

* New writings and mediations in health

Health in 16 mm: health education perspectives in 1940s Brazil

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FSESP Movies - Special Service Foundation for Public Health (Fundação Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública)

Archive available at: www.arca.fiocruz.br

Distribution (on DVD): VideoSaúde - Fiocruz Distributor

The purpose of this research project was to recover a set of 16-mm films from the Special Service Foundation for Public Health (FSESP) archive. The films had been lost for several decades. The goal of the project was to recover the films physically and to describe and thematically organise the films for a digital institutional repository. This treatment would enable the subsequent release of the films and their dissemination via the Internet to researchers and society.

This archive comprises a surprising and little-known facet of Brazil's Public Health history that exemplifies the effort and investment in the production and distribution of health education films. In 1942, a collaboration between Brazil and the United States led to the creation of the Special Service for Public Health (Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública - SESP). In the making of these films, the expertise and experience of the Rockefeller Foundation was introduced to Brazil. Despite the importance of the films, a large portion of the archive was forgotten in the dark corners of Brazilian bureaucracy.

The following text communicates the results from the research project, titled "The image of health in the official discourse of the Estado Novo regime - Recovery of the film archive of the National Health Foundation", which was funded by the Induction Programme for Research and Technological Development (Programa de Indução à Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento Tecnológico) at the Institute of Communication and Information Science and Technology in Health (Instituto de Comunicação e Informação Científica e Tecnológica em Saúde - ICICT) at Fiocruz. Another result of the research was an original article, "Health education in 16 mm: audiovisual memory of the Special Service Foundation for Public Health - SESP", in the journal 'Interface'. The article was written by the group that developed the research, including Maria Cristina Soares Guimarães (PhD in Information Science; Deputy Director of ICICT), Cícera Henrique da Silva (PhD in Information Science; Coordinator of the ICICT Laboratory of Information Science and Technology in Health - LICTS), Rosinalva Alves de Souza (Master in Communication; Image and Information Officer at LICTS and ICICT Researcher), Rosemary Teixeira dos Santos (ICICT Health Video Distributor specialising in Information Science and Technology in Health) and Luiza Rosângela da Silva (PhD in Production Engineering).

The aforementioned project aimed to recover part of the SESP archive in the 16-mm audiovisual format. The project exposed an iconic imagery universe that was created to reflect and endorse a national project to consider and expose various public health issues, such as issues related to hygiene, epidemiology and nutrition care. The national project was created for different audiences and articulated ideals of citizenship, the state, illness and health across various media. The goal was to promote continuing education through the prevention and promotion of health issues.

The National Health Foundation (Fundação Nacional de Saúde - FUNASA) is the health institution that currently manages national health programmes for disease prevention and the control of endemic diseases and epidemics. FUNASA is the result of the integration of the Superintendents of Public Health Campaigns (Superintendência de Campanhas de Saúde Pública - SUCAM) and the FSESP.

When Getúlio Vargas was president during the period known as the Estado Novo, health sector reforms included the implementation of a project to modernise the state with a highly organised and ambitious communication policy. The SESP was part of those reforms and became responsible for coordinating health activities, focusing primarily on disease education and prevention. According to several historians, the agreement that established the SESP was surrounded by controversy. The programme was celebrated by some and met with suspicion by others, especially because of its "bi-national" nature. Controversy aside, the SESP is the oldest surviving public health institution in Brazil.

In the early 1940s, the third Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the American Republics was held in Rio de Janeiro; a bilateral agreement was signed between the governments of Brazil and the United States, which was known as the *Basic Agreement*. The goal of the agreement was to prepare areas of Brazil such that American military bases could be set up as part of the war effort. Initial attention was focused on improving the Amazon and Rio Doce valleys. These areas were major producers of rubber and iron, which were important raw materials for the production of military components. American soldiers were sent to military bases in Brazil, and Brazilian workers received protection from malaria and other endemic diseases. Nelson Rockefeller, the Rockefeller Foundation president, was a member of the International Health Division. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Rockefeller is credited with playing a leading role in the development of the network of agencies that allowed health education films to reach Latin America from the U.S. Following Rockefeller's recommendation, the Office for the Coordination of Trade Relations between American Republics was created. Rockefeller was appointed director, and in 1942, the U.S. Congress approved the creation of the Institute of Inter-American Affairs (IIAA), which aimed to coordinate and administer the bilateral health programmes in Latin America. The IIAA quickly established itself in 19 Latin American countries. President Roosevelt also created the

Rubber Development Organization, an agency of the U.S. government that worked on the development of rubber plantations in the Amazon Valley and adjacent regions.

In 1942[1], the formation of the SESP was authorised by a legal decree from the Department of Education and Health. The decree mandated the SESP to be an administrative unit of the IIAA that was subordinate to the Department of Education and Health. This decree maintained the bilateral character of the SESP until it was transformed into a foundation in 1960 (the FSESP). SUCAM was later incorporated in the 1990s, which led to the creation of FUNASA in the wake of the Brazilian state reforms that occurred during the Collor administration.



The Collection

The collection of SESP films consists of 68 rolls of 16-mm film. The film includes several hundred health education films that had been produced in the U.S. and subsequently lost. The archive is composed of negatives, contact prints, positives, inter-negatives, combined copies and reversals. A total of 33 films were recovered during the research project.

The films were discovered in the mid-1980s on the premises of FUNASA in the federal district of Brasilia. The discovery was almost an accident: a researcher from the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Áurea Pitta, was "mining" audiovisual health material for the recently created Video Centre of the Department of Communication and Health (now known as VideoSaúde Distributor). The academic passion and voluntarism of this researcher led to negotiations in the late 1980s that allowed the films to be moved from Brasilia DF to Fiocruz in Rio de Janeiro. According to Aurea Pitta, the aim of the audiovisual management at Fiocruz was to capture existing health productions and to bring the productions to the Video Centre. The purpose was to identify audiovisual health productions, whether official or from non-governmental organisations, and to ascertain what had been produced in the field of health in Brazil. From the collection of 68 films, 18 were recovered with original project funds, and 14 were recovered with funds from the Memory Project for public health policies in contemporary Brazil. The Memory Project was funded by FINEP and was coordinated by Maria Tereza V.B. de Mello from Casa de Oswaldo Cruz (COC, Fiocruz). However, content was lost from a portion of the films, sometimes rendering it impossible to read the film credits. Various issues led the films to remain hidden until 2007, when more favourable conditions allowed the present research to be developed.

There is a discrepancy regarding the initial number of films in the archive of the FSESP. A list of titles included in the documents was sent by FUNASA at the beginning of the partnership with Fiocruz; the list accounted for just over 100 films. A 1976 COC catalogue found in the SESP documentation listed 124 films.

In 1998, Fiocruz signed a technical cooperation agreement with the Cinematheque at the Museum of Modern Art. The museum became responsible for technical issues related to the archive. According to a

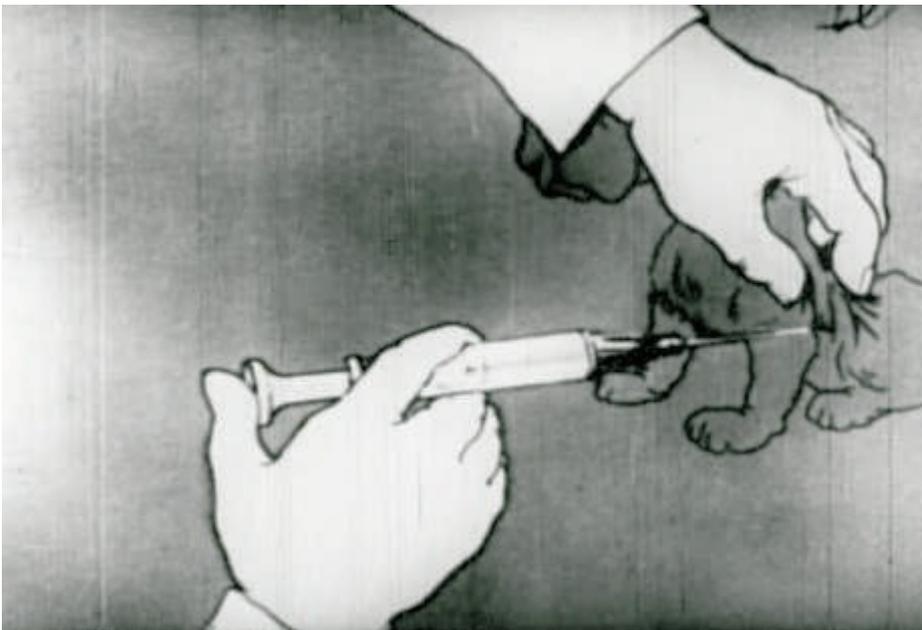
1998 report on the state of the collection's conservation, a number of rolls were already fully affected by vinegar syndrome, and a portion of the films had been discarded to avoid contaminating the remainder of the batch. This evaluation of the technical condition of the films led to nearly 50% of the collection's being discarded, leaving only 68 rolls in good condition and fit for telecine service. Nearly a decade after the first evaluation, inadequate preservation conditions have affected an additional 20% of the batch of 68 films. According to evaluations by three specialised laboratories (Labocine do Brasil, Mega Studios and Casablanca), it is not possible to recover these films.

Based on their initial contact with the collection, the project researchers reported that little was known about the contents of the films. By studying the titles that were printed on the film cans, it was first supposed that they related to public health campaigns from Vargas's Estado Novo period. The films had been produced by the Department of Press and Propaganda (Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda). During the course of the research and after watching the films, the films were found to have included a late 1940s and 1950s SESP project for health education. Their production was mixed between the U.S. and Brazil, but there was a strong prevalence of North American productions, as the IIAA was responsible for contracting services and specialised technical labour from the U.S. Many of the animated films, for example, were produced by Walt Disney. According to a survey conducted by researcher André de Campos, Disney once produced 10 films for SESP; these films were subsidised by the IIAA.

Notably, SESP pioneered the use of audio-visual resources as instruments for education. SESP even gained the status, recognised by UNESCO, of an international benchmark for this educational practise. According to COC researcher Cristina Maria Oliveira Fonseca, "SESP greatly emphasised educational work, and it became a benchmark in the dissemination of current thinking on health education".

The bilateral U.S.-Brazil agreement had a time limit of 10 years. At the end of the period, SESP no longer received financial assistance from the IIAA. Editions of the SESP newsletter from the early 1950s highlight the national production of educational films, especially the technical mastery of Brazilian professionals in the production of animated films – a complex art hitherto little practised in Brazil.

The use of motion pictures is an important method for education, as it provides information in an accessible format and language, thereby creating powerful instruments for universal distribution and understanding.



The animation genre offers operational advantages and provides a tool for educating children. Children can subsequently act as interlocutors of this knowledge for adults.

Though Walt Disney made several visits to Brazil, the production of these animations for SESP never crossed the borders of his studios. Disney mastered the technique, had the resources and necessary

technical equipment and had information about the economy and geography of Brazil (which, according to the films, was mostly rural). In addition to how appealing they are to children, animations are not constrained by portraying reality, particularly because of the liberties that fiction provides.

Nonetheless, this archive of educational materials offers a rich study resource for different professionals working in the field of public health. The archive offers the opportunity to review, analyse and understand the discursive constructions of public health material, which allows the films to be revisited in light of the political and historical contexts in which they were produced. This review enables us to follow the maturing of relationships between language, health care models and health policies in contemporary Brazil. Furthermore, this review contributes to the strengthening of educational, information and communication activities. The films may be viewed as providing insights into the past and present; they can yield a range of analyses that can be undertaken by health professionals, service users, students and the general public.

Discussions about the ideology behind this initiative, having been temporarily located in the Estado Novo period in the midst of World War II, can be conducted from the perspective of political propaganda that was in vogue during the period. The interpretation of the content of the films will be left to experts in various fields. According to the authors, this project aimed to assist in the construction of Brazil's memory of public health. The project fills a gap that many people did not know existed, and it provides a valuable educational tool. The project contextualises links among health, education and cinema, and it provides a framework for considering the collection and making it available. In a summary and trial form, the collection is available for a wide and complex network of actions and strategies that can develop the field of public health in Brazil.

Note

[1] See André Luiz Vieira de Campos's (Fiocruz Editor) "International Health Policies in the Vargas Era: the Special Service of Public Health, 1942, 1960 (Políticas Internacionais der Saúde na Era Vargas: o Serviço Especial de Saúde Pública)".