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Television, gas and electricity: consuming comfort and leisure in the British home 1946–65

Abstract

The arrival of television into the British home in the postwar period coincided with rising standards of comfort, provided by utilities such as gas and electricity and the devices that they powered. Television, in its capacity as a broadcast medium, was another utility flowing into the postwar home, providing domestic leisure. This article will explore how the material image of the television set became emblematic of the modern, leisure-based home, examining how it was used, in conjunction with gas and electricity, to construct an idealized comfortable home. This relationship was promoted in lifestyle magazines, advertisements, design publications and exhibitions. I will argue that from this relationship an idealized television lifestyle emerged, based around comfort and leisure, which was used to promote the consumption of gas and electricity, thus embedding television's material form in consumer culture. In this way, the article will position the history of television in relation to the other utilities which shaped the home in this period, namely gas and electricity.

Keywords

Television Lifestyle

Postwar Britain

Domesticity

Consumption

Comfort

Leisure

Introduction

Television is 'a domestic medium', which 'is watched at home' and 'ignored at home', (Silverstone 1994: 24), yet, as David Morley highlights, its material place in the home often remains 'largely unexamined' (Morley 1995: 170). This article aims to expand our understanding of television's place within domesticity in Britain by focusing on the material history of the television set in relation to other domestic technologies and utilities, namely gas and electricity. Such a relationship is worth considering as, in the postwar period, broadcasting, gas and electricity were three utilities which provided – for those that could afford it – a more leisure-based, comfortable form of domestic life. The prevalence of increased free time, and more pleasant homes in which to spend it, created an environment under which a medium like television could flourish. This article will argue that lifestyle magazines, advertisements, design publications, and exhibitions promoted a consumable television lifestyle based on the relationship between utilities, comfort and leisure, which re-shaped the conception of the ideal home in Britain in the 1950s and 60s.

Initially, the television lifestyle was fostered through advice about comfortable television viewing, centred around the correct application of heating and lighting devices to ensure optimal, healthy viewing conditions, but the visual motif of television and television viewing was soon capitalized upon by manufacturers and advertisers. The idealized television lifestyle was used to promote the consumption of gas, electricity and other related goods, which were presented as the means to achieving higher levels of comfort and gaining more leisure time. In this way, television's material form became embedded in consumer culture; television was

used as an emblem of a comfortable, leisure-focused home life, achievable through specific consumption practices. Connections between consumerism and television in Britain often coalesce around 1955, the date when commercial television aired for the first time (Thumim 2004; Turnock 2007). This article will demonstrate that this relationship began before advertising on television was possible, as prior to this an emerging television lifestyle was used as a means of selling an idealized domesticity. This can then provide a more multifaceted understanding of the ways in which television, domesticity and consumer culture intersected in this period.

The concept of the television lifestyle has already been identified by media scholar Tim O'Sullivan, who writes:

> A concern with television lifestyle starts with the materiality of how television appears and is indexed, prioritized and used in the actual domestic culture; how it occupies a space (or in fact multiple 'spaces') in the private situation and related household settings […] what the 'television' looks like, where it is positioned, and how it is used, regarded and assimilated into particular everyday routines and relationships, connecting and interfacing private territories and the dynamics of lifestyles, with public and mediated forms of cultural circulation. (O'Sullivan 2007: 22)

The television lifestyle, therefore, is the material way television is used and embedded in domestic life. Focusing solely on television's material form can be challenging, as its position as object and medium must always be considered. Dick Hebdige, in his cultural history of the Vespa scooter, argues that we need to listen to 'the number of voices which speak through and for' silent objects, as 'the enigma of the object resides […] in the babble which proliferates around it' (Hebdige 1988: 80). Unlike the objects Hebdige describes, television is

not silent, thus it can be difficult to ignore what's on it, but in doing so it is possible to trace the history of the materiality of the television set, listening to the 'babble' around it and examining the meanings attached to its object form.

In a British context, some attempt has been made to explore the material significance of television's place in the home (Chambers 2011, 2016; O'Sullivan 1991, 2007; Wheatley 2016), but there is no such equivalent to Lynn Spigel's extensive examination of television and domesticity in the United States (Spigel 1992, 2001). Using a cross disciplinary approach, this article will expand on the research in design history about the material culture of the British home, specifically the role that objects play in articulating the experience of domestic modernity (Attfield 2006; Miller 1987; Sparke 1995, 2004). Further to this it will build on research into how media objects have shaped and changed domesticity (Berker et al. 2006; Chambers 2016; Silverstone, et al. 1992; Spigel 1992, 2001). Spigel's research on the arrival of television into the US home pioneered a material cultural approach to television's history, exploring how the public were expected to appropriate the new medium (Spigel 1992). From this approach Spigel examines how television became embedded in the imaginaries of domesticity in the United States, focusing on the material manifestations of the television lifestyle. Helen Wheatley has concentrated on television in the 'ideal' home in Britain, using the site of the mid-century public exhibition as a means of tracing the history of television as a domestic technology, specifically examining how women were addressed as television consumers (Wheatley 2016).

As Spigel and Wheatley have done, this article shifts the focus on to the physical place of television in the material culture of the home by investigating what O'Sullivan terms the 'mediated forms of cultural circulation', to consider how other media, namely magazines and advertisements, helped to construct a specific version of the television lifestyle. I have selected the period 1946–65 to allow for the development of television from a luxurious and

expensive consumer good in the late 1940s and early 1950s into a widely-owned household object by the mid-1960s. I will examine how the construction of the television lifestyle changed over this period, as the meaning of the television set altered according to its status as a consumer good.

Lifestyle magazines reveal the idealized constructions of home, providing visual and written representations of how it should look and be used. Advertisements frame the relationship between the home and consumption; they imagine domesticity through the lens of consumer culture. In the 1950s, as consumer goods flooded the market after years of austerity, the connection between home and consumer culture became increasingly heightened. Indeed, lifestyle magazines played a key role in educating consumers, particularly women, in how to maintain the home and how to navigate this new market of consumable goods (Winship 1987: 43). The magazines frequently featured articles about the new appliances like cookers and refrigerators, advising on the benefits of using gas or electrical appliances, thus they played an important role in how consumer culture was navigated. Both magazines and adverts are a powerful mediator between the real and imagined experience of domesticity and, while they do not tell us how homes actually looked, or the ways in which they were actually experienced, they provide insight into the 'horizons of expectations' that readers might have had about the home (Spigel 2001: 15). Ben Highmore furthers this argument, writing that:

> It might seem that the idealised house is simply a fiction and that it is only the actual house that is real. But the idealised house not only shapes our imagination; it also shapes our real homes. (Highmore 2014: 10)

This research has centred on lifestyle magazines, including monthly magazines with a domestic focus such as Good Housekeeping and Ideal Home, weekly magazines such as Woman and *Woman's Own*, and DIY magazines Practical Householder and Homemaker. I have traced the ways in which the image of the television set or television viewing appeared across them. The appearance of television in relation to gas, electricity, heating and lighting emerged as a dominant mode of representation. It was quickly apparent that these connections were made most frequently in advertisements, often for products that related to the comfort of the home, such as heating devices, lighting and carpets, thus a high proportion of the sources discussed are adverts. Visual connections between gas, electricity and television were also made in features relating to how to heat and light the home, such as special supplements in the magazines on what kind of heating to invest in.

Further to the magazines, this article will uncover the other spaces in which meanings of home were being formed in this period to understand if the magazines were producing widely held beliefs about what constituted a comfortable home and the place of television within this. The Council of Industrial Design (CoID) produced literature, articles and exhibitions on the place of television in the home, which provided advice on how to achieve comfortable viewing, with a focus on how to light television viewing. This provides insight into how designers framed the relationship between television and other objects in the home. I will also use government reports on house building and social surveys, including studies of the home conducted by social scientist Dennis Chapman in the 1940s and 50s. These illustrate how the discussion about comfort was taking place across different platforms, not just in magazines, and that this was often in relation to the design and architecture of the modern home. In addition to this, I will refer to a Mass Observation directive from 1949, which asked for respondents to write about their attitudes towards television and the impact it might have on their lives. This provides access into the concerns that some members of the

public had about television and its impact on the work and leisure balance in the home. Many of the anxieties present in this directive are reflective of the advice given in the lifestyle magazines, which provided suggestions on how to negotiate this balance, normally using lighting. These complimentary sources help to illuminate why particular discussions might have taken place in the magazines, as well as where advertisers appear to have capitalized upon certain anxieties or preferences.

Technology and comfort

Historians have argued that the concept of the comfortable home emerged in the Victorian era; the comfortable, 'bourgeois', private home was formed as an escape from the increasingly bureaucratic, cold sphere of work (Rybcynski 1987). Developments in technology, including the domestication of electricity and the use of gas fires, aided the modernisation of the home in the twentieth century, providing opportunities for better heated and better lit homes. David Jeremiah writes that the Victorian legacy of comfort led to an 'overriding agenda to provide a better life, sustained by a belief in the objectives of progress and improvement, which through planning and technical change would put in place a modern Britain' (Jeremiah 2000: 1). In the 1920s and 30s the benefits of gas and electricity in providing a more comfortable home were widely promoted, with various exhibitions, leaflets, posters and lectures produced educating the public about the advantages of these utilities (Jeremiah 2000: 98). A leaflet from the 1930s promoting the various uses of electricity states that the 'electric home is bright, clean, healthy and cheerful' (Anon 1934: 36).

While many of the ideals about the comfortable, warm, hygienic home were laid down in the 1920s and 30s, the postwar period was a decisive moment in the improvement in living conditions and unprecedented access to comfort. In the period of postwar reconstruction, millions of new homes were built and slums cleared across the country

meaning that millions had access to a new standard of home, which for many meant the first time with indoor plumbing and running water (Langhamer 2005). In 1947 and 1949 respectively, electricity and gas were nationalized (coinciding with the creation of the welfare state), pivotal acts that changed these from commodities for the wealthy into state-run services intended for everyone. The end of postwar austerity, full employment, and the prevalence of Hire Purchase in the mid-1950s meant that there was increased spending power with which to buy new gas and electricity powered goods. Many of these devices were so-called labour saving; they were sold on the premise that they would decrease time spent working in the home, especially for women, and increase time spent on leisurely activities. Whether these devices decreased women's time working in the home is contested (Schwartz Cohen 1983), but declining working hours in other workplaces did create more leisure time, all of which contributed to a growing focus on the home as the centre of family life. It is out of this context that it was possible for television to grow into a mass medium, present in millions of homes. Social survey pioneer Mark Abrams wrote in The Listener in 1959:

> […] for the first time in modern British history the working-class home, as well as the middle-class home, has become a place that is warm, comfortable, and able to provide its own fireside entertainment – in fact, pleasant to live in. (quoted in Langhamer 2005: 341)

The fireside entertainment that Abrams refers to could include radio or television, as, from the 1930s onwards, leisure in the home was increasingly provided by broadcasting. Indeed, broadcasting was another utility flowing into the postwar home, domesticating the experience of modernity through its reshaping of the boundary between the public and private spheres. Like the newly nationalised gas and electricity, broadcasting was a public service, conceived

of as accessible to all, but for the price of the license fee. Television became a defining feature of the postwar home, bringing visual as well as audio information and entertainment directly into the home, and it soon became the main way in which many Britons chose to spend their increased leisure hours (Vahimagi 2014).

The amenities of the comfortable home, in theory, came to be considered basic components of the home, rather than luxuries, by the beginning of the 1960s, including running water, gas or electric powered heating, sufficient lighting, suitable amounts of living space, and broadcasting. In 1961, the Parker Morris Report Homes for Today and Tomorrow was published and laid out recommendations for the specifications of the modern home. As with the Tudor Walters Report of 1918 and the Dudley Report of 1944 it represented a landmark in the design of public housing (Burnett 1986: 304). While the 1944 Dudley Report rarely mentioned central heating, better heating was one of the dominating concerns of the 1961 Report (Burnett 1986: 299–306). Heating, the Report wrote, should be a common provision for all, not just the wealthy, in order for the whole dwelling to be properly inhabited (Burnett 1986: 308). Similarly, the Report recommended that there should be 15–20 electrical sockets per house, rather than the average of 6 found in new houses at the time to accommodate the increasing numbers of electrical products in the home (Burnett 1986: 307). Thus, technology and the comfort it could provide were becoming prerequisites of the modern home and a new standard of living was laid down. It is from this relationship between utilities, technology and domesticity that the concept of the comfortable television lifestyle was formed.

Are you sitting comfortably?

The early conceptions of the clean, light, healthy home from the 1920s and 30s are a particularly important context to how the television lifestyle was constructed. Much of the

promotion of gas and electricity rested on their ability to make the home healthier. Electric light was compared to sunlight in the health benefits it would bring in a leaflet produced by the British Electrical Developmental Association in the 1930s (Anon 1934: 28). Thus, the concepts of comfort and health were entwined, as comfort was conceived as the absence of that which might cause pain or damage health. Comfort, therefore, was conceptualized as a total corporeal experience. The early conceptions of comfortable television viewing resonated with this equation between comfort and health. Lifestyle magazines and design publications all provided viewing advice that aimed to prevent any damage to the health and thus create comfort. This included instructions on how to avoid eye strain with correct lighting and viewing distances, as well as on correct height of seats and neck tilt to avoid neck strain. In 1961, magazine Ideal Home explained to its readers, when watching television, 'viewing comfort is as important as the picture' (Anon 1961: 66). Lighting was considered essential to comfortable viewing, as this prevented eye strain and glare from the screen. Electric lighting, since the late nineteenth century, was framed to consumers as a means of achieving a healthy, as well as an aesthetically pleasing, home (Gooday 2008). Studies in the 1940s, such as the lighting survey conducted by Dennis Chapman, show the levels of care which were put into researching the optimum lighting conditions in the home. Chapman measured lighting levels across different social groupings, assessing if it was sufficient for the tasks that take place within the home (Chapman 1943). Achieving comfort, therefore, was a social and scientific endeavour, rather than an aesthetic one, which was reliant on the correct application of technologies such as lighting.

Similar attention to detail was given to the lighting of television viewing. Television, as a visual medium which gave out a large amount of light, could alter the balance of light within the home, potentially upsetting the ideal sensorial conditions. Previous media devices in the home, such as the radio and gramophone, altered primarily the soundscape, meaning

the television had its own set of unchartered potential problems. These potential problems were taken seriously and as a result there were collaborations between designers, magazines and medical professionals. At the Festival of Britain in 1951 a model room on 'entertainment at home', designed by interior designer Robin Day, demonstrated the different ways of lighting television viewing (Anon 1951: n.p.). The Council of Industrial Design's 1957 exhibition on television's place in the home 'Design for Viewing' went as far as to consult an ophthalmologist to obtain the ideal viewing conditions. In their monthly magazine Design, the ophthalmologist's recommendations were laid out in seven 'points for comfortable viewing'. Points 1–3 concerned position of head, distance and angle from the screen, while 4 and 5 recommend the correct lighting, by avoiding reflections from light sources such as fires and windows, and avoiding glare by not viewing in total darkness, as 'the contrast between the bright screen and dark background leads to glare', which would lead to eye strain (J.E.B. 1957: 43). An article from Ideal Home in 1949 provided similar advice:

> A fair amount of room light is desirable when looking in. Set and lighting should be placed so that the light does not fall directly on the screen and so that the screen does not reflect lamps or fires […] At night, a standard lamp can be placed to one side of the set. (Norris 1949: 29)

A decade later, DIY magazine Homemaker still took the same view: 'television is best viewed in subdued light, and this is usually supplied by the spill of light from other fittings' (Anon 1960b: 1334).

Figure 1: 'Entertainment at home', a room design from the Festival of Britain, 1951. Copyright: Design Council Archive, University of Brighton Design Archives.

Alongside lighting, the other key factor for achieving comfort in the home was warmth. The final point in the recommendations for comfortable viewing from Design magazine in 1957 is 'warm the room properly. Good all-over warmth in the room enables you to make full use of the viewing area' (J.E.B. 1957: 43). Before the fireplace lost its primary function as the main heat source for the living room, television owners were advised to place the set next to the fireplace in winter. As an Ideal Home article from 1950 described:

> In the warm months the TV can be anywhere in the room […] but in winter we need to sit near the fire while we look-in, which means the best position for the set is one side or other of the fireplace. (Norris 1950: 43)

Gathering round the fire here had a functional purpose and reminds us that it was not a straightforward transition from fireplace to television, but that they crossed over in function and use. A response to the 1949 Mass Observation directive shows how the desire for comfortable television viewing re-shaped the way in which the home was ordered, including where the fireplace was situated:

> [...] we used to sit and enjoy another room in the house. Since Kenneth fixed his set in the room with radiogram, piano and parquet floor, our very comfortable room seems to be losing all its furniture to this one! Even the fire grate has rolled (literally, because it runs on two wheels) into this one. (MO-A DR 1046 1949: n.p.)

Advances in heating were important for comfortable television viewing, as once the fireplace was no longer the primary means of heating, viewers could spread more freely throughout the room (Highmore 2014: 5).

Consuming comfort

While the early advice connected gas and electricity to comfortable, warm, healthy television viewing, this relationship was soon capitalized upon by manufacturers and advertisers. For example, television lights soon became a consumer good designed to sit above the television set. An advertisement for the R.E.A.L. plinth light from Ideal Home in 1956 offered a means to achieving the ideal television viewing atmosphere. It reads:

> When this restful, mellow and charming light is on the top of your T.V. set, a new era of soothing televiewing is born. No suspicion of eye-strain to mar your enjoyment; no reflection on your screen, no interference with the brightness of your picture. T.V. at its most perfect! The plinth creates an effect of non-darkness – rather than light – and sheds its softly diffused glow throughout the room. (Anon 1956: 197)

The light both offered to facilitate perfect viewing, without eye strain or reflections, but also to create the appropriate atmosphere for the room, from the 'soft glow' and 'non-darkness', effectively commodifying the feel of television. As much as this advert embellishes the potential of the product, it was very common to place a light above the television set, so it was tapping into an existing design choice. Indeed, in an edition of DIY magazine Practical Householder from the same year, a reader passed on advice on how to make your own plinth light using the chromium holder from an oven-proof dish (Dale 1956: 52). This commodification of the television lifestyle was often dismissed as being in 'bad taste'; in a

1950s television programme on design in the home, Kenneth Clark called a television light, in the form of an aquarium, 'just stupid and pointless'.[1]

The advice about lighting and television was reflected in buying choices made by television owners. For example, according to Jeremiah, this kind of advice led to working-class homes, once they had acquired a television set, buying reading lamps to watch television (Jeremiah 2000: 163). In Dennis Chapman's social survey on the home and social status conducted in 1955, he noted that the reading lamp was an item most commonly found in middle- and upper- middle-class homes because it was used for reading and sewing (Chapman 1955: 98). In this instance, the introduction of television encouraged working-class homes to buy more lighting, which was traditionally associated with upper middle-class homes, thus altering traditional markers of social class.

The same process of commodification applied to heating devices and, as the traditional fireplace was overtaken by newer devices, providers of heaters were keen to use the television lifestyle to influence consumers to upgrade their heating system. An example of this is an advert for gas from 1960 from Woman and Home, which, in the form of a cartoon, shows a woman standing beside her husband, shivering next to a roaring fireplace and television. It reads 'she was ashamed of her cold-hearted home [underlining in original]' and the woman is depicted saying 'I don't know what Kay and Bill will think – this place is like a 'fridge! Can't we do better than that fire? – it's hopeless' (Anon 1960a: n.p.). While she might have the modern accoutrements associated with a modern home, represented by the television set, she is afraid that her friends will judge her for having a cold home, for which, the advert suggests, there is reason to be ashamed. Furthermore, the home is described as

[1] This appears in the BBC2 documentary All Mod Cons: Ever So Contemporary (1997, UK: BBC).

cold-hearted, extending the association with feeling to the home itself, and that the traditional image of the roaring fire in the hearth, so often associated with a warm-hearted home, is here depicted as ineffective as the woman shivers next to it. Both the feelings of shame and coldness are experienced by the figure of the wife; the provision of warmth and cosiness in the home is presented as a female concern. The husband and wife visit the gas showroom where they purchase a gas heater, which is installed in place of the roaring fire. In the final cartoon, the friends are in the living room, with Kay remarking 'Joan darling what a cosy room this is – it's a pleasure to come into! [underlining in original]' (Anon 1960a: n.p.). This advert realigned the cosy home with modern forms of heating powered by gas and relegated the traditional fire to obsolescence, thus creating a paradigm whereby those who could not afford gas heating had a home that felt shameful and was out of date. Considering that gas had been nationalized for over a decade by this time, it is noteworthy that the gas service felt the need to promote itself using these methods. The early relationship between technology, comfort and health, born out of the social ideals about gas and electricity from the early twentieth century, was eventually overtaken by a conception of the comfortable home as contingent upon consumption practices, which were indicative of social status.

Figure 2: 'She was ashamed of her cold-hearted home', Gas advertisement, 1960.

Technology and leisure time

As the article has already demonstrated, there was a continuous focus on the ways in which gas and electricity could enhance the comfort of television viewing through heating and lighting, but further to comfort, these utilities were also connected to leisure time and television viewing. The image of the television set was frequently used to illustrate this, arguably because it quickly became emblematic of the new comfortable leisure-focused home

life. Technological advances in gas and electricity, and the products powered by them, became closely associated with leisure time, either as the means of creating time for leisure or as the means of powering it in the form of radios, televisions and cars. It was only because of a new availability of leisure time that it was possible for the television lifestyle to come into existence.

The association with leisure time and home developed across the 1950s, but in the late 1940s, when the television service resumed after the war, a 1949 Mass Observation directive reveals that for many the home was largely associated with work.[2] Respondents expressed concern that viewing television in the dark would prevent the possibility of working, and a preference is shown for the radio which was described, especially by women, as a companion to work rather than a distraction from it. These responses show an unwillingness to rearrange the home in favour of leisure time, with many feeling that there was not enough time to view when there was so much work about the house to be done. One man responded:

> A lot of routine work I can do while the ordinary radio is going, and I enjoy many things in the regular programmes as a background. It appears obvious however that sitting in a darkened room with the eyes glued to a small frame containing the picture, one cannot do much else but watch. (MO-A DR 1679 1949: n.p.)

The consequent advice in magazines, which firmly advocated lighting television viewing, may have been a response to these anxieties about television dominating home life. Roy Norris' article in Ideal Home in 1949 responded directly to these kinds of concerns:

[2] The amount and kind of work would have varied across classes and genders.

> Some people, not televiewers, say, 'we could not be bothered with television. We have too much to do to be able to sit idle in a darkened room every evening.'
>
> Actually, the room does not have to be darkened. With the latest sets even full artificial lighting can be kept on. Then, after the novelty has worn off, members of a family can 'view' or not, just as they can listen to, switch off, or ignore a radio programme. (Norris 1949: 28)

The magazines used lighting to integrate television into the existing modus operandi of the home, as well as a means of enhancing television viewing. This is significant because it shows the ways in which magazines helped to mediate television's transition into the home, assuaging anxieties about the distracting influence it might have on the home using other technologies.

Adverts for these technologies were also keen to show the relationship between leisure time and technology. An advert for the General Electric Company, from an edition of Homes and Gardens in 1953, framed the relationship between technology, television and domestic leisure. The advert is situated in the domestic environment, depicting a man and woman sitting together in armchairs drinking claret while watching television. A generator is shown above the television set, effectively powering the leisure of the couple, represented in the television set and the light. The television lifestyle of the couple is presented as sophisticated by the claret they are drinking and the historical television programme they are viewing, while the man's suit suggests that television viewing was still a reasonably formal

activity.[3] Yet comfort is also suggested by the rich red colour of the advert, the large armchairs, the man's cigarette and the low level lighting, all of which give an impression of cosy interiority, which contrasts greatly with the industrial might of the generator powering it. The text draws attention to this juxtaposition:

> Electric power – to light your leisure and to warm your ease, to cook, to clean, to preserve, to bring you music and the moving pageant of the world […]
> Electric power – to run railways and light cities, to equip airports and turn the wheels of industry […]
> Electric power – to carry Britain's reputation to the world's end and keep our country prosperous in the new Elizabethan age. (Anon 1953: n.p.)

In a grandiose way, it connected the lighting of leisure in the home with the grander narrative of national progress: the same power running industry was powering the television, lyrically described as the 'moving pageant of the world'. In this way, television viewing is presented as progressive and modern, and the home that is plugged into the power of electricity was thus a modern and progressive one, which will share, it suggests, in the prosperity of 'the new Elizabethan age' (the advert is from the year of the Coronation). The choice of the television set, rather than another electrical device such as a refrigerator, shows how critical television's double articulation into the home was; television brought the outside world into the home providing leisure, and electricity facilitated this, and both together connected the home into

[3] 1953, as the year of the Coronation, is a key year for television consumption as sales increased greatly in the lead up to the Coronation, and is a definitive marking point in the shift from television's status as luxury object into a more commonplace household item.

modernity. The advert is suggestive of Raymond Williams' concept of 'mobile privatisation' (Williams 1974), highlighting that television can facilitate a connection, from within the privacy of the home, with the outside world. The advert is a clear example of the ways in which the image of the television lifestyle fused, at a very early stage in its lifecycle, with the concepts of technology, power and leisure in their capacity as the purveyors of modernity. Notably, this framing takes place through the lens of consumer culture, as the main purpose of the advertisement was to promote the consumption of electricity, which, as a pre-1955 example, shows that television became entrenched in consumer culture even during the monopoly of publicly-funded broadcasting.

Figure 3: 'The Theme is Power', General Electric Company advertisement 1953.

Gender, leisure and labour

The advert above was unusual in its grandiose presentation of the relationship between electricity and leisure time; by and large, the relationship was constructed in more quotidian terms. Since the 1920s, electricity and gas were promoted, in adverts and pamphlets, for their labour-saving potential, which would free up more time for everyday leisure. The benefits of labour saving devices were usually aimed at women, who were the primary carers in the home. Electricity, labour saving devices and the benefits of gas powered fires and hot water were sold as domestic servants that would free up women's time for other pursuits. Once television arrived into the home, it was used as a symbol of the leisure that could be gained from investing in gas or electrical products. A promotional advert for the electric home from 1962 featured in Ideal Home magazine shows a woman lying on a sofa reading a magazine, with a television set behind her. The tag line reads 'sit back and enjoy life – let electricity do the work' (Anon 1962: 81). Though the television set is not actively doing anything in the

image, its presence suggests the possibility of other leisure activities that the woman could now take part in, but is also a visual reminder of what electricity can power.

An advert from 1963, also from Ideal Home, for gas, takes a different tack, but still follows the formula that utilities gave women more time. It is in the form of a cartoon strip and depicts a housewife exhausted by her washing up duties. Her husband sees this and goes to the gas showroom to buy her a water heater. A week later she is serving tea to her family who are all in front of the television set. Her husband says to her '[…] time off for tea and T.V. – this is something like!' to which she responds 'Bert! Give me hot water by Gas anytime – it makes all the difference!' (Anon 1963: 144). In this advert, gas is shown to provide the housewife with the chance to enjoy leisure pursuits with her family for the first time. While her chores could not be left to one side to do this, the efficiency of the gas water heater speeds up her labour freeing up her time for leisure, which is symbolized in the television set. The housewife is active in her role as the provider of comfort for her family in the form of cleaning and as the provision of the tea served alongside the TV viewing, but it is the man who goes to the gas showroom to purchase the means to lessen her load. His purchase of the water heater, and the water heater itself, are shown to provide the housewife with the opportunity to finally watch TV with her family; the new efficiency of her labour is a by-product of these factors, rather than something she herself has achieved, effectively rendering her a passive figure.

Figure 4: A section from 'She couldn't stand it any longer', Gas advertisement, 1963.

Spigel has demonstrated, in a United States context, the ways in which advertisements frequently depicted women's television viewing as contingent on chores being completed first, to assuage fears that the distraction of television might hinder a woman's work in the

home (Spigel 1992). Without irony, this advert reveals the often-hidden dimension behind the television lifestyle: that of woman's labour in the home and the fact that, for them, the boundaries between work and leisure were always blurred and necessarily contingent. Similarly, an article in weekly magazine Woman from May 1957 showed how open plan living could be adapted to allow the woman to watch television while she washes up – 'we can wash up and watch TV' – allowing her to enjoy leisure but not at the expense of her chores (Anon 1957: 20). For women, the relationship between leisure and technology was complex, as it was presented as providing relief from work, yet also contingent upon work, adding a highly-gendered aspect to the way in which magazines and advertisements constructed the comfort and leisure involved in the television lifestyle.

The gas advertisement alongside the one for G.E.C. discussed above provide a notable juxtaposition; in the decade between them, television moved from an expensive, luxury object into a widely-owned household item, which might account for the way in which the television lifestyle is presented as a refined activity in the earlier advert and far more quotidian in the later one. The woman in the G.E.C. advert is shown to enjoy the television alongside her male companion, which perhaps suggests that her higher-class status elevated her position within the home, while the housewife figure of the gas advert is defined by her role as carer in the home, rather than as an equal participant in home leisure. They are both, however, illustrative of the way television viewing quickly became a symbol of domestic leisure in the postwar period, both of which were dependent on the advances in technology powered by gas and electricity. Magazines and advertisements exploited this relationship, using the television lifestyle to illustrate the benefits of technology in providing a comfortable, modern domestic experience.

Conclusion

In the postwar British home, technology and utilities brought improvements, which made the home a more comfortable place to be, while increasing leisure time meant more time was spent there. Television was one of many technologies which re-shaped the British home in the decades following the Second World War. This article has positioned the material history of television in relation to the other technologies and utilities shaping the home, showing that television's place in the home was relational rather than absolute. Television should not be understood in isolation from the attendant technologies in the home, without which television's development would not have been possible. By tracing the material image of the television set in print and visual culture, this article has revealed how an idealized television lifestyle emerged based on the connection between television, gas and electricity, all of which contributed to a more comfortable, leisure-based conceptualisation of domesticity in the postwar period.

The television lifestyle was initially based around achieving optimal viewing conditions, which could be attained through lighting and heating. The connections between technology and health were social ideals of the twentieth century, which were then applied to television viewing. This article has shown that television soon took on a symbolic resonance in the idealization of the home in this period, becoming a visual motif for comfort and leisure. Television, as a technology powered by electricity and a provider of leisure within the home, became an apt symbol for modern domesticity. The visual motif of television appeared across a wide variety of advertisements and articles promoting comfort in the home through the purchase of consumer goods, such as boilers, fireplaces and carpets. These presented the television lifestyle as dependent upon consuming specific products, thus embedding television's image within consumer culture. Hitherto, studies of television's relationship to consumer culture have focused on the advent of commercial television in 1955, but many of the examples used in this article have indicated that the visual motif of

television was utilized as an advertising tool before it was possible to advertise on the medium itself. It is apparent that the potential of television to sell a desirable lifestyle was quickly capitalized upon by advertisers. This article has shown how the consumption practices associated with achieving the comfortable television lifestyle were frequently constructed around prevailing ideas about class and gender. Optimum comfort was framed as a means of distinguishing the home, and usually it was the female figure who was tasked with ensuring that comfort was achieved. Behind the constructed ideal of the television lifestyle was a reality predicated on gendered labour division within the home, which the sources discussed helped to reinforce.

The relationship between television, domesticity and consumer culture in the postwar period was, therefore, more multifaceted than has previously been allowed for. Beyond what was shown on the screen, a powerful material culture formed around television, which was relational to other domestic utilities and technologies, and rooted in consumer culture. It is only by examining this material culture that we gain insight into television 'as a symbolic, if not totemic, object' (Morley 1995: 170).

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