to create themselves.”¹³⁶ (translated) They claim that a multi-platform approach will be able to activate the population.

7.2 Multiple platforms

OPERATIE NL FIT makes use of several different platforms, including a radio show, tie-in merchandise, a website, Facebook and Twitter. In *Convergence Culture* Henry Jenkins argues that the combination of old and new media, and between new media, can offer new opportunities and forms of participation.¹³⁷ He claims that the new media platforms can add an aspect of interactivity to a medium like television.¹³⁸ Therefore I will only focus on these new media platforms. My textual, formal and stylistic analysis of these platforms will be restricted to one video on the website, the lay-out of a personalized page and some comments on Facebook and Twitter. The video contains a lesson of one of the experts and can say more about the relation between expert and viewer. The lay-out of the personalized page, which I

¹³² Enli, “Redefining PSB,” 105.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹³⁴ Trine Syvertsen, “Citizens, Consumers, Customers and Players: A Conceptual Discussion of the Relationship between the Broadcasters and their Publics,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no.3 (2004): 372.

¹³⁵ Enli, “Redefining PSB,” 108.

¹³⁶ AVRO, “Jaarverslag 2012 AVRO,” AVRO, accessed March 23, <https://avro.nl/Avro/Verantwoording/>. “We laten zien dat we verder gaan dan radio en televisie. Dat we mensen uitdagen om zelf mee te doen en zelf te creëren.”

¹³⁷ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

¹³⁸ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 249.



will discuss in detail later, will shed light on the relation between the captains and the viewer. Thirdly I will focus on the social media platforms, because they offer a more direct ‘conversation’ between the show and its viewers. However, a lot of elements of the website, like the blogs and personal pages of the captains will be left out of this analysis to keep it manageable within the limits of this thesis.

To make the transformation process more accessible to the viewer the show is extended with a website. The website offers the exact nutrition and exercise plans the experts have set out. For every day there are breakfast, lunch and dinner recipes, further explained by the dietician in a video, and a daily work-out video of the personal trainer. Every video of the dietician (or the personal trainer) has the same setting, cinematography and way of addressing the viewer. Thus it is enough for my analysis to only discuss one video. The next excerpt consists out of one of the recipe videos. The videos are always shot in what looks to be the private home of the dietician (Fig. 13). The expert is dressed casually and standing behind a kitchen counter as to represent an “everyday” domestic situation. This mise-en-scène addresses the viewers as “everyday people” and especially as members of a family. More specifically, the videos seem to be aimed at families with children, as in the attached written recipe instructions the ingredients are said to be for four persons.¹³⁹



Fig. 13 Operatie NL Fit: recipe video. Website, 00:03min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. < http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/operatienlfit_recept_roerbak_minikrieltjes/recepten >).



Fig. 14 Operatie NL Fit: recipe video. Website, 00:45min. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. < http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/operatienlfit_recept_roerbak_minikrieltjes/recepten >).

The recipes are all quite easy. They consist of ingredients that can be found in any supermarket and are explained in such detail that any viewer should have no difficulty cooking them. The expert’s vocabulary is more drawn from ordinary language, informal conversational language, than from a professional one. She does not use professional cooking terms, but presents the recipes as simple as possible: *add* (“voeg..toe”), *stir* (“roer..om”) and *strain* (“giet af”). The delivery is slow and measured, which shows a considerable effort to make sure that everything is clear and comprehensible. She guides the viewer through every single step.

¹³⁹ “Recept Roerbak Minikrieltjes,” *Operatie NL Fit*, October 16, 2013, accessed March 3, http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/Player/operatienlfit_recept_roerbak_minikrieltjes/recepten.

EXCERPT 7¹⁴⁰

1. DIETICIAN: Vandaag eten we een keer krielaardappeltjes,
2. en dat is lang niet zo'n dikmaker als dat je denkt,
3. en roerbakgroente.
4. We gebruiken hier 400 gram tartaar, 1 schaaltje taugé,
5. 250 gram verse champignons, een rode ui, verse knoflook of poedervorm,
6. kerrie naar eigen smaak en 300 gram voorgekookte krielaardappeltjes.
7. We doen de tartaar in de pan, zonder olie.
8. En we rullen deze. En giet overtollig vet of olie af.
9. Voeg daarna de geperste en gesneden knoflook toe
10. of pak gewoon lekker makkelijk knoflookpoeder.
11. Doe de voorgekookte krielaardappeltjes bij de tartaar
12. en roer dit even om.
13. Voeg daarna de ui en de champignons toe.
14. Voeg als laatste de taugé toe
15. en naar smaak, naar jouw eigen smaak, de peper, zout en de kerrie.
16. Ja, roerbakgroente met krielaardappeltjes.
17. Lekker met een beetje sla erbij.
18. Smakelijk eten.

Each of the steps is simultaneously expressed through words and image. When she notes a new action, the image immediately shows this action in a close-up. If she instructs the viewer to stir something (line 12), we see a close-up of her hand stirring in the pot (Fig. 14).

Cumulatively, all these aspects establish a teacher-learner relationship between expert and audience. With the constant use of the pronoun *we*, as she is explaining her actions, she tries to constitute a personal relationship with the viewer. The dietician presents the cooking process as if she is performing the steps simultaneously with the intended viewer. The use of imperative sentences like *add to* (“voeg toe”) and *stir* (“roer om”) indicates that she expects action from the viewer. By making the expert’s guidelines so easily accessible the viewer might be stimulated more to take action. Every choice, every decision is mapped out for them to follow. The threshold is set low in this video, because the whole population should be able to participate.

This scene offers a problem with the theoretical viewers that Ouellette and Hay describe. They state that: “The human subjects addressed by the interventions are typically presented as less knowledgeable and less personally motivated than the imagined TV audience.”¹⁴¹ According to them this causes the viewers to put themselves above the individuals, who are portrayed as risky “others”.¹⁴² However, in this case I argue that the viewer is addressed as less knowledgeable than the captains. They need step-by-step guidance, which seems more controlled than the guidance given to the participants in the show. This enhances my earlier claim that less knowledgeable people will be less ‘free’. The viewer cannot be put under supervision by the experts like the participants in the show. They

¹⁴⁰ “Recept Roerbak Minikrieltjes,” *Operatie NL Fit*.

¹⁴¹ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 65.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 66.



are the 'risky' individuals in this case as they cannot be surveilled in the same way. If they choose to participate they have to get set guidelines, as the experts will not be able to check if they are motivated and self-governing subjects enough to make their own decisions. In the detailed recipes we see that they are almost led by hand to follow specific guidelines.

An important aspect of this multi-platform approach is that the viewers are not just addressed as one audience, but also as individuals. According to Enli the multi-platform approach can "(...) not only offer the audience a collective experience, but also individual feedback and ranking."¹⁴³ This resonates with Foucault's idea of governmentality I mentioned before, in that the state is both individualizing and totalizing.¹⁴⁴ On the OPERATIE NL FIT website the viewer/individual is invited to make a page for themselves called 'Mijn NL Fit' which tracks their individual process and is only accessible to them.¹⁴⁵ To participate they choose one specific captain which fits in with their own lifestyle to follow as their personal coach. As a result they can not only track their own process, but also compare it to their captain. I have put an example of such an individual page below (Fig. 15).

On this page the individual weight loss process is presented as a game. The individual and the captain are represented by a different color. This fits into a game discourse where competitors often represent opposite sides through different colors. There is a constant comparison made between the individual and the captain. The graphic with the (intended) descending line to represent weight loss enhances the idea of some kind of race against each other. The viewer has now become an active 'player'. At the bottom of the page the 'player' can choose his or her favorite recipes and work outs. This adds an individual touch to their transformation. Additionally they are invited to compete with other people by posting their BMI's on social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter. For the 'player' this offers a showcase of their individual achievements. By focusing on their achievements through a game they are also focusing on their personal responsibility for their actions. I argue that these competitive elements implemented through a multi-platform approach address the viewer as an active and self-accountable individual.

¹⁴³ Enli, "Redefining PSB," 116.

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 782.

¹⁴⁵ "Mijn NL Fit," *Operatie NL Fit*, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/mijn/>.



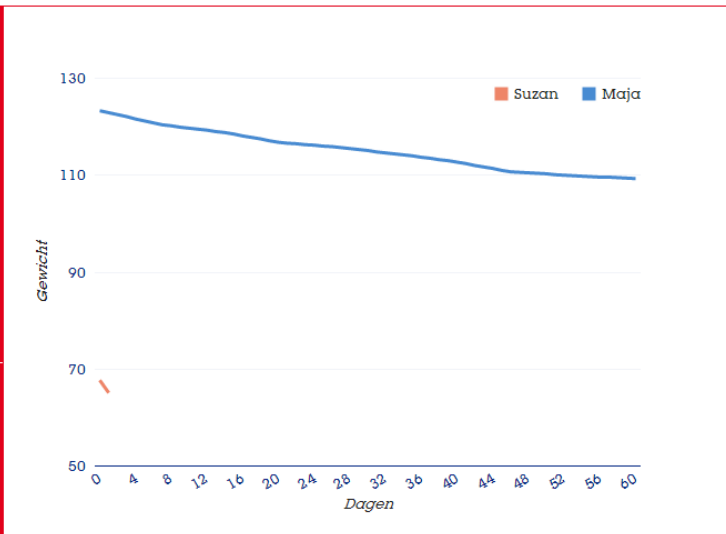
| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 21 JAAR | 67,7KG STARTGEWICHT | 2,6KG TOTAAL AFGEVALLEN | vs | 22 JAAR | 123,3KG STARTGEWICHT | 14KG TOTAAL AFGEVALLEN |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|

Gewichtsmonitor

Vul hier wekelijks je gewicht in Suzan. Vergelijk je gewichtsverlies met de voortgang van je aanvoerder Maja.

| | | |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Start gewicht | 67,7 kg | do 20 maart |
| Laatste gewicht | 65,1 kg | vr 21 maart |
| Afgevallen deze week | 2,6 kg | sinds do 20 maart |

Vul je gewicht van deze week in:



Evenementen

BMI-meter

22 Je hebt een gezond gewicht voor je lengte

Je hebt een gezond gewicht. Het is niet nodig om af te vallen.

Deel je score

Navigation: < 1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 >

Recepten Maja

Ontbijtopties | Lunchopties | **Diner**

Kipfilet, tomatensalade en aardappelen uit de oven

Kipfilet, tomatensalade en aardappelen uit de oven
Een mager stukje vlees met een heerlijk frisse salade.

[Bekijk dit recept](#)

Trainingen Maja

Training Dag 4

Training Dag 4
We gaan vandaag naar buiten. We gaan wandelen.

[Bekijk deze training](#)

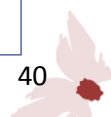
Mijn recepten ★

Je hebt nog geen favoriete recepten.
Klik bij een recept op het sterretje om deze toe te voegen aan je favorieten.

Mijn trainingen ★

Je hebt nog geen favoriete trainingen.
Klik bij een training op het sterretje om deze toe te voegen aan je favorieten.

Fig. 15 Operatie NL Fit: Mijn NL Fit. Website. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. <http://avro.nl/operatienlfit/mijn/>).



Social media offers another new media platform which, according to Jenkins, can offer new opportunities.¹⁴⁶ One of these opportunities is to spread the message of the programme even wider. On these social media platforms the viewers are invited to motivate others and reinforce the rules and guidelines posted on Facebook and Twitter by the experts and consequently the subject that the show is trying to constitute. They can share posts, like or retweet messages and spread their own tips with an NL Fit hashtag. Secondly, social media offer an opportunity for the programme to establish a more direct relation with the viewer. Enli sees this as a move from a one way communication towards a two-way democratic communication with a participatory audience.¹⁴⁷ In the TV show the participants or the experts can refer to the viewer and even address them directly. However, most of the time this will just be a one-way communication. The Twitter conversation below is an example of the relationship that can be established between the show and the viewer through digital platforms (Fig. 16).¹⁴⁸



Fig. 16 Operatie NL Fit: Twitter. Twitter. (Screenshot by Scarlet Hijmans, taken on 19.04.2014. <<https://twitter.com/OperatieNLFit>>).

The viewer showcases her achievements while the producers of the show cheer her on by responding to her message personally and applauding her achievements. Their relationship is more equal in this way as the viewer has the ‘freedom’ to give feedback on the advice that is given. According to Ouellette and Hay, discussing episodes on Facebook and Twitter, purchasing merchandise, reading biographies, watching video diaries etcetera invites the viewer to: “actively participate in the self-empowerment ethos of the program.”¹⁴⁹ By giving the viewer a voice, they are stimulated to be active. Twitter and Facebook also gives the show the possibility to address the viewer more individually than solely through the TV show. Through social media the viewer is able to get individual feedback and advice instead of just general tips for the totality of viewers. The direct relationship with the viewer established through the addition of social media platforms might therefore be seen as a surveillance technique to steer these individuals in the show’s desired direction.

¹⁴⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 249.

¹⁴⁷ Enli, “Redefining PSB,” 114.

¹⁴⁸ “Operatie NL Fit,” *Twitter*, accessed April 21, 2014, <https://twitter.com/OperatieNLFit>.

¹⁴⁹ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 85.

8. Conclusion

The main question of this thesis is how this specific public service reality television show, OPERATIE NL FIT, reinforces and constitutes specific notions of the self. I have divided this question into three specific elements/strategies: the 'before and after' effect, the expert and the multi-platform approach. Following Stauff I have approached this reality TV show as a technology of governing and the three specific strategies/elements as part of this technology.¹⁵⁰ I will describe in short the results of my analysis. Firstly, the 'before and after' effect, which is created through visual elements, but is also made apparent in the transformation of the relationship between experts and participants. Through a confessional of their 'bad' self in the first episode the obese participants are constituted as unknowing, passive and self-destructive individuals, which emphasizes their need of guidance. The celebration of their 'new' and 'improved' self in the last episode offers a contrast with the first episode to note even more which subject is 'good' and which one is 'bad' in the rationalities of the show. During the course of the show the participants are mainly empowered by the experts as they stimulate self-accountability, self-entrepreneurialism and self-improvement. The experts are shown to be a crucial aspect of television's ability to 'govern at a distance' and their differentiating fields of expertise are constituted as vital to the success of the transformation. Additionally I have addressed the show's addition of new media platforms as a strategy for stimulating the personal responsibility of its viewers and turning them into 'players'. The self-proclaimed goal of the show was to make the Dutch population healthier and fitter. Besides the focus on the population as a total, the programme has also shown in language and image to take an individual approach, which resonates with Foucault's idea of the modern state that is not just totalizing, but also individualizing.¹⁵¹

In doing a critical discourse analysis as described by Fairclough I have combined a textual analysis of specific scenes with the production context of PSB and political context concerning the role of the Dutch state. I have mainly followed the approach of Ouellette and Hay in using Foucauldian concepts to examine the relationship between this reality TV show and the neo-liberal ideas of 'governing at a distance'.¹⁵² However, I have attempted to broaden this research with a Dutch context by focusing on its political context. In my theoretical framework I have proposed to analyse television, and more specifically reality TV, as simultaneously intervening and representing reality. Following Stauff, (reality) television is not

¹⁵⁰ Stauff, "Governmentality of Media," 263.

¹⁵¹ Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 782.

¹⁵² Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 1-5.



only shaping society, but also shaped by it.¹⁵³ The political context that I have sketched out showed the distanced role the Dutch state desires to play in the Dutch ‘obesity problem’. I see this distanced role mainly reinforced through the experts of OPERATIE NL FIT. For example, approaching the experts as the guards of the Panopticon it may seem that the participants are stimulated from a distance to make the ‘right’ decisions (self-empowerment). Therefore, I see the reality of the Dutch state and the Dutch society reinforced in and shaping this programme.

Additionally I wanted to address the PSB context of the show. Ouellette and Hay are of central importance to the debate on reality TV as a neo-liberal way of governing at a distance. However, they put a lot of emphasis on the lack of a direct connection between television and official government and focus their theories on commercial broadcasting.¹⁵⁴ Having followed Ouellette and Hay in a lot of my arguments might therefore be a problematic aspect for this thesis, as it problematizes the analysis of OPERATIE NL FIT as a technology of governing and its connection to Rose and Miller’s understanding of the neo-liberal ideal of ‘governing at a distance’. As established Dutch PSB, and therefore OPERATIE NL FIT itself, has direct connections to the state. However, I have argued that at the same time this show might offer more opportunities for neo-liberalism, because of its capacity to address a wider audience and its focus on citizens instead of consumers. I suggest expanding research on neo-liberalism and reality television to public service reality TV as a more ideal technology of governing. As it does not deal with commercial pressures it might be able to focus more on activating the citizen to self-govern (be a ‘player’), than to just consume. Therefore I suggest to do further research on other PSB reality TV and compare these cases to commercial broadcasting reality TV. To analyse how PSB reality TV might activate the population more than commercial broadcasting it is also important to make an addition to my approach of CDA. As mentioned before, I have limited this thesis in certain areas, specifically its consumption context. This has resulted in the fact that my analysis of the constitution of a specific viewer has not been able to go further than establishing a mode of address. In further research it would be relevant to analyse how consumers actually received the show and combine this with the mode of address of the show to examine the role of PSB in activating the viewer.

¹⁵³ Stauff, “Governmentality of Media,” 263.

¹⁵⁴ Ouellette and Hay, *Better Living*, 66-67.



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